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Hold your first campaigning event

Whether online or in person, making a difference in the places where we live is the most powerful way we can respond to the climate and ecological emergency. Read our guidance on how to host your first campaigning event.

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Local action groups up and down the country are working to build greener and fairer communities. By transforming their local areas, they're playing a vital role in driving the national and international change we so urgently need.

We're seeing more widespread concern about climate change than ever before. Channel this energy by getting local people together to take action where you live.

The first thing we would usually suggest you do is to hold a public meeting to kick things off. This guide will help you plan your campaigning event, whether online or in person.

And if you need extra support to host your first event online, get in touch at community@foe.co.uk.

Not sure if you're ready to host an event? That's ok. [Create a social media account](#) for the prospective group (on Facebook, for example) and start generating interest that way. Once a few people have joined and got the conversation started about starting a local action group in your area, discuss hosting an event together.

Basic prep for an in-person event

1. Pick a venue that's easy to get to and accessible to all

Not everyone drinks alcohol, so avoid pubs. Somewhere without wheelchair access won't work either. A local café or community space could be your best bet – offering the relaxed space you need to get to know each other.

You could also try schools, student unions, public parks, offices, libraries, leisure centres, hotel dining rooms, or village halls.

2. Book the right date

Avoid faith, bank and school holidays when people aren't likely to be free.

3. Create a sign-up page

Host your event on Action Network to keep track of how many people are attending. [Follow our step-by-step guide.](#)

4. Promote, promote, promote

Ask friends to share on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Hand out leaflets on a busy high street or at a local train station. Leave flyers in local shops and restaurants.

The more diverse and inclusive your group, the more powerful it will be and the more influence it will have on decision-makers.

Consider groups and communities you could reach out to, like local businesses, farmers, unions, doctors, faith communities, and students.

Basic prep for an online event

1. Pick a day and time

Start by deciding when you'll be holding your meeting. Give yourself ample time to do some proper promotion so pick a day a few weeks away.

Make sure it will be convenient for most people to attend, so avoid holidays, stick to weeknights, and keep it short and snappy – think 90 min max.

2. Set up the tech

You'll need to pick a teleconferencing platform for your event, and we suggest you use Zoom. [Follow our step-by-step guide to setting up Zoom meetings.](#)

Once you've done that, we recommend setting up a registration page for your [event on Action Network](#). Think of it as an activist Eventbrite – it'll let you keep track of how many people are attending and enable you to start building an email list for your group.

Take a look at our step-by-step guide to setting up an event on [Action Network](#) and get in touch at community@foe.co.uk if you need help. We can show you how to get your event log-in details emailed out automatically to people who register to attend.

3. Promote, promote, promote

The more diverse and inclusive your group, the more powerful it will be and the more influence it will have on decision-makers. Make sure to put the link to your event out there for people to register.

Consider how you can reach out to a variety of groups and communities, like local businesses, farmers, unions, nurses, faith communities, and students.

Do you know someone who knows someone that you could email? Is there an online community board you can post on? Can you think of anyone who might have expressed interest in taking action on climate that you might contact?

Don't forget about social media! Create a Facebook event page and include the link to your event registration, plus some initial questions to get the discussion going among attendees before the event. Invite your friends and ask them to share it on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

You can also create some flyers using [our online templates on Canva](#). Simply edit them, print them and post them up in your area.

Keep in mind that your promotional material should be accessible, so remove any possible barriers that may stand in the way of someone interacting with it. For example, ensure it's in a variety of places so that it's seen by a range of people, avoid any technical terms or jargon, use fonts and colours that are clear, and add photos that will appeal to everyone.

We're happy to support you with promoting your event as well, such as by inviting Friends of the Earth supporters in your area. Just get in touch with us on community@foe.co.uk at least 3 weeks before your event.

4. Prepare

Consider creating a shared document (Google doc or other) ahead of time that you can send the link to during the meeting. That way you and others can split the task of taking notes in a shared space.

Gather any links you'll want to share during the meeting (eg the [Climate Action Plan](#), to join the mailing list on Action Network, etc).

Consider choosing a next meeting date that you can suggest to participants.

Think about adding social time to your meeting. You could propose that people join early or stay longer to chat and get to know each other better. If so, make sure to mention it in your reminder email (below) and prepare some sort of activity or questions to get the conversation going.

Finally, you might want to do some initial research to help in discussions during your meeting. For example, [use our postcode lookup tool](#) to find out how climate friendly your area is, check your council's website for information on existing climate policies or look at what other community groups exist in the area that you could collaborate with.

