Strategy

for Projects and Campaigns

Projects and campaigns usually start because we feel inspired about an idea or passionate about a particular issue. Our first impulse is to throw ourselves into action straightaway. But if we take a little time to analyse the situation and to develop a plan of action we can increase our effectiveness and our chances of success.

A strategy not only helps us to move from ideas to action but also to make the best use of people's time and energy. It will also help to prevent burnout and stop you from getting disillusioned half way through. A long-term plan means you can chart your successes - large and small - and appreciate them for what they are.

A strategy will help you to:

✯ **Choose the right tactics at the right time.** All actions have a positive and a negative impact - getting the balance right can be crucial. By looking at the medium and long term you can see which tactics will be useful and at what stage in the campaign/project they can be used.

✯ **Evaluate successes (or failures).** If you have a clear action plan you'll notice the milestones as you pass them. This is important for group morale, and helps to plan your future strategy.

✯ **Be consistent.** Your project should be seen to grow, rather than stop and start. This is important for group morale and to attract new people.

✯ **Evaluate offers of help / alliances / networks etc.** Is this the right time to accept concessions from your opponent? Is it worth compromising your position in order to work with other groups?

✯ **Fit into wider / similar projects, campaign, movements.**

✯ **Match skills and energy to the tasks at hand.** By looking at skills and interests first you can come up with more exciting (and interesting) ideas for action than thinking of tasks and then delegating them.

Once you have drawn up a strategy do be prepared to change it if necessary. Situations can change rapidly and require flexibility.

It's also important to remember that the initial motivation is a good source of energy, and shouldn't be allowed get lost in endless discussions about what to do. A strategy is there to help you into action and not to immobilise you by causing long discussions.

Developing a strategy:

1) Define aims
2) Gather more information
3) Identify targets - people, groups, institutions
4) Choose your tactics and actions
5) Pull the plan together
6) Hold Regular Reviews

> Strategy:
> A systematic plan combining several actions to reach a certain goal.

Defining your aims

The first step on the road to strategy is to define your aim(s). What is it that you want to achieve? You should be able to sum up this up in one clear sentence: "Create an organic school garden", "Stop this development from destroying our village", "Live together in a co-operatively owned house".

Your group's aim should be realistic and achievable. Spend some time in a relaxed atmosphere (in a pub, or having dinner together or at a special meeting) exploring people's personal motivations and developing the group's aim. Be aware that people's aims may be different from each other. Don't worry too much if your group can't come up with a united long term vision, but you do need to agree on a common immediate or short term goal to be able to work together.

Once you have settled on an aim, you have to decide whether this is negotiable or non-negotiable - for example, would you be prepared to accept a more sympathetic / less destructive development in the village, or is your group aiming for "No new development in villageton"?

> **Developing group aims**
>
> Ask every group member to write down their own aims. Compare these - what are the similarities, where are the differences? Use this as the basis for developing the aim of your group.

Gathering more information

The next step is to gather more information. What do you need to know to achieve your aims? This could include environmental data, details about similar projects/campaigns or background information about companies/institutions/people involved. Accurate information will not only help you make a good plan and give you ideas for action, but also help you to convince local people and potential allies. But don't get paralysed by a mountain of irrelevant information...!

For example, if you are planning to set up a community garden, find out whether the council would/could support you through finding a site and providing funds. Are there any other organisations that could support you? Can you link up with other community garden groups or learn from them? What could stop the garden from going ahead? Is there anyone who is opposed to the idea and why? If anyone is opposed to your plans, what threat do they pose? What do the local residents think?

Make use of the internet and local libraries. For tips on how to research companies contact Corporate Watch (16b Cherwell St, Oxford OX41BG, Tel: 01865 791 391, Email: mail@corporatewatch.org). Their website has a wealth of information: www.corporatewatch.org)

Identify targets

In this part you are analysing the information you have already gathered. Start by looking at all the different people and institutions that have an interest in the issue. Who are the people you need to talk to/convince/pressure to achieve your aim? Here is a very useful tool for this sort of analysis:

Forcefield Analysis. There are various exercises that go under this name - this is the one we've found most useful. It helps you to recognise which 'players' you should be focussing on, and which ones are not worth too much effort.

