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2.1 Introduction

Teamwork is at the heart of successful activism. Effective teamwork makes tasks inspiring and fun, and gives members the chance to fulfil their potential. It is also one of the keys to the sustainability of your group. This chapter offers advice and techniques that will help your group work together as a successful team.

2.1.1 What’s in this chapter?

This chapter offers ideas and techniques to:

- Help your group explore how you work as a team.
- Enable your group to develop as a strong, collaborative team.
- Help your group maximise your potential.

2.1.2 Case study: team building

South Cheshire Friends of the Earth has worked hard to develop as a team. Members have a strong sense of what they’re trying to achieve and everyone contributes to group objectives. The keys to the group’s success are:

- They make working together effectively a priority.
- They are willing to try new things to help them develop.

The group finds these activities work well:

**Planning meetings:** Each January, the group organises a planning meeting to identify upcoming events and reflect on what’s gone well in the past. Local events and group activities are slotted into a large, fold-out year planner, which enables members to visualise the year ahead. The year planner is brought along to each group meeting so that members know what’s coming up.

**Sharing the role of coordinator:** Tania, joint coordinator explains: “We’ve got two coordinators. I’m campaigns and education coordinator, and Janet is membership and admin coordinator. When Janet was sole coordinator, everyone looked to her, even for campaigns I was taking the lead on. By having joint coordinators, Janet has more space to focus on boosting the group’s membership, and the whole group has got used to sharing responsibility around. It’s great when one of us is away on holiday too – everything doesn’t have to stop!”

**Focus on group aims:** Recently, the group came to the conclusion that it was trying to cover too much ground. Members held a campaign strategy day to discuss priorities. With the support of an external facilitator, they looked at what they’d achieved and what was most important to them. They agreed two campaign priorities for the following 18 months. Tania comments: “We’re a lot more focused as a group now – everything we do relates in some way to one of these issues”.

After eight years of hard teamwork the South Cheshire group were awarded the Crewe and Nantwich Mayor’s Oscar for Environmental Initiative 2006

Teamwork 2.5.1 Case study: aim for focus
2.2 What is a team?

Local groups are full of different personalities, each with their own interests and ideas. For a group to be successful and sustainable, everyone needs to agree a common purpose and pull together as a team. This section looks at what makes a strong team.

2.2.1 Sustainable and empowering

Strong teamwork ensures that local group activism is sustainable. It also creates a supportive, motivating environment that empowers members. It’s possible to achieve quite a lot with a determined coordinator, or a collection of talented individuals working relatively autonomously. But this tends to be a draining and frustrating experience for those involved.

Groups that operate like this often collapse when key members leave or decide they've had enough of taking the lead. A group that works together as a team tends achieve greater success and be full of enthusiastic, motivated members.

2.2.2 Team characteristics

Teams face challenges and experience tensions, and they require nurturing to keep them healthy. Successful teams share similar characteristics:

- A clearly defined aim.
- Agreed objectives.
- Healthy ways of working.

A strong team shows its shared commitment through:

- The use of agreed practices and behaviours.
- Adherence to the group’s agreed ways of working.
- Mutual accountability to each other, and to the team as a whole.
2.2.3 Case study: shared commitment

Hammersmith & Fulham Friends of the Earth decided to reassess its activities and find ways of having more fun. Coordinator Paula White explains:

“A happy group will retain, revitalise and attract new members. We think it’s important that group members enjoy what they do and gain satisfaction from it. This is particularly important for new members, who may find it difficult to get involved.

We did a workshop where we all voted on types of activities (for example: days of action, press work, festivals, stalls, youth work, community arts) and types of campaigns. Individually we voted on what we felt a) had the most impact, b) we found most fun, and c) we wanted to do more of. We used the votes to discuss and agree our future approach. The group overwhelmingly voted for days of action as the most enjoyable. Stalls and marches followed. I think social events are another important factor in making things fun.

The interesting thing about using a workshop is that it gives people a choice and puts the group in control of what they want to do. I think people are keener to focus on areas in which they have made an active decision to participate.”

2.2.4 Talking point: is our group a team?

Does your group think of itself as a team? Which team characteristics does your group exhibit? Which could you develop?

Facilitators: If your group has nominated you to facilitate this Talking point, you might find it useful to read the section on facilitation.

Discussion prompts

Here are some prompts facilitators could use to help stimulate and guide group discussion:

- What is our group purpose or aim?
- Do we usually meet our objectives?
- Do we work together on objectives and share the workload?
- What do we think makes a good team?
- Which team characteristics do we value?
- Which team characteristics do we want to develop?
- Have any of us been involved with successful teams? Which characteristics did they exhibit?
2.3 Structure and roles

When it comes to developing a local group structure, there’s no one right way of doing things. Some groups rotate responsibilities between members. Others elect officers with formal areas of responsibility. This section will help you decide which structure and roles are right for you.

2.3.1 Are formal roles helpful?

Sharing roles and responsibilities enables a group to act effectively and achieve its goals. The use of roles varies from group to group. In some groups, the coordinator role includes acting as the main point of contact for new members. Others elect a dedicated membership secretary. Larger groups sometimes organise a coordinating committee, which meets separately to deal with administration and strategy. Most groups find that an effective structure combines formal roles with allocating tasks at meetings.

If your group structure isn’t working, this is probably having a negative effect on your ability to campaign effectively and to attract new members. If you spend a bit of time reorganising your structure and roles, this may reduce members’ frustration and boost your group’s long-term effectiveness.

The main advantages of having formal roles:

- **Accountability**: it’s easy to understand who is responsible for making sure a task gets done.
- **Expertise**: by being responsible for something over a period of time, a member gets very good at it. They then share their skills and knowledge with the rest of the group.
- **Accessibility**: New members and others know exactly who they need to contact.

