

Involving people in community action

These are some ideas and suggestions to encourage people to become involved in a new or existing group

Some ideas and points to consider

Each member of a group could bring a friend or neighbour along. Word of mouth and encouragement are the most effective ways of involving new people.

You could act as a mentor for each new group member, explaining references to previous actions and uses of jargon, and generally checking that they're alright with everything

If you see someone new arrive, welcome them, talk with them ... especially if you meet in a pub. Don't ignore them or immediately turn paranoid!

Share out jobs among members, from planning actions to facilitating meetings. If you are working on something, try and include at least one person who has never done that particular sort of work before. Work jointly – maybe pair up new people with the usual people. Move jobs around – if you're experienced, share your skills and knowledge with someone else. Let go a while and try something new.

Thank people where it's due. When things are going well, say so

Publicise your achievements, where this is possible. Try distributing or flyposting a newsletter. If you can't say "we've trashed 3 GM test sites this year" because you've got your contact details on the same poster, at least let people know that you've been "actively campaigning against GM crops" or something similar

Plan activities that encourage wide involvement, and make sure that all the usual suspects DO get involved too, and talk with new people. What might seem like a "soft" action to one person, is what might really get someone else into things

Try one off meetings at different times and on different days from a regular meeting you might have

Recognise the value of people's different life experiences

Take account of people's different commitments and abilities to commit time and energy

Encourage people if they want to set up groups to represent a particular interest (parents, young people, night shift workers) and support these new groups

Some practical considerations

How accessible are your meetings and actions? For example, can a wheelchair user practically attend your meeting space?

When do you hold your meetings? Try different meeting times and days – sticking to Tuesdays 8pm for ever means you'll exclude anyone who can't, for whatever reason, make then. Consider young people, older people, parents and carers

Empower small working groups to get on with particular work, reporting back to the main open meeting for support, questions and the OK to continue with that work. These small groups should all have someone new involved, that is, not made up exclusively of regulars

Let people add to the agenda before you start a meeting

Where do you publicise your meetings and actions, if at all? If you want to attract and involved more women, or black and asian people, does your publicity a, go up where people you are inviting will see it? b, welcome them explicitly? c, encourage them to get involved, offer ideas of what can be done?

During meetings, do you as a group challenge put downs and discriminatory remarks? Do you as a group have an understanding of equal opportunities and what practically this involves? Where can you find support to learn more?



What new people can bring to your group

Contacts and information – extend your group's knowledge of who's who, and who's up for what

Social skills – conflict resolution experiences and knowledge of different cultures

Practical skills – from minute taking to engineering, who knows what you might learn

Organisational skills – someone who wants to and can facilitate meetings, or plan slick 'n' perfect actions

Ideas and Humour – opens up new perspectives, and is kind of fun

There may even be a mythical human being endowed with all these qualities!

As a Group

It is very useful and effective to employ techniques such as:

Setting **aims** (what you're about) and **objectives** (realistic, practical stepping stones towards achieving your aims) and writing these out against a timeline

For example

AIM: to involve more new people

OBJECTIVES: By advertising meetings publicly (within two weeks)

By appointing certain people to welcome newcomers (immediately)

By including someone new on any action planning (at the first stages of planning)

Monitor how effective you are as a group

For example

Are new people coming? How many? Where did they see the group advertised? (try not to cross examine new people!)

Evaluate your aims and objectives after an agreed time. Look back and spend time as a group seeing what worked and what didn't, and lessons learnt. Listen to and value everyone's opinions. Encourage everyone to take responsibility for changes that need to be made.

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