STARTING A NEW COMMUNITY GROUP

A Toolkit for anyone who is considering starting a new group, or for existing groups who want a guide to their processes and activities.

A ROADMAP TO SUCCESS!

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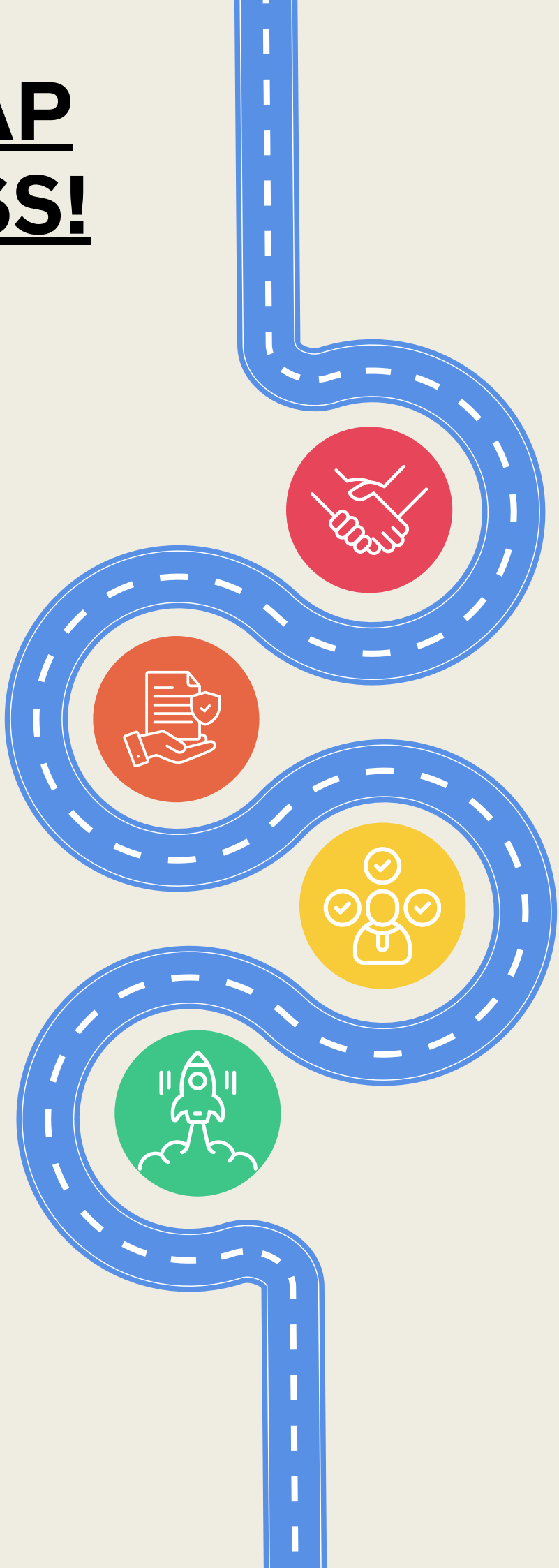

YOUR FOUNDATION



Well done! You've taken the first step in starting up a new community group.
There's a lot to think about, but this is the fun bit!
This is where you think about why you want to set up this group, everything you're hoping to achieve, and put together your initial plan to make it happen.
There is a planning template on page ?? for you to complete as you go through this section, plus an example for a fictional group to help.

Your Aims

You've probably decided to start this group because you (and maybe some others) have identified a local need, such as overgrown footpaths, or a common interest, such as playing hockey. So why are you starting this group? Write down your three top aims on the planning template.

Note: Have you checked that someone isn't already running a similar group locally? There are many groups in and around Alston Moor, so check that you are not duplicating the work of other groups. If you have a very similar project to someone else, think about working together to share resources and experience, or even joining their group. instead of setting up a new one.

Your Name

What will your group be called? This can be fun, but remember it will be on all your compliance documents, and things like your bank account! Keep it clear, and try to give people a sense of what you're about at a glance, such as 'Footpath Guardians', or 'Alston Youth Hockey'.

Your Team

Setting up a new organisation can be enjoyable, and give you a lot of satisfaction. However, it takes energy, enthusiasm, hard work and patience to make it a success. Therefore, you need a team who are passionate about this project. Write down who is on your team next.

Note: Ideally, you need 3 or more people to start with. If there's less of you, consider asking around for a few more pairs of hands. There's more information on advertising in section 4.

Your Action Plan

You've got your aims, and your team. So what's the plan?
Now's the time to jot down a rough idea of how you're going to achieve your aims. Will you meet once a month to clear weeds? Sell your crafts to raise money for a local cause? Run hockey practice once a week for under-11s?
This doesn't have to be very detailed, or think a long way into the future. It's a just a starting point, to get you going.

Consider:

- What you want to do
- How you plan to do it
- When your activities will happen, and how often
- How you will prioritise your ideas, if you have lots of them. It is better to do a couple of things really well, than take on too much and not achieve any of it.
- How you will measure success / know if what you're doing is working. This might be a target amount of money to raise, an ideal number of participants, or just if everyone has fun!
- If you already have specific members of your team in mind for specific activities.

Note: Always come back to your group's aims. Is this activity going to move you towards achieving them? If not, do you really need to do it?

Your Resources

Firstly, consider what resources you **already have**, which will enable you to carry out your activities.
Put finances aside for now, and think STEP: Skills, Time, Equipment and Premises.

Skills - perhaps one of your team has a first aid certificate, or has played hockey professionally.
Time - what's needed? Two hours a month? A week?
Equipment - does someone already have three pairs of gardening gloves they're happy to lend or donate?
Premises - perhaps you can borrow someone's garage for your activities, or hire a local hall.

