Frequently Asked Questions



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Does Community Building mean we’re not doing Actions?

Community Building fuels our ability to take action and talking action strengthens our community. They support each other, not as separate things but as a positive feedback loop.

AND

Community building is in itself a tool for change. By forging connections, identifying strengths and cultivating curiosity in our communities we create and grow power on our own terms. We divest from the pillars of power through communities withdrawing consent and coming up with ideas for the world we want.

What does Community Building and Action look like?

Our Actions are one of our strongest tools in building community! They bring us together in one place, with a shared purpose. We tell stories about our actions which define our community.

Community Building is one of our strongest tools for creating actions! Wider community support helps create inclusive and well supported actions. The insight, interests and issues local communities face bring new ideas and perspectives into our action planning, design and messaging spaces. Our local communities have shared causes that motivate them. By being part of these communities, as rebels, we can enhance our collective capacity to safely engage in more contentious action.

AND

The efforts of community citizens generate their own power and pressure which, through the addition of our assets, can amplify the impact and really drive change. Remember, it is the multiplicative effect of different groups (beyond the activist identity) that is a threat to the pillars of power, not many people joining one group.

How does Community Building get us closer to our demands being met?

Community Building is a tool to create change, it doesn't just sit alongside NVDA, it fuels and powers it, and in turn NVDA strengthens and empowers our communities.

To build the cultural momentum needed to meet our demands we need strong bases of community power and this means meeting, joining and building the communities we exist in. Community support can come from surprising places but we only uncover it if we start the conversation.

AND

Through communities we are able to create change for ourselves. Stepping into the power we can generate ourselves to meet the challenges we face. Instead of asking the government to meet our needs, we meet them ourselves.

What is a Community?

Community can mean a group of people who share aspects of identity, purpose, interest or experience. This could be a Local Group or a Circle within XR, a group that meet locally such as a sports club or allotment group, or it could be a group such as the wider LGBTQIA+ community or faith based communities.

Community can mean the space between individual change and governmental change where people collectively make change that matters to them. This could be a litter-picking group looking after their local environment, a tenant association supporting each other on an estate, or a group of friends hosting rent parties to support each other financially.

Community can be a verb, the things people do that build trust, connection, and collective action. This could be the sharing of food, the act of making inclusive decisions, or the process of sharing skills.

What does Community Building mean in an XR context?

Community Building is both an internal and an external practice for XR. We build community for ourselves really effectively through action and support. We can build on these skills and turn them out into our wider communities.

Through identifying the strengths we have in our groups we can share those with confidence and humility. There are some spaces where we are welcomed as an XR unit, and others where we are better stepping in as community members with something to offer.

This can look like having a local band who drums at strikes, rallies and marches when asked for. It can look like holding banner making workshops for local actions to create space for the community to come together even when some of those people cannot be on the streets. Your Local Group may have strengths in face-painting, infrastructure like PA systems, storage space, poets and gardeners and musicians, all of which can be shared.

Once we know what strengths and assets we have in our Local Groups we can turn those from being focused on our work alone to being assets for the whole community.

What does Community Building ask us to do?

The current ask comes in three parts:

1. Recognise and Celebrate what we are already doing!
2. Get even more confident in what we do well.
3. Connect with opportunities to use those strengths to amplify the work of your wider community.

This can look like:

- Telling stories about what your local group has achieved, e.g. using block printing ahead of a banner drop.
- Finding out who and what skills made those achievements happen, e.g. who made the banner, how was it done.
- Nurture those assets by teaching others, e.g. open block printing trainings to the wider community using your experience.
- Discover ways to amplify the efforts of the local community using the assets of your local group. Step into the interconnectedness of justice, e.g. making connections with other groups and ask how they might value print blocks.

I cannot engage with “Community Building” because of XYZ.

This is a statement that many of us have heard or said ourselves. Although it may sound and feel like a “No” it can instead be treated as an opportunity.

