

The CAG Project: 'Building Your Group from Scratch' Workbook

You've got a spark of an idea but what steps must you take to make it a fully-fledged project? How do you turn a small group of friends scheming around a kitchen table into a thriving community group?

This workbook provides a tool-kit of exercises you can do on your own or with other founders and members of your group that will take you through a step-by-step process to help you create your vision, engage your community and build your group from scratch.

1. Creating your vision

The first step to turn your idea into reality is to formalise what you want to achieve in your community. A clearly defined vision is an important part of your constitution or strategy documents, as well as giving you a framework to check progress against and talk about your project to supporters or in funding applications.

The exercise

Give your group at least an hour to do this exercise. At this stage, you can be ambitious and dream big.

Ask the following questions. You can record your suggestions either as individuals or as a whole group using whatever format works for you e.g. an interactive brainstorm/mind-map, a free-write or draw, a picture:

- *What are the needs / issues in your community or the local environment?*
- *What currently in your community or local environment needs to change?*
- *How could you see these challenges/needs addressed in a positive and sustainable way?*
- *What would improvement or transformation look like?*
- *What is the end goal / ideal result of your activity?*

Next, look at your record/s and try and draw out agreement / common themes and synthesise ideas. Formulate these ideas as a mission statement or set of aims. This only needs to be 1-3 sentences or 3 bullet points as a minimum. You should also try to make them SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound).

Next steps

Once you have set down your vision there are some other exercises that you can do to develop and plan for your vision. You can use the templates below:

- Back casting (i.e. working backwards) from your vision to create a timeline



- Create an action plan detailing the activities you will do to achieve your aims

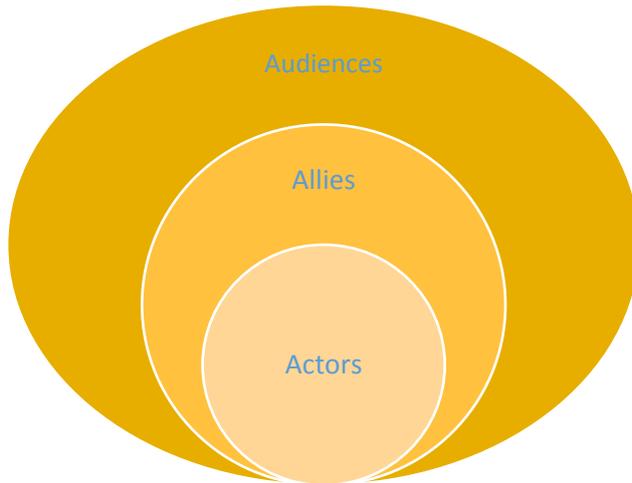
Start date	Deadline	Aim	Action / activity	Who responsible?	Resources needed	Measure of success

2. Engaging with your community

You can't achieve your vision alone! Mapping the landscape of your community will help you visualise who you need to engage with in order to build up your base of active members, supporters and participants. It will also make sure you know who else is doing similar things so you can work together rather than duplicate your efforts.

The exercise

Get a big piece of paper and pens and draw the nested circle diagram on it. This diagram will represent your community.



The central circle represents “actors” – i.e. those who will directly participate in your group activity to achieve your vision.

The middle circle represents “allies or partners” i.e. those who you might collaborate with to achieve your vision or who have decision-making power and influence.

The outer circle represents “audiences” – i.e. those who might be “interested” or “concerned” perhaps on the peripheries of your group or part of the wider community you want to engage with.

Brainstorm as a group who you need to engage with and place them on the diagram. Once you have a brief sketch of community, see if there are any links, connections and lines of influence between people and groups.

Tip: Think about groupings of people e.g. families, retired people; other organisations, community groups, TRAs or social centres; cultural or religious organisations / groups; local authorities and services; individuals who are key nodes / figures in community.

Next steps

Once you have mapped your community you can think about the best or most appropriate engagement methods for reaching each different group of people. You can use the templates below:

- Create a communications plan detailing how you intend to reach people with your messages.

Communications channel	Website	Social media	Newsletters	Press / media
Audience				
Tone / style				
Content / message				
Frequency				

- Create an events calendar to identify key times of the year or existing events you can piggy-back onto (sometimes you need to go to where people are!) or where you might create open opportunities for new people to engage with you.

3. Building your group

Once you have identified engaged people to become involved, you need to think about how you work together. Often groups come together in an ad hoc way or evolve from a group of friends but it is important to think early on about how you structure your group, make decisions and share the work otherwise conflicts can arise.

Tip: The key to well-functioning groups is to empower and give ownership to people by delegating responsibilities and creating open decision-making processes. What works best is to have clearly defined roles that may even occasionally rotate and working group structures where people share the workload of a planning an activity or the responsibility of health & safety for example.

The exercise

As a group work through these steps:

- *Brainstorm all of the tasks and responsibilities that need to be performed in your group for it to function and for your activity to run smoothly e.g. checking emails, social media, health & safety, facilitating meetings.*
- *Once you know what tasks need to be covered you can group them into areas of responsibility and create role descriptions.*
- *Then do a skills audit of your members to see who might be best placed to take on these responsibilities or what training your group might need to be able to perform these roles.*

Next steps

Once everyone in your group know exactly what they are doing, you could start thinking about formalising how you work together:

- Make a group agreement on how decisions are made and group members' conduct e.g. 'decisions will be made by a consensus process' or 'we agree not to talk over each other in meetings'.
- Plan how you will make meetings engaging. Ask yourselves: How the meetings are facilitated? Are people given opportunities to contribute? Where they are held? Are they accessible and inviting? Warning: Badly run meetings can kill enthusiasm!
- Create ways to welcome new members into your group. You could have a buddy system or greeting person. You might also want to think about if you want to induct or train new members or give 'handover' notes.

More help

There are many more 'how-to' guides and resources on the CAG Oxfordshire website:

<http://cagoxfordshire.org.uk/resources/>

If you are interested in finding out more about the CAG Network: info@cagoxfordshire.org.uk