

Team: Why it is important

We were not created to act alone. Being a singular activist can lead to frustration and burnout, and often does not bring about the change we seek. Creating and sustaining a Team is one of the most **effective and sustainable ways to bring about social justice**, while being a great gift to the people involved and the community the team is a part of.

A team is a group of people who...

- are **connected** by a **shared passion** for an issue, **love of people** who are affected, **vision for change**, and **commitment to work together** to bring that change about
- are in **active contact with each other** (usually **face to face**, occasionally by phone)
- **build One-on-One relationships** with each other, in addition to **meeting face to face** as a Team
- **build relationships with those affected** by the issue they are working on
- work together to come up with a **common vision** for their work
- care so deeply about their work that they **actively invite others to be part of their Team**
- think of creative ways **to engage the entire community**, not just those who usually participate
- use **“we” language instead of “I” language** when talking about their work

A team is NOT...

- an **email list or listserve**
- a **committee** that **does little** outside of meeting times
- a group of people **mandated by some other power** to be on a committee
- a group of people **more interested in being “the representative” in a structure** than in building relationships and doing real work with others
- those **disconnected from the people affected** by the issue they are working on

How to create a Team:

Step 1: Identifying where I’m at: Start with taking a look at yourself. Ask yourself the following ?’s:

- What am I passionate about? Why?
- What in my life journey has brought about this passion?
- What are my dreams / hopes for change?
- How could I see my community working to be part of bringing that change about?
- Think about how you would share your story and vision for change with someone else.
- Work on the main points of your story and how they connect with and support your vision.

Step 2: Finding a Buddy: A Team is built one person at a time. Start with identifying the one person you think would most share your vision and help you build up your Team.

- Sit down and have a One-on-One conversation - over coffee, lunch, etc. feels the most natural.
- Ask this person what their experience working around the issue you are passionate about has been.
- Ask them open questions, like “Why did you decide to get involved?” and “What was that like?” that will allow them to share their story with you.
- Share your own story and vision for how your community could be involved in working on the issue.
- Invite this person to work with you to identify others who might also care and want to be engaged.
- End with committing to each do 3-5 One-on-Ones and reconnect in a few weeks.

Step 3: Setting off the Domino Effect of doing One-on-Ones

- With every person you discover who is passionate about this issue, there is the potential to inspire them to not only join your Team, but to think of other people who might also be interested. (Because if you're passionate about something, don't you want others to share in the opportunity to also be engaged?) It starts with finding those people and inviting them in.
- At the end of every One-on-One, ask that person if they would reach out to 3-5 more people, and say you will connect with them in 2-4 weeks to see how it's going.
- Set a date for a Team meeting of interested folks, so you'll have a deadline to aim for.

Step 4: Bringing the Team together for a face to face meeting

- As people are out doing One-on-Ones, don't wait too long to bring folk together. It's important while energy is high for folks to experience that it is not just them out there that cares, but a growing team of people in their community.
- 1-2 months after the One-on-Ones begin is a good time frame to convene the first Team meeting, unless you have a solid group of 8-10 people confirmed earlier
- In the first face to face meeting, it's important for the Team to work together to create a common vision for their work, and then decide on an action plan and next steps

How to sustain a Team:

Continue to build relationships in the Team and in the community. People will stay engaged in the work because they are connected to others. Doing One-on-One relationship building meetings will continue not only to strengthen connections in the team, but will strengthen the work as well.

Operate with a purpose. Nothing burns people out faster than feeling like their work has no point. Create an action plan for your team to engage your community with purpose. Every plan should have:

- A concrete vision – ask yourself the question: One year from now, what is the concrete change in people's lives we want to see? What do we need to do this year to get us there? How do we need to be connected in relationship differently?
- Work backwards – if you know where you want to end up, what are some concrete activities and events that will get you there?
- Brainstorm creative activities and a realistic timeline to make them happen.

Create Leadership Development opportunities for the Team members. A key piece in sustainability is developing new and stronger leaders. Rotate which Team members take on leadership for making each activity and event happen. Create a process for development and support of new or potential leaders. Have more experienced leaders meet with new or potential leaders to discover what they would like to do on the Team – what type of leadership they would like to take on? Also have more experienced leaders mentor new leaders and work with them on their plans for making events happen, and debrief with them after their event to process how it went and what they learned.

Operate with a Planning, Action, Reflection cycle. The healthiest Teams are those that know there is more to creating a sustainable Team than just pulling off a series of events. Teams need to create a space in every face to face meeting to reflect on what happened last and what they learned, and then use that information to Plan for the next activity or event. This cycle of Planning and Reflection before and after every Action helps a Team remember they are working toward a vision and helps them regroup from moments when they fall short, and celebrate when they take solid steps forward.