

XR People's Assemblies Manual

People's Assemblies are part of the escalation, organisation and decision making strategy of XR. This grass roots method of self-organising and direct action is genuinely democratic and has been used throughout history to instigate people-powered change: People's Assemblies were at the centre of the Arab Revolt that spread from Tunisia to Egypt in 2011, as well as the Spanish 15M movement, the Occupy movement, and the Y En A Marre movement in Senegal, and they are central to the organisation of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria.

It is clear that traditional representational democracy is not fit for the purpose of addressing the climate emergency: politicians represent many competing interests before they represent the interests of people and planet. XR sees radical new forms of democracy, which put decision making back in the hands of the people, as the only way by which we can take back control from the corporate-captured system that is currently failing us.

The third XR demand - the use of Citizens' Assemblies chosen by Sortition - shows one way that our broken, political system can be made obsolete. Through Citizens' Assemblies, we trust ordinary people, who are chosen at random and put through a deliberative democratic process, to address the realities of the climate emergency in a way that those in power have failed to do and can never do. People's Assemblies offer other ways for us to transform our democracy – they offer a way of seeing democracy in motion out on the streets, and help people reclaim power. Both Citizens' 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.

'Government must create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice.'

Third demand of Extinction Rebellion

What are People's Assemblies?

People's assemblies are a structured way for a group of people to share thoughts and feelings, discuss problems and generate solutions collectively. The structure facilitates participation and inclusion – all voices are heard and valued equally and no one person or group are able to dominate the process (everyone is listened to and everybody listens). People's assemblies work to build trust, community and connection, whilst facilitating participatory and deliberative democracy.

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 will be 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 will 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 non-violent direct action, they 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.

People's Assemblies are also part of the deep adaptation that communities will have to go through in order to face together the growing impact of climate and biodiversity breakdown. As societal structures collapse, we are going to have to reclaim power for our communities and these forms of participatory democracy will become essential to the way we organise.

People's assemblies are 'self selected' meaning that anyone can choose to take part. They are not to be confused with citizens' assemblies, which are composed of people randomly selected from the population by the process of Sortition to make sure they are representative of society (for CAs, key characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level and geography are taken into consideration). Citizens' assembly members are selected to make a decision on a specific topic, before making that decision they would learn about critical thinking and hear balanced information from experts and stakeholders. They would then spend time deliberating in small facilitated groups, similar to the break-out groups used in People's Assemblies.

Three ways that People's Assemblies can be used:

- **Movement Building:** Assemblies held in public spaces can act as a way for members of the public to be drawn into joining the conversation and add their voice to discussion and debate around the climate emergency.
- **Direct Action:** Assemblies can form part of a direct action when they are held during occupations, roadblocks or other forms of nonviolent civil disobedience involving groups of people holding spaces any length of time.
- **Organising and Decision-Making:** Groups of any size can meet and discuss issues or make decisions collectively in regards to moving the aims and actions of XR forward. The basic participatory democracy method can be used by direct action groups to make emergency decisions, regional groups to make decisions on how to organise themselves or for affinity and working group meetings.

“People there wanted to raise their voices and state their opinions and there was a facilitator, people were taking notes. It was being done in an orderly way to ensure everyone could speak... Now everyone can say, 'We have the right to say that we are tired of things and want change.' We know now that we have the strength that comes from being many people.”

A member of 15M recalls her first assembly.

Background on People's Assemblies

People's assemblies have been used throughout history and all over the world as a means to enable people to come together and achieve real social change, and shape a society for the good of all:

- In Ancient Athens, for example, a people's assembly known as the **ekklesia**, which was open to all male citizens regardless of class, was where major decisions such as going to war, military strategy and the election of public officials were made.
- More recently, in Rojava, Kurdistan, people's assemblies have been at the centre of a democratic revolution. Decisions are made by the community, and the role of the elected representatives is simply to carry out these decisions. The community itself is the seat of power.
- In Spain, the Spanish municipalist movement, known as the Indignados or 15-M movement, used PAs to discuss and protest against the government's austerity policies. At the movement's peak, 80 assemblies were being held each week alone in Madrid.
- In 2014 the Y'en a Marre movement in Senegal helped oust the incumbent and corrupt President by mobilising the youth vote using people's assemblies and hip-hop.
- Closer to home there are the examples of Frome, Torrington and others, all of which are councils that have been reclaimed to some degree by residents in local elections. When councils are run by residents we see decisions get made that prioritise the needs of that community. To give a couple of brief examples, Frome has a Library of Things. This came from a small start up grant of £9000, which enabled over 300 things such as power tools, musical instruments, to be gathered for the whole community to borrow for a small fee. They also repurposed derelict buildings, solar panels sprung up everywhere, a local NHS initiative to prescribe volunteering plus the councils investment in civic and volunteer groups, this led to a 22% reduction in A&E attendances.

The Three Pillars

Three key elements of People's Assemblies, also referred to as 'the three pillars', are radical inclusivity, active listening and trust.

A people's assembly differs from debate where one person is 'right' and the other is 'wrong', and from the typical discussion or conversation where people have a tendency to dominate with questions and interjections. People's assemblies create a space in which each participant is respected and listened to without judgement, whilst sharing from the heart, and in which each participant listens to the ideas of others. The three key elements of people's assemblies (often referred to as 'the three pillars'), which support this supportive and empathetic interaction are radical inclusivity, active listening and trust.

