

## Resource | Action group meetings

Starting or joining an action group is an important step toward a just and sustainable world. Your commitment will bring challenges and rewards. It is possible groups addressing some issues may feel a greater sense of pressure than other community groups: the problems are sometimes overwhelming. It is important that your group balances the task dimension of your work – achieving social and environmental changes – at the same time as looking after the maintenance side of group life. It's equally important to look after yourself and group relationships as it is to kick the goals you've set your sights on. Members of your group will know best how to balance task and maintenance.

This tip sheet has been written to help you and your group work well together and achieve your objectives and highlights some group habits and actions that resilient community groups have relied on: effective meetings with an agreed agenda; clearly-defined roles; mindful decision-making; accountability; and inclusiveness.

### Good meetings should:

- Create trust
- Be punctual in starting and finishing
- Establish goals collaboratively and effectively move towards them
- Maintain participants' interest
- Ensure everyone is invited to speak, is heard and given a fair share of time available,
- Encourage everyone to take up an activity, no matter how small
- Celebrate achievements/successes
- Take care of participant needs such as childcare, social needs etc.
- Set a time and date for the next meeting and review what should be achieved by then.

### Meeting agenda

- Select facilitator and minute taker
- Apologies/those present
- Agree on the finishing time
- Check in. How is everyone? What's going on?
- Correspondence
- Previous minutes/matters arising from the previous meeting, including task review
- New business (including tasks and timing)
- Evaluation: What was great or interesting tonight? How can we our meetings be improved?

### The facilitator

The facilitator is responsible for trying to achieve a good meeting. If necessary she/he must act assertively to ensure the group can achieve its objectives. At the same time the facilitator cannot get deeply involved in discussion and certainly should not defend/push a particular view. His/her role is to present material, elicit responses, draw out from the group the points which the participants want to make and keep the meeting "on track". Ideally the meeting will hardly realise that it is being facilitated.

## Minute taker

This role is to record the meeting. The minutes should at least record the decisions made and should include key points in the discussion. The minute taker should also prepare the “Action Sheet” for the meeting.

## Consensus

Consensus decision-making helps create an effective action group. Consensus-decision making can move the group out of the numbers game of majority decision making, which can be highly alienating. On the other hand consensus can take more account of difference. Consensus decision-making is usually done by the facilitator summing up discussion on an issue and putting that summary to the meeting for acceptance by the whole group. For working consensus it is sufficient that there is no one so opposed to the proposal that they will stand in the way of the decision. The facilitator can ascertain this by asking if it is a decision that everyone can live with.

## Check in

This is a brief go round when those present have a chance to talk about their feelings, personal and those related to climate change. The power of this agenda item is that it allows people to express feelings, vulnerabilities, joy, allowing participants to see each other as people creating trust and commitment.

## Action sheet

This simple system ensures that everyone knows what is being done, by whom and by when. It can create a great sense of empowerment when members of the group can see that action is being taken and progress made.

Person responsible	Description of task	Completion date

## Group development

Bruce Tuckman suggested teams tend to follow a pattern of development that includes four or five stages: forming; storming; norming; performing and adjourning.<sup>1</sup> More direction is needed in the beginning of group development while the group is still forming. As the group continues to develop, less direction and more support may be required to keep energy going and move through interpersonal challenges. Well functioning groups may rotate the facilitator role and also self-facilitate so that the facilitator can be more involved in the content than during the group formation stage. Individual members become more comfortable over time to intervene to get their needs met. For instance, members may be more inclined to make suggest how group meetings might be improved.

## Realistic objectives

Climate change is not a new problem. Community groups have been campaigning to stem dangerous global warming for at least 25 years. We can draw from their lessons. Many have found that creating change is less difficult when the changes we set our sights on are strategic, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specific (or SMART). What outcomes meet those criteria for your group members? What scale will you work at? Local, regional, national or global? What timeframe will your campaigns be geared toward? Objectives that are achievable in 6 to 12 months are most motivating and give members a sense of agency. The challenge is to choose objectives you are confident will create conditions for further change. What tactics might you consider? Which of these

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forming-storming-norming-performing>

tactics will you select, how and in what sequence? Why? The Change Agency website has tips and tools for developing a campaign strategy that fits your unique circumstances.

Some issues that we are working on are not new problems. Community groups have been campaigning to create the kind of social and environmental change that your group is also working towards. We can draw from their lessons. Many have found that creating change is less difficult when the changes we set our sights on are strategic, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specific (or SMART). What outcomes meet those criteria for your group members? What scale will you work at? Local, regional, national or global? What timeframe will your campaigns be geared toward?

Objectives that are achievable in 6 to 12 months are most motivating and give members a sense of agency. The challenge is to choose objectives you are confident will create conditions for further change. What tactics might you consider? Which of these tactics will you select, how and in what sequence? Why? The Change Agency website has tips and tools for developing a campaign strategy that fits your unique circumstances.

## Source

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