Secondly, consider what resources you still need, and how you could go about getting these.

Note: Don't start buying things without asking around first. Many community groups have equipment and resources they are happy to lend, or people may be willing to donate things to your group. Make sure you are all clear whether something has been loaned or donated, to avoid future confusion.

Money

Inevitably, your group will need some money at some point.
But how much?
You don't need to know every penny at this point, but try to set out a rough idea of what your start up expenses, e.g. equipment purchases, and regular costs, e.g. hall hire, might be.

Where is this money going to come from? Below is a list of ways lots of community groups generate income. Most groups use a combination of these to raise what they need.
We'll go into more depth about how to manage your group's finances in the next section. For now, these are just ideas.

- Membership fees
- Community donations
- Fundraising activities e.g. cake sale
- Selling items made by the group
- Business sponsorship
- Parish Council funding
- Grant funding
- Community funding e.g. via sites like Gofundme

Jot down some ideas of how you might want to fund your group's activities.

Local Links

By now, you should have an almost complete plan of your group's aims, what you're planning to actually do, and how you're going to make it happen.

The final part of this section is to consider how your group will fit into the wider community. After all, you are not operating in isolation. You are part of a large VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) sector. There are many other groups operating on Alston Moor, and across wider Cumbria, and it is to everyone's advantage to work together as best we can.

Consider:

- What local events could you take part in?
- What other groups could you team up with, in order to move you both forward?
- Who could you share resources with?
- Who could you share skills with, and have their skills help you in return?
- How could you involve different sections of the community, even if this is further down the road?

NEW GROUP PLANNING TEMPLATE

Group Name

Group Aims

The Team

Action Plan

Resources

Money

Local Links

NEW GROUP PLANNING TEMPLATE EXAMPLE

Group Name

Footpath Guardians

Group Aims

1 - Regularly clear the main footpaths around Alston of weeds so they are pleasant to walk
2 - Litterpick in the town and surroundings so it looks and feels pleasant to live in
3 - Advertise footpaths and local walks to tourists to show off our town, and as part of the wider tourist offering. (This aim needs to wait until further down the line.)

The Team

Susan C, Paul A, David F, Laura M and Fiona W.

Action Plan

Clearing the footpaths of weeds is our first priority. We will start by meeting once a week for two hours to do this, then drop this down to once a month, once the weeds are under control. Paul has volunteered to look ahead and plan a route for us.
We will also have an initial litter pick through the town next Saturday.
We'll take before and after pictures to show the difference, and have tea & cake afterwards!

Resources

Fiona has offered to lend spare gardening equipment, including gloves, to those who don't have it. Susan is looking into the best way to dispose of the cut weeds and grass.
We can borrow litter picking equipment from the WI for next Saturday.
Everyone has committed to the initial 2 months in terms of time. After that we will need to reassess what everyone can commit.

Money

We do not need any start-up funds. However, over time we could look into getting some equipment that belongs to the group rather than to individuals.
At the moment, everyone is paying for their own tea and cake, and we are meeting in Fiona's house. However, it would be good if the group had a bit of a budget for refreshments, and for hall hire if our group gets larger. We could fundraise for the group by running a stall at several community events this year.

Local Links

We have already make contact with the 'Friends of the Cemetery' group, to work with them on the footpaths surrounding the church. We are also exploring ways to involve the local Girl Guides with some of our future litter picks.

ESTABLISHING A GROUP



Now that you have a basic plan, it's time to get a bit more formal. You may already have started having meetings, and doing some of your activities. However, there's more work to do to set you up as an established group, rather than just a collection of individuals.
This is important if you plan to engage with the wider world, or do some fundraising.
So let's get stuck in!

Your Constitution

A constitution is a governing document, a formal statement of your aims – what your group is going to do and how it is going to do it. It is also a set of rules that all members of the group agree to abide by.

If you are a small, unincorporated association with simple aims, there is no legal requirement for you to have a constitution, or governing document.
However, it is strongly recommended that you do have one, and that you write it at the beginning of the process, before your group starts its activities.

Why? A constitution:

- Prevents people finding themselves at cross purposes
- Serves as a reference point and guide for your organisation
- Helps resolve problems in times of controversy
- Demonstrates to others that your group is democratic and accountable
- Provides a clear procedure by which decisions are made
- Helps new members understand what you're all about
- Opens up more avenues for your group to engage with the wider world, such as applying for funding, opening a bank account, and participating in training or events

A constitution typically includes:

- Your group name
- Where your group operates, and any limits placed on this
- Your aims, and if they are charitable or not
- Who can be a member; membership fees and conditions

- An equal opportunities statement
- The committee roles, and how they are to be filled
- How often the committee / members should meet
- How and when the Annual General Meetings are to be held
- Rules and procedures for meetings
- How money raised will be spent, and how it will be managed
- How to make changes to the constitution
- What happens if the group needs to be dissolved

It can include anything else that is particularly relevant to your group, as long as everyone agrees.

On the next page is a 'Constitution Notes' template, for you to fill in as you go through the next two sections of this toolkit.
In section 5 of this booklet there is a link to a sample constitution, to give you a clear and appropriate structure. This can be easily adapted for any unincorporated organisation, once your notes are complete.

The type of group you wish to set up impacts what needs to be in your constitution. There is more information on this in the next section, and lots more guidance available online.

If you are setting up a charity, the Charity Commission has a sample constitution here (QR Code below):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806434/GD3.pdf

More complex incorporated organisations will need a more detailed set of governing documents. You may also need to get legal advice, to ensure you are complying with all relevant regulations.

