

Local Groups' Weekend 2017

Saturday evening Business Plan Development – Local Groups' workstream

This activity took the form of a speed dating session with seven pre-determined topics set out over tables, each table having 4 people and each person having a different coloured button. Every 5 minutes a bell would ring to signal one of three activities at the table – individual thought and making notes about the topic; group discussion on everyone's thoughts; and finally, agreeing the five top suggestions in relation to the topic at that table. At the end of each 15 minutes the bell was rung again and everyone moved in a different direction to a different table to meet up with a different group of people to consider the next topic. Each delegate had the opportunity to comment on 5 of the topics during the time available generating up to 25 suggestions for each topic under consideration. (There was understandably some duplication)

The output from the activity, in no particular order, was as follows:

As a local group what sort of support would you welcome from the National Committee?

- Guidelines on the effective use of email and the LDWA website for performing key tasks
- An improved website, particularly a good search facility to find things that are useful
- Specific support for struggling groups
- How to use new technology, e.g. setting up a local walks list
- Tell us what you need us to do – don't faff about! Particularly in relation to the new constitution and data protection
- Best practice guidelines and checklists for specific issues
- Coordination across groups to avoid reinventing the wheel
- Assistance in pooling information e.g. for recruiting volunteers
- Avoid interfering with groups on local items or issues except when absolutely necessary
- Help with major legal issues, e.g. insurance, legal etc
- Do some national marketing campaigns which focus on local groups (not just posters)
- Share information amongst groups where there is expert knowledge e.g. on PACER, Social Media, etc
- Don't focus too much on Business Plans – focus on action required in relation to having a good internet or things to do with membership
- Come and talk to us on our walks
- Look at our merchandise – does it do a marketing job for us or not?
- Produce some freebies for use with marketing
- Support websites where needed
- More frequent feedback from NEC meetings
- Difficult to check membership if people claim to belong to an affiliated cub – don't have affiliated members
- Don't allow events to clash – especially neighbouring ones
- Limit bureaucracy to a low level
- IT support for group officers
- Local issues that require legal guidance
- Guidelines, e.g. Health and Safety
- Standard presentation that could be used to promote LDWA by local groups
- Support to understand and appreciate how social media can impact on the local group

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If we develop a Volunteer Support Programme what sort of things should it include?

- Ways to help the volunteers feel valued and needed
- Feed and look after them at events
- Ensure they are aware of what they can claim for and what they need to provide themselves in advance, e.g. petrol, food, etc
- Good, clear instructions and training if necessary so they what to do and how to do whatever job they are given
- Have a central database of volunteers to draw upon to help at local/regional events.
- Document Library of 'How to' guides and checklists, e.g. Risk Assessments
- Coordinated training topics and methodology across the organisation
- All accessible, brief and plain English, e.g. Insurance
- Define what jobs, roles and opportunities volunteers could take on
- Have a house style of customer services – remember we are all volunteers
- Guidelines for particular tasks, e.g. catering, PACER etc.
- Have a directory of willing local 'experts' to assist with particular tasks
- Where to go for particular training, e.g. walk leading, mountain safety, first aid etc
- Include specific training at future local groups' weekends
- Ideas for a group programme for volunteers
- Identify different styles of training to suit individuals and topics, e.g. face to face, checklists, online learning etc
- Provide training and support
- Find out about people's special skills and aptitudes
- Let volunteers know what jobs/opportunities there are about
- Some sort of feedback process to get information back from volunteers and then make sure it is taken into account and we do something about it
- Ways to thank people
- Use buddies to help new volunteers
- Examples of best practice
- Outdoors first aid training
- Navigation/GPS training
- Training in the use of PACER or other event management software

What would you expect/like to see in a Local Group's 'Toolkit' to support group officers and members?

- Data Protection Guidelines, clear and concise
- Health/Safety/Hygiene Guidelines
- Generic risk assessment
- Contact list of service providers
- PACER, SiEntries generic information and instructions
- Social Media Guidelines
- Role Descriptions for Committee Posts
- New Member standard Introductory Letter – could be tailored for local use afterwards

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- Ideas and materials for advertising the group locally
- Catering guidelines
- Easy to find and up to date guidelines e.g. risk assessments and templates
- Best practice for challenge events, etc
- Near misses – shared to avoid making the same mistakes (Lessons Learned Logs)
- Standard templates/forms for finance, e.g. to present the accounts
- Clarity of data protection rules
- Sharing of good practice ideas
- Event planning template, including the risk assessment
- Walk leader's template and guidance
- AGM template (for local group AGM) including 'standard' forms
- Group accounts format and how-to template
- Media presentation template
- New members welcome guidance
- Insurance details. dogs policy, accident form, personal consent
- National expenses form and guidelines as to what can be claimed locally and nationally
- Details of local group or national 'experts'

What makes a great social walk?

