

LOCAL GROUPS

A guide to getting started

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About Compass and this project

Compass is platform for a good society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build networks of ideas, parties and organisations to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, build, support and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link that up with state reforms and policy. The meeting point of emerging horizontal participation and vertical resources and policy we call [45° Change](#). The question we are trying to help solve, as we endeavour to #BuildBackBetter, is not just what sort of society we want, but, increasingly, how to make it happen?

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What is Compass?

Compass is a platform to imagine and build a Good Society, based on the principles of democracy, equality, and sustainability. We create alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, support and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link that up with top-down/state reforms and policy. The question we are trying to help solve, is not just what sort of society we want, but increasingly, how to make it happen?

We know that in a future that will be negotiated, not imposed, we need forms of leadership, party and practice that enable a collaborative politics that's capable of dealing with the complexity of the issues we face. And we know we must be kind because we know means always shape ends.

Over the years, we've campaigned on issues like electoral reform, progressive alliances, participatory democracy, universal basic income, a Green New Deal, and more. Our work is underpinned by the principle of [45 Degree Change](#): the meeting point of vertical and horizontal power.

What is a Compass Local Group?

Compass Local Groups are a big way of empowering our membership to take our ideas and campaigns into their communities, and in turn they shape our national programme.

Compass Groups are local and specific spaces to practice your politics. They are usually initiated by local compass members can involve anyone who backs our vision of a good society and works and practice politics in an open and empathetic way.

Every local group is unique, defining its aims, objectives, and priorities according to the interests and expertise of its members, as well as the character of the local area.

When operating as a local group you'll be representing Compass as an organisation, so we're counting on you to demonstrate our values of care, tolerance and respect and principles of [democracy, equality, sustainability, and pluralism](#). You know your local area best, and so you will know how to apply Compass' ideas to that context. So, with our support, it's up to you to make the decisions, plan the events, organise the meetings, and keep the show on the road.

What kinds of things do Compass Local Groups do?

Local Groups do a lot of different things, and there's no right way to be a

Compass Local Group. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Critically they create a forum and a platform for progressives in your area to connect, talk, and organise.
- Map the political landscape in your area.
- Set up research and action groups on specific topics.
- Organise public events, talks, debates, and conversations around progressive ideas and campaigns.
- Learn about and practise new participatory and deliberative techniques, to give people the experience of different ways of doing politics We all need spaces where we can develop democratic capacity and demonstrate that the democratic approach can be both rewarding and efficient.
- Coordinate local campaigns inspired by [the work Compass does on the national level](#).
- Enable 45 Degree Change by connecting civil society activity with formal political institutions locally.
- Help to lay the groundwork for a Progressive Alliance at your next local or general election.

Case Studies

So what does that all look like in action? Here are a few examples of how other Local Groups have done things.

Brighton & Hove

Originally formed shortly after the 2015 general election, this local group quickly attracted a lot of supporters from various Progressive groups in the area. They later joined forces with a group called Sussex Progressives in a partially successful attempt to broker a local progressive alliance in the 2017 General Election. After a period of reduced activity, the group is relaunching with a campaign for local progressives to work together and #BuildBackBetter.

Calderdale

Founded in 2018, this group is particularly interested in democratic reform. They've organised several public meetings and talks on topics from electoral strategy and Proportional Representation, to the green economy and the four day working week.

Manchester

This group was founded in 2019, and has been trying to create a non-tribal space for local progressives. They hold regular meetings, and have an active social media presence.

Bristol/West of England

Founded in June 2020, this is one of the newest Compass groups. An initial meeting revealed a wide range of interests among its members, and work has begun organising events that reflect this. For example, the group has begun thinking about opportunities for Progressives at the mayoral elections next year.

South West Surrey

This group began in 2015 with a talk on the theme of 'Radical Hope for South West Surrey'. From there, an agreement to establish a small steering group and meet every 3 months was reached. The group continued meeting regularly to network and share ideas for about two years, before getting involved in brokering Progressive Alliances in 2017. They've had some success here getting Progressives elected to the County Council, and also managed to turn the seventh "safest" Tory seat in the country into the 151st.