More guidance can be found here (QR Code below):
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-of-the-regulator-of-community-interest-companies

Charity Model Constitution:

Guidance for Incorporated Organisations:

Your Group Type

There are lots of different types of VCSE groups, and it can get quite complicated. However, the following steps will take you through it as simply as possible.
There are two main decisions to make.

1. Will you be an unincorporated organisation, or incorporated?
2. Will you be a charity, or not?

Incorporation

Incorporation is a process through which an organisation goes from being a collection of individuals, in the eyes of the law, to a single entity which is legally separate from the individuals involved.

An incorporated organisation can enter into contracts, buy or rent property, and employ people in its own right. Any debts or obligations belong to the organisation, rather than to the individuals running it.

An unincorporated organisation is, in legal terms, a collection of individuals, and any debts or obligations are their responsibility. But don't be put off by that! Most small organisations have very few financial obligations, don't employ staff or run premises, and there is usually only a relatively small amount of money involved in running the group's activities.

Organisations with incorporated legal structures, such as Charitable or Community Interest Companies are more heavily regulated than those with unincorporated structures, take longer to set up, require more ongoing work to keep running, and are more likely to incur external costs. It's just a question of what is right for your group.

More information about different types of community organisation can be found here (QR Code below): https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/legal-structures-for-community-and-voluntary-groups/

Charitable Status

A charity in England and Wales is defined by law as an organisation which has exclusively charitable purposes, and is regulated by the High Court's charity law. Charities must prove they exist for the public benefit.

The criteria are listed on the Charity Commission website (QR Code below): https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-purposes-and-rules

If an organisation meets these criteria it is, by definition, a charity, even if it is not registered with the Charity Commission.
If an organisation does not meet these criteria then it is not a charity, cannot register with the Charity Commission, and is not subject to charity regulation.

Types of Organisation Information:



Charity Commission Guidance:



Most community groups are unincorporated, non-charitable associations. This is the simplest type to set up.

However, the legal structure of your group affects what you can and cannot do, and how you raise money, so it is important that you give it some thought.

Consider which is the most suitable for your aims. If you're not sure, start out as an unincorporated non-charitable organisation. You can always progress from there.

The Resource Centre has a Routemap tool which can help point you in the right direction (QR Code below): www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/routemap/

The government also has a tool which helps you decide if a charity is the right structure (QR Code below): https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-a-new-charity-is-the-best-option

Write what type of group you are planning to establish on your template.

Resource Centre Routemap:



Government Charity Decision Tool:



Roles and Responsibilities

Now that you know what kind of group you're setting up, the next step is to decide who will take responsibility for each area of your work.

What these roles are called will differ depending on which type of group you're setting up, however a lot of the responsibilities are the same. Generally, the larger and more formal your group structure, the more rigidly you need to stick to certain roles. Smaller, more informal groups can be less official.

To committee or not to committee?

Many groups have a committee, which is elected once a year at an Annual General Meeting, and is responsible for running the day to day affairs of the group. Other groups share or 'rotate' the jobs that need doing.
It is up to you to decide how many committee members you will have and what officers you want, however the main roles are usually Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer.

Chairperson. This role involves:

- Chairing meetings
- Helping the committee to work together as a team
- Having an overview of the work of the group
- Being the main spokesperson person for the group

Secretary. This role involves:

- Taking minutes at the committee and general meetings
- Keeping group and committee members up to date
- Keeping the general public informed about the organisation's activities
- Receiving and responding to information, emails and letters

Treasurer. This role involves:

- Manging the group's money
- Keeping financial records for the group
- Keeping the group informed of their financial situation
- Ensuring the group is financially compliant

You can choose to have additional officers, for example Press Officer, Fundraiser, Membership Secretary… whatever your group needs.

Note: just because someone is named in a role doesn't mean they have to do all the work! It's perfectly possible to share roles between two or three people to lessen the workload, or even rotate the roles between people. Just make sure these arrangements are agreed between all parties in advance.

Many small groups run very successfully without an elected committee. In this instance, the entire group is the 'management committee' and everyone is responsible for the group's affairs.

However, you still need to have members that take responsibility for long term tasks, such as managing the money, and have an overview of the big picture.

Additionally, many would-be volunteers are put off by the idea that 'we all do a bit of everything'. Clear, well-defined roles and responsibilities ensure people know where they stand, and what is expected of them, which makes it easier for them to commit their time.

Describe in the space on your template whether you will have a committee, what roles you will have and how they will be decided. If you're not having a committee, describe how the group will manage your work.

Note: Loose arrangements are more likely to cause conflict further down the line, as they are open to wider interpretation. The clearer a structure you can put together now, the better. Make sure everyone knows where they stand.

Contact Details

The final step in this section is more of a practical one. Communication is key to getting things done, so take a moment to think about how best to make this work, before you plunge in. This may seem obvious, but it's something that gets forgotten by a lot of groups amongst all the other decisions that need to be made.

Contacting Each Other

How are you going to keep in touch with the rest of your group, with members, and as a committee?
You may want a few different methods – for example the committee members may have a way to contact each other, then send out separate communications to the membership.

Some groups use messaging applications such as Whatsapp to communicate quickly and easily. However these do have downsides, such as messages/decisions being missed by those who can't check in as frequently, or becoming a bit chaotic if there are lots of members.
Other groups use email, especially to send out documents such as minutes, while other people prefer a good old-fashioned phone call!

The point here to to decide what is right for your group members, to ensure that everyone is kept informed and up to date.

