

General SOS guidance

Advice on how to organise and make decisions within XR UK using our Self-Organising System

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Why SOS? An introductory Q&A

Please click each question to see the answer.

Why do we have a Self-Organising System?

XR's tenth Principle and Value is that we are based on autonomy and decentralisation. The self-organising system (SOS for short) is a set of practices that guarantees this autonomy while also enabling the different parts of the movement to work together.

We also use the SOS to support other XR Principle and Values: mitigating power, reflecting and learning, and creating a regenerative culture.

But why does it have to be a system? Can't we just trust people to organise themselves?

For small groups that work more or less autonomously, the full SOS may be more than you need. But when the regions and nations are interacting with the XR UK Actions, and with the Media & Messaging team, and using the technology provided by the Digital team — and so on — we need some standard ways of organising and deciding, so that we're not having to spend time arguing from first principles all the time. These standard ways are set out in the [XR UK constitution](#).

Who decided how we should organise ourselves?

This decision was made by rebels and founders early in 2019. It is rooted in an evidence-based and tested approach to self-organising called holacracy. As well as safeguarding autonomy, we believe this approach contributes to a regenerative culture and embodies other [Principles and Values](#), like mitigating the concentration of power and encouraging reflecting and learning. It aims to avoid some of the pitfalls that have undermined other progressive movements such as Occupy.

OK, so what's the gist of self organising?

Starting from the aims of the movement as a whole, we break this down into smaller parts. To

achieve our demands, what are the things — actions, communications, regen, organisational, technical etc — that we need to get done?

With each of these, we then ‘mandate’ a team to achieve them. A mandate is what the rest of the movement wants the team to do. Within this mandate the team has complete autonomy (within the Principles and Values) over how it organises itself and its work. Frequently this may involve further decentralisation, dividing the authority in its mandate into smaller mandates. These are given to sub-groups and ultimately to individual roles.

Does a mandate give you power?

The power to decide how you achieve a specified outcome or purpose, yes. But also some responsibilities. As well as the purpose, a mandate also comprises a set of accountabilities. These describe *how* you will achieve the purpose, in a series of activities that others in the movement can expect you to do. The accountabilities of a group, or a role, are what they can be held accountable for.

Is a mandate like a job description then?

Yes, and no. Yes, the mandate gives a general idea of *what* a group, or role, is working towards, and how. But a job description sets the limits of what you’re allowed to do, and a manager can direct how you do it. A mandate flips that on its head: you can do *anything you need to do* (that doesn’t interfere with someone else’s mandate) to achieve your purpose. You are not restricted to your accountabilities. Your accountabilities define what others can ask and expect of you. There are no managers, and no one can direct how you go about meeting your accountabilities.

Managing without managers? Does that work?

It can if we decentralise our power through mandates, and keep evolving our organisation. We establish feedback loops within relevant groups and roles, so that each limb of the movement can renew itself. This helps embody two of our Principles and Values: mitigating power, and valuing reflecting and learning. But in turn it depends on everyone being transparent about what their mandate is, enabling others across the movement to find who is accountable for what, and to give feedback. Hence all our mandates and as many groups as possible are published on the [organism view](#) of XR UK.

What roles does every team have?

To work within the [XR UK constitution](#), each team needs to have at least three roles (the Core Roles):

- someone to organise the work of the team and support members in their roles — the Internal Coordinator;

- someone to integrate the work of the team with the broader movement — the External Coordinator;
- someone to keep records of who's doing what in the team, and ensure all members are on the team communication channels — the Group Admin.

Together these roles make sure that the team is as transparent and accessible as it reasonably can be to the rest of the movement — so that we can all quickly find who's accountable for what. There are still quite a lot of meetings, but we keep them as short as possible.

What happens when people disagree?

It's inevitable we will disagree, sometimes strongly. The [XR UK constitution](#) outlines an Integrative Decision Making process. If someone feels that something is not working as it should, they express this tension — ideally explaining how it impacts their mandate — and make a proposal for addressing it.

And then you put the proposal to a vote, right?

Not exactly. Traditional voting is something we steer away from, because we try to be less binary than Yes/No, less factional than For/Against. First, a facilitator guides the process of checking everyone understands the proposal and its implications — particularly for them and their mandates. Then the facilitator invites reactions to the proposal. Finally they ask for any objections. We avoid majority rule — voting — or minority rule — veto. Objections are only valid if they convincingly show that harm would arise from the proposal (for example: if a group would no longer be able to exercise its mandate, that would be harm). “I don't think that's going to work” is a *reaction* that the proposer may or may not take on when implementing the proposal, but it is not a valid *objection*.