First write the problem across the top of a big piece of paper (at least A2 - that's four times as big as A4), e.g. "Stopping the supermarket development". Draw a line along the bottom. This line is the *commitment line* and shows how strongly a party feels for or against the development. The left side of the paper is 'us' = strongly opposed, the far right is strongly in favour. People close to the middle are neutral towards the development.

Now draw another line down the centre of the page, top to bottom. This is the *power line* and shows how much influence a party has over the decision. The more power someone has the closer to the bottom they are.

Now plot the position of all the affected people, groups, institutions and authorities on the paper. What do you think is the position of local people, small shopkeepers, councillors, the local newspapers, your group, the developers? People may have power because of the law (like the council), or because of money (like the development firm), or because of commitment and beliefs (like us). In this example, the local member of parliament is neutral, and is far from the bottom line because, as MP, s/he has little power by law over local developments.
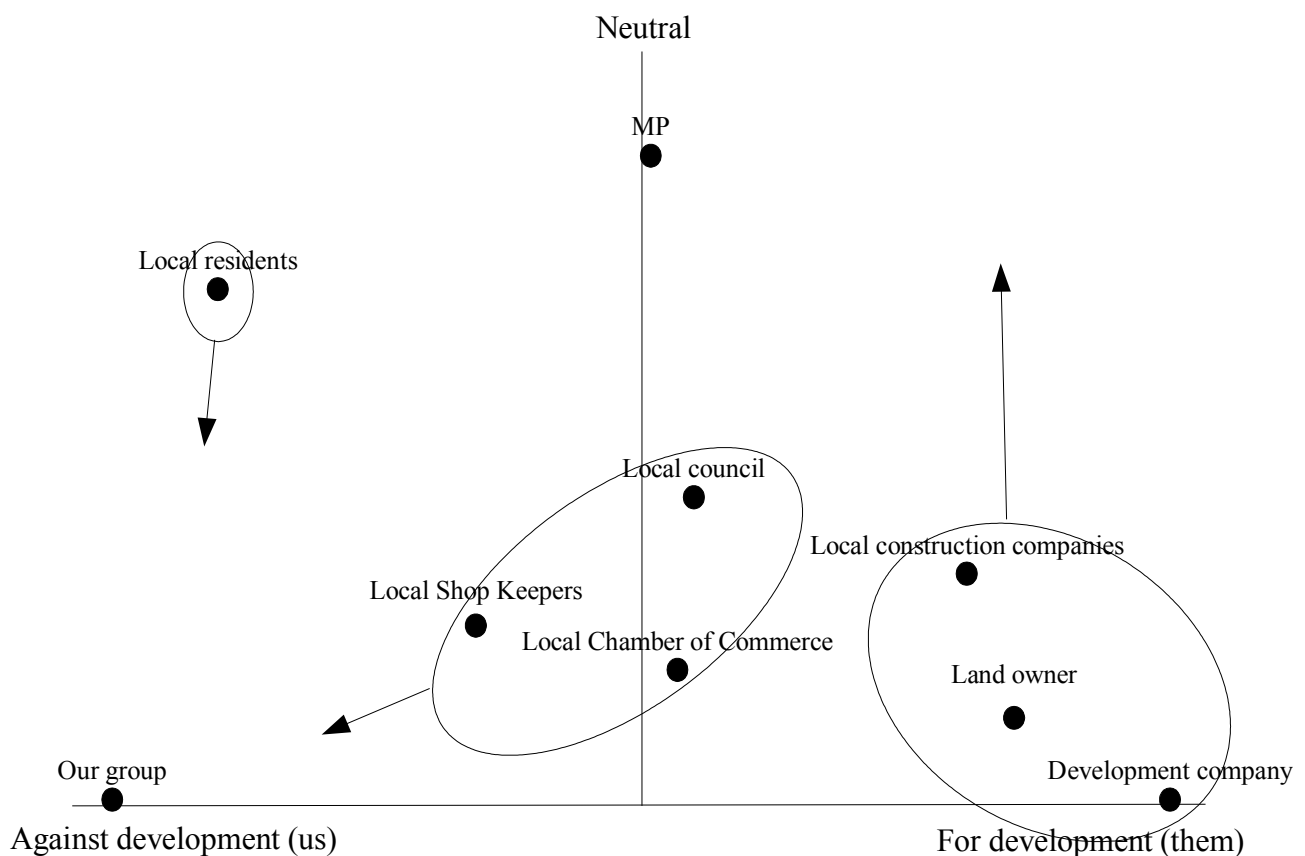
Mark the position of all the people/groups you can think of. Now look at each dot on the page, and work out how much effort it would be to drag that dot over to your side, and further down towards the bottom (ie get them to exercise more power). Think about the knock-on effects that would have.

