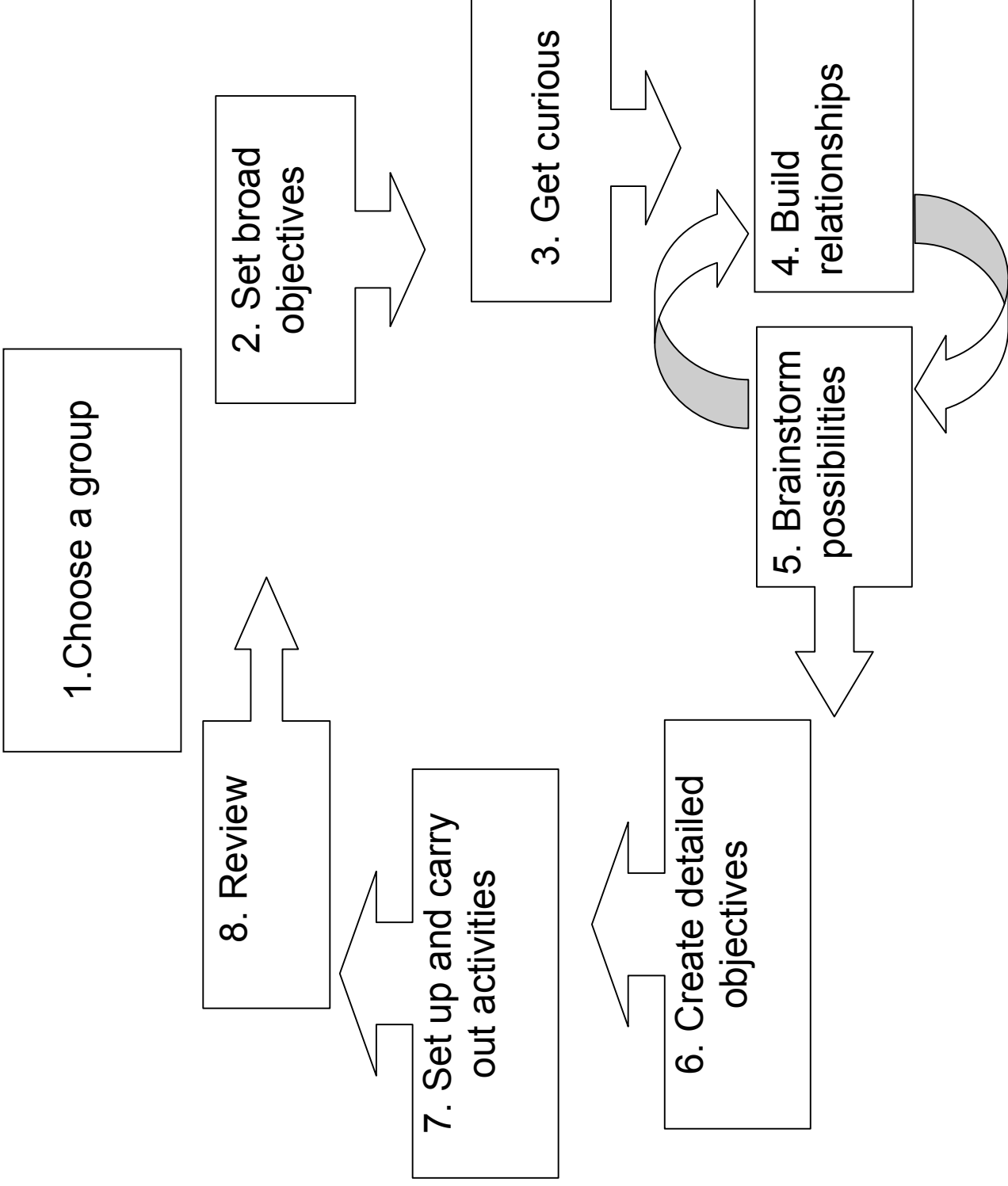


# Connecting Beyond the Comfort Zone

Try following these steps



# Connecting beyond the comfort zone

## The stages

### 1. Choose

Look at your comfort zone map and choose a group or a category of people you would like to move towards. You may find as you go through the stages which follow that the definition of your group shifts. People have overlapping group memberships and you may meet some of the people you would like to talk to in a number of different places/contexts.

