How to...
Recruit new members

Recruitment describes the process of finding and enrolling people to join your team. Intake is the process of incorporating them into the team.

There are three categories potential volunteers/organizers can filter into: prospects, new recruits and teammates. Each of these requires a different approach and a few key actions. From this perspective, recruitment is about turning prospects into recruits; intake is about turning new recruits into great teammates.

Prospects ---> New Recruits ---> Teammates

Recruitment is extremely important when you are getting your team started, because without other members, you won't have a team! After you have recruited some people and formed your initial team, you will need to decide together whether you will continually try to recruit and intake new team members, or whether this is something you will do occasionally in "waves" at specific times.

Additionally, you can think about creating different levels of engagement opportunities, so that as many community members as possible can be a part of your campaign, even if not everyone can fully commit to your team.

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1. Why recruitment and intake?

1.1 STARTING YOUR TEAM

No matter how great your project idea is, or how important the problem you're trying to solve is, you need a small group of enthusiastic, committed team members to join you in getting started. How do you find these people? You need to recruit!

1.2 BUILD YOUR CAPACITY

Even when you have an initial group of people assembled for your team, one of the fundamental pillars of building a team is recruitment. Bringing more people on board is essential to completing a project and to having enough capacity to make transformative change in the world.

Activity: looking for fun ways to get a new group together and active? Invite new folks to Paint your town with art for climate justice

Building capacity (or power) means increasing your team's ability to make change. It means not just increasing the number of people on your team, but also expanding what each member is capable of through training, mentoring and/or confidence-building to develop their skills. The process of building capacity has four main pillars:

1. Find new prospects.
2. Bring them to a team meeting or intake session.
3. Train and/or mentor them.
4. Find a role they enjoy.

As time goes on, you'll find teammates' capacity, priorities and boundaries will develop and change. They might drop off and leave because they or their family decide to move or they have a busy stretch at work that means they can't attend meetings. Even when someone was originally dedicated to the team, life may get in the way, which is why expanding your team and including new members is one of the most important things you can do for your team's sustainability.

Teams that don't actively recruit will start to shrink and force a small number of people to do all of the work, which will mean they are overusing their capacity, crossing their boundaries and suffering burnout. These teams often don't last long-term because teams need to be building group power to achieve their shared purpose and project goals.

Recruitment can be assigned as a role for certain team members (see the *Creating team roles* section of the *Team Roles and Structure* guide for more ideas), but in general, everyone should be involved in some way. Recruitment doesn't always have to be formal like managing a school club day, canvassing or posting flyers in your neighbourhood; it could be as simple as inviting a friend or coworker to your meeting, posting an invite on your social media or making a potential volunteer feel welcome at a team event.

1.3 PLANNING INTAKE AS THE KEY TO RECRUITMENT

To effectively use recruitment to build capacity, it's important to think carefully about your intake process before recruiting new people into the team. For an example, read this story from a volunteer with Sustainabiliteens:

> *"I was very involved in starting a community youth climate justice team. We needed more people on the team, so we launched a recruitment process which included initial meetings to which over 30 new people would show up. However, many of those people dropped off pretty quickly because they were not given a meaningful role in the group. Now I can see that this pattern was a result of a fear I had: that we would create a dynamic where a handful of existing members would call all of the shots and be too controlling. I was entirely focused on recruiting large numbers of people to join instead of considering how they would be in-taken into the work of the group, because I assumed that everyone had ideas to take action and would take initiative to make them happen. Reflecting on this, I think our intake strategy was explicitly geared towards finding other leaders. We wanted more people involved, but we wanted people who'd be able to independently understand what our group was doing, help figure out what to do next, and decide how they could contribute to getting there.*
>
> *However, not everyone has the capacity or capability to immediately begin taking that level of initiative. Instead, it takes energy and skilled leadership to set up a gradual **ladder of engagement** that starts with entry-level tasks empathetic towards what new members can and want to do. Looking back, I should have focused on developing strong individual relationships with each person who did show up, and working with them to ensure they had a purpose in the group. I came across a quote by writer Adrienne Maree Brown that explains this experience: "move at the speed of trust" and aim for "critical connections*

