

Your guide to setting up a residents' group

We want our residents to feel empowered to make a difference to their communities and where they live, and starting a residents' group can be a valuable way to achieve this. This information pack will give you advice on how to start a group, and what support we can offer.

Why start a residents' group?

People set up groups for many different reasons. Sometimes it is to campaign for improvements to where they live, to tackle specific issues, or to strengthen a community. Other reasons for starting a group can include:

- To work together to maintain standards where you live
- To campaign for local issues
- To help resolve disputes between residents, or anti-social behaviour
- To organise social events or other activities
- To represent residents' views
- To create a positive working relationship with your landlord



How do we set one up?

This step by step guide should give you advice on how to set up a residents' group in your local area.



Step 1 – find out if other residents are interested

If you are keen to set up a group in your area, then the first thing you need to do is speak with your neighbours and other residents, and find out if other people are interested in the idea. Some ideas for gauging interest include:

Raising the idea at any locally organised meetings

- Speak with residents in passing
- Posting the idea on a communal notice board and asking people to sign if they are interested
- Leaflet dropping or door knocking if you live in street properties

Step 2 – Building support for your group

Once you have a handful of interested people, the Resident Involvement Manager can support you in setting up an informal meeting so that you can discuss your ideas in more detail. At this meeting you can talk about why you feel there needs to be a group in your area, and also find out any issues the group would like to be involved in (for example there may be anti-social behaviour in the area or there may be plans to close a local amenity).

You can then look to get wider support from local residents. Some ideas on getting this support include:

- Displaying posters in communal areas
- Posting flyers
- Door-knocking
- Holding a meeting for all residents (the Resident Involvement Manager can advise you on how to do this)



It is important that everyone in the area that your group will be representing is given the opportunity to be involved, and this will be one factor in gaining formal recognition of your group. The following tips may be useful when trying to build support for your group:

- Some people may have many views and suggestions; however others may not want to be involved at all. Don't be put off by this, and always respect people's right not to be involved
- Talk to people about the benefits of starting a group, and how it can be a great way to work positively with your landlord and other organisations
- Find out if there are any other local residents' groups, and invite them to talk about their experiences

Step 3 – Decide who will lead on the establishment of the group

If there is enough support for your group, then it is good to elect a small number of residents who will be able to lead on developing the group in the early stages. Some of the tasks prior to holding your first meeting include:

- Drafting your constitution. Octavia has a model constitution which you can use, however you will need to agree on some issues to make the constitution relevant to your group, including:
 - What is the name of your group?
 - Which area will your group cover?
 - What are the aims of the group?
 - How often will the group meet?



- Which officer and committee members should you have, and what is their role?
- Setting a date for your first meeting

The Resident Involvement Manager will be able to work with you on these tasks.

Step 4 – Plan your first meeting

If there is enough support for the group, then you should begin to plan your first meeting. The Resident Involvement Manager can help you with this. Some useful tips include:

- Consider where to hold your first meeting. Usually schools and community centres have rooms available for hire. Remember – the closer you can hold your meeting to the properties your group will cover, the more likely it will be that people will attend.
- Make sure any venue is fully wheelchair accessible (if the meeting is not held on the ground floor – make sure there is a lift)
- Consider what time to hold your meeting. You want to make it easy for everyone to attend, so think about people that may have daytime commitments, but also don't hold a meeting too late in the evening.
- Think about how to advertise your meeting. Some ideas include posters, leaflets, or door-knocking. It is also good to remind people a day or two before the meeting.
- Put together an agenda. Ideas for your agenda include:
 - Welcome and introductions – ask everyone to introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the meeting
 - Guest Speakers – If you have invited any guest speakers, make sure they know why they are there, and what they will be talking about
 - Adopt your constitution – Ideally this should be sent out prior to the meeting, so that everyone will have chance to read it beforehand. This should avoid any objections being made at the meeting. The constitution and the establishment of your group needs to be agreed by a majority of people present (this does not include any guests or staff members)



Step 5 – Holding the meeting

This is the ideal time for you to really promote the benefits of having a group, and a chance to secure more support. It is also a chance for you to agree your constitution and formally elect your committee.