Does a valid objection mean you have to start from scratch with a new proposal?

Maybe, but hopefully not. Ideally we find a way to change proposal, so that it still achieves what it was intended to do, but without causing harm. A proposal can't go forward if there's a valid objection, but the group is invited to think creatively to suggest changes to the proposal. These changes should retain the purpose of the original proposal while also avoiding the harm identified in the objection. In this way we *integrate* the objection into the proposal, to meet the needs of both proposer and objector. Maybe no one is 100% happy, but hopefully no one holds a grudge either.

Key Terms in SOS

The Self-Organising System (SOS) is the decision-making process adopted by Extinction Rebellion (XR). This guide walks you through some key components of SOS that we adopt to further the principles and values of XR.

Circle:

A group or unit within the larger XR organisation.

Mandate:

The authority given to an individual or a circle, a description of what they are working to achieve, and what others can expect them to do in order to achieve it.

Roles:

Inside a circle, roles are created to share all ongoing work amongst individuals. This gives them the authority to make decisions to achieve their given goals — which are expressed in their mandate.

Circles in XR

A circle is a self-governing team within XR. The structure helps us focus on priorities, respond to events, and share responsibility across the movement.

- A circle operates to accomplish a set of well-defined goals.
- Goals for the circle are outlined in a mandate that says what it is expected to do or create.
- The circle decides how they work within their area of responsibility.

Circles and sub-circles

- Larger circles can delegate a specific task to a set of team members forming a sub-circle. Sub-circles are accountable for the work they do. This way, both groups can work independently towards a collective goal.
- Circles must prioritise activity as requested by the broader circle. Circle members
- Every circle includes three Core Roles crucial for the team's health, communication, and accessibility to the rest of the movement — more on that later, under 'roles'. Outside the three core roles, a circle is free to distribute roles to its members

Understanding Mandates:

Mandates in SOS are descriptions of responsibilities given to individuals or teams, outlining what they are working to achieve and what they are accountable for.

- Components of a Mandate
 - Purpose: Clearly state goals or outcomes that the mandate aims to achieve.
 - Accountabilities: a list of activities necessary to fulfill the purpose, using action verbs.
 - Domains: Include if exclusive control over resources like technology or information is required.

Read this step-by-step guidance on [How to write mandates](#)

- Distributing Mandates: “We are based on autonomy and decentralisation.”
 - Mandates are distributed among team members to spread power and share responsibility.
- Changing Mandates:
 - Mandates are created and amended in formal circle meetings, using collective decision-making.
 - If mandate holders are not fulfilling their responsibilities, the constitution sets out escalating steps for resolving issues

Roles in SOS:

Sharing the work to achieve XR’s core demands, together.

- Types of Role:
 - Core Roles: Circles **must** include three Core Roles: **Internal Coordinator**, **External Coordinator**, and **Group Admin**. Together they help to support the team, coordinate with other teams, and keep team records accessible. These roles are re-elected every six months.
 - All other roles: beyond the three Core Roles, the circle’s team is free to create any other Role to meet its mandate. Teams are all different, but may have some roles in common. Guidance for Templates roles is coming shortly.
- Creating or Amending Roles:
 - Creating or amending roles should be done collectively in formal meetings as governance decisions.
 - Any team member can call for an election for any team role at any time.
 - The Internal and External Coordinators of a circle must always be appointed by election.
 - When roles don't involve circle-wide power, individuals can be appointed by volunteering.
- Stepping Down:
 - Individuals can step down from a role at any time.

Your power and responsibility in SOS

A Guide for Every Team Member

As a team member, you have a unique role in fostering an environment where power and decision-making processes are transparent and effectively managed. Here's how you can contribute positively to your team's success.

Understand Your Decision-Making Power

Recognise your part in decision-making. Spend some time familiarising yourself with how your mandate fits alongside other roles in the team. Identify

- the scope of the decisions that you can take yourself, within your mandate;
- which other roles in the team — and possibly beyond the team — might be affected by your decisions;
- how the purpose of your role contributes to the purpose of your team, its wider circle, and so on up to the three demands.

