



**Friends of  
the Earth**

# How to: energise your group

**“ We need more group members – the ones we have aren’t active”**

**“ Nobody comes to our meetings”**

**“ We aren’t getting it all done – we don’t have enough time”**

**Does this sound familiar? Even if you feel you don’t have enough members, are you making the most of those you have? If not, it is time to get energising, say Penny Markell & Claudia Sartori, and turn those quotes... into these...**

**“ I felt support from all present; the atmosphere was really positive”**

**“ A happy group will retain and revitalise old members and attract new ones”**

**“ A new way of arranging meetings has kept our group viable”**

## Where do you start?

If you want to maintain a healthy group and attract newcomers, you will definitely need to spend time and energy looking at how you operate now and in the future. This is an excellent example of sustainability: by taking time and resources now to revive your group, you can enjoy campaigning as a healthy, active group in the future. This is not just the Co-ordinator’s responsibility. The group as a whole has to do some thinking about how to rekindle the groups’ spark as well as utilising each individual’s particular skills and interests. The best way to do this is to get everyone together for a dedicated energising meeting. Let people know it is a special meeting and choose a date when the optimum number can attend.

# Your step-by-step guide to an energised group

## 1 ▶ Plan an energising meeting

The Co-ordinator may be good at co-ordinating, but you may need to bring other people to the fore for this. Maybe you feel you need someone with especially good social skills, or someone who is fantastically well organised. You may like to change the venue on this occasion. Prepare a presentation of your group's successes and allow time for brainstorming. If your group has been keeping a scrapbook of press cuttings and photos, this would be a good time to get it out.

## 2 ▶ Make the meeting inspiring

Once everyone has warmed up a bit, explain that you want to spend time on energising and motivating the group and that people should be open and honest. Keep things focused. Ask them to write down their answers to the following questions: What were you hoping to get out of joining a local group? Have you achieved this? Are there skills you would like to be using to benefit the group? What do you enjoy and dislike doing?

Share the answers among the group. Discuss people's responses and make a list of what they enjoy doing, what they don't want to do, and what needs to be done. Talk through a plan for the group, prioritising those things that people find enjoyable.

It's important not to over-burden members, and to allow people to step down from time-consuming or difficult roles without feeling guilty. If you do this they are more likely to stay involved and share their skills and experience. Find new ways to work through difficult issues, such as the timing of meetings.

## 3 ▶ Keep the momentum going

### Fun, fun, fun

It goes without saying that the more fun people have, the more likely they are to get involved again. Get together as a group to do a range of completely different activities, eg a litter pick, a planting or conservation day, or a visit to a local environment centre or community project. Follow this with a social event (in a restaurant, café or pub). Take a tip from the Leicester group and hold a Christmas social or a summer barbecue hosted at a member's home, with everyone bringing along some food and drink. Invite all the members and supporters of your group, as well as members of other green groups in the area.

### Recognition and celebration

People are motivated to make a difference, but if their success and commitment are not recognised they might forget that they *are* making a difference. Recognise outstanding length of service or time put into the group. When you have campaign successes go for a celebratory drink and toast your success with wine or champagne (be sure the key players have their drinks bought for them!) Also, make sure that the success is more widely known and celebrated by emailing staff and local campaigners, as well as alerting the press and getting stories in the local papers.

Take photographs and put them on your website or in your newsletter. Keep a scrapbook of successes and copies of cheques and money raised, and make time to look back. Thank each other. Nominate hard-workers for an Earthmovers Award at Conference and look out for local awards. Link with other community groups for jollies.



# How have other groups done it?

## Camel

Camel Friends of the Earth



**Day of Action on Big Business:** group members with Paul Tyler, their very green MP, and Val Tomlinson on the right.

**Val Tomlinson** thought their group might fold; it faced dwindling attendance and low motivation. The AGM was crunch time. But the use of

**some of the techniques given here turned the group around and gave it a new lease of life.**

“I read my Co-ordinators’s report of the last year, which reminded us we had done quite a lot. I mentioned the unworkable turn out last month and asked everyone what they thought would make our meetings absolutely irresistible. Was this venue OK? Was it the right evening? Was the agenda wrong? There was an agreement (heaven knows why somebody hadn’t brought it up before) that Wednesday was not a good night

for several people, and so we changed it.