Here are some tips to make your meeting successful:

- Make sure different people have different tasks and responsibilities
- Elect someone to chair the meeting
- Arrive early to set up the venue
- Have spare copies of any documents (such as the agenda and constitution)
- Have refreshments available (tea, coffee, juice, biscuits etc.)
- Make sure the environment is friendly and welcoming
- Give everyone a chance to interact socially
- Keep a record of who has attended. This can be done by handing round an attendance sheet
- Try and keep to the agenda, and be aware of time. You do not want your meeting to run on longer than planned
- Be aware and encourage residents to share their thoughts
- Ensure access for disabled people is appropriate



Step 6 – Nearly there!

Once the group has established itself at the first meeting by agreeing the constitution and electing a committee, you are then able to formally apply to Octavia for a start-up grant. This is known as the 'start-up period' and gives you a chance as a group to work towards meeting the criteria to secure formal recognition by Octavia. For more information about applying for grants please see section 'What support is available?')

Step 7 – Formal recognition

You are able to apply for formal recognition at any time during the start-up period. To be fully recognised by Octavia as a residents' group, certain criteria needs to be met by you:

- You must have a constitution
- You must have an equality, diversity and inclusion clause within your constitution that is acceptable to Octavia
- For funding, you must have audited and/or verified accounts
- Open financial records, which will enable group members and appropriate staff to examine the records upon giving adequate notice
- You must hold an annual democratic election of your committee (this will usually be at the Annual General Meeting (AGM))
- Have held four general meetings during the year (this can include your AGM)
- Demonstrate 35% support from the area you are representing. This can be demonstrated in various ways, including getting residents to sign to state they support the group and its aims. A newly established group will have two years to demonstrate support (this is known as the start-up period)



Formal recognition of your group will be reviewed on a yearly basis, and is usually done when you apply for your annual grant. Should you not wish to apply for an annual grant, then the Resident Involvement Manager will contact you to find out how you meet the criteria to be formally recognised by Octavia.

What if we don't meet the recognition criteria?

If you are unable to meet the criteria to be fully recognised by Octavia, we will work with you to try and help you meet the criteria over time. If you are still unable to do so, you may decide that you would like to remain as an informal group. Informal groups of residents can still meet together and organise events, and you can be recognised by Octavia as an informal group, however you will not be eligible for funding from Octavia in the form of annual grants.

What support is available?

There are many ways in which Octavia can support you, either to set up your group or ongoing support once you are established.

The Resident Involvement Manager is able to offer advice on ways to involve your neighbours, different methods of getting everyone's views, and also support and guidance in setting up your group. They can also advise you on suitable training that may help you with the running of the group.

We are also able to offer financial grants to help you get your group started, and to support you once your group is established.

Start up grants

If a group of residents are interested in starting a group, they are able to apply for a start up grant of £250. This grant can help you pay to hire a venue to hold a meeting or for printing posters to advertise meetings or events.

In order to receive the start-up grant:

- There must be at least 10 residents interested in starting up a group. Names and addresses will need to be given to the Resident Involvement Manager
- You will need to have decided on a name for your group
- You must have a bank or building society account opened in the name of your group
- Elected two signatories for the account (usually the Chair and Treasurer)

On occasion, we may pay directly for the hire of a venue, or any other costs in order to support you in starting up your group. In this instance, these costs will be deducted when you apply for your start-up grant. For example, if we have paid £50 for you to hire a hall for your first meeting, then the amount of start-up grant you will receive will be £200.



A group in the start-up period is able to apply for a start-up grant for two years in succession. At the end of this period, you should have aimed to secure full recognition from Octavia, and are able to apply for an annual grant.

Annual grants

Once your group is established, you are able to apply for an annual grant of £250. In order to be eligible for an annual grant you must:

- Be recognised by Octavia as a formal group
- Have provided the Resident Involvement Manager with a copy of the minutes from your most recent AGM (Annual General Meeting), and a copy of your audited accounts.
- Elected a committee (comprising of at least a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer)
- Provided the Resident Involvement Manager with a list of all members of the group



You can use this grant for:

- Hiring venues for meetings
- Refreshments at meetings and events
- Hiring equipment
- Postage and printing costs
- Special provisions (including childcare costs, translators and interpreters)
- Travel expenses

If your group is made up of members who are residents of different landlords, or private homeowners, we are still able to provide funding where at least 10 members of the group are Octavia residents (this includes tenants, shared owners and leaseholders).

If you have any questions or require support please do not hesitate to contact the Resident Involvement Manager, Peter Walkinshaw on 020 8354 5500 or email be.involved@octavia.org.uk

