

Starting a Solar Action Group



Are you willing to be a leader and help empower others? Starting and growing your own Solar Action Group is a great way to kickstart solar action in your community.

Solar Action Groups are one of the core units of Solar Citizen's structure, with committed leaders and lots of active volunteers. Their role is to build the Solar Citizens movement, mobilise at key political moments and create change in their communities. We are growing the number of connected Solar Citizens and

local solar action groups, to keep strengthening our power to protect and grow solar across Australia.

There are a number of ways to start a group. Here are some key things to consider:

Define Purpose: What is the role of this group and how is it going to create change? For example, we are the Ballarat Solar Action Group and we are going to run Solar Citizens campaigns and other solar initiatives in Ballarat, to build the Solar Citizens movement here.

Gather an interim coordinating team: This working group forms to start up the group. They are the stewards of the process. They plan the initial public activities to get the group going. Ideally this team should include skills in group facilitation and process.

Reach Outward to Build a Group: Too often people have a group of a few people and focus all of their attention on them to build them up to leaders. Instead, we need to focus outwards. Activities should focus on getting more people - holding events, collecting signups, giving presentations, etc. This will not only build the networks and number of people in the group, it will also build the skills and leadership qualities of those in the group.

For example, holding a 'public meeting' or 'group launch' can be a great way to kickstart your group. If you have a guest speaker at the event, make sure they cover the importance of people power and movements. The meeting or launch should have an action focus:

- Ask for a show of hands: *'How many people from this town want to work together on this?'*
- Ask them to register their contact details (on laptops or paper)
- Invite them to a follow-up meeting to form working groups

Build a Group around Projects or Working Groups: People will be more interested in coming onboard to carry out a purposeful project (aligned with the previously defined purpose) rather than just to join a group that isn't quite sure what its doing. Similarly, working groups allow opportunities for more people within the team to be involved in planning and

decision-making. The initial group coordinators and members should decide on one or more projects or focus areas (such as Community Outreach, Fundraising, Campaigns, ...), and then build their group around these. The building of the project working groups will also provide the group with some structure to aid in recruitment.

Note: Working groups generally function best when they have no more than 10 people (6-7 is ideal).

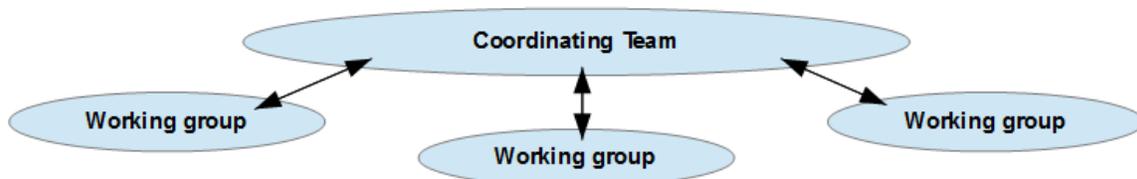
Do Stuff, Celebrate, Have Fun, Skill-up! The main reasons people join a group are to make a difference, meet like-minded people and develop skills. Make sure the group has all of these elements: meaningful projects (with successes that are measurable - like people reached, etc), celebration of successes, having social events and offering opportunities for volunteers to gain skills, such as trainings, discussions and new responsibilities.

Start Small with Goals: Goals should always be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced and Time-bound. An example is aiming for 40 people at a film screening in 4 weeks' time, raising \$200 for the next project. Start with short timelines (few weeks) leading up to longer ones over several wins. Make sure you celebrate all successes and take the time to learn from them.

Many Meetings are Boring: If a group just meets and doesn't act, the group will quickly disappear. Early on, establish a pattern of action-focused meetings. Make sure the first goal is decided in the first meeting, with clear next steps. Meetings can be hard to make fun, so make sure the facilitator is trained in facilitation and things are added to make it fun and engaging: get-to-know you activities, videos, food, games, brainstorming and information sharing.

Less Roles, More Tasks: If you give people titles such as Secretary, Media Advisor, etc, it quickly becomes unclear what people are doing. Aside from working group convenors, members of a working group should be on the same level with a single or rotating facilitator. At each meeting, all the tasks are listed and individuals or pairs can take on discrete tasks, which must be followed up in the next meeting. Once the group has been working together a while and been through at least one training, roles may emerge.

Coordinating Team: This now includes one or two overall coordinators, the convenors of each working group, and 1 or 2 more experienced people. This Coordinating Team needs to get used to working together, establish a contacts list and system of email updates.



There are many ways that action groups are structured. The above diagram is an example of a distributed leadership structure that is often effective. By devolving action into smaller working groups, more people get an opportunity to learn how they can contribute. You should consider what types of people and skillsets are needed to carry out the project tasks. In many cases people are challenged and supported to learn new skills. Some people surprise themselves with what they can do, and can then step up into leadership roles.