

Starting a Men's Shed

Your easy reference guide to starting a safe and sustainable Men's Shed. Find out more at

www.menssheds.org.uk

Starting a Men's Shed

Contents

About this Guide.....	3
Disclaimer.....	4
Develop a Steering Group.....	6
Hold a Public Meeting	7
Visit other Sheds.....	9
Decide what to do.....	9
Find Premises.....	10
Find Shedders	14
Formalise your Men's Shed.....	15
Organise your Development Group	15
Equip your Shed	16
Health and Safety	19
Insurance.....	20
How much will it cost?	21
Banking.....	22
How long will it take?	23
UK Men's Sheds Association.....	24
Further Reading.....	24

Starting a Men's Shed

About this Guide

So you're thinking of starting a Shed? Great! We're here help.

By now you've likely discovered that the Men's Shed concept started in Australia many years ago. It has since made it to the UK and Ireland, and many places in between.

The idea came about on reflection of the lack of social opportunities for older men, which is an increasing health concern in the UK too. We know from years of research that regular social interaction and continuing physical and mental activity can improve our health and wellbeing. Men's Sheds provide an enjoyable way to stay socially integrated in our local communities, stay active and learn or pass on skills.

At UK Men's Sheds Association (UKMSA), we support and promote Men's Sheds across the UK. We have a small but dedicated team and experienced Volunteer Ambassadors in many areas of the UK meaning there's always someone to help.

This guide is designed to give you a flavour of what is typically involved in starting a Shed, some top tips, and things to consider. There's no one-size fits all in starting a Shed, but we've arranged the guide in what most find is a logical order. Depending on your specific circumstances, you may not need all of the information, or may use it in a different order. That is expected and you should use this basic guide in whichever way suits.

We provide lifetime support to Sheds and Shedders, and when you join us, you'll become part of a network that spans the UK. You'll get priority support, all the resources you need to develop and sustain a thriving Men's Shed, and hand-picked, exclusive benefits including discounted tools and equipment.

We hope once you've read this guide you'll be as excited as us about your Shed journey.

Happy Shedding!

Victoria

Director

UK Men's Sheds Association

Starting a Men's Shed

Disclaimer

This document is provided by UK Men's Sheds Association for general interest on the given topic and not intended to apply to specific circumstances. It does not claim to be a comprehensive breakdown of all matters relevant to the subject matter and not all of the information will be relevant to every Shed's journey. You should not, under any circumstance, regard the information as constituting legal advice and it should not be relied on as such. In relation to specific problems, users are advised to seek professional advice.



The People

Starting a Men's Shed

Develop a Steering Group

Starting a Shed can sometimes seem like an overwhelming task, but the quicker you have people around who share your vision and passion, the less overwhelming it becomes. Sheds are about communities of men coming together to develop and sustain safe and fun spaces that benefit their health and wellbeing. It's important to involve as many people from the local community as possible to develop a thriving Men's Shed that benefits many and doesn't rely on a single person to keep it going.

The essence of a Shed is the relationship between the Sheddors, the sense of community and the kind, generous nature of supporters. This often comes about by sharing the work, trials and successes from the outset. There are many examples of groups bonding around the Shed idea, enjoying being together and working on projects long before a physical space is found.

UKMSA can often put you in touch with a local Volunteer Ambassador who has been through exactly what you are going through now and can be on hand as a friendly presence to advise and guide you if you feel this would help.

Start by spreading the word. If you have existing friends that love the idea of a Men's Shed just as much as you do, get them involved. If not, you'll need to cast your net wider. In small communities, you may be able to spread the word and find people to help simply by word of mouth, but in larger communities, this can be more challenging.

Here are a few ideas to help you get a group together:

- Ask local businesses to help spread the word to their customers
- Put a poster or advert in shop windows, GP surgeries and supermarkets
- Tell your local paper what you're doing. They often help with a free editorial or small advert. Ask free papers and community magazines to spread the word too.
- Speak to other community groups, clubs and churches.

Starting a Men's Shed

Hold a Public Meeting

If you're unable to get a steering group together by talking to people in your local community, you might benefit from advertising and holding a public meeting in a well-known community space, like a village hall or sports club.

Benefits of a public meeting

- It gives you a fixed point to work to and something tangible to tell people.
- You can spread the message to a large group in one hit rather than spending a lot of time on the phone or visiting individuals.
- You are likely to find willing volunteers to help with the next tasks.
- It will show you how much appetite there is for a Shed in your area and so can help inform the next stage.
- Questions will be asked that you may not yet have thought of and it can prompt your own thinking.
- You might attract local business support, or donations of tools.

