



**SHORT  
GUIDES FOR  
AMNESTY  
LOCAL GROUPS**

# **CHAIRPERSON**

Amnesty International  
**PROTECT THE HUMAN**

# A SHORT GUIDE TO BEING A CHAIRPERSON

## THE ROLE

Many groups choose a chairperson to run the group meeting effectively, and act as a spokesperson for the group. Some groups share the role by having different people facilitate the meeting or parts of it. This can make finding a new chair a little easier.

## QUALITIES NEEDED

- Well organised and punctual
- Able to actively listen and encourage others to take responsibility
- Prepared to be assertive if necessary in meetings to keep to the task
- Enjoy sharing out tasks

## WORKS CLOSELY WITH

The group secretary, the treasurer and other officers. Interacts with all members of the group. Outside the group, has contact with the regional representative, neighbouring Amnesty groups, the local trainer and other community groups.

## KEY TASKS

### 1 Organising the agenda

A good agenda is essential for a purposeful meeting. This could be made in collaboration with the Secretary and other officers. Look under 'Meetings' at the beginning of this section for ideas and tips.

### 2 Chairing meetings

This role can be shared around group members and carried out in different ways. It's important to think about both the **tasks** the group has to carry out and the **processes** which keep groups healthy.

#### TIPS

- Start on time, this encourages punctuality
- Make sure everyone introduces themselves
- Give a particular welcome to new members and make sure someone links up with them to explain things and to share a task with them
- Encourage everyone to participate – this may sometimes mean saying 'Let's hear from other people on this issue'
- Check regularly that everyone understands and agrees with what is being discussed
- Ask other group members to flip chart ideas or action plans, or to facilitate discussions
- Summarise any action points, who is doing what, by when
- Vary the style of your meetings – it will keep them lively. Use the Try Something New cards or Big Amnesty Skill Share ideas leaflets
- Remember to include social elements, give praise, and end on a positive note

### 3 Sharing out the work

This means dividing up tasks, delegating them and checking that people who undertake activities carry them out. Often local groups find that a small core of people do all the work, becoming overburdened, while others take on no tasks.

#### TIPS

- People who would be reluctant to take on large tasks are more likely to come forward to take on small ones.
- Be aware of members' skills and experience.
- Ask people informally to take on tasks before the meeting – explain why they would be suitable or good at doing it.
- Suggest to more experienced members who take on tasks that they should help a less experienced member learn the ropes.
- Suggest job-shares or working in small teams.
- Always establish clear deadlines for tasks.
- Always give praise for work well done and tasks completed.

### 4 Planning

The chairperson is responsible for ensuring that the group makes a plan and implements it. Each group needs a plan of action to ensure limited resources (people, skills, time) are used as carefully and effectively as possible.

#### TIPS

Groups plan in different ways but the main steps in the planning process are:

1. Use the planning pack provided by AIUK when looking at your year's activities.
2. Set an overall goal, eg to recruit more members to the group.
3. Set objectives, eg to improve publicity, to speak to three local schools.
4. Set priorities: What absolutely must happen this year?
5. Create an action plan: Who does what, when, where and how?
6. Follow up and evaluate: What went well? How can we improve next time?
7. Ask your local Amnesty trainer to help you produce a group plan for the year, or for a specific campaign or piece of work.

### 5 Acting as spokesperson for the group

This will depend on the group and its contacts with the local community, but it could involve speaking to the local press if the group has no media officer, accepting donations on behalf of the group, or representing the group at local functions.

### 6 Training the incoming chairperson

This will be made much easier if you have shared out some of the chairing roles, more people will have experience of taking a lead in the group. You will need to make sure you pass on all the relevant information and materials.

## **SOME THOUGHTS FROM AN AI GROUP CHAIR**

Being chair has been a real challenge - at times a bit like herding cats, at other times like minor crowd control! I think most people would have to develop in the role; you can't expect to get into the swing of it immediately, and you can never expect to get it exactly right.

Balancing good relationships with everyone, whilst keeping things going by reminding people what they said they would do, chivvying people along, following up old actions and getting people to agree to new ones, is tough at first. You are always acutely aware of how much of their free time people are giving up. I think it's important to remember that people are probably grateful to you for being prepared to 'manage' the group and its meetings, so they will tolerate more gentle reminders and prompts than you think. They will also forgive you when you don't get things quite right!

I am fortunate to be the chair of a big group, which means I'm surrounded by loads of experienced and committed group members who are always willing to support me and give advice when I ask. Such a big and longstanding group made it a bit more daunting to start with, but I don't think you necessarily have to have been a member of the group for ages and ages to be a decent chair. What you do need is to be organised, a reasonable communicator, willing to ask when you don't know things, familiar with the campaigns, and most of all, committed to what Amnesty stands for. This makes it all worthwhile.

**Mary Shinner, Chair of Manchester group**

## Amnesty International

We are ordinary people from across the world standing up for humanity and human rights. Our purpose is to protect individuals wherever justice, fairness, freedom and truth are denied.

Worldwide we have more than 2 million members. We are a democratic and independent organisation that follows no political or religious ideology.

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