Appendix 1: Examples of formal roles
2.3.2 Talking point: we need to fill an unpopular role

Inevitably, members will come and go according to their availability, leave the area completely, or want to try their hand at something different within the group. If you have advance warning that an active member is about to leave, a deputy could shadow them for a while and learn the ropes. But what can a group do, if no one wants the role? This Talking point is designed to help you discuss what to do when no one steps forward.

Facilitators: If your group has nominated you to facilitate this Talking point, you might find it useful to read the section on facilitation.

Discussion prompts

Here are some prompts facilitators could use to help stimulate and guide group discussion:

- What exactly is involved: skills, availability, time?
- How does the role benefit our group?
- Can we break the role down into manageable chunks and share tasks among several members?
- Can the more unpopular tasks be dropped temporarily – or even permanently?
- How will the rest of the group support the role holder?
- What external sources of support are available to the role holder, e.g. Friends of the Earth coaching and mentoring service, training?
- If we decide the role is essential, do we need to attract someone new into the group who has the relevant interests and skills?
2.4 Ways of working

As far as group empowerment and sustainability is concerned, the means are as important as the ends. This section explores positive ways of working together as a team.

2.4.1 Contrasting approaches

These fictional stories compare two ways of working as a group, highlighting the impact on members and on group sustainability.

Approach 1: going it alone

After reading about the Climate Day of Action in *Change Your World*, Mytown Friends of the Earth coordinator Maria attended the training day, ordered an action pack and informed the group that the action was to take place. She asked for volunteers and informed the group that she’d write the press release, unless anyone else was prepared to.

Maria had a hectic evening before the Day of Action, giving interviews, working through the preparations set out in the action guide and phoning volunteers to remind them to come. On the Day itself, Maria struggled off the bus carrying the stall and materials. The volunteers were late arriving and the stall was finally set up by lunchtime. After a couple of hours, Maria wanted to take a break but the others weren’t confident about the campaign and kept referring questions to her. She felt she should remain at the stall.

By 4pm, Maria was exhausted and decided to call it a day. They’d collected 130 postcards, which she felt was a good effort. A couple of volunteers suggested going to the pub but Maria was feeling tired, and wanted to get home and send out another press release before she ran out of energy. She was pleased with what she’d achieved but felt burnt out and decided to step down at the next AGM. But would another member take over or would the group fold?

Approach 2: sharing the load

Ourtown Friends of the Earth coordinator Carla knew the Climate Day of Action would interest members because they’d discussed their group priorities at the beginning of the year, and agreed to focus on climate and GM. Sure enough, Lloyd, who subscribed to the climate campaign network on behalf of the group, sent an email to the group’s planning email list. He let people know about the relevant training day and suggested the Day of Action for the next meeting’s agenda.
At the next meeting, Lloyd explained the Day of Action and how it related to the group’s aims. The group agreed that he and two new members would go to the training day. Then everyone brainstormed tasks and shared them out. Some members took responsibility for activities leading up to the Day, others signed up to helping out at the event, and two people volunteered to organise follow-up activities such as writing a press release and a photo story for the group web page.

On the Day, four members arrived at the pre-agreed time and set up the stall while they discussed their tactics and key messages. A rota was organised to ensure everyone got regular tea breaks. By the time the MP and local newspaper arrived at 2pm, there were six members running the stall. By 4pm, it looked like it might rain so everyone decided to pack up and count the postcards in the pub. They were pleased with the total of 130 and had another drink to celebrate.

Positive group dynamics include:

- **Being open:** A group should feel like a safe space where members feel able to make suggestions, ask questions or say they need help, without fear of being criticised or teased.

- **Including all members:** The group should feel like a shared project, not the property of the coordinator or a self-selected group of veteran activists. People will be more enthusiastic and motivated if they feel included and valued.

- **Respecting equality and diversity:** We’re only human, and groups sometimes replicate or reflect the negative behaviours, inequalities and prejudices found in our wider community. For example, one or two members dominate every meeting. No one thinks to check whether or not the meeting venue is wheelchair accessible. A group assumes they can only attract members from a certain age group, income bracket or ethnicity.

Discrimination, prejudice and negative behaviours affect your group’s effectiveness and undermine teamwork. They can prevent members contributing to group activities, create tensions and resentment, and drive people away. Working to overcome prejudice and oppression is a core value of Friends of the Earth International.

**2.4.2 Team dynamics**

Working together as a successful team doesn’t mean you all have to be best friends but you do need to cultivate a cooperative, respectful atmosphere. This means being sensitive to members’ needs and providing space to express them. Some groups find it useful to write a short charter or agreement that spells out how you will all work together.

**Profile 4.4** Messages with impact

**Profile 4.5** Face-to-face communications

**Appendix 2:** Example group charter

**Positive group dynamics include:**

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**Action 3.5.1** Diversity
2.4.4 Manage conflict and difficult behaviour

It’s healthy and positive for members to disagree, and to debate their points of view. Disagreement only becomes damaging when it is bitter and personal, or when it prevents the group from making decisions. Then it can affect morale and hinder the group’s ability to take action. Dealing with conflict or negative behaviours in a respectful and timely way enables everyone to move forward.

2.4.3 Case study: shared values

As coordinator Katherine Pitt explains, Hackney & Tower Hamlets Friends of the Earth has produced a group charter to guide and support its teamwork and actions:

“A charter is a way of setting out mutual values, and can be used as a means of reaching voluntary agreements and resolving conflicts. I thought a charter could be useful to our group, which depends entirely on the voluntary commitment of its members.

I think it’s important that the tone of the charter is light-hearted and tongue-in-cheek. I wrote the first draft one afternoon and emailed it to members. Then I presented it at a group meeting. Members welcomed the idea and suggested a few changes to the wording. The current charter is published on our website and reviewed at our annual re-energising meeting.

Hackney & Tower Hamlets Friends of the Earth find that its charter provides a solid foundation for successful teamwork and actions.

Managing email overload often seems to be a hard nut to crack for groups. The bullet points about email protocol work well for us. Another potential use of the charter is for managing difficult or disruptive people. We haven’t had to do this yet, fingers crossed.

