

**Drawing on insights
from our work with
ChangeMakers and
the experiences of
RSA staff and Fellows,
this handbook is
designed to help
you work with others
to share your skills
and connections.**

ChangeMakers handbook
June 2013 by Sam Thomas

www.thersa.org



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Introduction

The RSA's ChangeMakers project looks at the capacity of individuals to create positive change in their communities. Our research aims to understand the characteristics of ChangeMakers in a number of communities, and explores how they can best be supported.

As part of this, we want to help ChangeMakers – wherever they are – to support each other. There is much to be learned here from the example of the RSA's Fellowship, a network of people from a wide range of backgrounds, united by a desire to build a better society.

Drawing on insights from our work with ChangeMakers and the experiences of RSA staff and Fellows, this handbook is designed to help you work with others to share your skills and connections.

It sets out some practical ways that you can start to do this – for instance, organising a meeting, or using social media – and points towards resources that might help you.

ChangeMakers research

The RSA has carried out ChangeMakers projects in Peterborough and Lowestoft, Suffolk. In a recent report, RSA senior researcher Ben Dello, who has led this work, described ChangeMakers as follows:

‘They appear rooted in their communities, have an impressive repertoire of capabilities, and are instilled with an appetite to apply their skills and experience to address local issues.’

RSA ChangeMakers, p. 5

The report went on to show that often these people’s capabilities are not being used to their best effect, and suggested four reasons for this:

- Lack of influence among private and third sector ChangeMakers
- ChangeMakers’ expertise on local issues not being utilised
- Fragility of ChangeMakers working on the front line
- Poor connections between younger and older ChangeMakers

On the basis of these findings, the report suggested that helping to create a local network of ChangeMakers could strengthen their connections and help them have a greater impact on their community.



ChangeMakers report: www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/public-services-arts-social-change/citizen-power/changemakers

Networks, connectedness and well-being

When we use the word ‘network’, we mean something very simple: the people who you’re connected to. That might be people you know – your colleagues, friends or neighbours. It could be the people who *they* know. The RSA has done a lot of research into understanding who we’re connected to and how they can help us improve the way we work together, and also how our networks affect the way that we think and feel.

There is also evidence that, as well as being a means of tackling local issues, stronger networks are beneficial in themselves. In research at a number of sites across the UK, the RSA Connected Communities project has been examining the way that people’s networks affect their well-being and health.

One of its findings was that feeling part of something that matters – for instance, knowing someone who can get things done locally – was often linked to higher well-being. Equally, perceiving barriers to community locally was associated with lower life satisfaction.

By understanding the connections you have, and helping others to recognise and extend their own connections, you can make a contribution to the well-being of your community.



‘Are you well-connected?’, a summary of the research by RSA senior researcher Gaia Marcus: http://storify.com/la_gaia/are-you-well-connected

What can you do?

The rest of this handbook sets out ways in which you can strengthen your connections with others locally, and work with people to take action on issues that affect your community.

Organising something locally

Given the importance of our connections, organising a meeting or workshop can be a good way to focus attention on a particular issue or problem, or establish the range of skills and experience that exist in your network.

Why are you meeting?

People's time is valuable, and they will only use it to attend a meeting if they can see the benefit – either for them, or for achieving a shared aim. For that reason, it's important to think about the purpose of getting people together, and be clear about what you want to achieve.

By way of example, you could:

- **Develop ideas** to solve a specific problem or issue: for instance, how to make use of an empty building;
- **Exchange skills**, with people sharing projects they are involved in and the help or advice that they can offer;
- **Share knowledge**, with an organisation or individual talking about their work and answering questions or explaining what is offered locally.

