

# 3. Engaging Communities

Engaging communities involves putting energy into understanding who is in your area, what their needs might be, and how you and local networks could support them. It is the act of reaching out to people, be they similar or different, of building connections and of creating trust.

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# Overview

## **Why do we need to focus on engaging Communities like this?**

Building stronger social ties with our neighbours and local communities is in and of itself a transformative process. It enables us to create new and long-lasting connections with people who live in our community, to collectively create a support network of caring and compassionate neighbours, who look after each other, and to develop a sense of belonging, which can overcome the social isolation that runs through much of modern society. Making connections with others can also create a foundation from which we can work together to push for systemic change and to create a society that considers the needs of everyone. The way we organise and relate to our communities in this time of crisis could help to shift us towards a genuinely democratic society full of autonomous, empowered, resilient and supportive neighbourhoods and communities.

# Mapping Out Your Community

Before we engage in community work, it can be really useful to think about our relationships and connections with others, be they neighbours, members of the local community, friends and family, or any others whose needs we are aware of. By 'mapping' these relationships and connections on paper, we can visually place ourselves in the wider community ecosystem and identify where we would like to focus our attention and who we would like to reach out to.

## Map Out Your Relationships

Draw a map of yourself and **your relationship to others**. Place yourself in the middle of the page and draw lines out to others, be these people, communities, organisations or groups. The length of the line should represent your closeness or distance to those you identify.

This map can include both those that you are emotionally close to/far from and those you are physically close to/far from.

Once you have completed your map, consider the following questions:

- What struck you whilst you were creating the map?
- What is the relationship between those you are physically close to and those you are emotionally close to? Is there any crossover?
- Has the Covid-19 crisis impacted your map in any way? If so, how?
- Is there anything you would like to change on your map? If so, what?

## Consider People's Needs

This activity encourages us to think about who we need to be looking out for and what needs they might have. This activity can be difficult – thinking about those who are vulnerable and who need support can have an emotional impact. If you feel this is the case for you, then take some time out to think about what it is that is impacting you or reach out and talk to someone.

When completing the following questions, stay broad; you don't just need to think about the people in your local community, you can think about people nationally or globally. Sometimes it helps to expand our vision outwards as we may not be aware of everything that is going on in our local communities.

- Who has needs which need to be considered? Create a list.
- What are their needs? If different groups, people or communities have different needs identify each need.
- Whose needs are currently being considered and supported?
  1. How is this being done?
- Whose needs are not currently being considered or supported?
  1. Why is this the case?
  2. How might their needs be considered and supported?
- Are there any groups, people, or communities being forgotten?
  1. Why might they be forgotten?
  2. What can be done about this?
- Select one group or community and think about the following:
  1. What can the global society do to better consider their needs and support them?
  2. What can the national government do to better consider their needs and support them?
  3. What can the local government do to better consider their needs and support them?
  4. What can the local community do to better consider their needs and support them?

## Map Out Your Community

Now focus on your local community, using your ideas generated by the questions above and your knowledge of the area in which you live.

Draw a map of your community, using the following questions to guide you:

- Who is in your community?
- Do any of those in your community have needs?
  1. If so, who and what are they?
- What is in your community (think groups, services, facilities)?
- How do you know who is in your community?
  1. Are there any local events?
  2. Do people congregate in certain places?
- Of the different people and groups you have identified, are there any groups or people you particularly want to reach out to?
  1. If so, why is this the case?
  2. How might you reach out to them?
  3. What barriers exist?

- What is your place within your community?
  1. Would others view you as part of a group?
  2. How might this impact your interaction with them?
- If you wanted to reach out to and support someone in your community tomorrow, what would you do?

# Engaging Diverse Communities

## SOLIDARITY GUIDELINES

Solidarity is a collaboration where both parties are working towards shared liberation, based on mutual respect and understanding of the challenge.

Solidarity is an ongoing process and an essential quality for any activist to be developing.

This guide is not definitive. It is simply a collection of best practices and there are plenty of others out there. There are ongoing groups that are continuing to explore and deepen understanding of these areas, from workshops to discussion and action groups.

[See this list of resources for readings, videos, listening and learning.](#)

Ask yourself **why** you want to do a solidarity action.

Is it because you truly understand their struggle as equal to your own? Or because you just want them to support your issues. Good solidarity comes without expecting credit or reward. Good solidarity empowers everybody, but especially those who need that solidarity more.

This guide is split into two: first we talk about qualities needed for good solidarity, next we talk about practical guidelines for how to implement these qualities in acts of solidarity.