### 2. Set some broad objectives

Don't be specific at this stage as you don't yet know what will work with the group you are approaching. For example:

*Raise awareness in group x about climate change.*

*Raise recycling rates in group x.*

*Involve group x in our plans for Environment Day.*

### 3. Get curious

Brainstorm what you know already about this group and what it would be good to find out. For example:

- Where do they live/work?
- Where do they meet? Think broadly - not just community centres, but shops, basketball courts, clubs, cafes, schools, the park...
- Do they publish newsletters you could read/run public events you could attend in order to find out more? Are there festivals/ celebratory events you could attend?
- Do they share values/beliefs? If so, what are they? If they are a faith or cultural group or have origins in a particular country overseas, can you get some background information? (Use the internet/public library.)
- What are the main concerns/pre-occupations of their lives?
- What excites them? What do they enjoy?
- What do they already know about climate change?
- What are their concerns about climate change likely to be?
- Do they have space in their lives to think about climate change, or are they likely to be more concerned about other issues?
- Who are key players in the group? Who are the real organisers, advisors, decision makers and opinion formers?

Some questions you will be able to answer already, some you will be able to research, some will defeat you. So next you will need to:

#### 4. Build relationships

#### 5. Brainstorm possibilities

##### Connecting/networking/meeting– who should you talk to? Who can help you?

- Who do you know who is part of this group?
- Who do you know who is in touch with this group? Think about community development workers, local shopkeepers, school teachers, social workers, faith leaders, university chaplains or union representatives. Talk to everyone you can think of who might be able to help you get in touch.
- Who are the advertised leaders of this group? Who else are central group members?
- Think about the places and means of communication: meetings, festivals, publications, media (newsletters, radio) businesses, workplaces.
- Set up as many meetings as you can with individuals or small groups and discuss their concerns about climate change and what you can offer.
- Be aware that the advertised leaders are not always the people who get things done!

This is hard work to start with but really helps to build your profile as an organisation which is great to work with, which leads to offers of engagement pouring in!

##### Brainstorm possibilities

Think about the kinds of things you usually do and how they might fit with the group you are targeting. This is the point where you need to get creative and adapt what you usually do.

Think about:

- Places and times which feel familiar/appropriate/welcoming to your audience.
- Activities which will feel interesting/stimulating but not alien.
- Activities which may fit a need the group has (e.g. can you offer money saving advice, activities for children, volunteering opportunities for members?)
- Who could you work in partnership with? (E.g. organisations working on health issues, youth organisations, etc – especially if these organisations are already working with your target group).
- Dialogue – how you can learn from your audience and apply it to the way you frame your communications?
- Language – be careful about jargon; check whether you need an interpreter.
- Values which your audience hold and which you both need to respect and which may help you create something appropriate.
- Cultural sensitivities – be aware that your assumptions may not be shared; be prepared to ask and check.

## 6. Create some detailed objectives

Now you can set your detailed objectives – the targets you will check back on to see if they've been met: - although you'll need to retain flexibility. Objectives should be set with input from your target community. Some examples:

*Attract 50 people from group x to our environment fair.*

*Give 3 talks on climate change.*

*Carry out x energy surveys for people from this group.*

## 7. Select, set up and carry out activities.

By this point you should have a number of possibilities. If you stay in dialogue and follow your gut feelings about what will work, you will probably come up with a creative programme.

## 8. Review how it went.

Think creatively about evaluation as well.

- Surveys and evaluation forms may not go down well. A lot of people find them alien and associate them with officialdom; they may ignore them or may fill them in politely rather than truthfully.
- Try to set criteria that can be measured without recourse to forms – for instance:
  - the number of people accepting a low-energy light-bulb;*
  - the number of people attending;*
  - the number of stories you have collected.*
- Asking the group for feedback and building in dialogue as you go along will probably work better. Make sure you continue to listen.
- Follow-up phone calls and conversations once people have had time to digest are often useful.
- If you want to gather information about opinions and attitudes, think of an integral way of doing this – for example, an audience at a presentation may be happy to offer a show of hands about their opinions but would be offended if you asked them to write the same thing down on a form.

Good Luck!

Ro Randall and Shilpa Shah