*instead of critical mass." **Before making a concerted effort to bring more people in, we need to focus on valuing each person we currently have involved.** We do this by building solid individual relationships, getting to know what their strengths are and creating a corresponding clear role, and working one on one to empower them to contribute the most they can."*

You can learn more about the intake concepts that this volunteer suggested in the [Retaining new members](#) section of this guide.

1.3 TYPES OF RECRUITMENT

Before you begin planning how you will approach recruitment and intake, reflect on your team right now.

- Who is there and how did they get there?
- Who used to be around and why did they leave?
- What keeps people sticking around throughout the ups and downs your team has faced?

Whether you are just starting out or trying to bring a new wave of members to your established and flourishing team, there are a number of different recruitment techniques you can use. These can be put into two categories.

[Indirect (or impersonal) outreach:](#) This is one-sided communication that spreads the word about your team without allowing for dialogue or direct commitment asks. This means spreading information about your team through techniques such as posters and social media!

[Direct (or personal) outreach:](#) This is recruitment that involves dialogue with a potential recruit and allows you to directly ask them to commit to attending your meeting. This means talking to people about joining!

2. Indirect outreach

Indirect outreach is spreading the word about your team or project without talking to potential recruits face-to-face.

In general, indirect recruitment is about getting the word out about your team, so you should be thinking about where most people from the community in which you are trying to recruit get their information. Based on this, the options for indirect recruitment available to your team depend on the context of your team. For example, teams based out of schools have a number of options for indirect recruitment that are not applicable to other teams.

2.1 GENERAL INDIRECT RECRUITMENT TOOLS

Here are some suggestions for indirect outreach techniques for your team.

- _Posters_ — Some teams put posters up around their community that introduce their team and encourage others to join. Make sure to include information about meeting time/location (if available), and how to contact you. You can put posters on community notice boards in coffee shops or community centres, street lampposts, etc. If you're in a school or other institution, you could put posters on the walls.
- _Community newspaper_ — Smaller community newspapers are often happy to share events from local groups. To do this, find a community paper online or on your city's website, and then contact the editor. You could post a call for people to join your team and/or use this as a resource to notify the community of events throughout the project. If someone on your team is interested and the newspaper agrees, consider running an environmental column in every edition!
- _Social media_ — Assign one person on your team to be in charge of running social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), which includes uploading posts regularly and responding to direct messages. To learn more about how to run a social media account for your team, read the Future Ground Network "How to Use Social Media" organizing toolkit.

2.1 INDIRECT RECRUITMENT TOOLS FOR SCHOOL-BASED TEAMS

Here are some suggestions for indirect outreach techniques specific to school-based teams

- *Club day* — Most club recruitment happens at a school club day. This is when all clubs are invited to set up tables in the gym or other communal space. Students will walk around looking at the tables and sign up for clubs. If COVID-19 prevents club days from occurring, your team will have to strategize indirect tools for recruitment. Club days would be a direct outreach tactic, where you have conversations with people face-to-face.
- *School announcements* — If your school has daily announcements, you can add a segment with information about your club's next meeting and why students should join.
- *Student newspaper* — Most school newspapers are student-run and are desperate for information and content related to the student body. You can find info about your paper on your school's website. From there you can contact the editor. Feel free to post a call-out for people to join your team, and to use it as a resource throughout the project for events. If someone on the team is interested and the newspaper agrees, having a sustainability column in every edition might be a great way to recruit and keep the student body interested in the climate action your team is doing!

If your team is a university club, check out this guide for a detailed list of recruitment suggestions!