I want to start a Local Group

Compass is a small organisation with big ambitions. What we lack in personpower we make up for in enthusiasm, belief and networks, but this means we need Local Groups to be able to run themselves as independently as possible. Start by thinking about what you can organise yourself, or together with other progressive organisations in your local area, and work forward from there.

This guide is intended as a brief introduction, but if you're interested in starting a Local Group, get in touch with Compass on info@compassonline.org.uk and we can talk you through the process in more detail.

Find your people

A local group needs members. So where are you going to find them?

Compass Members and Supporters

Compass can help you to get in touch with other members and supporters in your area. Just let us know where you are and what area you're focussed on. It could be a postcode, a constituency, a town or city, a part or a whole of a county, or any other geographical unit which is meaningful to you. We have over 40k people on our national list - some of them will be near you.

Your Network

Many of you will already have connections in your area who will be interested in the work Compass does. Remember, Compass is all about collaboration between progressives of all parties and none, so Local Groups cannot refuse membership based on other organisational affiliations. All who share Compass' core values are welcome.

Other Organisations

You could also try reaching out to other organisations in your area whose values are aligned with Compass'. They might be interested in collaborating on projects or events.

Think about:

- Local campaigning or interest groups
- Environmental groups
- Community groups
- Political parties
- Trade unions
- Faith Groups
- etc

Get them together

Now that you know who you want to invite to your group, think about what kind of events you want to organise. For example:

- A brainstorming session on the topic: “What would the Good Society look like in our local area?” This can be a good one for a first meeting, to get an idea for the interests and expertise of your group, and produce ideas for future events.
- A talk from an expert on a topic of interest, followed by a Q&A/discussion.
- A more informal network session, which facilitates 1-1 or small group conversations. (This kind of event needs to be carefully structured to make sure people talk to people they don’t already know.)
- A combination of all three.

Looking for Inspiration?

The events and conversations that take place in your group will be unique to your local community. If you’re not sure where to begin, think about some of the following:

- Are any issues particularly relevant to your local area?
- What knowledge, expertise, and interests are already present in your group?
- Think about national campaigns that Compass is involved in. We may also be able to help you out with resources and speakers for these events. Look at the website to see who is talking about what.
- Someone from the Compass can join a call or attend a meeting

Boring but important

Compass Affiliation

We've already talked about the importance of acting in accordance with the values and principles of Compass. Although we absolutely encourage autonomy and independence in the direction you want to take your group in, each local group is representing the national organisation and will need to adhere to certain governance requirements.

Group Representatives

You'll need to nominate at least two people (ideally representing two different genders) to act as group representatives on the national level. These people will be the designated liaison with the Compass office, and will also represent the group at any national meetings like the AGM. They will also need to attend quarterly check-ins with the Compass office, with an update on group activities, plans, and any support that may be required.

If a Group Representative decides to step down from their role, they must inform the office and a replacement must be selected.

Other Roles

Depending on the scope and size of your group, consider electing a secretary, treasurer, and co-ordinators for any specific campaigns or research/action groups you decide to start. Although this may seem like a formality, it's a very effective way to give the group enough structure and focus to maintain its activities over the long term.

Using the Compass Name and Logo

All this is particularly important when it comes to using the Compass name or logo on any literature, events, or communications you produce. Everything you put out must be aligned with Compass values, campaigns, and strategic aims. If you have any doubts about this, please contact the Compass office and we will be able to advise you.

Fundraising

Compass can provide a small amount of funding to help get your group off the ground. This will mainly cover booking a venue for your first meeting.

After this you may engage in some fundraising to support your activities. How you go about this is up to you. Some groups choose to charge a small fee for refreshments, others ask for a small donation at meetings. However you decide to raise money, we highly recommend that you name a treasurer or fundraising manager, who will be responsible for monitoring finances.

Elections

If your Local Group is engaged, even indirectly, in any kind of electoral

campaigning, you will need to take great care to comply with the Electoral Commission's rules on campaign spending. Again, if this becomes relevant to your local group, please contact Compass immediately so we can support and advise you appropriately.

Appendix: Practical Information

Running a meeting

You might already have loads of experience running meetings successfully, in which case carry on doing what works for you. If you've never run a meeting before, don't worry! This section is designed to lay out a few basic guidelines to help you get as much as possible out of your group's time together.

