



Starting a community group

INFORMATION KIT

Introduction

Livingstone Shire is home to a vibrant and active community where many residents get involved in making the area a great place to live, work, and play. Congratulations and thank-you for wanting to be a part of this great work!



Starting or being involved in a community group can be a big commitment but can also be very rewarding. There are a few things you should think about before you commit to starting a new community group.

Most community groups operate as non-profit organisations. A not-for-profit organisation is one where individual members do not benefit financially from the organisation – the group can still make money, but that money is used to support the goals of the organisation.

If this is the type of group you are interested in starting, consider the following information.

IS THERE ANOTHER GROUP DOING SOMETHING SIMILAR?

Livingstone Shire is home to more than 150 community and sporting groups – with interests ranging from cricket to craft, Mah-jong to medieval re-enactments, there is a huge variety of groups already available locally. Before you commit to starting your own group, do some research and see if there is a similar group already operating in the area.

To get started, here are some sources that might be able to tell you about other groups already operating locally:

- Livingstone Shire Council's Community Development Sport and Recreation Team (email CDSR@livingstone.qld.gov.au or call 4913 5000 and ask to speak to someone in the team)
- Do a quick Google search, or check social media for local groups and activities
- Search the [Office of Fair Trading](#) to get an idea about groups in the area



If you do find a similar group already in the area, it may make more sense for you to join the existing group rather than start your own. There are a few reasons for this:

- People in the community who are also interested in the activity/idea/group could already be part of the existing group, and it might be hard for you to get new members or participants
- It will take less of your time and energy to join a group that already exists than to start your own – governance structures, membership, venues and more might already be established. Even if your area of interest is a bit different from an existing group, you could approach them to ask if you could form a sub-group, or be auspiced by that group (auspicing involves one group, usually a formalised/incorporated one, providing support, sponsorship, or guidance to another – this often involves support for grant applications)
- You can bring your ideas and enthusiasm and support a club, and that club can help you get your ideas up and running – a win-win!

If you find a group operating somewhere that isn't geographically close (for example, you want to start a group in Marlborough and there's one already in Emu Park or Rockhampton), it's still worthwhile to contact that group to discuss your ideas. They may still be willing to auspice your group or provide support in some other way.

If there are no similar groups, and you're sure you want to proceed with your idea, here are some further things to consider.

HOW MUCH TIME CAN I DEDICATE TO THIS?

It's important for anyone thinking about starting or joining a community group to be realistic. Before you make any commitments, think about how much time in an average week or month you spend:

- At work
- With friends or family
- Looking after kids, pets, parents, or others
- Running a household (chores, groceries, laundry, cooking etc.)
- Volunteering
- **Importantly – resting and looking after yourself**

Being part of a group can take anywhere from two to ten hours a week, while establishing a group could take up much more time. Wanting to make a difference in our community is great, but it is essential that you take time out to rest and recharge, too.

If you don't have the time to start a new group now, consider what other options you have. Some alternatives might be:

- To join a similar group in the area
- To volunteer for a similar cause in a way that takes less of your time – check out local volunteering opportunities [here](#)
- To wait for a time in your life when you might have more time to dedicate to it



WHO ELSE MIGHT WANT TO BE INVOLVED?

Starting and running a group alone isn't likely to work – you need the input and support of others to succeed. Many hands do make light work, so a team working towards the same cause is an essential starting point! You might already be working with a group, or maybe you need some ideas about how to meet others who might want to be involved.

If you are searching for others who might want to be involved, think about:

- Holding an information session in a public space. This could involve a short presentation, or some other way of distributing information about what your group is about and how people can get involved.
- Create a social media presence. Starting a Facebook page or group, an Instagram account, or some other social media profile is a great way to reach lots of people in a short amount of time.
- Make a flyer that clearly and succinctly states what your group's focus is, and how people can get involved, and put these on community noticeboards and other highly visible places – be sure to include contact details so people can get in touch with you.
- Talk to your friends, family, and neighbours – they may also be interested in your idea, or know of other people who might like to be involved. Word of mouth is still a great way to share your idea!

Whatever approach you take to finding members for your group, remember to respect other people's boundaries. People might not be as invested in your idea as you, while others just won't have the time or resources to be involved.



