



## Resources for **small groups**

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### **Committees**

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A new group needs people who will take responsibility for:

- making decisions on behalf of the group
- overseeing the running of the group
- looking after the group's finances
- ensuring the group acts in accordance with its constitution and any laws that apply.

Generally, a group will delegate these responsibilities to a committee which can be between 3 and 15 people, though between 6 and 10 is usually most effective.

#### **The committee's responsibilities**

The committee's main responsibility is to manage the group's affairs on behalf of the members, users or supporters of the group. In particular the committee ensures that the group:

- acts in the interests of its beneficiaries, as defined in the constitution.
- keeps to its rules as set out in the constitution.
- has sufficient resources to carry out its work and manages those resources properly.
- meets regularly and takes necessary decisions in a democratic way.
- oversees and monitors the services provided by the group.
- produces an annual report and accounts, and provides returns to the relevant regulatory bodies (e.g. Charity Commission).
- holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM). This is the meeting at which the committee reports back to the membership on how it has managed the group and its finances over the previous year.

It makes sense, wherever possible, to have people on your committee with specific skills in different areas such as finance, administration, publicity etc.

The Committee is unpaid and, apart from a few exceptions for the provision of professional services to the group, committee members should get no benefit from membership other than repayment of out-of-pocket expenses.

#### **Legal responsibilities**

The committee is responsible, by law, for the way the group functions and each committee member could be held personally liable if the group experiences problems or loses money. Whilst there are various ways in which a committee can limit the liability of members, it is important to remember that there is no protection or insurance against mismanagement by the committee.

Furthermore, although some committee members may take on specific tasks (e.g. the Treasurer), overall responsibility still rests with the whole committee. Similarly, when staff are employed to carry out the day to

day running of the group, responsibility for the group remains with each of the committee members, both individually and collectively.

## Membership of the committee

Your constitution will set out who can be committee members and how they will be chosen. However there are generally two ways in which people become committee members:

- Election: Typically, committee members are elected at the group's AGM. This meeting can also elect the honorary officers (see below)
- Co-option: This allows a committee to bring on additional committee members between AGMs. The constitution will specify how many members can be co-opted at any one time.

Some groups also allocate places on the committee to representatives of other organisations, or to user's representatives or volunteers. In each case, procedures for the involvement of others will have been set out in your constitution.

The group may invite people to attend committee meetings in an advisory role (e.g. staff members, service-user representatives, representatives from other organisations).

## Roles of committee members

Typically, a management committee will have three people with specific tasks: a *Chair*; *Treasurer* and *Secretary*. Click on these for the main tasks of each position. The roles of each officer can vary from group to group and some groups have paid staff who can assist with some tasks.

All the other committee members should take an active role in managing the group by keeping aware of all aspects of the group's work and contributing to decision making.

## Sub-committees

Sub-committees can provide an opportunity for committee members with specific skills to work in-depth on a particular area of the group's activities (e.g. fund-raising, publicity, finance etc.). Terms of reference need to be drawn up carefully and sub-committees should always report back to the full committee and refer important decisions to it.

## Summary of typical roles for Honorary Officers

- Chair: involved in the management of the organisation (including supervising the senior member of staff); chairs committee meetings; acts as a figurehead for the group and represents the group in dealings with outside world. In some organisations, there is a Vice-Chair to assist in these tasks.
- Treasurer: oversees the management of the group's finances, prepares budgets, oversees ordering and payments processes, and provides regular information to the rest of the committee on financial matters.
- Secretary: distributes papers to committee members, takes minutes at meetings, handles correspondence, maintains membership records.

