



## Registering as a Charity

This information sheet explains what a charity is, what charitable purposes mean, how public benefit is defined, and the steps required to register.

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### What is a Charity?

- Charity is a **legal status**, not a legal form. It sits on top of whichever legal structure you choose (e.g. trust, company limited by guarantee, CIO).
- Not all groups set up for community benefit qualify for charitable status.
- In England and Wales, organisations with an income over £5,000 must register as a charity.
- Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) must register regardless of income.

### Legal definition:

A charity must:

- Be established for charitable purposes only
- Be subject to charity law jurisdiction

Charities must exist exclusively for **public benefit**.

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### Charitable Purposes

To qualify, an organisation must have only charitable purposes. The Charities Act lists 13 descriptions of purposes, including:

- Prevention or relief of poverty
- Advancement of education
- Advancement of religion
- Advancement of health or saving lives
- Citizenship or community development
- Arts, culture, heritage, or science

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- Amateur sport
- Human rights, conflict resolution, equality and diversity
- Environmental protection or improvement
- Relief of those in need (youth, age, ill-health, disability, hardship)
- Animal welfare
- Efficiency of the armed forces, police, fire, or ambulance services
- Any other purpose recognised as charitable under law

Charities must state their objectives clearly when registering and report annually on how they are meeting them.

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### Public Benefit

To become a charity, organisations must show:

- **Benefit:** Activities must deliver positive outcomes, outweighing any negatives.
- **Public:** Benefit must be to the public or a section of it (e.g. a geographic area, a group such as young people, or those in education).

The Charity Commission applies the public benefit test using guidance and case law.

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### Steps to Register

1. **Trustees:** Ensure you have suitable trustees with diverse skills, perspectives, and commitment to the charity's aims.
  2. **Accounts:** Prepare annual reports in the required format.
  3. **Governing Document & Name:** Draft a governing document tailored to charity status and choose an appropriate name.
  4. **Aims & Objectives:** Clearly set out charitable activities and ensure they meet the public benefit requirement.
  5. **Register:** Submit your application to the Charity Commission.
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## Further Information

- Guidance is available from the [Charity Commission](#).
- Templates and resources can be found through national voluntary sector organisations.
  - [NCVO](#) (National Centre for Voluntary Organisations)
  - [NAVCA](#) (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action)
- Independent resource centres also provide advice on governance and registration.

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