## QUALITIES OF GOOD SOLIDARITY

### 1. Humility

This is not about feeling better about ourselves. It's about compassion. You should offer your services as an act of love towards different communities. You should come from a place of humility rather than acting as a saviour.

Think about where the action fits into the timeline of their campaign - rather than your own. Solidarity may involve not using any personal branding, and sometimes may not even be public. Think about whether your solidarity action accidentally drowns out the work of groups you're trying to act in solidarity.

Solidarity is a personal practice too. Good solidarity can only happen in authentic human connection.

Be prepared to make mistakes, say something insensitive, or use your power inappropriately...that's ok, because you are trying authentically, reflecting and learning as you go along. Remember it's never too late to say sorry, build bonds of trust and be better. Feeling uncomfortable is part of the process, it is in this space that you grow.

## **2. Willingness to learn and change**

Get rid of preconceived ideas of how this is going to work, and instead try to listen and learn. What you shouldn't do is presume to know what a group does, what it is about, how it organises, who it mobilises and what it wants. Nor should you presume to understand what the issue they work on is about. Understanding your own privilege before going into a meeting with a justice group will help to understand the cultural differences and ways of working. Be aware that we all carry expectations and judgements held from the past that we project onto others.

You are going to get things wrong, and that's ok, notice a tendency to get defensive and fight it. Check your unconscious bias, and remember how infuriating it can be to be on the receiving end of this kind of bias. [Here are some useful resources to tackle it](#)

Understand white saviorism and be guarded against it. But guilt is not helpful. We have to not worry too much about being called white saviours as long as we are doing this right. This is because white solidarity is important and necessary. Solidarity between the environmental movement and other movements is necessary for us all to succeed.

## **3. Active (not Passive)**

Understanding issues is important, but bridge towards building personal relationships with people involved in the struggle, not just the organisers of each group, but every participant. Find out what actions they are taking, what little ways you can support (going to actions, platforming the issues, fundraising, ongoing dialogue, authentic friendship)

## **4. Collective Liberation**

We are mutually liberating each other in our common struggles as we seek to collaborate and work alongside one another. By showing solidarity with another group, you are helping their cause but also yours in turn.

## **5. Long term relationship and community building**

Our work is to aid others in their development and that takes a while to establish. To build trusting networks of connections is a long term commitment that requires grassroots community building and strong interpersonal relationships.

## **6. Based on personal relationships**

Not just organisational connection between the 'leaders' and a transactional arrangement; fostering empathy, compassion and a sense of service to others in a personal and organisational

level are important to open up trust and loyalty.

## TEN PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

- Make sure the offer of solidarity and its design is led by the needs of the other party that you are acting in solidarity with. Nobody knows better what they need and what would be most helpful than them.
- Make sure the action you undertake is clearly communicated beforehand in case the framing or parts of the action itself unintentionally damage your solidarity partner. Poor communication can harm their interests on the day or in general. (eg: Phulbari action)
- It's a good idea to research the issue(s) that your solidarity partner works on, and research the group you are acting in solidarity with. This helps to understand what kind of solidarity they are likely to be more keen on, and also helps to build a relationship- it clearly demonstrateOne way of researching is to ask other activists who may know more about the group or issue. If possible, try to get to know the people you are trying to act in solidarity with. The process of creating a relationship that goes further than a working relationship, or further than a simply need-to-know basis, is also called 'deep hanging out'. In all things it's important to remember solidarity is a two-way relationship, in this particular case remember to share things about yourself instead of simply trying to find out all you can about others.
- Solidarity is mostly about a relationship of trust, which means reliable support that isn't self-serving. It also means that solidarity isn't a one-off, it happens more than once such that it can be relied on and called upon when really needed. Trust is the bedrock of all relationships.
- Solidarity across divides necessarily involves compromise. Extinction Rebellion has set behaviours and guidelines, and you can choose which are flexible and which are red lines (for example, you may be happy to make your messaging more radical, but you don't want to collaborate in a violent action). However, it *must* involve significant compromise of some kind, as XR needs to build a wide coalition outside the environmental movement to win. Only acting in solidarity or in coalition with groups that are closest to your theory, practice and focus is not the kind of relationship that is most needed right now.
- Be especially careful about drowning out other groups' voices. Extinction Rebellion is a large group with a large media following. Our actions can accidentally drown out the actions of other groups. For example, during one of the rebellions the group 'Mothers against Knives' were due to hold a march they had been planning for a long time. Our rebellion totally drowned out any interest in their march, and a lot of their organising time had been wasted as a result.
- Understand XR's failings in the past, and why its reputation is damaged, and why other groups don't trust us, and how defensiveness doesn't rebuild any trust. For example, frequent XR messaging about a climate Armageddon that will happen in the future