Contacting Others

If you want your group to be contactable by the outside world, you need to decide how this is going to be done. Initially, you may have started by using someone's personal email address, or phone number, as your group's main contact. However, this isn't ideal, especially if you're hoping for your group to grow, or that person wants to take a holiday a some point!

It's also better to have group contact details that don't rely on distributing someone's personal information, can be accessed by multiple group members, and would survive future changes to your committee.

Email

Group email addresses can easily be set up via engines such as Gmail, or Outlook, or linked to a website, if your group chooses to have one. Make sure more than one person has the password!

Phone

Group phone numbers can also be set up, using companies like Yay.com, which ring to existing mobile handsets. You could also consider purchasing a dedicated mobile for your group, if that suits your activities. Don't forget to include guidance around how this will be used in your constitution, to prevent misunderstandings.

Other Media

Now, consider if your group wants to be contactable any other way, or have a public profile. Do you want to be active on social media, such as Alstonmoorcommunity.com, or worldwide sites? What about having a website, or Youtube channel? For some groups, these will be essential immediately, while for others they may be totally unnecessary, or will naturally develop further down the line.

Companies such as Wix or Wordpress can guide you through setting up a simple website for your group, and there is a lot of training and guidance out there on this topic if you choose to pursue it.

Things to remember:

- Some of these services, such as website hosting, will incur a cost for as long as you wish to use them. Consider how this will be funded. A group member may be happy to donate the cost initially, as it is often inexpensive. However, they may not be quite as happy to still be doing this in a year… or five!

- Websites and social media pages need to be maintained – you can't just set them up and walk away, if you want them to be successful. Consider the technological capabilities within your group. Who will be responsible for this? Be careful that you don't allow 'someone's friend who works in IT' to set up your site, which then no one in your group understands how to operate!

- Be careful when setting up a group social media account. These are often linked to people's personal profiles, which makes it harder to keep it separate or have other group members use it. Take some time to make sure you really understand how the site works, before you make it essential to your group's function.

- Always make sure that everything you set up is accessible by multiple group members. You'd be surprised how many groups have had problems when they have a disagreement, and then someone walks away, taking the password for the website and all knowledge of how to update it with them…

NOTES FOR OUR CONSTITUTION

Group Type/Structure

Roles & Responsibilities

Communication & Contact Details

Notes on Meetings & the AGM

Financial Notes

Policy Notes

Other Documents and Procedures

COMPLIANCE

Congratulations! You've probably done a lot of work by this point, and have hopefully successfully set up your group.
Unfortunately, the administrative burden on community groups is larger than it used to be, and showing no signs of shrinking.
Therefore, whilst you now have everything you need in order to get started, there are other documents that your group will come to need over time, or which may be useful to you in carrying out certain activities.
That's what this section is about. But don't worry! Lots of sample documents are included, to make this as straightforward as possible.

Recording Meetings

Your group should try to have regular meetings, as outlined in your constitution. These meetings should be a chance for everyone to get together, review your activities, discuss the way forward and make decisions.

On your template, consider:

- How often are you planning to meet?
- Will you have a minimum number of meetings annually?
- Who will be entitled to attend your meetings? Just the committee, or the entire membership?
- Will you have a quorum (a minimum number of people who must attend) in order to make decisions?
- Everyone who is entitled to attend a meeting must be invited, so how will you do this?

The Agenda

It is helpful if you have an Agenda for your meetings. This is simply a plan of what you will discuss during the meeting. It should also be sent out to invitees ahead of the meeting, so that everyone knows what will be discussed and has time to prepare what they want to say.

It is usually the Chair's job to lead the meeting through the agenda, keep the discussion on track, and make sure nothing is forgotten.

A link to a sample Agenda can be found in section 5. It is usual for the agenda to follow the same format each time. For example:

- Apologies from absent members
- Approval of the previous meeting's minutes
- A financial update from the Treasurer
- Updates / decisions regarding your various activities
- Any Other Business – a chance for any member present to raise something they want to discuss

Taking Minutes

Also in section 5 is a link to a template for minuting your meetings. Taking minutes just means writing down everything that was discussed during the meeting. Doing this is important to ensure your group is democratic, transparent and accountable, and is acting in accordance with your agreed rules.

Minutes can be brief and to the point, but they do need to provide a full record. They also need to be sent out following your meeting so that everyone has a chance to read them, and then approve them at the next meeting.
This is to ensure everyone agrees on what has happened previously, so that any later disputes can be settled, and your group can make informed decisions.

This all might seem very formal, and if you're setting up a simple, informal association then there is no external requirement for this to be done.
However, if for example the public are donating money to your group, then they may want to know how you are spending it, and having a clear record makes sure there are no ambiguities in how you are acting.

Annual General Meetings

Most groups hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) once a year. This is when you inform everyone about the work the group has done over the year, and share your annual accounts. You can also (re)elect your committee, and make changes to the constitution.
The general public is also usually invited to the AGM. This is another way your group can be transparent in your activities, and held accountable.

Note down:

- How and when members will be notified of the date, time and venue of the AGM
- The maximum time there can be between AGMs
- How people should nominate themselves for the committee, and how this will be agreed / voted upon
- What the quorum will be, and what you will do if this number is not met

Your group may also occasionally require Special or Extraordinary General Meetings. These are usually called when an important matter has arisen, which cannot wait for the AGM. They are conducted in a similar manner to an AGM, and need to be minuted carefully, especially if large decisions are being made.

