



Information for

Resident Associations



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1. What is a Residents' Association?

A Residents' Association is just a group of ordinary local people, who meet for a couple of hours every now and then, and work to improve life for everyone in the area. A Residents' Association can work well even with just a handful of people and you can:

- Get funding from the Council for your running costs
- Work with police to help clear up crime and anti-social behaviour in your area
- Make newsletters to keep locals informed and build a sense of community
- Apply for grants to improve your area, visit the Grant and funding webpage on the Cambridge City Council website
- Really make a difference

How can we help?

We can:

- Help you have a real say in the way the council looks after your home and estate
- Help you to influence the services provided by the Council
- Help you to get your voice heard by the Council, the housing service and city Councillors
- Help you to set up and run a Residents' Association
- Give you training to help you get the results you want
- Give you a collective voice on issues that affect your lives

2. Why start a Residents' Association?

- ✓ To improve things (better play facilities, better repairs service...)
- ✓ To campaign against things (closure of local facilities, traffic problems...)
- ✓ To have a bigger say in how things are done – a collective voice
- ✓ To build a feeling of community
- ✓ To keep people informed about issues that affect them
- ✓ To arrange social events (bingo, street party, coach trip...)

How to get started:

Get everyone's views

Talk to your neighbours. Ask them if they would be interested in having a Residents' Association. You can do this by door knocking, visiting local shops, churches, schools, playgroups, community centres and so on

What to ask them

- Are you concerned about local issues?
- Do you think it's a good idea to set up a group?
- Would you come to a meeting to see what you think?
- If not, would you like to know the outcome of a meeting?

It only needs a few people to come to a first meeting – 5 or 6 (or even just 3 or 4!). It may help if people know that just coming along doesn't mean they have to get involved.

- We can help with making leaflets and
- posters to publicise your meeting
- We can help with advice on how to run a meeting
- We may even be able to help by chairing your first meeting
- We can get funds for running your group

Arrange a first planning meeting:

Invite people who are interested to an informal planning meeting. This could be held in someone's home. At this meeting, agree what you want to achieve with your group: What are the aims of the group? (To sort out a problem, to improve the environment...) You could agree a name for the group, so it becomes real.

One person needs to act as "chair" or leader to make sure everyone has their say. Someone else should jot down the names of everyone there, the main issues that are raised, and any initial decisions agreed. These issues and decisions can then be taken to your first public meeting to check that you really represent most people's views.

Your first public meeting

You will need to think carefully about where and when to hold the first public meeting. You want everyone to have the opportunity to come, so think about your neighbours: Are they about in the day time, or would an evening meeting be better? Are there lots of young families who might need to find babysitters? Are there days in the week when other activities are going on? You won't want to clash with a Bingo session or a Pub Quiz night... consider the elderly or disabled.

Where to hold the meeting

This could be a local community centre, a school or church hall. You will need to check that the room is suitable for anyone with a disability, that there is enough space, seating etc. Consider whether there is a cost to hiring the room.

Publicity

Try to get people curious and interested. You might use a question, like "Are you fed up with...?" or "Would you like to have...?" Don't put in too much detail. Make the date, time, place and purpose very clear. Include contact details for anyone wanting more information.

Agenda

Make sure you prepare an agenda – the list of things you want to talk about. At this first meeting the main things will include getting support to form the group, and agreeing your priorities for the group. To make meetings run smoothly, you'll need someone to act as Chair. You will also need to keep 'minutes', the records of your meeting. Minutes don't have to be long, nor do they have to record everything that's said. The main thing is to write down what the main issues are, and any decisions you make about your activities

After the public meeting

Don't be disappointed if not many people came. Some people might be uncertain about whether or not to join in. If there was enough agreement to start a group, you should begin work. Tell your neighbours about what you're trying to do, and how they can benefit from what you are doing. This will encourage more people to join in.

Frequently asked questions

- Are there any requirements for Residents' Associations?

If you want to get a Cambridge City Council grant to pay for your running costs, there are some requirements. You must have a 'Constitution', which states the aims and objectives of the group.

- Do we need to set up a bank account?

Yes. For a Council grant, you need to have a bank or building society account, with at least 2 signatories for signing cheques, who are not be members of the same family or living together.

- Will we need insurance?

If you want to organise events or social activities you may need to take out public liability insurance.

- Is there a limit to the number of members we can have?

No, the group can be as small or large as you want it to be - it could cover one small sheltered housing scheme, one street or a whole estate.

- Can a Councillor or Council employee be a member?

This is up to the group, but if they live in the area covered by the group we would advise that they be allowed to be members, but not on the committee in case of potential conflicts of interest.

- Can we still get a Council grant if our group includes leaseholders or owner-occupiers?

Yes, provided that the area covered by your group contains at least 35% council housing.

