

**MODA BASIC ORGANISATIONAL GUIDES
(MBOG)**

This guide is the first of a series of organisational and community development guides which MODA is planning to produce. The guides will also be translated into community languages.

MBOG aims to provide expert practical knowledge and at the same time introduce elements of good practice, and professional understanding of organisational structures, mechanisms and behaviour.

MODA Basic Organisational Guides

MBOG1

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Starting and developing a community organisation

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STARTING A COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

THREE PILLARS OF SUCCESS

Before starting a new organisation or project, make sure that you are aware of and work for establishing the three pillars necessary to make your project a successful one. These pillars are workability, accountability and democracy.

1. Workability (Feasibility):

Considering and researching different factors that might restrict or facilitate your chances of success. Some of these factors are internal; i.e. they relate to you: your commitment, skills and resources. Some are environmental or external. They relate to the context and environment you will be working in (e.g. your neighborhood, your local community, your ethnic community, your local authority, funding opportunities, other organisations doing similar work, etc). Explore your weaknesses and strengths. Explore opportunities and obstacles.

Be realistic in assessing any factor.

Weaknesses	Strengths	Opportunities	Obstacles

2. Accountability:

Make sure that from the start you are aware of legal responsibilities involved in setting up and running an organisation and accountability to people who might become involved in your project such as funders. Accountability means being able to answer questions, provide accurate information and offer explanations about your work, your methodology, your achievements and the way you make use of your resources.

Accountability to:

Law	
Funders	
Charity Commission	
Members	
Local authority	
Local community	
Other	

3. Democracy:

Community organisations are set up to work for and with other people for common objectives. Democracy and participation are therefore vital for the success of any community organisation. The process, structure and operation of the organisation must be flexible, open and democratic to allow for the participation of all people who might benefit from the project.

Develop ideas to make your organisation effectively democratic, participatory and committed to equal opportunities. Act positively to encourage the representation and involvement of women and disadvantaged people. Develop relevant community development values.

Democracy	
Participation	
Equal opportunity	
Empowerment	
Advocacy	

STARTING STEPS

1) Form a team:

- Bring together a small team: 3 people or more who are prepared to think and work together to start the project or the organisation.
- Discuss the idea of setting up a community organisation. What has brought you together? Do you have similar values and vision?
- Create shared values and vision of the purpose and process from the start. Eliminate or marginalise differences. This is vital for the success of team work.
- Work as a team. Establish ground rules for teamwork, e.g. periodical meetings, alternate chairing and minute-taking, action points and follow-up responsibilities.

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- Draw up an action plan including what work needs to be done over, say, the next three months. Allocate tasks to each member of the team and define realistic time to carry out the tasks. See Table 1 (Some actions which need to be carried out are stated in the sections below).

Tasks	Person responsible	Target date
Find a venue for next meeting		
Prepare an agenda for the meeting		
Contacting supporters		

2. Knowledge and skills needed at this stage:

Although the group you set up might be informal, it is nevertheless advisable that you approach your work professionally and try to use right tools and methods in

conducting your activities. That is why we think that some of the skills below need to be available within the work team right from the start.

Skills and knowledge	Who has it?	Who is willing to learn?
Organising & chairing meetings Preparing agendas Taking minutes Some administrative knowledge Communication skills Word-processing (computer use) Basic fundraising Leadership skills		

If you do not have any one within your team who has the above skills, you can seek two solutions:

- Seek the support of a second tier organisation. These are organisations, which provide advice and support to front line organisations including the newly-forming ones. Refugee and migrant groups can seek the support of the Refugee Council's Community Development Team, Migrant Organisations' Development Agency or the Voluntary Action centres in your borough.

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- It is better to plan for training your team at this early stage. Some local voluntary action centres as well as refugee forums provide free training for which you might be eligible. Contact the Refugee Council, MODA or your local voluntary action centre for information and advice.

Skills needed	Training available	Who will have training

4. Feasibility study or Appraisal:

Having agreed the idea within your team and developed a common will to go ahead with the idea/project, it is necessary now to appraise your idea in a more systematic way.

⇒ Do some basic research. Try to answer these questions:

- Is this new organisation/project really needed?
- Who needs it?
- Are there similar services/projects? Who are they? What are they doing?
- What will you be doing which will be different from or added value to what they are doing?

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- How can you learn from them and co-operate with them?
 - What elements of your community's traditional culture can be adapted to make a positive contribution to your process and results?
 - In the light of this appraisal, make a decision to abandon the idea or carry it out

4. Do a needs survey of the target group or community.

Find out what your potential beneficiaries think about your idea. These are some of the ways you can use.