Group Finances

Bank Accounts

If your group is regularly receiving money, then you should consider opening a suitable bank account, for the sole use of your group. Like a constitution, this is not a legal requirement for small, unincorporated organisations. However, it ensures that your group's finances are transparent, fair and accountable, and that you can more easily keep track of your group's money. It is also a necessity if you plan to apply for grant funding of any kind.

Several banks offer accounts to community groups, and they all have different requirements, charges and benefits. It will be up to your group to search through the options, and find one that is the most appropriate for your work. A list of bank account options can be found at (QR Code below):
https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/bank-accounts-for-community-and-voluntary-organisations/#accounts
A good place to start is by asking around. and finding out what other community groups do, which has worked for them.

While you are waiting for your account to be set up, ensure that you are keeping a clear record of any financial transactions your group carries out.

If your group cannot open a bank account for some reason, or you need a system to use while you wait for your account to be opened, you may want to consider using a fiscal hosting service like the one provided by The Social Change Nest CIC. The Social Change Nest acts like a bank and holds money on behalf of your group.

Bank Account Options List:

Financial Rules

In your constitution, you should have a section covering financial rules – a set of agreements on how your group will look after its money. Even if you don't have a constitution, it would be helpful to have some agreements in place regarding your finances, so that everyone is clear about how the money will be handled.

As well as helping your group to function better and preventing arguments, financial rules show funders and other bodies that your group is looking after its money well.

If your group is larger, or handling large sums of money, then you will need more detailed procedures.
You should decide details such as:

- The type of financial records you will keep – account book, petty cash book, spreadsheet, online accounts etc.
- What bank or building society accounts you will hold, how many signatories you will have and who they will be.
- How you will deal with cash, for example if a float is needed for events.
- Whether committee members can buy items without going to a meeting for approval, and if so, the maximum amount of money that can be spent this way.
- What expenses (if any) will be allowed, and how these can be claimed.
- The financial year (for example, if your accounts will run from 1st April to 31st March, from 1st January to 31st December, or on a different cycle).
- How often the treasurer will report to the committee, and what their reports should look like.

Jot down some notes on your template. Everyone on your committee should be aware of these rules, and how your group's finances are being handled.

Keeping Accounts

Keeping good financial records will help you to budget, plan ahead, and make the best use of your money, as well as demonstrating your ability to look after your money to external organisations.

You can also use your accounts to influence your group's activities. For example, if you are trying to decide whether to run a raffle or have a stall at a local fair, then you can use your accounts to compare which has previously raised the most money.

Your Treasurer should present the annual accounts to the AGM for members to discuss and approve. Your members have a right to know about the group's finances, and question any transactions.

Depending on the type of group you have set up, you may be required by law to produce annual accounts and have them independently verified. You may also need to employ an accountant if they are particularly complex. Registered charities need to send off their accounts annually to the Charity Commission.

If you apply for a grant, the funder will always ask to see accounts as proof that the group is well run, and will use the grant properly. They may also have terms and conditions of their own about how the group's finances are handled. You may need to jump through a few extra hoops, so having clear records to start with will make the whole process much smoother.

There are many different tools you can use to help you manage your money, from an accounts book, to a computer spreadsheet, to an online programme such as Quickbooks (though there may be a cost to these programmes).

Section 5 contains a link to a sample set of accounts from a fictional group, showing how they could be laid out for your records, and for presentation at an AGM.

Keeping Receipts

Alongside your accounts, you should keep additional records of your group's transactions, particularly larger ones. These could be receipts, invoices, grant confirmation letters, cash sheets for cash intakes, expense forms – whatever you have as proof that a payment was made into or from your account.

In section 5 is a link to a simple expenses claim form, which could be adapted for use by your group.

Record Retention

How long you need to retain your group's records for will depend on the type of group you have set up, and who you are accountable to.

For small, unincorporated associations, your committee could agree on a period of time that records should be kept for, for example 2 years, and write it into your constitution.
For larger, charitable or corporate groups, you may need to keep your records for a standard 7 or 10 years, and should check this in the guidance provided in section 2, regarding choosing a type of group.

This is no longer the physical burden it used to be however, as it is now very easy to keep records for long periods, digitally. Simply open a separate folder on the computer, and save everything related to your group into it.

With paper documents such as receipts, take a clear photo, and store that digitally too. This file can be saved onto a memory stick, or onto a file sharing platform such as Google Drive, so that other group members can have access to it.

If your records are particularly sensitive, you can password protect these folders, or your memory stick. Again, more heavily regulated group types may have more stringent rules around record retention and protection – please check this.

Public / Private Documents

It is also useful to consider at this point who will have access to your documents, and whether some of them should be in the public domain.

More than one member of your group should always have access to all documentation, passwords etc, simply in case of accident / a group member having to leave unexpectedly. This could be your Chair and Secretary, or other members you decide would be suitable.

You may also decide that it is in the public interest (for example if you have received a lot of public money or scrutiny of your activities) to publish your constitution, meeting minutes, group policies, or summary of your financial activity on your website, if you have one.
This is not a requirement for most groups, but can be helpful in certain situations – just make sure it is all up to date and accurate!

IMPORTANT NOTE:
Your group's finances are not solely the responsibility of the Treasurer!

They might deal with day to day transactions, but every group / committee member is responsible for deciding how money will be raised and spent, and dealing with the group's money in a clear, responsible, and organised way.

- The whole committee should agree on financial decisions.
- The whole committee should understand your group's financial position.
- Everyone should ensure that money is being spent responsibly, and according to your group's rules.
- Every member of your group has the right to know how money has been used.
- If there is a problem, then you will all be held equally accountable.
- The best way to avoid issues is to have clear rules from the beginning, then ensure they are stuck to.
- Have regular financial reports at your meetings, and ask that everyone pays attention to them!
- The whole committee, not just the treasurer, is responsible for ensuring that proper records are kept.
- You should be consistent in how you handle money and keep records. Follow the rules you have decided upon, and make sure that everyone who joins your committee is aware of these rules.

