

How to Organise and Run Assemblies in Your Community

This manual outlines the various steps that you can take to run a community assembly in your local community. It has been created by people in XR's Future Democracy Hub and Trust The People. This manual collates best practice from people throughout history and from all over the globe, who have used Community Assemblies to come together and achieve great things.

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The Three Pillars of Community Assemblies

The three pillars of Community Assemblies which support supportive and empathetic interactions are radical inclusivity, active listening and trust.

A Community Assembly differs from a debate where one person is 'right' and the other is 'wrong', or from a typical discussion or conversation where people have a tendency to dominate with questions and interjections. Community Assemblies create an inclusive space in which each participant is respected and listened to without judgement, whilst sharing from the heart. Facilitated by a trained person, each participant listens to the ideas of others.

Radical Inclusivity

Effective assemblies achieve radical inclusivity, where the emphasis on all being heard and valued equally means no voices dominate and the collective wisdom of the assembly is harnessed. People can participate safely and openly without fear of judgement or ridicule. Radical inclusivity, therefore, also means being aware of potential barriers to engagement and working with those affected to enable their participation.

"Diversity in opinion will pay you back in the long run socially... if we don't fix this problem to start with we are simply going to replicate existing power structures."

- Eleanor Saitta, hacker and designer

Active Listening

Active listening is focusing on hearing someone all the way through before responding and overcoming the urge to start figuring out your response in your mind whilst someone is still talking. Assemblies recognise that no one person or group holds all the answers. It is through the collective wisdom of the crowd that we gain powerful intelligence about the issues being discussed. Active listening is also vital to enhance our capacity to empathise.

"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."

Trust

Once the system and process for assemblies has been agreed on, it is essential that all participants trust the process, trust the facilitators and trust the various working groups involved. Facilitators and assembly team enable this trust through sticking to the agreed process and ensuring that everyone follows the facilitators.

"I see the 15M assemblies and neighbourhood organising in retrospective and I'm amazed how it could work and most importantly all the trust that it meant."

- Carolina, a founder of 15M and takethesquare.net

Creating a Team

"I can't change the world on my own, it'll take at least three of us."
- Bill Mollison

Below, we have listed a few working groups that may help you get a community assembly off the ground. They constitute best practice, not a minimum requirement. Your local group may feel that so many working groups are well beyond your capacity so don't let this guidance discourage you! It doesn't take an army of volunteers to put on an assembly!

Alliance Building

Importance: Essential

Timing: From project start

This is the role that you need to establish very early on in your project. At least one person in your local group should lead communications with other organisations. While it will be helpful to brainstorm in your local group around potential assembly topics and locations, you will need to discuss all of these things early on with other organisations and be open to their suggestions if you want to collaborate with them. Unless you have a political or lobbying team, this will also be the role that contacts local politicians and invites them to the assembly. On Rebel Toolkit, you can find [resources for local alliance building](#) to inform this work.

Fundraising

Importance: Nice to have

Timing: From project start

You can request financial support with your assembly by filling in this financial support form. However, it is always appreciated if your local group can try to raise as many funds as possible themselves to finance your projects. If you end up working together with other organisations, you can explore sharing certain costs.

Outreach and Integration

Importance: Essential

Timing: From middle of project

Just like you would do outreach to promote a Heading for Extinction talk, we will do outreach to spread the word about our assemblies. At the end of your assembly, you can invite attendants to join your local group or get involved in a local campaign in which case this team will have to prepare how people can join and what tasks they can take on. You will need an outreach and integration crew later in the project once you are clear on assembly time, location, topic, etc.

More information about [Outreach and Integration](#).

Media and Messaging Crew

Importance: Nice to have

Timing: Middle to end of project

The role of this group is to promote the assembly through the media. That could involve your local group's own online channels and newsletter, but you could also try local press outlets or ask allied organisations to promote the event in their newsletters and social media. On top of that, this team will coordinate taking pictures of the assembly and capturing them on your social media.