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. At its heart, radical inclusivity is a practical step, which enables the widening of a movement by providing agency to all who participate.

Radical Inclusivity, therefore, also means being aware of potential barriers to engagement and working those affected to enable their participation. It is important to think about disabled access, sign language, whisper interpretation for those for whom English isn't their first language, and other possible means by which barriers can be removed. When planning for and holding an assembly, ask if there are any barriers to engagement that need to be identified and then work 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 someone all the way through before developing your responses, and overcoming the urge to start mapping out your response in your mind whilst someone is still talking. Assemblies are not an arena for intellectual jousting or point scoring; they are spaces which recognise that no one person or group holds all the answers, and that it is through the wisdom of the crowds that we gain powerful intelligence about the issues being discussed. Active listening is also 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.

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

Aristotle

Trust

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

People's Assemblies - a Quick Start guide!

This is the basic framework for creating and running a People's Assembly. This 'Quick Start Guide' is essentially all you need to run an assembly, but is followed by a more in depth look at how to create and run effective assemblies. If you are running an assembly it is suggested that you read through the entire manual first, but if you are in an emergency democracy situation, you can just jump straight in here!

You can find a basic script template at rebellion.earth/assemblies, and in [Appendix 1: General Script](#)

Hand Signals

Assemblies maintain inclusivity and ensure all voices are heard equally by using hand signals to facilitate the discussion. Using hand signals helps people to take it in turns to speak, and allows others to finish what they are saying without being spoken over or interrupted, as so often happens in daily conversation.



Point (or 'I would like to speak')

When someone in the group wants to say something, they should point their index finger up and wait for the facilitator to let them have their turn in speaking. It is vital that people do not talk over anyone else and wait for their turn. If someone, who has not yet said anything, puts their finger up to speak, whilst others have spoken a lot, then the facilitator should give that person priority over the 'stack' (the queue or order of speakers based on the order they raised their finger to speak).

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can type STACK in the chat or use the raised hand in the participants' panel, or say 'stack' for their name to be stacked.



Wavy Hands (I Agree)

The 'wavy hands' signal of approval is used to show agreement or support for something someone has said. It instantly indicates how much consensus there is towards something and can highlight how popular an idea is. If everybody erupts into a forest of waving hands during a breakout session, for example, the note taker can see that this is one of the more popular points made and it will become one of

the key bullet points fed back to the main meeting room.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can use the 'clapping hands' icon under 'more' in the participants' panel, or write 'AGREE' in the chat.



Clarification

If someone says something that is unclear, people can hold their hand in a 'C' shape as the 'clarification' signal. The facilitator will then pause the discussion giving the person who made the signal the opportunity to ask a question to clear up any confusion. This signal should be given priority above all others as it means that someone does not understand something and it may thus inhibit their ability to engage in the discussion.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write 'Clarification' in the chat, or unmute and say 'Clarification and their name'.



Direct Point

If someone has directly relevant information to what is being said, then they can make the 'direct point' hand signal and the facilitator will let them provide that information immediately after the person speaking has finished. Think of the direct point hand signal as being like brackets, which are used to add critical information that a speaker is not aware of e.g. "the action has now been changed to Wednesday".

The direct point signal is not an excuse to jump the queue just to make a point. It is important that people do not abuse this signal as otherwise it can make all present lose trust in the process.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write Direct Point or DP in the chat, or unmute and say 'Direct Point' and their name.



Technical point

If someone has information that is immediately relevant to the running of the meeting, they make a 'technical point' signal by making a 'T' shape with their hands. This is only to be used for concerns external to the discussion that need to be addressed immediately e.g. "We only have ten minutes left" or "I am the note taker and I need the loo so can someone else take over?" The facilitator should stop the discussion to

address the technical point.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write Technical Point or TP in the chat, or unmute and say 'Technical Point' and their name.



Round Up

Facilitators need to ensure that no one speaks for more than necessary (two minutes is a suggested maximum amount of time as it encourages people to be concise). If someone has been speaking for two minutes (or whatever the set amount of time is), the facilitator makes the 'round up' hand signal by repeatedly making a circular motion with their hands (as if they are tracing a ball). This must be done

sensitively, but firmly as it ensures that no one person dominates the meeting.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can use the 'time' icon under 'more' in the participants panel.



Speak up

If someone is speaking too quietly or they cannot be heard, others can ask them to raise their voice by raising and lowering their hands with palms open and facing up.

Online consideration: If people do not have their video turned on, they can write 'Speak Up' in the chat, or unmute and say 'speak up' or use the 'thumbs up' icon in the participants panel. If using this second option you will need to explain to the whole assembly what the thumbs up icon means so they know to increase their volume if speaking.

Temperature check

Jiggle the fingers on the palms of both hands at a level that corresponds with feelings. If hands are pointed upwards and jiggled, this suggests support. If they are held horizontally, this suggests people are ambivalent, and if they are pointed downwards, then this suggests that people do not support something. A temperature check can be used to quickly check the feelings of the group.

Roles

Each assembly needs:

- **Lead Facilitator** (Ideally two with a gender balance)
 - They are responsible for the overall running of assembly, time keeping, and the delivery of all relevant information.
 - They facilitate the discussion using hand signals, ensure no one dominates, keep an eye on the time, maintain radical inclusivity and active listening, and adhere to the 'Inclusivity Statement'.
- **Assembly Notetaker**
 - They are responsible for recording the results of the *feedback / integration* phase of the assembly and for feeding the assembly results into wherever they are destined to go.
 - They might, for example, need to send them to the local Council to demand action, or feed them into an online organising platform.

