

GUIDE

HOW TO GET AND KEEP PEOPLE INVOLVED IN TRANSITION

People:	Ideally everyone in your group
Time:	1 - 2 hours to read and discuss as a group
Resources:	This guide and a place to meet

How can this help us?

Your Transition group needs people to get involved and stay involved if it is to be effective, this is one of the biggest challenges most groups face. People come and go through the following different stages of Transition, at the start when you need an Initiating group to start and develop Transition and later on when you set up your core group to carry on delivering Transition and when delivering projects. Each stage needs people, the challenge is to find them, welcome them and keep them involved. Doing this well at the start can really make Transition easier in the long term, as you will keep people involved and hopefully engage new people.

The guide:

This guide will help you to do this by exploring:

- Why people get involved in groups
- How you can welcome and involve new people, so that they stay
- What roles are needed to do this, for example a welcome person or buddy role
- What resources you could produce to give to new people
- Decide who will be responsible for meeting and welcoming new people

Why people get involved

People get involved in groups for a number of reasons such as, to learn new skills, to meet people, to feel valued, to give their skills and energy to something worthwhile, to find their way into new work and for many other reasons. It's great if people are getting some personal benefit from being part of Transition in ways that go beyond just getting work done then they are likely to hang around. Think about why you got involved in Transition what you get out of being involved. Ideally, Transition should nurture people to personally develop and also have fun. This not only keeps people involved, it avoids burnout and is good for the group as a whole.

How to get new people involved in your initiating group

Here are some ways to find people for the Initiating Group:

- Contact friends, likeminded people or groups that are already doing similar things.
- Publicise it through your networks, social media channels local radio station.
- Put on a film, talk or other event.
- Put an ad in the paper!
- Go along to groups with similar aims and start to make connections

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When you meet someone who you think would make a good contribution to your group:

- Invite them - and tell them why you'd like them to join
- Often the first people to start a group are the ones who just jump in and start things - but those who come later may be less confident, or need an invitation to step in

First steps to developing your group

A good first step is to set a date for an initial meeting to just chat about Transition - so people don't feel they are signing up for a big commitment.

Then In your first few meetings, you want to actively develop your group through:

- Developing your relationships by getting to know each other and finding why you want to be involved in Transition
- Developing a shared understanding of Transition
- Deciding on the geographical area you want to cover
- Deciding how you will work together
- Finding out what skills people have and what other groups they are involved in
- Registering on www.transitionnetwork.org (or your national hub website outside the UK)
- It can be useful to run a small event together to find out how you work as a team

Some groups try to get on with doing things really fast, but often come unstuck later so let these early stages take a bit of time. Take time to develop your relationships and you will build a solid foundation that will keep you going through the hard times.

Can anyone join our group?

It's fine for groups to set "criteria for joining" which might include things like this:

- Supports the overall mission and aims of our group (these obviously need to be clearly set out)
- Can attend most meetings (e.g. $\frac{3}{4}$ of meetings over a year)
- Can contribute to the group through giving time, skills, resources, contacts or something else. Groups might specify how much time is expected in addition to attending meetings. And it's fine to recruit for specific skills or connections that are missing
- Is able to be part of a group – to put the group's needs and agenda before personal needs and agenda most of the time
- Commits to abiding by the group agreements, policies and ways of working (providing they are available and clearly laid out)

Welcoming and involving new people

If your group is already working well you may not want to keep inviting new people.

Perhaps you can find a balance by making a time when new people can step in, and others can easily leave - once or twice a year.