5. Send a reminder email

Make sure people who've registered to attend are reminded that your event is coming up. You might want to send a few reminder emails (eg weekly leading up to the event day).

At the very least you should send one the day before your event to remind attendees that it's coming up and that you look forward to kick-starting local action in the community.

Include login details for the meeting, the agenda (and anything they need to prepare ahead of time), and [our Zoom guide for first-timers](#).

If you're using Action Network, it will automatically send 2 reminder emails. Be sure to edit these before they go out.

Planning your agenda

Think about how you want to use the meeting space and the atmosphere you'd like to create. If your meeting is online, plan an agenda that's snappy to keep people engaged, as it's easy to lose focus during online meetings.

Focus on the solutions more than the problems. [Friends of the Earth's Climate Action Plan for government](#) will help your group prioritise the type of actions you want to do.

[Find more help and ideas on our resource hub.](#)

Example agenda for a 90-minute meeting

If this agenda works for you, great. Feel free to shape it to fit your needs.

(10 mins) Talk through the ground rules

How will the space will work? What is the event for? What are the rules for ensuring respectful, well-organised meetings? (see facilitation guidelines below). Talk about the network of local action groups around the country and how your combined actions can achieve big system change, then go over the aim of this meeting.

If the meeting's online, briefly explain how to use key controls in Zoom, remind people to turn their cameras on if they can and outline how people can participate. Send the link to the shared document and ask for a volunteer to take notes throughout the meeting. You can also ask for volunteers for other small tasks, such as time-keeping, so that people feel they're already taking on a role in the group.

Finally, outline the agenda, so everyone knows what's coming up.

(30 mins) Introductions and discussion about climate and/or ecological breakdown

The aim here is to get people to know each other and frame the discussion. First, have everyone:

- Introduce themselves ([including their pronouns](#)). You can also add an icebreaker here, for example, ask each person to bring an object that best represents their personality (if you do this, remember to mention this in your reminder email before the event).
- Say a bit about how they feel about climate change and what brings them to the event.

Then have a discussion about the solutions to the climate and ecological emergency, using these broad areas: better transport, cleaner energy, eco-friendly buildings, nature-friendly farming, less consumption, and supporting more vulnerable countries to deal with climate breakdown.

What should be done on a national level to bring these solutions to life? How could your community do better in those areas? What is already being done and what other steps could your council take? What are other communities doing well?

If you have more than 10 participants, you may want to split people into small groups and assign each group a solution to discuss. Smaller groups also encourage those who are a bit shy to participate, and for connections to be created.

If you're online, use Zoom's breakout rooms function to split people into groups. Ask one person from each group to take notes of people's contributions and add them to the shared document.

(30 mins) What your groups can do

First, remind everyone that local action groups create change by working with their local councils on ambitious climate action plans, and by coming together at key moments (eg during elections) to push for change at a national level.

Then, introduce the [Climate Action Plan for councils](#) which will guide your group to push for change at a local level. Open up a discussion about how you'll use it to get a Climate Action Plan from your council.

Has your council declared a Climate Emergency yet? Do you know how engaged it is on climate issues? How will you start a conversation with your council? What actions can you take to show support from the community for a local Climate Action Plan?

Spend this time gathering ideas for what your group wants to do next. For example: doing more research about what your council has done on climate issues so far, adapting the template to your area, creating a placard you can use to raise awareness in your community, starting a petition, or setting up a meeting with your council to present your Climate Action Plan.

Don't get stuck into trying to create the perfect group strategy and timeline – there'll be plenty of time to refine and change your plans down the line. Just focus on deciding what your initial priorities are, what you want to spend more time exploring next time you meet. It's also a chance to sense where the energy is at and what roles people might be interested in taking on.

(15 mins) Action points

Now's the time to agree next steps. For each of these, make sure to write down agreed action points and the names of people who are volunteering to take these on so you can send a detailed follow-up email.

- When are you going to meet up again? You may want to suggest a date to speed things up and if you're online, get people to say "agree" in the chatbox if that works for them.
- Who will organise the next meeting? Let someone volunteer or suggest two people team up to do this if no one wants to take it on alone.
- What will your next meeting focus on? Use ideas you've come up with previously to decide what you'll spend time on, whether it's presenting research or planning for an action.
- How will you all stay in touch? If you're online and you've set up Action Network, post the link in the chatbox for anyone who hasn't yet signed up to the email list. Otherwise, have everyone provide their name, phone and email address and record this somewhere.