effectively rolled back the concerted efforts of many groups over decades to get wider recognition among environmental organisations that climate change is actually happening now (and predominantly to the Global South). Other examples of previous XR messaging that intended to resonate with anti-migrant sentiments and nationalism has actively contributed towards the abuse and attacks on people in our society who are already on the frontline of the climate crisis (for example, many BME people, migrants groups), forever alienating them from Extinction Rebellion. The focus on arrest was also given heavy attention as a strategy which did not provide room for marginalised people, and showed a lack of recognition that the police are dangerous to marginalised peoples. The police are an institution that murder, they ruin peoples' lives (especially those of migrants who can be deported for being at a protest) and while they are in uniform they will be dutiful in shutting down our protests.

- Understand and argue persuasively the case for intersections between climate and other issues. Racism is one of the main reasons people don't care about climate change - because it mainly hits people of colour in the Global South. The system we fight as environmentalists involves extraction, limitless profit, unregulated markets, extreme inequality, brutal class and international division, unchecked corporate power and fatal exploitation. This is the system that drives climate change, and it is the system that divides its victims from each other. The way our climate and nature is being destroyed is simply another way our political and economic system rears its head, whilst modern-day colonialism, poverty, war, and oppression are other ways. Solidarity is a way of building strong relationships of unity, and unity scares those who want to protect the way things are.
- Understand what parts of XR culture can be alienating to other groups. It's important to remember that being overly-spiritual can be alienating. Being nice or being spiritual is not the secret to worldwide social, cultural or political renewal. The bonds of solidarity, directed at those truly responsible for the crisis, boldly aiming for a true system break, and backed up by reliable action and practice, are what will get us to where we want to be. Focussing on nature and the environment too much can be alienating elsewhere (for example, if a community is facing the direct onslaughts of a brutal police force such as black people in the west, or if a community is facing total eradication or forced relocation such as the people of Palestine, Kurdistan or West Papua, then they have other existential crises to be focussing on). The belief that climate change is the biggest issue, rather than part of a wider issue, is too simple and binary. Use of XR-specific terms that describe our strategy ('rebellion', 'whirlwind moment', 'momentum-driven organising'), or our inner workings ('rebellion weavers', 'the hive', 'movement of movements') can be alienating too because no one knows what they mean. Some institutions within XR can also be alienating in terms of lack of disclosure, structural inequalities and putting those already privileged in positions of facilitation/coordination.
- XR is not the only movement or best movement, NVDA and momentum (US) organising is not the only or best strategy. There are multiple strategies in existence, many have much more success than XR's DNA gives them credit for. The belief that "everything else before us has failed" is completely wrong. There are multiple strategies in existence and they

can either work together or work apart. Solidarity is forging true relationships of mutual assistance across broad divisions.

For more information, check out [this document made by XR Youth on what good solidarity involves](#).

## Some further pointers

- Deciding a group doesn't want to work with you then sticking around and seeing how things progress. Not getting defensive
- Find what moves you, we can't do everything and be connected to every struggle all the time. But try and find a movement that is outside of your comfort zone
- Where does the action fit in to the timeline of their campaign - not your campaign
- Deep hanging out
- Feeling uncomfortable is part of the process, it is in this space that you grow, it is here in that Chinashop analogy
- Being careful about how to share correspondence with others; not misrepresenting a group's views by using blanket statements or fallacious claims

# How to Deal with Conflict when Engaging with Strangers

Use this guide to understand both what you can do to avoid situations of conflict arising and what to do should conflict arise. This guide uses information and ideas from Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication (NVC) approach.

## What is NVC?

NVC (also called 'Compassionate Communication' or 'Collaborative Communication') has been described as a language of compassion and a tool for positive social change. It is taught as a process of interpersonal communication designed to improve compassionate connection to others.

"NVC is based on a fundamental principle: underlying all human actions are needs that people are seeking to meet, and understanding and acknowledging these needs can create a shared basis for connection, cooperation, and more globally – peace." These universal human needs are never in conflict; rather, conflict arises when the strategies for meeting those needs clash.