But, be careful...

Advertising and holding a public meeting can draw lots of attention and create premature expectations from people wanting to join the Shed. If you already have a group of people that can help you start the Shed, you could hold the public meeting later to announce the Shed is opening.

If you need to find people to help and you can't whip enough support from your local area, make sure it's explicit in your advertising that the public meeting is to find support to develop a Shed in the area, but it won't be open right away.

Planning your meeting

At this point you'll need to start thinking about a budget. If you have one, great, if you don't have one and can't find any, then don't worry, a lot can still be done. The main costs to consider at this early stage are printing information, hire of rooms and tea and coffee.

Starting a Men's Shed

Make sure you give yourself enough time to plan the meeting and decide how you are going to inspire attendees to help or join the Shed. You should also make sure you advertise it well in advance to make sure as many people are free to attend as possible. Don't forget the refreshments. They'll help draw a crowd and oil the conversation.

Top Tips

- Let UKMSA know you're holding a meeting – we will help to advertise your meeting on social media and we may have had enquires from people wanting to help start a Shed in your area already.
- Encourage family and friends to spread the word. The value of networking for Sheds cannot be underestimated.
- If you are struggling to find a venue many supermarkets have community rooms that you can use for free, and always ask if they will provide tea and coffee as a donation. If it's summer, you could even hold it in a local green space with a shelter.
- Tell your story everywhere you go. Most Sheds have a story behind them; whether you're doing it to improve the wellbeing of the men in your community or you've found yourself with more time on your hands than you'd like – people will want to help when you tell them why you're developing a Men's Sheds.

See our helpful guides in our [Resource Library](#) on our website. You can contact us to request a Starting a Shed PowerPoint presentation to enlist support from potential fellow Shedders, help them understand what a Shed is and how to set one up.

Starting a Men's Shed

Visit other Sheds

One of the best ways to determine what you want your Shed to be like (and what you don't), is to visit other Sheds. The more Sheds you can visit the better as no two are the same. You can get inspiration for the type of activities you want for your, and you can share experiences and get tips from other Sheddors too. Not only that, it's a great way to build connections and make friends.

If you'd like to visit other Sheds, you can find details of the ones nearest to you, and across the entire UK, by visiting our [Find a Shed](#) map. Click on the Sheds on the map to find contact details.

Decide what to do

The activities you decide to do in your Shed should be determined by the group developing it. A range of activities to suit the starting group are likely to be attractive to lots of men in the local area. There aren't any rules about the type of activities that have to go on in a Shed, but here are some common ones that you might like to include in your own:

- 📌 Woodworking and metalworking
- 📌 Electronics and 3D printing
- 📌 Model building
- 📌 Bicycle repairs
- 📌 Upcycling and repurposing
- 📌 Gardening or conservation work

If you do activities for the public in exchange for a fee or donation, be careful not to take trade from local craftsmen or small businesses



The Place

Starting a Men's Shed

Find Premises

At some point you will start thinking about premises. A place where you can store your tools, share a cup of tea and get down to some serious creating. What you need will depend in part on what you want to do in the Shed, how many Sheddors you're likely to attract and what is available locally.

We recommend you draw up a wish list for the perfect Shed, decide with your steering group what the deal breakers are and be prepared to compromise on the rest. Many groups grow out of their first Shed at some point and find something bigger and better going forward, as a larger and more cohesive group.

You should also consider:

- 🏠 Is it easily accessible by public transport?
- 🏠 Is there somewhere to have a tea break/social time and wash up afterwards?
- 🏠 Does it have toilet facilities or is there a toilet nearby?
- 🏠 Will your noise (and laughter) disturb neighbours?
- 🏠 Is it safe?

Surveying your town is a good first task for a fledgling committee and can generate leads to follow up. Use local knowledge to guide you. Here are some suggestions of places to start, but the list is by no means exhaustive.

- 🏠 Check with large factories, warehouses, universities, colleges or schools close by.
- 🏠 Look for empty or underused properties and check on your local authority website as some publish comprehensive information about empty properties.
- 🏠 Make connections with other community groups who may know of underused space in premises. To start with, you might be able to share.
- 🏠 Make connections with your local housing association who can be large property owners.
- 🏠 Make friends with local estate agents, explaining what you are looking for and why. They may be able to put you in touch with owners of empty properties who would be happy to have a community group housesit for them.

Starting a Men's Shed

- Talk to your local authority. They may have premises that are empty that need some TLC. It's a great way for them to get some good publicity and show they are supporting a community initiative.
- Contact the likes of rail companies, the local police, fire service and doctor's surgeries who sometimes have space to spare.

