

Communicating with people who show an interest in the group

Your first few interactions with potential members are crucial. Think about:

- The initial call or e-mail exchange
- Their first meeting (before, during and after)
- The follow up call to the first meeting

The initial call/ email

Good things to do if they call or email you and show interest:

- Follow up any contact within 5 days - There's a 90% drop out rate if people haven't had contact/met up within 5 days. Seize the moment.
- If people call you invite them to the next meeting but it's not for a couple of weeks, call them the week before it and remind them
- If you don't think the next meeting will be that much fun then invite them to your next action, or to the meeting after that
- If you don't have time when they call, ask when it's a good time for them, and call them back then
- Have a very short briefing/intro to your group outlining your aims and successes that you can send out once people have rung. Use templates from the welcome pack as guidance and have an email version too.

but:

- Don't take the opportunity to bemoan the state of your group - or the state of the world!
- Don't assume that this person is going to be the newsletter editor you've been longing for and scare them off by your over-enthusiasm!

The first meeting

What can you do at every meeting that could make the difference for potential new members?

Before:

- Invite them to come early.
- Make sure designated 'newcomers' person meets and greets them:
 - Talk them through the agenda and give some background to help them understand the group activities.
 - Give them your welcome pack which should include a sign-up recruitment leaflet. Friends of the Earth has designed a welcome pack for newcomers you can use as a template.
 - Ask for their contact details (phone, email, address) – you could contact them for actions even if they don't want to be a group member.
 - Ask if they would they like to be on the e-group that gets minutes of meetings, when actions will be happening etc.

During:

- The meeting itself
 - Read out the agenda and have copies or make it clear on a flip-chart – including breaks, refreshments and end time – plus perhaps mentioning you'll all be going for a drink in pub after the meeting. Stick to this!
 - Make sure you introduce yourselves.
 - Briefly explain things as you go through rather than talking 'over the head' of the new member.
 - Just talk about the things you have to talk about...and spend more time doing stuff! You should make the vast majority of your meeting dedicated to matters that everyone can be part of, e.g. planning activity and even doing a quick action in your meeting itself (responsibility rotates for finding next action to do).

- Have an occasional speaker or video night (e.g. The Corporation). This will make for an interesting evening, but will only be useful for recruitment and retention if you spend some time afterwards discussing what you can do as a group about this issue and plan some sort of activity or action.
- Meetings should be as inclusive, participative and outcomes focussed as possible. To get this right it really helps to brush up your facilitation techniques – there is a facilitation toolkit at: <http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/events/past/20041208144614Z.html>
- Don't overwhelm them with immediate requests and demands.
- Rein in difficult members – this can actually be a real problem. If there's someone in your group who is really putting people off joining then you need to tackle their behaviour or the group will eventually close.
- Do a 5 minute action in every meeting – rotating responsibility to find one [have examples available – postcards, letters etc.]

After:

- At the end of the meeting – spend some time with them answering questions and being sociable. In this time:
 - Agree who will call them in the next week

The follow-up call

- In this phone call:
 - discuss how they found meeting
 - answer questions
 - discuss options regarding why they wanted to join the group, what they might like to do, how much time they have, what skills they have

This phone call is important – they need to be able to say yes or no to getting involved in the group. If they say no – you haven't failed, they just weren't the right piece for your jigsaw, and don't waste your time trying too hard to convince people who are not interested.