



By Jen Yockney, with help from Rowan Alison. Originally written in 2001, this edition 2017.

“It’s a shame there isn’t an A to Z of how to run a group” someone said on a bisexual email list a great many moons ago. Nothing like a challenge, is there? Within a day, Jen had got hammering away at the keys and the first 23 letters were done. Here’s an updated version.

A - advance work. Set a target of getting the first meeting in say four months, and start now with contacting local LGB, women’s centres, sexual health projects, community centres, centre for voluntary services and so on. Get advice on setting groups up, info about local council and community funding sources to cover room hire costs. Ask if they know of friendly journalists on the local paper. When you’re up and running, other community bodies will already have heard of you, and it will be easier to gain profile and members.

B - BCN magazine. “Tell us you’re trying to get things going. When you are set to have the first meeting, let us know in advance and we may be able to include a flyer in with copies of the magazine going to subscribers in your area,

or plug you in the news pages,” say BCN, who you can contact online at www.bicommunitynews.co.uk

C - calendar. Planning ahead for the full year - dates of meetings, possible topics to discuss, going to BiCon and local Pride festivals. It gives you something to look forward to. Also factor in that you meet at say 7.30 at the community centre each month, and will go to the pub by 9.30!

D - diversity. Bi people disproportionately likely to be on lower incomes, from ethnic minorities, and to have health issues. Venue choice will affect who can come along.

E - exhibit yourselves! Go to LGBT conferences, events, community group forums in your town. Take flyers. Hand bundles of them to anyone with a community centre or a leaflet rack. Excite them at the news of an active and growing new bi group here in Bloggstown.

F - f---ing. You’ll want a rule around conduct of people in positions of power and responsibility. Perhaps that people who run the group aren’t allowed to get involved with the group users. Or that such a rule applies for newcomers’ first few nights along at the group.

If they aren’t happy with this, you need to ask if they are trying to run a supportive space or just get laid. This also goes beyond the people running the group – are your group users here to make friends, talk about bi issues and maybe get involved in awareness raising, or is the group there to help them find lovers?

G - groundrules. From meeting one, agree basic rules about respect for diversity of gender, race, cultures, and the rules the

meetings will have around confidentiality. Remind people of the rules at every session.

H - heterosexuals and homosexuals. Work out what your ground rule is about whether this is a bi/questioning-only safe space, or whether people can bring partners along who aren’t bi, but non-bi partners are welcome at the pub after a meeting or at social events during the month.

I - interacting online. Twitter and Facebook are key ways you’ll reach people, and that they will try to contact you. It’s best to keep them somewhat professional and not your personal account: not least as if you ever have to move away or step down the handover is simpler. Look at how other groups use both: pages with events posts, private discussion spaces on facebook, and reminders of real-world meetups.

J - joining in discussions. Making sure that everyone can. You need to balance the conversation at group sessions so it doesn’t focus on a few individuals within the group or their particular interests. While respecting the right of members to be shy, quiet types, try to ensure they all get a chance to speak or raise issues.

K - know it’s a commitment. Accept it’s going to be a long haul to get things going and to get regular attendance beyond the core team. The MerseyBis group set themselves a target of going for a year and seeing if attendance built in that time to a level that made it worth continuing. Some groups fold when no-one comes to the second meeting and the organiser loses heart. It takes time.

L - local listings. Some places still have local fortnightly or monthly *what’s on* print magazines. Get plugged as a new exciting thing. Go

back for a followup story a year later. Are there listings blogs & websites in your area too - drop them a line.

M - mobile phones. Less key than 10 years ago but a "pay as you go" phone can offer a simple information line. Either as a recorded information service or answered at certain times of the week. But know your limits here on counselling skills and so on. Before trying to solve callers personal problems over the phone: have Samaritans and local switchboard numbers to quote instead.

N - newbies. Think about how to be welcoming for new members. Some will never have met another out bi person before or talked to others about being bisexual. Assign someone to greet people when they arrive at the group, tell them about what will go on, give them info about things like BCN, BiCon and so forth, and answer basic questions or concerns. They need to be good at listening as well as talking. Rotate newbie duty amongst the core group unless someone is really good/bad/uncomfortable at it!

O - one-off. If you don't have a core group or can't find a regular venue, try organising a single day of bi awareness work with local LGBT groups, like having bi talks in a local student LGBT awareness week. Bi Visibility Day (September 23 - see www.bivisibilityday.com) can be a good excuse, or perhaps something for LGBT History Month.

P - posters. Make a few simple posters ("Bi Bloggstown. A new social group for bisexual people and those who think they may be. Follow us on twitter blahblah or see our web page blahblah") and get them put up in friendly places like womens' centres, LGB centres, cafes, etc.

Q - queer listings. Ask for queer press and local websites to link to you - where might you have gone looking if you were trying to find your group? National listings too like BCN and Stonewall. Keep note of who you contacted though - it's good to tell them you closed down if the group folds, to save other people the trouble of fruitlessly trying to get in touch with a long-gone group.

R - realism. You can't be there for all the bi's in your town and solve all their problems. Define your group, is it a coming out space, a support group, a social group?

Don't feel that you have failed if someone comes to your group who needs a different kind of support or environment.

S - switchboard. Tell your local LGBT switchboard you exist. Tell national LGBT helpline you exist at www.queery.org.uk too. They will both then refer people to your group, so you will gain a trickle of members that way.

T - twinning. Find another bi group, ideally nearby, and lean on them for ideas and support. E.g. Liverpool borrowed Manchester's groundrules & post mailbox facility.

U - umbrella. The 'umbrella' organisation that works to help LGBT community groups nationwide is the Consortium. Once you've been running a few months, affiliate - you'll get to attend networking conferences for free where you can make good new contacts and pick up advice, training, ideas for funding etc. See www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk

V - venue. The most essential thing! You may have ideas already. Try local gay pubs which may have spare rooms or be willing to let you reserve a table on a regular basis,

say Saturday 3pm or whatever. Try local sexual health projects, LGBT community centres, and so on. Contact the local centre for voluntary services and ask for help and advice - it's what they're there for. Ask for donations each meeting to help cover the costs of photocopying, web domains, posters, room hire and so on.

W - www. Get a web page with a sensible URL (along the lines of www.bibloggstown.org.uk). Or perhaps a free blog site - like bibloggstown.wordpress.com

Web sites draw in lots of members for the effort involved. If you don't know how to set one up, drop another bi group a line for advice.

X - ...rated. You have to persuade people that you're not, that is, as a few people will assume otherwise. Which is where the groundrules and the tone of your publicity will mean a lot.

It's also worth being clear on this to potential meeting places, who might otherwise assume you want to hold an orgy... (The Sexual Freedom Society in Edinburgh had this problem at one stage, and ended up changing its name.)

Y - yourself. As in look after yourself. Someone has to be at every meeting, but as soon as you can, start to groom your successor, because you may want them sooner than you think.

Z - zoos. And cinemas, museums, restaurants and... Outings make a pleasant change and some people prefer them to pubs which can be noisy and sometimes too crowded. And they're easier to organise than meetings, so fill in the gaps with fun stuff and cheer yourselves up.

Like this?

Noticed something that's missing?
Drop a line to jen@biphoria.org.uk