



**GMFA's guide to setting up
and running a successful gay &
lesbian social group or sports club**

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If you're thinking of starting up a social group or sports club or if you're already running one, then we hope the following guide will help you to make that club as fun and rewarding as possible, for you and all your members.

We'll start with what makes a club a success, then look at how you start a club, how you turn it into an organised club, and how you run that organisation. Finally we look at some of the common questions that arise for clubs and groups in the processes of setting up and running of them.

What makes a club a success?

In an ideal world a successful social group or sports clubs would probably be one where:

- If the club isn't already at maximum capacity, those who should feel welcome to join (ie: anyone eligible for membership) know that the club exists, know how to join it and feel welcome to do so.
- Members and non-members alike are satisfied with the experience they have at the club – whether they continue to attend or not. To ensure this club organisers should make sure that everyone attending their club is treated with due respect – whether or not they appear to 'fit in' to the established group and whether or not they choose to stick around.
- If the club hasn't reached maximum capacity (for the venue or the practical management of the group) then it is growing.

These success criteria might be the aims of your club. You might want to write similar but different aims or write entirely new ones, in addition to, or instead of these. They could be big aims, eg: The club represents Britain in the Gay Games, or small aims, eg: The club meets once a week on a Tuesday.

If you're starting up a sports club or social group, you will find much of the work has been done for you if are connected to or are familiar with an established sports or social scene. If you know how and where to make connections to things like venues, local events and tournaments, sources of information, coaching, equipment and so on, it will be much easier to build your club or group than if you don't. Branching out on your own, on the other hand, may be necessary if you are sufficiently disillusioned with the culture of the established sports or social scenes with which you are familiar.

I want to set up a new group / club – where do I start?

If you're starting a sports club from scratch you may be better off starting small. One way might be to invite your gay/lesbian friends to join the team you already belong to, even if it's not specifically a lesbian or gay team. Over time you could invite one or two others to join, and in time your 'non-lesbian/gay team' may have a significant sub-set of lesbian/gay team members. Eventually you may have enough lesbian /gay team members to split off and form your own little team. This may be a gradual splitting off until your gay/lesbian group is confident enough to survive on its own.

If you're starting a sports club or social group independent of any established group, you may find it difficult to assemble a number of people who all share the same interests. But such a group could occasionally meet, network and form the beginnings of a number of different clubs, which would be based around shared interests – in particular sports, activities or subjects.

Before you leap in and set up your own club we suggest you start by asking yourself some key questions. Answering these questions should help you work out if starting a club is something you really could achieve:

- Why do you want to start a club?
- How much time do you have to spend organising it?
- Is someone already running this kind of club for gay men and lesbians in your area?
- If so, is there a good reason to start a new one?
- If a similar group exists, can you get some help from them – guidance, networking?
- What other kind of help will you need?
- Do you know where to get it?
- What kind of budget do you need to run the club?
- How much of this budget can you meet using membership fees?
- How much, if any, of your own money can you afford to invest in the club?
- Do you think you could find a sponsor for your club? (A gay bar for instance)

Top Tips

Playing Straight

While it's wonderful to have gay or lesbian competitions or events to participate in, that's not always possible locally, at least in the beginning. So consider letting your team or group participate in non-gay events. That way you'll get to enjoy your sport or activity, and your team or group can get

some valuable practise. You can decide how 'out' you want your members to be. The most important thing is for them to participate.

Play Away

Find out about lesbian and gay meetings, events or tournaments in other cities, and use the excuse to take a mini-vacation with your friends.

Create your own competitions

If you have enough people to involve, create your own events or tournaments. Even if you aren't a sports club – find a game or sport you can play each other at, and if necessary change the rules to accommodate the number of players, etc. Whatever it takes to get people together in a fun and supportive environment.

Finding coaches and venues

Ask around for professionals or ex-professionals (experts, coaches, players) who would be willing to help your group or club on a voluntary basis. Use existing municipal recreation programs. Network with people who work in schools and universities. Let group members take turns leading activity sessions, coaching or training. Find books written on your sport / interest – and improve your ability to pass the information on – develop your own coaching and facilitation skills.

