Guide to Assemblies

What, why, how?

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What Are Assemblies?

Deliberative democracy is rooted in good information and shared understanding in order to make informed decisions.

Assemblies, a form of deliberative democracy, allow people to have informed, open conversations, express opinions and share ideas in an inclusive, structured way. The recommendations or key ideas can either be shared with other groups, or lead to further assemblies, diving deeper into subjects.

It is **important that the assembly process and what will happen to the results are communicated clearly**. Keeping to the structure, as closely as possible, is best for everyone to have confidence in the outcomes.

Assemblies may be more or less formal. They can vary in length, complexity and cost, according to whether the decision affects a few people taking part in a small activity, or the population of an entire country. The three types below are just a few examples of how assemblies can work.

PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY	COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY	CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY
Deliberative democracy	Deliberative democracy	Deliberative democracy
Group deliberation	Group deliberation	Group deliberation
No external speakers necessary	Informed by experts, stakeholders and people with lived experiences	Informed by experts, stakeholders and people with lived experiences
Self-selected	Self-selected	Random selection called 'sortition'
Can be as little as 45 minutes	If possible, several hours but not necessary. 90 minutes to a day	10-30 days
Inform activists' decisions	Inform policy	Inform policy

- **People's Assemblies** - On-the-hoof, 'casual', particpants are self-selecting, for quick decision making or gathering of ideas, e.g. during actions.

- **Community Assemblies** - These involve more planning and last longer - anything from a few to several hours. Although participants are self-selected, they should be advertised widely to maximise inclusion and encourage diversity of attendance. Plans should be in

place to process outputs that can inform policy and decisions. The partipants should be aware of the impacts they can make by giving their time to this process. This type of assembly is to be used for XRUK's Movement Assemblies.

- **Citizens' Assemblies** - The most formal type, they are informed by experts, participants are chosen via 'sortition' (like a jury) to be representative of the population, usually run over a number of days and should inform policy. Participants may be paid for their time, so relatively expensive. They are embedded in XR's third demand.

Why do we need assemblies?

Citizens', Community and People's assemblies are based on the 'assembly' process which enables people to share equally and openly within an environment that is non-judgemental and respectful - and facilitated to that effect.

As the world becomes more and more atomized, meeting with strangers and sharing your feelings is itself transformative.

In the context of Extinction Rebellion, assemblies are constructed in a way where people are safe to share their experience, make decisions collectively and work together to problem solve, as well as share the grief and loss they feel for a world that is rapidly collapsing.

The assemblies hold that grief with respect, and allow people to work together to organise towards rebellion and a shift away from the system that has brought us to this crisis of all crises.

Assemblies are not an alternative to nonviolent direct action in fact people's assemblies can be used to complement such action and can themselves be a form of direct action if they are being held in a space designed to be disruptive or during occupations.

As societal structures collapse, we are going to have to reclaim power for our communities and all these forms of participatory democracy will become essential to the way we organise.

Assemblies Team & Training

The XRUK Assemblies team are here to support the movement by ensuring:

- XRUK has the knowledge and support it requires to promote the Third Demand.
- XRUK, Local Groups, Regions and Nations have a broad understanding of the power of deliberative democracy, and have the support they need to run community assemblies as required.
- Rebels can learn the power of Polis, an interactive polling tool, for upgrading assemblies.

Facilitation Training

If you're interested in facilitating an assembly, watch Community Assemblies Facilitation Training.

Polis Moderation Training

Want to learn a great new skill to support organisers of interactive polls? Please get in touch with the XRUK Assemblies team on your preferred channel to learn about Polis Moderators - see 'Contact Us' below

Contact Us

If you have any questions, or need any support, please contact us:

- Email: assemblies@extinctionrebellion.uk
- Mattermost: UK Assemblies Reception
- Ask any questions in our UK Assemblies Sharing Telegram chat

The Three Pillars

The three pillars of radical inclusivity, active listening, and trust, are a way to provide a safe space and support empathetic interaction, allowing all assembly attendees to share and to be listened to.

Radical Inclusivity

Effective assemblies achieve radical inclusivity, where the emphasis on all being heard and valued equally means no voices are dominating and the collective wisdom of the assembly can be reached. People can participate safely and openly, without fear of judgement or ridicule.

Radical Inclusivity also means being aware of potential barriers to engagement and working with those affected to enable participation. Think about disabled access, sign language, whisper interpretation for those for whom English isn't their first language and other possible means by which those barriers can be removed. Ask if there are any barriers to engagement that people need to identify and then request that the group works together to find ways to remove them.

> *"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 people before developing a response in your mind whilst someone is still talking. Active listening is vital as it enhances our capacity to empathise; when we fully listen to others, we gain more of an understanding of people, their views and their concerns.

Assemblies recognise that no one person or group holds all the answers. The collective wisdom of the crowd means we gain powerful intelligence about the issues we discuss.

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

Trust

Once the process for a people’s assembly has been agreed, it is essential that participants trust the process and trust the facilitators. The facilitators enable this trust by sticking to the agreed process and ensuring that everyone follows too.

It is not meant to be a perfect system and can only be effective if people trust that those involved have come together in humility, to work towards decisions and actions that are best for all.

> *“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