

Organising a local AWL branch

The branch is the basic unit of AWL organisation.. It is normally organised around a particular geographical area (although a few branches are organised particular workplaces). A branch elects a local organiser, a treasurer and a sales organiser. A branch above a certain size - say five members - should also elect a branch committee consisting of these three officers and, perhaps, other members, each with a specific role. While every organiser/committee has a bureaucratic-executive role, their fundamental task is a political one. The committee forms a local political leadership.

1. Local meetings

The local AWL branch meeting should be the centre of every comrade's political week. If meetings are businesslike, attractive, interesting, well-attended and regular (weekly), then a lot of matters will be sorted out almost automatically. If they are not, no amount of effort can compensate.

The purpose of the meeting should be to get adequate discussion of our current political priorities, so that each comrade understands what we are doing and what their part is in it. The meetings should also have an educative function.

The meetings must be prepared properly. The organiser must read the local and national press, our own publications and circulars, and decide what issues, disputes and campaigns need to be discussed. We have an internal e-mail list: all members should be on it.

Smooth functioning is helped by regular contact with the national office. Phone in regularly.

The organiser/committee should have a clear idea of what should come out of each meeting.

What to do, what not to do

a. The agenda. A written agenda must be produced in advance and copies circulated at the start of the meeting. Try to stick to a regular format - something like this:

- (i). Attendance
- (ii). Political Report
- (iii) Finance
- (iii) Reports from activities, organiser's report, minutes of last meeting, other reports
- (iv) Discussion
- (v) Review of next week's activities
- (v) Date of next meeting
- (vi) AOB

b. Agenda items:

Attendance. The organiser should phone each comrade before the meeting to tell them what is on the agenda, and to ask them about reports they can give. The organiser should report any apologies to the meeting. Avoid giving excessive, fussy reminders (otherwise comrades will conclude that they shouldn't take any arrangement seriously unless they get reminders for it), but make sure that every comrade knows when and where the meeting is (and not just by email which they may not read).

Comrades who are missing should be chased up during the week by the organiser; attendance is an obligation of membership.

An organiser may have to help with childcare arrangements (for example using branch funds to pay for a babysitter).

Political report. Based on the major political issue or task as highlighted in the paper, or maybe in the recent days' news. Set the framework. Try to make sure that practical conclusions are drawn from the discussion, and that major activities are explained, motivated, and discussed politically, not just announced administratively.

Finance. Money for local levies, any money due to the national organisation (subs collected in cash, money due for national events, extra sales money, etc) should be collected in the meeting, at this point, by the branch treasurer.

Gathering money is a political matter (we could not function without it), not a private and personal one. Comrades should be accountable in financial dealing with the organisation, as in other political areas.

Make sure that each branch meeting reviews and discusses the branch's activities since the last meeting - highlighting successes, but registering failures too - so that the branch develops some collective accountability. Maximise the number of comrades who give reports (even if it's only a one-minute report from a street stall or a trade union meeting).

Organiser's/committee report. The branch committee should be able to economise on the time spent on organisational matters.

Branch meetings should not be bogged down by organisational detail. On the other hand the committee should not substitute for the branch. It is important that the branch develops a collective responsibility for the organisation of its work.

Check that the branch and individual members have done what they said they would do during the week and refer to the minutes of the previous meeting; make comrades accountable in the meeting.

The organiser's report should briefly deal with the key areas of work and practical responsibilities. If the organiser requires help or volunteers for a particular job, it should be done at this point.

Prepare a diary clipboard, listing upcoming activities. Pass it round the meeting for comrades to sign up to activities. The organiser should review who's signed up for what, and lead a discussion on it at the end of the meeting.

Political questions - of local orientation, application of policy, or whatever - should be drawn out and discussed in a structured way. The local committee should have considered such matters and attempted to provide a lead.

Try to organise so that every member has an input into this part of the meeting - either reporting something they have done or volunteering for a particular job.

Political discussion. Pick an issue current in the news, or an issue of theory or historical topic.

Comrades who are asked to give introductions must be notified in advance and given time, and sometimes help, to prepare.

Introductions should not be more than 15 minutes long.

c. Time of meetings. Always start on time - to do otherwise penalises the punctual. The meeting should not last more than two hours.

d. Chairing meetings. The organiser should not chair meetings.