Get yourself a wingman

If you can find one person who is willing to support your vision for the club or group, ask them to help you with your communication to the rest of the world about the club. Often when you are leading a project you get too close to essential information to know how to present it most clearly and effectively to others.

Keep everyone informed

Effective communication plays a key role in helping any organisation succeed. The key to keeping everyone informed is knowing who 'everyone' is. Examples include:

- Existing team or group members
- Potential team or group members
- Financial supporters and potential financial supporters
- Other gay/lesbian sport groups, near and far
- Other non-gay/lesbian sports groups

- Other non-sport gay/lesbian organisations
- Volunteers

In the beginning, often the most important people are your current group members and potential new group members. Later, financial supporters, volunteers and other audiences may need to be considered. Once you know who you're trying to reach, you can build communications vehicles to reach them, such as:

Telephone trees – when information needs fast distribution, recruit three or four team mates to each telephone another four or five different people on your list of telephone numbers. It's a fast way to reach fifteen or twenty people.

A newsletter – create and publish a simple newsletter for an effective way to reach many different kinds of audiences. The most basic newsletters deliver current information to your existing members and other people who have expressed an interest in participating with your group. Make sure your newsletter includes, at the very least:

- How to contact your organisation for more information
- Practise or meeting times with descriptive addresses
- Statement of group purpose

Newsletters are also an effective medium to publicise business sponsors or display business advertising as a means of rewarding financial supporters.

Email lists – if many of your group members have access to email, maintaining up-to-date email lists can be a highly effective method of keeping your contacts well informed. You can even have separate lists for group members, media, supporters, etc, and one large list with everyone on it.

Web sites – a simple web site can be created and maintained by your organisation. Perhaps you can find someone who is skilled at creating sites, or you can get your organisation listed on sites like G-A-Why Don't You? If you set up your own web site, you'll want to be sure that it conveys, at the very least, your practice or meeting times, with location addresses, your statement of purpose, and how to contact your organisation for additional information. Make sure to include your web site address (URL) in all your other communications so that people know how to find your site.

Other group's communication channels – if you know of other groups in your community that already have effective communications vehicles (such

as a web site or existing newsletter – eg: GMFA's F:S) see if you can insert news about your own group into it.

The club is started, but it needs to get more organised, what can we do?

After starting your sports club or social group (or as soon as you like, but probably not until you have established sufficient interest from your members) you may want to take it to the next level by establishing an organisation. By doing so, you can increase the chances that your club or group will continue into the future, even if you or some of the other founders leave.

By establishing an organisation you also increase the number of people who can help you to meet the collective needs of your group. A functioning organisation can accomplish much more than any one individual.

- Call a meeting and host it in a place where people coming will feel comfortable. Often pubs will let you use their upstairs rooms for meetings, another good reason to find a pub to sponsor your club or group.
- Two or three meetings can get things started – it's not necessary to have a large group, in fact starting with a small group can be easier.
- Some clubs may want or need to have exclusively male or female membership. However, consider the advantages of having both men and women equally in your group. It can break down community barriers, increase the talent pool, widen your outreach possibilities and increase your potential for the future.
- Establish group leadership – Start with the basics, get someone to handle the finances (Treasurer); someone to handle correspondence and communications (a Secretary); someone to call meetings, propose agendas and promote involvement (Chairman and/or Captain). The names of titles can be different, can change and can have different job descriptions, as long as you have a simple understanding of 'who does what' to reduce the burden on any one individual and increase the sense of 'group ownership' and responsibility.
- Delegate – if you feel like you're doing all the work by yourself try recruiting other members of the group to help you.
- Establish Purpose and Goals – it's a good idea to write down and agree upon a purpose for your group, and some specific short-term and long-term

goals. For example, a purpose might be 'to create and promote ballroom dancing opportunities in our community'.

How do we run our new organisation?

How you run your organisation to meet your purpose and goals will depend on how long your club has been running, who is running it (yourself and however many others), how many members it has and what its main activity is.