The best thing about doing the above is that you are also getting known in your local area and the more you are known, the more avenues open up.

As premises are usually the single biggest overhead for a Shed, the advice above focusses on getting premises for as little as possible. However, you shouldn't discount the following:

- Hiring a room – this can be a great way to start quickly. Utilities are usually covered in the hire charge so you can budget your usage and often only pay for the hours you use. Block bookings can often attract a cheaper rate. This can sometimes mean restricted usage and you will need to leave the room as you found it, taking away any tools and materials, but it's a start.
- Renting at commercial rates – if you can be assured that you can raise the funds on an ongoing basis without relying on funding, this could be an option. Be aware that newly established Shed groups may find it difficult to enter a tenancy agreement so may need the backing of a guarantor.
- Buying a property – this is an expensive option and a luxury many won't be able to consider at first, but it's not impossible. If there's a building you think would be perfect, you could apply for grants and fundraise to afford it. Make sure you get legal advice and do all the appropriate surveys before you commit. You may have to do a planning application for 'change of use'.
- Building your own – for the ambitious Shedders! If you can find a suitable plot of land to buy and you're confident you can raise the funds, speak to your local planning authority to see if it's likely you'd get permission to build a community Shed. This would depend on various factors, including the area on which you would be building and what else is surrounding the land. Again, remember to get surveys completed and seek professional advice before purchasing land.

Starting a Men's Shed

But, be careful...

Whichever route you go down with your premises, never neglect the legalities or surveys where necessary, and always ensure you have a lease in place before moving in. A lease is paramount even if the premises or land is loaned to you for free or at a nominal or 'peppercorn' rent. Situations change and legally bound agreements such as leases are for your protection. You should ask the advice of a local lawyer if you have any concerns. Such services can sometimes be accessed through local authority Communities departments or Community Voluntary Service (CVS).

Starting a Men's Shed

Find Shedders

Word of mouth is the cheapest and most powerful way to get members and you should encourage everyone in your steering group to be advocates. You can also try open days and initiatives like 'bring a friend' (or brother or neighbour) to the Shed day. Remember, you can use all of the same advertising methods that you used for your public meeting.

If you think a website would help, basic web hosts like Weebly and Wordpress that hold contact details and opening times are easy to set up and develop.

Speak to other local charities who may have male volunteers and individuals that would enjoy attending your Shed.

But, be careful...

If you have very small premises, spending a lot of money or time on marketing and publicity is going to result in a surge in potential members who you cannot necessarily accommodate just yet. If you have decided to become a Shed group before getting premises (many do), then the more the merrier.

Starting a Men's Shed

Formalise your Men's Shed

Most Sheds find that once they get started the amount of people willing to help increases. People will come to the Shed for different reasons, and want and need different things from the Shed. It's important to realise this at the outset and welcome everyone's input and contribution.

Organise your Development Group

We hope that many of your new contacts will want to become involved in helping run the Shed early on. This will help form a Management Committee to steer, support and work together to develop the Shed.

Most Sheds do this by becoming an unincorporated organisation. This is still a fairly informal group without the legal protection or obligations of a charity, but allows the work to be shared out amongst the committee and adds some accountability. It ensures that decisions are made democratically and that all committee members take collective responsibility for the Shed. It is governed through a constitution document. Member Sheds can download a template for this from our [Resource Library](#).

The Committee can vary in size according to your Shed needs, but it usually needs a minimum of three members to cover the roles of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

UKMSA can provide more detailed guidance and support about becoming an organisation if you need it. At some point, you are likely to benefit from becoming your own charity, but we usually tell Shed groups to get going to a comfortable level first. Becoming a charity has lots of benefits which we can help you learn, but it also takes some heavy form filling to start with and can put some groups off. It is not necessary to be a charity to start your Shed.

When you're ready to take the next step, see the Becoming a Charity section of our members' [Resource Library](#).

Starting a Men's Shed

Equip your Shed

The type of tools and materials you need will depend on what you and your members want to do. Most Sheds start with members using their own tools, then as word spreads, they often get tools (and all sorts of other things) donated. The majority of donations will be small, electrical, DIY quality tools or hand tools, but many Sheds get lucky and are given bigger donations. Don't forget to tell the donor upfront if you can't use the equipment, and what you are going to do with it e.g. donate to another Shed using [Toolcycle](#) on our website.

As a responsible organisation, you and your Committee should ensure that these tools are safe for your members to use. Talk to a local electrician about safety and Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) any donated tools, they may offer to do this for free if you tell them about the Shed.

Once your Shed becomes a member of UKMSA, it will qualify for great discounts on tools and equipment.

