There is no set blueprint for running a successful group, but there are some basic things you will have to do and meeting regularly is one of them. Getting together as a group on a regular basis is important so that you can talk, get to know each other and plan campaign actions and events. Meetings should be empowering and people should come away feeling energised and excited about taking action.

Most groups meet once a month, near the beginning of the month to tie in with the Think Global mailing.

Meeting less than once a month can make it difficult for new people to get involved (as they may have to wait two months before getting involved, and by then they may have lost interest or become busy) and can make it a lot harder to organise regular campaign actions and events. It also means that if someone misses a meeting, they have a long time to wait before the next one, which can make people feel ‘out of the loop’ or disengaged from the group.

Make sure your meeting is well publicised in advance. Keep your website updated with the details and have leaflets with your next meeting on stalls and at events. You can order leaflets for your group by emailing activism@wdm.org.uk

You will need to decide during your meeting how many of the suggested activities you can manage as a group in the coming months. There may also be local events or issues related to global justice which you want to get involved in. Although WDM local groups are encouraged to prioritise the campaigns we are running nationally to ensure our campaigning effectiveness, it can be useful for the group to be involved in local campaigns. Going with where the enthusiasm lies is important.

Encourage everyone in the group to read Think Global before the meeting so you don’t have to spend time in the meeting going through it, and can use the meeting for planning and discussion.

You can sign up to receive Think Global by email at www.wdm.org.uk or by emailing activism@wdm.org.uk with ‘Think Global’ in the heading.

Steve Huxton, Cardiff WDM

The most important thing is that people walk away from meetings feeling better for having been there, believing they can make change happen, and looking forward to taking action and getting involved.

PARTICIPATION

Participation is vital for a dynamic and exciting meeting. From feeling welcome and confident
enough to contribute, to helping shape a meeting’s agenda, participation by everyone present will make a meeting more interesting and productive.

Tips on how to encourage participation:
• Welcome people at the beginning of the meeting and introduce newcomers.
• Give everyone the chance to speak.
• Share roles in the meeting: encourage different people to facilitate and take notes each week.
• Try to avoid too much jargon, or as a group put together a ‘jargon buster’ at the start.
• Share tasks and encourage newcomers to take things on.
• Try a ‘go-round’ to get everyone’s opinion on something or to see what ideas people have (a go round is when everyone takes a turn to speak with no interruption).
• Try splitting into smaller groups or pairs to get a discussion going. This can help some people feel less intimidated about speaking.
• Arrange the chairs in a circle as this can feel more inviting and less formal than sitting round a table.

An interesting agenda
The best meetings feel worthwhile and productive. Varying the issues discussed and the ways in which meetings take place can help keep people motivated. Group meetings should be enjoyable!
• As a group establish a few aims or expected outcomes for the meeting. What do you want to get out of it?
• You can try setting the agenda together, or asking for suggestions before the meeting takes place.
• Start the meeting with a short video or piece of exciting news.
• Finish the meeting with action points for different people to take on. This can help people feel involved and have more ownership over the group’s activities.
• Take time to chat and get to know each other. It can be nice to have an informal social after the meeting by going to a café or a pub.
• Celebrate successes and positive actions!

Facilitation
Good facilitation is crucial for making people feel included and able to participate, making the meeting flow and keeping it on time. Facilitation doesn’t have to fall on the chair or one ‘facilitator’ – it is the responsibility of the group to help the meeting flow and keep people engaged.
• Welcome everyone to the group and go over any housekeeping issues (e.g. location of toilets or tea and coffee).
• Go through the agenda at the start so people know what to expect and can add things that are missing.
• Keep the meeting focused and make sure you are getting things done. This can help prevent it becoming a talking shop.
• Take breaks. If you feel the energy levels are dropping or discussions are getting stuck in a rut, a short break can refresh everybody.
• Ask for feedback on how the meetings are run. Find out what could work better and what lessons you can learn for next time.
Flip chart paper, or big sheets of paper can be useful for recording ideas during brainstorms, writing out the agenda or organising plans.

**Where and when to meet**

Think carefully about where you meet. Groups meet in lots of different kinds of places including community centres, development education/environmental centres, rooms attached to pubs and their own homes. Cost is obviously an important factor to consider but it is equally important to think about how inviting your meeting place might be to potential members. Is it easy to get to in the evening? Is it inviting? Would anyone be happy to meet there?

Meetings in cold and draughty halls, for example, are unlikely to succeed in the long run – but meetings in more pleasant or social surroundings are. Meetings in private homes can seem exclusive (without intending to be) as can meetings in religious buildings. Meetings in pubs may be off-putting to others.

“Holding our meetings in a cool and central new coffee shop has helped to keep people coming along. It’s free to meet as long as we buy a coffee.”

Shropshire WDM

Tips for when and where to meet:

- Make sure your meeting doesn’t clash with other significant meetings or events that might draw people away.
- Make sure your venue is easily accessible by public transport.
- Does your venue have wheelchair access or provisions for the hard-of-hearing?
- The venue needs to be big enough, but not too big as this might make the meeting feel tiny.
- Try shaking things up once in a while and having a social or informal event in a different place.

**FURTHER READING**

Seeds for Change and Rhizome are training collectives who have plenty of free resources about meetings and facilitation on their websites.

Seeds for Change: www.seedsforchange.org.uk
Rhizome: www.rhizome.coop

WDM staff can run facilitation workshops, so if your group is interested in facilitation training contact activism@wdm.org.uk
What is facilitation?

Facilitation is about helping a group to have an efficient and inclusive meeting by facilitating discussion. It’s also about making sure everyone can be involved in discussions and making decisions. It combines a series of roles and tasks. Sometimes these are taken on by one person – the facilitator, however there’s no reason why they can’t be shared between one or more people in the meeting.

Key facilitation tasks

- Help the group plan the meeting’s agenda. Think about timing and order of agenda items, and how to tackle each point.
- Prepare the room so it’s comfortable and everyone can participate; sort out materials the meeting might need e.g. paper, pens.
- Introduce the meeting and what it’s about and how the meeting works.
- Keep the group to the agenda and decision-making process.
- Keep the meeting focused on one item at a time.
- Help everyone to participate. Keep track of who wants to speak. Draw out quiet people and limit those who talk a lot.
- Clarify and summarise points, ensuring everyone understands the discussion.
- Ensure that action points and decisions are recorded.
- Keep the meeting to time.
- Listen for underlying issues, concerns or emotions. Help bring them out so they can be dealt with.

Taken from Seeds for Change, Facilitation meetings: a short guide, www.seedsforchange.org.uk