

Creating a “phone tree” or call group

What is a phone tree?

A phone tree is simply a system for connecting a group of people by telephone.

In its simplest form it is a list of phone numbers of members in the community. In a more complicated form, it may have a defined structure and an agreed set of rules.

Traditionally the phone tree system has often been used to help spread a brief message quickly to a large number of people, for instance to warn of bushfire threat. The aim is to make sure everyone in the community is contacted.



So in confronting the challenge of Covid19 (Coronavirus), when we are looking at several weeks, or even months, of social distancing, quarantine and isolation, we want to make sure all of our community are connected and we are looking out for each other.

Setting Up the Phone Tree

The Organiser of the phone tree collects information about all the individuals who would like to be included in the list. Ideally, collect at least two contact numbers for each person, including a contact number with an answering machine or voicemail or a mobile with a text / messaging application. It might also be useful to collect Skype id's if people have them.

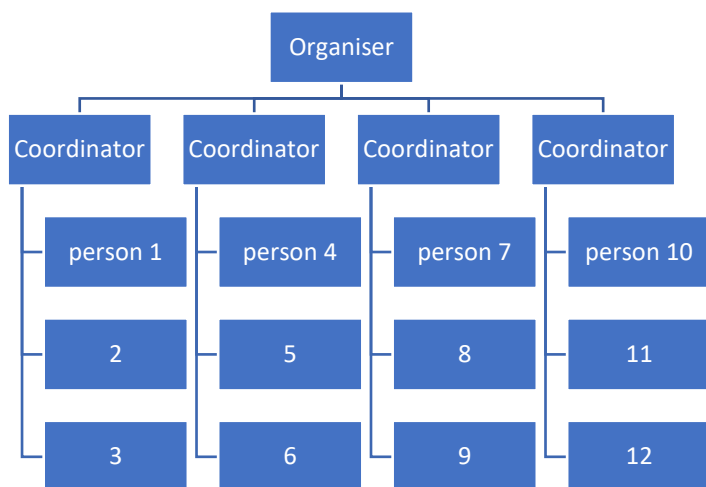
From that list, recruit a smaller group of reliable people to be Coordinator's who will be responsible for calling the other people on the list or making sure that group calls take place as agreed.

- **Create groups:** Divide the people on your list among the Coordinators so that each Coordinator is responsible for a small group (for eg. between 3-8 people).
- **Create a structure:** Draw up an organisation chart. You can set up a phone tree in any way that suits your community. The key is to ensure that everyone is contacted by at least one person regularly, and there is a way to check in on this. In general- the simpler the better! (See eggs on page below)
- **Create some guidelines / ground rules:** Consider if you need a few points for ground rules, or guidance for people when calling. For instance: what happens when they can't get a hold of someone? What do we do if someone needs help? Or to clarify the purpose and scope of the phone tree - what are the key questions we might want to ask and be asked, when we talk to each other?
- **Communicate:** make sure all Coordinators have copies of the Organisational chart, and your contact list, and are clear on how it works. You could also circulate the organization chart and / or contact list amongst the entire list (if appropriate).

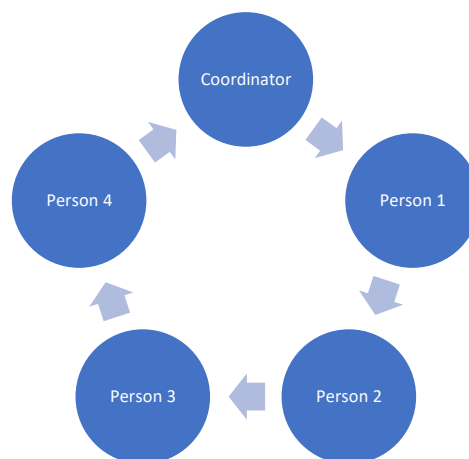
Drawing up the Organisational Chart and working out how you want the Phone Tree to work can also be done collaboratively between the Organiser, Coordinators and others in the community.

Examples for how to organise a phone tree:

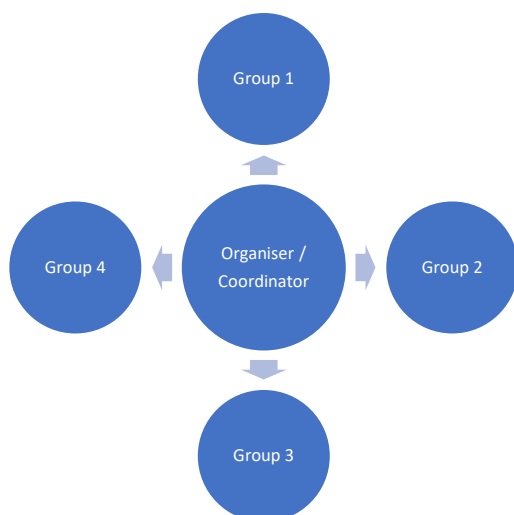
1. Linear



2. Circular



3. Combination of circular and linear



How these different examples work?

1. Coordinators simply take responsibility for calling a small group of people.
2. Coordinators start a call chain, where people take turns calling the next person on the list in their group, until the call is returned to the Coordinator.
3. An Organiser or a Coordinator could call a single person in each group and initiate a call chain around that group.

Or any other model that works for your community!

Tips for activating your "tree"

- When the Groups are first established, the Coordinator should check in with the group and make sure they are on the same page and agree amongst each other, about when and how people might like to call each other, and how often.
- You can be as inventive as you like! People on Skype or Whatsapp or Facetime, might want to face call.
- The Coordinators should notify the Organiser when they are not able to make the calls, or something changes in their ability to participate.
- The Organiser should also check in regularly with the Coordinators.

Remember the phone tree is mainly to ensure everyone has someone looking out for them, especially where there are people who might not use the internet or might be living alone.

Everyone in the community can still contact each other however and whenever they would like!