

How to build a movement

A movement is a group of people with a common purpose who are campaigning for social, political or cultural change. Movements are often large, and they can be made up of individuals, or a mix of individuals and organisations.

Movements are different to organisations:

An **organisation** has a person in charge who is responsible for its work. Rules and procedures are centralised and often formal.

A **movement** is facilitated, rather than coordinated or controlled. There is a unifying, shared vision, shared leadership and an emphasis on collaboration. Movements focus on equipping and inspiring people, and connecting participants to each other.

Key factors for success

There are many ways to build and grow a movement, depending on the goal and the context. Here are a few important principles to help you get started.

Values: Develop a set of core values (eg non-violence, mutual respect, integrity) and put them in writing. You can then regularly check that the movement is sticking to these values over time.

Vision: A clear vision of what could be achieved will help people to feel inspired, motivated and ready to help build a better future.

Skills: Different members of a movement will bring different skills, eg the ability to organise events, conduct research into an issue, plan, communicate well or understand the law. Mutual sharing of knowledge, experience and skills will increase confidence and provide everyone with the opportunity to learn and contribute.

Relationships: Relationship building helps members to feel part of something bigger than themselves. A lack of hierarchy, and the feeling that all members of the movement are leaders, are key to sustaining motivation and action.

Advocacy demands: The advocacy demands of a movement need to be clear, specific and communicated well if they are to get the attention of decision-makers.

Plans: Small actions can help create momentum, and small, early successes provide motivation.

Patience: Bringing about the social, political or cultural changes you want to see may take a long time.



See Tearfund's movement building guide for more information. Visit learn.tearfund.org and search for 'movement building'.

Potential challenges, and ways to avoid or overcome them

- 1 People within the movement want to use methods that you disagree with (such as rioting).

Response: If people are doing things that go against the movement's stated values, you may need to explain to them that they cannot do these things 'in the name of' the movement. If this does not change things, you will need to publicly state that your movement is against the behaviour.

- 2 The movement loses focus.

Response: For every activity that is planned it can be helpful to consider how it is contributing to the vision of the movement, and whether there is a different method or activity that could be more effective.

- 3 The government closes the 'space' within which movements can operate, eg by making public meetings or some advocacy activities illegal.

Response: This can be very challenging. It may be that your movement can continue, using other methods to communicate and advocate. However, in some cases, the political environment may change so much that movement building is no longer an appropriate option.

- 4 Members become disillusioned or lose interest.

Response: Communication with movement members is key. They need to be well informed and know that their contribution is vital. Having regular actions and activities to take part in will help add momentum and keep people interested.

- 5 You (and/or others) become exhausted.

Response: Take enough time to rest, including spending time with family members and friends. Delegate to others and ask for help. Building and sustaining a movement is not about one person doing everything. It is about working with others and sharing leadership, decision-making and workload.