We realised that we must accept we are a small group and had possibly been spreading ourselves too thinly, trying to take on too much. This meant that our work was maybe not as effective as it could be with more concentrated time and effort applied to fewer issues. Put to the vote, nobody wanted the group to disband... I came away feeling delighted. I felt real support from all present; the atmosphere was really positive and constructive.”

## Hammersmith & Fulham

Hammersmith & Fulham Friends of the Earth



**Group workshop:** Hammersmith & Fulham group with Paula White front right.

**Members of this group wanted to reassess its campaigns and activities and put some fun back in to them. Co-ordinator Paula White** tells us:

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

We did a workshop where we all voted on types of activities (for example: days of actions, 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 overwhelming voted for days of action as the most enjoyable. Stalls and marches followed this. 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. As a result I think people are keener to focus on areas in which they have made an active decision to participate.”

## North Lancashire

**Paul Martyn, Co-ordinator, describes how this group responded to a change in focus:**

A few years ago this group set up a sub-group focused on the growing threat of GMOs in food – the North Lancashire Real Food Group. The remaining members felt that, in order to make

involvement as easy as possible for members with different personal circumstances, they should meet up as two groups.

The ‘Family Friendly’ group meets during the day and is attended by those with young families; it works on local environmental issues or issues of concern to people with

children. The ‘Pub’ group meets in the evenings to discuss issues that have come up and to have some child-free social time.

It’s important to ensure that these groups keep in touch and continue to work together, but they have found that this is an effective way of keeping their group viable.

**How to...**Pull-out section

## Energiser checklist:

- ✓ Delegate, it will lessen the burden and increase others' skills
- ✓ Develop enthusiastic people to take on roles and responsibilities. Conference is a great opportunity for training, networking and learning
- ✓ Plan for the future of your group... does the Co-ordinator still want that role in 20 years time?
- ✓ Get input and agreement from everyone on the group direction
- ✓ Be aware that people's motivations and development needs may change, so you need to regularly review the group's direction and individuals' satisfaction with their involvement
- ✓ Make time to recognise the effort and commitment people put in (don't forget your Co-ordinator)
- ✓ Invite inspirational speakers from Friends of the Earth, your local community and other campaigning groups

### How will Friends of the Earth help?

We have a plan in place to build our support and resources for local campaigns. This includes new staff based in the regions across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

A project is underway to raise awareness and membership of local groups across the country. A pilot is going to run in the north initially, so listen out for more.



Sarah Welsh

**Team work:** campaigners for improved transport, traffic and safety in Longsight, Manchester, talked with people everywhere – in shops, mosques, laundrettes, libraries, youth groups and bus stops.

## The final word...

Start organising your energising meeting now

Be prepared to change everything: venue, dates, times, rotating Chair, agenda style, how you run stalls, the actions you do...

Let everyone have a say and try everything at least once

Most importantly, be open to new ideas

### Useful resources

Inspire your group to take action by reading **How to win: a guide to successful community campaigning**, ref L480, £2.50 + £1p&p, and watching Friends of the Earth's **Action highlights video 2003**, £5 including p&p.

Both can be bought by credit card by phoning 020 7490 1555, or by posting a cheque (payable to Friends of the Earth Ltd) to Friends of the Earth, 56-58 Alma Street, Luton LU1 2PH.

You can claim expenses for social events through your local group accounts or apply for a grant. See the *Change your world* pull-out in the last issue: **How to raise money for your local group**. See also the pull-outs on **How to run better meetings** and **How to put act back into action**.

Paper copies are available from the Information Service: Freephone 0808 800 1111, or you can download them from: [http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/how\\_tos/index.html](http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/index.html)

**Please add your experiences to the Community forum under local groups – running your own.**

[http://community.foe.co.uk/quote\\_unquote/](http://community.foe.co.uk/quote_unquote/)