

Amnesty International

How to run fab meetings



At the first meeting... be prepared:

Give yourselves plenty of time before the meeting is due to start, set up the TV and DVD or Powerpoint and lay out any leaflets and newsletters.

Stick up direction posters on the way from the main entrance door to your meeting room – new first years may not know their way round and may be discouraged from attending if they cannot find the room!

Have a quick run through of the agenda and timing to make sure that you are all clear.

General principles

Be organised and clearly explain the purpose of the meeting so that people know what to expect, e.g. to introduce the work of AI, to explain about the Student Action Network, to outline areas of possible student activity and to set out a programme for the term/year.



Explain the aims of the group to everyone – e.g. for members to learn more about human rights, achieve something useful and meet other people at the same time. You may also want to leave space in the meeting to decide a clearer purpose for your group e.g. to campaign for human rights, to raise awareness, to fundraise or to do all three.

Stress the social aspect of the meeting. Show people that although AI is an activist group dedicated to campaigning for human rights, it can still be fun! If funds allow, serve refreshments. Keep the meeting short and go for a drink afterwards.

Do not hold elections for committee members at the first meeting. You may scare people off and / or end up electing people who are less than committed to your group.

Do not include too many organisational matters.

Leave space for people's input and involvement.

Ideas for the meeting

Opinions vary on how to involve people in the first meeting. Some think that introductions will get people feeling more relaxed and less anonymous. Others feel that, at their first meeting, new members like to remain anonymous and may be intimidated by having to speak in front of everyone. If you plump for introductions, you could ask people to say their name and answer a standard question e.g. Why are you interested in Amnesty International? If the group is small, people may be able to introduce themselves to everyone in the group. If the group is larger, then split up into twos or threes and get people to introduce themselves within these smaller groups. If you don't want to create a situation in which people are forced to contribute, then give a general invitation to people to say why they are interested in AI, what they know about it etc. and leave it up to individuals to contribute.

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If you are confident about introducing AI's work then give a brief talk, explaining the mandate, giving examples of cases that AI works on and include some success stories. If not, then invite a speaker along from your local AI group or from the Student Speakers list. You could show the 4 minute Amnesty introductory DVD which is a good, quick way to introduce Amnesty International to anyone that has little or no previous knowledge.

Alternatively, you could run a participatory activity on AI and human rights. This is easy to do, it gets people talking and tends to leave people feeling a greater sense of involvement. Contact the Education and Student Team for more information on these.

Show a brief DVD on human rights; Amnesty has a small selection that we can send you.

Leave some time for people to write letters (or participate in some other action), so that people leave the first meeting having done some form of campaigning. If you have the facilities you could take part in online petitions or actions during the meeting; there are actions and information on Amnesty's website.

If you have not already done so, come to some agreement on a time and place for the meetings. Have the group decide how many times a month to meet.

Spend some time getting an idea of what people are interested in doing e.g. if they would like to have speakers on particular issues or be involved in organising actions on particular campaigns.

Develop contacts

Circulate a list for people who attended the meeting to give their names, addresses, mobile numbers, and email addresses. Invite them



to join your Facebook group / MySpace group etc (if you have one, if not, create one!). Ask which is the best way to contact them.

Start networking – some participants may also be members of other groups e.g. People and Planet. Take the opportunity to share information, ideas and experience.

Subsequent Meetings

Planning meetings can be the best way of getting people involved in your group, but it is also worthwhile remembering that some people may only be interested in the more educational aspect of meetings. If you have a large number of members coming along to meetings, it might be an idea to hold your planning meetings before the start of the public/educational meeting, or have them at a different time altogether.

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At the beginning of the public meeting, always introduce yourself and briefly explain the purpose of AI and your group, for the benefit of any newcomers.

Keep changing the content of your meetings to retain interest. Arrange speakers, film or documentary showings, discussions, letter writing and run workshops or participatory activities. Utilise your lecturers, or those from other departments and members of the nearest local group if you have one (this information can be found on the AIUK website).

Try not to let meetings overrun or drag on for too long.

Always allow for some social time – either before or after the meeting.

Ask for feedback on meetings and act on people's suggestions.

Do you have any ideas on how to run good meetings which we could add to this leaflet? If so please contact:

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