Bat Group Mingle - Mailing Lists

7th February 2024

Introductions by Abby Packham (BCT's Bat Groups Officer). The mingle had been arranged following emails from bat groups requesting support in the handling of their membership and mailing lists. Abby invited one of those groups to start off the discussion.

Gloucestershire Bat Group member said they were trying to get a handle on the information and methods used, having recently taken up a committee role. There is some information on a spreadsheet and a separate mailing list in google. They find the google account difficult to use, and only one person has access, with google security measures stopping other committee members signing in. Looking for something more all in one that allows multiple access. With only one person accessing it means all communications have to go through that person which is a big time commitment and pressure.

An attendee enquired if they had considered Mailchimp, something BCT uses. Can be accessed by multiple people. Used to send out "campaigns". However weren't sure what costs were involved. There's a free version but has limitations. See here for mailchimp pricing plans.

A London Bat Group (LBG) member introduced the system they use, called IO groups. Thought it is believed to be more secure than google groups. They often consider their duty of care as a registered charity (LBG is a registered charity but not all bat groups are, nor need to be) to securely hold data. They use multiple groups with IO groups, such as whole membership or committee only. Within a group, every member can contact every other member by replying, but not on an individual to individual basis. Means members can end up with lots of emails which can be overwhelming. However, it is again a different system to their membership information. There is an element of faff signing up new people to the groups, and they need to accept an invitation to join the IO group.

This brought up wider agreement for the need to consider GDPR and to keep data securely. Abby shared a link to the GDPR advice provided to bat groups (this webpage has been updated on 12.02.24). LBG member clarified that group members email addresses can't be seen by all, unless they personally reply to the group, then the group can see that person's email.

A comment from the chat was highlighted: "Cleveland Bat Group (CBG) use gmail too, it's not too bad if you're quite tech savvy but I have the same issue that only one person can send everything to members which makes a lot of work". The CBG member elaborated that they have lots of folders in the gmail account so all lists are in one place. They email out from there, BCC-ing the relevant groups. Separate roles in the bat group make it difficult if only one can send or access the information, so have to confer about who is still a member etc.

Jersey Bat Group (JBG) member said it depends on whether the secretary is happy to be the only one with access. Can be time consuming, particularly if sending an email on behalf of another member of the committee so needs discussion. However, it does keep control with data protection in mind as to who has consented to what in terms of sharing. JBG use an email account with virgin, Shropshire Bat Group had also mentioned this in the chat. Multiple committee members can have access to this account, but the secretary is still the one to send things out. Straight forward to handle, no separate

membership data because if someone hasn't paid they are taken out of the members email group. Can also set up groups for projects.

Avon Bat Group (ABG) members shared Avon's use of whatsapp groups which are used like a message board, only the admin can post in it to share news about surveys and events. Members need to agree to be added to the group but their numbers cannot be seen once in the group. Thought it was best option as some don't use facebook and emails aren't always checked regularly.

Wiltshire Bat Group (WBG) shared their strategy – keep it simple. Name and email only kept on a spreadsheet, shared in a dropbox folder that only relevant committee members have access to. The list is then copied and pasted in BCC for emailing. If someone from the group sends a reply, the reply goes to the WBG email address, not all group members. Secretary then decides how to action. Finance/membership details kept separate.

They also do not use forms, all membership is dealt with by enquiry emails. Following an enquiry, they send details about joining including a GDPR document to explain how their information will be stored and used. Other groups say they share GDPR info on their membership forms, but the section is brief and they wondered if it's sufficient. WBG wonders if their longer GDPR information puts people off, so pros and cons to their method.

WBG manage projects, events and updates separately to other communications. Project leads have their own mailing lists, so it is not something the secretary has to deal with. If a member wants to be part of a project, they email the project lead themselves. Project leads check with membership officer if someone is a member every now and again, up to the project lead how much they want to check. This raised a question of insurance from Somerset Bat Group but confirmation from BCT that it must be a bat group activity to be covered, not that all participating need to be members (see overview document on insurance webpage for more details). Somerset said it could be different if project leads themselves aren't members of the group. WBG says it's tricky, same approaches won't work for everyone.

Tayside Bat Group said they also use the spreadsheet, then copy and paste the emails into the BCC field. A small group so works for them. Somerset and Ayrshire bat groups mention using gmail labels for mailing and membership tracking. Others mention membership tracking to be another issue, sometimes compounded by committee member changes.

Attendees mentioning there's lots to consider, many will be taking stock and thinking of applying different methods. JBG also highlights the need to think about the replies, as well as how to send information out. Conversation turns to trying to get responses from membership, and that this is also a shared difficulty.

Also short discussion on what groups offer lifetime memberships, and what the price is of these. A member of West Yorkshire Bat Group (WYBG) mentioned they do a 3-year membership. Many liked the sound of this, useful for students moving to the area for a short amount of it. Questions followed on how to manage this, WYBG confirmed they use spreadsheets with colour coding, was involved to set up but now is simple.

Event wrapped up with attendees sharing it was eye opening to see how many issues are shared amongst bat groups, and many have had inspiration to try new ideas.