3. Direct outreach

3.1 WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

While getting the word out about your team is important, posters and announcements will only bring in people who are extremely motivated and actively looking for a team like yours. These people are amazing but only represent a small portion of total possible team members. Moreover, the most passionate and promising potential volunteers may fail to notice your information.

The most effective way to grow your team is through direct outreach. Direct outreach involves personally inviting someone to join your team. Doing this makes the invitee feel wanted. It also

makes them feel more accountable to you to join: if they're not interested they have to say "no" to your face; if they only saw a poster, they could ignore it.

Think about it this way: Are you more likely to attend an event if you see it posted on social media, if someone shares it in a group chat you're in or if a friend asks you to attend? Conversations also help create meaningful connections with people you could be working with.

In traditional community organizing, direct recruitment often consists of canvassing. Canvassing means talking to someone on the street, inviting them into your shared purpose or campaign goal and trying to get their signature and contact information on a petition. If someone signs up and indicates an interest in volunteering, organizers will often call them to follow up and invite them to an organizing meeting. If you are interested in using canvassing as a recruitment tactic for your team, you can learn more from this resource.

3.2 WHO TO RECRUIT?
Recruitment can be very simple: start by just asking your friends. They'll probably be open to coming to a meeting just because you want them to.

If you are reaching beyond people you are not already close with, recruitment is all about making new friends. If making new connections is something you love, recruitment will be natural! If you find it hard to reach out to new people, it might seem challenging. That's okay! Remember that the power of a team is that everyone has different strengths to offer to the collective success. If the idea of talking to people you don't know terrifies you, you don't need to, although it can also be a valuable opportunity to push yourself and gain new skills.

There are three important elements for effective recruitment:

- The elevator pitch
- The hard ask
- Reminders

For more information on who to recruit to an already established team, read this resource from the Sunrise Movement on Recruiting Outside your Social Circle.

3.3 ELEMENT #1: THE ELEVATOR PITCH

An elevator pitch is a way of having a quick conversation to recruit for your team. The easiest way to imagine it is if you're in an elevator when someone strikes up a conversation. In those 30 seconds before the doors open on your floor you try to recruit them for your team or project. What details are the most important? What details can be left out? How can you get them to buy into your idea in a short time?

Two main pieces of an elevator pitch:

5. A story of *us*: "Who are the people being called to action?"
6. A story of now: Invite them to act with you

Here is a resource that explains these two pieces more: Public Narrative Worksheet.

It may feel somewhat new or intimidating to think about directly asking people — even your friends — to join the team. You need to explain the purpose of the team to a new recruit. People have many different ways they can spend their time and they want to understand what they will accomplish by joining it. It might take some practice to briefly explain what your team is doing.

You should explain why you chose to join the team. You can be honest about the severity of the climate crisis, and you can try to make people feel that intensity too. A key part of recruitment is making someone feel connected to you, and you do that by sharing your reasons for why you show up for your team.

Since you're going to mostly be asking people you know, you might convince them to come as your friend without having to explain much. However, you don't want them to feel like they are doing you a favour. Remember, you're not imposing a burden on them, you are giving them an amazing opportunity to get involved!

When you use this pitch to ask friends to join your team, you probably will not give the whole pitch as one speech. Instead, think of these points as things to get into a conversation.

This can be further simplified into these main points of focus:

7. Communicate shared purpose.
    a. Succinctly explain the purpose of your team in general, and what's happening at the next meeting.
8. Tell your story.
    b. Explain why you chose to be a part of the team and why you care about the issue. Be honest about your feelings.
9. Hard ask.
    c. Directly ask them to come to the meeting. They should say yes or no.
    d. Make it specific. Specify the time, place and location of the meeting.
    e. Make it personal. Make them feel that you want them to be there, but not like they are doing you a favour.

3.4 ELEMENT #2: THE HARD ASK

When you ask someone to make a commitment — to attend an event, or take on a new role — it's important to make a **hard ask**, a clear and direct request that results in a commitment to a specific action.