Should we invite Councillors or Housing Officers to our meetings?

That is up to you. If you think it would help to have them at your meetings when there are issues you want to resolve

3. The role of the Chair

The Chair is the person who makes sure meetings run smoothly, and makes sure that any decisions or actions agreed by the members are carried out. They guide the group to help it achieve its aims. They are usually elected by the members for a year at a time. The Chair is the person who makes sure things get done – not the person who does everything.

A good Chair needs to have:

- Patience and tact in dealing with people
- The ability to keep people under control during meetings
- The ability to be as impartial as possible, even when they have a particular interest in what is being discussed
- The ability to act as leader of the group
- The ability to ensure that decisions are made in a proper manner in accordance with the Constitution (the set of rules for the group)

In meetings the Chair should:

- Introduce and summarise the purpose(s) of the meeting
- Invite all attendees to introduce themselves if there are new people at the meeting

- Introduce each topic on the agenda, giving background information if necessary
- Make sure each topic on the agenda is fully discussed
- Make sure only one person speaks at a time
- Contribute to discussions, but not dominate them
- Stop people talking for too long or going off the point, and encourage those who don't say much to join in, so that everyone gets an equal chance to contribute to the discussion
- At the end of the discussion, summarise the points made, check everybody's opinion on any actions or decisions to be taken, and (if necessary) have a vote on the actions or decisions

Between meetings, the Chair should:

- Be aware of all activities carried out by the association (but not necessarily being directly involved with them all)
- Ensure members carry out the tasks they have agreed to do
- Consult members about agenda items for meetings, and prepare the agenda

Should there be a Vice-Chair?

- It is useful to have a Vice-Chair to lead meetings if the Chair is unavailable.

4. The role of the Secretary

The Secretary's job is to keep people informed, so that they feel involved and are able to join in what the group does.

The main duties are:

- Taking minutes (notes) during meetings
- Telling people when and where meetings will be held
- Helping the Chair to prepare the agenda for meetings
- Writing and receiving letters on behalf of the association
- Keeping records of membership, important phone numbers etc.

Preparing for a meeting

- Help the Chair prepare the agenda, and prepare all other paperwork
- Give plenty of notice of a meeting, with full details of when and where it will be held
- Send out agendas, minutes and other relevant papers a week before the meeting
- Take extra copies of all paperwork to the meeting (in case someone forgets their copy)

During the meeting

- Make a list of all those present at the meeting, and note any apologies for absence

- Take notes of what is discussed, and any agreed decisions or actions

After the meeting

- Draft the minutes of the meeting, and check them with the Chair to finalise them
- Write up the final version and distribute them to all members and attendees

Minutes should

- State the name of the association, date, time and place of the meeting
- List who was present at the meeting, and apologies for absence
- Follow the order of the agenda items
- Be clear, short and easy to understand (minutes should not record everything that was said, just the main points on each item, and decisions or actions agreed)
- Have an action column showing who will carry out decisions or actions agreed
- Give the date, time and place of the next meeting

5. The role of the Treasurer

The Treasurer is the person responsible for looking after the association's money. The Treasurer must:

- Open a bank account, with at least two people needed to sign all cheques (the two people must not be related nor living in the same household)
- Pay all money received into the bank account, and keep a record of it
- Pay bills and keep a detailed record of money spent
- Keep petty cash for day-to-day expenditure, with a petty cash account book
- Keep an account book, with details of all money going in and out of the association
- Check the accounts against the bank statements
- Write reports for members of the association, showing its financial position
- Keeping accurate, detailed records is the most important part of being a treasurer.

Treasurer

The accounts must show every transaction, every cheque counterfoil must show the amount and what the cheque was for, every purchase by cheque or cash must have a receipt or invoice to show what the money was used for and so on. Keeping up-to-date, detailed and accurate records is the key to being a successful Treasurer.

All members of the group need to know how much money the Association has, where it has come from and how it is spent. This will help the group make informed decisions about how to use its money.

The Treasurer does not make the decisions on how money is spent - the Association members make those decisions. The treasurer's role is to give accurate information and advice about how much money is available to spend on the group's activities.

It is good practice for Associations to have written financial guidelines that cover things like who can sign cheques, what petty cash can be used for and the maximum amount – for example, petty cash could be used for purchases or expenses under £10; larger amounts must be paid by cheque. These guidelines are designed to protect both the Treasurer and all the members.

6. The role of the Committee

The Committee in Residents' Associations and other groups

Residents' Associations and other groups are made up of people working together towards a common goal. For example, a group of residents might get together to find ways to improve their neighbourhood. If the group is quite big, it makes it easier to run by choosing a committee from its members – a smaller group of people with particular jobs to do, like a Chair to run meetings, a treasurer to look after finance, a Secretary to keep notes on the meetings and activities of the group. The committee for a big group might also have a fundraiser, or a publicity officer and so on. In a small group, there might not be a need for a formal committee, but it's still a good idea to decide who will do what.