Facilitation techniques

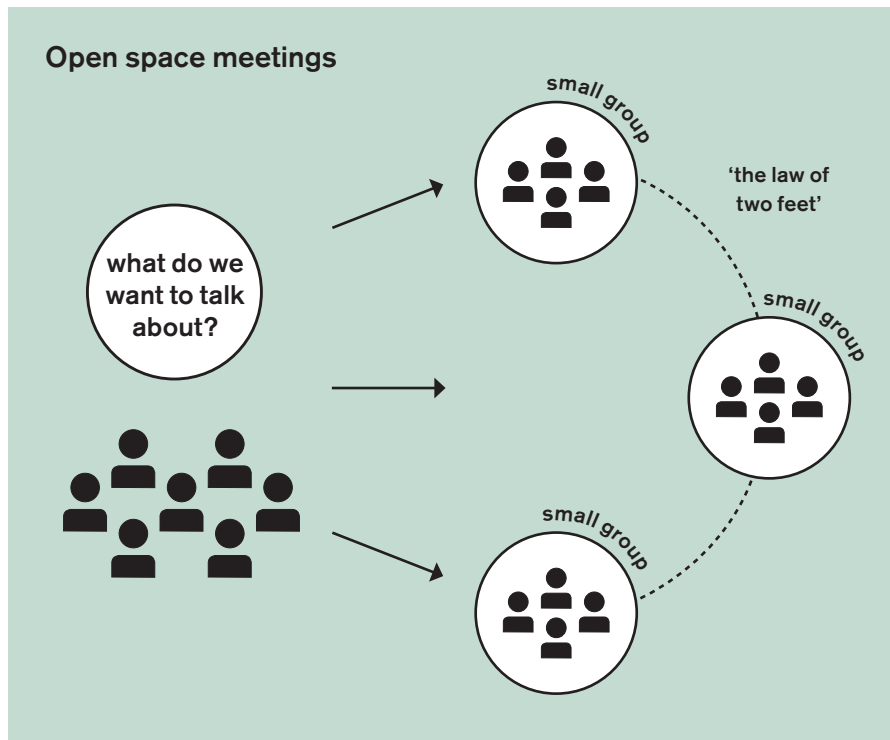
The role of a facilitator is to help a group of people work towards something together, whether that's answering a question, designing a project or coming to an agreement. It's not always necessary or appropriate to have formal facilitation at a meeting, but it can be helpful in making sure that the meeting is productive.

Here are some techniques you could try:

Open space

Open space meetings are aimed at getting people to talk about things they're interested in, with no fixed agenda. They're particularly good for large, diverse groups of people, as they give everyone a chance to talk about a range of subjects.

Running an open space meeting can be very simple: you can start by inviting anyone present to raise an issue or question they'd like to talk about. Each person then assigns a place (such as a corner of the room), and sometimes for longer meetings a time (from a set of pre-arranged slots) for people who want to join that conversation.



This diagram illustrates how a simple open space meeting works. The 'law of two feet' means people can move freely between discussions.

Attendees are then free to join whichever conversation they find most interesting. At the beginning, it can be helpful to explain that 'the law of two feet' applies: everyone is free to move around between groups of people, and should not feel compelled to stay in a group if they have nothing more they wish to contribute.



An introduction to the open space approach to meetings:
www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi?WorkingInOpenSpace

Project development workshops

If your group is meeting to look at a particular issue or challenge, you could hold a workshop that asks attendees to work together on ideas that they could take forward afterwards.



RSA Fellows at a project development workshop on mental health.

An approach we've used in the RSA Fellowship is to invite several people who have led successful projects of the kind you're discussing to speak briefly about their work, with the aim of showing what's possible. Then, ask participants to work in groups, and consider some or all of the following questions:

- What is the specific problem you're looking at?
- What could a solution to that problem look like in practice?
- Who would you need to involve to make this work?
- What resources would you need?
- How would you make the solution sustainable?

These are adapted from the questions we ask applicants to Catalyst, the RSA's seed fund for Fellows' projects.

It can be helpful to ask groups to 'pitch' or present their idea at the end of the session, which both challenges groups to keep their discussions practical, and allows others in the workshop to offer constructive criticism, or even support in taking an idea forward.



