

Resources for small groups

Planning for small groups

Taking a regular look at your group and the direction in which it is going is an important part of managing it.

Why groups need to plan

- Planning improves everyone's understanding of the group and where it is going and helps everyone to pull in the same direction.
- A plan gives a group a common purpose, targets to aim for and a method of monitoring its success.
- A written plan demonstrates to funders and others that you know what that future of your organisation should be.
- Planning enables you to keep abreast of changes, such as the needs and expectations of users, the types of services provided by other groups, the interests and priorities of funders, etc. The people involved in your group can also change over time, bringing with them different skills and interests. The planning process enables groups to think about how to deal with these changes and have some control over them.
- Without planning, you end up having to react to events and managing from one crisis to the next, which takes more time than if you had planned how to deal with these events in advance.

Different types of plan

The contents of a plan can vary greatly according to its purpose. Typical descriptions of plans include:

- *Strategic plan*: An overall view of your group, its services and its needs.
- *Development or service plan(s)*: Focusing on specific services.
- *Business plan*: Concentrating more on finances, looking at how much activities will cost and when the funds will be required and spent.

In the case of a small group, it may well be feasible to combine all of these areas into one planning process, to give an overview of where your group is going, details on the services to be provided and relevant financial information.

A basic planning framework

A basic framework could follow three broad themes:

- **Where are we now?** What were we set up to do, and for whom? (refer to your constitution's objects or your mission statement if you have one). What are we doing at the moment? What do we do well and what less well? What do others around us do (e.g. other service providers, local authority etc.)? How do we manage what we do?
- **Where do we want to be in the future?** What should we be doing, and for whom? Why should we be doing this. What will we need to do as a result of others (e.g. changes in the law, or the priorities of funders)? What benefits will this bring for our users and our group?

- **How are we going to get there?** What tasks do we need to do? Who will do each task, and when? What resources do we need, in terms of people, equipment and money? Where are we going to get them from? How will we fit everything together?

In considering these issues, you are not just looking at the services your group provides, but also the way they are provided and managed. Planning will involve you looking closely at your group and how you could improve it. As a result, you may decide your priority is to improve the skills of your management committee, or seek to employ a worker to run your group on a day-to-day basis, rather than make any changes to the services you provide.

Typical contents of a small group's plan might be:

- a short summary;
- your current services and the way your organisation works;
- the likely need for your services in the future (what level of need? from whom?);
- the services you will provide in the future in response;
- what your group will need to provide these services (people, premises, equipment, funding, etc);
- how you will manage your group in the future; and
- your financial requirements for the future.

More than just a piece of paper

Planning is about more than just a written document. Planning is a process a group goes through which enables everyone to understand and be involved in the future of your group. To have any benefit, your plan must be a part of your organisation, something you all agree to and something that you use to develop your group.

Further information

For more detailed guidance click on the link below
www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/future-planning