Do not feel obliged to rotate the chairing. Try to pick a good chair and stick with them. Remember: a bad chair can make a meeting a frustrating, irritating place to be; a good chair will allow the main issues to be structured, debated and clearly understood.

e. Bad behaviour. Meetings must be habitable for workers, youth, new people, shy people... Comrades who tell in-jokes, speak obscurely at length, or parade their cynicism or world-weariness should be stopped from abusing the meeting. A good chair will prevent much of this sort of behaviour; a good organiser will ask comrades to behave well in meetings (talk to the people involved, face-to-face, after the meeting).

f. Political controversy. This is not something to worry about, to attempt to avoid, or push to one side. If someone disagrees with what you have said, or with a point made in the paper or

magazine, organise a local discussion. Do not be indulgent with tired older comrades who may be showing off how "dissident" they are, but make sure that any younger comrade who has a comment does not get "put down" or treated with condescension, even if the comment seems off-beam to you. Our internal regime is rational, open and tolerant. Political disagreements should be dealt with by debate which seeks to clarify political lines and clear up misunderstandings. An organiser should be familiar with the AWL constitution and ensure it is abided by, scrupulously.

g. Varying the format. You can vary the agenda from week to week, alternating mainly business meetings with mainly discussion meetings.

h. Minutes. Minutes should be taken each meeting. The organiser should keep a copy and refer to the minutes and the diary clipboard (see above) during the week, checking the branch is carrying out all its decisions. Copies of minutes should be sent to the national office, preferably by e-mail. E-mail is also the best method to circulate minutes locally. But better to take minutes by hand and then photocopy them and distribute by ordinary mail than have the minutes late because the person responsible has not got round to typing them up.

i. What to take with you. Distribute Discussion Bulletins, leaflets and other materials from the national office before the meeting begins. The sales organiser/organiser should check every comrade has a good stock of the latest issue of the paper and magazine. Extra copies should be available.

Appendix: Problems in the branch

a. Difficult conflicts.

Disputes can sometimes arise on non-political (clashes of personality), organisational or semi-political matters. Such conflicts can be the nastiest conflicts to deal with. Remember that our meetings are political meetings. We are an association based on a particular programme, we are not a group of friends. We do not ask comrades to like each other (although clearly political life is easier if they do), but simply to maintain comradely relations. We should insist on this. Stop all manifestations of bullying, cliquism and rudeness. Branches should not be allowed to divide along lines of friendships. The only rational divisions in a political association are political divisions.

Also remember that our organisation has no right to attempt to regulate the private lives of members. Don't attempt to play God.

b. Difficult people

In every branch there are comrades who are less active and reliable. Some may not pay their subs money on time; some may refuse or fail to do particular types of activity; some may drag down branch meetings with whingeing. It is important that such people do not set the tone. They will drag down the more active and enthusiastic comrades.

Don't spend all your time and emotional energy on such people. Build on areas of strength.

Decide, case by case, what you're going to do with 'the difficult person'. If a comrade is having a hard time in their personal life, perhaps they just need a bit of time and space. Perhaps they need to find another area of work - ask them what they want to do. Perhaps they are unconfident and need your help. Or maybe they should simply be told to shape up or ship out. But decide what to do in each case, and do it. Try to avoid getting into long-running low-level petty disputes.

Even if pettiness is directed at you, and even if you conclude such behaviour is completely unjustified (and you should ask yourself if it is), try to rise above it.

2. Local public and open meetings

AWL public and open meetings have the following functions: they provide an attractive, open forum for new people to find out more about what we stand for; they raise our profile - and so local people will be more likely to know of our existence, what we say, and that we are an option to join; they press us towards talking to and organising our periphery.

Our policy is to hold public meetings at least once a month. The public meeting should replace the weekly branch meeting for that week. Discuss in the branch what would be a politically useful, interesting meeting, and what, precisely, the political slant should be.

It is best to pick a regular date for public meetings - the 1st Wednesday or 3rd Thursday, or whatever - and stick to it. Debates are generally better meetings than simply having an AWL speaker - the political lines tend to stand out more clearly - invite representatives of other socialist tendencies, campaigns or parties to speak. Or perhaps the branch should invite representatives from a local campaign or strike. Or perhaps you could use a video during a meeting.

a. Advertising the public meeting.

