Introduction to Alliance Building

Why Are We Building Alliances?

An essential component of mass mobilisation involves building links with other groups. Alliances can be made at national and local levels.

At a national level, XR Relationships circle reaches out to organisations, groups and movements, and will build on the relationships established during The Big One. To avoid complications, Local Groups are asked not to reach out to the **central contacts** of large organisations or movements. If you hold such contacts, please let Relationships Circle know.

What are community alliances?

These are built by Local Groups (LGs), and are just as important as national relationships. This page focuses how your Local Group can build community alliances.

Relationships with groups in your local area may already exist - for example, through individual members of LGs - or you may need to forge new links. This guidance will help you to strengthen existing links **and** build new ones. The steps involved in both these processes have much in common.

Building stronger social ties with our neighbours and local communities is in and of itself a transformative process. It enables us to create new and long-lasting connections with people who live in our community, to collectively create a support network of caring and compassionate neighbours, who look after each other, and to develop a sense of belonging, which can overcome the social isolation that runs through much of modern society.

Making connections with others can also create a foundation from which we can work together to push for systemic change and to create a society that considers the needs of everyone. The way we organise and relate to our communities in this time of crisis could help to shift us towards a genuinely democratic society full of autonomous, empowered, resilient and supportive neighbourhoods and communities.

Step 1: Gather a team

Identify members of your LG who are likely to be interested in this kind of work - for example, those with useful local contacts; those involved in relevant networks; and those who are skilled communicators. Consider establishing a working group, with regular meetings.

As a group, consider your motivations, drivers and priorities.

Join the Community Alliance Building Telegram Chat to share your progress and problems, or ask questions.

Step 2: Research

Research groups that exist in your area - for example, find out about their aims and objectives, their theory of change, how they are organised, and their networks. Review any contacts and connections between LG members and these other groups.

Remember that XR needs to activate a new wave of people, by bringing on board individuals who wouldn't typically align themselves with our cause. This will include those who don't typically see themselves as political and may never have participated in a protest before. However, they might be willing to get involved in local and community events.

Therefore, we need to break out of our activist bubble and think about unlikely partners in our community. Examples of local groups and movements you might consider:

Activist

- Environmental, ecological, animal justice, conservation
- Trade Union branches, local Trades Councils, renters unions
- Democracy, human rights
- Local campaigns, e.g. clean air, flooding, bus routes, public transport, water
- Racial justice, global majority
- Gender equality
- Political
- Disability groups
- LGBTQ+

Community

- Faith hubs (e.g. churches, mosques, synagogues)
- Parent Teacher Associations
- Food banks
- Reading groups

- Residents’ associations
- Minority groups
- Sports teams/groups
- Women's groups
- Gardening groups

Step 3: Shortlist which groups you wish to approach

Ask yourself why you might want to work with any of the groups identified in Step 2. Questioning your motivations, defined in Step 1, will help ensure an alignment of values and concerns. Hence your relationship will be strategic, as well as being based on mutual trust and understanding.

It's important to collaborate with unexpected partners, going beyond the usual activists and their supporters. That's how we'll position ourselves as a force that cannot be ignored. By reaching out to this broader audience, we'll infuse fresh perspectives into our movement and generate significant influence within our communities.

In particular, it’s important that we turn towards more diverse communities, including those that may seem difficult to reach or appear to be different from our own familiar communities. The question ‘Who’s not here?’ focuses us on the need for inclusivity and the importance of understanding the perspectives, needs, and interests of those who may be marginalized, underrepresented, or excluded from decision-making processes in our community.

Engaging a wide range of groups strengthens the sense of ownership and agency within the community. By considering who is absent, organisers can work towards creating an environment that encourages and empowers individuals and communities actively to participate in shaping their own futures.

Possible factors in favour of reaching out to a particular group include:

- similar aims and objectives (e.g. green groups, democracy groups)
- group has significant local influence
- group has access to a large network of potentially sympathetic people
- group members might benefit from XR demands being met

Step 4: Relationship Mapping

Relationship mapping helps you to identify the levers and relationships you can use to access and influence a target - in this case, your community and influential groups within it.

Relationship mapping will help you decide:

- the best target(s)
- what and who might persuade them to respond positively to you
- the pathways or relationships that can help you access or put pressure on the target.

More information & instructions can be found on this page.

Step 5: Reach out

The most effective way of reaching out to another group, organisation or movement is to use pre-existing personal relationships to establish contact with individuals involved with that group.

