

## Resources for small groups

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# Constitutions

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Drawing up a constitution is an important part of the process of formalising your group. It is a document which sets out exactly what the group will do and for whom, along with some agreed procedures on how the group will be run.

### What is a constitution?

A constitution (or governing document) clarifies:

- the people the group is aiming to help or work with;
- what exactly the group wants to achieve;
- the sorts of activities the group will carry out; and
- how the group will be run and managed.

This is written out and agreed by the members so that everyone concerned with the group understands how the group is to be run.

A constitution is necessary because it:

- defines your group,
- clarifies the way decisions can be made
- assists in resolving any disputes.
- enables outside bodies such as funders to have a clear understanding of how the group operates.  
(Funders will generally require any group they fund to have a constitution).

### Preparing a constitution

A small group with a very low income which is unlikely to seek registration as a charity can have a short and simple governing document. However, if your group is likely to expand, fundraise, or seek registration as a charity, you will be better off with a constitution which follows a standard format. This would be more likely to meet the approval of the Charity Commission and would be understood by potential funders.

You can adapt one of many *model constitutions* that are available and have been prepared or approved by the Charity Commission. However it is important that everyone in the group understands the meaning behind all of the clauses. MVSC's *Development Worker* can help groups prepare a draft constitution.

## What a constitution contains

A constitution will typically contain the following information:

- *Name*;
- *Objects*: the overall aims of your group, what it intends to achieve, and the geographical area your group will work in. If you intend to register with the Charity Commission, your objects will need to meet their specific *definition of 'charitable'*;
- *Powers*: what your group can legally do to achieve its objects or carry out its activities. Eg. to raise money or own or hire property.
- *Membership*: who is entitled to be a member of the group, how they can become members and how people can be disqualified from membership;
- *Committee*: who can be a member of the committee, how people can be elected or co-opted, how the honorary officers are elected, how people cease to be committee members, and the overall size of the committee;
- *Meetings*: procedures for committee meetings and meetings of the membership, including the annual general meeting;
- *Finances*: how the group will manage its money, hold any property or investments and prepare its accounts;
- *Alterations to the constitution*: when and how changes to clauses can be made;
- *Dissolution*: procedures for closing down the group;

## To draw up and adopt a constitution, you will need to:

- make sure the group's objects are clearly set out and everyone connected with the group agrees with them;
- draw up necessary clauses (or get a copy of a model constitution for adaptation) and make sure that everyone connected with the group understands the meaning and purpose of each clause;
- meet to formally adopt the constitution;
- ensure committee members sign and date the constitution.
- destroy any early drafts of the constitution so that the document in circulation is the one that was formally adopted.

From this point on, your constitution becomes a legal document and your group must be managed according to its rules.