A leaflet. The meeting should have an interesting title. Include the following details: a local contact number/address; an e-mail contact address; our national web site address. Make sure comrades take leaflets with them to meetings.

Listings. In local and student union papers.

Posters. In student unions and labour and trade union clubs
Flypost.

Mail and/or email people you think might be interested with the flyer (you should have a list which is regularly updated). Then follow up with a phone call or visit. Personal contact is vital. Organisers should not kid themselves that meetings will be built by mailings or emails alone.

Do not necessarily do all the phoning-round yourself. Your aim as an organiser should not be to make yourself irreplaceable, but on the contrary, to make yourself redundant as local organiser and able to move on to other activities. To inspire, encourage, assist and train other comrades to do work is much better than doing it yourself, though of course no branch can operate without the organiser doing certain things himself or herself. Usually it is best to have one comrade in the branch - not the organiser, and maybe someone who gets out less, because of shifts, childcare, or ill-health - taking regular responsibility for a regular phone-round to contacts.

Having one comrade who does a large, systematic contact phone-round is generally more efficient than parcelling out the work so that each comrade has three or four phone calls to make.

b. Getting people there

The organiser should make sure all members will definitely turn up. Don't harass them with "reminders", but a phone call to ask them to do some little job in the meeting can also help remind. Every member should have people around them who are politically sympathetic and the local public meeting is an opportunity to bring them together. All members should be encouraged and expected to bring people to the meeting.

For some people attending a socialist meeting for the first time is intimidating - offer to meet new people before the meeting; offer lifts. At the meeting, make sure new people are talked to. If you see someone at the meeting whom you don't recognise, introduce yourself and talk to them. Train comrades to be open and friendly, not cliquey.

c. Speakers

You do not necessarily need a speaker from London to hold a meeting. It is good to use local speakers or people from your area. Notes or help are available from our national office. Use local public meetings to help train comrades in your branch in public speaking. Make sure comrades new to speaking have help from someone more experienced for their first few times on the platform, so that a minimum standard is maintained.

Speakers should not speak for more than 20 minutes.

Make sure some comrades have contributions prepared - avoiding an embarrassing silence after the speakers have concluded. The initial contributions should be short - a long initial contribution may well put off others from speaking. Unless the meeting is very small, speakers should stand up to address it, not speak from a sitting posture.

d. The meeting: dos and don'ts

Set the meeting room out as attractively as you can: with banners and posters. Bring a bookstall.

The comrade who chairs the meeting should do so formally. At the end of the meeting, give the main speakers an opportunity to reply to the discussion and make some concise announcements (future AWL meetings, and other activities - workplace bulletin distribution, picket lines, demonstrations, campaign meetings - which the AWL is supporting). You should have planned your next public meeting and be able to announce the time, date, venue and title.

If comrades from other tendencies attend - good, they should be encouraged to do so. There should be much more debate and dialogue on the left. We oppose the petty, stupid rules which most of the left employ - attempting to prevent other organisations selling or speaking at their meetings. Have a sign-up sheet prepared to pass round the meeting for people to put names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers for further information.

e. Small branches or groups

You should still have publicised open meetings. They will generally also be small - but even one or two additional people is a start.

Small groups often bill their open forums as 'Marxist discussion groups'.

f. Extra help

We have published an old Communist Party pamphlet from 1942, *How to Organise a Public Meeting* (see Discussion Bulletin no. 170, available from the national office), which might help comrades consider some issues. The pamphlet's main point is very true: that successful public meetings do not happen by a vague scattering around of a few leaflets, they require systematic, thorough work.

3. Organising sales

Selling publications is important financially. It is even more important politically.

Selling *Solidarity*, *Workers' Liberty* and the pamphlets or books we publish is one of the two main ways we have of getting over our ideas (the other is by talking to people).

Don't assume that people will buy a paper and then, only after they have read the paper for some period, will they 'be ready' to read the magazine, pamphlets or books. Some people will buy books or magazines more readily than the paper - particularly if the magazine, say, has an article which particularly interests them.

The rhythm and routine of distributing and selling publications, and using the publications to fight for our ideas in the movement around us, also regulates and organises our political work.

Sales organisers are notified of publication dates by e-mail and phone.

Branches outside London receive publications, usually, by TNT courier. Branches in London arrange to pick up publications from the London office. Isolated individuals generally receive material by post.