Policies and Procedures

Policies

A policy is simply a set of statements, relating to a particular issue connected to your group's work.
It is similar to a constitution in that it sets out some rules about your group's behaviour and actions, except it is focused on one element of your work, such as the environment or safeguarding.

If you're still right at the beginning, you may not have given much thought yet to the policies your group might need or want to have.
You might end up not wanting any - some groups don't need them!

However, for some groups they are an absolute must. For example, if your group is planning to work directly with children or vulnerable adults, a Safeguarding policy is essential, to keep your members safe and make sure everyone knows what to do in certain circumstances.

Sometimes, policies are also requested by funders or larger organisations your group might want to work with. For example, if your group is working in infrastructure, transport, the built environment or with certain types of equipment, you may be expected to have a Health & Safety policy.

You may also decide that you want certain policies in place for your group, because you want your members to behave in a certain way when they act on your group's behalf.
For example, an environmental policy might govern the way your group disposes of rubbish at public events, or say that you have to purchase recycled paper bags for your cake stalls.

Here is a list of common policies your group might want or need. Section 5 has a link to a sample copy of each one, which can be adapted to suit your group.

- Data Protection
- Environmental
- Equality and Diversity
- Health and Safety
- Safeguarding

Policies do not have to be overly formal or complicated. It is important, if your group decides to adopt a policy, that everyone understands what it requires of them, and why it is important to your group.

Make sure everyone in your group formally agrees on a policy (such as during a minuted meeting). If the presence of such a policy is integral to the functioning of your group, you may want it to be written into your constitution as well.

Jot down what policies you think your group will need on your template.

Unless it is a vital part of your setup, such as Safeguarding when working with children, you don't need to have all of these in place straight away. They can be added to your documentation as and when you find you need them.

Other Procedures and Documents

There are several other documents your group might need, or that you decide are useful to have, as you carry out your activities. The main ones are listed below, though you may come across others.

It is easy to think that your group is not big enough to need these documents, or that your activities won't be significant enough to warrant the expenses of licences or insurance.

It is important that your group understands when these things are legal requirements, and when not. Is it also important to understand the risks of not having these documents in place. Without them. you could be opening your group up to even more expense, or legal consequences.

Therefore, when your group is planning an activity, you should always do a little bit of research to find out exactly what you should have in place. Remember that regulations often change, and you group's preparation needs to change with them.

DBS Checks

DBS checks are carried out by the Disclosure and Barring Service, also known as DBS. A DBS check is a record of a person's criminal convictions and cautions, sent to the organisation who requests it. They are most commonly requested by employers, who want to find out if the person they are employing is suitable for the role.

However, they are also relevant to some volunteers. As with a Safeguarding policy, if you are volunteering with children, you may find that you need a DBS check.

It could also apply if you are employing / roping in a third party to provide activities for children and young people – do check well in advance that everyone who needs a DBS has one.

There is more guidance on this topic here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disclosure-application-process-for-volunteers/disclosure-application-process-for-volunteers



Risk Assessments

A risk assessment lists the different hazards that your members or the public might encounter whilst taking part in activities run by your group, or while using equipment or a venue that is looked after by your group.

Whatever your group does, from organising a street party to running a community building, you have a responsibility to do what you can to make sure people don't get hurt. Doing a risk assessment can help with this.

Conducting a risk assessment for your group can seem like a big job, and perhaps a bit worrying. However, it doesn't need to be complicated or difficult.
In section 5 there is a link to a risk assessment template, and also an example that has been filled in, to show you how it might be completed.

As you will see, most of it is just common sense, and you'll probably think about it anyway in the course of your planning. A risk assessment simply writes these thoughts down, and makes sure everyone in your group is doing the same, agreed upon actions.

A risk assessment:

- Helps you to think things through
- Helps your group to take joint responsibility for risk
- Saves you from having to make the same decisions again and again. Once you've written a risk assessment for your annual fair, it won't need to be done again, unless something changes.

Additionally:

- Funders and licensing authorities often want you to do a risk assessment, if they are funding/licensing an activity or event
- It may be difficult to make an insurance claim without a risk assessment

A few more things to remember:

- There is no point having a risk assessment if you aren't actually going to do what you say you will. Make sure the actions are clear, practical and doable by everyone involved.

- Don’t make your risk assessment too restrictive, or let the idea of it stop you from doing things. No activity is completely without risk. The idea here is to do what you can to reduce risk, not remove it entirely!
- You can’t be expected to think of everything. Just do your best, and make sure that no one person is left to do this all on their own. Get your whole committee involved – many heads are better than one.

Insurance

There are two main types of insurance that your group might need: public liability, and employer’s liability.

Public Liability

When you organise an activity or event, your group could be held responsible if a member of the public is injured, or receives damage to or loss of their property, and they think it is your group’s fault.
For example, if you place sound equipment and a member of the public trips over a wire and hurts themselves, they may consider your group liable.

They could then make a claim against your group, asking you to pay an amount of money to them. Public liability insurance protects you from this, providing you have met the terms of the insurance.
The term ‘public’ means anyone who is not an employee or volunteer, so it includes members and anyone else attending your events and activities.

There is no general legal requirement to have public liability insurance, so your group needs to decide if you want to take out this insurance or not. Some venues may have their own insurance. Some external organisations, such as funders, councils or licencing bodies may require you to have insurance for certain events.