In this example, local residents support your group, but aren't exercising much power. You have to think of ways of mobilising the general public to bring them closer to the line. Doing this will also help to bring the local council further over to your side of the paper, since local people will begin to lobby the council - so by dragging the *local residents* dot down, you can also drag the *local council* dot a little towards you too.

On the other hand, it will be very difficult to drag the *land owner*, *development company* and *local construction companies* to the other side of the neutral line. What you can do, however, is push them away from the bottom 'power' line, ie help them to lose interest in the development.

Choose your tactics

Once you have identified people/institutions to target, you need to decide on the best method to do this. Many groups do this by plunging straight into discussing the first one or two ideas that people come up with. Often they get stuck there for hours and time runs out before other (more interesting) options can be explored. This approach not only limits the choice of action, but also stifles creativity.
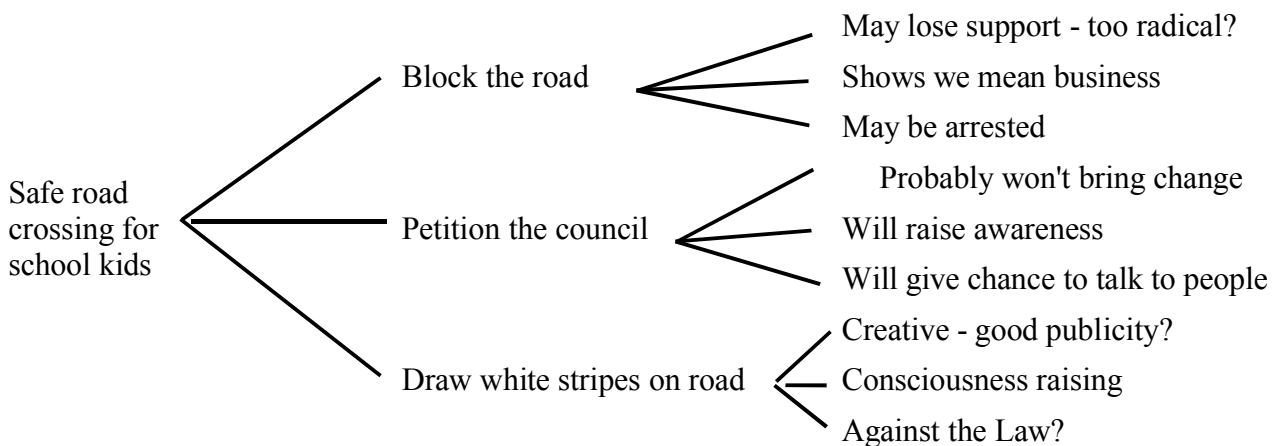
You can avoid this by using the following exercise:

⭐ **Action Brainstorm -** This tool helps to quickly gather a large number of ideas for actions you can do. The idea is to encourage creativity and free energy. Begin with stating the issue to be tackled. Ask people to say whatever comes into their heads as fast as possible - without censoring it. The crazier the ideas the better. This helps people to be inspired by each other. Have one or two note takers to write all the ideas down where everyone can see them. Make sure there is no discussion or comment on others' ideas. Structured thinking and organising can come afterwards. After the people run out of ideas check over the list of actions that has been generated and get short explanations for any that aren't clear.

Now you can move on to discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the different ideas. Make sure you don't discount crazier ideas out of hand. Sometimes these are the ones with the most potential. A good way of analysing actions is the

⭐ **Flowchart -** On the left side of a large sheet of paper write down the problem being adressed. In a column next to it list a number of actions that might be taken. Then write down the benefits, limitations and consequences of each action next to it.

Safe road crossing for school kids

Block the road
- May lose support - too radical?
- Shows we mean business
- May be arrested

Petition the council
- Probably won't bring change
- Will raise awareness
- Will give chance to talk to people

Draw white stripes on road
- Creative - good publicity?
- Consciousness raising
- Against the Law?