Comrades take - and pay for - a minimum of 6 papers and 6 magazines each.

The job of local sales organiser is to ensure the prompt, efficient distribution of papers and magazines; to organise local sales and the sale of subscriptions. The sales organiser should keep a record of all public sales.

We aim for each comrade to build up a regular round of people who take the paper or magazine.

Organising the work

a. Distribution. The sales organiser/branch committee must arrange for the immediate distribution of publications. The best method is to ask one comrade to pick up the latest publication and drop off copies at every comrade's home that evening. Do not set up complex organisational chains (A takes papers to B, who then takes them to C, who passes some on to D, etc): they break down, leaving some comrades without their publications. Do not wait until the next branch meeting, or until you happen to bump into a sympathiser or less active comrade. Such sloppy arrangements send precisely the wrong signals: that the publications we produce are not worth energetically circulating even to our own members.

b. Selling our publications. It is an obligation of membership that all activists do at least one public (workplace, street or estate sale per week). The sales organiser must convene the sales ensuring that comrades volunteer and turn up.

Selling papers and magazines is easy. Here are the rules for the various types of sale:

i) Street and college sales: use a petition (use the petition of a local campaign, do your own, or get the latest petition from the national office) - when a passer-by signs, ask them to buy a paper. If they buy a paper, the comrades on the sale should explain a little of the political work we are doing; ask if they want to be kept informed. If they seem interested tell them about our next public meeting (you should have leaflets with you).

Ask comrades to approach people as they pass (make eye contact, be polite); stop comrades standing around looking miserable, or talking to each other in groups.

Your branch should have a stall (a portable paste table) on which magazines, leaflets and papers are placed in addition to holding papers. A sales organiser should make sure the stall is brought along to street sales.

Street and estate sales usually last one hour. The best time is usually 11.00 to 12.00 Saturdays.

ii) Estate sales: are done door to door and are the quickest way to sell papers. The best times are early evening or Sunday morning (don't go too early, 11.00 is the best time to start).

Take a note of who you sell to, and then go back with the next issue. Introduce yourselves: "We are selling *Solidarity* and campaigning against privatisation (or whatever is on the front page). Would you like a copy? It is 80 pence, or 30p if you're unemployed". If people are prepared to talk, discuss with them. Ask them if they want to be kept informed about our work.

iii) Ensure comrades sell at work (unless victimisation is a real threat);

iv) Ensure that our members always have papers and magazines with them. They should bring publications to all political activities. At meetings, ask each person present to buy a copy; don't stand in a corner; don't ignore right-wingers or members of other groups;

v) Systematically attend other organisations' meetings and sell our literature.

c. Reluctance to sell papers

Some comrades are outgoing, some may be shy and find selling publications and talking to people more difficult. Nevertheless all comrades must be able to help with this work - and comrades will be more willing to try if they fully understand the importance of sales.

In the end, reluctance to sell our publications should be understood as a political, not a technical matter. An organiser must sit down and explain the importance of this work to any comrade who is reluctant to help.

d. Subscriptions.

Selling a subscription to someone in your area is the most effective, reliable way of ensuring people promptly receive our propaganda.

Subscriptions are very important for medium term recruitment and gaining influence.

Subs leaflets are available from the national office. Do not sprinkle them like confetti around meetings or demonstrations. The efficient method of selling subs is to approach specific people, face-to-face, and ask them for cash or a cheque.

e. Bookshops and newsagents

All left and many independent bookshops will take the paper and magazine. They normally take one-third of sales money on a sale-or-return basis.

Many newsagents will also take our publications. Please draw up a list of shops and drop in and talk to the manager.

4. Local branch committees

A branch committee should: deal efficiently with routine business, freeing up time in branch meetings to discuss politics; organise the most active comrades; train comrades to become organisers.

The membership of local committees is the three basic officers - organiser, sales organiser and treasurer - plus, in a larger group, additional members, each with specific roles.

The committee should meet at least weekly and meetings should be brief and businesslike. The organiser should take minutes.

5. The treasurer's job

Finance is also a political question. All our organisation's work - from publishing books, to sending speakers to local meetings, to work around strikes and union conferences, to answering the phone - would end, quickly and abruptly, without serious, detailed attention to finances.

We have no rich backers and our work is funded mainly through voluntary contributions from members and sympathisers, and the money remitted to the national organisation from sales of our publications. In addition we make limited extra money from national events and conferences, and from fundraising.