One member has commented that she particularly likes the bullet point ‘Everybody is busy’. People’s day jobs and family commitments always come first, and we all feel entitled to say ‘sorry I don’t have time at the moment to do X’. The charter makes it clear that there’s no need to feel guilty, and also emphasises that we need to respect other people’s time and not let each other down.”

Appendix 2: Example group charter
Here are some tried and tested ways to manage conflict and difficult behaviour:

Facilitation
If serious disagreement arises during a meeting, the member who is chairing / facilitating can use various techniques to move things forward. You could consider using an external facilitator for a meeting about a potentially controversial topic, such as discussing group aims and objectives, or at a meeting where all members want to be involved in the discussions. The facilitator will set ground rules for the meeting.

Set ground rules
Many groups find it helpful to have an agreed set of ground rules for acceptable behaviour. The ground rules set clear boundaries for what’s acceptable and what’s not, and can be used by facilitators during meetings and brainstorm.

Agree shared goals
Discussing and agreeing a set of shared values and goals ensures that everyone knows what they are trying to achieve. A team aim and a set of objectives can be used to remind people what they have in common and bring the focus back to identifying a practical way forward.

Think about the underlying causes
There may be an issue that can be resolved quickly and simply. A member may be interrupting everyone during meetings because they feel they’re not being listened to. Or perhaps they are hard of hearing?

Seek support
Members who are affected by conflict or difficult behaviours may find it useful to talk to others in the group and externally, and share responsibility for dealing with the issue. People in other local voluntary organisations and Friends of the Earth staff, such as your network developer, may have useful ideas and advice.

Focus on the behaviour, not the person
Explain exactly what is unacceptable, and give specific examples of when the behaviour happens. It may be that the person hasn’t realised they are having a negative effect.

Follow the complaints procedure
It’s very rare for conflict to become so serious that the group is unable to resolve themselves. If all else fails, follow Friends of the Earth’s complaints procedure.

Appendix 2: Example group charter

References
2.5 Team aims

If each member simply follows their own interests, your group risks lots of wasted effort and minimal impact. This section offers advice and techniques for focusing your energies into agreed aims and objectives, giving your group a better chance of achieving your goals and having fun along the way.

“It's good to have a mission statement – it brings people together.”

Tania, South Cheshire Friends of the Earth

2.5.1 Case study: aim for focus

South Cheshire Friends of the Earth decided it needed to focus its campaign activities and organised a strategy day, advertising it to members as “your opportunity to inspire our campaigns”. Members booked a church hall, arranged supplies of tea and biscuits, and arranged for Mick, an external facilitator, to come and help.

Tania, joint coordinator, recommends using an external facilitator for this kind of discussion: “We all had loads of ideas and opinions to contribute, so it would have been really difficult for one of us to facilitate as well. Mick also took notes for us, which were really useful later.”

The day in brief:

- Tania gave a short presentation about the group’s current campaign activities, relating them to Friends of the Earth’s national strategic objectives.
- Everyone was given a list of campaign areas, and asked to rank them according to what they thought the group should focus on.
- Questions such as “Local or national – what’s most important for you?” were written on large sheets of paper and displayed on the walls. Members wrote comments on post-it notes and attached them to the relevant sheets.
- Mick talked everyone through the rankings and comments. After a quick discussion, the group agreed to focus on two campaigns.
- Members broke into two small groups to discuss how the group could approach the campaigns. They discussed questions such as “What are our campaign aims?”, “Who are our audience(s)?” and “How does this tie in with what we’re already doing?”.  
- The group continued their discussions over lunch, to which they all contributed.
2.5.2 Talking point: what is our aim?

What is your group purpose or aim? Do all members agree? If you don't have a clear, agreed aim you may find it useful to discuss this Talking point.

Facilitators: If your group has nominated you to facilitate this Talking point, you might find it useful to read the section on facilitation.

Discussion prompts

Here are some prompts facilitators could use to help stimulate and guide group discussion:

- What inspires us to support Friends of the Earth?
- Why did we decide to join this group?
- What is the purpose of our group?
- What could our group achieve in the next 12 months?
- What are our priorities as a group?
- What is our main aim as a group?

2.5.3 Key skill: objective setting

Once members agree and understand your group’s overall aim, you are ready to work out how to achieve it. Aspirations such as “We want to save the planet” or “We will help provide solutions to environmental problems and make life better for our community” are too broad and long-term to provide the necessary focus when you come to planning actions. It makes sense to break down each aim into tangible, shared objectives.

Ownership

If members participate in making decisions, they will be more motivated to get involved in achieving the objectives.

Prioritise

A challenging objective may be less achievable if your group is working on three others at the same time. Prioritising necessarily means postponing or discarding some activities in order to focus your group’s energy on the activity with the highest priority.
Be flexible

Having clear objectives means that your group can seize and take advantage of opportunities, rather than being buffeted by external events. If external events demand a change of direction or focus, even temporarily, you can make a conscious team decision to refocus.

Be SMART

To be workable and effective, objectives must be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time based).

- **Specific** objectives spell out what you want to achieve.
  
  This objective is not specific: “Our objective is to promote cycling to work”.
  
  This objective is specific: “Our objective is to persuade 20 per cent of our friends to try cycling to work at least once in the next month”.

- **Measurable** objectives describe how you will measure whether or not you have achieved it.

- **Achievable**: Are you attempting too much? The objective must be achievable given the context of your action.

- **Realistic**: Do you have the necessary resources? Your objective must be realistic given your members’ circumstances, skills and knowledge.

- **Time** based objectives have a start date and a deadline for completion.

Shared commitment

Once you agree your objectives, write them down and refer to them at every meeting. Bring them up to date whenever necessary. Explain them to new members.
2.6 Communication

Positive communication is fundamental to every team. In a strong group, all members are able to state their points of view and share information. They are also able to engage with, and understand, the views and information offered by other team members. This section offers ideas to help members communicate effectively.