- Create an agenda and stick to it.
- Circulate the agenda before the meeting.
- Create a welcoming atmosphere. Try to greet everyone as they arrive, especially any unfamiliar faces.
- Organise some basic refreshments like tea and biscuits if you have the facilities.
- Try to regulate the conversation so everybody who wants to speak gets the opportunity.
- End the meeting with an agreement of next steps, or action to be taken and make sure everyone knows what they're responsible for.
- Follow up after the meeting as soon as possible with a written record of the main points discussed and the actions agreed.
- Start and finish on time! It's polite, and it shows people that you value their time.

Beyond Meetings

Meetings can be really great for sharing ideas, creating a sense of community, and interacting with new people. But they can also be inefficient and fail to produce genuine connection and mutual understanding. Large group meetings can also be intimidating for newcomers, skew the conversation towards louder voices, and easily get bogged down in irrelevant details.

It's good to facilitate other kinds of events which aren't built around the large meeting model. After 10 minutes of chatting to one person, you're likely to have a much greater understanding of who they are and what they have to offer than if you'd sat in a 2 hour meeting with them. Can you think of ways to enable 1-1 conversations between your members? This could be as a timed breakout section of a larger meeting, or you could introduce a system whereby members are encouraged to have a short phone call with every other member before the next meeting or event.

You can also use digital tools like Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Groups, and Google Docs to collaborate on ideas on ideas digitally. This means projects can move forwards much more quickly.

Online meetings

Since Covid-19 forced us to move most of what we do online, a lot of people have now become a lot more comfortable with meetings. Online meetings can lack the immediacy and human connection of face-to-face meetings, and can take a bit of getting used to. On the other hand, when we meet online we're no longer constrained by our ability to travel, nor do we have to worry about finding suitable space. It seems likely that videoconferencing is here to stay, and can open up exciting new possibilities if used well.

Running a meeting online

Many of the rules of face-to-face meetings still apply, though, as well as some other things to consider.

- Keep it short: 60 minutes is ideal, or 90 minutes as an absolute maximum.
- You'll need a chair to manage the conversation. For meetings of more than 5 people we strongly recommend that you use the chat box and the 'raise hand' function to help with this.
- Collect everyone's contact details so you can follow up with them after the meeting.

There are plenty of other great features on Zoom that you can use to your advantage:

- Breakout Groups: If you've got a big group, you can break it down into smaller groups for more informal discussions. These can then be brought back together to feed back to the larger group at the end.
- Screen sharing: good for giving presentations, or using visual aids.
- Polling: Useful for deciding the date of your next meeting, or getting a flavour for the group's position on a given topic.

If you'd like any support on getting the most out of Zoom, just let the office know and we'll be happy to talk you through it in more detail.

Communicating outside of meetings

WhatsApp

For those who own smartphones, WhatsApp is a quick, easy, and simple way to keep in touch as a group. Set up a WhatsApp group before your first meeting, and get everyone there to sign up to it.

You can invite people to join a WhatsApp group with just one link, so this is especially easy to do over Zoom. If your first meeting is in person, you can email the link to everyone on your mailing list.

Email

For times when WhatsApp is not enough, and for those who don't use a smartphone, there is email. Compass will be able to set you up with a unique local group Gmail address for this purpose.

Social Media

Nowadays, most people will find out events in their local area through social media. Think about setting up a Facebook page, where you can post information about your group, events, and anything else you want to share with the wider public. Twitter is also a great platform for interacting with people and groups with similar interests and priorities. Make sure you follow @CompassOffice and tag us in your tweets!

Some people are much more comfortable using social media than others, so we recommend nominating someone who knows the ropes to manage your accounts.

GSuite

With your Compass Gmail account, you'll also have access to things like Google Docs, Google Calendar, and Google Groups: all tools which are simple to use and make organising and collaborating as a group that much easier.

COMPASS IS THE PRESSURE GROUP FOR A GOOD SOCIETY

We believe in a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen.

JOIN COMPASS TODAY

action.compassonline.org.uk

The logo for Compass, featuring a stylized '@' symbol followed by the word 'compass' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

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