Each breakout group needs:

- **Facilitator**

They facilitate the discussion using hand signals, ensure no one dominates, keep an eye on the time, maintain radical inclusivity and active listening and adhere to the 'Inclusivity Statement'.
- **Notetaker**

They summarise the most popular points, ideally as bullet points, aiming to boil them down to 2-5 key points or ideas from the discussion. They look for wavy hands to record agreement.

Structure

- There are three main phases of people's assembly, these are the setup phase, the deliberation phase and the integration/feedback phase.
- Please See **Appendix 3 - Graphic of People's Assembly Structure**.

Setup Phase

- This phase Can be broken down further into the introduction and input, the latter of which can be of varying lengths according to the purpose of the Assembly.
- Ideally, the setup phase should be around 30 mins in total. However, if a speaker is attending or it is important for those present to learn about a subject, then the setup phase may take longer.

- Unless it is an emergency assembly to make a rapid decision all assemblies should begin with the Children’s Fire, or with something to unite all of those present, such as encouraging people to think about something/someone they are grateful for.
- **Children’s Fire** - At the start of the assembly once everyone has gathered, light a candle or candles either in the centre of the assembly or in a prominent place. The flame represents all life on earth and the next seven generations. It serves to remind us that every decision we make is not just ours to carry, but will be felt for seven generations to come. Facilitators should explain this, then ask for a two minute silence as the candle is lit to allow everyone to contemplate not only the next seven generations of human life, but of all interconnected life on earth that we must act in awareness of.

Introduction

- Start on time.
- Lead facilitators introduce and explain the hand signals, so that they can be used throughout all parts of the assembly.
- They then introduce the assembly agenda, including where the results of this assembly will go – it is important to explicitly state what the assembly is being used for. If you are, for example, doing an assembly on whether or not to hold a site and you will make a decision based on a temperature check held at the end of the assembly, then clearly articulate this.
- They then talk through the three pillars (radical inclusivity, active listening and trust) and ask for help from the crowd to remove any barriers to engagement that may be identified, before reading out the Inclusivity Statement:

“We value all voices equally in the assembly, as the aim is to hear the wisdom of the crowd gathered here and not to have the assembly dominated by individual voices or groups. We recognise that confident speakers are not always right and that those who are not confident speakers will often have the most useful ideas or opinions to put into the discussion. This is why we value all voices equally and we ask you to do the same. We do not tolerate any calling out, abuse or shaming and should conflicts arise in this way, there are [conflict resolution](#) tools you can use to resolve them. We welcome all people but not all behaviours.”

Input

- This can be as simple as the lead facilitators framing the question for discussion and explaining why the assembly has been convened, or asking the gathered crowd for suggestions as to what they would like to deliberate on (known as People’s Choice).
- Or it can involve a longer and more in depth input section such as a live panel of experts, or a video input.

- The Input should be balanced and factual – if research is being done to provide context, consider how you will keep it impartial. If there are several PA's on the same topic how will you ensure consistency across all of them?
- A badly planned input can skew a deliberation and deliver unwise answers. If, for example, people were discussing social care funding at local level, they would need to be given information on how it currently works. Many people may believe that the NHS pay for it, when really the local authorities pay for social care funding. If an input did not deliver this information then the PA results would have low legitimacy.

The Topic

- Consider the topic and question carefully.
- Pick a topic people want to discuss that allows for the full consideration of the key points to emerge.
- If you are looking to attract people to an assembly, the topic is so important. People will show up to a session on a topic they care about, so it is worth spending time researching what that is.
- If you want to take the People's Choice approach, then the lead facilitators can ask for suggestions from the crowd on what they would like to discuss, whilst the assembly note taker records them. Ideally look for three or four suggestions maximum or the process can be very long and drawn out! The crowd are then asked to vote using the 'Temperature Check' Method. The lead facilitator reads them out one at a time and looks for the most 'Wavy Hand' signals to show the overall preference.

Testify

- Invite people to take the microphone for two minutes maximum and share their feelings about what has brought them to join the assembly or action that day.
- In an open public assembly, this section can be drawn out as long as people volunteer to speak. It opens the space for people to connect emotionally, but be careful to ensure it is not used as a 'soap box' on the issues about to be discussed.
- Ideally ask for a woman to speak on the microphone first (It has been shown that this will greatly increase the level of engagement of female participants. The rate of engagement and uptake for males isn't affected in the same way), and allow as much dead air as is necessary for people to build up the courage to come and talk.
- Be strict with timing but ensure that the people speaking are supported and made completely safe in their sharing.
- Ideally work with two facilitators so that one facilitator 'guards' mic and keeps stack, whilst one sits in front of the speaker with timer and gives 'round up' hand signal as they approach 2 mins.

Deliberation Phase

Main Deliberation

- Before people go into groups a lead facilitator clarifies the discussion topic or question, including making clear how many points are to be fed back from each '*breakout group*' (usually 3-5 points depending on the size of the assembly – the larger the assembly, the fewer the points).
- Lead Facilitators then divide the assembly into '*breakout groups*', ideally of eight. Facilitators need to try and ensure this is roughly the size of each group and encourage people to sit in groups with people they don't already know.
- Each breakout group has one facilitator and one notetaker as explained above.
- Clarify the duration of deliberation (discussion in breakout groups) phase, and stick to timings throughout the assembly as many people who are attending have work or family responsibilities that have to be respected.
- A deliberation phase should last around 30 minutes (5 minutes can be allocated to introducing the phase, and groups should have 25 minutes to discuss their ideas).
- Recap the hand signals before putting groups in breakout groups.

