

Title: Developing your Idea and Your Plan

Projects and campaigns usually start because we feel inspired about an idea or passionate about a particular issue. Our first impulse is to throw ourselves into action straightaway. But if we take a little time to analyse the situation and to develop a plan of action we can increase our effectiveness and our chances of success.

How to plan:

1. Define your aims
2. Gather more information
3. Identify targets - people, groups, institutions
4. Choose your tactics and actions
5. Pull the plan together
6. Hold Regular Reviews

1. Define your aims - What is it that you want to achieve? You should be able to sum up this up in one clear sentence: "Create an organic school garden", "Stop this development from destroying our village", "Live together in a co-operatively owned house". Your group's aim should be realistic and achievable. Don't worry too much if your group can't come up with a united long term vision, but you do need to agree on a common immediate or short term goal to be able to work together.

2. Gathering more information - What do you need to know to achieve your aims? This could include environmental data, details about similar projects/campaigns or background information about companies/institutions/people involved. Accurate information will not only help you make a good plan and give you ideas for action, but also help you to convince local people and potential allies. But don't get paralysed by a mountain of irrelevant information...!

3. Identify targets - In this part you are analysing the information you have already gathered. Start by looking at all the different people and institutions that have an interest in the issue. Who are the people you need to talk to/convince/pressure to achieve your aim? There is a very useful tool for this called Forcefield Analysis. Look up the 'Planning' Resources on seedsforchange.org.uk.

4. Tactics and Actions - Once you have identified people/institutions to target, you need to decide on the best method to do this. Many groups do this by plunging straight into discussing the first one or two ideas that people come up with. Often they get stuck there for hours and time runs out before other (more interesting) options can be explored. This approach not only limits the choice of action, but also stifles creativity. You can avoid this by using an **Action Brainstorm**.

This tool helps to quickly gather a large number of ideas for actions you can do. The idea is to encourage creativity and free energy. Begin with stating the issue to be tackled. Ask people to say whatever comes into their heads as fast as possible - without censoring it. The crazier the ideas, the better. This helps people to be inspired by each other. Have one or two note takers to write all the ideas down where everyone can see them. Make sure there is no discussion or comment on others' ideas. Structured

thinking and organising can come afterwards. After the people run out of ideas check over the list of actions that has been generated and get short explanations for any that aren't clear.

Now you can move on to discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the different ideas. Make sure you don't discount crazier ideas out of hand. Sometimes these are the ones with the most potential. A good way of analysing actions is the flowchart. See 'Planning' Resources on seedsforchange.org.uk.

5. Pull the Plan Together - By now you should have a good idea of what kind of actions and tactics you want to go for. The next exercise helps you to form them into a **Time Line**.

The purpose of a time-line is to give you an idea of how many different things you may have to do, and when.

For example, a group wants to set up a resource centre for local people and community groups to use. They started by working out what the overall time frame is - the aim is to have the centre up and running within six months. Then the group worked out what tasks need to be done by when. For example the funding application needs to be handed in quite soon, because it takes most funders two or three months to decide. But to be able to apply for funding the group needs a constitution, finance plan and a bank account. The group also needs some money straight away as well as publicity to get more people involved. See 'Planning' Resources on seedsforchange.org.uk for a drawing of a TimeLine.

6. Reviewing your plans and actions - In the day to day nitty gritty work it is easy to lose sight of the long-term aims. When a group gets stuck it helps to review what you set out to do and what you have achieved so far. It is also important for every group to recognise and celebrate its successes as well as learning from mistakes. As more information is discovered your strategy may need to change.

Let's not forget that empowering people and building communities are really important in this disenfranchised society. They are major achievements, even if they are not a direct aim of your group.

Celebrate success whenever you have a chance!

Adapted from seedsforchange.org.uk - a free, @nti-copyright resource for campaigners.