An RSA blog describing a workshop event:
www.rsablogs.org.uk/2012/fellowship/love-plan



The RSA Fellowship website has advice on different approaches to running meetings: www.thersa.org/fourways

Finding a venue

Traditional meeting rooms can be prohibitively expensive if you don't have a budget, but there are alternatives.

Through your network

Most organisations have spare meeting rooms and spaces, and asking people in your network whether they have space available can be very successful. It also gives people the opportunity to find out more about the organisations that people in their network work for. You could consider rotating venues, asking different people to 'host' a meeting each time.

Cafés, bars and pubs

For small meetings, it may be possible to meet in a café or, for evening meetings, a quiet pub. Often pubs are happy to reserve tables, and in some cases it may be possible to use a function room (although there may be a charge or minimum spend for exclusive use of such spaces).

A useful tip: holding your event on a weekday night other than Friday will increase the chances both of finding somewhere quiet, and securing a space free of charge.

Temporary spaces

There is a growing number of organisations, such as **Meanwhile Space** and **3Space**, helping to convert unused premises – such as empty shops or offices – for use by community groups. Although the rooms available can be quite basic, they are often free to use and usually very spacious.



3Space: <http://3space.org>



Meanwhile Space: www.meanwhitespace.com

Organisation

There are some useful tools you can use to help take some of the strain out of organising meetings.

Finding a time

It can be difficult to find a time to meet that works for everyone, particularly with a large group of people. By using **Doodle** or a similar service, attendees can easily choose between a number of possible dates and times, and you can choose the one that works for the largest number of people.



Doodle: www.doodle.com

Inviting people

Sending an invite with specific details of what will happen at the meeting makes it more likely that people will attend. At the end of this document, you'll find examples of some of the emails that the RSA sent to people about ChangeMakers' meetings in Peterborough.

Keeping track of who's coming

Knowing how many people are coming to a meeting can be useful. You can invite people to RSVP by email, but it can be really time-consuming to keep on top of all the replies. Instead, you might want to consider using an event registration website like **Eventbrite** which will create a web page for your event, keep track of who's coming, and let you easily send reminders and follow-up emails.

If lots of people in your network use online social networks, you might want to use **We Will Gather**, a new tool created by RSA Fellow Dan Thompson that allows you to organise an event very quickly using Twitter or Facebook. It's geared towards community action and will help you promote your event to others.



Eventbrite: www.eventbrite.com



We Will Gather: www.wewillgather.co.uk

Resolving conflicts

In any group, there is the possibility of disagreement or conflict. People may be frustrated if they think progress is too slow, or if their own interests or priorities are not being given enough consideration.

Some of the facilitation techniques described above can help ensure everyone gets to have their say. It's particularly useful in these situations to have a strong facilitator, who can comfortably moderate the discussion and ensure no one is able to dominate.

If a particular individual is making it difficult for the group to work together, it may be worth talking with them one-on-one, and exploring their concerns in more detail. There may be an easy way to accommodate

their interests or needs; if not, you might suggest an alternative forum that they could join instead.

Follow-up

The energy and enthusiasm that are created at a good event can easily evaporate afterwards. Here are some suggestions for avoiding this:

Ask people

End your meeting by asking what should happen next, and challenge people to commit to something they'll do as a result of the meeting. This means that people will leave with a clear idea of what they should do next.

Follow-up email

Write to everyone who attended with a very brief summary of what was discussed. This will remind people of what they discussed – especially if it comes a couple of days after the meeting.

Who's organising the next meeting?

With a regular meeting, it can be helpful to ask if someone will take responsibility for organising the next meeting – for instance, finding a date or picking a topic. Not only does this share the administrative burden, but it also gives people an opportunity to share the ownership of what your group is trying to do.

Inspirations

Here are some other organisations you might want to look at, to see how they organise events that get people working together:

Social Spaces, an organisation led by RSA Fellow Tessy Britton, has long been exploring how help people collaborate. Most recently it has produced Community Lover's Guides to places around the world, which focus on interesting local projects.



