Telephone Trees

HOW TO

What is a Telephone Tree?

A telephone tree is a simple way for connecting groups of people. It allows groups to spread a message around quickly within a community. Telephone trees rely on each member to phone another and so on.

They are generally used when there is urgent information to share or a decision needs to be made, Telephone trees were generally the way of contacting members before the use of emails. They are still a means of contacting those who cannot meet together or do not have access to the internet.

Setup

Form a list of contacts:
Collect information from people who agreed to be included in the list. Remember privacy and confidentiality must be managed, consider how the group will do this.

Create Structure:
For smaller groups calls can be made by anyone in the group, make sure everyone receives a call. For larger groups you may want to consider recruiting a small number of members to act as "key members" or "coordinators". These members can be assigned groups that they are responsible for calling. Ensure that everyone is contacted, create a way to monitor this.

Create Guidelines:
Consider setting up group rules. What are the key questions you want to ask and be asked, when to call, purpose and scope, what to do if someone needs assistance.

Communicate:
Ensure everyone is clear how the phone tree works and members have copies of the contact list.
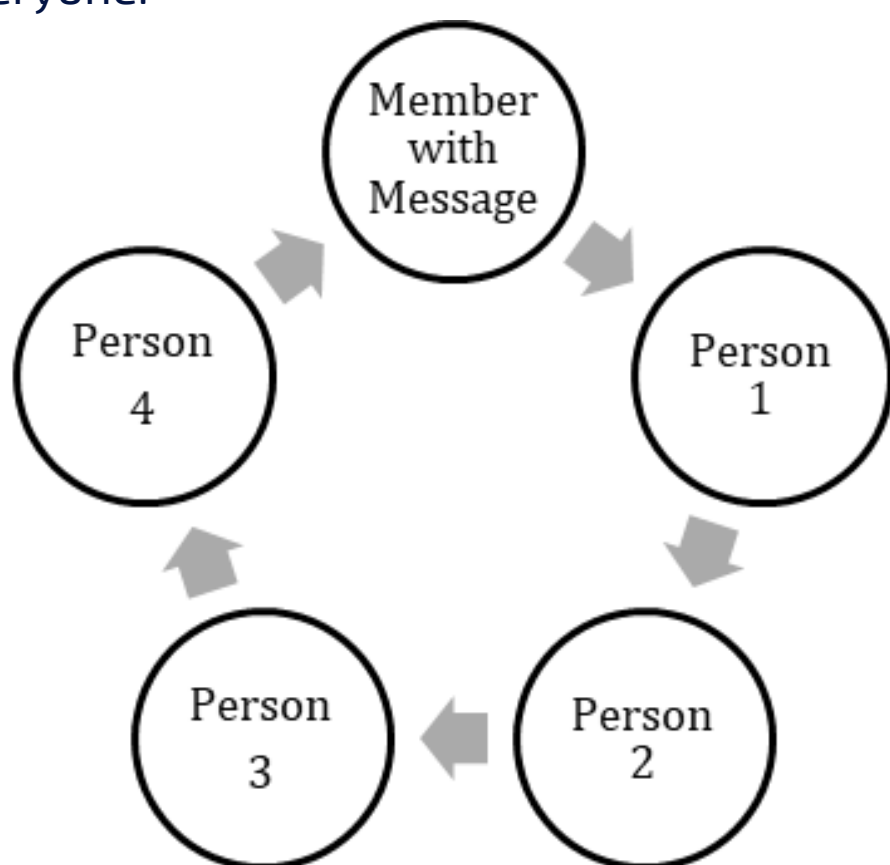
Types of Telephone Trees

There are two different styles of telephone trees that you can use depending on the needs and size of your group. A linear style is a top down approach which works well for large groups with a lot of members. A circular style is better suited for smaller groups.
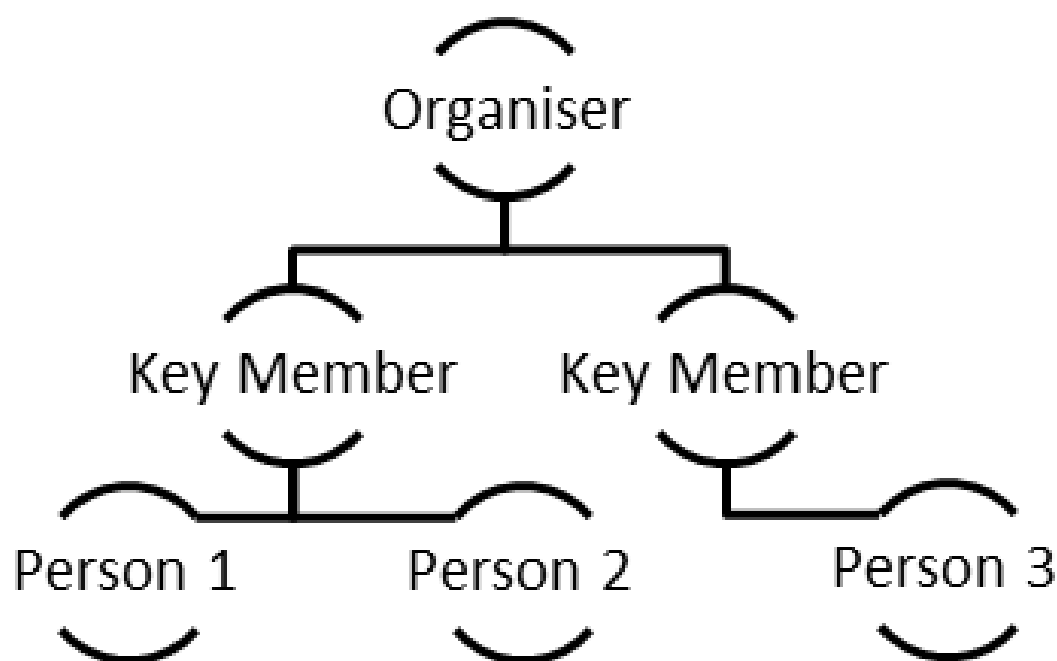
Circular:
 In a circular model anyone in the group can start a telephone tree. The person with the message starts a call chain where each member of the group takes turns calling the next until the call is returned to the person who started the call chain. When the message reaches the person who started the call chain you will know the calls have reached everyone.

Linear:
For this model the organiser will contact the key members to pass on a message. Each key member will phone the people in their assigned group. This will continue until everyone has been contacted.

Other Resources

*Anglican Church "Creating a "phone tree" or call group"
*DHHS Tasmania "Your Care Your Say; Telephone Tree"
*CFS SA "Phone Tree"
*Intermountainpro "How to Build a Phone Tree"
*Youtube - "2020 Neighbours Day Aotearoa: So what is a telephone tree?