- Organise a consultation meeting for the people who are likely to be involved in the project.
- Use brainstorming and workshops to collect information/ideas from them.
- Design a questionnaire and then deliver it to people who are likely to be interested in the project.
- Do some face-to-face interviews.
- You may arrange some snowball interviews.
- If possible, organise further participatory meetings.
- Elect/select/form a steering committee to carry on the work

5. Elaborate your ideas:

- From the above exercises you might get ideas that cover a very broad range of problems, needs and issues. Do not ignore any of them.
- Go for a broad vision and try to get as full a picture as possible before you start looking for solutions and responses.
- Work out what the priorities are.
- Summarize the background, aims and objectives of the would-be organisation in simple easy-to-grasp words.

6. Decide what sort of organisation you need.

All what you have done so far was to prove that:

- There is a social/community need that you have identified.
- You have developed an idea/ a project to respond to the need.
- You have done feasibility study and needs survey to establish the reality of the need and the workability of your proposal.
- You have worked as a team and developed some organisational skills to carry the proposal forward.
- You have a clear vision about what you need to do next and how to do it.

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- You have a steering committee of committed members who have necessary skills between them.

At this stage you need professional advice about what legal form and operational structure will be most suitable for the aims and objectives you have defined. Once you decide the form of the organisation, you need to develop a constitution suitable for it. Before adopting a constitution, you should:

- Agree the name of the organisation.

You must not duplicate the names of already existing organisations. If your organisation is envisaged to be long living, try to choose a name that will take account of its future development as well. If the organisation will serve primarily the interests of a specific ethnic or target group, then it is necessary that this name is included; the other words may reflect the kind of work the organisation will be doing, the specific group it will be targeting or the issue and geographical area it will be covering. For example, let us look at the names of some existing Chinese organisations in London:

Chinese Community Centre	The name implies serving the general needs of the Chinese community in London as a whole. (general/ generic)
Chinese Information and Advice Centre	Serving Chinese people through the provision of advice and information about various issues. (type of work)
Chinese Mental Health Project (target	Focusing on mental health needs of the Chinese community group)
Chinese Cultural Association	Dealing with Chinese cultural issues and activities (area of activity)
Lambeth Chinese Association	Serving the needs of Chinese people in one borough which is Lambeth (Geographical scope).

- Agree the location of the organisation.
This ideally should be where you have the largest constituency of your beneficiaries or your target group; or it should be accessible by them.
- Agree the nature of the organisation (whether it will be local, London-wide, regional, national or international, whether it will be a general (generic) or a specialist organisation, groups and issues it will cover, etc

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- Agree the aims and objectives of the organisation.
This is the most essential constituent of your organisation. Once you have decided this, it means the organisation can exist and is ready to have its own identity.
 - Agree the management structure and style of the organisation.
A common mistake made in setting up community associations and projects is that no thought is given in advance to the kind of management structure and style appropriate to the would-be organisation. This often leads to confusion and conflict at an early stage of the development of the organisation.
 - Agree whether you want the organisation to be a charity, a company limited by guarantee, a trust, a friendly association, a co-operative, etc (ask professional advice).
 - Produce a Constitution suitable to your organisation in the light of the information above.

Developing your organisation:

Once the organisation has been formally constituted, it needs to be able to operate well and develop. The co-existence of three organisational elements are vital to make this possible:

- 1) **Vision:** to be always aware where you are going, what you will be doing next and how you will work to achieve your aims and ideals! From time to time (at least annually) involve your team in visioning, in dreaming, in envisaging what can be improved. This might give you a wealth of ideas to map future plans and projects.
- 2) **Planning:** visioning enables you to dream and go beyond routine realities. Planning brings you back to earth to consider rationally what is possible and achievable. Involve your group in strategic (long-term) plans and short term plans.
- 3) **Leadership:** whether individual or collective, leadership is the decisive factor in making the difference between success and failure, between

effective progress and stifling stagnation. Leadership is the art of dealing with people, motivating them, creating common purpose within the team and making and enabling them to perform in the best possible manner. This can be done through:

- earning leadership through democratic process, hard work, commitment and initiative.
- equally recognising the worth of every individual and making them feel and see that what they are doing is valuable and appreciated,
- making available what paid and unpaid or voluntary workers need to do the work including safe and supportive working environment, equipment, training, advice, supervision and moral and practical support.
- making sure that they are consulted about the organisation's aims and plans and that they contribute to develop the organisation's purpose, plans and processes.

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- giving a good role model. Be positive, assertive and supportive. Enjoy working and people enjoy working with you.
 - avoiding confrontation, discrimination and conflict of interest. Treat people equally, give responsibility to people when they are ready for it, give equal opportunities for employment, involvement and personal and professional development.

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**To order or for more information, advice, practical and technical support and training regarding this Guide contact:
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