

Capacity Building Project



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

Case Study 10

The Organisation:

Newmarket Community Partnership

The Challenge:

Becoming a Charitable Company

The Response:

Planning for management by a Trustee Board

Examples of Good Practice:

1. Managing the change
2. Policies and procedures
3. Staff management systems

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The Organisation: Newmarket Community Partnership

Newmarket Community Partnership was formed in 2004 following completion of the Newmarket Area Healthcheck, a research project on the state of the Newmarket community. Information was gathered from all parts of the community and compiled into a report with an Action Plan of 150 possible actions. The Partnership was formed from people who had participated in the Healthcheck and wanted to help move the Action Plan forward. There are 170 members from local businesses, charities and voluntary groups as well as concerned individuals from the local community. Its mission is to undertake activities aimed at influencing and supporting growth in Newmarket and its hinterland and bringing benefits to its people and businesses without compromising local distinctiveness.

A Steering Group of 24 volunteers was formed to develop the Partnership and progress the Action Plan. With funding from EEDA (East of England Development Agency), Forest Heath District Council and the Newmarket Town Council, the Partnership was able to appoint a Project Officer. Working Groups were established to focus on different areas including transport, community, housing, leisure and marketing.

The Challenge: Becoming a Charitable Company

With the first two years of funding running out, the Partnership faced a big challenge to raise funds to ensure its long-term viability. To improve funding prospects and provide more effective management of ongoing and future projects, the Partnership decided to become a Charitable Company. This has enabled them to secure continuing funding from the district and town councils.

The Partnership wanted to be well prepared to commence operating under its new legal structure. Particular challenges have included recruiting Trustees, becoming an employer for the first time, taking over management of the finances and office accommodation (both previously responsibilities of the Newmarket Town Council) and developing a set of policies and procedures to ensure compliance with legal obligations and to meet good practice standards.

The Response: Planning for management by a Trustee Board

The Partnership gathered information on becoming a Charitable Company. This involves first applying to become a Company Limited by Guarantee (£20 fee) and then to become a Registered Charity (free). Resources are available from the Companies House and Charity Commission websites. The Memorandum and Articles of Association to be adopted is the generic document available from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, which has been read and understood by the new Trustees. Currently, the Partnership is awaiting approval of the application to Companies House.

The partnership has planned for the transition to its new legal structure with a communication strategy to keep members informed and a Trustee recruitment drive. Policies and procedures relating to employment and organisational management have been developed using SAVO's Practical Toolkit and these are ready to be implemented when they commence operation under its new legal structure. A line

management structure has also been established and the Chair has already taken over line management of the Project Officer.

Examples of Good Practice:

The Newmarket Community Partnership provides numerous examples of good practice. With forward planning they have been able to manage the change to the new legal structure and prepare the trustees for their new roles and responsibilities. They have also developed policies and procedures that provide clear guidelines for managing the organisation, its staff and volunteers.

1. Managing the change

The Partnership planned for the transition to becoming a Charitable Company. Using the Partnership's newsletter, members were kept informed of the changes and a Trustee recruitment drive launched. Up to date information on the changes was also made available through the Partnership's website.

All Steering Group members were invited to apply to become Trustees of the new charity. It was considered important that potential trustees had appropriate skills and understood what their roles and responsibilities would be. Steering Group members were therefore sent a copy of SAVO's "Trustee Pathway", a CD-Rom that provides practical information on what is involved in being a Trustee. People applying to become Trustees were provided with a Trustee Role Description and were required to complete a Trustee Application Form, a Skills Audit and a Declaration of Eligibility. All trustees are required to undertake a 4-day Trustee training programme. So far, three trustees have been recruited; the process is continuing to recruit additional Trustees through local networks.

2. Policies and procedures

The Partnership used the model policies and procedures in SAVO Policies and Procedures Toolkit as the starting point for developing their own policies and procedures. There were a number of key policies that were considered essential to help the organisation meet its legal obligations and meet good practice standards. As a small organisation, the Partnership had limited knowledge of these policy areas but felt confident that the SAVO policies were well thought out and could be relied on. They also found that downloading the policies from SAVO's website and adapting them to their needs was easy.

The following policies are ready for implementation when the Partnership commences operation as a Charitable Company:

- Computers and E-mail Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Employment Contract
- Employee Exit Strategy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Grievance and Discipline Policy
- Harassment Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Personal Safety Policy
- Staff Handbook
- Travel and Subsistence Policy
- Trustee Role Descriptions and Code of Conduct
- Volunteer Policy
- Working From Home Policy

Many volunteers are involved in the activities of the Partnership so there are plans to promote the Volunteer Policy to ensure that the volunteers understand its contents and how it will enhance their experience of volunteering. The aim is to get volunteers to engage with the policy, making it a living document that both volunteers and the organisation will follow.

3. Staff management systems

Prior to the Partnership becoming a Charitable Company, the Project Officer was employed and line managed by the Newmarket Town Council, although for day-to-day matters relating to project delivery, management of the Project Officer was provided by a committee of three people. This was not ideal as lines of accountability were not clear.

With the Partnership becoming an employer for the first time, the Partnership wanted to provide the Project Officer with clarity about future job security and to put systems in place to ensure proper accountability. An Employment Contract was drawn up for the Project Officer and a Staff Handbook provided with information addressing employment rights and detailing additional benefits offered.

The Project Officer is now line-managed by the Chair of the organisation and has just one person to report to, which has made the lines of accountability much clearer. The Chair is available any time for support via telephone and there are plans for formal support meetings to take place every three months. The approach will be one of “open access” to the line manager. This will ensure that the Project Worker, as the sole paid employee, is not isolated but feels supported by the organisation.

There is a division between the management and governance roles. The Trustees are responsible for governance which includes providing strategic direction for the organisation and its projects, while the Project Officer, her line manager, and the various working groups, are responsible for managing the delivery of the Partnership’s numerous projects.

Sharing the Learning:

Lessons learnt from the Newmarket Community Partnership cover good practice in governance, change management, policies and procedures and staff management. By drawing on available resources, the Partnership has established good foundations for its future as a Charitable Company and for successfully implementing its projects.

Lessons Learnt

A Trustee recruitment strategy involves defining Trustees’ roles and responsibilities and ensuring potential trustees have the appropriate skills

Policies and procedures help an organisation meet legal obligations and meet best practice standards

Becoming an employer for the first time involves meeting important legal obligations and providing proper support and supervision

SAVO has produced resources to help organisations improve their governance and management including the “Trustee Pathway” CD-ROM, the Practical Toolkits and downloadable policies and procedures

Questions To Consider

- What is your Trustee Recruitment strategy?
- How do you communicate to your Trustees what their roles and responsibilities are?
- Do they have the appropriate skills?
- Have you done an audit of your policies and procedures?
- What policies do you need to review or implement?
- What employment arrangements do you have in place and do they meet legal requirements?
- What support/supervision do you provide to staff?
- Do you have copies of SAVO’s resources?
- How could you use these resources to improve your governance and management?