Breakout Groups

- In the breakout groups, it is good practice for the facilitator to restate the discussion topic or question and for the note taker to write it down. This enables people in the group to refer back to the original point for discussion to make sure the group stays focused and on subject.
- It is also good to start by going around the group and stating names, and making space for anyone to highlight any barriers to engagement that they may have that the small group can work together to try to work around.
- The breakout groups will have a set amount of time to discuss the topic, as outlined by the lead PA facilitators beforehand – a good amount of time is 25 mins.
- 10 minutes before the end of the deliberation phase, the lead facilitators should notify the breakout groups that they have ten minutes left, and should request that the breakout group note takers feed back their summary of the discussion to their groups, so that they can identify which key points they will be feeding back to the main discussion. It is also a good idea for the lead facilitators to remind the breakout groups how many points they will be feeding back.

Integration Phase

Feeding Back

- The lead facilitator calls the breakout group note takers to the front of the assembly (they should ask the name of each note taker before they feedback so that they can thank them at the end).
- The lead facilitator should request that as the note takers feedback their key points, the crowds use wavy hands to signal their support for the points raised.
- Each note taker then feeds back the key points as the main assembly note taker records the points as they are fed back, noting down which ones get the most approval from the entire assembly. It's nice to do this on a white board or a large piece of paper so that the assembly participants can see it.
- The assembly note taker then feeds results of the assembly to wherever they are destined to go (e.g. sending them to the local council to demand action, or posting them on a community online organising platform etc.). This destination is determined prior to the assembly and will have formed part of the framing of the process in the Setup phase.

Finishing Up

- The lead facilitators express gratitude for the breakout group facilitators and note takers, and for everyone who participated.
- If there is a need to vote on the results of the assembly, you can do a '*Temperature Check*'. The lead facilitators read out the different options to be voted on and the members of the assembly cast their 'vote' using 'wavy hands' for the option they like the best. The assembly note taker and lead facilitators watch for the most wavy hands and that gets taken forward.
- '*Shout Outs*' are an invitation for those gathered to call out brief notifications such as upcoming actions or events. These should be short and arranged with the facilitators beforehand if possible. This should take no more than 10 minutes.
- The lead facilitator summarises the results of the assembly if necessary, and thanks everyone for participating.

How do you organise a People's Assembly?

Process Working Group

Ideally you should have a Working Group focused specifically on organising and delivering People's Assemblies as part of your Local or Regional Group. The Process Working Group liaises with all the other working groups to organise and publicise the Assemblies and are the point of contact for all things relating to them. The Process Working Group is also in direct contact with the XR UK People's Assembly Working Group. This enables constant evaluation of

best practice, support and skill sharing. This may be a full working group, or just one or two people who take on the role of point of contact for assemblies coordination

Facilitators

For each people's assembly, you will need at least one facilitator, ideally two. It is important not to use the same facilitator each time as that can impact the dynamics of the group and prevents others from growing through facilitation. XR aim to provide facilitators to visit regional groups for training and support in running effective assemblies, but recognise that there are likely many people in your community with these skills in your community and encourage assemblies with facilitation where:

- Facilitators are rotated often, and experienced facilitators work to train and support others to move into facilitation roles.
- Volunteering through the process working group to be a facilitator remains continually open and it is this working group's responsibility to ensure equal representation of race, gender and age as well as there being no facilitators with entrenched political bias or other strong prejudice.
- One female facilitator is one of the assembly leads - neutrality and diversity in facilitators provide effective assemblies. It has been shown that this will greatly increase the level of engagement of female participants, and the uptake into facilitation roles of women in general. The rate of engagement and uptake for males isn't affected in the same way.
- Facilitators maintain *radical inclusivity*, *active listening* and *trust*, with all voices being heard and valued equally.

What to discuss?

This will depend entirely on the setting and framing of the Assembly. Regional organisers, the assembly process team and spokespeople from working groups will often choose the subjects for assemblies which are most relevant to furthering the aims of the rebellion. Simple online digital democracy tools like <https://citizens.is/> can be used to allow people to choose or suggest subjects for assemblies as well as continue community comments and prioritising ideas.

An assembly agenda could include a discussion point ('what will the effects of climate breakdown be on our community over the next three years?') a proposal ('we should support the local anti fracking camp with a day of non-violent civil disobedience at the drilling site next Saturday'), organising ('feedback and updates from the working groups') or decision making ('shall we join with a larger group or create our own actions here in our town or do both?')

Proposals

- If the assembly is focusing on a proposal, the facilitators can ask for a 'temperature check' where the proposal is read out again (after having been discussed in the breakout

groups) and those in the assembly use their hands to show agreement or not (for more information on temperature checks, see the hand signals section below).

- If only a few people are showing agreement, then the proposal is taken back and can either be adjusted to include any ideas or points made in the assembly, or dropped altogether if it has no support or no way of being adjusted to meet the collective vision of the assembly. For example, a proposal for putting all the group's time and resources into a local anti-fracking campaign may not be approved but a popular point made from a group that some of the time and resources be put into the local group could see the proposal returning with that adjustment.
- Facilitators must be sure to check with the assembly note taker that the exact wording of the proposal is noted.

