

Planning projects as a group

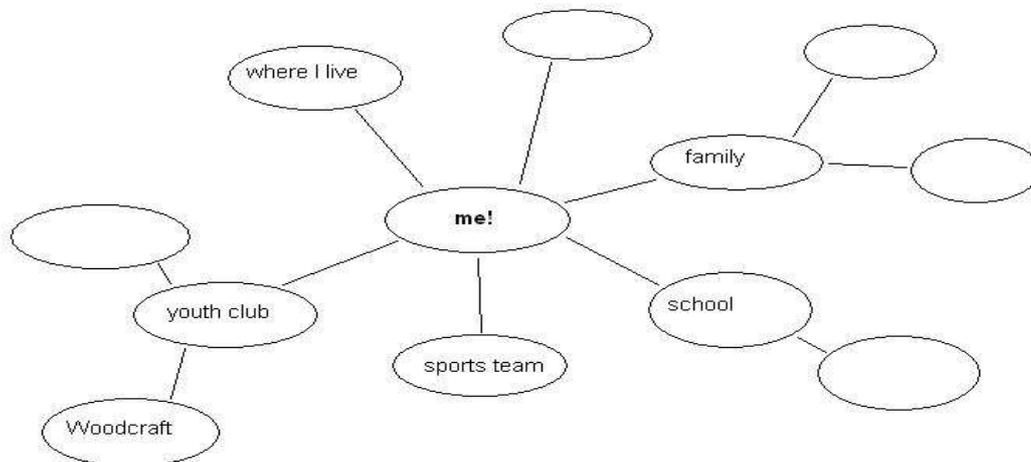
There are lots of brainstorming and planning activities that could be used to plan projects as a group, but it may be useful to have some more specific, in depth activities too. Here's a series of ideas that could prove particularly helpful for planning action projects and campaigns in your community – discussing ideas for topics or issues to focus on, thinking how to address this, planning how the project could work and even applying for or raising some money to run it.

Starting points

Who's in my community?

If you're looking at doing a local project or campaign, it could be good to start by identifying what you see as your 'community' and who is in it. Is it people within a geographical area? People in your family? People from your school? People with common interests? People of a similar age? This activity will help each member of the group think about who they link to individually, before pooling all of their 'communities' to map out the networks covered by the entire group. You'll need a piece of paper and pen for everyone, and a big sheet of paper for a group activity.

Start with a quick discussion about what community means. Think of as many definitions as you can and write them down. Then you can move on to look at the range of different communities that group members belong to. Give out pens and paper and work individually to start with. Write 'me' in the centre of your paper and then link yourselves to each other group you are part of – from your neighbours to your netball team and everything in between. Include other groups that you're linked to but not part of, by putting them further out from the centre, or joining them with dotted lines. The diagram below makes a start and gives some ideas.



When you've all finished, come back together and see if you can combine all of your maps to draw the community network for the whole group on a big sheet of paper.

The best and worst

This activity would lead on well from the previous one, but could also stand alone. It will help the group to think about what is good and bad about their community. First, take a few minutes to think as a group about what is good and what is bad about being part of a community. Think quite broadly, rather than about your specific communities for the time being. Write your ideas in two lists (good and bad). They might be things like feeling safe, belonging, friendship (good) and trapped, not appreciated for who I am and labelled (bad).

Then using the good and bad qualities from the list, play the 'continuum of agreement' game. To do this, set up an imaginary line across the room, clearly marking where it begins and ends – for example, with chairs, signs or masking tape on the floor. This is a 'continuum', with two opposing views at each end. Mark the ends of the line with signs saying 'agree' and 'disagree'. Someone read out each item from the list as a statement relating now to your community. For example, "I feel completely safe in my community" or "I think that people label me in my community". The rest of the group must then respond to each statement by choosing a place the stand along the continuum that reflects their opinion. Discuss why you've stood where you have and whether or not you are happy about this aspect of the community.

Representing others

This is a quick and fun activity that will get everyone thinking about a whole range of issues and concerns – as well as representing other members of the group to argue their case. It only needs 15-20 minutes, some small pieces of paper, pens and a hat or bowl. First of all, everyone needs to take a small piece of paper and write on it something they feel really strongly about – it could be anything, from world poverty to friendship. Don't show anyone what you write, fold up the paper and drop them all into the hat. Then all draw out a piece of paper and read what's on it to yourselves. Take 3-5 minutes to think and come up with 3 short points about why the thing that some else has put on the paper is important. Everyone has 30 seconds to present these three points and argue the case for the issue in their pieces of paper in turn. Finally, reflect as a group on how it felt to have to speak on someone else's behalf and hear someone else representing you.