Step into your authority. Where you have a mandate, you do not have to ask permission of anyone. So take initiative without feeling the need to establish consensus first. Invite advice where you feel you need it, but that's your decision, not your advisors'. It saves meeting time if we avoid unnecessary consultations.

Exercise your influence responsibly by adhering to the mandates assigned to you. This ensures that power is distributed fairly and decisions are made transparently.

Propose changes thoughtfully when you see an opportunity to improve processes or outcomes. If you believe a modification in your mandate could benefit the team, bring your suggestions to team meetings with clear reasons and potential impacts.

Navigate Team Mandates

Familiarise yourself with the bigger picture. Explore the relationships between teams and what they do on the [XR UK Organism view](#) (click on the circles to see their contents).

Clarify the purpose and accountabilities of your role with those you collaborate with. Knowing what they expect of you and what you are responsible for can guide your actions and decisions.

Adjust your mandates when necessary. If any accountabilities do not align with your skills or if you believe you can add more value in other areas, discuss these adjustments with your Internal Coordinator in the first instance. Some roles may have more than one person in them, and you can have informal agreements about who majors on what. You don't have to record everything in your mandate, but keeping it current provides a better guide to future role holders.

Understand the decision pathways within your team. Recognize which decisions you can make independently and which ones require consent by your team. Usually the decisions that require consent are

- how your team divides its mandate between roles and sub-circles, including their mandates;
- who is appointed to what roles;
- whether the team adopts any policies that constrain or empower what the roles can do.

(We refer to these as governance decisions, because they affect the power of the team members.)

Practise Effective Listening and Speaking for Decisions

Listen actively to your teammates. Pay attention to discussions and feedback, considering how the insights relate to the team's objectives and your role. This not only helps in better decision-making but also strengthens team cohesion.

Speak from your role(s), especially in meetings. Decision-making meetings are quicker and more effective if you keep in mind your mandate and whether the decision affects your ability to deliver on that — and if it doesn't, can you save any opinions for a separate agenda item or meeting (possibly a project or team-building meeting)?

Get familiar with integrative decision making (IDM). This method is **specified in the Constitution**. You don't have to use it other than for governance decisions, but it can be useful even informally to follow the IDM sequence:

- **clarifications** — what exactly is being proposed to happen next?
- **reactions** — how do I feel about it?
- **objections** — am I sure that bad stuff will follow if what is being proposed actually happens? If not, let it happen, see what actually follows, and work from there...

Focus on developing relevant skills that enhance your role's effectiveness within the team. Whether it's improving your strategic thinking or your ability to analyse data, enhancing your capabilities can make you a more effective member.

Lead from within your role

Make your role useful by demonstrating how it can help others. Even if your mandate seems relatively modest — let's say scheduling meetings and taking minutes — you can still have an impact in achieving your role's purpose — which might be "Everyone has the information and records they need to have effective meetings". Keep focusing on all the things that would bring you closer to that purpose.

Be accessible and respond to requests. You are the expert and have the authority in what you do. Anyone in XR can ask for your help in doing the things that you're accountable for. So help make it easy for them to reach you with requests, and respond quickly when they do.

Manage expectations and priorities. While others can expect you to do what's included in your accountabilities, they can't specify how you go about it, or when (unless dependencies are written into the accountabilities, like "Preparing the PA system before the speakers begin"). You may feel you should prioritise other accountabilities first, so let requesters know what they can expect.. If your team follows the XR UK Constitution, then you "must align [your] work with the priorities set by the Internal Coordinator of [your] circle." Those will be general high-level priorities, so, if it's not immediately obvious, check with your Internal Coordinator how a particular activity fits into those priorities.

Reflect, learn, regenerate

We all know there's more to good team work than assigning roles and making decisions effectively.

Be proactive in understanding the impact of your actions on the team's dynamics and outcomes. Reflect on how your decisions help achieve the team's goals and how they affect other members.

Fill your role in a way that supports your teammates in their roles. Offer help when you see opportunities, and be open to receiving support when needed. A collaborative approach can lead to more effective problem-solving and innovation. Create collaborative projects, involving different roles working to a common end.

Stay informed about the broader organisational goals and how your team's work contributes to these aims. Ask for updates from your External and Internal Coordinators. This broader perspective can enhance your decision-making and ensure that your efforts are aligned with the strategy and demands.

