

# Starting a Shed

There are two ways that Men's Sheds get started:

## 1. Independent model

In the independent model, a Shed gets started by one man or a small group of men who have heard about the benefits of Men' Sheds and have the time and energy to get a shed started.

Their professional backgrounds in community development, leadership, etc., may be an advantage, but the main thing is that this group is passionate about and determined to start a shed.

## 2. Community organization model

In this model, a Shed is started by staff and/or volunteers who already work in a community organization such as a Senior's Centre.

This model benefits from:

- having an experienced coordinator take the lead.
- Staff already knowing potential men to invite to the Shed.
- The organization's space may be able to be offered free of charge.

- Staff may also have experience with grant-writing and be able to apply for funds.

There are challenges and benefits with each model, but they both work.

It is also important to remember that the model used initially can change as membership grows. For example, some Sheds are started by model one, then decide their needs can best be met by affiliating with a community organization. Or Sheds begun by an organization may grow in strength and choose to be more independent. Any Shed started by an organization may want to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the sponsoring body. Such MOU should identify what each party to the agreement expects of each other and indicate that at some time, the partnership may best be served by ending the mutual agreement.

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## Seven Steps to Getting Started

### **1) Build your Startup Team**

Your first objective is to announce your intention to start a Men's Shed, casting as broad a net as possible, looking for startup help: i.e. people to be members, advisors, connectors, funding sources, recommenders, etc. At this stage, it's about creating a Buzz, letting people know the party is about to begin and that they want to be in on it in oh so many ways.

### **2) Hold a Launch Meeting**

It is often helpful to hold an information meeting with community members. Publicity for this can be done through local media, posters, newsletters,

community support groups, and word of mouth.

A few points to remember when holding a launch meeting are:

- 1) Make sure the location is accessible.
- 2) Try not to schedule a meeting at the same time as another popular event (sports, etc.).
- 3) People will be more likely to attend if they know "refreshment will be served."
- 4) Men like to "pay their way," so have a jar/box handy and a sign saying "refreshments by donation."
- 5) Have a short agenda and clear purpose – introductions; review the benefits of a Shed; consider the interests of attendees and what kind of meeting space would accommodate those interests;
- 6) Have someone take notes of your meeting.
- 7) Record everyone's contact information for future contacts.
- 8) Make a plan for follow up with items discussed, including:
  - a) Find someone to look after the donations jar till the next meeting;
  - b) Find someone to look after the notes made and the contact list;
  - c) name a place and date for the next meeting.

At the end of that first meeting, you want to leave with:

- i) a list of potential members,
- ii) a list of names of people who won't/cannot be members but would like to help and how they think they can,
- iii) a list for an excited larger group who now understand the noble objectives and who will spread the word once you have settled on some details
- iv) recorded group suggestions on ideas for finding a Shop/meeting

Space, possible sponsoring organizations, potential startup committee members, etc.

That's a lot to do in a single meeting, but you don't get a second chance to make a first impression, so make your meeting as polished and prepared as possible.

### **3) Find a Meeting Space**

You will need to find appropriate meeting space for your Shed.

This can be a challenge but is of utmost importance.

The interests and activities, plus the long-term goals of initial members, will guide you in your search.

Some Sheds start in a park, a community centre, a member's home, a library, a Legion hall, or a coffee shop.

In the beginning, rental costs for meeting space can also be a challenge.

Some community centres or organizations will allow the use of their space for free or in exchange for help maintaining the building or grounds.

There can be more than one meeting location – e.g. a favourite restaurant for breakfast, a borrowed workshop for projects, and a hall for fellowship meetings. One of these will evolve as the primary "home" of the group.

But a Shed is most likely to last and grow  
when the members find a safe place they can call a “home” base.

### **4) Decide What to Do**

Men tend to socialize while doing something.

So, after the first meeting or two, having chairs set up in a meeting space is secondary to having some activity or project to work on.

Some sheds will focus on a single activity, and others may have many.

Activities, projects and goals may change in time, but doing things will remain a focus that draws guys together.

Here is a list of potential activities that your Shed might include:

- Drop-in – socialize with coffee/tea.
- Bikes and bike repair.
- Woodworking.
- Small engine repair.
- Cooking.
- Gardening.
- Mentoring and skill-sharing.
- Walking or hiking.
- Activism and community involvement.
- Volunteering.
- Music – listening and playing.
- Culture-specific events/activities.
- Workshops with guests.
- Watch topic-specific videos followed by discussion.
- Book clubs.
- Computers/technology workshops.
- Home repair.
- Health-related discussions and guest speakers

## **5) Find Others**

The group that launches a Shed may be small and decide to stay small and closely connected, but Sheds will need to reach out and draw others in most places.

There are many ways to spark publicity and community interest:

- Get to know the local news media and invite them to do an interview story about shedding.
- Talk to people in your neighbourhood like the local hardware store owner, Community Care organizations, retirement facilities, etc.
- Talk to your municipal politicians about the benefits of a Men's Shed in the community.

Research has shown that some places work best for getting information to men.

Here is a list of places to get the information out:

- Local billboards
- Union or professional email lists
- Seniors publications
- Activity-specific places (sports, arts, or theatre)
- Local Neighbourhood publications
- Cultural events and publications (e.g. pow-wow, seniors fair etc.)
- Organizations for newcomers
- Places of worship
- Other community organizations

## **6) Startup and operating Costs**

Depending on your location and activities, your Shed may incur various costs. Try to determine, early on, how much your Shed will cost (a) to get started and (b) to operate annually.

Some Sheds are cost-free (e.g., a small group, meeting in a coffee shop). Other Sheds have high expenses (e.g., a group that rents space to set up a workshop). But for most Sheds, there are some basic costs such as rent and insurance.

Your costs will differ depending on how large the Shed is, its goals, and what kinds of activities it plans, but there will be costs. This means that you will also need to think about how you will pay for both initial and ongoing expenses.

Here is a list of ideas to enable a Shed to raise money:

- Member donations.
- Initial or annual membership fees (if you decide to have an annual membership fee, do this from the beginning as this can be tricky to incorporate later on).
- Selling member-made crafts at local farmer's markets.
- Hold a BBQ at a local hardware store or other community location.
- Become involved in other community events or organize one.
- Develop a tool-lending library and charge a small fee for loans.
- Do work in the community for donations – this works well in smaller communities.
- Provide low-cost repair services (e.g., bike repair, small engine repair).
- Approach other organizations that might be able to donate supplies.

## **7) Funding:**

While a Shed will need to think of ways they want to raise money to cover ongoing operational costs, there can also be costs to getting a Shed started, such as:

- (a) rent a hall
- (b) take an ad in a local paper
- (c) buy coffee and donuts for a launch meeting,
- (d) cover the costs of inviting an experienced Shedder to come and meet with local men

Not having any capital to do the above has been challenging to get started.

The good news is that, at present, there is a grant of \$1,000 to cover the costs needed to launch a Shed.

You can apply for these funds through HelpAge Canada. Visit <https://helpagecanada.ca/mens-sheds>

All of the above can be daunting.

Just keep this in mind as you begin the journey:

Build your team first because  
"Many hands make light work."

Avoid volunteer burn out before the shed even begins.