The number of people you have on your Committee will depend on the size of your group, what you are trying to achieve, and what skills your members have. In larger groups, the committee may meet to come up with suggestions and plans, and bring them to the meetings of the whole group for discussion.

The Chair and committee members are chosen by all the members of the group to lead it towards what it is trying to achieve.

It is not there to make all the decisions – the members of the group do that. Differences of opinion are a natural and

necessary part of making the group think about what it is doing. Everybody should have the chance to air their views and discuss them freely. To make sure this happens, all members of the group should stick to some basic rules, such as:

- Attend meetings regularly and arrive on time
- Contribute to discussions
- Keep comments short and to the point
- Keep in mind the goals of the association
- Listen to others and do not interrupt
- Support others, and help people without taking over
- Do what they say they'll do
- Abide by the group's decisions
- Don't be disruptive or aggressive – interrupting, shouting, using bad language etc.

At the end of any discussions, all decisions should be made by a vote from all the members of the group.

FAQs for Residents' Association Grants

Who can get a Residents' Association grant?

Residents' Associations in residential areas of Cambridge where at least 35% of the homes in the chosen area are City Council homes

What is the grant for?

The grant is for funding the group's communal activities and projects.

What can't you use the grant money for?

The grant must not be used to fund transport, refreshments, prizes, gifts and so on for social events. (Residents' Associations can organise such events, but must find separate funding for them). The grant is not intended for buying large items of equipment, such as computers or printers, may be able to loan a computer and peripheral equipment to RAs

How much is the grant?

The grant is based on the number of homes in the Residents' Association area. (For details, see the Residents' Association Grant Application form)

Who looks after the grant?

The Residents' Association is responsible for the grant, ensuring it is only used for allowable expenses, and keeping accurate records and evidence of how the money is spent. (For details, see the Guide to Residents' Association Grants)

What happens when the grant runs out?

The grant is meant to fund Residents' Association activities for a year. At the end of the year, if your grant is almost spent, a new grant application must be made, with full details of the previous year's accounts and supporting documents. Any money remaining from your grant will be carried forward to the new financial year and deducted from the amount of the new grant. If at the end of the year you still have much of your grant unspent, you need not apply for a new grant until your funds begin to run

7. Running and funding your RA

Step-by step guide to Residents' Association accounts

Looking after your Residents' Association grant money is an important responsibility, but it does not have to be difficult. The main things to remember are:

- Keep good records
- Keep them up to date
- Keep it simple!

RA accounts are the record of all the money that comes into and goes out of your RA bank account. You must keep records of what you spend your RA grant on. This can be done with three columns, showing what the money was used for or where it came from (transactions), money coming in (income) and money going out (expenditure).

For example, the table below shows that a grant of £240.00 has been paid in, money has been spent on printing leaflets and hiring a meeting room, and the bank has paid £3.45 interest on the money in your account.

Transactions Income Expenditure

RA grant 240.00

Leaflets 16.50

Room hire 18.00

Bank interest 3.45

However, as well as recording all your transactions, you need to know how much money you've actually got – your 'balance'. You can work this out by adding up all the money coming in, then taking away all the money going out. A good way of doing this is to have another column to show the balance as you go along – see the example below.

Transactions Income Expenditure Balance

RA grant 240.00 | 240.00

Leaflets 16.50 | 223.50

Room hire 18.00 | 205.50

Bank interest 3.45 | 208.95

In the example, you can see that the £240 grant was paid in, giving a balance of £240.00, then £16.50 was spent on leaflets, leaving a balance of £223.50 (£240.00 take away £16.50 = £223.50). Then £18.00 was spent on room hire, so £18.00 is taken away from the previous balance, leaving a new balance of £205.50. Then the bank paid interest, so £3.45 is added to the putting the balance up to £208.95

The table above shows the basic record of your transactions, but there are other things you can do to make record keeping easier. You could add another column to show the cheque number for each payment, and another for the date of transactions (see next page). This helps with checking your records.

Date Transactions Cheque Income Expenditure Balance

1/10/07 RA grant- 240.00 | 240.00

6/10/07 Leaflets- 16.50 | 223.50

6/10/07 Room hire-18.00 | 205.50

12/11/07 Bank interest- 3.45 | 208.95

Whenever you buy anything by cheque, you must get a receipt (or invoice) invoice that shows the amount of money and what it was for and, and keep it for your records. It's a good idea to write the cheque number and date paid on the receipt, so you can easily see what each cheque was used for. You can get invoice or receipt books which give you 2 copies of each transaction – one for your records, and one for the other person.