If you would appreciate any support with your local media work, feel free to contact

media@rebellion.earth and they can put you in touch with your regional/national Media & Messaging rep.

Facilitators

Importance: Super essential

Timing: End of project

For each Community Assembly, you will need **at least one facilitator, ideally two**. Facilitators maintain **radical inclusivity, active listening**, and **trust** so that all voices are heard and valued equally. They keep the discussion focused and structured and prevent it from becoming unwieldy which is absolutely crucial for a successful assembly.

~~Trust The People provides training on how to become a Community Assembly facilitator. While it is ideal to have a local facilitator, facilitation takes a bit of experience and if you've never facilitated a meeting or event before, facilitating a whole assembly throws you in at the deep end. You could watch another facilitator first before giving it a go yourself and invite a facilitator from another LG to facilitate your assembly.~~

Recommendations:

- Make sure that your facilitators don't have entrenched political bias or other strong prejudice, in accordance with inclusion principles. Party-political neutrality in facilitators ensures more effective assemblies.
- Ideally, a female facilitator is one of the assembly leads. It has been shown that this will greatly increase the level of engagement of female participants and the uptake of

facilitation roles of women in general. The rate of engagement and uptake for males isn't affected in the same way.

Connecting with the Community and Allies

Relevant teams: [Alliance Building](#), [Outreach and Integration](#)

Before you attempt to bring a community together in Assembly, you need to actually familiarise yourself with that community. This will help you to select an assembly question that matters to the people around you, and to design an assembly event that is appealing to your local community.

Think: Who makes up the community in question? Where are they? Who are the obvious future participants? Who are the less obvious ones? Which communities are hidden from you? Where are the community connections that already exist happening? Are those connections deliberate or organic/cultural? Who are the influencers, the stakeholders, or the 'Elders' within this community?

Whilst we are connecting with the community, we need to connect with ourselves as well. We need to ask ourselves what assumptions we carry about the community we are trying to reach. We must challenge our own blind spots and prejudices at every opportunity, and continue to do so throughout the process.

It is also vital to develop active listening skills, so that when you are engaging with others in your community, you are taking time to understand them, their needs and their wants, rather than trying to push your own agenda.

To help you better connect with your community, take a look at the following modules in the [Trust The People](#) programme:

- [Personal Processing](#) - This module encourages you to think about your identity, your biases, and your relationship to society.
 - [Deep Reflection: Understanding Ourselves and Understanding Others](#)
- [Engaging Communities](#) - This module supports you in reaching out to others and forming relationships founded on trust.
 - [Deep Hanging Out Guide](#)
 - [Active Listening Guide](#)
 - [Door to Door Listening Guide](#)

To help boost your ability to connect with those in your community, consider the following:

- Hold meetings in open and oft-frequented places (i.e. a local pub or cafe), so that many can easily participate.
- Be visible and open to conversations – find ways to bring those around you in.
- Attend existing community events – if relevant, you might run a stall.
- Contact existing community groups and connect to their issues and experiences.
- Organise events such as seed swaps, ‘free’ markets, community meals, music evenings, Empathy Circles or Cafes.

In the same phase of your assembly planning process, you want to put your feelers out to local organisations and see if any of them are up for organising an assembly together with you. Working together with other organisations will not only increase the diversity of your audience but will also bring new ideas to the event organising process that you might never have thought of on your own.

Dare yourself to reach out to a group that you have never been in touch with before. XR groups are most commonly in touch with unions, environmental and faith groups or unions. How about getting in touch with a local racial justice or LGBTIQ+ group?

Assembly Framing, Scope and Topic

Relevant teams: Your local group and ally organisations

The exact framing and scope for the assembly need to be agreed upon before any promotional work can occur. The destination and legitimacy of the results of the assembly should be discussed and decided upon prior to convening the assembly, and it is important that all assembly participants are made aware of this information before the assembly begins.