Broadly speaking, there are two methods you might use to run your club – the first is benevolent dictatorship and the second is something approaching democracy.

A benevolent dictatorship

A benevolent dictatorship is one in which a single person or partnership makes the final decisions about what the club as a whole will do, with the best interests of the club at heart (whether or not they have established the agreement of the majority of members). Some people choose to run their clubs this way in order to save time, effort and paperwork, and make the process of joining and participating in the club's activities as simple as possible for them to manage. Others will have a very particular vision for their club, and want to maintain tight control over its development.

Advantages

- Basic decision making can take much less time and effort, and club organisers can let their imaginations run free as they pursue their vision for the club.
- Members are free to enjoy the activity of the club without having to spend time participating in, hearing or worrying about committee meetings.
- There is much less paperwork.

Disadvantages

- Responsibility for the success of the club depends almost completely on the skills of the dictator and his deputies at communicating with the club members – both listening and responding to them.
- Consulting members on club development issues can be problematic if members are not in the habit of giving their opinion on club development.

- The existence of the club may be threatened if there is a leadership challenge, if not during the reign of it's dictator then when that dictator steps down or abdicates.

A democracy – or something like it

An organisation set up to run according to democratic principals would be one where the final decisions are made through some kind of consensus between its members. Some people will set up their clubs to run in this way so that the club evolves in a direction that the majority of its members are happy with. The democratic approach also enables a club organiser to spread the liability as well as the responsibility.

Advantages

- Clubs run democratically are not so 'top heavy' and can survive change and conflict more easily than benevolent dictatorships.
- Members who choose to do so can gain as much from 'giving' to the club as they do from participating in its activities.
- The club is fundamentally set up to grow according to its members' wants and needs.

Disadvantages

- Decision making can take a lot longer and involve more time and effort.
- It is hard work to make committee meetings efficient and inspirational.
- There is much more paperwork.

Deciding how to run your club

Your own preferences, experience and circumstances should guide you in deciding whether to run your club as a benevolent dictatorship or something approaching democracy.

When starting out, even if only during the first few weeks, your club may be much better run as a benevolent dictatorship than a democracy, especially if you don't have that many members. If you attempt to follow democratic procedures and you only have ten members, you may find that you don't have enough people who are willing and able to contribute usefully in committee meetings and it's not worth the effort of using them to run your club.

The larger your club gets, the harder it may be for you to run a benevolent dictatorship, keep in touch with and respond to the popular opinion of

members. You may then move towards a more democratic organisation, where popular opinion more naturally rules.

Common questions that arise in the set up and running of social groups and sports clubs

How do I promote the club?

Promoting your club is an art that you'll get better at over time and with practise. It may involve a process of trial and error – advertising in different places and in different styles before you hit upon a method that works.

Remember you can buy advertising or you can get PR, which is a lot more cost effective. Find someone who works in marketing to help you write a good news release to send to the press and organise some photographs of your club. Then phone up the editors and ask them if they would like to run a feature on your club – and tell them you can give them photographs. Remember that editors are looking for an interesting 'angle' so if you can be creative with your words and pictures and you are more likely to get the coverage you want.

If it helps you could do some market research. Ask the people you know, and find complete strangers to ask whether or not they would be interested in joining your club, what they would expect from it and where, if you were going to use advertisements to make announcements about it, they would see them.

Or you could just write a hit-list of places to advertise and go for it. Here is one to get you started.

Places to inform/advertise

ONLINE

www.gmfa.org.uk/theguide

www.gaytoz.co.uk

www.rainbownetwork.com

www.outintheuk.org

www.gaydar.co.uk

www.gay.com

www.outforsport.org

www.outsports.com

www.gaysport.info

www.pinkclassifieds.co.uk

www.queery.org.uk

www.gayscape.com

PRESS

QX

Boyz

GAY Times

Pink Paper

Attitude

AXM

NOW UK

GayUK

Refresh

Magazines serving the particular interest your club is built around (eg: fishing).