Employer’s Liability

Employer’s liability is the same as public liability except instead of referring to members of the public, it refers to your group’s volunteers or employees.

If you have paid employees, you are required by law to have employer’s liability insurance.
If you have volunteers, you can take out employer’s liability insurance to cover your group if a volunteer gets injured and makes a claim against you. Public liability insurance will not cover you for volunteers.

You can take out a joint public liability and employer’s liability insurance policy, if you want both types of insurance. These can be purchased as annual cover, or for one-off events.

Note: Not every insurance company will cover community groups. It is a good idea to ask around, and find out what other groups have done in similar circumstances.

Other insurances your group may need include:

- Buildings / contents insurance if you have premises
- Insurance which covers any valuable equipment your group may own
- Vehicle insurance, if your group owns a vehicle. If your members drive in their role as a volunteer, for example driving members of the public to events or appointments, they do not need additional car insurance, but should inform their current insurer of what they are doing.

If you are not sure if you need insurance, ask around. There are many community groups on Alston Moor who have put on a huge variety of activities and events – someone will be able to help you.
You could also get in touch with the Parish Council or Local Authority for advice.

Licences

There are some activities that your group may need permission for, usually in the form of applying for a licence.

Small, community group activity is exempt from some of these, especially if you are raising money entirely for charity or your group's cause.

However, it is always best to check, as some of the rules are quite specific.

The following activities may need a licence, and are subject to a range of restrictions:

- Raffles and lotteries
- Bingo, race nights & casino nights
- Music, films and other entertainment
- Alcohol sale and consumption
- Events on public land
- Food and drink
- Street collections/donation buckets
- Street closures

Lots more information is available here (QR Code):
https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/licensing-and-regulations/#work%20residents

Guidance is also available from the relevant authority:

- The Gambling Commission
- Westmorland & Furness Council
- The Parish Council
- https://uk.mplc.com/ (Motion Picture Licensing Company)
- https://www.ppluk.com/ (Music / Audio Licensing)

Photography Consent

This is a relatively new concept, but is increasingly important at a time when most people have a camera in their pocket, and an image can be spread across the globe in a matter of minutes.

Images in which people can be identified are a form of personal data. Personal data is protected by data protection legislation, which sets out how organisations should treat people's personal data in order to respect their privacy.

As a general rule, before taking any photos or filming, your group should ensure that people know that they are being photographed, who is taking the pictures, what they will be used for, and who they will be shared with. You should also tell people what to do if they do not want to be photographed, or if they want their images deleted later.

This doesn't have to be as complicated as it sounds – a simple announcement at your meeting will do:
"At next week's craft workshop, Mary is planning to take photos, which will be printed in our next newsletter and put on our social media page. If you don't want to be in them, please let Mary know."

If you are running a large event, or have lots of people attending, it can be harder. A good idea is to put up signs at your event, or send a message out in advance, explaining what is happening to the general public.

Photographing Children Under 13

Understandably, photographing children under 13 is subject to tighter restrictions.

Before photographing or filming children, you need to make sure that their parent or guardian is aware of why you are taking pictures, what they will be used for, and how to contact you to ask for them to be deleted. Parents/guardians should have an opportunity to tell you if they do not want their children to be photographed.

As a general rule, if you cannot get permission from a parent/guardian, do not take a picture of the child.

If you run regular activities for children, it is a good idea to get consent in writing. There is a link to an example form you can use in section 5.

A note on working with children:
As has been mentioned several times already, there are certain things that are not optional if your group plans to work with children, especially if your volunteers will be working without children's parents or teachers being present.

You must ensure that everything is in place before you start. The Out of School Alliance has a good checklist for you to go through here: https://outofschoolalliance.co.uk/activity-clubs

Back to Your Constitution

You should now have lots of notes, which will hold most of the information about your group and how it will be run.
Now is a good time to have a look at the sample constitution structure, and have a go at writing one.

SURVIVE AND THRIVE!



Congratulations! You now have everything in place to run a successful community group. It will take time, effort and persistence, but with a good team around you, you will no doubt be very successful!
This last section is all about your future: where you are going, and how you're going to get there. This might not seem important if you're still at the beginning of the process, but it's something that can easily get forgotten, once you get into the weeds of your activities.
Take some time to jot down some ideas, then try to set aside a little bit of time regularly to focus on this.

Advertising

At some point your group will almost certainly need more people, either to join your committee, join as a member, or participate in your activities.

Advertising what your group is doing is a great way to connect with the local community and get more people on board. It's easy to assume that everyone knows what you're doing, and would come along if they wanted to. But that's not necessarily the case. Often, people don't know what's happening locally, and they don't always want to ask.

Here's a few tips:

- Make sure you're taking advantage of those local links discussed in the first section.
- Don't make assumptions about what people already know about you or your group – act as though everyone is new to your work.
- There is currently no one thing you can do to ensure your work is seen by everyone on the Moor. Try a wide variety of approaches.
- Remember that you are competing with a thousand other things in people's busy and complicated lives, so think about how your message might cut through that noise.
- Be persistent – it's not 'one and done'. You will have to repeat your message several times in order to get it across.
- Vary the words you use, but focus on creating an emotional connection to your purpose.

Types of advertising to consider:

- Get yourself in the next edition of the Community Directory
- Posters in local shops & venues
- Leaflets in local venues, or through letterboxes
- Articles in the local newsletters and papers such as the Cumberland & Westmorland Herald
- Social media posts, such as Alstonmoorcommunity.com
- Chatting to people at local events
- Banners
- CVS recruitment portal: www.volunteering.cumbriacvs.org.uk

Create an Emotional Connection

Why should someone give precious time to you?
Ultimately, if you want more people to join you, this is the question you need to ask. Your group might represent a very worthy cause, or be fantastic fun! But that's no good if you can't communicate it to people.