The local treasurer should be someone who is reliable, serious (taken seriously by other comrades), not easily fobbed off and diligent. In small groups the organiser also acts as the treasurer.

The role of the local treasurer is:

- i) To make sure all local comrades are up to date with subs and publications money owed to the national office and that the national treasurer receives this money promptly;
- ii) To ensure fundraising is carried out according to local decisions or national fund drive targets;
- iii) To run the local AWL branch fund.

The Treasurer should keep records of all money collected for the national and local organisation.

a. Methods of payment

Members and sympathisers of the organisation generally pay subs and publications money to the national organisation monthly, by standing order. This is the most efficient, time-saving method of organising our finances.

In unusual circumstances, where a comrade has no bank account or has very little money, dues and paper money are collected in cash, weekly.

No one should be admitted to membership without having the financial commitments explained to them, and without agreeing to those commitments. The local treasurer should ask the new comrade to fill out a standing order, immediately, according to the rates set on the dues assessment form (these forms and the attached standing order forms are available from our national office and should be returned to the office after they have been filled in).

b. Local money

Is collected in cash, at meetings, or, if the local branch has a bank account, through small standing orders. Money should be collected systematically, or diligent comrades will subsidise the less diligent.

This money is generally used to pay for room bookings, babysitters, leaflets and postage.

c. Money is a political question

Almost everyone can give us a little money - if they decide we are important enough to do so. If a comrade is unwilling to give the organisation money, or is only prepared to give a lot less than someone else with similar circumstances and income, this should be treated, in the first instance, as a political question.

That comrade is simply not convinced the organisation is worth giving money to. The local leadership should discuss the matter politically with the comrade.

6. Recruitment

One of our main tasks is to find interested people, systematically draw them towards the organisation, bring them into membership and thoroughly educate them in Marxism, and create self-sufficient Marxist propagandists. Such people form the backbone of our organisation. And effort spent in the creation of 'self-sufficient Marxist propagandists' will, in the medium term, be re-paid many times over: in many situations and struggles the existence of even small numbers of well-educated, organised socialists, is decisive. Through such people the AWL can have a tremendous impact on very broad layers, well beyond our immediate ranks.

Renewing and building our organisation is an essential job, and this forms a major part of every AWL member's political work. The general political level of existing left activists in Britain is low, and in the labour movement there is often demoralisation and inertia among long-standing activists who are scarred by the defeats of the 1980s and 1990s. This means we have to make more effort than in the past to reach out, beyond the existing, easier-to-find, organised layers, especially to the youth, students not involved in student-union mechanics, young workers. Contact work requires patience and a certain tenacity.

The definition of a contact: a contact is someone who will discuss with us in a structured way, someone who will agree to meet us and talk.

In this period all recruits must pass through this process of being a contact.

There are several stages to this process, all of which require study and organisation:

- i) Finding new people. In every area of our activity - from work in the unions to selling papers on estates - individuals stand out as more interested, more serious. We find them by talking with

them, and by not giving up if on first contact they are not quite "on our wavelength". (Who would have brought them "onto our wavelength", if we haven't talked to them yet?)

ii) Asking people to join us. Joining our group requires commitment, and real commitment requires a conscious decision. The formality of such political discussions is useful: we want potential recruits to understand who we are and what their relationship to us is.

It is counterproductive, and a waste of time and energy, to recruit people who do not understand what they are joining. Generally they leave at the first problem, often recoiling entirely out of our orbit.

It is equally counterproductive to hover round contacts until we judge that they are "ripe" for joining, and only ask them then. (The contact thinks: who are these people? Why don't they want people to join their organisation?)

The answer is to ask people straight-out and soon. If they say yes, explain that discussions are necessary, and organise them. If they say no (which is more common, first off), talk about why not, and ask if they will undertake regular discussions.

iii) How to discuss. The purpose of discussions is to persuade contacts of our political ideas, not primarily to get them to do this or that (although we might ask for money for the group, a subscription or help with a particular initiative, at the end of a meeting - even better, the contact might suggest one of those things). Discussions might begin around whatever the contact is interested in, moving on to more abstract questions of theory. Normally discussions take place after reading a particular article or pamphlet.