By focusing on these areas, you can be a proactive, supportive, and effective member of your team, ensuring that both power and responsibilities are managed wisely to achieve collective success.

How to work things out (and help the movement work better)

Every tension is a learning opportunity

We talk about XR as an organism. Like all living organisms, it is changing to adapt to its environment and new challenges all the time. Cells die and are replaced. Tensions build up in its muscles and limbs and need to be loosened. From time to time its digestive and respiratory systems get infected. This all requires treatment and adaptation.

We notice things that ought to be improved within the organism all the time. We call these 'tensions' because the idea of a tension stretches from:

- a mild sense of unease — for example, I have some information that I think others need to be aware of, to
- a risk that something really important to our strategy will not get done, or from
- an opportunity that hasn't yet been taken to make the movement more effective, to
- the work of one team is about to undermine another team's ability to do what they need to do.

This page is about how to process and ease different tensions, whether they are problems or opportunities, or both. And, in the process, maybe help the organism adapt to avoid or mitigate similar tensions in the future.

By addressing personal and local needs, we help the whole organism learn, and bring about movement-wide evolution.

Surface and define your tension

Notice the tension. You may start from a general unease and a feeling that something's not quite right. Or it may not be a negative feeling: it could be a sense of good news that hasn't been properly shared and appreciated. Can you remember when and where you first noticed this tension? What was happening then?

To help notice what tensions you may be feeling, try these

thirteen questions to surface tensions

- Is there something I need help with?
- Is any of my work stuck and could anyone here help me get it unstuck?
- Is there anything I'd like to brainstorm that could use a few more brains?
- Am I regularly doing work that is not captured in the mandates of my roles?
- Am I having trouble with any stakeholders?
- Is there anything upsetting or frustrating me?
- Do I intend to make a decision that might impact another role soon?
- Do I have any news/successes/announcements to share "for the good of the whole"?
- Are there any opportunities I'm excited about that I want to see movement around?
- Is someone else waiting on me for something and would an update from me help them?
- Is there anyone I'd like to recognise for doing something great or would I like to be recognised for doing something great?
- Do I have any questions about anything shared during team updates or meetings?
- Is there anything I'm holding inside that would feel better if others were holding it with me?

Give the tension a name. No need to spend too much time on this — you can change it later.

Work out where it starts from. Ask yourself, 'What would need to change for my tension to disappear?' Sometimes the answer may appear simple or straightforward — 'give me that resource, or this information'. And often it may indeed be that simple. But if your answer is, 'Person X leaves the team' or 'this part of the strategy is rewritten', you may need to think a little more.

To help explore sources of your tension, try these

seven questions to map tensions.

1. What, if anything, is standing in the way of me taking action to ease my tension?
2. Is this a one-off situation, or is it something that also happens at other times, to other people and teams, in other circumstances?
3. If it happens at other times/to other people/in other situations, what are the common factors?

4. If it happens to other people, how do they experience it and what do they do about it?
5. Is what I need something that someone else is accountable for (so it is covered by their mandate)?
6. If not, should there be someone who is accountable for this kind of thing?
7. Can I describe or specify the behaviour/information that I want to see, and the circumstances (who/what/when) when I want to see it?

Explore pathways to ease your tension

First work out who has the power to decide on the changes you want to see. And whose advice should they seek (in line with the [Advice Process](#))? Power to decide is distributed through the movement in the form of mandates, so find the role or team with the mandate to address your tension.

Please click any of these pathways that looks like it might be worth exploring.

Request another role to take action, or do it yourself.

If the source of the tension falls within someone else's mandate, ask them to do what they are accountable for to resolve the tension. If they agree and do it, that may be the end of the matter. Discuss options with them as necessary: it's their decision how they go about their accountabilities, so share some ideas for the kinds of things that might work for both of you.

If they don't agree, try one of the other paths.

If the source of the issue is not in anyone's mandate, then can you take action yourself to resolve it?

Change your mandate.

If the tension stems from decisions that you'd like to take but don't have authority to take, consider taking this path.

Would it help you achieve the purpose of your role if you had extra authority to decide and to act? If so, could you propose adding an accountability to your mandate, to give you this authority?

Or perhaps it would help if you gave up some authority and made it available to another role? For example, if the other role has access to information that you don't.