An Assembly for Sharing and Community Building

If, for example, you are planning to host an assembly designed to bring community members together to discuss issues that are important to them in the spirit of creating community bonds and finding common ground, then the framing and scope are as follows:

Framing: The event is open to all members of the community to provide space for discussion around local issues.

Scope: No decisions are being made, so the scope is limited and does not extend beyond the sharing of ideas and feelings. The ideas and issues generated in the assembly should be fed back to the community through social media and serve as a starting point for future conversations.

An Assembly for Discussing a Specific Topic and Generating Ideas

If you are convening an assembly which focuses on specific issues and where what is discussed will be shared beyond the local community with an external body, such as a council, then the scope would be broader. Say, for example, a local sustainability group advertises an open assembly on their social media channels to discuss how the local council can act after declaring a Climate and Ecological Emergency, then the framing and scope would be as follows:

Framing: The event is open to anyone who chooses to participate to share their ideas on what the council can do.

Scope: The ideas and issues generated in the assembly could be published on the local group's communication channels (i.e. their Facebook page or their newsletter), and also be emailed to the local Councillors asking them to take the suggestions to the next Council meeting.

An Assembly for Making Decisions and Proposals

Assemblies can also be convened to ask for the opinions of members of a group and to make decisions. Say, for example, a local group calls an assembly to discuss whether they join with a larger group for a day of action or create their own one locally, and they advertise it to all members through every channel of communication, then the framing and scope are as follows:

Framing: The event is open to the members of the group so they can share their ideas on what they would like their group to do in the action.

Scope: The assembly has the legitimacy to make the decision on behalf of that group, and the decision made during that assembly will be reported to the group and acted upon. The assembly, however, would not have the scope to make decisions beyond their own group. If, for example, that same group holds an assembly to decide if they, as a region, should combine with another region in the same manner, then the results of that assembly would be fed into a larger decision-making process that would affect other groups within the region as well.

Once you have decided on your assembly question or topic, make sure to display it clearly on your promotions materials and the assembly itself for all to see.

A good question is worded such that it is:

- In everyday language
- Not too long
- Broad enough to allow for free discussion, but not so broad that a structured conversation around it is difficult.

Assembly Planning

Choose the venue

- Assemblies are usually held in public spaces like town squares or outside prominent places like a city or town hall. They are designed to be as open as possible so that members of the public can easily join in. They are also held in community centres or other public buildings, particularly during the winter.
- Assemblies can be located outside (or inside) somewhere that may link to the issue being addressed by the assembly. For example, if the assembly is looking at the effects of climate and biodiversity breakdown on the agricultural industry, an assembly outside the local National Farmers Union, for which the process working group has invited the key members, is a way of forcing a response.
- All assemblies should be held in venues that are fully wheelchair accessible.

Online Assemblies

Holding your Community Assembly Online is potentially a good way to be more inclusive especially in rural areas where face to face assemblies could potentially mean long commuting to the assembly or it might be easier to attend an online assembly for parents.

In recent years [Zoom](#) has become the most common software in usage for meetings and assemblies. Here is some guidance for holding Community Assemblies via Zoom:

Advance Preparation

In the spirit of 'radical inclusivity' pillar of Community Assemblies and in accordance with Extinction Rebellion Principles and Values, check the Extinction Rebellion [Principles of Inclusivity](#) to ensure the Assembly is optimising access across diverse needs.

Zoom Settings Management

To create a Zoom link and publicise it everywhere, check Extinction Rebellion guidance for [Zoom set up and promotion](#).