Decision Making

When a temperature check is used to decide between two or more options and there is no clear decision then the Assembly will need to decide how to proceed. It may be a case of taking an actual counted vote, or returning the options to the breakout groups to find a solution that can accommodate the points raised or the differing wishes.

Assemblies during direct action or occupations

Depending on the size, duration and police presence, these assemblies could potentially be quick decision making assemblies ('the police have given us these options, what should we do?'). In a situation where an extremely rapid decision was required, such assemblies could even dispense with breakout groups, relying instead on facilitation towards the whole assembly, taking in immediate hand signal based reactions and using temperature checks to gauge the feelings of those present. Alternatively, if the action or occupation were going on for a long period of time, they could be longer assemblies where people were able to discuss the key issues related to the action ('we are occupying the offices of a major extraction corporation, in what other ways can we disrupt the fossil fuel industry?').

Assemblies can also form part of the outreach during an action or occupation, and can be designed to include members of the public, or include invitations to people from organisations or institutions that are being targeted or affected to come and participate. The subjects for discussion can relate directly to the target of the action, or can be more broad and inclusive such as 'how can we support each other in our communities in the face of climate breakdown?' or 'how can we help each other to face the grief that awareness brings?'

Assemblies provide us with a process by which to move and act with immense flexibility as a large group during times of action or occupation. They allow for immediate changes and decisions to be made on the spot that enable us to act and react with speed and flexibility, whilst still being able to make those decisions collectively, and in large numbers.

[PICS WITH CAPTION FROM DECISION MAKING TO STAY IN THE ROAD OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT ON DECLARATION DAY. Caption: On Declaration Day 31st October 2018 a few hundred people moved into the road at Parliament Square in London and held a quick collective decision making assembly deciding to stay in the road as non violent civil disobedience]

[PICS WITH CAPTION FROM THE WESTMINSTER BRIDGE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ON REBELLION DAY 1. Caption: On the first XR Rebellion Day around 400 people took part in an assembly during the occupation of Westminster Bridge, with 27 breakout groups discussing 'in what ways can the UK move to net carbon zero by 2025?']

Planning an Assembly

This is a framework for organising an open public assembly. This is essentially a 'best practice' scenario and many assemblies will be created without this level of input or forward planning. Assemblies can often be convened as part of a talk, larger event, or meetings, in which case you can pick through the planning process detailed here and see which elements apply, or jump straight in using the 'Quick Start Guide'.

Choose the venue

- People's 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.

A week before:

- A 'process working group' is responsible for the overall organising of the assembly and will be preparing for each new assembly as it is coming up.
- The media and messaging team advertise the assemblies a week in advance, if possible creating local media coverage.
- Messaging of the assembly includes stating the agenda and any proposals, giving people time for consideration or research.

The process group:

- Plan for a play area where the assembly will be held so that parents know they can attend and there will be a safe place where their children can be cared for during the assembly.
- If the assembly is expected to be over 100, plan for a PA system so that elderly people or people who are hard of hearing are included.
- Organise who the two lead facilitators and assembly note taker will be and confirm with them the date and time and the agenda.
- Organise a team of greeters who will be available on the event to welcome all people as they arrive, answer questions and provide hot drinks and snacks.
- Make sure social media are ready to cover the assembly and arrange live streaming if possible.

A day before:

The process group:

- Meet with the facilitators and make a plan for how the assembly can be run most effectively.
- Check the venue is still open and has not had road works start or any other unexpected change.
- Make sure the greeters are prepared and have food and hot drinks organised.
- Check the people running the child care area are prepared.
- Test the PA system if using one.

An hour before:

- The process group, facilitators and media and messaging team meet and run through the assembly plan.
- The assembly team all wear clothing making them easily identifiable.
- The greeting team set up food and hot drinks and any XR stalls
- The PA is set up and tested
- The children's area is organised
- Social media team starts sending out pics of the assembly being set up, using #XRAssembly.

During the assembly:

The process group:

- Support the facilitators in keeping the assembly being run as planned and on time.
- Make sure people in the assembly are supported.
- Answer any questions on the process, one to one, aside from the assembly.

After the assembly:

The process group:

- Support greeting team in collecting any sign ups from new people.
- Answering any questions about the process or about the assembly schedule or how to volunteer to help with assemblies.
- Have a detailed feedback and reflection meeting with facilitators.
- Make sure PA equipment is packed and returned.
- Have a party with everyone remaining.

What Then?

The outcomes of an assembly and their destination are dependant on the scope and framing of the assembly and who convened it. The destination and legitimacy of the results of the assembly should be discussed and decided upon prior to the convening of the assembly, and it is important that all assembly participants should be made aware of this before the assembly begins.

Decision making and proposals:

An assembly convened by a group and advertised throughout the entire membership of the group has the legitimacy to make a decision that affects that group. They would not have the scope to make decisions beyond their own group, but could feed into larger decision making processes.

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. The assembly is advertised through all channels of communication so that every member of the group has the opportunity to attend. The decision made during that assembly gets reported to the group and acted upon.

The same group holds an assembly to decide if they, as a region, should combine with another region in the same manner. The results of that assembly can be fed into a larger decision making process that would affect other groups within the region as well.

Discussion around a topic or to generate ideas:

An assembly convened to look at issues with a broader scope would report results through the groups communication channels and if the results or recommendations related to an external body or organisation they could be conveyed to that body as well.