It may be the case that discussions carry on over a period of years. Even if a contact never joins the group we will have clarified the disagreements and - almost certainly - have some sort of fellow-traveller who will work with us in particular areas for the common good or serve as a conduit for our ideas to others.

iv) Organising the work. Monitoring contact work, and assisting and training unconfident or unpractised comrades in doing it, is the job of the organiser.

7. Education

Comrades are obliged to regularly attend local, regional and national crash courses and schools. New members are required to go through a six month period of education before they are admitted to full membership, with voting rights.

Education, however, is not just for new members. Every member should be engaged in some systematic process of education and self-education, all the time, however long they have been in the organisation.

For an organisation like the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, where membership does mean a real degree of democratic control over the running and policy of the organisation, an educated membership is a prerequisite for a healthy internal democracy. We can't allow a situation where members are deciding on complex questions about which they have little knowledge or understanding.

Our education programmes aim to encourage members to educate themselves and use their knowledge to educate others. A rounded Marxist education will make comrades much more effective socialists. And an thorough understanding of Marxism and the socialist project is the best guarantee against political collapse during discouraging times or difficult struggles.

a. Introductory schools

These schools are run by the national organisation, usually over a weekend. They cover basic questions - such as bourgeois democracy and workers' democracy, the revolutionary party - and various practical matters of group organisation. All new members must attend such a school.

b. National crash courses

These deal, over a two, three or four day period, with questions of Marxist theory - capital, Imperialism, the national question etc. All comrades are invited to attend.

c. Local and regional schools

The organiser is expected to organise schools locally and ensure their branch members attend regional events. Guidance about subject-reading matter and other help is available from EC members at the national office.

d. One-to-one educationals

Are organised through branches between more experienced comrades and newer members. Every new member should go through the AWL's Basic Educational Programme (available on our web site or from the national office) in this way.

8. Industrial work

Work in the workplace and unions is organised through national fractions and monitored locally by the branch committee. It is important that local organisers are aware of important union and workplace issues facing each worker in the branch and, more generally, issue in your local area.

Activity around major strikes is normally co-ordinated nationally.

Our policy is to ask student comrades leaving college to get jobs where political work is useful.

We aim to publish regular, local workplace bulletins (more information about this type of work is contained in a bulletin available from the national office). Even if a branch is small, or has no member of contact in a suitable workplace, every branch should be able to distribute our national Postalworker bulletin.

9. Student work

The AWL has been central to the student left since the mid-1980s. Through work in colleges, local Student Unions and NUS we have met very large numbers of young activists - some recruits are now key AWL activists in the unions, AWL organisers etc.

The AWL has a national student committee which meets regularly and reviews progress. Activity in the student movement is closely monitored by our national student organisers.

Locally, sales and college meetings must form a regular, basic, weekly feature of our work.

The activity of small numbers of students can be monitored by a branch committee; larger numbers should be organised through a local student fraction, which should have an elected organiser, and be responsible to the branch as a whole.

It is particularly important that students are carefully inducted into the organisation, receiving a basic Marxist education and taking part in a broad range of AWL activities, including activities around workplaces, trade unions, and working-class communities.

10. Organising for national drives.

Periodically we organise national political drives. This could be a nationally co-ordinated drive to sell a book, or a subscription drive, or to build our annual summer school (held over a weekend each June or July, in London).

First, address the question politically: the branch committee, then the branch, should discuss the political purpose of the book, or planned school etc. The aim of a local political leadership is to ensure all activists are convinced of the project.

The rules for local book sales and subs drives are similar to those for public meetings.

Make one competent person in the branch responsible for organising the activity.

Cast your net as wide as possible: include all those interested in the subject of the book etc, not just those on our wavelength.

Mail them a leaflet and go and visit them, taking a copy of the book, magazine and paper with you.

Do all these things for a national event in London, and in addition, pay particular attention to:

i) Ensuring transport is booked, booked properly, and that every

minibus has a driver. It is important that transport (minibuses, hired cars, train tickets, whatever) is booked early because you will need to tell every interested person how you are going to get to the event, when you will set off and arrive home again, and how much transport will cost. Booking earlier also generally makes travel cheaper.

ii) Getting ticket money from those who say they are interested in attending. There is an iron rule: if someone says they want to attend an event but will not buy a ticket or give you a deposit, they have not decided to attend at all. Your branch still needs to persuade them that the event is interesting, useful and worthwhile.