

# Starting a Community Group

## 7. Developing and Writing Plans

Good management of a community group begins with planning. Having robust plans in place from the very start will clarify your long-term goals, focus your resources and help you consider problems you may come across and how you can manage these.

There are no rules as to how many and what type of plans a community group need and these will depend on the size and nature of the organisation. There are however, three standard plans a group should consider having:

- A Start-up Plan which shows the activities a group needs to do to start operating
- A Business Plan (3 to 5 years) which details how the group will operate
- A Strategic Plan (5 years +) that describes the sustainability and growth of the group

The plans should have specific goals, time frames and measurements of success. As they will be used to check progress and evaluate if the group is achieving what it intends to do.

### Start-Up Plan

A Start-up Plan is basically a “to do” list of everything that must happen to get the organisation up and running from the initial idea to opening the doors.

Start by listing everything that must be done to launch the group. Once you have the list break down each task into individual action items, assign each item to a Steering Group member and set a target completion date.

A Start-up Plan may include:

- Conduct a Needs Analysis
- Write a Community Profile
- Carry out Community Engagement
- Undertake a Feasibility Study
- Decide on Legal Structure
- Write a Constitution
- Write a Business Plan
- Apply to be a charity/company
- Secure funding
- Get premises
- Get volunteers

You will work on many of these tasks simultaneously, listing them in a plan is a great way to keep up with everything that must be done and will give you a way of evaluating progress as part of Steering Group meetings.

## Business Plan

A business plan is a clear statement of the actions your group plan to undertake over a period of time - typically three to five years. A business plan can be for your group as a whole, or it could focus on a particular project.

Your business plan will present a combination of your ideas and the costs of putting them into practice. It should be a well-presented document, based on research informed from a feasibility study or some other planning processes that you have undertaken. A business plan will:

- Identify a common set of goals for the organisation
- Establish the feasibility of these
- Identify their strengths and weaknesses and consider responses to these
- Make a strong case to funders, investors, and any other potential stakeholders

## Putting together a business plan

Your group's Business Plan should be developed by the committee in conjunction with your community, stakeholders and other interested parties. It should contain certain key elements:-

- Executive summary - This should be a brief overview of the main points of your plan
- Introduction - Start with a concise explanation of what your group does, its purposes and aims. If you have a Mission Statement, include it here
- Background - Give a brief history of your group include, a broad description of what it does, its legal status, staff and volunteer numbers, demonstrate your group has the capacity to deliver your plan.
- Monitoring and Evaluation - Outline how your committee will measure progress
- Research – Detail what research has been carried out to support the plans development include:
  - How your groups development fits into the bigger picture of your community. Are you filling a void or complementing the work of other groups?
  - Demand - What particular needs will be met by your project and the range of user groups benefiting
- Management implications - Will your committee need to make any changes to itself in order to bring the plan into reality?
- Resources - Staff, volunteers, equipment, buildings. Allocate tasks and decisions to people. Allocate funds and other resources available to you
- Budget - You will need to identify all the costs associated with your plan. How will you cover these costs? Your plan should ideally include a breakdown of all income and expenditure with an indication of cash flow. If the plan is for 3-5 years you will need to project the costs over this period.
- Detailed deadlines - Outline the dates and times for achieving short, medium and long term plans. Decide which tasks are the most urgent and most important; and which are less important and urgent. Assess the order in which they will have to be completed and insert a deadline for achieving the tasks. Decide which decisions are the most important and when they need to be taken

## Strategic Plan

Strategic planning ensures a group is working toward common goals by setting priorities, focusing resources, strengthening operations and planning the group's direction in response to a changing environment. A strategic plan is a document that details this direction. It can be a single page or a comprehensive report, depending on the group's size and complexity.

There are five basic elements of a strategic plan

- The groups purposes as defined in your governing document
- A mission statement
- The group's core values which describe the group's beliefs and behaviours e.g.
  - Leadership: The courage to shape a better future
  - Collaboration: Leverage collective genius
  - Accountability: If it is to be, it's up to me
  - Passion: Committed in heart and mind
  - Diversity: As inclusive as our brands
  - Quality: What we do, we do well
- A SWOT Analysis - SWOT is an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A SWOT analysis provides a health check of a group's position in a set point in time. It allows the groups to identify what is happening, where there is risk and how this can be mitigated.
- Long-Term Goals - Long-term goals are statements that sit under the purposes with a description of how the group will achieve them. These are usually in a timeframe of 5+ years and directly align with the mission statement and business plan.

Document produced March 2020