



Producing a development plan

Whether a group is just starting up or has been established for many years, it can help to have a clear, shared focus. Groups often get caught in the trap of being purely reactive. This can lead to resources being over-stretched and key individuals exhausted. Even in some cases, to groups not achieving much at all, which can leave members feeling unmotivated. Producing a development plan can help to overcome this; the process of inviting people together to discuss the future can inspire existing committee members and encourage new volunteers with fresh ideas to get involved.

The most important information to include will be:

- the group's current resources and interests
- your aims and objectives
- who will deliver what, and by when
- how you will monitor progress

An approach for writing and presenting your plan is provided below. Some examples have been given to demonstrate the underlying process, tailor the plan to suit your group.

Part 1: Reviewing current status

Before considering the group's future, assess your current activities and resources. This will give you a baseline against which to measure future success. It will also help you to start thinking about realistic and achievable targets moving forwards.

Consider including the following headings:

- Your mission/strategic objectives
If your group doesn't have a mission statement or agreed strategic objectives, then this would be a good opportunity to formulate some.
- Organisational structure
Briefly outline how the group currently operates in terms of the committee (if you have one) and membership.
- Current interests and activities
What areas of the bat world most interest current members, is it science and research, public engagement, record development? Then identify what activities the group is currently involved with, for example, bat care, monitoring, research, training, walks and talks; stalls at public events, roost visits, bat box checking etc. Quantify these in terms of average annual delivery (or volunteer effort) where possible and note who leads on and/or is actively involved with each. Do these two currently match up?

- **SWOT Analysis**
List the group's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats with regards to your mission statement. Large groups may find it helpful to complete a SWOT analysis for each broad area of work the group's involved with.
See example below:

Example Bat Group	
STENGTHS A good range of experience in the group, popular public walks well attended, regularly maintained and informative website	WEAKNESSES Over-reliance on one or two people to organise events, bat carers over stretched, display materials out dated, not enough detectors
OPPORTUNITIES Empower less experienced members to help with event organisation, apply for grant support to buy more detectors, improve	THREATS Key members moving away, dwindling membership

Part 2: Aims and objectives

Having worked through part 1, you've probably already started to develop an idea about future aims and objectives for the group.

In the simplest terms, effective development will hinge on:

- building upon your strengths;
- remedying your weaknesses;
- taking advantage of opportunities; and
- putting measures in place to buffer the group against threats.

Your aims should be broad statements of what the group would like to achieve.

For example: to increase the number of people who take an active role in organising/delivering events.

Your objectives should then build on these by providing clearly defined targets. Some example objectives are provided in Appendix 1. The most effective objectives will be:

- specific – quantify targets where possible and always identify who will deliver them.
- time-based – set deadlines.
- agreed – it's not in the group's best interest to sign someone up to a task without first checking they're willing and able to deliver.
- realistic – don't over-stretch your resources, including people's time.

Prioritise and be logical in your approach, for example you may not be able to build on your strengths until you've addresses certain weaknesses.

Think also about which activities are likely to give the greatest returns. Ultimately, you want to focus your resources (such as volunteer time) on activities that are most profitable for bat conservation. For example: public events can be resources intensive, however some events are more rewarding than others because of the number and type of people that attend.

Remember, the group doesn't need to do everything from monitoring to contract work. If an activity doesn't work for you, then don't do it. Concentrate on those activities you enjoy and deliver good results for bats.

Part 3: Monitoring progress and success

Don't fall into the trap of agreeing your objectives, creating a beautiful looking document, and then forgetting all about it. Agree some clear mechanisms of how and when the group's progress will be monitored, and by whom (see suggestions below). Also, make sure that everyone listed on the plan has access to a copy. This way, everyone can take responsibility for delivering and monitoring their own targets.

Throughout the year

- Keep track of deadlines. It can be helpful to nominate one person to keep an overview of progress throughout the year (and to send gentle nudging reminders when deadlines look to be slipping).

Annually

- Evaluate success by asking questions such as: has the group achieved its targets? If not, why? What are the lessons learned and how can these be addressed for the coming year? If targets have been met, great! Does this create new opportunities? Are there new opportunities to further build on this success?

Every 3-5 years

- Review and update part 1 of your plan, to ensure you are always working from a sound baseline.

Appendix 1 – Example objectives The table below provides examples of specific, time-based objectives that build on issues and opportunities identified in the first example SWOT analysis. Please note, these objectives are intended to demonstrate a process only, they are not personal recommendations.

Addresses issue of over-reliance on one or two people to organise events

Also helps to buffer against key members moving away

Builds on the strengths: public walks well attended, regularly maintained and informative website'

Aims	Year 1 Objectives	Year 2 Objectives	Year 3 Objectives
Raise interest in getting involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Kate to develop a vibrant display advertising the different ways that enthusiastic people with limited bat experience can make a positive contribution to the group by Feb. -George/Alex to promote public walks/talks. -Phil to add new content to the bat group website by March. -Secretary to circulate this to existing members in March. 		
Empower more new members to run events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> George to deliver 1 fun introductory training day, to include 'introduction to bats' and 'how to lead a bat walk', for 10 people in April. 6 new bat walk/talk leaders deliver 4 bat events between June and Sept. (working in pairs), with support/mentoring from George and Alex. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 events organised and delivered by the 6 new bat walk/talk leaders. 2 events run by George; 2 events run by Alex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -2 bat walk/talk leaders taught by George in April how to train others -New trainers jointly deliver 1 fun introductory training day for 10 people in May. -4 new bat walks/talk leaders deliver 6 events between supported/ mentored by new trainers. -2 now experienced bat walk/talk leaders deliver 4 events. -2 events run by George; 2 events run by Alex