# Moving to a Core Group

## Guide

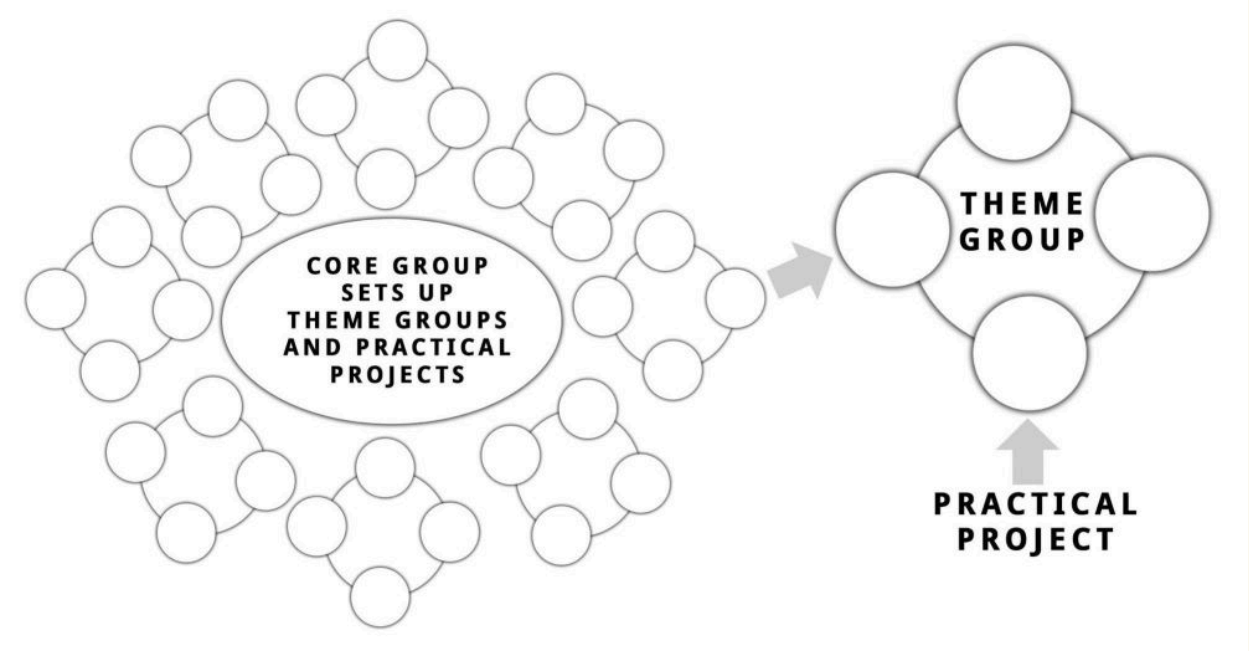
Prepared by: Transition Network 2016, updated by Root Cuthbertson 2025.



Many initiatives follow a process of moving from an Initiating group to a Core group. Early on, the Initiating group sets things up – ideally with some basic core values of the Transition movement (though this is not always the case). Later, it is a good idea to create new structures which will sustain the initiative longer-term. You can design these to include sub-groups, like theme-groups and practical projects (see Part One below). Or if there isn't enough energy to do that, the pathway forward might be different (see Part Two below).

### Part One - Theme-Groups and Practical Projects

In the earlier phases of group development, theme-groups and practical projects are typically set up by members of an Initiating group (or Core group)(see How Groups Develop). Theme-groups or practical projects can operate autonomously while also remaining connected to the Initiating group (or Core group). In the diagram below, the Core group has set up 8 theme-groups, each with 4 practical projects.



## Seeding Theme-Groups and Practical Projects

The idea is to find and invite people who can help, who have the energy and skills to take things forward. You can develop seed projects and theme-groups by hosting events with speakers, films, or Eco-fairs (see Events to Help Promote Your Project). At these events (or soon after) you might run some public Open Space sessions to have conversations which lead to action (see How to Run an Open Space Event). Ensure that you:

- Have time at the end for discussions.
- Discuss the next steps of the theme-group.
- Agree the details of the first meeting of a continuing theme-group.

(see also Identifying People and Groups to Help You, Planning Putting on Events, 7 Ingredients for a Just, Fair, and Inclusive Transition, Working With Young People, Building Bridges, How to Build Networks, Regional Networks, Being Part of the Transition Movement).