We propose the following questions:

1. **Can you widen your definition of Community Building?**

Community Building is not a narrow ask requiring people to engage with people who make them feel unsafe or having to push beyond your limits to organise events and do everything yourself.

Community building can be small, it can be light, it can happen from your couch. It can revive rather than drain you, it can be the difference between feeling isolated in a sea of strangers and having true supporting and caring people around you to help in times of crisis.

2. **Is this barrier self made or self imposed?**

The knee-jerk reaction to say “Nope, I cannot do that, it's too much” is a common one. Whilst holding respect for our boundaries we should question this when it pops up. We often build narratives of cannot when the reality is that we don’t know how.

Community building can be scary, it often means stepping into vulnerability, but with tools like the Gift Circle and Personal Community Mapping we can make that step from a position of strength.

3. **Given this barrier, what assets to I have to work around or with it?**

There is no disputing that community building can be challenging, especially so if you have disabilities, negative experiences, and limitations on your capacity. There will be times where you will have to confront barriers and problem solve around them in order to show up. We’re not here to dispute or minimise the difficulty and frustration of adapting to a new set of circumstances. You are best placed to understand what you can and cannot do.

For Example

One of our rebels has an energy limiting condition which severely impacts her ability to leave the house. But she is still present and active in her communities:

- “I am very open about what I can and cannot do, and when attending things in physical space I will often act as a “basecamp” of sorts, holding space for people, starting conversations and linking people together while other activities happen around me. You will often find me at big actions, in my chair with tea and snacks and a group around me where people come and go”
- “When I am unable to leave the house, I am very active in group chats and focus on how I can best support people in doing whatever it is they are holding. I am quick to offer help where I can often through hype and encouragement, listening to people and distilling often overwhelming ideas into written plans, or just acting as a sounding board.”

4. **If the barrier is immovable, how can you support others in this work?**

Not every part of community building is for everyone, and that is okay, we need a diversity of tactics in this work. There will be some things you can get involved with, some things that you can

adapt to contribute too, and there are some things you cannot do. Here, you can find those who are doing this work to support. Maybe your contribution to Community Building is in hyping and supporting your friends in their efforts?

How do I do this when I experience barriers to community?

It’s very easy to fall into the trap of defining yourself by what you struggle to do. Given that we’ve explored the diverse nature of what community building can be, there is so much scope to adapt community building to something you can do!

This is not to say your struggle is your superpower, nor is it dismissing that community building is going to be that extra bit of a challenge for some people. What we are saying is you’ve got this!

Why are we so confident that rebels can contribute to community building?

- Your experience meeting challenges in a world not designed for you means you will have developed a set of skills perfect for bringing to community work.
- Similarly, you’re a natural problem solver!
- The fact that you have found this Rebel Toolkit page means that you are connected to the XR Community, a space where lots of people grappling questions such as these.This not only means you’re already great and finding community but there’s also an opportunity to learn from and collaborate with others who have a wealth of experiences. Feel free to reach out to our Community Building Reception Channel on Mattermost.
- You do not have to do this work perfectly. Nor does everything need to happen at once. People won’t forget you if you need to rest for a few days or weeks, and even a little bit of connecting with people goes a long way!
- Technology can be a boon. With a laptop and a mobile phone, community building can be done from the comfort (or discomfort) of your own bed.

I don't see myself as a part of communities...

A lot of our community connections are hiding in plain sight. We often don’t highlight them for what they are. A large part of Community Building is making the invisible visible and highlighting the strengths and connections we have.

Consider:

- Is XR your community? How many different communities within XR are you in or on the edges of?
- Do you have digital communities? Not all our support comes from our locations, maybe you have online groups, long distance friends, digital interests you engage in with people.
- Are you on the edge of communities? You don’t have to be the organiser or instigator of a community to be a part of it. And you don't have to be a regular to be valued by it.

Once you have identified the communities you are in, you can work to build and strengthen them with intentionality.

Remember that in times of hardship and crisis it is our community connections that predicate our survival. Who knows to check in on you and make sure you are okay, who can you lean on.