Peeling the onion

For this activity you need to choose, as a group, an issue you feel strongly about so that you can dig deeper and find out more about it. It may be helpful to choose something local that the group can act on, and is familiar with. If you've already run 'the best and worst' activity, it could be something which has arisen out of that. If there isn't an obvious choice, you could vote on which topic best combines importance with scope for local action.

Draw a huge onion (lots of concentric circles basically!) on flipchart paper and write the issue round the outside edge. Either as a whole group or in small groups, discuss **why** it's an issue. Write your answer inside the first 'layer' of the onion. Then ask **why** again, and write the answer on the next layer. Carry on asking 'why' until you feel you've got right to the core of the issue. You may have a few answers at each level, converging on the centre of the onion. If you've got a few onions happening at once, try to all visit each one and add your ideas.

Activities like 'peeling the onion' that get to the core of the issue can help you to decide what your goal might be. Once you've finished your onions, use an ideas storming technique to pool ideas about how to address the issue and then decide on your focus and desired goal.

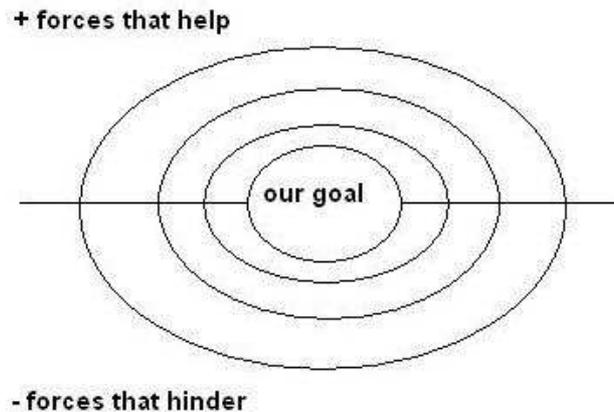
Getting into the plan

Once you've identified an issue as a group that you'd like to work on, you'll need to plan what you'd like to do about it in your action project or campaign and who else in the community might be useful to connect with. Here are a couple of activities to help with that.

Forcefield

This activity is a useful tool for thinking about how you'll reach your goal and what might help you – or get in the way of doing this. You'll need a big piece of paper, or board to write on, lots of pens and some post-it notes. Start off by drawing the 'Forcefield' – a number of concentric circles with your

goal written in the middle. If there are a number of different aspects to your goal, you could spread them around the middle of the Forcefield. Then write “+ forces that help” at the top and “- forces that hinder” at the bottom, shown in the diagram below.



Work all together or in small groups (with lots of Forcefield copies) coming back together to share your ideas. First, write on post-it notes all you can think of that could help and hinder you in reaching your goal. Then stick them on both sides of the Forcefield – closer to the centre if you think they’d have a huge effect, and towards the edge if they’re less influential. Next, look at the forces on either side of your goal. You want to have the positive ones as close to the centre as possible, and the negative ones on the edge – so think about what you can do to move them in those directions. How can you change or neutralise the forces that might work against you? How can you use the positive forces around you to the benefit of your project? When you think of ways to move the positive and negative forces in or out, move the post-it notes accordingly, drawing arrows to mark where they moved from and write a note beside each one to explain how you’ve been able to move it.

Community links

This is another activity to think about forces that might help you – but focussing on the community and building links either through your project, or for your project. If you’ve already done the ‘who’s in my community’ activity, look back to it. If not, do it now! Look at who you’re linked to as an entire group and highlight (by circling, underlining or marking in some way) all of the groups who you might be able to work with in your project, talk to for advice and ideas, or who you might want to tell about what you’re up to. Are there any other useful groups missing from your map, for example, local media, or the council? Add any you think of around the edge, it doesn’t matter if they don’t have links to any group members yet – the next job is to build those bridges during the project!

And finally...

If you enjoyed some of these activities and would like to develop a plan and run a project or small campaign to take action with your group, you could apply to the **Woodcraft Folk Action Projects** fund to get up to £500 to help you. The forms have been designed to be filled in at group nights so it’s simple to apply once you’ve got some ideas. Go to www.woodcraft.org.uk/action-projects for information.

Most of these activities are adapted from a resource called *Act by Right* and I’m very grateful to the author, Bill Badham for letting us ‘borrow’ his ideas! If you’d like to see more *Act by Right* resources, go to www.actbyright.org.uk.