

5 Steps to starting the group

1 Find interested individuals

This can sometimes seem like the most difficult and daunting stage to tackle, but don't panic! Most groups tend to advertise an informal gathering where interested people can get a feel for what the group aims to do. The main aim of this stage is to generate as much interest in your potential group as possible.

Speak to the parks department because they may have contacts in the community who would like to become involved with such a group. You will usually find that there are many people in the local community who have an opinion about their local park or open space.

You may want to organise an event to gain interest in the group; bulb planting or a photography workshop for example.

2 Hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Once you have found a number of interested individuals, you will need to get them together to meet as a formal group. This is known as the groups first 'AGM'.

Speak to the parks department if you need help booking a room.

At this meeting, you will need to write a constitution and elect a committee. This is covered below.



3 Write a constitution

A constitution basically explains how your group will be managed, from the aims and objectives of the group through to how meetings are to be run. The constitution of your group does not have to be complicated but it should reflect how you wish your group to be managed.

Your group does not have to start from scratch when deciding on a constitution; parts of other groups' versions can be used. (Copies of other groups' examples have been included in this pack). When your group has a constitution they wish to adopt, they need to formally adopt it at the AGM, and the committee need to sign it.

4 Elect a committee

The group's 'committee' helps with the day to day running of the group. The committee should consist of a chairperson, treasurer, secretary and at least 5 other members. The 5 other members do not have to take up a specific role, however other groups have chosen to elect vice positions, such as vice chairperson, vice treasurer and vice secretary.

Anyone can elect another member to a position, however it must be decided by vote who takes a position. It is possible for individuals to act as chairperson and secretary whilst organising the first AGM, but they must give up their position when the committee are to be elected.

5 Set up a bank account

You will need a bank account to manage any money that the group may generate through fundraising, and to pay for items such as stationery and room bookings. The account should be set up in the name of the group, with at least 2 signatories. The signatories must be members of the committee, usually the chairperson and the treasurer.

Other groups have chosen to have 3 signatories on the account, allowing a member of the committee to sign if another is unavailable.

After these stages are complete you will be a fully a constituted group with a committee and a bank account, the next stage is to start working towards your groups aims and objectives.

If you would like help with any of the above, it is worth contacting Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action. They offer a variety of training courses, and may be able to offer advice in getting the group together. Visit www.ocva.org.uk/training/ or phone 01865 251946.



Although the formalities involved in setting up a friends group may seem excessive, they are important.

If you wish to apply for funding for your park, awarding bodies will want to see evidence that your group is democratically elected, with a defined structure and constitution.