



*Proceedings of the Sixth International Permaculture Conference  
September-October 1996, Perth, Western Australia*

*© Copyright Permaculture Association of Western Australia Inc. and authors.*

## **Establishing a Sustainable Local Group**

*Naomi and Rick Coleman (Australia)*

*[Submitted Paper]*

### **Features of a sustainable group**

- Requires minimum input for maximum output.
- Clearly defined functions needs and products.
- Initial leadership role in implementation stage no longer required as the group evolves.
- Self seeding; smaller groups may form within the larger group for specific purposes.
- People keep coming back and new members feel welcome.

### **Identifying priorities**

#### **Functions needs products analysis**

- Important to define what people want to gain from the group.
- Newly formed groups should make this a top priority and people new to the group can be encouraged to express their needs once the group is formed.
- Needs may change over time; a flexible group will cater for this.

### **Applying principles of permaculture to establishing a group**

Starting up a local group can be treated as a design exercise in itself. Applying relevant permaculture principles can help keep the group focussed and truly permacultural in its practices.

### **Relative location**

Elements of the group are placed in relationship to each other to assist each other, eg:

- Teams of people may be formed based on interest in order to take on specific projects
- A telephone tree may be established based on locality so people who live near each other contact each other. Encourages more interaction.
- Try to link the group in with other established groups (eg LETS, Community houses) so that resources can be shared effectively and more people can access the group

### **Each element performs many functions**

- Meetings perform many functions (social, bartering, information sharing, etc).
- Working bees can be designed to be multifunctional (resource sharing, building gardens while building knowledge, social, etc).
- Multifunctional groups more likely to be diverse therefore more stable; attracts more people.

### **Major functions supported by many elements**

- Determine the major functions of the group:
  - Social interaction with like minded people.
  - Information sharing.
  - Resource sharing (tools, seeds, skills, bartering).
  - Achieving a specific goal or project (providing a community with food, community garden, demonstration site, etc).
  - Spreading the word about permaculture ( recycling projects, composting workshops, etc).
- Need to support each of the stated functions in as many ways as possible; brainstorm all the ways the group could meet each function, then form a strategy for achieving this. For example, information sharing could be met by:
  - Courses.
  - Workshops run by members or guests.
  - Subscribing to *Permaculture International Journal*.
  - Developing a shared library of books.
  - Informal study groups on topics of interest.
  - Videos.
  - Newsletter.
  - Site trips.
  - Working bees.
  - A sharing session at meetings, etc.

- Encourage different people to have input and contribute in different ways, possibly in teams.
- Ensures that if one person leaves the function will still be met
- Keeps the group focussed and productive

### **Energy efficient planning**

- Determine zones of energy for the group.
- Develop a strategy for each zone (see handout for example).
- Utilise resources wisely, link with other groups.
- Give long and protracted thought to processes and develop strategies before jumping into action.

### **Small scale intensive systems**

- Develop an ethic of keeping the group local and small; when the group becomes large it can split into smaller local units.
- Ensures that everyone can still have input and that individual needs are met.
- Group stays focussed and productive.
- Can still retain the larger group entity with special functions, a newsletter, insurance purposes.

### **Attitudinal principles**

- Turn problems into solutions.
- Be prepared to be labour intensive at first and look forward to reaping the fruits later.
- Always examine your own motivations in establishing the group, and try to ensure that your role is that of facilitator rather than group leader; a truly sustainable group is one that will function without you after it is established.

Good luck with seeding your own local groups!!!