Social Spaces: www.socialspaces.org

Spark and Mettle, led by RSA Fellow Eugenie Teasley, has led workshops with young people and designers helping them collaborate and share their talents, some of which have been supported by RSA Catalyst.



Spark and Mettle: www.sparkandmettle.org.uk

Using social media

It's not always convenient to meet with others face-to-face. Tools like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn can be invaluable in helping you connect with other people in your community who are interested in social change – or indeed those who share your aims and interests wherever they are.

You probably already use these tools to communicate with friends and colleagues. However, they can also be a powerful way of connecting with people who are trying to create change in your community. You might use social media to:

- Create an interest group around a particular issue or campaign
- Share information about local organisations or activities
- Organise an event or meeting

Finding out what's happening

A good first step in finding out what's going on locally is to search for keywords or names that correspond to the issues you're interested in, and where you live. For instance, if you lived in Peterborough you might search for 'Peterborough event' to find others who are already meeting in the city.

Once you've started to connect to a few people or organisations, you'll find that new connections come easily: the nature of social websites is that the people you link to help you find others interested in similar issues.

Keeping people informed

Social media can be an efficient way for people to keep track of what's happening with a project. By creating a group using LinkedIn, or setting up a Twitter account, people can stay updated about events and developments without the need for constant emails.

Make sure someone is responsible for monitoring any social media accounts you create, in order to answer questions and connect with people who show an interest in your group.

Where can I get help using social media?

The RSA has produced a directory of resources that explain how to use popular social media tools to connect with others. You might also want to attend a **Social Media Surgery**; these are volunteer-led sessions that aim to help people make better use of the web to support their local community.



RSA online community manager Matthew Mezey's directory of social media guides: http://rsafellowship.com/notes/Other_social_media_guides



RSA Fellow and social entrepreneur Trudy Thompson has produced a free guide to using Twitter: www.bricksandbread.com/index/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Trudys-Twitter-Tips.pdf



Helpful Technology's Digital Engagement Guide has lots of guidance on how to use social media. It's aimed at people in the public sector but the advice applies more widely: www.digitalengagement.info



Find a Social Media Surgery near you: <http://socialmediasurgery.com>



A social media workshop organised by RSA Fellows through the Social Entrepreneurs Network in May 2012.

Taking the next step

Once you've identified a common interest, or a project that you'd like to work on with others, you should give some thought to how to keep people engaged in what you're trying to do.

Structure: how much is enough?

Often the first instinct after agreeing you want to do something is to try and formalise roles and responsibilities.

Sometimes formal structures, such as a steering group or leadership positions, can be useful. They can help with making decisions, and give people a sense of belonging. They are particularly important if you think your group might in time want to register as a legal entity – for instance, a registered charity or community interest company – which requires people to be assigned roles and responsibilities.

It's also important to remember, though, that creating more structure can mean spending more time in meetings and on administration, and less time taking action. Sometimes, thinking about the structure of your group can become a distraction from doing what you set out to do in the first place.

There are no easy answers here. The approach you take will depend on the nature of and personalities within your group, and on what you're trying to achieve. Here are some questions to ask that might help you think through your options:

- Do you need meetings? If so, what needs to be covered at them, and how often do they need to be held?
- Is it possible to discuss some things by email, or through an online discussion?
- What are the most important responsibilities that need to be assigned?
- Who are the leaders in your group? Can you recognise and support the responsibility they've already taken?

Don't feel pressured into adopting a rigid structure such as a committee or a board: it may not be the right fit for what you're trying to do. However you decide to approach it, remember that the most successful structure for your project is the one that will best strengthen and sustain the relationships that make it work.

Funding

You can accomplish a lot without money, especially where people are prepared to be generous with their time and skills. Eventually, though, the success of most projects comes down to being able to find funding.