You can make a proposal to change your mandate and take it to your team to seek consent. Make sure that the proposal does not give you decision making power that already begins to another role. If so, that role can object to your proposal on the grounds that it harms their mandate.

Change another role's mandate, or create a new role.

Do you want to be able to expect something from another role that they are not currently accountable for? If so, propose adding something to an existing mandate — or perhaps creating a new role.

Is the target role in your team? If so, take the proposal to your team meeting, where it can be decided on, with any objections integrated into a revised proposal.

Is it in another team? If so, it's a little more complicated, because the other team has the power to decide. Speak to the role holder themselves (or possibly the Internal Coordinator of their team) and see if you can persuade them of your case. Then they can take the proposal to their team.

Alternatively ask the External Coordinator (EC) of your team to bring your proposal to the wider circle that your team is part of. Depending on where the other role is, this may have to be passed through other ECs... that's why getting the role holder on side is often simpler.

Notes:

- If you want to change the mandate of another team, rather than just a role, the process is exactly the same, but the decision is made in the wider circle of which the team is part.
- The process is also very similar if you want to create a new role where there was none before. This is almost always done in your own team, not another one (it's a basic principle of autonomy and self-organising that teams decide their own roles).

Define how something is done.

Do you want to specify how something — a process, activity, project — is done, whichever roles are involving in doing it? If so, define it in a policy.

You still have to work out who has the power to decide on this policy. It could be that many roles and mandates are involved, across many teams. Locate the broader circle that all these

roles and teams are in. For example, for an action, it might be the Actions Team; for something on the website, it might be Media and Messaging, or Digital — or if both these are involved, it may have to go out to the Hive.

As with role mandates, you need someone in the relevant team to propose the policy in a governance meeting of that team.

‘How to write a policy’ is a whole other guidance page, not yet written. In the meantime, here are some [examples of different kinds of policies](#).

Protect access to something.

Is there something that needs coordinated control? Perhaps a PA System that must not be booked in two places at once, or a social media channel where it’s important to avoid competing or inconsistent messaging. If something like this is identified as a ‘domain’, then it can be added to a mandate, giving exclusive authority to the team or role with the mandate.

Do you want your role to be granted a domain? If so

- Check that the wider circle has a claim on the domain within its own mandate (it cannot assign authority to your role that it doesn’t have itself).
- Write a short proposal to the circle that explains the tension you have identified: “as things stand, my role is at significant risk of harm, because I cannot control...” the thing you want to control.
- Present the proposal to a governance meeting of the relevant circle. Be ready to integrate any valid objections that may arise.

Embed the adaptation

Hopefully one of those pathways leads to your tension being resolved.

In the first pathway, nothing changes beyond one task being completed at your request or instigation.

All the other pathways lead to changes in the way our movement operates, and these changes persist until someone else senses a tension about how they work, and proposes further incremental changes (or, in theory, a reversal — but that is very rare in practice).

You have worked something out to help your role be more effective. But there is also legacy that your proposal is leaving behind.

'We value reflecting and learning,' as Principle and Value #5 says. By updating our teams, their roles, mandates and policies, our movement is learning, improving what we do and avoiding getting stuck in repetitive behaviour.

'We actively mitigate power,' as Principle and Value #7 says. By recording mandates, policies and how we continuously adapt them, we make transparent how power is distributed through the movement, and how its flow is regulated. This helps us see and address any instances in which authority gets centralised in a small number of people or positions.

How to write mandates

Why mandates?

We are based on autonomy and decentralisation. Mandates are the building blocks by which we decentralise and mitigate any concentration of power.

We divide all the different types of decision we have to make into mandates, and then we distribute these mandates to the people best able to carry them out. We trust them to do just that, and we hold them accountable if they don't.

So the mandate for a circle or role defines which decisions it can make.

Taking care of our mandates — recording them, communicating them, updating them — is *critical* to how we manage ourselves without managers.

What's in a mandate?

A mandate has three parts:

- a **purpose** — the result we want to bring about (e.g. for XR UK the purpose might be 'Achievement of the three demands');
- some clear **accountabilities** — the activities we will do to bring about the result;
- some **domains**, if they're needed — the resources (e.g. PA system) or spaces (e.g. website, social media presence) to which we need to regulate access.

What makes a good mandate?

