

Planning and Producing a Community Newsletter

This information sheet is designed to help your group produce a successful community newsletter. It's part of a series of four, which can be read together or separately.

The other three information sheets are:

- What will you put in your community newsletter?
- How to make your newsletter look good
- How to write clearly

Before you begin

A successful newsletter needs enthusiasm and ideas, but also thought and planning.

In the Resource Centre's experience the three things that are most likely to make your newsletter a success are:

- Involving your committee and the broader community
- Having a small group of people prepared to do the work - or at least more than one person
- Good organisation and planning

Don't rush off and put a newsletter together before you've talked to other people and thought the whole thing through. Spending a bit of time to think and plan at the start is really important.

What's the first step?

The first step is to have a full discussion at a committee meeting. Make sure you allow enough time to talk everything through properly.

At this meeting, there are a number of things it's useful to discuss. You could use the following list as a guide:

1. Why do you want a newsletter?

Write something down about why you want the newsletter and what you are hoping to achieve. It can just be a few sentences, but it is important to discuss and record this.

2. Do you want to print your newsletter or put it online?

If everyone who will receive the newsletter uses the internet and checks their emails regularly you could produce your newsletter online. There are several websites where you can do this for free (for example www.mailchimp.com). Another option is doing both, with an online PDF version of your newsletter going out to those people using email.

This information sheet concentrates on how to plan and produce a printed newsletter, but a lot of the information is relevant to both.



If you are a Brighton & Hove Tenant Association or a Resource Centre member group, then the Resource Centre can do the design work for you. We also offer training to teach people in these groups how to do it themselves.

You can get your newsletter printed cheaply at the Resource Centre. Contact us for prices and more information.

*See the Resource Centre's information sheets **Beginner's Guide to Printing and FAQ***

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3. Who will decide what goes in the newsletter?

This could be an editorial group meeting separately, or the whole of your committee. It's important that the views of one person don't dominate the content or the tone of the newsletter.

4. Who will do the work?

There is a lot of work involved in producing a regular newsletter. You may want to appoint someone to coordinate the work, but it is too much to expect one person to do it all on their own. The newsletter will also be more interesting if there are a range of people involved. Be clear about what tasks are involved, and who is going to do what.

5. Who will design it?

There might be someone on the committee, or among your members, who has the skills to do the design work. This doesn't have to be one of the editorial team or committee, but they do need to have a good idea of what your group wants.

6. How often will you produce it?

Think carefully about how often you want to produce the newsletter. How long does it take to do each edition, and how much time do people have? Don't be over ambitious - it's better to have a less frequent but regular newsletter than one which is promised every month and fails to appear. A lot of groups find that a quarterly newsletter works well.

7. What size will it be?

Generally people have a folded sheet, with the finished size being either A4 (the size of a normal sheet of typing paper) or A5 (half the size of A4). It is also a good idea to have an agreed number of pages, so you know in advance how much space you are trying to fill, and how much it will cost you.

8. How will you get it printed?

It is expensive to print in full colour. Unless you have pots of money or a generous benefactor, stick to black ink on white or coloured paper. This can still look attractive and eye-catching.

If you are doing a very small number of newsletters - 20 or so - then these could be printed out on someone's personal printer. However, this is an expensive and slow way to print, and is not suitable for large numbers.

It is useful to talk to whoever is doing your printing before you design the newsletter, as they may have particular requirements or useful advice about how to get the best results

You might want to print some of your newsletters, send others by email *and* put it on your website. In this case it is best to produce a design as if for printing, and then make this into a PDF file.

9. How will you pay for it?

Work out how much it is going to cost you to produce each edition. Will you need to apply for grants or raise extra money to cover the costs? Be realistic, and think about what you can sustain.

Some groups charge local businesses to advertise in their newsletters. The advantage of this is that you raise a bit of extra cash. The disadvantage is that it requires quite a lot of administering and organisation. Your production costs will also be greater if you make the newsletter bigger in order to put in adverts.

10. How will you distribute it?

Who will get the newsletter? Have a list to make sure everyone is included - in addition to your members you may want to send a copy to your Housing Officer, local councillors, your MP, community centres, doctor's surgeries, hairdressers or other local groups. Will you want to post some copies? Are there some people you can email a copy to?