Some theme-groups and practical projects are set up by:

- Invitation by the Initiating group (or Core group).
- Spontaneous generation!
- One initiator who hosts events or invites people to set up a theme-group.
- Organising a 'Dragon's Den' or projects marketplace. People present ideas to an audience interested in supporting local projects – with money, time, space, advice, skills, and so on. Audience members choose to support their favourite presentation.
- Helping existing projects run by other organisations. Just be careful about bringing two different groups' visions and cultures together (see How to Create Partnerships).

## Evolving the Core Group

Developing a Core group can benefit from some attention and care, maybe even recruiting new members. Often the Initiating group evolves into a supportive Core group which 'provides services' to all the other sub-groups. The Core group typically takes on certain roles like:

- Coordinating activities to avoid clashes and duplication.
- Continuing to host events that promote the entire initiative (not only one project).
- Looking for synergies and opportunities.
- Holding key relationships with other community organisations.
- Developing a guiding strategy that works for all.
- Taking care of the well-being of the whole.
- Connecting with the media and representing the entire initiative.
- Advocating for the core values of the Transition movement.
- Ensuring that communication and interaction with wider aspects of the Transition movement continue to happen (see Being Part of the Transition Movement.

Some members of the Initiating group may not like (or be suited for) the new tasks and roles that a Core group develops. These members may prefer to leave the Core group, and devote their energy to a theme-group or practical project instead. There is a risk of this happening too much (see The Donut Effect below). It can be fine – and it can also help to direct some energy into the Core group to better sustain the initiative overall.

## New Structures

As a Core group develops, it often creates new structures designed to help 'provide services' (see Effective Groups). New structures might include:

- Taking care of organisational requirements like: insurance; personal liability; health and safety; child protection; financial and legal responsibilities.
- Giving those affected by decisions a say in making them (including different sub-groups)(see Decision Making).
- Creating ways to be accountable and transparent about its activities, both internally to members, and externally to the community the initiative serves.
- Balancing transparency with enough privacy to create internal safety for discussions and processes.
- Maintaining some continuity while allowing in new ideas, people, and ways of doing things.

To develop effectively, these new structures usually benefit from a different focus than the original Initiating group had. They are another reason that members of the original Initiating group might choose to leave the developing Core group; and why new members with relevant skills might be better suited to join the Core group.

## Founders Empower the Next Generation

The shift from Initiating group to Core group is a normal and natural stage of group development (see How Groups Develop), part of moving from the start-up phase toward becoming more established. Often, during this stage, there are opportunities to explore a transition in the initiative's group culture (see Transition in Group Culture).

The initiative overall can benefit from Founders (and earlier members) starting to hand over responsibilities and share power with newer members in various ways. Without this, newer members can begin to feel frustrated and limited. The task for Founders is an important one: to create a self-sustaining organisation which can continue without them.

This is often the stage where Founders let go of their role. They may change their role, becoming more of an advisor, and increasingly hand over the running of the initiative to the next generation. This can be a key 'make or break' moment for many organisations (see From Founders to the Future, see Succession for Long-Term Success).

Often there is a shift in the vision as the Founders let go:

- Sometimes it's a power struggle, sometimes it's peaceful.
- There can be a feeling that the original radical vision is diluted somehow.
- Sometimes a gentler or more mainstream vision can appeal to more people.
- Sometimes the world has changed, and the vision can be expressed differently to be more relevant.

## Honour the History

Often when an initiative starts up it runs on goodwill. People are reacting to whatever is needed at that moment in time. Informal understandings are developed within a typically small and committed team. As it becomes more established and new people join, it helps to empower new people by creating some kind of orientation or induction which explains how things are done and outlines the history of the group. While this may feel frustrating and slow to original members, it can help the group to run more smoothly (see Effective Groups).

**Activity - Timeline**. One way to honour the history is to make a long 'timeline' on a roll of lining paper:

- Mark the years on it.
- Use words or images to record what has happened.
- Mark everyone's joining date on it.
- Add all significant events, internal and wider.
- Take time to reflect together on the journey.
- Celebrate achievements, learnings, and changes.

**Activity - Past to Present Line**. Another activity is where everyone stands in a line with 'longest serving' at one end, and 'newest' at the other.

- Ask what people appreciate about those in another part of the line.
- Ideally you have both original members and newcomers, and everyone is able to see the value of the others.
- Have an open conversation about how it is to be a new member in this group.
- Ask the Founders how it feels to have set it up. And how they feel about letting go.

**Activity - Handover.** Some initiatives create a process or ritual for handing over leadership, so the moment of Founders letting go and newcomers stepping up is officially marked.