- **Short** — rebels need to be able to scan mandates quickly to find the right team, so try to make this easy.
- **Clear** — use plain does-what-it-says-on-the-tin terms that rebels don't need training to understand.
- **Specific** — each circle or role has a purpose which is part of, or contributes to, the wider circle of which it is part. So focus on what your part of that wider purpose is, and avoid overlapping with areas that other circles might think are part of their mandate.

Notes:

- None of this means that your team cannot create richly described visions of the world you would like to bring into being, or the strategy by which you might do this. If that helps you achieve your mandate, do it. But it is separate from your mandate, and serves a different function.
- If circles *do* feel that their mandates are overlapping unhelpfully, then we count this as a tension and one or both circles may work on a proposal to resolve it. This is part of how the wider Self-Organising System works.

Tips for writing mandates

Purpose

Everything starts with the **purpose**. This is the outcome that your team exists to bring about.

Why purpose matters - a short anecdote from history

In 1962, President John F Kennedy visited NASA for the first time. During his tour of the facility, he met a janitor who was carrying a broom down the hallway. The President then casually asked the janitor what he did for NASA, and the janitor replied, "I'm helping put a man on the moon."

The janitor knew something that most of us struggle with, the purpose of his work. He kept the building clean so that the scientists, engineers, and astronauts could focus on their mission of putting "man on the moon". They did not have to worry about spending their time on trashcans, bathrooms, or hallways. He did that for them. He saw where his contribution fit in the organization. He connected his purpose with theirs. [[source](#)]

How does your purpose connect with achieving XR's demands?

Try answering one or more of these questions:

- What would it look like if your team were wildly successful?
- If I fulfilled my purpose, there would be... [what?]
- We imagine a world where... [what? but keep it specific: remember this is what *you and your team* are creating, not the whole movement]

You should be able to use your answer as a purpose statement.

You can do whatever it takes to achieve your purpose.

What is the point of 'purpose'?

1. Rebels across the movement can see how their team plays its part in achieving the XR demands.
2. Rebels can see how the organism works and how the pieces work together (like seeing how an organism has a respiratory system, a digestive system, a locomotive system, and how the smaller parts — the bronchioles, the kidneys, the feet and toes — play their parts).
3. Rebels can easily locate the part of the movement that serves a particular function (if you know something that would make the respiratory system work better, you need a way of finding the relevant part or organ).

The movement is complex, but by representing its hierarchy of purpose we make it as simple as possible to understand how it works, and empower rebels to take action to help it work better.

Some Do's and Don't's when writing Purpose statements

Do

1. Keep it as short as possible (there are a lot of teams; rebels haven't got time to read an essay about each one).
2. Keep it simple and able to stand on its own.
3. Keep it practical. Ground the vision in an achievable outcome.
4. Check that the purpose can reasonably be understood as a subset of the purpose of the broader circle it sits within (the broader circle cannot distribute power to you that it doesn't itself have)
5. Be clear about how the purpose contributes to the goals of broader circles, but...

Don't

1. ...Define the purpose in such a way that it requires other circles (or the whole movement) to do things in a particular way — that would not be self-organising.
2. Refer to other strategies, policies or mandates that rebels have to read in order fully to understand the purpose (possible exceptions to this are the demands, and the principles and values, which all rebels can be expected to know).
3. Include 'representing' a group or individual: the purpose is about how the work serves the wider goal of the organism, not about how one team projects its collective voice to it.
4. Include a list of several activities (these may fit better as Accountabilities) or goals — though you can have one end-point with several attributes.
5. Define a purpose that is wider than the circle itself can achieve — in other words a purpose that depends heavily on effort from the rest of the movement to accomplish fully. It's great to be ambitious about what a team can achieve, but don't be

completely unrealistic.

Accountabilities

Accountabilities are the things that a circle or role does day-to-day, the most common activities to achieve the purpose.

Try completing the sentence, "I was watching the team (or role) for a while and I saw them..."

- contacting..., communicating..., coordinating...
- creating..., producing..., designing..., making...
- identifying..., analysing..., evaluating...
- supporting..., assisting..., caring for...
- planning..., deciding...

Try to avoid words like 'ensuring' because they usually imply controlling someone else's work.

Think about all the work your circle/role needs to do to fulfil its purpose.

Again, try to keep each accountability to a single concise sentence, so that all rebels can grasp them quickly.

The holder of a mandate has the *authority to do whatever they need to get their accountabilities done*, unless it impacts someone else's domain.