Local straight press (including Time Out and The Evening Standard)

OTHER

Gay & Lesbian Switchboard

Noticeboards in pubs and cafes (eg: downstairs in FirstOut cafe, just round the corner from Tottenham Court Road tube)

How can I attract new members?

Promoting your club is one of the most obvious things you can do to attract new members, but you also need to ensure that your established members make your new members feel welcome. A club whose established members have formed very strong bonds with one another can easily forget to do this. If established members are encouraged to welcome new members they will probably also increase the promotion of your club by word of mouth – which is the best kind of promotion your club can get.

How do I keep established members interested and happy?

While you're concentrating on attracting new members to the club, it can also be easy to forget the established members. And sometimes even if new members are flowing steadily into the club, they're also flowing steadily out again because you're having trouble hanging on to them.

If life were simple your members would tell you how they want you to organise things – you would organise things that way that would keep them happy. In reality people often don't know what they want, or they're not very good at communicating what they want, or they find out that when they get what they want, it isn't really what they want.

Many people fall into this category and don't want to be given too many choices. They don't so much want to be asked what they want to do, as told

what is happening. Over time some of these followers will turn into leaders – if not leaders of others, then of themselves. As they become more comfortable with the environment of the club and more willing to take responsibility for decisions that are made about its activities they will become clearer about what they do and do not want, and they will be prepared to tell you. Don't be surprised if this takes a while though.

Of course while some people just want to follow, some do want to lead. To keep any natural leaders in your club happy, try to make the most of their needs and talent for leadership. Delegate to them as much responsibility for the organisation and activity of the club as you and they feel comfortable with.

As long as everyone is being treated with equal and due respect, let the emerging leaders lead, and let the willing followers follow.

Keep listening to feedback from your members and keep responding accordingly, but don't expect to be able to please all the people all the time. If people are leaving as fast as they're arriving, ask them if they don't mind telling you why and see what you can do to change things so that people stick around for longer.

Do I need insurance?

Social groups and sports clubs are not legally required to have public liability insurance, however insurance companies recommend any organisation that might be held responsible for an accident to take out a policy. Ultimately it is up to you to decide what risks you think you should cover and can afford to. If you do decide to pay for insurance, make sure you shop around because prices vary quite a bit – with new deals being brokered all the time. At the time of writing public liability insurance begins at around £500 per annum - your insurance broker will be able to advise.

How can I raise funds?

A good way to approach the subject of fund raising is to identify first what you need to raise money for, and why. You may need to hire a meeting space. You may need to buy equipment or uniforms. Maybe you publish and distribute a newsletter and flyers and need funds to pay for them.

It is important to remember that fundraising can involve a lot of effort. If it is possible, try to lower your need for funds in the first place, then only raise money for the 'extras'. Often, the members of your team or organisation can pay for the basic things. You may need to collect monthly dues from

members, or collect money from members every each time you meet, in order to rent whatever facilities you use. Every situation is different.

Prioritising is the key. Identify your biggest needs, establish how much it will cost to meet these needs, how much can be paid by your members and how much would need to be raised from other sources. Make sure there is an agreement in your group about these goals and priorities. Members are more likely to help raise funds if they are included in the fund raising planning and decision making process.

Sources of financial support

- Local business sponsors – eg: gay bars. Find the owners of local businesses that might support your team and approach them. Ask them to pay for specific items and offer to put their name on those items (eg: team members' clothing).
- Businesses that advertise in the gay press. These advertisers may be willing to support your fundraising efforts. It's better to suggest a specific way to contribute. For example: "Will you sponsor our Tournament Program for £xxx, and we'll print your name on the program?"
- Government funding. The Arts Council offers grants from £200 to £30,000 to organisations for arts related activities, such as: projects and events; activities for people to take part in; education activities; research and development; commissions and productions; marketing activities; 'audience development' (activity carried out specifically to meet the needs of audiences and to help arts organisations develop ongoing relationships with audiences); capital items (such as equipment and improvements to facilities and buildings); professional development and training; organisational development to improve the long-term stability of arts organisations; and touring. For more information and an application form visit www.artscouncil.org.uk
- Sport England makes Lottery money available for community sports groups through the 'Awards for All' programme. It is possible to access up to £5,000 in any one award and although it's not essential for you to have money already set aside as matching funding for the proposed scheme, it does help.