- A good leader
- The route – well planned, interesting, informative
- Camaraderie in the group
- Keeping a group together regarding pace and terrain where they can keep each other going and support each other, as a group
- Refreshments, breaks and comfort stops
- Good varied route
- Competent and knowledgeable leader
- Pace appropriate for the majority of the group
- Good places to stop, e.g. sheltered, views, or cafes/pubs for lunches or end
- Good start/finish venue with free/cheap and easily accessible parking and toilets
- Good friendly welcome to newbies and visitors
- Points of interest where the walk leader has done some background research
- Group support for the leader – recognise the work the leader has put it to make it a good day out for everyone
- Well behaved participants
- Encourage participation – nurturing of group contributions
- Good planning in all respects
- The weather!
- Leader having respect and empathy for all participants
- Variety of walks and variety within the walk
- Optimum number and speed of the event – be prepared to say walk is full
- Walks in new areas or on different paths
- Reasonable speed so as not to lose interest but need to accommodate all walkers
- Good weather

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- Local history
- Keep to advertised mileage within a couple of miles
- If something is going wrong be prepared to think on the hoof and change plans

What is the best thing about using Social Media with your local group? Which Social Media service do you use most?

- Connecting people – all group members are able to keep in touch with what is happening in the group
- Ease and speed of access and transfer of information – immediacy
- Sharing of activity within the group to a wide audience
- Appeals to the younger element
- Ability to demonstrate/utilise visual elements such as photographs and graphics
- Enables easy and regular contact
- Can share photographs easily
- Good to engage younger people
- Easy way to contact members
- Generates interest in group activities
- Promotes walks and encourages people to go on them
- It is easier to put photos onto Facebook than onto the LDWA website gallery
- Need to be aware of data protection as it relates to Facebook and putting up photos of people
- Facebook is the most widely used of the different services
- Some groups don't use social media at all
- Important that everyone in the group knows what media is being used to communicate with them
- Easy to distribute photos using electronic communications to reinforce the good experience of the walk
- Bulk emails to provide additional information prior to a social walk is very effective
- Best thing is that social media is free!
- Reaches a non traditional LDWA audience
- Use in the promotion of local groups
- Advertising a specific event and reminding people is easy
- Heads up for short term updates
- Speed and immediacy
- Email should be included as a social media

Why do some groups decline and what makes others successful?

- Poor leadership leads to decline
- Motivating leadership leads to success
- Aging demographic leads to decline
- Attracting and involving new members leads to success
- Different objectives and infighting between group leaders is damaging
- A strong group of officers working together makes for success

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- No suitable meeting place except on walks makes things difficult
- Effective communications within and outside of the group helps success
- Lack of fresh ideas and using the same walks and routes leads to decline
- New walks, figure of 8 loops where people have options etc leads to success
- A dynamic group committee with periodic change so no-one feels over burdened makes for success
- Sufficient social and challenge activities to attract new members
- Fun stuff like weekends away and other walk related activities
- The ability to draw new people in to balance the existing members so there are a variety of types and grades of walkers throughout the year
- Geography can both help and hinder. Sparse and widespread populations can make it difficult to get participation. Need closer associations with neighbouring groups
- Reputation. Good reputation makes a successful group as word spreads
- Good walks programme with variety and quality feeds into reputation
- Being welcoming and accommodating
- Generation 1 don't trust generation 2 to be able to run a successful group and then it spirals downwards
- Ageing groups not attracting new members leads to decline
- Many alternative and competing other activities, e.g. cycling, running
- A cluster of groups in a geographical area can lead to low participation for each of them
- Difficulty in recruiting younger people
- Lack of people volunteering to lead walks
- Some groups are elitist and therefore have a lack of appeal to outsiders, visitors etc
- Lack of communication within and between groups can lead to decline

How can Local Groups help to recruit and retain members?

- Advertise on local radio especially with the 50th anniversary coming up
- Use social media e.g. Meet Up and Facebook
- Use Leaflets, electronic and paper drops using online sales, especially Amazon
- Maintain new members by talking to them and encourage them to try a walk with a 'slower' leader. Encourage them to share their own experiences, build them up.
- Use on-line questionnaires like Survey Monkey to find out what people want
- Promote membership at all Challenge events
- Raise the profile at National level using electronic means where possible
- Encourage support for new walk leaders with support for training e.g. First Aid, navigation, etc
- Target new members – make it the role of one person in each group
- Target DoE/Youth groups/Scouts etc
- Clearly advertise some walks as being easy/moderate/suitable for new people (this would also suit older members who perhaps don't get out as much for fear of 'keeping people back')
- Customer service - welcome new members, talk to them, look after them
- Get in touch with new members by email or phone
- Pinch Ramblers when they are ready to upgrade to longer walks

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- Be aware of marketing with low key opportunities, e.g. with the Business Card
- Use Challenge events – use a pricing incentive, link to website with event communications
- Local publicity to explain what the LDWA is (Best Kept Secret)
- Put on shorter walks and taster days
- Work on retaining members – a lot easier than trying to attract brand new ones
- Word of mouth is important so make sure every event is a happy and successful one
- Ask existing members to encourage others to come along
- Target people who are interested in walking
- Weekends away helps in forming groups and friendships