Here are some options to consider:

RSA Catalyst

If you're an RSA Fellow, you can apply for funding and support from the RSA's Catalyst fund, as well as a number of regional and national venture funds. Catalyst provides small grants of up to £2,000 (with further follow-on grants available) for projects at their new or early stages that aim to have a tangible and positive social impact.



RSA Catalyst: www.thersa.org/fellowship/catalyst

Awards For All

The Big Lottery Fund's **Awards for All** programme provides grants of between £300 and £10,000 for local projects in England (£500 – £10,000 for Northern Ireland and Scotland; £500 – £5,000 for Wales). The grants are targeted at projects to improve local communities and the lives of people most in need.



Awards For All: www.awardsforall.org.uk

Further resources

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations provide advice and guidance on seeking funding, and have also developed **Funding Central**, a website supported by the Cabinet Office that provides details of funding opportunities.



Funding Central: www.fundingcentral.org.uk



NCVO advice on funding: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/advice-support/funding-finance

Where next?

A short guide like this can only scratch the surface of the ways that ChangeMakers can support each other. You might be interested to find out how the RSA supports its Fellows in turning their ideas into positive action, and look at the advice and resources we offer.



The RSA's four ways to get involved: www.thersa.org/fourways

If you're interested in joining them, and becoming part of a diverse movement for social change, we'd love to hear from you. You can find out more about the RSA Fellowship and how to apply to join it on our website:



Becoming an RSA Fellow: www.thersa.org/fellowship/apply

Contributors

This handbook was produced by Sam Thomas. It draws on the knowledge of the Fellowship team at the RSA, their work with 27,000 Fellows in more than 100 countries, and the findings of ChangeMakers project led by Ben Dellot from the RSA's Action and Research Centre.

The following people made valuable contributions to the document:

- Lorena Hodgson, FRSA
- Alice Kershaw, FRSA
- John Turner
- Ben Dellot

This handbook is a work in progress, and we'd love to hear your suggestions on how we could improve it. On the RSA Fellowship blog, you can find more advice and guidance from RSA Fellows and staff, and share your own experiences to help us improve this resource for the future:

<http://fellowship.rsablogs.org.uk>

Appendix: Sample emails and copy

On the following pages, we've included some of the communications we used to arrange meetings in Peterborough. Feel free to adapt them for your own purposes.

Appendix A: Sample invite email



Peterborough ChangeMakers network

Dear ChangeMaker,

As someone who has participated in our work in Peterborough, we want to keep you up to date on developments in the ChangeMakers network.

Next ChangeMakers meeting

The next ChangeMakers meeting will be held on Wednesday 13 June from 6pm at the Brewery Tap on Westgate. This is an informal chance for you to share what you've been up to since we last met, and ask other people in the network for help and advice on what you're working on.

We'll also have a presentation from Ben Middleton of Peterborough Environment City Trust, talking about his plans for the Green Festival, which plans to help community groups create businesses using social enterprise models.

You can find more details and let us know you're coming using Eventbrite. If you'd like to talk about something you're working on at the meeting, or make a request for help you need from other ChangeMakers, please get in touch.

Contact

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Appendix B: Sample agenda



ChangeMakers Network Meet-up

Date: 6 February 2012

Time: 18:30–20:00

Venue: City College Peterborough, Brook Street, PE1 1TU

18:30–18:40 Arrival and tea/coffee

18:40–18:50 Progress to date and potential plan for the ChangeMakers Network

18:50–19:30 'Open space' exercise

19:30–19:55 What ChangeMakers are working on
Are you interested, or can you help?

- Richard Astle – The Single Delivery Plan
- John Turner – Railworld
- Rod Allerton – Corporate Social Responsibility Forum

19:55–20:00 Next steps and close

The RSA: an enlightenment organisation committed to finding innovative practical solutions to today's social challenges. Through its ideas, research and 27,000-strong Fellowship it seeks to understand and enhance human capability so we can close the gap between today's reality and people's hopes for a better world.



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