- Envision how it might be if this has happened really well.
- Have each person describe one thing that will be different about how they do things.
- Note: It can be helpful to have external facilitation for this process if there are tensions or charged emotions (see Making Space for Uncomfortable Emotions, see Inquiry - Emotions).

A useful tip for Founders and early members is: You may be like pioneers, the kind of people who see something that needs doing and step in to do it. People who join later may be less confident. They may benefit from being actively invited or supported to step up to taking responsibility (see From Founders to the Future, see Succession for Long-Term Success).

## Newcomers

New people may approach you to get involved through your awareness-raising activities, or you can actively seek to recruit people. It can be very helpful to develop clear processes for bringing new people into the group. To ease in newcomers and help them take on responsibility (instead of waiting at the edge, or leaving) you can provide some induction or orientation materials that explain the basic structures and procedures of the initiative, like:

- Who is in what role, and what do they do?
- How are finances dealt with?
- What is the initiative's organisational structure (charity, non-profit, membership association, social enterprise, and so on)?
- How are decisions made, and recorded, and followed up?
- How are meetings run (agenda-setting, ground rules, roles, location, and so on)?

Supporting newcomers might mean having a person who initially greets and meets newcomers, who can answer questions and explain how things work, acting as a contact for them and keeping them engaged (see How to Get and Keep People Involved).

Sometimes you may want to recruit someone with specific skills or experience. You can do this for trustees, Core group members, volunteers, helpers with practical projects or theme-groups. You might actively promote this to your networks, or advertise publicly.

When new people take on roles, be very clear about:

- What role is needed or being handed over. It can help to produce a description document for the role.
- The skills and time commitment.
- How the handover will happen.

The process of handing over a role might include:

- The person holding the role giving several weeks' notice that they plan to step out of the role.
- Defining and describing as much as possible about the role.
- Being open to sharing the role, maybe dividing the tasks so they can be done by more than one person.
- Inviting others to step into the role (all or part of it).

Remember that even though the process of empowering newcomers can take some time, it is important for the long-term success, sustainability, and regeneration of the initiative. Try not to let the pressure of 'doing' activities get in the way of supporting newcomers (see Task-Process-Relationship, see Burnout to Balance).

## Part Two - Continuing Without Theme-Groups or Projects

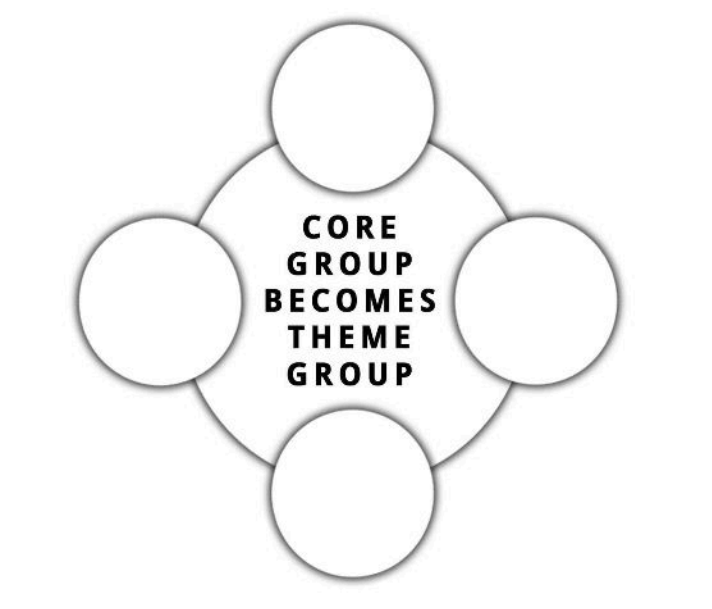
What if you can't get practical projects or theme-groups started? You can still carry on even if it is difficult to get projects or theme-groups up and running. Ideas for continuing without them include:

1. The Initiating group becomes the Core group. The Core group often decides where to put its energy by:

- Responding to what's happening in the community.
- Deciding what activities people have energy for and interest in.
- There is no right programme for any initiative – you are the best people to decide what to do.

2. The Core group can act like a theme-group by hosting activities such as:

- Putting on awareness-raising events, like Re-skilling workshops, to bring in new people and energy (see Events to Help Promote Your Project).
- Offering training, talks, or information about the initiative to other organisations or at events.
- Running practical projects (see Small Practical Project Ideas) such as:
    - Setting up a community garden or planting trees.
    - Doing a bulk buy of solar panels (or a hundred other things!)
    - Some projects might get funding and generate some paid work (see Developing Practical Projects).

