

# How to start a group



A basic guide to getting started with setting up a political or campaigning organisation.

There are four simple requirements for an effective organisation.

## People

People is pretty self-explanatory. To have a group you need more than one person and really at least five before it becomes sustainable. For example, for an anarchist group, in most places anarchists are not very hard to come across. In most countries at least 1 in a 1,000 to 1 in 10,000 people might consider themselves an anarchist. So even in fairly small towns there are likely to be at least a dozen or so 'anarchists'.

Unfortunately the next step most groups take is to try and set up a group which includes just about everyone that adopts the label. This may seem like the logical thing but problems arise when we look at the next two requirements.

## Politics

For a group to be effective it has to have a clear idea of what it is fighting for, not simply what it is fighting against. And it must agree what the best tactics are to use and that everyone in the group will use follow the agreed tactics. This will be discussed at length later.

## Money

In order to function an organisation needs a paper, leaflets, rooms to met in, money for mail-outs and a dozen other items that require lots of the green stuff. Ways of tackling this requirement include:

- Ignoring it - Which means things only take place if someone is willing to fund them out of their own pocket. This is pretty common but if course results in things not getting done. It also gives the funder undue influence.
- Use 'criminal' means to raise money - This sometimes happens but is generally not a good move as sooner or later people get caught and end up in prison or worse. What's more if you come under any sort of police investigation it will rapidly become apparent that your getting funds from some dodgy source which will in itself attract further investigation. It also gives the state a good excuse for a 'non-political' clamp down.
- Organise fund raisers - Although this can work well for special purchases, like say a printing press if its used for regular bills (printing, rent etc.) it soon turns into a massive drag and waste of resources. You can spend half of the time discussing gigs etc. which is off-putting.
- Membership levy/subs - This is what many groups use. For example members contribute 5% of their gross income on a weekly or monthly basis. A percentage system is fairer then a flat rate as an unemployed member (on £100 a week) pays £5 where as someone working and earning £500 a week pays at least £25. This gives an income to pay for a paper, magazine, leaflets, rooms and even to subsidise travel to demos for unemployed members. Of course it also has a negative effect on the first requirement - people - as some people may be unwilling to loose the equivalent of a couple of beers a week. Which brings us to the fourth requirement - commitment. [Read more about financing your group](#)

## **Commitment**

The amount of work you do and the amount of money your willing to put in depends on you feeling good about the organisation. It is adversely affected if you feel you are being used, or that other people are not willing to contribute their share. That much is obvious. However its also true that your commitment will be dependant on how much you agree with what the group is doing/saying and whether the groups seems to be going somewhere or just treading water. It's easy to keep people around when lots of stuff is happening, the difficult thing is the periods in between bursts of activity.

Some favour a high commitment oriented group over a 'as many people as possible' one. With time the high commitment group can come to involve a lot of people where as often the reverse is not true. Enough background, here's some concrete ideas.

Find another four or five people that are willing to do something serious. You may know this many already if not get an address you can print on leaflets and start leafleting demo's etc. with anarchist stuff. Get a flag or a banner together. Maybe call a public meeting on a relevant issue see who turns up.

Once you get your four or five people be prepared to spend a couple of years getting your act together before you start to expand. Agree on a membership levy and conditions of membership. Write down agreed perspectives and strategy for promoting anarchism and getting involved in activity. Start publishing a regular paper arguing these ideas. Sell it through bookshops, campaign meetings and demos. Get involved around struggles and develop respect for your group as good activists and people with good ideas. Don't concentrate on talking to anarchists, concentrate on talking to activists. Find out about the national groups and travel to nearby demos/ conferences. Make a banner you can bring on marches.

Above all you need to be patient. A big problem is the 'revolution next year' syndrome where you hype yourself up to expecting a lot and then get disappointed when it does not materialise. Work out where you are going but be prepared to go there slowly, as I said above its likely to be two years before you get any serious return on your work.

*libcom.org 2005*

*This text is adapted from [The Struggle Site](#).*