

Starting a Group – Summary

This Information Sheet will help you if you are starting a new voluntary or community organisation in the Rutland area.

What will it be like?

Setting up a new organisation can be enjoyable, and can give you a lot of satisfaction. It takes energy, enthusiasm and hard work, and sometimes a good deal of patience, to make a success of a new organisation. There are sure to be problems, and there may be setbacks. Working with a group of like-minded people means that you can work on problems together, and encourage and support each other.

First steps

The best way to start is to bring together a small number of people who share your interest and talk with them about what you could do. How can you find interested people, if you don't already know them? You could try the 'grapevine' asking school teachers, community workers, or anyone else who meets a lot of people in the community, whether they know someone who might be interested. Or you could put up a notice, in post offices, libraries, community centre's, or places of worship, explaining what you want to do and asking interested people to contact you.

If you want to reach a wider audience, try writing to the local papers, outlining what you propose and giving a contact address or phone number. Voluntary Action Rutland may be able to give you useful contacts, as well as publicity in our newsletter.

Funding and managing money

Even at this early stage, you may need some money to pay for meeting rooms, leaflets or posters, telephone and postage. If you cannot meet these costs yourselves, you will need to find out about possible sources of funding. Some funders offer '**start-up**' grants to help groups to get off the ground.

Aims and objectives

Or in other words, what are you going to do, and how are you going to do it? Now you have found several other interested people, you need to talk this over with them, and start to clarify what you plan to do. At this stage you are learning to work together as a group. It is important to allow plenty of time for discussion. Even in small groups, there will be different points of view. If you discuss these fully and openly, you may be able to reach an agreement.

A good start is to discuss what the problem is that you are trying to tackle. Do not be surprised if you see it in different ways try to find out why this is. Often it is because you have different information (and different gaps in your information). It may also be because you have different values. Such differences of values cannot be resolved easily (or perhaps at all) but it is important to know that they are there.

Other organisations

In Rutland there are numerous voluntary and community groups. It is worth finding out about the other groups with similar interests to yours. A network of contacts in similar



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organisations can be an invaluable source of advice and support, and can help you to see things in perspective when your own group faces difficulties.

A first meeting

It is usually a good idea to have an open meeting to launch the new organisation. Contact the local press, both for advance publicity and to be represented if they can. If you want the group to attract people from all sections of the community, invite representatives from different groups to contribute their ideas at the first meeting, rather than waiting until the group has become established.

The meeting could be formal or informal. Either way, it is a chance to explain what you have in mind; to make, or strengthen, useful contacts, to seek publicity, to attract volunteers, and to find out how your proposals look to other interested people. It is worth keeping a note of the points that people make, even if you do not have formal minutes.

Finding volunteers

You may find enough volunteers through your own contacts. If not, you could contact the Volunteer Bureau at VAR, which helps groups to find volunteers and advises people who are looking for voluntary work..

Making decisions

How will your group make decisions about what it is going to do, and how it is going to do it? At one extreme, all the decisions could be effectively taken by one person; at the other, everything could be discussed until everyone is in agreement. Most groups come between these two extremes. For day to day decisions, it is simpler if the group can agree on a quicker method such as majority vote, delegation to an elected committee, or delegation to elected or appointed officers. These methods are then written into the constitution; which is in effect the rules of the group. VAR has further Information Sheets on **Constitutions** and **Management Committees**

Making a plan

Once your group is going, it is time to draw up a simple working plan. This will tell your members, supporters, and other interested people, what you are doing, why, and how you will go about it. You will need a plan if you apply for a grant.

An outside view

You may find it helpful to involve one or two people from outside the organisation, to give encouragement and advice from a different point of view, put problems in perspective and offer a wider range of contacts.

Voluntary Action Rutland Support

Voluntary Action Rutland is here to provide help, support and give advice to new and small groups. When you have read through this pack and thought about some of the questions and issues, contact Voluntary Action Rutland to discuss what help you might need.

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