2.6.1 Positive communication

Effective communication relies on everyone working together to try to understand each other. This may sound obvious but many people don’t listen properly to what others are saying. There are many reasons for this, including:

- They are distracted; half listening and half thinking about something else.
- They are involved in a disagreement and are busy formulating a response to what they think is being said.
- They have preconceptions about the other person’s point of view or background, and assume they know what they’re going to say.

2.6.2 Key skill: active listening

Active listening is a structured form of listening and responding that focuses the attention on the speaker. First, the speaker makes their point while the other person listens with their full attention. Then the listener states, using their own words, what they think the speaker has just said. This exercise enables the speaker to find out whether the listener heard and understood.

The active listener aims to acknowledge the speaker’s feelings as well as their words, saying “I gather that you felt angry / frustrated / confused when…” The listener aims to state what they heard and does not have to agree.

Benefits of active listening:

- It encourages people to listen attentively to others, which can promote shared learning and understanding.
- It prevents misunderstandings because members have to confirm that they understand what the other person said.
- It encourages people to open up. If each person feels that the other wants to listen, they are likely to explain in detail what they feel and why.
- It can assist in bringing out areas of agreement and conflict. If parties in a conflict or disagreement practise active listening, there is a greater chance of being able to develop a mutually acceptable solution.
Tips for active listening:

- Focus on what’s being said, not on preparing your response.
- Think about the speaker’s underlying meaning – what are they getting at?
- Be attuned to the speaker’s emotions and body language, and be ready to acknowledge what they are feeling.
- Look at the person who’s speaking – make sure they know you’re listening.
- When you say what you think you heard, give the speaker a chance to correct or comment. Don’t assume you got it right first time.

2.6.3 Communication systems

You may find it useful to organise systems for communicating with members between meetings. Most groups choose a combination of email and telephone systems, both of which have pros and cons.

- **Telephone systems**: The advantage of the telephone over email is that you can be confident that someone has actually heard your message, and you can get an immediate response. Using a phone tree system, where it’s agreed in advance who will call who, shares the burden of telephoning every member.

- **Email systems**: When used considerately, email is a useful means of communicating between meetings, and with group members who can’t attend meetings. It’s quick, free, and accessible to a large majority of people through public libraries, home computers and cafés. Your group may find it useful to establish ground rules for communicating by email.

🔗 Appendix 3: Email and phone systems
2.6.4 Case study: using email lists

Tim Atkinson, group coordinator, explains how Southwark Friends of the Earth developed simple but successful targeted email lists to improve communications between members:

“Over time, we’ve developed an email system to suit our group and what we do. It was a case of trial and error until we hit on something that worked for us. Before I became coordinator, we used an ad hoc email list that was a mix of active and non-active members, and other contacts. People were receiving lots of emails that weren’t necessarily of interest or relevant to them, which meant urgent and important messages were often overlooked.

Friends of the Earth head office recommended that local groups use Yahoo! Groups to manage email communications, so I looked into the idea. The free Yahoo service includes a calendar, photo library, and other facilities, and I thought it could be a really good thing for us to use. We gave it a go but it didn’t work out because many of our members aren’t all that familiar with the Internet and had problems with the registration procedure.

We liked the principle of using targeted email lists, so we decided to go back to basics and develop our own system. We had already surveyed our members and asked people to let us know how active they wanted to be, which campaigns they were interested in, whether they wanted to be emailed, and so on. This was a really useful exercise, which we are going to adapt and repeat this year.

We used the survey feedback to develop targeted email lists, which work really well. Each month, we email our electronic newsletter to everyone who said they wanted to receive it. I maintain an active members email list, sending out updates and activity requests once or twice a month. We also have separate email lists specifically for active members who have shown an interest in a particular campaign.

We are reducing the quantity of email communications and improving the quality. In total, active members receive up to ten group-related emails each month. Without the coordinated emailing system, I estimate they would be bombarded by more than 40 emails a month.

As coordinator, it’s difficult to stay on top of everything that’s happening in the group. Our email system helps the group maintain strong communications without me having to do – and know – everything personally. For all those overworked coordinators and busy group members out there, our learning is that Yahoo! Groups is a great idea but if it doesn’t work for your group, don’t give up. We’ve found that a simple system of targeted email lists works really well for a small group.”
2.7 Facilitation

Meetings are key to your group’s development and success as a team. They are the key time to bond as a group, share information and skills, make decisions and allocate tasks. This section explains how a facilitator can help you make the most of this invaluable time.

2.7.1 Role of facilitator

Facilitation is about responsibility and service, not power. The facilitator’s aim is to make sure the meeting or brainstorm works for the whole group. To do this, the facilitator maintains the group’s agreed processes to enable open discussions and sound decisions.

Groups may occasionally find it helpful to bring in an external facilitator, particularly for discussions or meetings in which all members wish to take part as contributors.

2.7.2 Share tasks

The facilitator need not assume responsibility for all facilitation tasks. Delegating tasks will help ease the burden and empower other members of the group.

**Tasks that could be shared include:**

- **Deputy facilitator** to step in if the facilitator is flagging or wants to take a position in a discussion.
- **Note taker** to record key decisions and actions.
- **Mood watcher** to let facilitator know if there are rising tensions, a general lack of focus, flagging energy.
- **Meeter greeter** to welcome members, especially newcomers, and explain how the meeting will work.
- **Timekeeper** to make sure each agenda item gets its allotted time and that the meeting finishes at the agreed time.
- **Jargon buster** to explain terms and acronyms, making the meeting accessible to all.
- **Mingler** to help newcomers meet existing members and take part in social meetings.
2.7.3 Meeting preparation

“We switched to a central venue which was easy to get to and did not either rely upon turning up at someone’s house (who you might not know) or getting the music turned down in the pub! We meet in Cheltenham’s Centre for Change so we also get the warm glow of supporting a sustainable development initiative by hiring the low cost (£5) meeting room every month.”

Alex Minshull, Cheltenham Friends of the Earth

The facilitator’s aim is to ensure the meeting is well prepared, and is publicised to all members.