When you are analysing different types of actions and tactics it helps to look at what kind of skills people have and what they enjoy doing. People work better if they enjoy what they're doing, and so the best way to run a project or campaign is to make it fun! The following exercise helps you to

match people's skills and actions. It is also a very good way of generating new ideas for actions and for realizing how many resources you have at your disposal.
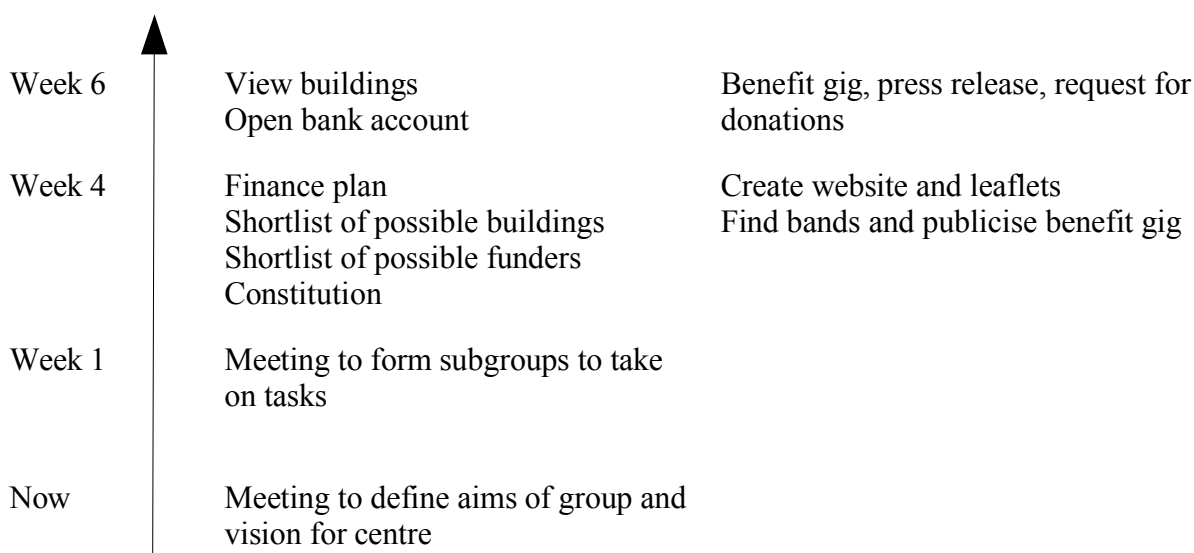
⭐**Skills - Task Match -** Cut up lots of pieces of paper - A4 cut into four pieces is a good size, and give everybody a few pieces and pens. Ask people to write down what skills, equipment or other resources they have access to (on separate pieces of paper). They don't have to have it themselves directly - it could be, for example, "the neighbour's trailer", "my son's computer and printer" or "the photocopier at work". Other examples could include things like "sewing", "time", "an ice-cream van". When everyone is finished writing, have a look at what you have - it's best to stick the pieces of paper on the wall with blue-tack. You'll be surprised at how many skills and useful things your group has access to. Move the pieces of paper around to make groups - "sewing" might go together with "theatre skills" to give you the idea of doing a street-carnival - possibly a lot more interesting than getting everyone doing press releases and leafleting.

Developing the plan

By now you should have a good idea of what kind of actions and tactics you want to go for. The next exercise helps you to form them into a time plan.

⭐**Time Line -** The purpose of a time-line is to give you an idea of how many different things you may have to do, and when.

In this example a group wants to set up a resource centre for local people and community groups to use. They started by working out what the overall time frame is - the aim is to have the centre up and running within six months. Then the group worked out what tasks need to be done by when. For example the funding application needs to be handed in quite soon, because it takes most funders two or three months to decide. But to be able to apply for funding the group needs a constituion, finance plan and a bank account. The group also needs some money straight away as well as publicity to get more people involved. The time line for the first few weeks looked like this:

Week 6	View buildings Open bank account	Benefit gig, press release, request for donations
Week 4	Finance plan Shortlist of possible buildings Shortlist of possible funders Constitution	Create website and leaflets Find bands and publicise benefit gig
Week 1	Meeting to form subgroups to take on tasks	
Now	Meeting to define aims of group and vision for centre	

When you've plotted out the course of the project/campaign in this way you can see how much work it will take and whether your plans are realistic. If you have huge gaps in your time line then you need to redistribute your activities or think more about what to do then. Be aware of your

limits in terms of time and energy. Starting off with lots of activity may be tempting but if this means that after two months everyone is burnt out, you should think again. It is definitely worth checking how much time people in the group are willing to give to the project.

