



Democracy Hub Briefing

How to Make Change

What do you want to achieve?

In design, form follows function is the mantra. That means expressing your purpose and then making sure you meet it in choosing to use your resources. It also helps if it is easy to use and even better if it is beautiful.

Lots of us buy stuff that works, but it annoys us, slows us down or is pug-ugly – that is the nature of limited choices. So, when you set up a group for any reason, you need to put pretty sure about what it is going to do. Democracy Hubs aren't any different.

Is it clear what your group wants to achieve? It is okay to say better-educated citizens but being angrier and better informed will not change anything without a clear focus.

What energises us is usually the focus of campaigning. But think it through. It is great to irritate the hell out of your opponents and make a lot of noise, but it may change absolutely nothing. Life is too short, and it is terrible for your blood pressure to be angry all the time. Stay calm and make change.

So, do you want to be effective or to be noisy and angry? So you have some choices to make.

Voter Registration

One thing that is guaranteed to change things is getting more people to vote. The young of this country are often politically disengaged; they don't register to vote and then don't turn up on the day. The old tend to see it as a civic duty and turn out. Guess which way the older do vote, and they vote Tory. Generally, the young tend to be more progressive. (Yes, there are exceptions, boomers did change the world by being radical, and some haven't lost the taste for it.)

An easy win is to focus on getting more people involved in politics. It should be non-controversial, and everyone can frame that work as positive regardless of their voting preferences. The Reboot guide to Registering is available here ([link](#))

Local Focus

A lot of things that irritate people politically are under the control of Local Government. However, the budget for Local Government is controlled by the central State and the Government of the day. Many people don't know that, so they vote against councils that cannot change the funding formula they operate within. Surprise, surprise, then that in a two-party system that is resulting in changes of administration. Which in some cases brings in councillors that support more austerity and reductions in the budget of councils? So, the cycle of decline in the support for local government continues.

One area for campaigning is to help local people understand who is responsible for setting the spending formula for councils. Find out about it and work out ways to talk to more people about why your Council doesn't have a free hand to 'fix' what is broken.

Other issues like the quality of schools and the lack of affordable housing are also often laid at the door of Local Government too. Local bodies indeed administer these budgets, but within spending, frameworks sent down from on-high. We know that those formulas are being manipulated to give better outcomes to Tory-run areas than their opponents. Children in deprived areas receive less spend per head than the leafy boroughs, less in the North of England than the South.

On housing – Local Councils do not have a free hand to build council houses. The Planning System is now pro-developer. Local councils have limited powers to ensure that the 'promises' made on initial planning applications are fulfilled. We all know of housing developments without schools, shops, buses, and amenities built after promises were cancelled. Like the social housing that mysteriously disappears after the first application or is built boxed out of key attractions in the area. Playgrounds and entrances where social tenants are denied access. So, it is not always fair to blame the local Council.

In some areas, the quality or quantity of housing being built is an issue; too much development and insufficient green space are left. Often Councils cannot hold off developers because the national government gives them large housing targets. The Southeast of England is littered with councils trying to fit in yet more housing. People are protesting to protect their parks, wild area, or nature reserve. So, when choosing your campaign, let us attack the right target, the national housing allocation, not the Council, which might be against that development.

Can you find a local example that you can use to illustrate the broader point about the funding formula or the lack of powers for local councils? To show a link between more powers to choose and the kind of built environment that local people want and need? It is crucial to link the local example and the real reason, not simply to be against something. You need to argue for a better role for local government based on local needs.

National Focus

God, where to start. There are so many things that need to be fixed in Britain. Reboot Gb has its TEN to Fix Britain, but we need to think about purpose before policy.

What is the role of the national government? We make assumptions all the time that the role of government is to make things easier for citizens but is that true? In the Covid crisis, the government has now left us to face the virus alone. The Health Secretary says the government has no duty to provide health care for us. The justice system depends on your ability to pay to gain justice after legal aid has been butchered. The government wants to water down our human rights and won't give us a guaranteed healthy environment. It does continue to tax us, but it doesn't ask us how those tax revenues should be spent.