(Still want more? Check out this [blog post from HolacracyOne](#) for some further guidance on writing accountabilities.)

Domains

Domains are things that a role has exclusive control over. These could be physical things (like a PA system or greenhouses) or more abstract things (like payment processes, or event lists).

Only add a domain to a mandate if there is a clear reason for it. It serves as a kind of "Hands off" or "No trespassing" sign. But if there's little risk of others interfering, it doesn't need mentioning. Most mandates don't have domains.

What harm would be caused by having no exclusivity? If a role wants the PA system for an event, but finds it has been taken to another event, the former role experiences harm. If lots of people can add, edit or delete events from a list, there could be harm (e.g. from mistaken deletions), but there may not be. Is it safe enough to try?

Scope - important

A circle cannot delegate a mandate that has a wider scope than its own mandate:

- it can't give a role or subcircle a purpose that is not a part of achieving its own purpose;
- it cannot make someone accountable for doing something that it is not itself accountable for;
- it can't add a domain to a mandate unless it already controls that domain.

Example mandate

Let's say our circle has been given a mandate to organise a fundraising party.

We decide we need a role for finding the venue, which we'll call Venue Finder. Now we need to give the role a mandate so that someone has the authority to find the venue.

Purpose: The party is held in a location with space for dancing and awesome acoustics.

Accountabilities:

- Contacting and maintaining a list of potential venues
- Evaluating the potential venues in terms of access, cost, and other criteria agreed with relevant roles
- Booking a venue for the date of the party

Should the Venue Finder role have 'Food and drinks tables' as a **domain**? If they did, the Catering role would have to get permission from the Venue Finder if they wanted to move the tables or buy more tables. It is for the circle to decide, when creating the mandate, whether this is necessary or would prevent the Catering role from fulfilling its own purpose and accountabilities.

How to write proposals

Proposals enable ideas to move forward if they are "good enough for now, safe enough to try".

Bringing proposals to your team helps it work better — from unblocking a task to reorganising your roles. They introduce agile and creative ways to progress work, bring new ideas and resolve tensions. ("Tension" is a catch-all term that covers issues from mild unease to full-blown conflict.)

Everyone can contribute to the better running of their group or team. If you are sensing a tension in the way your team is operating, or have a new idea or spot an opportunity to do something is not currently covered properly, write a proposal!

You may not need to go through all of these steps below for every proposal, it depends on how complicated the issue is, or how elaborate the idea is.

Proposals should generally try to include the following:

- A short sentence summarising the proposal at the top.
- A brief list of the background, motivations, tensions addressed, including examples.
- The proposal itself. Make this as clear and simple as you can.
- The implications if it gets adopted, and how it will need to be implemented.
- A list of who you've spoken to in creating the proposal. This may include anyone who will be significantly impacted.
- A clear system for receiving feedback, eg please comment on this document, or send feedback directly to me at...

Use the template at the foot of this page if you find it helpful.

Check in with a few other people

Ask for other people's thoughts and ideas. Consider using the [Advice Process](#). This helps to capture collective wisdom and build a culture of collaboration and joint ownership around proposals.

Redraft the proposal to integrate the advice you receive.

Circulate the proposal

Share to the wider team with enough notice for them to consider it properly before you meet.

Concerns or objections

Contact members of the circle who might object to the proposal, based on their feedback, to see if you can integrate their concerns in advance of the meeting. (This step is optional. It may be easier to process objections in a meeting.)

Bring to a meeting

Ask the Internal Coordinator or meeting facilitator to add your proposal to a meeting agenda. Then you can have your proposal processed using relevant [decision-making processes](#). Depending on the response of the team, you may need to be open to amending your proposal or integrating objections.

Your proposal is adopted!

Be clear about any actions that should follow as part of the implementation of the proposal, and ensure these are recorded for follow up.

Keep sensing tensions

We value reflecting and learning. We adopt proposals that are good enough for now, safe enough to try. We **do not** sweat trying to make every proposal perfect before we try it. So, if experience shows that the proposal can be improved, this counts as a tension: please make another proposal for that improvement.

Proposal Template

Summary

This proposal is for the following change(s) to be made: [keep this short and clear].

Background and motivations

[The history and context that led you to propose this change, including examples. Make clear what role or circle/team is affected and how.]

Tension(s)

[What is (not) happening at the moment that your role or circle needs (not) to happen? State in one sentence if you can.]