For example:

An Affinity Group holds an assembly as part of an action. It's an open assembly in a public place looking at how the local Council can act after declaring a Climate and Ecological Emergency. The results of the assembly are published on the local groups facebook page and reported in their newsletter, but they are also emailed to the local Councillors asking them to take the suggestions to the next Council meeting.

Assemblies can also feed into national conversations and decision making processes through simple online digital democracy tools like citizens.is and loomio.org

More information about how Extinction Rebellion uses these online platforms and tools, along with other resources for People's Assemblies and Participatory Democracy tools can be found on the People's Assemblies page at <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/peoples-assemblies/>.

Taking It Further -

The XR UK Peoples Assembly Working Group are -

- Advocating the value and purpose of People's Assemblies (PAs) as part of XR strategy, internally and externally:
 - Keeping PAs alive in rebels' mind through regular participation, presentations and PAs offerings to other XR circles and working groups
 - Actively promoting and sharing knowledge and experience of PAs outside XR through talks and workshops
- Supporting the introduction and practice of PAs as a deliberative and participatory collective process within XR centrally, regionally and internationally through trainings and co-facilitation:
 - Generating and providing access to online resources about the history of PAs, their role and how to run them effectively
 - Providing an initial point of contact for those needing information and support, when considering running their first regarding PAs

- Offering both one-to-one and virtual space for sharing and ongoing learning about PAs; thus building a growing and supportive community of PAs facilitators within XR
- Facilitating PAs at key sites - preferably on a daily basis - during action/rebellion periods

For more information including contact information, links to tutorials and results of previous assemblies please visit the People's Assemblies page at <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/peoples-assemblies/>

This manual has been produced with input by [activists from 15M](#), Stop the G8, the [Fearless Cities](#) global municipalism movement and majority world activists [from Ghana](#) and Senegal.

The manual is not written to be prescriptive to majority world XR groups where existing cultures of assembly are already practised. Neither are the areas of discussion for assemblies meant to be prescriptive to majority world cultures of resistance.

Further Reading:

- XR People's Assemblies: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/peoples-assemblies/>
- XR Citizens' Assembly: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/citizens-assembly/>
- XR Future Democracy Hub: <https://www.xrdemocracy.uk/>
- Take the Square: <https://takethesquare.net/>
- How to Occupy: <https://howtocamp.takethesquare.net/>
- Fearless Cities: <http://fearlesscities.com/en>
- Amy and Arnold Mindell – Deep Democracy: <http://www.aamindell.net/worldwork/>
- Rhizome Network Facilitation Resources: <https://rhizomenetwork.wordpress.com/resources/#Facilitation>
- Seeds for Change: <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/resources>
- The World Café: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>

Appendix 1: General Script

Also found here -

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RGxRJmxRzLzL5rLuitK_YkLTpo5ZVvCJLHnzo5rSzQU/e/dit?usp=sharing

PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY SCRIPT

Before you attempt to facilitate a People's Assembly, please make sure you have at least attended one! But remember: it's not rocket science. Give it a go! You'll be great!

This script is just a starting point. As you do more, you'll figure out your own way of saying what's here. Don't feel that this is the only way in which a People's Assembly can be facilitated, although this method is based on many years of experience in PA's by people from all over the World.

Other stuff to note:

- *The two facilitators should be of different genders if at all possible.*
- *Ensure radical inclusivity! Do you have chairs for those that need them, and is your space child friendly? Is your space accessible for all?*
- *Remember that all voices are valued equally. Trust the process, and allow all people to speak, even if you are not sure you're going to like what you hear!*
- *We welcome all people, but not all behaviours: if someone says something that makes you feel uncomfortable (i.e. they may have been racist or sexist), then **name the feelings triggered by that behaviour**...for example, "what you said just then made me feel very uncomfortable". Do not judge the person: saying "you are a racist" or "you are a sexist" or whatever in this situation is more likely to lead to an escalation, and is likely to put the person into a defensive mode that will make further conversation more difficult.*

There's loads more hints and tips and background on PAs in the People's Assembly Manual, which you can find here: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/peoples-assemblies/>

Facilitator 1: Childrens Fire

(Welcome everyone and invite them to take a seat)

We will start this assembly with the lighting of a flame and a two minute silence. The flame, also known as the Children's Fire, represents all life on earth and the next seven generations. It serves to remind us that every decision we make is not just ours to carry, but will be felt for seven generations to come. I invite you all to take two minutes of silence to to allow yourself to contemplate not only the next seven generations of human life, but of all interconnected life on earth that we must act in awareness of.

[Light candle or candles and commence 2 mins silence]

Thank you.

Assemblies have three 'phases' - Setup (includes introduction), Deliberation (discussion) and Integration (Feedback).

In the Setup phase we will explain the process and structure of the assembly, Introduce the hand signals and frame what the assembly will be discussing and what will happen to the outcomes from this assembly.

[if you are having more input here than just presenting the topic for discussion, such as speakers, video etc you will explain that here]

During the Deliberation (discussion) phase you will sit in small groups for [insert chosen length of deliberation phase] minutes and discuss the question/topic of this assembly.

At the end of the Deliberation phase you will come back into the full assembly and feedback what was generated in your small discussion group.

Facilitator 2: Hand Signals

[Here you will demonstrate the hand signals used in assembly to allow people to use them during the introduction and Setup phase of the assembly]

We use hand signals to facilitate a discussion where all voices get heard, no one dominates and we don't speak over each other. I will go through the ones you will need to take part today, and they will be repeated later in the process so don't worry if you can't remember them!

