

Governing Documents (Constitutions) – Quick Guide

A constitution is a document that sets out how a community group or charity operates. It is often called a governing document, with the name depending on the organisation type:

- **Trust** – Trust Deed / Declaration of Trust
- **Community or Voluntary Group** – Constitution
- **Unincorporated Charity** – Constitution or Trust Deed
- **Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)** – Constitution
- **Charitable Company** – Memorandum & Articles of Association

What does a governing document cover?

It should clearly outline:

- Your aims and objectives (what you do and who you support)
- Your powers (e.g. fundraising, employing staff, entering contracts)
- How trustees/committee members are appointed and replaced
- Meeting arrangements, including AGMs and decision-making (quorum)
- Membership rules and voting rights
- Financial management, including controls and use of funds
- How to amend the constitution
- What happens if the organisation closes (dissolution)

Why is it important?

A governing document:

- Demonstrates you are properly set up for funders
- Is usually needed to open a bank account
- Helps manage conflict and decision-making
- Clarifies roles and responsibilities
- Keeps your organisation focused and accountable

Good practice to include

- At least two unrelated signatories for financial transactions (recommended for transparency)
- Clear quorum rules for meetings to ensure valid decisions
- Regular AGMs and documented meeting minutes
- A requirement that funds are only used to achieve the organisation's aims
- Clear process for managing conflicts of interest
- Our Simple Quality Protects can help you with this – for more information contact enquiries@sloughcvs.org.uk

Top tips

- Use templates from the Charity Commission or Companies House:
[Model Constitution for a Small Charity.doc](#)
[Model constitution for a CIO.doc](#)
[Articles of association.doc](#)
- Involve your committee when developing or reviewing the document
- Keep it clear, practical, and easy to follow
- Review it regularly to keep it up to date
- Make sure trustees and members understand their roles

Need support?

Slough CVS can support you with developing or reviewing your governing document. For more information contact enquiries@sloughcvs.org.uk

*Please note: **This is guidance only and not legal advice.** For legal matters, seek professional advice.*

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