

FACT SHEET

A Guide to Action Planning in different situations

This note looks at how Community Champions can use the Action Planning game in a range of different ways to make it as user-friendly as possible.

The EAC Action Planning game has proved to be a very useful tool. But it has its' limitations. A lot of the actions are aimed at groups who have offices and who have a moderately high level of resources. Ideas about bulk-buying or switching off photocopiers may not mean much to groups struggling to exist. The actions on the cards have indeed been criticised by some groups as being too expensive.

So how can Champions use the game most effectively? This sheet covers some general ideas and then looks at a few specific ideas.

Making it accessible

Most Champions have probably worked out that to run through all the cards with a group takes quite a while. So the first action may be to limit the number of cards you use. This is not just about saving time; it's about making the actions as relevant as possible to the group you are going to be working with.

Selecting the cards needs to be done carefully: try not to make too many assumptions about a group: just because you're working with a refugee support group in an inner city area doesn't mean that they might not be interested in creating a wildlife area (but they may not have the time or resources to consider 'making your own free electricity'). You may think that a youth group won't want to consider a Parish Plan but you can easily be wrong.

One way to get this right is to work with one or two of the group's key members beforehand. Even if you can't show them the cards, talk to them on the phone and discuss the kinds of things the group has done and might like to do. Think about what their next steps might be and select the cards accordingly. Always throw in a few cards that might push a group outside their 'comfort zone' – you never know you might inspire them! Always keep in at least 20 cards; otherwise you may only have a very few selected for the prioritisation work.

Bear in mind some key points:

- **'We don't have an office' or 'we meet in someone's house'** If the group is working in this way, then immediately you can cut out about 12 cards which will not be relevant (but bear in mind that some energy saving cards may be relevant to people's own lives).
- **Urban and rural** Reducing the number of miles people travel in their cars to meetings probably won't be very relevant to a residents group on an estate in a big city. Similarly setting meeting times to allow for people to get there on public transport won't go down well in a village that lost its bus service ten years ago!
- **Richer and poorer** It's not just about the 'buying solar panels' card. There's quite a few cards that would involve quite a bit of expenditure. But (as above) don't assume that because a group doesn't have much funds it won't want to invest. They may just be waiting for a good idea on what to apply for funding for to a local regeneration agency.
- **Accessibility** If you're working with any group working on disability issues it should be obvious that care will be needed in selecting cards. You should definitely consult with a group member and you may want to add some others (see below)

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- **Older and younger** There may not be as many differences here as you might think (although bulk-buying of food is not likely to appeal to teenagers...) but you may want to think carefully. Both groups may have some time of their hands (and thus be interested to organise visits etc.) or they may already be very active on certain issues which you'll need to fit in with.

Training and support

Some of the cards are actually a little difficult for people new to these issues ('what would I do if was an 'energy champion'????'). That's not a reason not to use them, but you may want to do a little bit of pre-planning. On that energy issue, are there active energy groups in the area who could help and advise? If you've done your homework you may be able to show people that some of these points wouldn't be so difficult. The same applies to organising visits to other projects or Farmer's Markets, and to getting the group involved in volunteering. Don't hand it all to them on a plate, but do give them some signposts and advice.

Adding more actions

The blank cards are there to be used, but of course Post-Its work just as well. You can even add an extra session in after the initial reading of the cards and invite people to come up with more ideas.

Bear in mind that the prioritisation exercise (using the circles) had been used for many years before EAC came along, and in those cases people were just asked to come up with ideas that would improve their neighbourhood without any prompt cards.

Stop and talk

If you don't do it already, think about focusing on some of the cards when they come up (be careful about this becoming too long a process!). If there are cards that some people think are not at all relevant or appropriate to them, then have a quick discussion with group: Could the card be amended to be more relevant or appropriate? Why did the designers include this action? Why don't we like this action? Be ready to write another card if something better comes up. And be ready to answer and discuss questions like: 'What does this ('greener biodiesel' / 'community strategy' / 'Fair trade') actually mean?'

Too many people (you can never have....)

It's hard to run the EAC game with the existing sheets and cards with more than about 15 people. It can get crowded and people may find it hard to read the cards. So why not run two sets side by side on different tables? You can split the cards (or print off more from the website, or make your own or borrow some etc...). You can also make your own grids and circles on flipchart or even an old sheet (easy to transport!).

If you plan carefully (and with some assistance and preparation) you can do this kind of exercise on a much larger scale (four groups of 10-12 has worked). Once the different sub-groups have done their prioritisation then you can bring the top four or five cards from each table together and do a combined final exercise (bear in mind that cards may get many votes and shoot up to the centre – take some sticky gold stars and mark the cards that get to the top with a star before bringing them back to the outside to go up the ladder again).

Involving more people

Not everyone in a group may be available for the whole session. You can widen engagement: first get a group of people to do the initial selection and to choose the cards for the prioritisation exercise. Then set the 'circles' sheet up in a place where people will come past – a café, foyer etc. and invite people to participate for as little as five minutes. You'll need to make a big sheet of 'what to do' and have someone always present to do regular verbal explanations and offer guidance ('only one vote per card'). This 'drop-in' approach can widen the participation of larger organisations