- **The venue**: May need to be researched and booked. Make sure the venue is light, airy and quiet, and there are enough refreshments to suit the meeting. It’s worth thinking about how to make best use of the space. Arranging chairs in a circle works well as everyone can see each other and there is no physical hierarchy.

- **Publicise the meeting**: This may include sending a reminder to the group email list, placing an item in the newsletter, ringing each member, and putting a notice in the local paper. Date and timings need to be agreed and communicated well in advance.

- **Prepare an agenda**: Work with members to identify and prioritise agenda items, and then allocate time to them. It usually makes sense to develop a draft agenda, which is finalised and agreed by the group at the start of the meeting.

- **Plan the facilitation tools and techniques** you might use to help the meeting run smoothly and achieve its objectives.

   ✨ Teamwork 2.7.6 Key skill: facilitation techniques

2.7.4 During the meeting

The facilitator’s aim is to promote full and frank discussion that is relevant to the items on the agenda, and to enable sound decisions.

- **Establish and maintain norms of behaviour**: You may need to remind members how the group wishes everyone to behave during a meeting.

- **Bring out and resolve conflict**: Try to bring conflict into the open. Restate differing opinions to ensure they are recognised and understood, then encourage the group to work through them. Managing conflict constructively is usually easier members are encouraged to remember the group aim and objectives. This common ground should hold the group together in times of tension.

   ✨ Teamwork 2.5.2 Talking point: what is our aim?
- **Encourage participation**: A successful meeting includes and involves all members. Shy people may need encouragement. Dominant members may need reining in. Be especially sensitive to any imbalances based on age, ethnicity, or gender, and work with the group to address them.

- **Keep to the agenda**: Once the group has agreed an agenda, stick to it. Bring rambling discussion back to the agenda item. Don’t let members begin discussing the next item before the previous one is resolved. If an important topic demands extended discussion, work with the group to rearrange the agenda, moving less immediate items to the next meeting.

- **Bring out ideas and proposals**: Look for areas of agreement and clear proposals for action. Make sure they are given a proper hearing and the whole group understands them.

- **Test for agreement**: If there seems to be general agreement on a point, present the ideas you are hearing and ask for a sign of agreement or disagreement. If there is a clear indication either way, ask a member to present a proposal for action.

- **Keep a record**: Make sure all decisions and action points are recorded, and check that each item is completed before moving onto the next.

- **Keep to agreed times**: People may stop coming if your meetings regularly overrun.

- **Evaluate the meeting**: Work with the rest of the group for a few minutes at the end of the meeting to reflect on how it went and what could be improved next time.

### 2.7.5 Follow-up after a meeting

Members need to know what was discussed and agreed at the meeting. The facilitator of the next meeting needs to follow-up any action points or outstanding items.

- **Circulate notes or minutes**: Tell everyone what’s been decided, what they need to do and the dates of the next meeting.

- **Learn and develop**: If the group discussed how group meetings could be improved, check that any learning points are implemented.

- **Rotation**: If the facilitation role rotates between members, liaise with the person who is facilitating the next meeting.
### 2.7.6 Key skill: facilitation techniques

Here are some of the most common techniques used by facilitators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cross-reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A written agenda</td>
<td>Key to structuring and focusing the meeting. Once agreed by the group, the agenda gives you a mandate to remind everyone to stay focused when they talk off subject. Ensure the agenda is visible during the meeting by distributing copies or writing it on a flipchart.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground rules</td>
<td>These are discussed and agreed by the whole group. For example, having a no interrupting rule enables the facilitator to say, “We agreed that we wouldn’t interrupt each other. Is everyone still happy to abide by that?”</td>
<td>Appendix 2: Example group charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active agreement</td>
<td>A useful ground rule. Everyone agrees to take an active part in making decisions. When the group is asked a question or needs to make a decision, the facilitator insists on active dis/agreement. This can be done through a hand signal.</td>
<td>Teamwork 2.9 Decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand signals</td>
<td>Can help meetings run smoothly, make it easier for everyone to contribute, and give the facilitator a chance to see emerging agreements and common ground. The most basic and essential hand signal is raising a hand or finger to show you want to speak. Members could also agree signals to show agreement and disagreement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking with the group</td>
<td>Ask how members are feeling, whether they need a break, or want to modify the agenda. Checking encourages a sense of ownership among members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorms</td>
<td>This is an excellent way to get creative juices flowing. Members shout out ideas without fear of comment or criticism. Ideas are recorded on a large piece of paper or flipchart, which is visible to the whole group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritising</td>
<td>Give people a limited number of post-it notes or coloured dots to stick on a list of ideas. This helps a group focus on what they think is important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State / restate</td>
<td>What someone has said in your own words to show the person they are being listened to.</td>
<td>Teamwork 2.6.2 Key skill: active listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break into small groups</td>
<td>This may encourage shy members to speak up. All views are fed back to the whole group. Using small groups can help break up negative dynamics and encourage people to listen to different perspectives. They can also save time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speakers list (stacking)</td>
<td>The facilitator records members’ names as they indicate they want to speak and calls on each person in order. Groups quickly become impatient with members who frequently ignore this protocol and interrupt. This may also help the more tentative members get involved in the discussion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take a break</td>
<td>Give people a chance to collect their thoughts and focus. A break also gives the facilitator time to take stock and plan the next section of a meeting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.8 Delegation

Delegation means sharing tasks and burdens. It also gives members the chance to get involved, learn new skills and have fun together. This section provides ideas about how group members can develop this valuable skill.

2.8.1 What is delegation?

Successful delegation enables a group to meet its objectives, achieve its aim – and enjoy doing it. All members have a say in planning the project or action, and so they feel empowered and motivated. The coordinator or project manager can focus on leading and supporting the team. Everyone understands their role, feels supported and knows how to achieve the tasks they’ve volunteered for.