As time goes on you might want to intensify your activities and increase the pressure by choosing more confrontational tactics.

⭐ **In order to...-** This is a very simple but effective tool to work out whether a course of action is realistic, or should be dropped in favour of something else. It can also show that an unrealistic sounding idea is perfectly practicable - so apply it to all your ideas!

Think of an action - by brainstorming, using the Skill-Task Match tool or by using whatever props you want - then complete the sentence "In order to {do action XYZ} . . .we need/have to/should...." This will help to work out what the action needs to be successful. You can then check whether there is enough energy and time in the group for this action.

Reviewing Your strategy and actions

In the day to day nitty gritty work it is easy to lose sight of the long-term aims. When a group gets stuck it helps to review what you set out to do and what you have achieved so far. It is also important for every group to recognise and celebrate its successes as well as learning from mistakes. As more information is discovered your strategy may need to change.

List all the activities of your group. What was good? What didn't work so well? What could be done differently in the future? Be aware that what some people feel to be negative might be a positive thing for others. It isn't necessary to agree on this.

When people are disillusioned and frustrated, it helps to look at the successes the group has had. When there is still a mountain of work to be done, it is easy to forget what has been achieved. Just put up a large piece of paper and ask people to list any successes, however small. These could be a mention in the newspaper, a successful fundraising event, making links with other groups, publishing a pamphlet. On a personal level people may have learnt new skills, feel more confident, got to know new people. Your group may also have a had a general knock-on effect on the community - neighbours might now talk to each other, people in the village liked the fundraising event and are now organising more etc.

Let's not forget that empowering people and building communities are really important in this disenfranchised society. They are major achievements, even if they are not a direct aim of your group.

Celebrate success whenever you have a chance!

Other things to consider

Burnout

If you use these tools properly, they can help you to avoid burnout. If you notice that anyone in your group is getting tired out, then see how they can pass on some of their responsibilities. If that isn't possible then re-evaluate your plans so that they're less intense. Everyone should be aware of their own personal limits, and not take on too much - again by mapping out your plans you can take account of people's limits and availability.

Underlying Values

When considering aims and tactics one question regularly crops up - is your group 'radical' or 'reformist'? Is your group wanting to improve the existing society or does it want to achieve a fundamental change in the way society works? People also have widely varying ideas about how change happens and this will influence the tactics they choose. However most groups mix their tactics and tools, regardless of political persuasion. For many mainstream groups direct action has become more acceptable and is often used to attract the media. You'll also often find the self-confessed anarchist lobbying local councillors, because sometimes it's the most efficient and effective way to achieve a particular goal. Turning the Tide have produced some briefings on the issue. Below is an excerpt. For more see www.turning-the-tide.org/infoSheets/power.htm

How change happens

Persuade the elite	letters, delegations, information-giving.
Coerce the elite	boycotts, demonstrations, non-cooperation.
Replace the elite	vote another party in (dubious, as people in power tend to fall into the structures and patterns of behaviour that they inherit.)
Become the elite	get elected, palace coup (but there is always the danger of being co-opted.)
Ignore the elite	direct action, just do whatever it is for yourselves, Gandhi's 'constructive programme' of making village India self-reliant and self-governing.
Abolish the elite	revolution, restructuring society to disperse the power.

(From Turning The Tide - "How Change Happens")

Seeds

for Change
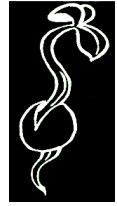
For more briefings on grassroots activism
and to find out about free workshops and training
have a look at our website:

www.seedsforchange.org.uk

Or contact us:

Seeds for Change Lancaster
96 Church St
Lancaster LA1 1TD
Tel: 0845 330 7583
lancaster@seedsforchange.org.uk
Scotland, Northern England and North Wales

Seeds for Change Oxford
16b Cherwell Street
Oxford OX4 1BG
Tel: 0845 458 4776
oxford@seedsforchange.org.uk
Southern England, South & Central Wales

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