There is a lot of pressure on the fund but a number of Lesbian and Gay sports groups have been successful in getting grants. All you need is a well thought out proposal, a constitution, a bank account and preferably a set of accounts showing you to be a well organised (even if impoverished!) group.

Sport England's site 'Sports Gateway' will link you to the criteria and priorities for the 'Awards for All' fund. See www.sportengland.org

If your group feels it needs to discuss the detail before submitting an application to the region division of Sport England that covers your geographical area, you can get some help from the British Gay & Lesbian Sports Foundation Co-Chair, Jim Atkinson, jim@bglsf.org

- **Wealthy Donors** – Along with other people in your organisation, brainstorm “who knows who”. Perhaps members of your group each know one or two wealthy individuals who can be approached to make a donation to your cause. This requires personal networking and discretion. Often wealthy individuals will support courageous efforts by organisations such as yours to improve the lives of gays and lesbians. Appeal to their sense of altruism. Point out the empowering and liberating aspects of open participation in organised sport, not to mention the healthy team-building skills sport fosters.
- **Team involvement** – There are many ways to raise money by getting your team mates involved. Brainstorm ideas that make sense for you. Collect prizes from supportive businesses and have all your team mates sell raffle tickets for chances to win. Hold a car boot sale. Organise a team night in a local bar and charge a small admission at the door as a donation – have everyone on your team show up in their sports uniforms and have fun distributing information about your team. Even though many of these kinds of fund raisers don't raise large amounts of money, they can be fun team building events, which help publicise your group, making it more visible in the community and making recruiting members and raising funds easier in the future. NB: Large scale fundraising efforts, such as hiring out whole club venues for the evening can be very time consuming and often end up losing money or barely breaking even. Approach with caution or plenty of experience.

Confidentiality / Data Protection

It is good practise to get someone's permission before holding on to personal information about them or to passing it on to a third party. If in doubt, ask if you can hold on to the information or whether they want you to destroy it. For more information about the latest data protection laws and guidelines, visit: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/

Accounting

You are not legally obliged to keep accounts of money spent within your club, but it is advisable to keep accounts of money coming in and going out

of your club as transparent as possible, so that, should something happen to you, you are not the only one aware of what the club has charged its members, and what it has paid out of club funds.

Equality and accessibility

Sometimes clubs have to discriminate against certain people participating in their activities order to maintain their integrity. It is obviously impossible to welcome everyone to an exclusively gay men's social group. However, it is in the interest of everyone for club organisers to consider differing levels of physical ability (mobility, vision, hearing) and do their best to make their clubs as close to equally accessible to all eligible members as they can.

Health & safety

There is no legal requirement for social groups or sports clubs to have a designated first aid officer, although it may be required by a club's insurers and it is highly recommended that group activity facilitators and organisers are properly first aid trained. Contact the St John's Ambulance for information about First Aid Training. They can be reached on 08700 10 49 50 or by visiting: www.sja.org.uk/

Dealing with conflicts

Most major commercial organisations have in-house policies regarding conflicts between employees, bullying and harassment, grievance procedures and any disciplinary procedures that may follow. They are not produced in the anticipation of frequent and serious conflicts, but in an attempt to resolve fairly and effectively any serious problems that arise between members of an organisation. The larger a social club or sports club gets the more the organisers might consider establishing some policies to deal with conflicts between members.

What happens if people attending our group or club have problems we can't help them with?

Some social groups are specifically set up to provide support to members – for example social groups for gay men newly coming out, while others are not. Whatever your club has been set up for, you may find members or people attending your club who are in need of help that you don't feel equipped to offer. Under these circumstances it can be useful to have a referral list of organisations who are specialists in providing practical help to gay men who need it. Two of the best places to refer gay men with personal problems to are: THT Direct on 0845 1221 200 and www.metromate.org.uk