

How to Form a Flood Action Group?

The following are some guidelines in setting up your Flood Action Group.

Step 1. – *How do we get our community interested?*

The purpose of any group is to ensure that you are representing the whole community. So, the easiest way to start is to hold a local meeting of **residents**. At the meeting you could discuss concerns, and then lead to a 'hands up of those who would like to be actively involved as part of a core group'. You ideally need to aim for no more than 10 people as subsequent meetings with more than this can become a little unwieldy, but this is just a guide, we have many affiliated groups of less, it will all depend on the size and how affected your community is.

Those who are disinclined, usually for many different reasons, might be happy to be partially involved by a willingness to deliver newsletters, put up posters, do photocopying, be flood watchers (more on these later) etc. The rest of who are present need to have their particular concerns addressed through the new core group. To do this you may like to have paper and pens at the back of the meeting room and ask them to leave their contact details and the concerns they would like the Flood Action Group to address.

Step 2. – *How do we set up our new core group?*

There are many ways the group can be structured: you may like to adopt a constitution or be more informal. A constitution shows the group has a mandate and elected officers to represent their community. It will also be necessary if you intend to raise funds as it is needed to open a bank account on behalf of the group. The National Flood Forum has a template constitution that can be adapted to suit your group, for a copy get in touch. Other groups are set up in a more informal way adopting a less onerous approach. Either way, as long as the group embraces representing the wider community and keeps them regularly informed of what is happening, then the best approach is what suits your group best. Basic needs would be an elected Chairperson and a Secretary: both positions could be shared if desired.

It is also desirable to have some 'flood watchers' these are often the dog walkers/walkers in the community of which some will hopefully be in your group. They are useful in keeping an eye out for blocked drains/culverts, tree branches in rivers, and anything else that may cause a flood risk, and reporting them back to the group.

Step 3. – *How do we approach tackling the issues we have?*

Ideally you need to collate all the concerns of the community into manageable groups (many residents will have the same concerns). A useful tip is to write the concerns on 'sticky fix-it's' and use a larger roll of paper or a wall to stick them into groups. Once the concerns are grouped they can be put onto an action plan, for an example of an action plan get in touch.

Step 4. – How do we get known?

In order to promote your group and its activities you will need to get used to dealing with the media. The more people know about your group, the more likely any requests for action will be taken seriously. Local newspapers and radio are usually keen to hear from people with a 'local' story. Parish magazines, posters, announcements, use public areas such as the library, sports centre, village hall etc. Inform your Parish Council (if applicable), residents groups, MP etc.

Step 5. – What do we need to do to prepare for the Agencies & Authorities?

Discuss how you are going to engage with them, for a successful partnership The National Flood Forum **strongly advise a non-confrontational** approach.

- Make sure the issues on your action plan are not written in an accusing way
- Ask for their advice/opinion to your suggestions
- Keep calm & reasonable
- Allow flexibility in possible solutions
- Understand the restraints that Agencies & Authorities have (usually money)
- Work together to find possible areas of finance that can be pulled together from more than one source (partnership funding)
- Form a good working relationship of mutual trust & understanding

You will find that the Agencies & Authorities will appreciate historic information that you can provide. It is very useful to them, helping them to put the missing pieces together for a more informed picture of the area. They realise that as local people living on the street as it were, that you are the experts of what is/happens in your particular area.

Step 6. – How do we set up our first Multi-Agency meeting?

You will need to invite engineers from the Environment Agency/ Natural Resources Wales, Local Council (if applicable) & County Highways, and the Water Company as standard. Others may well be appropriate such as riparian owners (private individuals, National Trust/Park, Business industrial estates, educational establishments etc.), Network Rail, IDB's (independent drainage boards) etc.

The time set for the commencement of the meeting should bear in mind that Agency/Authority staff are giving up their time to come and meet you on your terms. Their needs at the end of a busy day are as ours: food & families. They in turn need to appreciate that due to working commitments, communities tend to be tied to out-of-office hours.

To take into consideration all, try to make the meeting as early as possible in the late afternoon/early evening. It maybe that some of your group are able to arrange to leave a little earlier from work. When sending invites ensure that plenty of notice is given as they all have busy diaries, around 6 weeks is ideal. Give an option of several assorted dates in a couple of different weeks hopefully this will ensure that a common date is convenient for all. If one can't be found then send out a new set of options.

It is very important to see all Agencies/Authorities collectively, if one Agency/Authority drops out of the confirmed meeting date then it is wise to cancel the whole meeting and re-arrange. We realise that it is tempting to go ahead anyway, but it is wise to stick to your original plan.

For more advice and information on this do give the NFF a call. When confirming the date, attach your action plan and agenda.

Step 7. – Where should we meet?

This will depend on what is available to you. The National Flood Forum find that a relaxed informal style taken, with a mixed circle of Agencies/Authorities & residents, ideally in someone's home, for many reasons, works best. If this isn't possible then a hall, a room in the local pub or hotel, a club will be fine, but try not to seat people in a 'them & us'/stage & audience way.

Step 8. – Well here we are altogether; we have had our tea & biscuits and are ready to start the meeting!

Remember to:

- be polite
- listen
- contribute positively
- consider everyone's view
- ask for advice
- do not allot blame – move on for the future.

Fill in the action plan with identified Agency/Authority assets, suggested ways forward etc. **Before the meeting closes make a date for the next Multi-Agency Meeting**, to start with this will be every couple of months, eventually reducing down to a couple of times a year.

Step 9. – How often do we need to meet?

The frequency of meetings will vary, dependent on the tasks that the group has undertaken or has set. They tend to be top-loaded and gradually lessen with time due to actions being completed. Try to have action group meetings at regular intervals, (the multi-agency meetings will be less than the action group meetings) in that way the problems are kept to the fore, even when flooding is the furthest thing on people's minds.

Step 10. – What about our wider community?

It is important to ensure that the community at large is kept appraised of all information/plans and results of core meetings. This could either be through a newsletter, public meetings or any of the options mentioned in step 4.

Step 11. – Finally

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We wish you every success with your group and remind you that we are here to help, at no charge to 'grass-roots' communities.

Flood Action Groups can also work with local voluntary groups to put a plan of action together to reduce the effect flooding has on the community, in preparation for a flood event. Have a look at The National Flood Forum's 'how to go about initiating a flood plan'.