If you are using a hard ask but still getting poor turnout or indirect answers from the recruit, try making a more *compelling* hard ask. This would include explaining the purpose for the ask. People might not say yes to something they feel isn't worth their time or doesn't seem purposeful. Giving context for why an action, event or team meeting matters will help increase the urgency for them to say *yes*.

SOFT OR UNCOMPELLING ASK	HOW TO IMPROVE	HARD AND COMPELLING ASK
Hey, we have a meeting every Tuesday night. You should totally drop by!	**Make sure your ask is not just a suggestion or statement, but a clear and direct question that elicits a specific commitment.**	*We have weekly meetings to talk about our climate solutions campaign. Will you come out on Tuesday evening?*
Hey, we have a canvas on Thursday. Can you come by at 6 p.m.?	**This ask is direct, but could be more compelling. Make sure to give some context as to why the event matters. Offering a couple of date options also increases the odds of a yes.**	*We're trying to reach our goal of collecting 1,000 signatures on our solar petition to deliver to the city next month. Will you come out canvassing with us next Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. or next Saturday at 1 p.m.?*
I know you're really busy but we need some extra folks at the farmers market to promote our upcoming town hall this weekend. Would you mind coming out this Sunday at 11 a.m. or 1 p.m.?	**This ask is apologetic. Remember volunteering is an opportunity, not a chore, a burden or an act of "helping" someone else.**	*Our team is going to the farmers market on Sunday to promote our upcoming town hall. It's going to be a blast and we'd love to have you join! Can you meet us there at 11 a.m. or 1 p.m.?*

3.5 THREE TYPES OF NOS

"Not now, not that, not ever." These are the three types of "no" you may encounter during your recruitment efforts. "Not now" and "not that" are soft nos. While you may be tempted to let these prospects go, try to respond to them with another **hard ask** that requires listening and takes their considerations into account. A "not ever" is a clear rejection of the volunteer opportunity. It's always helpful to ask why, but then thank the prospect and stop calling or asking them.

REPLY	TYPE OF NO	SOFT RESPONSE	HOW TO IMPROVE	EFFECTIVE RESPONSE
Sorry, those times don't work. Can you email me later?	**Not now**	*Sure, no problem. Take care!*	**Make an explicit follow-up plan with your prospect.**	*Sure, I can do that. Can we set a time to check in again in a couple of weeks?*
I don't really feel comfortable canvassing.	**Not that**	*Oh, don't worry, you'll get lots of training and it will be fine!*	**Listen to your prospect's concerns, and try to find a solution that will work for them.**	*Why don't you like canvassing? Would you like to meet early to go over the script together? Or would you prefer to come for data entry this Friday at 5 p.m.?*
I checked the volunteer box by accident and I'm not interested.	**Not ever**	*Okay, bye!*	**Asking why may yield helpful feedback. Remember to remove them from the list.**	*Sure, no problem. May I ask why? Okay, I'll remove you from our list. Thanks, and take care!*

3.6 ELEMENT #3: REMINDERS

Even if someone agrees to attend your team meeting, you'll still need to remind them to show up. Send reminders the day before, the morning of and a couple of minutes before your team meeting. This can be done via text or email, but make it consistent every time so people know where to expect the reminder to be. A large rule of thumb is to do **more than one reminder in more than one place**. For example, if you have a Google calendar event for your meeting where each team member's email has been added, send out a reminder the day before through email. The day off the meeting, it might be best to send a quick text message or group chat message to

remind everyone where and when to meet. It doesn't have to take too much time, but it should explain date, time and location. If people are required to bring special materials, remind them as well.

4. Retaining new team members

Even if you're able to recruit someone to come to one meeting, you still need to convince them to keep coming back, which can be the biggest challenge. Many teams may have a lot of new members at the beginning of the year or after a big event but, as the weeks go by, people stop showing up. They have other ways to spend their free time or just don't feel that much is happening with the climate movement.