Other ways to reach out include:

- Social media
- Email
- Attend protests or events
- Send an invitation to a meeting
- Outreach stalls at community events
- Leafleting and talking to people
- Meeting one-to-one with leaders of other organisations or community groups
- Offering a service such as free meals

Step 6: Have a conversation

One of the advantages of engaging with the local community is that you have the opportunity to meet in person, have deep conversations and build relationships based on empathy and shared understanding. A key aspect of building alliances is actively listening and engaging in open dialogue with people in the community - these are fundamental to effective alliance building.

Identify individuals within your chosen group who hold influence, and speak to them one-to-one. Ask them what they care about, and their values and aims, and listen attentively. Tell them about your values and concerns, and establish common ground.

Introduce them to the idea that you are building local alliances, and present that as an opportunity to take action over something they care about.

Remember that we don't all experience the climate crisis in the same way. We need to make this explicit in our messaging around the crisis. As environmentalists, we are keenly aware of the devastating consequences of human activity on nature and the exploitation of natural resources. We understand that the exploitation of the environment and that of people are interconnected. By explicitly addressing this connection, we show that we recognize and empathize with the daily struggles faced by all individuals affected by the climate crisis. Neglecting to do so could create a perception of being out of touch with the lived experiences of all those directly impacted by climate

change, and with their human rights - within the UK and globally.

Step 7: Hold a meeting

Arrange a meeting in which groups within your community can come together and discuss collaboration.

Working with groups with which we haven't previously collaborated can present challenges and push us outside our comfort zones. However, it is precisely in these moments that meaningful work is often accomplished. By embracing discomfort, we have an opportunity to expand representation within our movement, which in turn provides us with a stronger mandate to take action.

Community assemblies are an excellent means of fostering relationships with different groups. They enable you to leverage your existing alliances and create opportunities to forge new connections. If you intend to cultivate new relationships through a community assembly, it is vital to engage in proactive communication with the participating groups during the preparatory stages. This ensures that the chosen topic for your assembly resonates with your intended audience and generates genuine interest.

Step 8: Activities that could be carried out by LGs to build community alliances

Offer a service: Building alliances and fostering relationships within your community can be achieved by offering valuable services, such as workshops or sharing skills and knowledge with others. Providing essential resources like food, or engaging in other acts of kindness, can significantly contribute to the wellbeing of those in your community. By developing ideas that meet local needs, you can create initiatives that will attract participation as well as being helpful to your community.

Mutual aid: By working together and sharing resources, we can build a more equitable and resilient society. Mutual aid entails individuals, groups or communities coming together to provide assistance and resources, based on the understanding that everyone has something to contribute and everyone has needs.

Campaigns: The strategic development of alliances and effective organisation together make it possible to initiate and win local campaigns. This will foster closer relationships between local groups; positive changes in your locality and the wellbeing of the community; and the promotion of local democracy.

Activities for a LG that is low on capacity:

- Local picnics

- Stalls and activities at local events
- Climate conversations
- Leafleting

Activities for an LG with a committed core team:

- Running workshops (e.g. gardening, mending, cooking)
- Offering talks and workshops on the climate crisis
- Facilitating justice dialogues
- Climate cafés
- Public meetings

Activities for an LG with many active members:

- Community assemblies
- Launching a local campaign planned and carried out in tandem with other groups
- Nonviolent direct action in support of a campaign

Activities involving collaboration with other groups:

- Co-sign an open letter to the local press
- Plan and deliver community events together
- Organise mutual aid or other community-building initiatives
- Join forces in fundraising
- Plan a local project together
- Organise a local action together: see this document for guidance

Advice on working with other groups

Build trust

- Take time to build trust
- Be honest and authentic
- Be clear about your red lines (Principles & Values), e.g. around talking to police,
- and find out theirs
- Don't overpromise
- Don't be dogmatic - be willing to compromise
- Be willing to listen and be open to different approaches
- Be confident in what you are offering

Avoid unhealthy conflict

- Communication is key
- Keep an open mind and be ready for different ways of working that might not seem to make sense at first
- Don't be afraid to ask questions about a group’s ways of working and be ready to explain the thinking behind ours
- Be willing to compromise
- Approach difficult conversations with empathy and sensitivity - different groups have had different experiences, which will have shaped their approaches
- Make sure the other group’s role is agreed in advance and is clear
- Allow enough time and proceed slowly - communication often breaks down under pressure or when time is short

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Email the Relationships team with any questions: Relationships100days@gmail.com

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