Much more information and training on this topic is available should you want it, however for now, remember a key part of advertising is to try to touch your audience's emotions. When you're putting together a poster, or letter, how do you want the reader to feel?

- Inspired
- Hopeful
- Amused
- Sad
- Energised
- Or something else?

Simply taking this into consideration can really improve your advertising.

Another effective tool is to use photographs, either of your work or your volunteers in action. We humans are naturally drawn to look at people's faces, so this is much more likely to get attention than a sketch or just text. (Make sure you get permission though!)

Online programmes such as Canva are great to create professional-looking posters, leaflets, presentations and even videos. They also often have a free version and are easy to learn how to use.

Recruiting Volunteers

Without doubt, this is the toughest issue facing community groups on Alston Moor at the moment.
And it's not just us – this is an ongoing issue for community groups across the country. Volunteer numbers decreased rapidly during the pandemic, and have never really recovered.

Don't be disheartened, but do manage your expectations about how many people will be able to join you. It's not because they don't want to – lots of other factors are influencing low volunteer numbers.

Section 5 includes a link to some guidance on recruiting more volunteers to your cause.

Top tips:

- Stay positive – it's not a reflection on you or your group
- Keep trying
- Make sure you have a good personal support network
- Don't overextend your group's capabilities: wait until you have new people to start new things, rather than starting something then looking for help
- Don't be afraid to scale back your activities if things get tough – it doesn't mean you're failing
- Don't personally take on more than you can cope with
- Remember that volunteering is completely optional, and it's supposed to be fulfilling! If you're not finding it worthwhile, you're allowed to walk away.

Training

One way to expand your group's activities is to give your team the chance to participate in training.
For example, a food hygiene certificate will allow you to run larger catered events, and reassure your guests that you know what you are doing.
You may also decide that your group needs certain training, in order to carry out your activities safely and in the correct manner.
For example, Safeguarding and First Aid training may be required when working with children or vulnerable adults.

Common training topics include:

- Food Hygiene
- Safeguarding
- First Aid
- Writing Funding Bids
- IT Support

- Governance / Trustee training
- Mental Health
- Health and Safety
- Equality and Diversity

There are many, many online training providers. Some training can be found for free, others comes at a cost, and there are different levels of training too. Your group will have to decide if you are willing to spend money, depending on what you need.
Some good places to start for free training are:

https://freecoursesinengland.co.uk/
https://www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses





Whatever training you choose, do check that it's with a properly accredited provider, or it may not be accepted by external organisations.

Future Planning

Planning your group's future is something that can easily get lost in the day to day running of your group. You're busy with paperwork, events, firefighting problems, and celebrating short term successes.
However, taking some time to plan for the future is not only very helpful for the long term viability of your group, it is also very motivating in the short term, so try to devote some time to it.

Questions to consider:

1. If you achieve all your aims this year, what would you like to achieve next year?
2. Will you add anything new / expand your group's activities?
3. What about five years down the line – what would you like your group to be achieving then?
4. What will you need to get there, that you haven't got now?
5. Can you put anything in place now, to set you on that longer term path?

Celebrating Your Successes

Running your group will be difficult at times. There will be activities which are boring, lonely, and make you question whether it is worth it, Future planning can help overcome some of this, but another tool is to make sure that you are celebrating when things go well.

At the end of an event, a project, a term of activities, or even a really long AGM, make sure you are taking the time to show everyone your appreciation.
This can take any form you fancy – a cup of coffee together, a group day out, a box of chocolates each at Christmas, a thank you card… anything!

Sometimes, volunteers don't want to be rewarded. That's not why we get into community activity after all, and people don't want to spend the group's money on things that aren't necessary.
But it is important to notice when people have done things well, and when your group has achieved its aims and objectives.
This can be a simple thank you in your next meeting, such as:

"I just want to say a huge congratulations to everyone on the committee. We raised over £400 for the playpark, and managed to recruit another volunteer. I particularly want to thank Joanne for her brilliant work on the signage, and Tom for organising pickup of all the tables and chairs. Great effort everyone!"

They might be embarrassed, but that doesn't mean it isn't having an impact. Making people feel that their efforts are recognised helps keep everyone going through more difficult times.

Further Resources

Hopefully, you have found this toolkit useful, and it has helped you with your group's work. There is a lot of guidance on this topic out there, and below is a list of further resources, which will help if you need more information.

- Get Legal Toolkit – free online reference and decision-making tool for charities, social enterprises and co-operative organisations: www.getlegal.org.uk
- www.resourcecentre.org.uk
- Government guidance on charities: https://www.gov.uk/browse/citizenship/charities-honours
- NCVO guidance: https://www.charitysetup.org.uk/
- www.ncvo.org.uk
- www.cumbriacvs.org.uk

SAMPLE DOCUMENTS



Lots of sample documents have been prepared to help you set up your group as easily as possible. These are:

- Constitution
- Agenda template
- Minutes template
- Sample accounts
- Expenses claim form
- Example Data Protection policy
- Environmental policy
- Equality and Diversity policy
- Health and Safety policy
- Safeguarding policy
- Risk Assessment template
- Example Risk Assessment
- Photography consent form
- Ideas for recruiting volunteers
- Support from the Community Development Co-ordinator

All these documents and more can be found on the Community Site: https://community.alstonmoordirectory.com/resources