Tips:

- **Articulate purpose.**
  When planning your agenda, include a quick discussion on the purpose of the meeting. It's important to build this into the structure of your meetings so people feel what they are doing is purposeful. If people feel the meetings are a waste of time, or don't understand why they are happening or what outcomes the group is hoping to achieve, they won't continue to come back. Having a good balance between action and discussion is key to holding everyone's interest and to not feeling stagnant.

- **Greet and get to know newcomers.**
  It's important to take a few minutes to stop and talk with new folks. When someone comes to a meeting, they're showing an interest in the work, so greet them and find out about them! Then, ask them if they want to catch up one-on-one to talk more about getting involved with organizing. (Learn more in the Welcome meeting section.)

- **Create space for various forms of participation.**
  Some people can give a lot of time, while others can only give a little. It's important to plug people into roles and tasks that suit their availability. Check in with them regularly about how it's going. Are they feeling overextended or are they willing to take on more? A foolproof way to drive people away from your team is to continue asking them to give

more time than they are able. On the flip side, it's critical to delegate tasks and increase the workload for those who want to take on more. Don't let people get bored and feel as though they're not contributing.

- **Make people feel valued and appreciated.**
  If you want to inspire people to keep coming back and stay in this movement for the long haul, make them feel valued and appreciated. Acknowledge new people's contributions, however small, and make time to check in with fellow organizers outside of meetings. Ask their opinions often: What did you think of the meeting? The workshop? Bounce your ideas off of them and ask for their feedback.

- **Build a sense of community.**
  One of the best ways to keep people coming back is to build a sense of community. Organizing isn't all about meetings and to-do lists. Make this work fun and irresistible. Plan social time together and make space for playfulness and laughter along the way.

- **Have food.** An excellent way to get people to show up to your meeting, if they're in person, is food! Try to bring food to at least the first meeting, and tell everyone that it will be there when you're recruiting them. Once you get people to show up, then you can hook them with more information about your exciting plans. You can also promise food at the second meeting to entice them to come back.

Read this article for more very helpful tips on retention and making new people feel welcome.

5.1 THE WELCOME MEETING

Once someone has come to your team meeting, the next step is to schedule a follow-up meeting, or a one-on-one meeting. This is a direct, personal conversation between the existing team member and the new recruit. This is a chance to get to know the new team member better, plug them into team activities and roles that interest them and make plans for next steps.

A simple structure for a welcome meeting is as follows:

- The meeting is scheduled in advance, not an impromptu chat.
- The meeting is between two people, so that the conversation creates a strong personal connection. If the new recruit is uncomfortable with this, you could have a shared welcome meeting with two new recruits.
- The meeting can take place in person, by phone or over video chat, but it should not be text, Facebook chat or Slack. Text-only conversations tend to be distorted because you can't see or connect with the person face-to-face.
- The meeting can last 20 to 40 minutes.
- The meeting should have a loose agenda:
  - Both people share stories: Why do you care about the climate crisis and why do you want to be involved now? The recruiter should also share the story of the team.
  - Provide context for why the team's current activities are important.
  - Share goals, strategy and project plan if you already have this decided. If not, share some ideas you have based on your team's current shared purpose. This doesn't need to be a formal purpose statement if you don't have one yet. Think of it as the reason that the team formed. For example, your purpose could be as broad as "stopping climate change."
  - Explain the different roles available on the team and ask what they would be most interested in doing. A good way to talk about this is to ask what they are good at, and what they're passionate about. If there isn't currently a role on the team that aligns with their answers, feel free to brainstorm a new one with them. Come up with creative ideas for how they can use their unique skills and passions to further the purpose of the team. (For more information about creating team roles,

including why they are important, what sort of roles you can create, and how to choose who does which role, read the "Team Roles and Structure" guide)
- Make a hard ask: Ask them to commit to joining the team, in the role you found for them. Try to give them a specific task to do, based on the role they took on and what tasks the project needs. Sign them up for the next meeting.

