

Involving people in your group

How do you get lots of people along to your meetings and events? How do you make sure that more than a handful of you are doing the bulk of the work? These are difficult questions for every group, and there are no quick fixes or easy answers.

In 2015 the Resource Centre ran two workshops for Tenants' & Residents' Associations based in areas of council housing in Brighton and Hove. They were attended by 17 people from 13 different Associations. The sessions focused on exploring these issues, sharing our experiences and coming up with some solutions.

Below is a summary of some of the issues raised, some questions to think about and some suggestions and tips.

This information has been produced with Tenants' and Residents' Associations in mind, but other groups may also find it useful for thinking about getting people involved.

What does your Association do?

- ◆ People are more likely to get involved in your group if it is clear what it is all about, and what it has achieved.

Some questions to think about:

- ◆ Why should local people be interested in your group? What does the group do?
- ◆ What successes have you had? What difference has this made?

Some ideas:

- ◆ Produce a short '*Introduction to our Residents' Association*' with information about the group, what you are trying to do, how you go about doing this and how people can become part of it.
- ◆ Tell people what you have achieved – a group which is successful and getting things done will encourage people to join.
- ◆ Find out what the burning issues are for your local community – are you responding to what people want?
- ◆ At least once a year, have a discussion in your group about what you want to do in the coming year, and how you can improve and develop.

How do people know you exist?

- ♦ Does everyone in your area know about the Residents' Association?
- ♦ Don't assume they do! You could try a quick test – the next few times you are at the bus stop, or in the local shop, or outside the school, ask someone you don't already know if they have heard about the Association.

Some questions to think about:

- ♦ How do people new to the area find out about the Association?
- ♦ Are there different ways you can publicise the work of the group?
- ♦ Can people get in touch with you easily?

Some ideas:

- ♦ It can be useful to practise talking about the group and what it does – try role-playing this with another committee member. It'll help you to gain confidence, and to get clear about what you want to say.
- ♦ Ask everyone on the committee to talk to someone who has never come to a meeting or event – word of mouth and personal contacts are still the way most people get involved.
- ♦ Leaflet the places people go, like the local schools.
- ♦ Social media may not be relevant if your Association is mainly elderly people, but increasingly it is the way people get their information. Some Associations are using Facebook and Twitter, and some have websites. Ask someone from another Association to come to one of your committee meeting to talk about how social media is working for them, and for advice on how to get started.

What is it like to come to one of your meetings?

- ♦ If you work hard to encourage people along to a meeting, you want to make sure they have a good experience and will come back again.

Some questions to think about:

- ♦ Do people leave thinking 'that was useful, we got a lot done'?
- ♦ Is there a welcoming and friendly atmosphere?

Some ideas:

- ♦ Have someone whose job it is to greet and welcome people as they arrive.
- ♦ Create opportunities for everyone to talk and contribute – ask new people their views and take them seriously.
- ♦ Always explain the background to discussions, and don't use initials or jargon.
- ♦ Don't allow one person to talk all the time.
- ♦ Stop people from interrupting each other.
- ♦ Finish discussing one topic before you start on another.
- ♦ Make sure decisions are made and it's been agreed who will take on any tasks.
- ♦ Start and finish on time.

What's in it for them?

- ♦ You are asking people to put time and energy in to the Association. The rewards they get from their involvement need to outweigh the effort involved.

Some questions to think about:

- ♦ What will make them want to come back?
- ♦ What will make them feel part of the group?

Some ideas:

- ♦ Always talk to new people – find out their interests and skills.
- ♦ Include some social time at the start or end of the meeting – use it to introduce new people to other members.
- ♦ Have a 'buddy' system – where an established member of the group partners up with a new person, introducing them to people, supporting them in tasks they take on and filling in the background to the group's work.
- ♦ Keep people in the loop – make sure everyone involved is kept informed and is part of discussions and decisions about the work of the group.
- ♦ Thank people when they have put in work – it's always good to have your contribution recognised.

How do you get more people to do the work?

- ♦ There are various different levels of involvement, and often it is the same few people doing the bulk of the work, and taking on the central roles in the Association.
- ♦ How can you change this?

Some questions to think about:

- ♦ Is there one person who is identified as *the* Association?
- ♦ Do you always feel it is quicker to do something yourself rather than ask other people?
- ♦ Do people take on tasks and then not do them?

Some ideas:

- ♦ People want to be useful, but need encouragement and ideas about how they can contribute.
- ♦ At a committee meeting put together a list of all the jobs that are involved in running the group. Where possible break these down into small, separate tasks. Think about who is doing what, where the gaps are, and how you might divide the work up differently.
- ♦ Have some small, practical tasks you can ask people to do – e.g. deliver flyers to their street or help tidy up after the meeting. People are more likely to take on a time-limited, concrete task.
- ♦ Don't overwhelm people with too much responsibility and work too soon.

- ♦ Try not to mind if things aren't done exactly as you would like them to be, or how you would do them yourself.
- ♦ Talk to people about how much time they are able to offer, and whether they have particular skills or areas of interest.
- ♦ Think about sharing roles, or having a hand-over system where the experienced person can give some guidance and support to the new person.

Where next?

This is just a starting point. We can offer more support to Resource Centre member groups.

For example:

- ♦ We may be able to come along to one of your committee meetings, or you can arrange for sessions at the Centre.
- ♦ If you would like to produce '*An introduction to our Residents' Association*', or a poster for your meetings and events, we can help with finding the right wording and making it look good.
- ♦ If you have new people taking on roles in the Association we can provide training and support on the role of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

We can also provide support and training on:

- ♦ working together in a committee – sharing roles and responsibilities
- ♦ running meetings
- ♦ working out your aims
- ♦ representing your area – finding out what people want
- ♦ being effective – getting things done

Your group may be eligible for this support if you are a volunteer-run group based in Brighton and Hove, which is:

- ♦ Run by and for people living in an area of social housing, and/or
- ♦ Run by and for black and minority ethnic people, and/or
- ♦ Run by and for disabled people.

If you think you may be eligible, contact us to find out whether we can help.