Define your group

Once you've got a group together (a group of five to seven is ideal to start with), there are a few things you should think about next.

MEETINGS

Once you have a working group together, it's a good idea to start holding regular meetings as soon as possible to ensure you maintain enthusiasm. Meetings should be held at a time and place that suit your group members. Virtual meetings (e.g., Teams, Zoom, Skype) can work well for people who work, have family commitments, or don't live nearby.

Make sure your meetings have a clear agenda so that you can stick to an agreed time limit, too – try to keep meetings to one hour to ensure people stay engaged.

MISSION/GOALS

It's important as a new group that you agree on the mission or goals of your group early on, as this will guide many future decisions.

To help the discussion, think about:

- What issue in the community you are trying to address, and how you plan to address it
- What gap you have noticed that your group will fill, and what you will do to meet this

Essentially, your mission or goals should quickly and clearly describe why your group exists, and what its' core business is.



NAME

One of your first meetings should involve choosing a name together. A successful group needs a great name! Try to think of something that:

- Clearly identifies the group
- Is memorable
- Isn't already being used (check the [Office of Fair Trading](#) to see if your name is available, and be sure it isn't protected as a trademark at [IP Australia](#))
- Includes the word 'Incorporated' if your group is incorporated, or plans on becoming incorporated (see the following)

Formal and informal groups

Now that you have a working group, a name, and a well defined mission or set of goals, there is another important decision your group will need to consider: do you remain as an informal collection of individuals, or do you become a formal group? There are benefits and drawbacks to both formal and informal groups, but it is important that your group is aware of both in order to make an informed decision.

An informal group is also referred to as an unincorporated group. As an unincorporated group, you can continue to hold meetings and operate with few legal responsibilities. There are, however, opportunities that will not be available to you. Being unincorporated might also expose members of your group to legal or financial risks.

A formal, or incorporated, group is one that has a legal status. With this legal status comes both beneficial protections to members of the group as well as certain responsibilities. Incorporated groups also have access to opportunities that unincorporated groups do not.

UNINCORPORATED GROUPS

An informal group can still achieve a lot, but there are certain issues that unincorporated groups are likely to encounter. This includes:

- The inability to apply for grants
- The inability to book or rent Council (and other) venues and facilities (even one-off bookings for events or meetings often require evidence of incorporation)
- Limited legal and financial protections – unincorporated groups require individual members to take on legal and financial responsibilities (rather than the group itself), meaning group members may face financial and legal issues as a result of being in the group

Unincorporated groups can also fall apart if membership changes – consider what would happen to the group if you or another member of the working group moved or could no longer dedicate time and energy to the group. Incorporation ensures the structure of the group remains, regardless of membership.



We want to start a formal (incorporated) community group

Formalising your community organisation is a great way to protect members and to ensure your group can meet its intended goals. While incorporation can seem like a daunting process, the benefits of formalising your group are worthwhile and will ensure your group can continue operating securely into the future.

An incorporated group is a legal entity which can:

- Continue to operate regardless of group membership
- Enter into contracts (including rental or leasing agreements)
- Apply for government grants
- Protect members: Incorporation protects individual members from most personal liability



RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN INCORPORATED GROUP

It is important to understand what will be expected of your group if you become incorporated. These obligations include:

- Including 'incorporated' (or inc.) in the name of your organisation
- Developing a written constitution (rules) that the group must operate by
- Paying registration fees and annual fees to the government
- Keeping the public register, including the name and address of the main contact for your organisation, up to date
- Holding regular meetings and keeping records of these meetings
- Keeping membership records up to date
- Providing information about the organisation's finances to the government (and accepting that this information will be publicly available)
- Being insured against public liability

HOW DO WE INCORPORATE?

While there is a lot of information to consider, the act of becoming incorporated is fairly straightforward. In Queensland, the Office of Fair Trading oversees incorporation. In order to incorporate, your organisation must:

1. Pass a resolution to become an incorporated association (with at least $\frac{3}{4}$ majority voting in favour), and appoint a person to make the application to incorporate
2. Choose a name (including the word 'Incorporated' or 'Inc.')
3. Prepare a constitution (rules guiding how the group operates)
4. Elect a management committee
5. Apply to the Office of Fair Trading

Visit the [Office of Fair Trading's website](#) on setting up an incorporation for more details, relevant application forms, and a sample constitution.

