

# Five Steps To Starting A New Friends Group

**1. Find interested individuals:** this can seem difficult sometimes, but don't worry. There are lots of ways to contact potential group members: speak to the park staff, local street wardens and community police officers who may already know of some local community contacts who might want to get involved. Contact businesses and organisations in the immediate vicinity of the park such as schools, GP surgeries, tenant and resident groups, community centres, local shop keepers, faith organisations, community nurseries, sheltered housing, youth clubs, etc. You may want to organise an event to gain interest in the group: bulb planting or a photography workshop in the park for example. Or you could try holding a stall in the park during busy times and asking park users to fill out a brief questionnaire about what they feel about the park and how they might want to improve it. Remember to collect contact details of as many people as possible.

**2. Hold an initial meeting:** publicise it well (flyers through letter boxes, posters in local shops and community notice boards, an article in the local paper); find a venue which is welcoming and easily accessible for people with mobility problems, think about the timing of the meeting: Will it be dark? Will people feel safe coming to the venue? How can you make the meeting more interesting and appealing: can you find a speaker? Show a video? Offer refreshments? Remember to contact any interested parties who will be able to help you find a venue and organise this important first meeting. At this meeting you will need to agree the aims of the group, decide who will do what and write a constitution.

**3. Write a constitution:** A constitution is simply the aims and rules that your group will use. It is a short document which sets out the group's aims and objectives and how you wish your meetings to be run. Your group can adapt the existing constitutions of other similar groups and a sample constitution is included in the information. Once your group has drafted its constitution, this needs to be formally adopted at a special meeting called an Annual General Meeting and the Committee members 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 who runs the meetings, a treasurer who oversees the finances, a secretary who takes charge of taking notes (minutes) of the meetings and up to 5 other committee members depending on the size of the group. Some Friends Groups elect a membership secretary to oversee and keep records of the membership. The Committee members are elected by the group members at the Annual General Meetings and must stand for election annually.

**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 who must be members of the Committee (usually the chairperson and the treasurer). Some groups choose to have 3 signatories on the account, allowing another member of the Committee to sign in the event that either of the main signatories are unavailable and/or on holiday. Once you have completed these stages, you will be a fully constituted group with a Committee and a bank account and you will be ready to start working towards your group's aims and objectives. You may, in addition to a Constitution, want to discuss how your group will address the issue of Equal Opportunities and you could consider drafting an Equal Opportunities statement summarising your group's position. Looking at policies from other organisations can be useful in helping you think these issues through thoroughly.