So, we need to agree on what the government is meant to do? Then we can talk about how to organise it. However, it is improbable that your group or any group on its own can create an ideal constitution and voting system for a country. That is why Reboot Gb supports a people's convention to discuss this in-depth, supported by the necessary experts.

We need our nations to ask the big questions and work together to design a Britain that works for most of us, not the few. That is something worth being in favour of and campaigning to achieve. Still, it needs a context in which to become operational. Right now, the route to political change is via the imperfect vehicle of the political parties. They are in the way, and we need to fix that too. How to start?

The Road to a Common Agenda for Change between the Political Parties

To create fertile soil to plant that idea, we need a consensus amongst political parties that things are going badly wrong. Or we need a formal alliance between them that includes this as a policy commitment. Neither is likely to happen without people from different parties talking about what they agree needs to be done first.

Can your group help create a space for that conversation? Rather than competing with each other, can we determine the minimum that the political parties can agree on and get them to start with a “what we have in common” approach? That is a great place to start – how about inviting a few supporters of political parties first and trying your ideas out on them.

A Workshop Idea

To make people open up, we need to stop attacking them and ask them open questions. You might want to run this like a workshop.

Provide some essential lists of challenges so that people only have to rank them. Give people the physical space to work as groups. Give them materials in case there are things you haven't listed. All of us has an inbuilt bias; that's okay. It is why we need to have a broad group of people in the room at any time to get the broadest possible perspective.

Agenda

To get people to talk about what is meaningful, why don't we start with basic questions?

1 What is the purpose of government in the 21st Century?

(Important to include the context, as the challenges we face now are not those of earlier times)

2. What does government need to do to achieve those goals?

(Be specific – what structures, resources and powers?)

3. What are the biggest challenges facing the UK government in the next 10 & 20 years?

(Get people to create a list themselves and then rank them in order. Then you can compare and contrast the results according to the people and the party representatives attending.)

4. What are the policy areas that address those challenges? Are they different short-term and longer-term?

(Might be an idea to have duplicate lists of challenges so they can be in different orders according to time period.)

5. If you had to do ten things after the next General Election, what would they be?

(Note this isn't party policies; it is the policy areas that people want to 'fix'.)

End

See how framing a discussion changes the tone of the conversation. Please don't ask people to justify their views. Just hear them, respect their genuine options – you don't know their journey. We are all made by our experiences and our personalities. Let's the Hub be a safe space where being different isn't threatening. Each of those invited is a person like us, trying to make sense of a complex world, full of questions. Remember to smile and encourage. These are tough questions for anyone to want to voice their answers. Be respectful of the extent of the challenge you are issuing people. To learn more about how to facilitate meetings click here (link).

After the workshop session is over, the workshop organisers should collate the answers to each question, showing which policy areas are shared. Note it is okay to disagree, what we are trying to find out if there are any areas of common concern. Give feedback to others involved.

You can then use the results of this workshop to discuss where a common alliance agenda could be developed. Try not to be finger-pointing, it is important to allow people to realise their similarities. That is quick a journey after being opponents and competitors.

Follow-up

Before deciding what to do with your answers, some honesty is required. Did you get a good cross-section of people in your area? Where are the quiet ones represented as well as the loud ones? Did you get all the parties represented? If the answers are no, then perhaps you need to rerun the event.

If it was successful with some folk, it is easier to get them to recommend others to the next one. The second time around, you will be better at facilitating this type of meeting. After your second event, do the same check and repeat until you have a complete set of opinions. Repeat as necessary until you feel you have represented the views of all locally active parties.

Asking Voters Do They Agree?

Asking people what they think is essential, but it is tricky without a hook. The findings of this exercise provide you with such a hook to involve them in a dialogue. Could you run a street stall based on the results of any of these questions?

- What is government for?
- What are the biggest challenges facing the UK government in the next 10 & 20 years?
- What are the top 10 things the government should work on now?

Could you design a multiple-choice questionnaire for each option? Or use the sticker method that the Pro-EU groups found to be so effective.



Use Your Knowledge to Inform

When you have completed any survey of the public you have an interesting piece of information to share. There is a guide to how to promote your Hub's materials – we have called it DIY politics and you can download it here. (link).

It covers everything from how to write a press release, to use the press media, what a communications program involves, how to work locally or nationally and what gaining influence really means.