Check out this resource for more information about how to build your base through one-on-ones.

5.2 CREATING VARYING LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

To retain as many people as possible, it's crucial to structure your project to allow for varying levels of commitment based on different amounts of capacity. Everyone has different levels of capacity, and even people who are really passionate about your project may only be able to devote a couple of hours a month to helping out.

Often people won't be willing to immediately commit to spending hours a week on the project. They might start out with an entry-level, low-commitment task, and then get more passionate and committed, escalating progressively to higher-commitment actions. If you don't have an entry-level way for them to initially get involved, they are more likely to leave.

Here are some tools to use to diversify the options for involvement available on your team:

- **Circles of commitment**: The circles of commitment describe the varying degrees of relationship that a person can have with your campaign, from being part of the team's core to a member of the general community the project takes place in. The goal of successful recruitment and intake is to move people closer to the centre of these circles. Learn more here: Circles of commitment – The Change Agency
- **Ladder of engagement:** People rarely decide to devote hours a week to your campaign the first time they hear of it. Campaigns will often use a ladder of engagement to support members gradually committing to higher commitment roles. The "bottom of the ladder" often consists of people initially getting involved through a lower-barrier, lower-

commitment task such as signing a petition; then, people who do that are asked to commit to gradually higher-commitment actions, such as attending a protest, then attending organizing meetings, then leading meetings. Learn more about how this works here: Increase Your Volunteers' Involvement: Using the Ladder of Engagement.

- **Menu of tasks:** People will only stay involved in your group if they feel they are needed. This means giving them tasks; however, giving work away can be challenging. A menu of tasks is a great way to organize this process: How to Get Others Involved: Using the Menu of Tasks.

5.3 THE ENGAGEMENT PARADOX

Hard asks, relationship-building and meaningful actions are the most important aspects of retaining those you recruit over the long haul. This is because of the engagement paradox. People often think that community groups are effective because of the issue they are working to solve, but that isn't always the case. Groups are often most effective because of the strong relationships held by team members. The paradox of engagement suggests that if you have a hard ask when you recruit someone, strong relationships are formed with team members and meaningful actions are taken. This leads to retaining the power you've built within your team.

HARD ASKS → REALTIONSHIP BUILDING → MEANINGFUL ACTIONS

It works under the assumptions that:

- You SHOW UP because somebody asked.
- You COMMIT because of the relationships.
- You WALK AWAY when you don't feel effective.

This paradox comes from a study done on the organizers and volunteers involved in Barack Obama's Get Out the Vote campaign. They surveyed the group in 2008 and 2012 during their volunteering. In 2012, they discovered that many reasons volunteers gave for returning to the campaign *had nothing to do with Obama or his policies*. They instead were based on the relationships they had built and the community they were involved in.

For another example, read this story by a volunteer with Force of Nature:

"I showed up to a team meeting when I was asked by the team leader to come, which she did with a simple phone call. I was also asked at the meeting to take notes, which I did, and then at that very same meeting, was approached about being an executive leader for the team. Within the first two months I had built strong relationships with the team leader, and my fellow executive leaders. During the 2018 municipal elections we had phone banks seven days a week, sometimes twice a day, and even had executive phone calls on Monday or Tuesday nights that went past midnight. We had this obligation to each other which was unlike any other team I had been a part of. If I didn't feel that the midnight phone calls were essential to ensure our campaign and team were ready for the elections, then I wouldn't have shown up. I would have gone to bed instead. During the long hours of phone banking during the election, I often wanted to give up, but I was with my friends having fun, listening to music and we had built a competitive atmosphere among the three of us that we wanted to win, and we each made each other better in our own organizing journey. We were not just committed to the goal or the election itself, but to each other and the team."

5. References

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