Materials

You can find materials in a combination of ways:

- Salvaged – that bit of excess worktop in a skip might just come in handy. If you see something you like the look of, ask. It also gives you another opportunity to spread the word about the Shed and you might save the person time and money by not having to recycle it. Other useful sources include Freecycle, charity shops, reclamation yards and asking at your local builder's merchant for any material that is unsellable or didn't pass their quality check.
- Donated - from individuals, or companies clearing their stores, you'll be forever humbled by the kindness of your locals.
- Purchased – if you are doing a specific job then buying your materials to ensure their suitability and quantity might be the best option. Tell the supplier about your Shed and see if they can give you a discount.

Starting a Men's Shed

Top Tips

- Look online for user manuals if they don't come with donated equipment.
- Use the tool manuals to get safety information for each item and use that in inductions. You can even print them in large and have them laminated and easily accessible to encourage people to keep refreshing their memory.
- Talk to local schools, universities and colleges. Some are closing departments and may have equipment available.
- Hold fundraising events for larger equipment. This has the added bonus of raising the Shed profile.
- Consider funding applications to grant makers with aims related to your purpose. UKMSA can give advice on funding applications if you need it.
- Scaffold companies are required to replace any scaffold boards with minor defects which can be great for things like worktops and bird boxes.
- Always ask for a discount!



The Formalities

Starting a Men's Shed

Health and Safety

As community groups and organisations, Sheds have a duty of care under civil law towards their volunteers and fellow Shedders. Considering the health and safety (H&S) of your members in all areas of the Shed is vital.

Be reassured that although it can seem like a big hurdle before you start, having simple, straightforward policies, procedures and checklists is the key to effective health and safety. We have plenty of examples and templates in our [Resource Library](#), for health and safety procedures to help you and your members stay safe.

You'll need to at least consider the following:

- ✦ Keep an H&S policy with relevant guidelines clearly accessible in the Shed.
- ✦ Keep a regularly updated [Risk Assessment](#) with clear mitigation methods.
- ✦ A safety induction for general tool use for each new member (no matter how experienced they are when they join) and a record of this, plus refreshers at appropriate intervals.
- ✦ First Aid training for a few Shedders to ensure you always have a first aider in the Shed. Keep well equipped, regularly topped up first aid kits in accessible places.
- ✦ Fire safety guidelines and extinguishers in easily accessible places, and an identified, well-known fire safety point away from the building.
- ✦ Building Regulations certificate for the building (the building owner's responsibility)
- ✦ Shed safety posters showing clear procedures e.g. goggles to be worn at all times when sawing etc.
- ✦ Make sure safety measures like ventilation and dust extraction are in place where necessary and equip the Shed with relevant Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Things like goggles and dust masks are inexpensive, but invaluable.
- ✦ If you have adults at risk in your membership, you should implement a [Safeguarding Policy](#).
- ✦ Consider PAT on electrical equipment to ensure their safety, particularly those donated and not bought by the Shed from new i.e. no guarantee.

Starting a Men's Shed

The more thorough your H&S procedures, the safer and more insurable you'll be. That can mean more cost effective premiums too.

See the [Health & Safety](#) section of our [Resource Library](#) for examples, templates and printable safety signage.

Insurance

As soon as your group starts meeting and carrying out even basic activities, you'll need insurance. This applies even if you don't have premises yet, but are working in the community or doing projects together in a temporary place. You will always need Public Liability insurance, but you should also consider the following:

- Property Damage (or buildings and contents)
- Product Liability
- Employer's Liability
- Trustee Indemnity

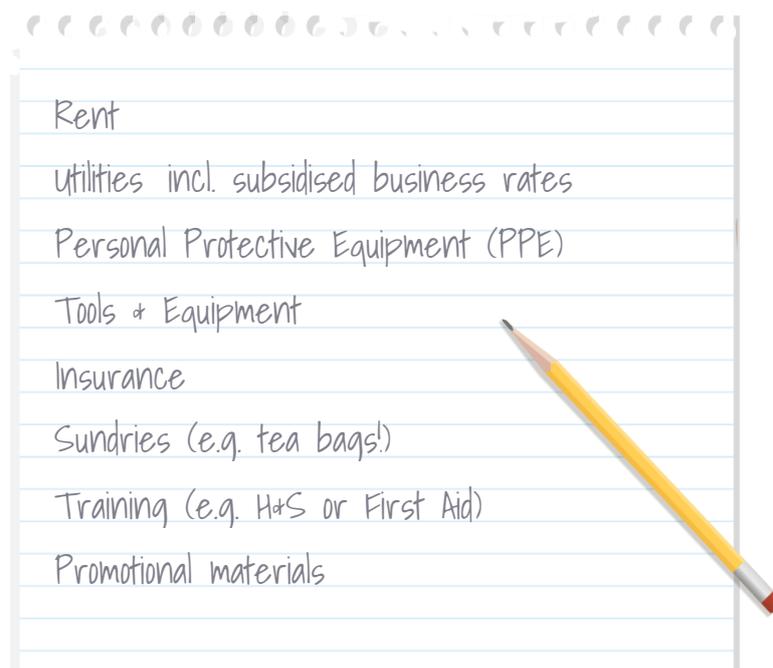
You can read about each of these in our [Resource Library](#), where you'll also find details of our recommended supplier. It is important that you fully explain your activities to your insurer to get the right cover, and practice good health and safety to show your insurer you've mitigated against risks. This can help bring down your premium too.