In your Zoom account '**Settings**' on the left, under '**My Meetings**', click on the meeting you are facilitating. Make sure the following settings apply:

- **Waiting Room**, if set up so that participants are not automatically admitted.
 - Once you have opened the session, pop up messages at the top of your screen will tell you that participants are in the Waiting Room. Just click on 'Admit'.
 - Once you have started the session, you can allow late arrivals to jump straight in, rather than going to the Waiting Room. To allow immediate entry for late-comers, click on 'Participants', then select the 3 dots, bottom right, then select 'Enable Waiting Room'. This will (counter-intuitively) disable the waiting room, allowing people to join without you having to Admit them. NOTE: this option will only work if you have created a Zoom registration link and selected both Passcode and Waiting Room when you created the Zoom meeting.
- **Meeting Entry without waiting.** Start meetings with participant video off, as they may be eating, or not be ready to join fully for whatever reason; this respects participant privacy. Participants can change this during the meeting.
- **Mute participants upon entry.** Automatically mute all participants when they join the meeting. The host may control whether participants can unmute themselves.
- **Chat.** Allow meeting participants to send a message visible to all participants
- **Auto saving chats.** If you wish to capture the chat, maybe as a way to get people to leave their emails for follow up, etc, you can automatically save all in-meeting chats, so that hosts do not need to manually save the text of the chat after the meeting starts.
- **Co-host.** Allow the host to add co-hosts. Co-hosts have the same in-meeting controls as the host. A technical facilitator managing breakout rooms will need to make the other facilitator(s) co-host.
- **Non-verbal feedback.**
 - Participants in a meeting can provide nonverbal feedback and express opinions by clicking on icons in the Zoom 'Participants Panel' or typing 'Stack' in the Chat. The Tech Facilitator can explain that process.
 - Facilitators should also explain the rationale for and use of hand signals.
- **Breakout room**
 - Allow host to split meeting participants into separate, smaller rooms
 - The Tech Facilitator can manage timings here
 - Click on the 'Breakout Rooms' icon on the bottom bar of your Zoom
 - Choose how many people can go into each room [3 or 4 is a good number; maximum 8 people] For randomised room entrants, select 'automatically' to let Zoom select participants at random to go into different rooms.
 - Select a time; e.g. 5 mins.
- **Share screen.**
 - In the host controls, click the arrow next to '**Share Screen**' and click '**Advanced Sharing Options**'. Under '**Who can share**'; choose '**Only Host.**' If needed, this can be changed back to allowing others to screen share. Select your booked **Meeting**
- Access details are the same as booking the meeting. REMEMBER to check if you're already logged into another Zoom account. If so, you need to log out of that one to log into the Zoom account where the Community Assembly is booked. Go to the avatar top right, sign out and then sign into the correct account.
- **Closed captions options.**

- Anyone that's D/deaf or partially deaf will need these running from the start of the meeting. At the bottom of your screen, select closed 'CC/Live Transcript'. You or others can always 'Hide Subtitles' if you don't want to see them,
- OR ask once everyone's arrived, if anyone wants them running. If no one says yes, they can be turned off. You need to be a Host to turn CC/Live Transcript on/off.
- Computers or Laptops are best for online Zoom meetings, but participation can happen on smartphones too.
- **Tech Facilitators** need to be on Computers or Laptops, as you can't always create Breakout Rooms on phones. You should be aware of the different options participants are viewing; according to what device they are using, layout may differ, for instance between phone and lap top.

Ask people in advance via promotions who have used Zoom before to sign in 5 minutes before the start time, and those who have not used Zoom before to sign in 10 minutes early; this allows time to work out how to use the buttons on their screen.

Penn State has an [excellent guide on using Zoom for circulation to facilitators and / or participants in advance](#), in order to familiarise teams with options available.

Zoom Facilitator Roles

Ideally for an online Community Assembly, have facilitators with different roles, e.g.:

- **Group Facilitators** who ensure inclusion of participants;
- Assembly **Note-takers**;
- **Technical Facilitator(s)**, they manage the breakout rooms, muting people, monitoring chat questions; while it isn't essential, this role helps the group facilitator focus on discussion and deliberation. They may also manage tools, such as Slido, or other digital support platforms.

How to run a Zoom Assembly

The process of running an Online Community Assembly is pretty much the same as one that you would use for an in person Assembly. Break out rooms will be used for the deliberation phase.