You want to avoid one person getting landed with all the deliveries. Can you organise a network of volunteers who will deliver to their block or street? This requires initial organisation, but is a good way of involving people.

What is involved in producing each issue?

You need to know how long it will take from collecting the articles to receiving the printed newsletters. It's easy to underestimate the work involved at the different stages.

If you plan your dates in advance, and agree these with the various people involved, you'll be sure to have the newsletter ready when you want it. Also, you don't want to put pressure on people by needing everything in a rush at the last minute.

Below are the issues you need to think about.

1. Discuss the content

Think about what you are going to include, and who is going to write the articles or collect the information.

2. The final deadline for articles

Agree a date by which articles have to reach you. It's a good idea to advertise this in the previous newsletter. You may need to remind people who have promised to write articles a few days before the deadline. Be firm about not accepting articles after this date - if people don't believe it's a real deadline, they'll ignore it.

If the Resource Centre is printing your newsletter and you provide us with bags and labels, we can package them up ready for distribution.

There is a quick check list on page 6 - you can use it to plan your next newsletter

3. A committee/editorial meeting to discuss the content

Once you've collected all the articles for the newsletter, meet to discuss what you want to include and what will go where. You may want to establish a regular format, for example news is always on page 2, letters on page 6 etc.

At this point you might have decisions to make about what articles to include. You are not obliged to publish everything everyone gives you - it might not be appropriate for your newsletter, or you may not have enough space. You may also need to edit down articles that are too long.

4. The date to hand over the articles to designer

It's best to meet with whoever is designing your newsletter to go through the content and discuss how you want it put together. Agree how much time the designer will need to do the work. This could be a couple of weeks, depending on the size of the newsletter and how much time they have available.

5. Date you'll get a draft or 'proof' copy

Agree a date with the designer when you will get a draft copy of the newsletter.

Before the newsletter goes to print it is very important to check this over to make sure there aren't any mistakes - this is called 'proof-reading'. You will need to:

- correct any spelling mistakes and typing errors
- correct grammar or punctuation mistakes
- check dates, names and telephone numbers are correct
- check that nothing has been left out by mistake
- look at the design and see if you want any changes

If possible, get someone who hasn't been very involved with the production of the newsletter to do the proof-reading. If you are very familiar with the content it is easy to miss mistakes. You may want two or three different people to look at it. It's worth spending time getting this right.

6. Set a print date

Agree with your printer the date when you will give them the completed newsletter design, (this is often called the 'artwork')

7. Set a collection date

Agree with your printer when you can collect the printed copies of the newsletter.

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8. Set a distribution date

Agree a date that you will get the newsletters to your volunteer distributors. It is worth asking them to do the delivery within a certain time, so you know when people will be receiving it and to provide some motivation to do it sooner rather than later!

9. Set a date to think about how to improve the next issue

At the first committee meeting after a newsletter has gone out, have a bit of time to think about how it went.

These are useful questions as a starting point:

- What have people said to you about the newsletter?
- What things went right? What things went wrong?
- What did you like in the current newsletter? What did you dislike?
- Do you want to make any changes in the next issue?
- Are people happy with the role they played in producing the newsletter?
- Who is going to do what next time round?

Newsletter production check list

	Task	Date	Done
1	Ask people for articles and collect information for the newsletter.		
2.	Agree a date by which all articles and information for the newsletter has to be with the newsletter group.		
3.	Hold a meeting to discuss the articles, agree what you want to include etc.		
4.	Meet with the designer or the Resource Centre to discuss content.		
5.	Collect draft copy from the designer or the Resource Centre.		
6.	Give draft copies of the newsletter to group members to proof-read copy and look at design to check it is what they want. Set date for when this will be done by.		
7.	Return the draft to the designer/Resource Centre and go through any amendments and changes you want.		
8.	Give your finished design ('artwork') to your printers/the Resource Centre		
9.	Collect newsletters from printer/Resource Centre		
10.	Set date by which you expect newsletters to be distributed.		
11.	Distribute newsletters to people doing local deliveries. Send out copies to other people.		
12	Committee meeting at which you'll discuss how it went and start thinking about the next issue.		