

# Setting up a new group or student society.

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If you want to set up a new group make sure you let us know. The contact details for your regional campaigner are at the back page of this toolkit and they are there to provide advice, support and materials. Some of our campaign groups have been around for many years, and by joining our activist network on The Enabler [www.oxfamblogs.org/enabler](http://www.oxfamblogs.org/enabler) you'll be able to link up with some of them and get the benefit of their advice and ideas!

## What's Oxfam's role?

It is useful to decide who in the group will take on which roles and responsibilities, for example: group co-ordinator, treasurer, media, events, constituency contact, newsletter editor etc. This may help you get new members as you can advertise a specific role at the local volunteering centre (eg, "Media Co-ordinator needed for Oxfam campaigns group"). Your Community & Activism Campaigner will have example job descriptions for a range of roles.

You should avoid relying on people to do the same tasks year on year. By sharing the responsibilities you avoid people feeling overly relied upon. You will also develop the skills of your members by giving them experience of different types of activity. All members of the Group should act in accordance with Oxfam's culture and beliefs – respecting alternative points of view and valuing diversity.

## Participative meetings for effective action

Meetings are a good way to share ideas and organise effective action. They should be *accessible, friendly, effective, organised, motivating* and *action-focused*. An agenda can help you to ensure that everything you need to cover gets discussed. Write down action points and key decisions for reference at the next meeting, and to help people who weren't present but are interested in staying involved. There are many different things you can do: invite a speaker, organise a skill-sharing session, or arrange a social event.

## Communicating with your members

Clear lines of communication are important to make your Group a success. Some of the options are *newsletters, minutes of meetings, phone calls, email groups* and *websites*. Check that people are happy to share their details with other group members/Oxfam. If you're not sure, it's best to use the 'bcc' option when you send out emails so that people do not see other email addresses. Please ensure that people know what they are signing up for when they give you their email address, and be clear how their data will be stored and used.

In addition to your own written communications, there are publications available directly from Oxfam; Change magazine and Activist News. If members want to receive these please tell your local Community & Activism Campaigner.



## Machynlleth Oxfam Group

The Machynlleth Oxfam group started life in 1984 as a 'Hungry for Change' group working on Aid, Trade and Arms. Over the last 25 years we've got involved in 'Walk for the World', 'Bread not Bombs', 'Drop the Debt', and more recently the huge climate change march, 'The Wave'. I started the Machynlleth group when I had small children and felt the pain and despair of parents not being able to feed, clothe, educate or protect their children from disease. The injustice and hypocrisy of the economic and political systems made me angry. I could not see how any system could flourish based on exploitation, and saw inequality as the real threat to world peace.

I set up a stall at a charity fair inviting people to join; I had to tell the first person that the group only consisted of me but he became our first chair. Since then we have run annual Christmas fairs and summer festivals, participated in the Machynlleth carnival, and held open garden events. We have collected items from a book-bank for the Oxfam shop in Aberystwyth over a number of years. We have organised political hustings, run disaster relief collections, coordinated street petitions and leafleting, produced street theatre, and sponsored fasts, to list just some of our activities. The best thing we have done I think is just to keep on going, year in year out.

I remember standing on the street in the 80s and having people seriously telling us that the poor are poor because they are feckless, lazy and need teaching how to grow things! Thinking has changed and now it is normal for people to believe that hunger can be eliminated, to respect the autonomy of people in developing countries, to think that we should all have an equal right to trade and get a fair price, and that we have human rights to a peaceful family life, education, protection from slavery and so on. There's such a long way to go and such a lot to learn, I hope that the global disaster of climate change, that we have set in motion through stupidity, ignorance and greed, will teach us quickly the respect we should have for the planet and all its peoples.

*Victoria Bamford*

## Attracting new members and keeping existing members interested.

- Ask yourself what the group wants to do more of. What new skills are needed to achieve this?
- Think about why a potential new recruit might want to join the group. What sorts of activities might they want to take part in? What might they want to achieve?
- Materials – put together a general leaflet describing the group's activities, and a sign-up sheet for your events. Consider where you will advertise, and to whom? What is likely to appeal to your chosen audience? What is the effect of the language you use in your materials?
- You could invite new members to a group meeting, campaigning activity, or social event. Try to ensure people feel positive about what they can achieve, and know what action they can take next.

## Finances and fundraising

It is Oxfam's policy that volunteers may claim expenses reasonably incurred in the course of their activities on Oxfam's behalf. What expenses may be claimed is set out in Oxfam's Volunteering Policy:

[www.oxfam.org.uk/get\\_involved/volunteer/policy](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/volunteer/policy)

Your group may raise funds as well as campaigning. It is not legitimate simply to use the money you raise from the public to fund your campaigning activities, although a proportion of the funds you raise may be used to cover expenses. This is because Oxfam has a duty to account to the public for all the funds raised, and to explain how they are used. Oxfam's auditors require us to provide information on all our financial activities, including the activities of Oxfam groups. Further details of how to deal with legitimate expenses are contained in the Financial Guidelines for groups. Your Treasurer should already have a copy of these, or you can ask your Community & Activism Campaigner.

If you want to get involved in more fundraising you may be able to get support from a Community Fundraiser in your regional office – contact them to find out. Alternatively, suggestions for fundraising activities can be found in the *Oxfam fundraising kit*: [www.oxfam.org.uk/fundraise](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/fundraise)

## Representing Oxfam

Oxfam is lucky to have built trust and respect in the UK, and the survival of our life-saving work around the world depends on it. As an Oxfam activist we trust you to do what you can to uphold Oxfam's reputation and not take it for granted.

## General conduct

In particular, we'd like you to:

- Try to reflect Oxfam's values in the way you represent the organisation. Show consideration and respect for other people and their points of view, both within and outside the organisation.
- Be open and honest about your relationship with Oxfam and whether you are communicating your own views or Oxfam's – don't paint a personal opinion as an Oxfam position.
- Respect any requests to keep sensitive information to yourself.
- Be aware that, as an Oxfam activist, your opinions about Oxfam can have a lasting effect on those around you, for better or for worse.

Act and communicate in a way that best represents Oxfam, especially at events and meetings or in communication with third parties. Never do anything that could bring the good name of Oxfam into disrepute.



## Manchester and Liverpool Oxfam University Societies

59 students from the Manchester and Liverpool Oxfam University Societies and one polar bear who wants to save the humans joined together in December 2009 to make an epic hitchhiking trip to Copenhagen...

This really great project was co-organised by the Manchester and Liverpool University societies to raise awareness and funds for climate change. The work was done over a six-month period and involved 'adopting' an MEP who members met with multiple times, including at the big climate change march in Copenhagen. Lots of media work culminated in a small group of the hitchhikers interviewing Ed Miliband on the BBC.

A multitude of small teams hitchhiked for three days to Copenhagen raising awareness for climate change as they went along. It was a great event that filled the groups with energy and enthusiasm (despite the lack of a decent climate change deal) and really strengthened the university groups. The success of the project led to the Liverpool Oxfam group winning a university societies award for their work, and the bonds between the two university groups are now really strong.

Lucy Coen (one of the volunteer organisers) said: 'Being a chair of the Liverpool university society and organising the hitchhike to Copenhagen has really made my university life special. I can't imagine what uni would have been like without being in the Oxfam society – it has taught me so much and given me opportunities to do things I never would have imagined before going to uni. I'm now going on to become an Oxfam school speaker and feel so passionate about Oxfam as an organisation that does so much good in the world and gives volunteers such an opportunity to really get stuck in and take action on poverty!'