RUNNING AN INCORPORATED GROUP



There are rules and regulations about running an incorporated group, too. These include:

- Record keeping
- Regular meetings and meeting procedures
- Financial management
- Insurance requirements

Visit the Queensland Government's [website on running an incorporated association](#) for more information.

Note: Council advises groups seek independent legal advice about incorporation. Council cannot provide this advice.

Other considerations

There are a few other things your group should consider when starting a new community group.

OPENING A BANK ACCOUNT

Your community organisation will need to open a bank account in the name of the organisation – it is not a good idea to open the account in the name of an individual, as this can have financial consequences for that individual. It can also mean funds are inaccessible to the rest of the group.

Talk to banks and credit unions operating locally about what they can offer to your group before deciding which bank to go with. It might also be worth talking to other not-for-profit groups in the area about who they bank with.



HOW WILL YOUR GROUP COMMUNICATE?

Your group will need a way to communicate with members and outside organisations. It is a good idea to set up an email account that key members of your group (for example, the president and the secretary) have access to. This way, monitoring emails is not the responsibility of just one person, and it is easier for you to keep the business or the organisation separate from your personal life.

It also means if there is a change in membership you can avoid access issues. Avoid using people's names in the email address – use the name of the organisation instead (e.g., organisation@gmail.com).

GETTING AN AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS NUMBER

There are some instances where your not-for-profit will require an ABN (Australian Business Number). An ABN will be required if your organisation:

- Is required to register for tax obligations
- Seeks endorsement as a registered charity for tax concessions
- Seeks endorsement as a deductible gift recipient

Your organisation may want to apply for an ABN even if these criteria don't apply. An ABN can make it easier to interact with government agencies and businesses more easily. Applying for an ABN is free but does involve some paperwork. For more information, visit the Australian Taxation Office's [website](#).

INSURANCE

Public liability insurance protects your organisation if someone is injured or property is damaged, either on the property owned or managed by your group or as a result of the actions of your organisation (or your members). Your organisation must have public liability insurance (typically \$20 million coverage) if the organisation:

- Owns land
- Leases land
- Holds land in trust
- Plans to use Council facilities, even temporarily (for events etc.)
- Plans to hold activities that will be open to members of the public

Further, there are certain government grants that require evidence of public liability insurance. A number of insurance agencies offer public liability insurance for community organisations at affordable rates. It is worthwhile to compare quotes and take time to choose the policy that best suits your organisation. When making this decision, think about:

- The limit of cover: How much does the policy cover you for?
- Excesses: Is there an excess payable if you make a claim? How much? Is the excess payable on every claim?
- Exclusions: What is not covered by this policy? Some exclusions might make a policy unsuitable to you.
- The geographic scope of the policy: Does it cover you and your members/staff/volunteers when they are interstate or overseas? Do you need it to?

For more information, visit Our Community's [website](#) on insurance.

SUPPORT FOR YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP

Council's Community Development Sport and Recreation Team offers support for community organisations in a range of ways, including:

- Support to seek and apply for grants
- Monthly capacity building workshops on topics such as building and retaining volunteers, grant writing, running successful events, and more
- Bi-annual administration of the Livingstone Shire Community Grants program
- One-to-one or small group meetings to work through issues specific to your group
- Information on the broader Livingstone Shire community that might support your group's undertakings

Contact the team on CDSR@livingstone.qld.gov.au or 4913 500 for more information.

Resources

[Community Door:
Start a community
service organisation](#)

[Associations
Incorporation Act 1981](#)

[Our Community:
What types of insurance
does my organisation
need?](#)

[Australian Taxation
Office:
Register your not-for-
profit](#)

[Queensland
Government:
Incorporated
associations](#)

[Office of Fair Trading](#)

[Intellectual Property \(IP\)
Australia](#)

[Seek Volunteer](#)

[Livingstone Shire
Council:
Community groups and
sporting clubs](#)

[Volunteering
Queensland](#)