Proposal

[How will the change(s) in the summary (above) address the tension.]

Implementation and impact

[How will the proposal be implemented? Which roles and circles/team will be affected?]

Advice taken

[A list of who you've spoken to in creating the proposal, which hopefully will include anyone who will be significantly impacted.]

Feedback

[How others can send feedback, pre- and post-adoption.]

Project groups

Project Groups in the **Self-Organising System (SOS)** are temporary, goal-focused teams that bring together people from multiple circles to work on a specific initiative.

Key Characteristics of a Project in SOS:

- **Short-term focus:** A project is usually created to address a particular need and is dissolved once the goal is met.
- **Cross-team collaboration:** Projects often involve people from multiple circles, unlike working groups, which belong to a single circle.
- **No formal mandate:** While working groups require a **mandate** from a broader circle, projects operate through existing roles and mandates.
- **Coordination considerations:** Setting up a project should involve defining objectives, aligning activities with relevant roles, and ensuring clear communication and coordination

When to form a Project Group

A **project group** should be formed instead of a **circle (or working group)** when the work is **temporary, specific, and cross-functional**. Here are key scenarios where forming a project group is the best approach:

- **Defined Timeframe:** If the work has a clear end date or is meant to achieve a one-time goal, a project group is preferable. Circles are ongoing and focus on maintaining long-term functions.
- **Cross-Circle Collaboration:** When an initiative requires input from multiple circles, a project group allows for flexible participation without restructuring existing mandates.
- **No Need for a New Mandate:** If the work can be carried out within existing mandates and does not require a formal governance structure, a project group is sufficient. Circles, by contrast, need a **mandate** from a broader circle to define their purpose and responsibilities.
- **Experimental or Trial Initiatives:** If an idea needs testing before becoming an ongoing function, a project group allows for agility and quick adaptation without committing to the formal structure of a circle.
- **Urgent or Fast-Moving Work:** When rapid action is needed, project groups enable quick mobilisation of relevant expertise without waiting for the governance processes required to establish a new circle.

If a project proves to be essential beyond its initial goal, it can later transition into a **circle** with a formal **mandate** to sustain its work long-term.

Checking your Project has the Right People

Ensuring that a project group has the right participants is essential for its success. Here are key steps to assess whether your project team is well-formed:

- **Match Skills to Needs:** Identify the core tasks required and ensure that the group includes people with the necessary expertise. If gaps exist, seek additional contributors from relevant circles.
- **Clarify Mandates and Roles:** Each participant should understand how their **existing mandate** connects to the project. If someone's role does not naturally align, they may need explicit support from their circle to contribute effectively.
- **Balance Perspectives:** A good project team includes a mix of strategic thinkers, implementers, and communicators to cover all aspects of the work.
- **Check Availability and Commitment:** Confirm that members have enough capacity to contribute meaningfully. If someone is stretched too thin, consider redistributing responsibilities or bringing in additional support.
- **Review Regularly:** As the project progresses, assess together whether the team composition remains effective. If priorities shift, new expertise may be needed, or some members may step back once their contribution is complete.

By periodically reviewing these factors, you can keep your project group agile, well-resourced, and aligned with its objectives.

Organising a Project Team

Once you have the right people involved, structuring the project team effectively is key to smooth collaboration and progress. Here's how to organise it:

- **Define the Purpose and Scope:** Clearly articulate what the project aims to achieve, how success will be measured, and the expected timeframe for completion.
- **Clarify Roles and Responsibilities:** Assign tasks based on each member's expertise and mandate, ensuring that everyone knows their contribution and decision-making authority.
- **Establish a Communication Flow:** Decide how the team will stay connected—through regular meetings, shared documents, or messaging platforms—to ensure updates and coordination.
- **Use Existing Structures Where Possible:** Leverage the mandates of existing circles to support the project rather than duplicating efforts. If needed, designate a point person to liaise with relevant circles.
- **Track Progress and Adapt:** Use a simple system (such as task boards, check-ins, or progress reviews) to monitor work, resolve challenges, and adjust as needed.

- **Plan for Project Closure:** Before the work begins, outline what will happen when the project ends—whether the outcome will be handed over to a circle, wrapped up completely, or lead to a new phase.

By maintaining a **clear structure, good communication, and alignment with existing SOS processes**, the project group can stay focused, effective, and flexible in achieving its goals.