Starting a Men's Shed

How much will it cost?

Each Shed is different and a lot of costs depend on location and facilities, therefore it's impossible to give a definitive answer of how much it will cost. Do some research into what your Shed will cost for your group and how you'll fund it before you get started.

Most Sheds use a combination of income streams; earned, donated, grants and membership. We have found that the most sustainable are those that have a good mix of income streams with higher levels of self-generated income meaning less reliance on grants. The key areas to think about when planning your budget are:



Most Sheds charge a membership fee of some kind and we recommend you charge enough to cover your basic ongoing costs without relying on other types of income for these. One way to do this is to ask for an annual donation (which you might be able to claim Gift Aid on) and then ask for a small session fee on top. Be careful not to charge too much as this can create barriers for those on a low income.

You can earn additional income through selling items made in the Shed, taking on community projects for donations and applying for funding here and there for those 'nice to have' things.

Starting a Men's Shed

Banking

Once you're a constituted group and you're generating money through memberships, you'll need a bank account. You can then start receiving donations and memberships straight to your bank, and your money can be kept securely.

Most banks and building societies offer special accounts for small voluntary and community organisations and give free banking as long as your account is in credit. You might want to see what your local branch can offer. The convenience of local banking shouldn't be underestimated.

Check that the account is:

- Specifically for community groups, or charities if your group is a charity. Banks sometimes refer to community groups as "Clubs and Societies".
- Not for businesses, as they often charge for business accounts.
- Offering "free banking". This means you won't have to pay any charges simply for having the account, although you will probably still have to pay for things like going overdrawn, stopping cheques or requesting extra statements.

To open a voluntary group or charity account you will be asked for proof that your group is a voluntary, non-profit-making organisation and not a private business.

This could be one of the following:

- Copy of your group's Constitution or Trust Deed
- Charity number, if you're a registered charity

Make sure you set your account up so that at least two people are required to sign each cheque or online transaction, and to approve withdrawals. This increases safety and accountability.

Starting a Men's Shed

How long will it take?

The length of time it takes to start a Shed depends on many factors including where you live, how hard it is to find premises, the interest level of people and the other commitments of those doing the start-up work. We know of Sheds that have set up in two months and some in two years. The important thing is to stay motivated and persevere, because it can always happen if you keep at it.

Starting a Men's Shed

UK Men's Sheds Association

Becoming a member of UKMSA means becoming part of a support network that spans the UK. You'll get dedicated, priority support from our Membership and Support Officer and any Volunteer Ambassador in your area. You'll also benefit from all of the resources you need to develop and sustain a thriving Men's Shed, and a whole load of exclusive benefits including discounted tools and equipment, and voting rights at our General Meetings.

You'll have 24 hour access to our online Member's Area where you'll find information, examples, easy-to-use templates and print ready promotional material. We'll guide you through the processes of membership, fundraising, becoming a charity, health and safety, getting planning permission to build your own Shed and much more.

If all of that isn't enough, you get full access to Toolcycle, our tools, equipment and materials exchange and donate platform.

It's just £24 per year to be a member, which we bet you'll save in discounts alone. Find out more [here](#).

Further Reading

Once you're up and running, take a look through our [Resource Library](#) and get involved in our [Online Community](#) to connect with Shedders across the country.

- 📌 Individual toolkits, guides and examples in our [Resource Library](#).
- 📌 UKMSA's Shoulder to Shoulder newsletter. Sign up [here](#).
- 📌 Men's Sheds [FAQs](#).
- 📌 Our Starting a Men's Shed [checklist](#)



Happy Shedding!

If you need further help or you can't find what you're looking for in our [Resource Library](#), contact us on 0300 772 9626 or admin@menssheds.org.uk.

www.menssheds.org.uk