Your cheque book, paying in book and bank statements also form part of the records you need to keep. Whenever you write a cheque, fill in the cheque stub, showing the date, who the cheque was paid to, what the cheque was used for, and the amount. When you pay money in to the bank, write the amount and where the money came from on the stub in your paying in book.

When you get a bank statement, you must check it against your other records. Go through the statement, and make sure that it tallies with your cheque book and paying in book stubs.

Tick each item in the statement as you go. Then check that your accounts tally with the statement.

As statements are often not quite up to date, some recent transactions might not be shown on the statement. It's a good idea to make a note on the statement of any missing transactions, so that you can look for them on the next statement when it comes.

If at all possible, avoid paying cash – it makes record keeping more complicated. But if you do have to pay cash, draw it out of the bank, and make sure you get a receipt for it. The receipt must show who you paid the money to, what it was for, and the amount. It must then be signed and dated by the person you paid the cash to, and the receipt kept with your files.

Top tips

- Keep full records of everything – you'll need them for applying for a further grant
- Keep your accounts up to date – it's much easier to record everything as you go than to try and do it all just before you need to apply for your grant
- Get organised – use a file or folder to keep all your records in order, with sections for accounts, statements etc
- Avoid using cash if at all possible. If you must pay someone cash, make sure you get a signed receipt from them
- Every now and then, get someone else to check your recent records – we all make mistakes, and it's much easier to put them right sooner than later
- Make sure you only use Residents' Association grant money for the costs of your meetings – it must not be used for social events or other activities
- If you want to run other events, you must raise the money elsewhere, and you must have a separate bank account for it (not your RA account)

Residents' Association accounts - jargon buster

- Accounts: the records of all the money that goes in and out of your bank account, and what it was used for:

- Transactions: what the money was used for or where it came from
- Income: money coming in to your account
- Expenditure: money going out of your account
- Balance: how much money you've actually got
- Bank interest: some banks pay a little interest on the money in your account
- Cheque number: every cheque has its own number. Noting this in your accounts makes checking easier
- Dates of transactions: Noting this in your accounts makes checking easier
- Receipt: shows amount of money that has been paid, who it was paid to, and what it was for
- Invoice: a bill from someone asking for payment
- Paying in book: for paying money into the bank. Sometimes it's a separate book, sometimes it's just paying in slips at the end of the cheque book
- Cheque / paying in stubs: the part left in the cheque or paying in book when you tear out the cheque or paying in slip – for noting details of the transaction
- Bank statement: list of all transactions, sent by the bank each month so you can check your accounts

8. Events

Estate Walkabout

These are neighbourhood events where you walk about with council officers and ward councillors to identify issues in the local area. They are a relaxed, informal way of having your say to Council officers. You could show them areas of concern in your neighbourhood.

9. What we need from you

- Up-to-date details of who your RA officers are
- Up-to-date contact details
- Codes of Conduct updated annually for all members
- The minutes of your RA's AGM to keep on file
- RA meeting dates – we can publicise these through Open Door/Website
- Information about residents' successes or issues, so that we can publicise them (as above)
- Courtesy: observing Codes of Conduct, and having “a welcoming, inclusive resident involvement community that is attractive to a diversity of resident groups”
- Accurate record keeping: if all the documentation is available and in order it will make applying for your grant quicker and easier. Don't forget - if you need any help with setting up a system to help you manage this we can advise you

10. Keeping people interested groups

People are the most important resource your group has. The hardest task is to get people interested, and keep them involved. Here are some suggestions to help you do this:

Find out what people want

It's not much use trying to start up a group if your neighbours don't share your concerns, so:

- talk to your neighbours
- do a simple survey of local residents to find out what they think needs improving

Define your aims

- Be clear about what your group is trying to do, for example stopping anti-social behaviour, getting the area tidied up, new play facilities for youngsters
- Be realistic about how long this may take to achieve
- Set short-term aims too – things you can work towards day-to-day, with a good chance of quick results. People will see the point of staying involved and will enjoy things more if they can see results
- Check with residents to give get an idea of how to prioritise the local issues you want to tackle. This will also help promote your group, and can be useful when dealing with Councillors and your landlord

Share tasks

- If too few people do all the work they may get tired and fed up, and other people may feel excluded and unimportant
- List all the jobs that need doing i.e. delivering newsletters, booking rooms, making phone calls etc. and put a name by each to share them out evenly

Keep in touch

To feel involved, people must know what the group is doing and what decisions have been made, so:

- Send out regular newsletters and leaflets
- Publicise your successes
- Organise regular public meetings and events
- Knock on everyone's door twice a year to tell them what's been achieved and what's next
- Try to find out what prevents people from coming to meetings, like the time of meeting, lack of babysitters, unable to read or understand your
- leaflets - then be flexible to overcome these obstacles