USE HAND SIGNALS

- Hand up to make a point (facilitator will stack. Can choose to stack out of order. Focus on making sure that all voices are heard to ensure RADICAL INCLUSIVITY)
- Wavy hands for agreement (to help note taker and make sure you're not interrupting...remember it's all about ACTIVE LISTENING)
- Clarification
- Direct point (not for responding, just for extra added info!)
- Technical point
- Round up (after 2 minutes, to make sure that those who are more comfortable speaking don't go on and on...remember: RADICAL INCLUSIVITY)
- Speak up

Facilitator 1: What is a People's Assembly?

- A people's assembly is a structured way for a group of people to discuss issues, generate ideas and/or make decisions collectively in a manner in which all voices are heard and valued equally and no one person, or group, is able to dominate the process.
- People's assemblies are 'self selected' meaning that anyone can choose to take part. They are not to be confused with Citizens Assemblies which are randomly selected from the population by the process of Sortition, to make sure it is representative in terms of key characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level and geography. Citizens' Assembly members would learn about critical thinking before they hear balanced information from experts and stakeholders. They would then spend time deliberating in small facilitated groups, similar to the break-out groups we're going to use in this People's Assembly.
- People's Assemblies have been used throughout history and all over the world as a means to enable people to come together and achieve real social change:
 - In Ancient Athens, for example, a people's assembly known as the **ekklesia**, which was open to all male citizens regardless of class, was where major decisions such as going to war, military strategy and the election of public officials were made.
 - More recently, in Rojava, Kurdistan, people's assemblies have been at the centre of a democratic revolution. Decisions are made by the community, and the role of the elected representatives is simply to carry out these decisions. The community itself is the seat of power.
 - In Spain, the Spanish municipalist movement, known as the Indignados or 15-M movement, used PAs to discuss and protest against the government's austerity policies. At the movement's peak, 80 assemblies were being held each week alone in Madrid.
 - In 2014 the Y'en a Marre movement in Senegal helped oust the incumbent and corrupt President by mobilising the youth vote using people's assemblies and hip-hop.
 - Closer to home there are the examples of Frome, Torrington and others, all of which are councils that have been reclaimed to some degree by residents in local elections. When councils are run by residents we see decisions get made that prioritise the needs of that community. To give a couple of brief examples, Frome has a Library of Things. This came from a small start up grant of £9000, which enabled over 300 things such as power tools, musical instruments, to be gathered for the whole community to borrow for a small fee. They also repurposed derelict buildings, solar panels sprung up everywhere, a local NHS initiative to prescribe volunteering plus the councils investment in civic and volunteer groups, this led to a 22% reduction in A&E attendances.

INCLUSIVITY STATEMENT:

Before we start a People's Assembly, we like to read out this inclusivity statement:

"We value all voices equally in the assembly, as the aim is to hear the wisdom of the crowd gathered here and not to have the assembly dominated by individual voices or groups. We recognise that confident speakers are not always right and that those who are not confident speakers will often have the most useful ideas or opinions to put into the discussion. This is why we value all voices equally and we ask you to do the same. We do not tolerate any calling out, abuse or shaming and should conflicts arise in this way, there is a [conflict resolution process](#) in place to resolve this. We welcome all people but not all behaviours."

We want to hear your voice no matter what. If you like what XR are doing, or don't like it, whatever age you are, wherever you are from and whatever you do.

The whole process will take about an hour and a half*, and we'd love you to stay for the whole of that, but feel free to go or come as you like or need.

*[*If you have the time, it's good to do a TESTIFY at this point. It'll add about 15-30 minutes to the overall length of the PA, but gets people talking about why they are at the PA before the main section of the assembly...]*

TESTIFY (if there's time)

Before we get into the section of the People's Assembly where you will all be able to talk through our specific issue in a facilitated way, we first like to give anyone who would like an opportunity to talk about what has brought them here today.

QUESTION: What has brought you here today?

Offer the microphone to anyone who wants to speak. Ask for a woman to speak on the microphone first (to ensure that we don't have a succession of men, men and more men)

Allow as much dead air as is necessary for people to build up the courage to come and talk!

FACILITATOR 2 should sit on the floor fairly close in front of the speaker, timing and doing the 'round up' signal as necessary. If you're too far away, a nervous speaker won't see you!

After 15-30 minutes, move into the remainder of the PA...

Facilitator 2: The Three Pillars

A people's assembly is different from a normal conversation or discussion because it is based on dialogue whose history is rooted in indigenous ways of sharing and making decisions. It differs from debate where one person is 'right' and the other is 'wrong' and from the typical discussion or

conversation where people have a tendency to dominate with questions and interjections. The assembly allows each participant to be held with respect and full attention - and no judgement - whilst sharing from the heart and for each participant to get a turn.

It's ok not to actively share too, witnessing the sharing of others' feelings and experiences is as important as expression one's own.

In an assembly, the focus is on personal feelings and experiences - beyond thoughts and opinions. It is a sharing that takes place at heart level as much as possible. Each speaker is encouraged to say 'I' - rather than 'we' or 'they' whilst sharing with others.

This can be encapsulated within the three pillars, which are:

THREE PILLARS:

Radical Inclusivity: No voices dominate / all are heard / all valued equally. No fear of judgement or ridicule. For those who often speak up in situations like this, think WAIT...Why Am I Talking - try to say only what is needed.

