

How to: plan ahead



**Friends of
the Earth**

Are you always wondering what campaign issue will crop up next? Do you want to know how to plan your campaigns for the year ahead more strategically? Local Groups Development Co-ordinator **Nikki Packham** and Network Developer **Louise Hazan** reveal some tried and tested methods for choosing well and staying on track.

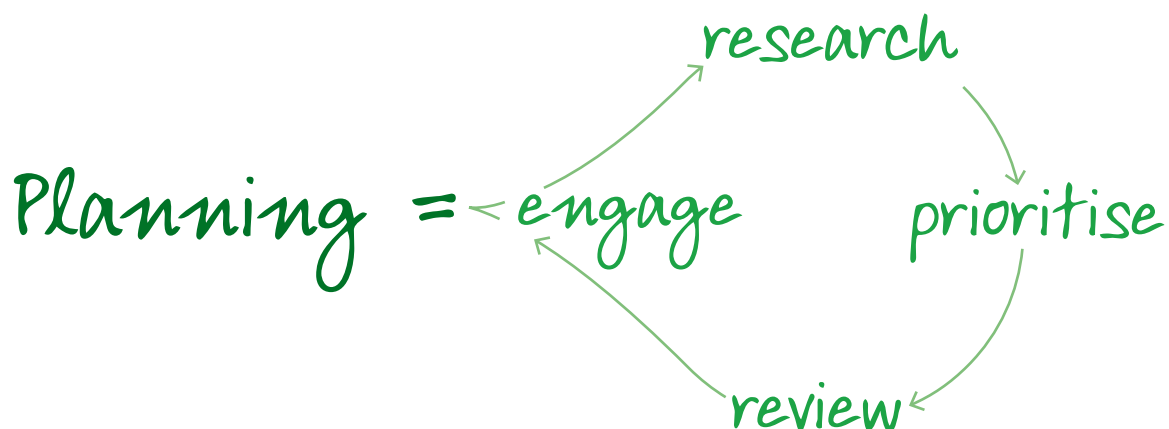
As The Big Ask campaign winds up and we prepare to launch an exciting new climate change campaign, it can be quite daunting thinking about what's to come or how this might fit in with your local agenda. All Friends of the Earth groups work on at least one national campaign, such as climate or planning, as well as campaigning for positive solutions to a number of local issues in their own communities. You've done a great job of balancing national and local campaigns throughout The Big Ask, and now is an ideal time to look and plan ahead.

Think global, act local

Juggling the competing demands of national and local campaigns with the interests of all group members can be tricky. Every group will have seen a meeting agenda go out of the window at some point because a breaking local story needs your urgent comment or someone brings up a new campaign

idea. It's easy to take on too many issues or get side-tracked from your agreed campaign priorities. Striking a good balance between national and local issues is important to maintain group motivation and achieve your campaign aims. The key to success is picking the right number of issues for your group and staying focused on these chosen campaigns.

While flexibility to respond to events is important, preparation and choosing your focus for the coming year will help your group negotiate the potential pitfalls of taking on too much. In this pull-out we explore simple ways of finding out what's coming up and how to plan and prioritise for the year ahead. Many groups already use simple, practical solutions for keeping themselves focused on both their national and local campaigns. Take a look at the case studies and top tips, which will point you towards some new resources designed especially to help you navigate this tricky issue in the coming months.





Recently our group came to the conclusion that it was trying to cover too much. Members held a campaign strategy day to discuss priorities. With the support of an external facilitator, we looked at what we'd achieved and what was most important to us. We agreed two campaign priorities for the following 18 months. We're a lot more focused as a group now – everything relates in some way to one of these issues”.

Tania Sayer, South Cheshire

Looking ahead

Setting aside some time to look at the big picture and the interests of all group members will help you identify and focus on your campaign objectives. Ideally the whole group should meet to decide your aims and the sort of activities you will do. The more people who feel involved in these decisions, the more likely they are to commit time and energy to making them happen.