2.8.2 Case study: share and empower

As a new coordinator, Clare Armour of Bannside Friends of the Earth drew practical inspiration from the prototype of this handbook – and the result was a successful new event. Clare explains:

“We had a group brainstorm and decided to focus on one local event and key national Friends of the Earth actions. Three of us formed a sub-committee to work out the details. We took our thoughts back to the group for further discussion and that’s how the Green Living Open Day came about.

The sub-committee met again to discuss the specifics of the event, and to draw up a list of roles and responsibilities. We took the list to the next group meeting and invited members to volunteer. People were cautious about taking on roles until they had enough detail about what was involved – then they could make an informed decision.

Eventually, all the roles were filled. Members took responsibility for displaying posters, greeting exhibitors, or managing the event’s topic areas, which included: In the home, transport and recycling.

As the event drew near, we held special group meetings to finalise everyone’s roles, and drew up guidelines for the day itself. The meetings were really useful because we could thrash out all the details, right down to who was bringing tea and biscuits.

On the day, the event went really well. Our target was to attract 50 visitors and, despite some difficulties more than 100 people attended.

My feeling is that having a clear focus meant we all knew what we were trying to achieve, which made it easier to delegate tasks. Following the success of the Green Living Open Day, we’re starting to think about using delegation in the day-to-day running of the group. For example, we’ve just nominated a press officer.

The Green Living Open Day showed that as long as members know what they are being asked to do and why, they are more than happy to contribute as much as they can.”
2.8.3 Key skill: delegate for success

Here are some techniques that may help you delegate within the group.

- **Agree a leader or coordinator**: Agree who will lead the project. The chosen member is responsible for delegating and monitoring the tasks. This may be their only role in the project or campaign.

- **Make decisions together**: If everyone has a chance to discuss and agree the project, they are more likely to volunteer to take on roles and tasks.

- **Explain why**: Make sure everyone understands how a task will help the team achieve its aim. This will help members feel personally committed to achieving the task. If you are struggling to explain a task’s significance, consider whether it really needs to be done.

- **Explain what’s involved**: Don’t assume that every member will understand what a task or a role entails. Provide details of what’s involved, how much time is needed and what support is available.

- **Something for everyone**: Look for opportunities to split roles and tasks into manageable chunks that can be shared between several members. For example, one member could take overall responsibility for coordinating a group stall. This member could delegate specific tasks such as contacting the police for permission, distributing publicity leaflets, or inviting your MP to attend.

- **Offer support**: If a team member lacks confidence, suggest they join a more experienced member in taking joint responsibility for a task. Provide informal mentoring or coaching to build team skills so that more people feel able to take on tasks in the future. Make sure members are aware of the support that’s available and know of opportunities to develop new skills.

- **Seek support**: There’s plenty of Friends of the Earth support and training available for members who are interested in taking on new roles. Many areas also have a volunteer centre that offers training and advice. Other activist groups in your area may be happy to take part in a skill swap.

- **No offers?**: Perhaps you don’t collectively have the time to do what you all think is necessary to achieve your objectives. Or the team doesn’t want to do the task because they aren’t sufficiently committed to the objectives. Check that your objectives are achievable and realistic.
2.9 Decision making

Group success depends on achieving shared objectives, so it’s vital that you’re able to discuss and make decisions as a team. This section offers advice and ideas to help you make shared decisions that everyone can commit to.

“Our decisions almost always just emerge in the course of a well-facilitated discussion. If there was a difference of opinion, it would be voted on according to our constitution.”

Tania, South Cheshire Friends of the Earth

2.9.1 Key skill: make sound decisions

Making decisions involves discussing and clarifying ideas, exploring their strengths and weaknesses, and giving each member the chance to be heard. In a facilitated meeting, this often happens informally. Sometimes, especially with big or controversial decisions, it’s useful to employ a formal process, which everyone understands and is committed to.

Using a decision-making process doesn’t mean looking for compromises. It means making decisions that work for the whole group: decisions that members can commit to even if they didn’t personally advocate them. There are many formal decision-making processes, or models, each of which has strengths and weaknesses.

Three formal processes / models commonly used by local groups:

 Majority voting: if the majority votes in favour, the proposal is adopted.

- Strengths: A clear process, most people are familiar with the concept.

- Weaknesses: Risky for big decisions. May be adversarial. May upset the minority, who may be just less than half of the group. May force tactical fudges, generate factions.

- Use: Good for quick, practical decisions e.g. when to hold a stall.
Qualified majority voting: similar to majority voting but requires a specific ratio of members to vote in favour (e.g. two-thirds).

- Strengths: Emphasises finding decisions that appeal to most group members.
- Weaknesses: See majority voting. Also, the requirement for a larger majority can make it more difficult to make a decision because a minority could block the rest of the group.
- Use: Some groups use this model for bigger decisions e.g. changes to long-term policy or constitutional amendments.

Consensus decision making: all members have the right to amend, stand aside from or block decisions. In return, they are expected to place deciding what is best for the group before any personal preferences.

- Strengths: Generates shared commitment and focus. Produces decisions that have been carefully considered and developed by the whole group. Helps groups avoid adversarial discussions and the marginalisation of minorities.
- Weaknesses: Requires skilled facilitation to explain the process and keep the discussion on track. Most people aren’t familiar with this process so careful explanation is essential.
- Use: many groups using consensus restrict the circumstances when an individual may use their block, for example to cases where the safety, viability or unity of the group may be jeopardised.
2.10 Evaluate and celebrate

An action or project isn’t fully complete until it’s been evaluated and celebrated. This section explores the value of evaluation and how to approach it.

Celebrations publicise group achievements and boost morale. Bannside Friends of the Earth celebrated 21 years of campaigning with a party complete with birthday cake.

2.10.1 Key skill: how to evaluate

Evaluation isn’t usually a long or complicated process, particularly if your group set SMART objectives at the beginning of the project or action. When planning the action or project, you may decide to pre-agree a series of milestone evaluations, with a full evaluation at the end.