Please find more information in the [Quick Start Guide](#) section of this manual.

In-depth Plan with Timings

One Month To Go:

- Agree time, date and venue.
- Book venue and any necessary equipment such as a PA system or kitchen equipment.

- Think about back-up venues in case of any issues nearer the day, especially if it is being hosted outdoors.
- Create an event page, e.g. on Eventbrite, so you get an idea of what attendance to expect. Ideally, it would allow people to express if they need British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation or childcare so you know if it's worth investing in those things.
- Organise hosts and facilitators, along with others to take appropriate roles such as:
 - Organising play area.
 - Refreshments.
 - Meet and greet team.
 - Media and messaging (to document and share during and after the event).
 - BSL interpreter (if needed)
- Identify and invite stakeholders and influencers in the community.
- Invite your MP and local councillors.
- Print posters, leaflets, etc.
- Think about advertising:
 - Make a list ahead of time of all those relevant to your area and decide which are worth pursuing.
 - Ask people where they look for events.
 - Try a few places and get feedback on where people see the information.
 - Many people read their community newsletter or free paper but not the local paper.
 - Find out where the important information such as local bin days and recycling is routinely published and try those first!

Two Weeks to Go:

- Re-share on all social media platforms, and be prepared to check for questions and comments. Be responsive.
- Put up posters. Think about points of contact such as libraries, cafes, noticeboards, supermarkets etc. Think of the less obvious places such as Youth Centres, Homeless Shelters, Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Door knocking and flyering.
- Hand out flyers in prominent places such as high streets or any other community events.
- Follow up with local councillors or your MP if they haven't got back to you yet.
- Check there are no issues with the venue that might affect the event such as road works etc.

One Week to Go:

- Check in with all crew - Make sure you know who is responsible for:
 - Bringing equipment for the play area.
 - Refreshments supplies.
 - Ways to capture contact details for future events

- PA equipment etc.
- Check all roles are still covered.
- Agree a running order with the host and facilitation team, and circulate it to all crew.
- Reshare on social media.
- Ask interested parties to share within their own networks, perhaps challenge everyone already wanting to attend to bring one or two people along with them on the day.
- Ask people to share with those they think should be involved.
- Ask people to identify places where the information should be shared to reach those less likely to see it.
- Re-check there are no issues with the venue that might affect the event such as road works etc.

One Day to Go:

- Last shout-out reminder on social media.
- Send reminder emails or messages to anyone who registered on your event page.
- Re-check there are no issues with the venue that might affect the event such as road works etc.
- Check in with anyone holding a role that they are all good to go and agree to meet an hour before the start time to set up.
- Send a reminder email to your local councillors and MP.
- One Hour to Go
- All crew meet at the venue at least one hour before the advertised start time.
- Host, facilitators and the media and messaging crew run through the assembly plan together.
- Set up and test any PA equipment being used.
- Set up food and hot drinks, and any information that is being displayed.
- Ideally all the crew should wear something to identify them as being part of the organising team. This will make it easier for people to ask questions about the event or the process.
- Set up the children's area.
- Circulate pictures of the assembly being set up through social media channels to generate interest.
- During the Assembly
- Be available to greet anyone coming in and make them feel welcome/explain the process to them.
- Be aware of tensions and needs.
- Be available to support anyone. Many people may find themselves moved by the experience of listening to others or having their own voices heard, and some may need space or support.
- After the Assembly
- Be available to answer people's immediate questions about the assembly process or what happens next.
- Collect emails and contact details to ensure that people can be kept in touch with (make sure your process for doing this is GDPR compliant).
- Pack away all the equipment and tidy up the venue.
- Plan for a feedback and reflection meeting with facilitators and crew, ideally following the assembly. This can be scheduled for another day, but don't leave it too long.
- Have a party with everyone remaining.

Community Assemblies - a Quick Start guide!