Here are some tried and tested methods of achieving this:

Organise a planning meeting

Make sure you invite all members and ask them to bring campaign ideas that interest them. If some members can't make it, offer to take their suggestions by phone or email and bring them to the planning meeting.

Reflect on previous successes

Knowing what works in your local area and what your strengths are will help with future planning. Ask questions like 'Which action was most successful? Which campaigns and actions did you most enjoy doing? What would you like to do more of?'

Brainstorm members' interests

Ask everyone to list the issues and types of activities they want the group to do over the coming year.

Campaign Opportunities Calendar

To help you prioritise your campaigns, we've put together a helpful calendar. It lists opportunities month by month for individuals and whole groups to get involved in national campaigns over the rest of the year. The calendar will be updated every six months, so keep an eye on it for changes and new opportunities. Your group co-ordinator has a copy and it is also available on the Community website. Use it to decide which national campaigns you would like to work on.

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/campaign_calendar.pdf

Planning your year ahead

You might identify other areas to work on to increase your effectiveness as a group, such as increasing your local profile, or making your meetings more effective. Make sure you plan in time to socialise together as a group and celebrate your achievements.

Brainstorming hints

- Make sure everyone gets a chance to suggest ideas
- Don't engage in discussion until the brainstorm is finished
- Write up every suggestion
- Make sure everyone can see the flipchart or whiteboard
- Use black or blue pens – green and red can be hard on the eyes
- Try to group similar suggestions together
- Identify upcoming events and opportunities
- Get a year planner and make a note of any existing campaigning opportunities such as regular festivals in your local area, upcoming elections or consultation dates. Use the Opportunities Calendar (see above) to pick out significant national campaigning opportunities throughout the year.

Don't storm ahead

"Recently, we decided to brainstorm the key campaigns we wanted to focus on over the coming year. Before the brainstorm I phoned group members to ask their main interests and discuss the possibilities for campaigning on those issues. Some people will be relatively new to environmental campaigning and some people will lack confidence in expressing their ideas in meetings. It is vital that the co-ordinator understands this and helps everyone to have an equal voice.

During the brainstorm, members discussed their interests; what they enjoyed doing; how much time they could give; and what would attract other support and we made a long list. I included the interests mentioned by members during our phone conversations and Friends of the Earth's priorities.

Then we used coloured dots to vote for our favourites. We agreed as a group to prioritise the three topics that most interest our members and to focus on them through the year. At each meeting we organise the agenda around the three topics, because we're focussing on issues that really interest members, I'm finding people are much more enthusiastic about getting involved and sharing the workload."

Victoria Harvey, South Bedfordshire

Decision time

When you're really inspired and motivated, it's easy to bite off more than you can chew. It's likely a brainstorming session will generate far more issues than you can realistically take on. You can maintain group inspiration by prioritising some activities and focusing on clear objectives. Follow these simple steps to engage the group in choosing future priorities:

Let's prioritise

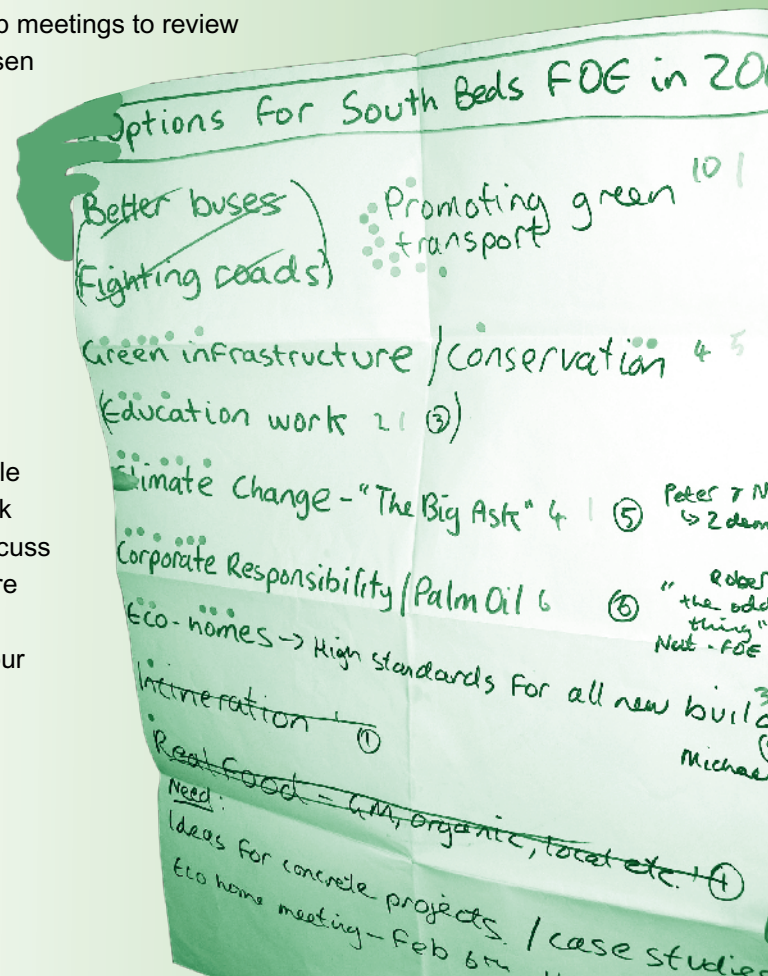
It may be difficult to achieve your campaign objective if you are working on several campaigns at the same time. Once you've generated a long list of ideas, events and general opportunities, you'll need to decide which to prioritise. Remember to keep everyone involved at this stage. It's vital to ensure everyone gets a chance to feed in their thoughts and participate in deciding your group objectives. If people feel they have ownership of decisions, they will be more committed to achieving them.

Stay on track

Even best laid plans need flexibility. Be prepared to adapt some of your plans to suit new campaigning opportunities as they arise. This could be a local event your group has been invited to or a change in national policy which needs immediate action.

To help manage conflicts, be prepared to spend time at your group meeting re-evaluating your top priorities. This may mean postponing or discarding some activities in order to refocus your group's energy on the highest priority.

Regular chats at group meetings to review progress on your chosen campaigns should help to flag up potential clashes and provide time for discussions on where conflicts might occur. Some groups include a regular agenda slot for updates on each priority campaign, while others choose to break into sub-groups to discuss each campaign in more detail. Either way, it's important to review your progress regularly in order to stay on track.



Further information and support

Local groups handbook

Every group should have a copy of the handbook (copies were sent with the Partnership Agreement renewal in February). It contains a wealth of case studies, practical advice and resources to help you with every aspect of running a group.

For help with planning ahead, check out:

- Chapter 1 Inspiration
- Chapter 3 Action – in particular Talking Points: 1.3.2 and 3.2.4



Local Group Calendars

The new Campaign Opportunities Calendar and an updated Co-ordinator Calendar are available on the Community website. Both highlight the important events and dates to be aware of at national level when planning ahead. Go to http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/coordinator_calendar.pdf or <http://community.foe.co.uk/events>

Regional Action Updates

Make sure you're signed up to receive the monthly action updates from your Network Developer. These include details of events in your region, new resources available and the latest updates on priority campaigns. Contact your Network Developer (see contact details on back page) or sign up online at www.foe.co.uk/england/join_list

Network Developers

Your Network Developer is a trained facilitator and always available to help you organise or run a planning session for your group. Having an external facilitator can be a good way of lending extra importance to your planning meeting and allows all group members to engage fully (see contact details on back page).

Campaign Networks

Make sure someone in your group is registered with the relevant Campaign Network for your priority issues. These provide regular updates on each national campaign and ways of taking action. Sign up by contacting your Network Developer or download a Ready to Network flyer http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/forms/networks_signup.pdf

Other pull outs

Don't forget that all previous pull-outs are still available online. In particular you should take a second look at:

- How to campaign strategise
- How to energise your group

http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/

Paper copies available from Activist Information Officer Jill Andrews
0207 5661677 or localgroups@foe.co.uk