An effective evaluation involves the whole group, reinforcing a feeling of shared responsibility. It encourages members to see things from different perspectives and explore how the project or action worked for them. It’s possible to conduct a fairly thorough evaluation of a project or action in about half an hour. If issues or tensions emerge, you may wish to allow more time to discuss them. Learn from the experience and publicise your achievements.

Some groups prefer to conduct their evaluations by email. This can save time in meetings but misunderstanding or confusion may develop. Having an evaluation in a meeting enables you to celebrate achievements and acknowledge contributions, which boosts group morale.

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Teamwork 2.5.3  Key skill: objective setting

Action 3.7  End your action

Inspiration 1.3.5  Celebrate your achievements
A useful evaluation is:

- **Honest**: there’s no point coming to the end of a disastrous project where the aims weren’t met or people let each other down, only for none of those issues to be raised in the evaluation.

- **Focused on learning**: this means identifying solutions as well as problems. Record learning points for future reference. Discuss useful improvements or modifications, and agree who will do them.

- **Timely**: evaluations must be scheduled close to the time of the relevant milestone or the end of the project. If not, people might forget what happened, and the group misses the chance to celebrate and congratulate.

2.10.2 **Talking point: how did we do?**

It’s valuable for the group to evaluate an action or project together. It would help refresh everyone’s memories if someone who was closely involved could explain the context and describe what happened.

**Facilitators**: If your group has nominated you to facilitate this Talking point, you might find it useful to read the section on facilitation.

**Facilitation**

**Discussion prompts**

Here are some prompts facilitators could use to help stimulate and guide group discussion:

- Did the project meet our aims and expectations?
- What went well?
- What could have gone better?
- What impact did the project have?
- What could we / would we do differently next time?
- What are the main learning points?
- Are there any improvements or modifications we need to make now?
2.11 References

These lists are not designed to be exhaustive. Your group may wish to add your own references that are specific to your action or locality. For the latest news and updates, check Community website and Change Your World magazine. To order a print out of any of the Internet documents, contact the Activist Information Officer: localgroups@foe.co.uk, 020 7566 1677.

2.4 Ways of working

2.4.4 Manage conflict and difficult behaviour
Friends of the Earth complaints procedure:
http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/organisational_policy/complaints_procedure_expla.pdf

2.9 Decision making

2.9.1 Key skill: make sound decisions
Consensus decision making:
http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/
Appendix 1 Examples of formal roles

While using this Appendix, please refer to Teamwork 2.3.1 Are formal roles helpful?

Here are descriptions of formal roles that are sometimes used by Friends of the Earth local groups. The person who takes on the role is not expected or encouraged to take responsibility for every related task. They are encouraged to share tasks and empower other members.

**Coordinator**

There is an expectation in the Partnership Agreement that groups will designate a coordinator. For some groups, this is simply the member who signs the Agreement and acts as the first point of contact with Friends of the Earth staff. However, most groups elect one or more people who are responsible for ensuring that the group stays focused and achieves its goals. The coordinator promotes involvement, communication and delegation among the membership.

**Administrative coordinator**

The admin. coordinator ensures maintains the group’s systems and processes, and oversees tasks that are crucial to effective group work. They may act as group secretary, ensuring information and enquiries are sent to relevant members and taking overall responsibility for group meetings.

**Campaign coordinator**

Some groups split the role of group coordinator into two main functions. They elect an administrative coordinator and a campaign coordinator. The campaign coordinator ensures the group focuses on its action plans. They identify opportunities for actions and organise the delegation of tasks. They ensure newcomers are supported to take on tasks and encourage all members to get involved in unfamiliar activities in order to develop their knowledge and skills.

**Campaigner**

Some groups have designated campaigners, each focusing on a different issue e.g. waste campaigner. The campaigner’s role is to be informed about their issue (probably by subscribing to the relevant Friends of the Earth email list), to network with allies and others interested in the issue, and to inform members about opportunities for action. Having specialist campaigners doesn't mean you have to work on every issue at the same time. But they will probably help the group decide what you want to focus on and your lead campaigner’s knowledge may give you a head start.
**Treasurer**

Banks and building societies insist you have a treasurer before you can have a group account. The treasurer is usually responsible for managing the group bank account, organising financial paperwork, signing cheques and keeping track of income and expenditure. It’s not a time-consuming task and some group treasurers rarely attend meetings.

**Membership secretary**

There are two halves to this role, which some groups divide between two people:

1. **Ensure membership administration is up to date**: maintain a membership list/database, ensure people receive newsletters or group emails, collect subscriptions.

2. **Recruit and involve new members**: ensure posters are displayed, enquiries are answered, new members are welcomed, welcome packs are up to date. A membership secretary takes the lead in welcoming and involving members but an important part of their role is to get the rest of the group involved. Be a welcoming group, not merely a group with a welcoming membership secretary.

**Secretary**

The secretary may act as first point of contact and put their details on your website and communications materials. They receive all information and enquiries, and distribute them to the relevant member(s).

**Facilitator (aka chair / meeting coordinator)**

Running meetings is often part of a coordinator’s role but many groups have found it helpful to share this responsibility. The elected facilitator ensures that a suitable meeting venue is booked, the meeting is publicised, an agenda is prepared and circulated, all members are included in discussions, and action points are noted down and distributed. They may chair the meetings themselves, or they may simply be responsible for ensuring that someone is prepared to do this each month.

**Social secretary**

A social secretary focuses on ensuring the group has fun and stays inspired. They identify social activities that appeal to the group, and motivate members to participate.
Webmaster

If your group has a website, a webmaster may take lead responsibility for ensuring it is kept up to date and that your hosting costs are paid for. This doesn't necessarily mean they take sole responsibility for all the design, writing and updating.

Profile 4.7.11  Websites

Newsletter editor

A newsletter editor may take lead responsibility for ensuring that newsletters and email bulletins go out on time. This may involve chasing members and other contributors for content, editing and formatting.