- If you see someone new arrive, welcome and talk to them!
- Think about how you can support new people joining your group:
 - You could have a person whose job it is to meet anyone new and help them to find their place, explain how the group works, and answer questions

- oYou could also have a trial period, where the group and the person get to know each other before they make a decision about joining?
- It's really useful to have a short information guide for new people joining that includes:
 - oHow roles are assigned and who currently does them
 - oContact numbers, emails for group members and website information
 - oAny group agreements such as how you make decisions, codes of conduct vision document, your organisational or legal structure if you have one etc.
 - oAny other information that will help them understand your group

How to include new people in meetings

Including new people in your meetings is really important. It makes them feel involved and increase the chance of them returning. You can do this by:

- Give time at the start for everyone to say their name, role and something more personal (such as why they joined, or what they get out of being part of the group)
- Then give the person joining a bit more time to say all this, plus something about what they're bringing to the group, and what they might want from being part of it
- If you notice that new people aren't speaking much at meetings you can:
 - oGo round the whole group asking for ideas or feedback on a proposal or topic
 - oSpecifically invite new people to give their views- but be sensitive about embarrassing them, or putting them on the spot
- When sharing out new tasks include new people, but be careful to not overburden them, partner them up with an existing member who can work with them on it
- If you are already working on something, you can invite new people to get involved in those groups
- Be extra aware of any jargon or exclusive language you may be using - Transition has its own special words such as Initiating group and Peak oil, which may need explaining
- Make sure you challenge any put-downs or discriminatory remarks as this can really put people off being involved?
- At the end of meetings that include new people, allow 10 minutes for them to tell you how it was for them and what they may need to really participate

Keeping People engaged in your group

Once someone is involved in your group, you then have to create an environment that keeps them engaged, the following can help to do this:

- Thank people when they do something
- Celebrate when things are going well
- If you have people from different backgrounds, spend some time together learning about what this means. People may have different experiences and expectations around things like:
 - oTime
 - oRoles and responsibilities
 - oHow to work together
 - oLeadership
 - oLanguage
 - oGiving each other feedback?

- Look at the Transition Network Diversity toolkit here www.transitionnetwork.org/resources/embedding-diversity-and-inclusion-transition-guide for more suggestions about how to do this well.

If you're having difficulty getting new people to join, or stay

There are many reasons why people come to a group and then don't stay. Sometimes it's because of other commitments, but often it is because the process of welcoming new people in is not working.

The following suggests some ways to address this:

- If you notice that people seem interested in your group but don't stay, take action!
- Ask for feedback from people who have left on the following:
 - o What was it that made them get involved in the first place?
 - o Why did they leave?
 - o What would have helped them to stay involved?
- Reflect together on this feedback and the culture of your group:
 - ols it task-driven, appealing only to those who just want to crack on with things, in which case more reflective people may not want to be part of it?
 - ols there a lot of talking, in which case those who want to do stuff may not stay?
 - ols it friendly, welcoming and interested in people's backgrounds and life experience?
 - o How do you get to know each other as people, as well as doing tasks?
 - o How would someone new coming to your group know that you value their presence and input?
- Pay attention to the practicalities of your meetings - how accessible, or easy to find, are your meeting spaces? Does the meeting time work for all - day or evening?
- Recognise the value of people's different life experience and give them time to share this with the group
- Take account of people's different abilities to commit time and energy - see if you can be creative so that even those who can only give a little still have a role and feel valued
- Now and again plan activities that encourage wider involvement. Make sure that all the usual suspects get involved, and talk with new people. What might seem like a simple piece of work to you may be really exciting to a potential new member
- Where do you publicise your Transition initiative and its activities?
 - olf you want to do something about a gender imbalance, or want to work with more black and minority ethnic groups, does your publicity/word of mouth go to where these people will see or hear about it?
 - o Does it welcome them explicitly to your group?
 - o Does it encourage them to get involved?

This list was adapted from the following Seeds for change article www.seedsforchange.org.uk/checklist.pdf

Growing your Transition initiative beyond the Initiating Group

If the Initiating group is doing a good job of inspiring, engaging and connecting with people you're probably working well as a group already, and may not want new members joining all the time - so think about how you can involve new people in other ways?

Here are suggestions for including new people beyond the Initiating group itself.