- Do you want to register as a Climate Action group? [If so, agree a name for the group and have someone volunteer to register it.](#)
- Do you want to get in touch with other groups? If so, get someone to volunteer to research groups that might be worth chatting to and commit to reporting back at the next meeting. [Do some community mapping to identify possible alliances.](#)
- Do you want to promote your group more widely? If so, have one or two people come up with ideas to get the word out and report back next time you meet.
- Anything else people want to volunteer for? Leave space for people to suggest things they can take on, eg someone may want to co-ordinate social media accounts for the group.

(5 mins) Close

It's nice to close with a recap of why everyone is here and the hope of what we can achieve together. You might want to suggest extending or, if your meeting is offline, moving elsewhere for people that want to socialise.

Follow up after your event

Within 24 hours of your event, email all attendees to thank them for coming and recap agreed next steps. Make sure to explicitly remind specific people of the roles they volunteered for and any key information (date of agreed next meeting, where to register the group, etc).

You can also let people know about the online training events available so they can start to skill up. In particular, encourage people to attend a Welcome Webinar if they've not done so yet.

Facilitating your event

Poorly run meetings are frustrating and likely to put people off, no matter how committed they are to the cause. This is particularly true of online meetings. Here are some top tips for good facilitation. You can also check out our [7 tips to get the most from online meetings](#) and [our guide to facilitating online meetings](#).

If you'd like any more support on facilitating your meeting, get in touch at community@foe.co.uk and we'll be happy to help.

1. Create a safe space

Hopefully your meetings will appeal to a diverse audience of people from many different backgrounds. Make everyone feel welcome and at ease to participate. Listen and understand the needs of participants, adjusting the meeting as necessary.

Avoid jargon or specialist terms as much as possible and explain any that might come up. Don't assume any lived experience, people will have a variety of backgrounds and have a range of skills and knowledge – respect and embrace this, it'll make your group stronger.

Zoom meetings can feel naturally more formal and businesslike than in-person meetings, so keep the tone light and allow people time to chat and explore their opinions and motivations with others.

2. Set ground rules

Agree ground rules with everyone in attendance. Even really basic rules such as 'listening when others are speaking' are worthwhile. They help set an inclusive tone for the meeting and give you a reference point to return to should anyone break the rules. If you're online, let people suggest their own rules in the chatbox as well as putting some forward yourself.

3. Keep to time

If you need more time to finish an agenda item, check in with the rest of the group first. You can always take the discussion online, over email or to the group's social media channels. It's extra important to keep online meetings to time as they require more focus and attention from participants.

4. Avoid one person dominating

When one or a few people dominate the discussion it limits how much others can input. In the worst cases it can alienate people and put them off attending. Keep an eye on who has spoken and encourage people who have not spoken to contribute.

Don't be afraid to refer back to the ground rules and to reiterate good meeting etiquette if needed. If you're online, you may also need to proactively mute participants who are being disruptive or are having trouble doing it themselves.

More tips to create an inclusive event

Encourage everyone to:

- Be thoughtful about personal power and privilege.
- W.A.I.T. (Why am I talking? Why aren't I talking?).
- Notice when their behaviour negatively affects others.
- Listen to understand before rushing to respond.
- Avoid jargon and explain specialist language.
- Be clear about what is confidential and what can be shared – "what's learned here leaves here, what's said here stays here".

Get people to join and stay

1. Promote yourself

Plan a regular series of events and invite people to attend by promoting them to your mailing lists. More people will get involved, and eventually your numbers will naturally grow. We recommend you hold your meetings online, but should you want to organise face-to-face activities, make sure you've read [our coronavirus guidance](#).

2. Listen to people

Ask new people what they are interested in and why they want to be involved. It's a great way to find out more about each other and build great relationships. It's also a good way of finding out what people would like to achieve, what roles everyone might be drawn to and what you all want to make happen as a group.

If someone declines to join your group – or you get the feeling they are unsure – ask them if they'd like to stay in touch with what you're up to by joining your mailing list. Let them know they're always welcome to get more involved, but don't pressure them.

3. Enjoy yourselves

Great change comes from great relationships. Make it as much about socialising as it is about campaigning. Be friendly and positive and celebrate successes.

Think about social activities your group could do online to get to know one another and blow off some steam, eg an online quiz night.

4. Keep your meetings light

It's best not to get bogged down in process and minutes. People don't want to feel like they are at work. Whether online or in person, explore different ways to keep your meetings fun and engaging, for example encouraging people to do short presentations to the group.

5. Provide opportunities to lead and follow

Some people will want to take on leadership roles, others will prefer to follow at a distance. It's great to have a range of activities to make sure that no one is left feeling redundant.