Profile 4.7.8  Newsletters

Media secretary

A media secretary ensures the group's media profile is developed and maintained. Their role usually includes ensuring the group develops a media strategy, maintaining lists of media contacts, ensuring press releases are sent out, and acting as a first point of contact between for journalists. They may also write press releases, act as spokesperson and give interviews but ideally they'll encourage other members of the group to get involved too.

Profile 4.6  Your local media

Appendix 1 references

The Partnership Agreement information and form:
http://community.foe.co.uk/local_groups/running_your_own/basics/partnership_agreement/
http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/organisational_policy/partnership_agreement_grp.pdf

Information and support for coordinators:
www.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/coordinators_our_relations.pdf
http://community.foe.co.uk/local_groups/running_your_own/basics/

Information and support for treasurers:
http://community.foe.co.uk/local_groups/running_your_own/basics/
http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/treasurer_top_tips.pdf
Appendix 2 Example group charter

While using this Appendix, please refer to Teamwork 2.4 Ways of working

The
Happy Hackney and Towers of Happiness
Friends of the Earth
CHARTER

If we are stressed or un-motivated we are no use to (wo)man, beast, or the environment.

Therefore:

• Hackney and Tower Hamlets Friends of the Earth is declared a stress-free zone.

• Everybody is busy.

• You don't have to do anything at all – but if you say you will and then can't its nice to let someone know.

• Don't think you're not a valuable member of the group.

• Communications – this is important and requires sub-bullet points:
  o Dumping large quantities of information on another person via email with no summary or suggestions for what to do with it at the top will be considered low-level anti-social behaviour, and recipients should not feel under any obligation to respond (whether the email is from a group member or someone external).
  o Subject headings of emails should describe what's in them. Long emails with complicated information should have a note at the top along the lines of 'read this only if you are really, really interested in sustainable acronyms and have time on your hands. If not, don't worry'.
  o When responding to an email from the lists, consider whether all members really need to see your response.
  o Emails will be kept lighthearted, readable and to the point.
  o Making phone calls during working hours can be difficult for people at work. We will identify member(s) who can easily make phone calls on behalf of the group in the daytime, if needed.

• Each group member to accept no more then one action per meeting.

• Meeting start times to be reviewed.

• If lobbying your MP is boring and / or terrifying, we will get dressed up and do stunts instead.

• Eccentricity, creativity and imagination are to be encouraged.

• We need to remember to drink to our successes.
Appendix 3 Email and phone systems

While using this Appendix, please refer to Teamwork 2.3.1 Are formal roles helpful?

Many groups find it useful to organise systems for communicating with members between meetings. Groups usually choose email and/or telephone systems, both of which have pros and cons. Here are some techniques for getting the most out of your communications.

1. Email systems

When used properly, email is a useful means of communicating between meetings, and with group members who can't attend meetings. It's quick, free, and accessible to a large majority of people through public libraries, home computers and cafés. However, used inappropriately email can be time-consuming and contentious. Here are some tips to help your group make email work for you.

**Groundrules:** Just like meetings, email communication relies on shared expectations of how it will be used.

**Common groundrules:**

- Reply to messages which request a response, if only to say you've read the message and have nothing to add.
- Writing in CAPITALS can seem aggressive and should be avoided.
- The subject line of the email should tell people what the email is about.
- Effort should be taken to structure emails clearly and concisely.
- Personal criticism is best given face-to-face or by phone.
- Emails should be relevant to the purpose of the list.
- Strong language should be avoided.

**Email lists:** Rather than copying lots of people into emails, many groups find it helpful to set up email lists. You communicate with the group of people subscribed to the list by sending an email to just one address. The most important thing is that everyone is clear what the lists are for, respects their purpose and uses them appropriately. Email lists usually have the advantage of a range of optional settings, which customise the list to the groups needs, for example:

- Allowing people to subscribe themselves automatically online.
- Offering a web archive of past correspondence.
- Restricting who may post messages without the permission of a moderator.
The most common email list structure used by small to medium sized local campaigning groups is to have two lists: Planning and Announcements. The Planning list includes core group members and is a key method of communicating about group business between meetings. This list will generate a lot of emails.

The Announcement list includes anyone who wants to be kept up to date with the group's activities but doesn’t want to receive lots of business emails. This list might include members, supporters and representatives of other local organisations. Only specified people will be allowed to email unmoderated messages to the list. Specific types of message are permitted, such as the newsletter, meeting reminders, and news of forthcoming campaigning events. This list will probably only generate one or two emails a month.

**Email list services:** Several Internet providers offer free email list services. (two that are currently being used by local groups: http://groups.yahoo.com and http://lists.riseup.net).

### 2. Telephone systems

The advantage of the telephone over email is that you can be confident that someone has actually heard your message, and you can get an immediate response.

**Ring-round:** The simplest way of communicating to a group by phone. The person who has a message to communicate calls everyone who needs to receive it. This is simple and doesn’t require any preparation or complex systems. But if there are more than ten people to call, this places quite a burden on the person doing the ringing round.

**Phone tree:** Spreads the burden of making the calls, may be more practical when there are large groups of people to ring. A phone tree is a prearranged, pyramid-shaped system that enables a group of people to communicate a message by telephone in a systematic way. This system can spread a brief message quickly and efficiently to a large number of people. It can be used in conjunction with email to reinforce a message and encourage participation, for example to remind people to come to a meeting or action.

A simple phone tree will have three levels of roles. A phone tree co-coordinator initiates contact by calling each member of the key group. Coordinators need to make sure their message is relevant to the purpose of the tree, clear and precise. They will also probably have responsibility for maintaining the phone tree, ensuring it is kept up to date. They will have details of all the people on the tree. If one of the key group members can't be contacted, they will act to fill the gap.
The phone tree key group will each have a list of the phone tree members they need to call. They will carefully pass on the message given to them by the coordinator, and report back to the co-coordinator once they've completed all their calls. They need to persevere in getting through to everyone, and be careful to get the message right. If a phone tree involves more than about forty people, it will probably need an extra level in the pyramid.