- At every event or workshop collect contact information for people wanting to know more or become active
- Send regular bulletins of news to your growing email list including photos, stories of what's been happening, and asking for help with things coming up
- Have a list of people willing to help at events - bake cakes, be on the door, bring tools, share skills, be a "meeting and greeting" person. Appreciate every contribution. Some groups have a volunteer coordinator to make this even more effective
- Have events where people with enthusiasm can share their ideas and find others to work with. This is key to starting new projects without the Initiating group having to be involved. Some suggestions -
 - o Use Open Space - on a particular theme such as food or energy, or a general topic about creating a sustainable, inclusive, happy future. (Guide to open space here www.transitionnetwork.org/support/community-engagement)
 - o Have conversations spaces such as Green drinks, Conversation Cafes. Include regular times where people talk about projects they're doing and want help with, or ideas they have for getting something new started - and then have a way for people to talk to them
 - o Use specific events to seed new projects and Theme groups. For example, a talk or work-day on growing food might end with an invitation to start an on-going group helping with growing projects. If you have one person who will coordinate a first meeting of such a group this makes it easy for others to sign up to a first group meeting
 - o Don't duplicate or compete with what already exists in your community - for example if there are lots of food growing projects, just publicise what they're doing and encourage people to join them

Can we ask someone to leave, if there are deep disagreements between two sections of the group?

This has been a BIG tension in many Transition groups. One of the most common questions we've heard on trainings, at "group clinics" and whenever Transitioners gather is along the lines of "we have this really difficult person in the group - what should we do?"

It's also common to have more general difficult dynamics around groups - conflict between two groups, or many-way conflict. This is where having good group processes can really help, especially around decision making and running meetings.

What follows is some advice on what to think about and do if new people joining then become "the problem".

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There is no simple solution to this question. Here are some of the things that might be going on..

- People with very high support needs are often attracted to groups – especially those with a principle around inclusion, and which offer friendly connections and a warm welcome
 - These needs may take the form of dominating behaviour “My way or no way!”
 - Or needing reassurance or personal support – sometimes bringing personal issues and taking up meeting time, or one-to-one time outside meetings
- Someone new has joined who has a different culture from the group but essentially supports the groups aims, and could bring a new diversity of worldview, culture and connections – but the group isn’t able to be flexible and adapt to welcome this person’s offer
- The group itself has a culture of scapegoating – blaming its difficulties on one person so it doesn’t have to face its own dysfunction or shadow
 - Sometimes people are very wounded around power, and will continually experience meetings as exclusive, dominated by a few and so on (this is a particular form of support needs, which can be common in movements like Transition which intend to empower those who have felt marginalised)

How can you tell which dynamic you’re dealing with? (and of course there will be others not listed above!) Here are some suggestions on ways you can address these issues.

Does the person genuinely support the group’s wider purpose?

Ask yourselves as a group these questions, to decide on a way forward:

- Are the difficulties they are bringing to do with a narrowness of culture or perspective in the group?
- If the group spent time addressing the person’s concerns, what benefit might come?
- Are they contributing to other projects in a constructive way – showing that their needs aren’t getting in the way elsewhere?

People with high support needs:

People with high support needs can help a group to learn to challenge difficult behaviour and assert its own agenda. The facilitator or chair has a particular role in keeping the meeting on track (not to shut people up, but to serve the group by keeping people to the agreed agenda item). It’s part of the skill of facilitating to interrupt people respectfully and come back to what’s relevant. Outside the meeting it’s a good idea for someone to talk to them about their behaviour – framed around the group’s purpose and needs, and the function of meetings.

If someone’s behaviour doesn’t change – and the level of disruption may escalate – it can be ok to ask someone to leave. Providing this is a shared view of trusted people, and not a few people ganging up on someone they don’t like, or are different from. Getting to this point of agreement really needs to happen outside meetings, and can take a lot of time.

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Asking someone to leave

Once such a conclusion has been reached you may as a group come up with the best way to approach this. Often, the best way to ask someone to leave is for someone who they trust, or a respected leader, to have a conversation with them outside the meeting in which it's made clear that it's not working. Doing this in a way which is honest and ends with mutual respect and appreciation can be a very transforming and empowering process for both sides – and this is quite a skill! as some people may be very unhappy, angry or hurt by such process.

More support:

For more support and information on developing healthy groups go here:

<http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/healthy-groups/>

Check out the 7 essential ingredients of Transition here:

<http://transitionnetwork.org/do-transition/starting-transition/7-essential-ingredients/>

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