

## **Promoting your community group**

Taking the time to promote your community group effectively can offer many practical benefits:

- it can help you attract more members and volunteers
- it can lead to better relations with others in the community
- it can raise your profile and standing in the local community
- it might help with getting funding
- it motivates the group and also shows others that you are doing something.

However, before you rush into publicising and promoting your community group and what it does, you will need to give some thought to:

- what information/messages do you want to communicate?
- who do you want to get your message across to? who is your target audience?
- how can you reach these people and what are the best ways of doing this?
- what do you want the result to be, e.g. attracting greater community involvement, raising awareness of a particular local issue?
- what resources do you have to put into promoting your group – perhaps you have artistic volunteers or ones who are competent on computers, access to cheap photocopying facilities, or contacts at local newspapers.

The answers to these questions will then give you a clearer idea of the steps you need to take and which practical ways of publicising your group will prove to be the most useful.

### **So do some research! Find out:**

- what local publications and newsletters exist
- what noticeboards are in your local area
- who else regularly puts out information locally
- what other services/facilities could help you with distributing or displaying your publicity e.g. schools, GP surgeries or health centres, community centres, post offices, local shops and businesses, housing offices, sports or social clubs, libraries or the mobile library service etc.
- do any of your group have contacts that could be useful?
- where do existing groups and organisations get together
- which local groups and organisations regularly get positive coverage in local papers or on local radio and how do they do it.

Many community groups give one person on the committee, or a volunteer, the overall responsibility for dealing with publicity and promotion. Other groups find that it is a significant workload that requires input from more than one person and form a publicity sub-committee. Either way, it is essential that regular updates on activity are given at committee meetings so that everyone is aware what is happening. It is also worth exploring

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whether there are opportunities for you to work with other local groups in jointly promoting what you are doing and share the work and the benefits.

It is definitely worth investing some serious time in promoting your group and telling people about your successes. Often you only really see the benefits if you keep plugging away at it and keep up a steady flow of information and publicity material. Unfortunately many community groups can experience the downsides of promotion, particularly in the local press – their activities are only publicised when there is something negative or damaging to report. It is also an ongoing task that doesn't have a natural end of "we've done publicity, so what's next?"

### **Practical publicity materials:**

- word-of-mouth – use your management committee, volunteers, members, local councillors and MPs, community workers in the locality, the wider community, and other local community and voluntary sector networks to spread the word about what you are doing.
- leaflets – should be attractive with an eye-catching cover. They don't have to be professionally produced – often the most effective leaflets are cheap and cheerful. Do make the content interesting and to the point. Don't overload them with unnecessary information and be clear about what people can gain from getting involved with your group or service. Do think in advance how you are going to distribute them – are there sufficient volunteers to drop them to every household in the area or do you need to find money for postage costs?
- posters – should be short and snappy, eye-catching and visually stimulating. They should not include anything but the most essential information, which can be picked up instantly by your target audience. Don't forget to include a contact number for further information.
- displays – are there events taking place in your area where you could have a display stand or exhibition?
- newsletters – many groups produce their own community newsletter which can be a very useful means of keeping people informed. However, newsletters often take lots of time to produce unless you have lots of material readily available, can be expensive to photocopy and difficult to distribute without the support of willing volunteers. You also need to be sure that you can actually keep it going for a period of time before you begin producing it. A better option might be to find out what newsletters are produced by other agencies (e.g. Councils for Voluntary Service, Single Regeneration Budget newsletters, local authority news sheets) and submit articles about your work every so often or negotiate to have a regular slot or column in their publication.
- press releases – many groups get lots of publicity from being featured in local newspapers and on local radio stations. One of the major benefits of this form of publicity is that it's free!
- events and meetings – tap into local networks and forums, many of which have slots for sharing and exchanging information.
- website presence – this method of promotion will become more of a reality in the future as increasing numbers of community groups secure funding for computers, but

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it is probably not the most effective means of promoting a group with a very local presence.

As mentioned above many groups find it valuable to strike up positive relationships with local newspapers and radio. So what do you need to tell them to grab their attention?

### **Tips for writing press releases:**

- think of an interesting or catchy headline to grab the editor's interest
- the first section should include "the Five W's" - Who, What, Where, When and Why
- keep it short and to the point - it shouldn't be longer than 1 or 2 pages of A4 paper, typed in double spacing
- include at least one brief quote and state who said it
- sell the local angle of your story
- put a contact person and number at the bottom and print it on your group's letterhead
- include a photo to the press if possible or suggest photo opportunities
- send the press release in plenty of time to meet their deadlines
- phone up the newspaper/radio/TV and check who the press release should be sent to
- always follow up the press release – make sure that the named contact received it, find out what they are going to do with it and if they need any more information.

You should keep a scrapbook/file of examples of your publicity material and relevant cuttings from newspapers, newsletters etc. This is a good way of reviewing your work and reminding you what you've achieved over a period of time. Potential funders often like to see examples of these, and the cuttings can be used as display material in the future, at public meetings etc. Wherever possible try and get photographs taken of events and activities that you have held so that you have a range of material to draw on for display purposes.

*For further advice on **Promoting your Community Group** contact:  
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