[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 at the start of an assembly if there are any barriers to engagement that people need to identify and then request that the group work together to find ways to remove them.]

Active listening: It is easy to start mapping out in your mind what your response may be while someone is still talking. Active listening is focusing on hearing someone all the way through before developing your responses. Assemblies are not an arena for intellectual jousting or point scoring but a place that recognises that no one person or group holds all the answers and that through the wisdom of the crowds we achieve powerful intelligence about the core issues being discussed.

Trust: We need to trust the process/facilitators/other participants. This is not a perfect system! It is only effective if we all trust the intentions of the people in the room – if we work in humility and accept that our ideas may not be the best ideas – and we work towards the best decision for everyone.

Facilitator 1: What is the aim of THIS people's assembly?

BACKGROUND

[Frame your assembly here -

Why has it been convened? What are the aims of this assembly? Where will the results of this assembly go and what legitimacy do they hold?

- *Is it a decision making assembly? Is there a yes or no answer that needs to be generated?*
- *Is to generate ideas or feedback? Where will these go and are they recommendations that will be acted upon or are they feeding into a wider discussion?]*

QUESTION(S)

[State your question or topic for discussion clearly here, and if possible write it up in the exact wording you use somewhere that will remain visible to all participants throughout the assembly.

- *Always ask for any clarifications at this point, and be open to working to reword the question/topic if needed You can ask for a 'temperature check' here to make sure the assembly agrees with the proposed wording*

A good question is worded in accessible language, not too long, and is broad enough to allow for free discussion but not so broad that a structured conversation around it is difficult. Likewise a very specific question won't generate a very diverse response –

Example- You would like to generate ideas for actions at an assembly of a Local XR Group

- *'Should we do an action at the Council buildings? - Very narrow, really requires a yes or now, unlikely to generate a lot of great ideas.*
- *'Generate ideas around local targets and actions that we can take locally' - Broader, still focussed on local targets, gives scope for creativity.*
- *'What can we do to support the Rebellion? - Too broad, could encompass all manner of different approaches and likely to lead to the conversation jumping from topic to topic.]*

Facilitator 2: How does a People's Assembly work?

We use BREAKOUT GROUPS!

You will discuss question in a group (8-10), then feedback to the entire assembly.

Need a facilitator and a note taker

- Facilitator: ensures all voices are heard (radical inclusivity). 2 mins per statement (max)
- Note taker: makes notes on what is said.

USE HAND SIGNALS *[recap hand signals here]*

- Hand up to make a point (facilitator will stack. Can choose to stack out of order. Focus on making sure that all voices are heard to ensure RADICAL INCLUSIVITY)
- Flappy hands for agreement (to help note taker and make sure you're not interrupting...remember it's all about ACTIVE LISTENING)
- Clarification
- Direct point (not for responding, just for extra added info!)
- Technical point
- Round up (after 2 minutes, to make sure that those who are more comfortable speaking don't go on and on...remember: RADICAL INCLUSIVITY)
- Speak up

10 minutes before the end, directed to go through notes.

Note taker identifies the points that got the most support or acceptance

[how do you want the feedback to happen? Larger assemblies = fewer points fed back verbally.]

Assembly note taker to make note of the most popular points or just ask for note takers to give written points in to assembly Facilitator/Notetaker?]

Common structure-

- **'We want 3 points delivered in writing**
- **10 words delivered verbally from note taker to whole assembly'**
- Ask for clarifications on process
- RESTATE QUESTIONS
- GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

[25 mins discussion]

- *After 25 minutes, warn groups that they need to round up: they have 10 minutes for...*
 - Their note takers to read through the notes they have taken
 - To choose the three points which had the most support, and write them (LEGIBLY!) on a piece of paper to be given in during the feedback *[or whatever form you have decided the feedback will take]*
 - To write 10 words that the note taker will feed back verbally to the whole assembly *[or whatever form you have decided the feedback will take: if the assembly has around 5 or fewer groups, each group could read their three points to the whole assembly instead of using the "10 words" method]*

[10 mins rounding up]

Facilitator 1: Ending

FEEDBACK (15 mins)

Note-takers to deliver feedback, and hand in written feedback. *[or whatever form you have decided the feedback will take]*

Remember to get the names of the people giving feedback, and show appreciation.

Thank everyone for participating

Explain what will happen to the results of the assembly. Point anyone that wants more information about XR People's Assemblies to rebellion.earth/assemblies

[at this point you can offer space for 'shout outs' - 'Shout Outs' are an invitation for those gathered to call out brief notifications such as upcoming actions or events. These should be short and arranged with the facilitators beforehand if possible. This should take no more than 10 mins]

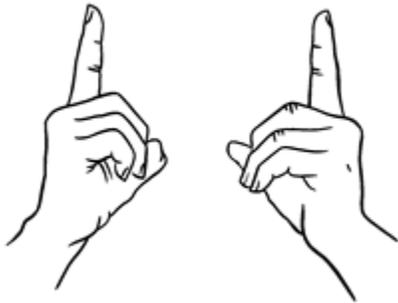
Close the assembly and ideally let everyone know when the next assembly will be if appropriate.

Appendix 2 - Hand Signals

POINT TO BE MADE...



I AGREE



DIRECT POINT
(JUMP THE QUEUE)



CLARIFICATION



TECHNICAL POINT



SPEAK UP!

Appendix 3: Graphic of People's Assembly Structure

