Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Supporting charities, volunteers and communities

1. Getting started

1.1 First steps - from idea to action

What is a voluntary group?

A voluntary group is a collection of individuals who work together to undertake certain activities for the benefit of the community – whatever or whoever that community might be. There are an estimated 33,000 voluntary groups in Wales ranging from small specialist self help groups run by users through to national charities. They can operate on a national county, district or neighbourhood level each tending to have their own specific area of interest.

Voluntary groups generally exist because people perceive a need and work together to bring about change, or provide a service, for the benefit of the community.

Setting up a new organisation

This information sheet will help you if you are starting a new organisation. It suggests some points to think about right at the start and tells you how to find out more.

What will it be like?

Setting up a new organisation can be enjoyable, and can give you a lot of satisfaction. It is a way to get more done about something that is important to you than you could by working on your own.

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. Things do not always go to plan. That is another reason for working closely with a group of like-minded people. 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. Even if they do not all want to be involved long-term, they may be willing to contribute ideas and experience in the early stages.

How can you find interested people, if you don't already know them? You could try asking community workers, schoolteachers or anyone else who meets a lot of people in the community. Ask them whether they know someone who might be interested in your ideas.

You could also put up notices in post offices, libraries, community centres, places of worship or anywhere else where lots of people go, e.g. shops, doctors' surgeries, and don't forget to use local websites. The notices should explain what you want to do and ask anyone interested to contact you. You may be surprised at the results!

If you want to reach a wider audience, try writing to the local papers. Outline your project or what you propose and give a contact name, address and phone number. They may print something for you free of charge. Your local County Voluntary Council may be able to give you useful contacts and possibly some publicity.

A first meeting

It is usually a good idea to have an open meeting to launch the new organisation. Contact the local papers and radio stations. Invite local councillors, your Assembly Member and Member of Parliament.

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. It's better to have involvement from the outset. As well as the people already involved, think about inviting:

- anyone else you know who may be interested in helping
- other organisations working in a similar field
- organisations working with specific groups or communities
- key local authority staff
- a representative from your local County Voluntary Council

The meeting could be formal or informal but should be structured and have an agenda. Either way, it's an opportunity for you to:

- explain what you have in mind
- make or strengthen useful contacts
- seek publicity
- attract volunteers
- find out how your ideas are looked upon by others

It is worth keeping a note of the points that people make or taking formal minutes.

What happens next?

Those people who want to have a formal, in-depth involvement in the organisation should meet to form a management committee and to put together a constitution. (See Information Sheet 1.5 Choosing legal structures).

Disclaimer
The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

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