

Getting a Group Constitution

What is a Constitution?

A constitution is a document that describes the rules that govern how your group will operate. It provides the framework for the way your group will function. It is a good idea to record the constitution.

The constitution explains what your group is, what it is for, who can join and what the rights and responsibilities of the members are. It sets out financial rules such as who controls the money and rules for financial reporting and keeping proper accounts.

The constitution will vary depending on the type of legal structure your group decides to adopt. Below are some of the main points that you should think about when drafting your constitution.

What should you Include?

Drafting your constitution should help focus your group on what you do and why. Try not to get bogged down in the detail. A constitution is useful because it ensures everyone knows how decisions are made and who has to face the consequences of them. It also shows others outside your group, such as potential funders or members what your group is for and how its finances are controlled. Remember to keep your constitution as clear as possible, using plain English.

Try to make it short and simple for everyone to understand. It doesn't matter about the terminology used, as long as everyone knows who does what. Time taken to draft your constitution at the start will prove valuable in the long run. It will probably save a lot of disagreement and confusion and wasted time. If you want to apply for charitable status the Charity Commission has produced model constitutions which can be adapted by your group. For further information contact the Charity Commission. See www.charity-commission.gov.uk

Other Clauses

You may also want to include clauses dealing with disciplinary and grievance procedures for members, a code of conduct, the formation and dissolution of the group and employing staff and acquiring property if appropriate.

SAMPLE CONSTITUTION

1. NAME

The name of the organisation shall be
(.....)

2. AIMS

The aim of the organisation is to promote and develop self-help initiatives with the homeless and socially excluded by offering support, organising social events and campaigning for better services.

3. MEMBERSHIP

The group is open to all(..... e.g. men/women/under age 18) in (.....insert area). It welcomes different ages, races, cultures, abilities and sexual orientation. If a member does not attend for four consecutive meetings without good reason it will be assumed that their membership has lapsed.

4. OFFICE-BEARERS

There will be a Chairperson (or a floating Chairperson) who will be responsible for chairing the meetings , a Secretary who will keep minutes and a record of members and be responsible for all correspondence, and a Treasurer who will be responsible for keeping accurate accounts and making and receiving any payments on behalf of the group. Office-bearers shall be elected by majority vote of the members and may not remain in position for more than two years, after which time they can stand for re-election.

5. MEETINGS

Meetings will be held every (.....e.g. week/month/quarter) fromam/pm. Other meetings will be arranged if necessary and members will be given a minimum of 3 days notice. At any meeting the rights and views of each individual shall be respected and the meetings shall be conducted in a way that allows all individuals to participate positively without fear of intimidation.

6. FUNDS

There will be four signatories for the bank account, one of whom will be the Treasurer. Two signatures will be needed for the withdrawal of funds. The accounts will be available for examination at each of the meetings. A fee of £..... per will be paid to cover the cost of refreshments.

7. MINUTES AND RECORDS

Minutes of meetings will be kept in the minute book. Records of all financial transactions will be kept in an appropriate cash book.

8. ALTERATIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Alterations to the Constitution will need a majority of members (reference will be made to the membership records)

9. DISSOLUTION

The group may at any time be dissolved by a resolution passed by a two-thirds majority of members. Such a resolution will provide for the distribution of any funds remaining to local charities named by the meeting. (Once any grants have been repaid to awarding bodies, if appropriate).

This constitution was adopted on the ---day of-----200- by the members whose signatures appear below.

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