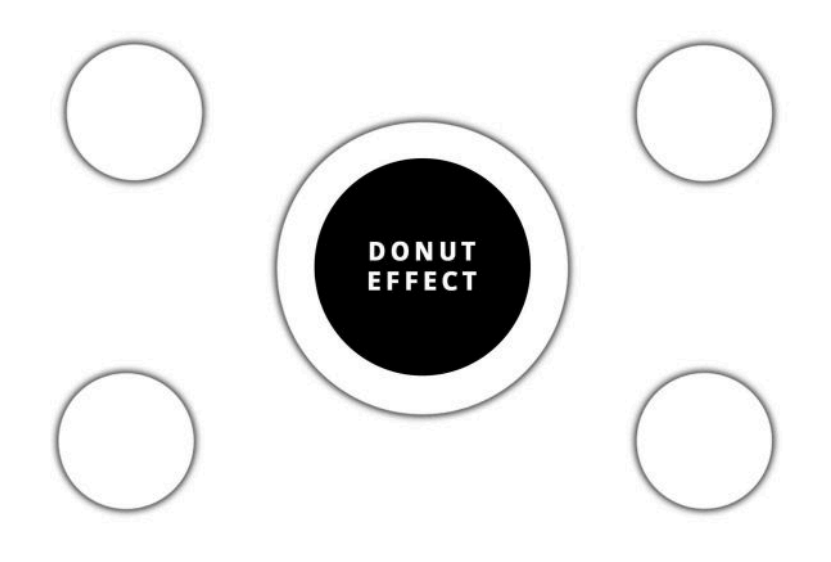


3. The Core group takes time to consolidate by:

- Checking on people's energy levels (see Inner Feedback for Personal Resilience, see Respecting 'Yes' and 'No', see Group and Personal Sustainability).
- Recruiting new members and deepening together (see How to Get and Keep People Involved).
- Rethinking the initiative's purpose and vision by thinking about:
    - What is our purpose now?
    - What are our agreements (see Group Agreements)?
    - How do new people come in, and how do we welcome them?
    - How are our relationships with others in the local area (see Building Bridges)?
    - How is our personal and group resilience (see Group and Personal Sustainability)?
    - What could we improve about how we work together (see Working Together Well)?

## The Donut Effect

If everyone (including the Core group members) has gone off to do projects and no one's holding the centre, this is sometimes called the "donut effect". It can happen to theme-groups as well, if a great idea for a new project comes along, and everyone goes off to do that. The group can end up resembling a donut, with lots of projects around the edge and a big hole at the centre.




This might mean that the Core group ceases to operate.  Which could be fine, and it can be wonderful when lots of practical projects are happening. Not having a Core group might mean losing the advantage that comes from many theme-groups collaborating in a similar direction (see Evolving the Core above). In the longer-term there are benefits to having a shared 'support' function to co-ordinate tasks that are common to all theme-groups and projects (like publicity, financial accounting, insurance, recruiting new people, and so on).

Ideally the Core group makes it easier to run projects and does not feel like a drain. It can help to consider how it would operate, and finding some people who are good at (and prefer) the work of coordinating theme-groups and projects, not only doing hands-on work themselves.  Both of these kinds of activity are valuable and contribute toward a successful and effective initiative.

Moving to a Core group can be a challenging yet rewarding process. Thanks for reading and joining in. This guide is intended as a starting point for conversations that may be part of a transition toward greater understanding of the varied experiences of individuals and groups throughout the Transition movement.

## Related Resources

How Groups Develop
Events to Help Promote Your Project
How to Run an Open Space Event
Identifying People and Groups to Help You
Planning Putting on Events
A Just, Fair, and Inclusive Transition
Working With Young People
Building Bridges
How to Build Networks
Regional Networks
Being Part of the Transition Movement
How to Create Partnerships
From Founders to the Future
Succession for Long-Term Success
Making Space for Uncomfortable Emotions
Inquiry - Emotions
Effective Groups
Decision Making
Transition in Group Culture
How to Get and Keep People Involved
Task-Process-Relationship
Burnout to Balance
Small Practical Project Ideas
Developing Practical Projects
Inner Feedback for Personal Resilience
Respecting 'Yes' and 'No'
Group Agreements
Group and Personal Sustainability
Working Together Well

## References

[Dragon's Den](#) - Wikipedia