

how to...

# Get started with campaigning

Activism guide • September 2016



**Getting people together and taking collective action is one of the most powerful ways that we can make change. So how can you go about doing this?** Before you get started, think about:

## What are you trying to achieve?

What are you trying to change? Who are you trying to influence? Are you organising a short-term campaign or working towards a specific moment in the year? Or do you want to start a longer-term campaigning group?

## What exists already?

Find out what local groups and campaigns already exist in your community. Do they intersect with the issue or campaign you want to work on? It might be that there are similar groups or networks in other places which you can plug in to and get support or inspiration from.

## Get people together

The first step to local organising is to bring people together who might be interested in getting something off the ground.

Whether you want to run a local campaign, organise creative actions, lobby your MP or organise public events, it's always good to share the work and encourage more people to get involved. This could start as a conversation with a couple of friends or by organising an open organising meeting which you publicise widely.

## Publicise your group

- **Use social media:** Facebook and Twitter are great for reaching lots of people.
- **Set up a website:** You can set up a simple and free website using Wordpress.com
- **Start an email list:** lists.riseup.net provide discussion and announcement lists for activist groups. Build up your list by having sign up sheets each time you run an event or hold a stall.
- **Get in touch with other active local groups.**
- **Put up posters:** Visit community centres, cafes and libraries with information about your group and upcoming events.

## The first meeting

**1. Make it interesting:** You want people to go away feeling excited, inspired and empowered to take action. You could show some short videos or invite an external speaker. Put up some photos of what other groups have achieved.

**2. Take time to get to know people:** What prompted them to come? What are their interests, knowledge and experience? What skills do they have that might be useful? You could ask people to write a couple of thoughts on post-it notes and stick them up on the wall.

**3. Map out your networks:** It's likely that people in the room will be involved in other groups or have useful contacts within your community. On a large piece of paper or flipchart, map out who is in the room. Think about who you want to outreach to and whether there are any existing connections.

**4. Sketch out a timeline for the next few months:** Think about potential campaigning opportunities – are there any upcoming events where you could hold a stall to attract more people to your group? Are there any national or regional actions that you can join? Identifying moments and opportunities can give groups a sense of purpose by knowing each meeting will have a tangible outcome or is working towards something.

**5. Work out next steps:** When are you next going to get together? How are you stay in touch with each other? You can set up an email list so you can have discussions outside of the meeting.

## Make your meetings dynamic

Make sure each meeting has a purpose: use it to plan something new; do something practical during the meeting; invite a speaker for part of the meeting; show a film or have a social.

## Once you get going

- **Be realistic about your group's capacity:** what time and energy do people have? How can you make the most of this?
- **Share tasks and responsibilities across different members of the group:** It's easy for a couple of people to end up doing most of the work but this can lead to informal hierarchies and feel disempowering for people, especially newcomers. Sharing responsibility and skills in a group builds engagement.
- **Build trust and relationships within your group:** Organise socials and take time to get to know each other. Practical tasks e.g. banner painting sessions, prop-making, and running a stall are good chances for people to get to know each other and have fun.
- **Share skills and knowledge:** Encourage people to try something new and take on different tasks. Buddy people up so they can feel more confident trying something new.
- **Work with others:** You can be stronger by working with other groups. Work out how your issue intersects with others and where there might be opportunities for collaboration or mutual support.

## Activists Assemble

In 2014 people in Edinburgh came together as 'Activists Assemble' - a new group who take action on a range of social justice issues. The group isn't linked to one specific organisation, but takes action across different campaigns. They have organised a flashmob of dancing robots to protest the EU-US trade deal; set up a pop-up food garden in the street as part of a food sovereignty day of action, and have campaigned for fossil-fuel divestment.



## Growing your email list

**Global Justice Glasgow** has over 1,100 people on their email list and it's still growing. Here are some tips from the group on how it's done:

- We always have a sign-up sheet at anything we do. We use tickboxes on petitions and we're very careful to explain to people what ticking the boxes means (we always have a 'national updates' box, as well as one for our email list).
- Think about how you use your list. We do an email about once a month (never more often - we don't want to annoy people) with updates on what we have done and what we have planned. We also include updates about the campaigns, such as links to online actions. It does take a bit of

work to do this, so it's good if groups can think about how they will share the work.

- Don't worry if people drop off your email list; but you need to keep adding new people if you want to maintain or grow your list.
- Mailchimp - a tool for sending mass emails - has been invaluable. It makes it very easy to send emails once you have set it up and keeps everyone's email addresses secure. It's free to use if you have fewer than 2000 subscribers.
- A big email list won't instantly generate new group members. It's more of a long-term investment. We have had new people get involved from our list, but sometimes a couple of years after they first signed up!

## Email lists

Most groups use two types of email lists: an organising 'discussion' list for people involved in the running of the group; and a wider announcement list to publicise events and actions. Be careful not to overload people's inboxes with too many emails.

- With a **discussion list**, all members can post and respond to each other. This is very useful for organising between meetings and events.
- With an **announcement list**, only the list admins can send out emails. It's useful for keeping people updated of upcoming meetings, actions and events who don't necessarily want to take part in the everyday organising of the group.

Riseup is a good activist email list provider you can use: [lists.riseup.net](https://lists.riseup.net)

## Keeping up the energy

- **Check in with how things are going:** Evaluate things you have done and think about what you could do differently. Be open to trying something new and organising in a different way. The most important thing is to find a way that works for you and that you feel is most likely to keep people involved and excited about your group.
- **Organise socials:** Having fun is an important part of local organising. Have a picnic, organise a quiz or have a party. Having refreshments at meetings and events also helps bring people together.
- **Celebrate achievements:** Reflecting on what you've achieved, either as a group or as part of a wider movement, can make your group a positive place to be that people want to come back to. Similarly with showing appreciation for each others' work.





Academics and students held a day-long conference outside the place where the DSEI arms fair was due to take place

## Useful resources

Lots of organisations provide support for grassroots groups. This includes providing training and workshops; speakers for public events; online and printed resources, and other useful advice such as how to get local media coverage.

### Tools for organising

- Seeds for Change: A workers' co-op that offers training and facilitation. Its website has lots of useful resources for organising. [seedsforchange.org.uk](http://seedsforchange.org.uk)
- 350.org: Lots of useful tools for facilitating meetings, getting a group going and planning a creative action [trainings.350.org](http://trainings.350.org)

### Creative action ideas

- Beautiful Trouble: [beautifultrouble.org](http://beautifultrouble.org)
- Actipedia: A database of creative actions from around the world [actipedia.org](http://actipedia.org)

### Activist training collectives

Each of these websites includes lots of useful resources and links to other groups

- Seeds for Change: [seedsforchange.org.uk](http://seedsforchange.org.uk)
- London Roots: [london-roots.org.uk](http://london-roots.org.uk)
- Turning the Tide: [turningtide.org.uk](http://turningtide.org.uk)
- Tripod (Scotland): [tripodtraining.org](http://tripodtraining.org)
- Rhizome: [rhizome.coop](http://rhizome.coop)

### 'How to' guides

You can find other 'How to' guides on the Global Justice Now website including:

- How to organise a creative action
- How to lobby decision makers
- How to organise an event
- How to make the most of local media
- How to hold a great meeting
- How to run an effective stall

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