Growing Great Working Groups:
Our learnings from Black Thrive Lambeth's Employment Project

Welcome to Lambeth

START HERE

1 A Working Group is brought together to advise on or co-deliver a project. It should include people with lived experience of the issue being addressed. Working Groups usually develop over time. It can feel like a journey, with many twists and turns. You will learn what works best as you go. This poster maps what we learnt from delivering our Working Group. We think these things are important to consider when setting up your own!

2 Recruit a diverse group of people.

3 We know there is no single, unified 'Black community', so we aimed for diversity of thinking and experience.

Our Working Group included a range of Black people from different places, with different intersecting identities.

4 Understand and accommodate the needs of group members.

Members may need additional support for pre-meeting tasks, using technology, understanding jargon or understanding the project.

Allocate time and resource to support members outside of meetings. Ensure everyone can contribute in ways that are meaningful to them.

Think about members' wellbeing. The work can be emotionally draining. We had a 'wellbeing fund' accessible to all members to purchase items/services to support their mental and physical wellbeing.
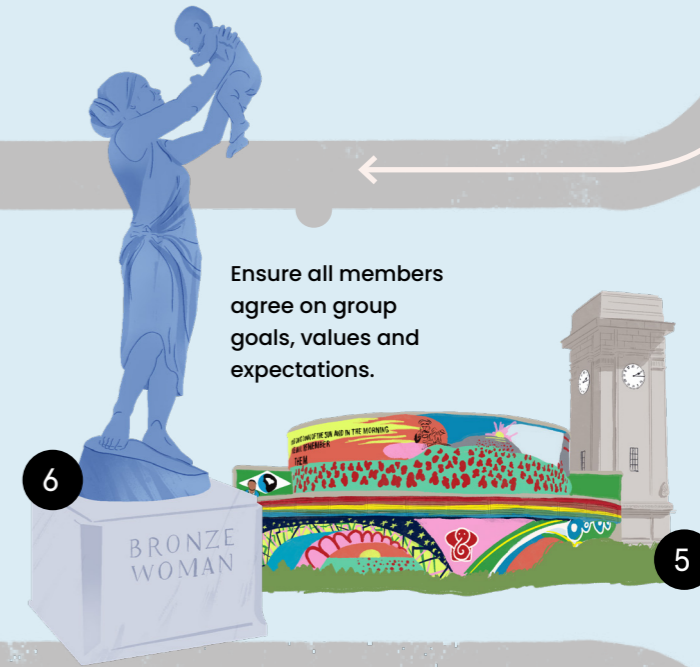
8 In meetings, focus on decision making as well as collaborative and interactive tasks. Other tasks can be done outside of meetings. Keep members engaged with regular updates.

Respect the time/contributions of all members. Leverage existing skills and knowledge; members bring different learned and lived experiences.
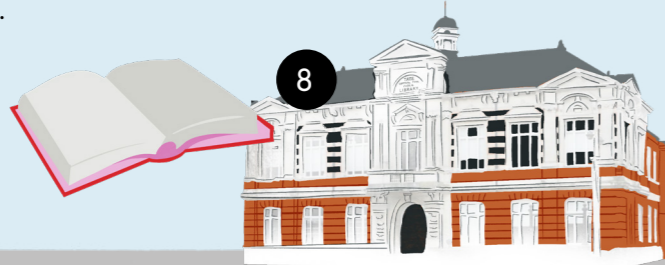
7 Ensure everyone knows their role. Agree on the Chair's role. Be clear on boundaries of what members can/cannot do. Any payment should be central and transparent.

Resolve tensions around decision making and 'power'.

6 Set the context. How will group members participate? Who does the group serve? What is expected of members? What values should they embody? How are decisions taken?

5 Ensure all members agree on group goals, values and expectations.

Invest in capacity-building and training to allow members to develop skills/confidence.

11 Avoid assumptions about members' beliefs and actions.

Openly discuss equity: race, gender, age, disability, faith, sexuality.

Integrate intersectionality training.

Get the chairing right. Chairpersons are the backbone of the group and facilitate how meetings are run. Be flexible with chairing structure and consider revolving the Chair(s) so everyone has an opportunity for a leadership role.

10 Adopt a developmental approach. Provide members with the option to adapt, change and improve how you work together. Embrace feedback.

9 Manage conflict as it arises. Be sensitive to the impact of resolving it vs. not resolving it.

12 Plan how members can create long-term community change. This includes developing skills, knowledge and capacity for use in future communities/projects. Issues tend to require long-term campaigning – a Working Group is only the start.

Connect your group to opportunities when they arise and celebrate success!

'All work and no play' makes for a dull Working Group. We met in local venues with food and refreshments, boosting morale and giving members a chance to bond as a group. Relationships are integral to a successful group, especially if people have not worked together before.

Provide social events/meetings that include space for feedback and reflection.

Consider in-person and online sessions. We found that online worked well during the pandemic but people also valued face-to-face time. A mix seems ideal!

Black Thrive HQ

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Our top five tips for running Working Groups

1

Recruiting a diverse group of people to form a Working Group can be challenging and time consuming, but it is a vital step.

• Reach different communities, particularly people that may be less likely to access your group.

• Engage with communities to garner interest and build trust with local people.

2

Ensure your group is as accessible as possible. Find out how to best accommodate group members.

In our Working Group, we had a member who was legally blind. We spoke with them via the phone to go over tasks, and how they could be supported during and before the meetings. We also purchased assistive technologies to support them.

• Enquire about the additional support needs people may have; remember that some people may not feel comfortable disclosing that they need extra help.

• Agree the best way to support reasonable adjustments with members and ensure you have budgeted for this in advance.

• Suggest services that could support members for adjustments beyond your capacity.

3

Reflect on the ways the group makes decisions, facilitates tasks and distributes power.

• Adopt a 'learn as you go' approach to the group – it's okay to have an idea of how it should be run initially but be open to change as you progress.

• Ask for feedback from group members. Listen to feedback and make changes.

• Provide the option to vote on how to change (or not!) the group. Voting helps to reach a decision when consensus through conversation is difficult.

4

Plan for how the group will end. Think about:

• Can you connect the group and its members to future work or opportunities? If not, can you keep them updated if opportunities arise?

• How will you share what the group has achieved and learnt?

• What skills or knowledge can you develop with members that might help with future opportunities?

• How will you celebrate the group's work and mark the end of their project?

5

Plan resources to support the group with their wellbeing.

Avoid being extractive or tokenistic. Group members should benefit from being involved in the work. The following will help:

• Pay members for their time, and for any expenses.

• Provide training and development opportunities.

• Provide opportunities for members to make strategic decisions.

• Build members' connections to new people and networks.

• Ensure the members co-own any outputs produced.

• Recognise reciprocal learning – benefit from each other's skills, interests and knowledge.