The goal of NVC is not to get what we want, but to make a human connection that will result in everyone getting their needs met. "Understanding each other at the level of our needs creates such connection because, at this deeper human level, the similarities between us outweigh the differences, giving rise to greater compassion. When we focus on needs, without interpreting or conveying criticism, blame, or demands, our deeper creativity flourishes, and solutions arise that were previously blocked from our awareness. At this depth, conflicts and misunderstandings can be resolved with greater ease.

Learning NVC is a process similar to learning a new language or skill: step-by-step learning coupled with ample time for practice leads to growing mastery. While it takes time to develop fluency, any knowledge of a new language makes it more likely that communication can take place.

The language of NVC includes two parts: honestly expressing ourselves to others, and empathically hearing others." Both are expressed through four components, which this guide will explore: observations, feelings, needs, and requests.

## What you can do to avoid situations of conflict arising

# Expressing Feelings

To build trusting relationships in our communities, we can start by expressing feelings. NVC instructor Daren De Witt explains the powerful impact this can have: 'expressing our feelings can have a profound effect on others, enabling them to see us in a more human way. Expressing our feelings to others and reflecting back their feelings fosters empathy, understanding and trust.'

## Developing a feelings vocabulary

The more precisely we can identify and express feelings, the more effective our communication can be. It can be helpful to choose from the lists of words below and practice using them to express your feelings and help others to express theirs. You can gradually add to these lists and extend your feelings vocabulary.

## Basic Feelings Vocabulary

### When are needs aren't being met:

Restless, reluctant, aroused, helpless, embarrassed, *regretful*, lonely, withdrawn, bored, tired, cold, numb, indifferent, low, *uncomfortable*, uneasy, unsure, confused, surprised, baffled, *overwhelmed*, *concerned*, *anxious*, nervous, *worried*, scared, frightening, terrified, *frustrated*, irritated, impatient, annoyed, *angry*, resentful, disgusted, furious, disappointment, unhappy, *upset*, *hurt*, *sad*, miserable, despairing, grief, pain.

### When are needs are being met:

Cheerful, *happy*, buoyant, joyful, overjoyed, thrilled, blissful, ecstatic, *pleased*, appreciative, *grateful*, thankful, proud, delighted, *glad*, *comfortable*, secure, calm, *content*, at ease, peaceful, *relaxed*, astonished, fascinated, amazed, *curious*, hopeful, optimistic, enthusiastic, overwhelmed, inspired, *hopeful*, *confident*, *excited*, sensitive, loving, warm, *touched*.

Generally speaking, our culture places considerably less value on the expression of feelings than on the expression of ideas. Consequently, there is often confusion around the accurate expression of our feelings. Some of the commonest mistakes are:

- **A thought masquerading as a feeling:** e.g. 'I feel that you aren't listening to me'. To clarify feelings in these instances, ask 'How would I feel if I weren't being listened to?' You may feel frustration, sad or upset.
- **Confusing feelings with how we think others are behaving towards us:** E.g. 'I feel manipulated by him'. This is an interpretation of behaviour. How might I feel if I interpreted his behaviour this way? Annoyed or confused, perhaps.
- **Confusing feelings with evaluations of ourselves:** E.g. 'I feel useless at this task'. 'Useless' is an evaluation or judgement. How might we feel if we thought we were useless? Dejected or disappointed, perhaps.
- **Confusing feelings with needs:** E.g. 'I feel understood'. If my need for understanding had been met, I might feel relieved, grateful or satisfied.

- **Expressing our feelings as if they were caused by others:** E.g. ‘I feel irritated by you’. Others may be the stimulus or trigger for our feelings, but they are never the cause. The cause is our unmet need. E.g. ‘I feel irritated because I am needing some peace and quiet.’ Confusion and conflict can be avoided if we own our feelings rather than blaming others for them, or thinking they are responsible for them.

## Activity 1: Identifying Feelings

In each of the following statements, do you regard the speaker to be expressing his or her feelings? If not, please edit the sentence until it does.

1. ‘I feel dismissed when no one at work responds to my suggestions’.
2. ‘It feels completely incomprehensible how you can do such a thing.’
3. ‘I’d be furious too if that had happened to me.’
4. ‘You’re wearing me out.’
5. ‘I feel independent, now that I have my own car and paycheck.’
6. ‘I feel I am being unkind to others.’
7. ‘I feel you’re annoying me on purpose.’

*Please see the end of the guide for sample responses.*

## Expressing Needs

“When we’re in conflict with others, we often feel angry, and we criticise and blame them and ourselves. This often results in others feeling angry too. As a result, we are less likely to get what we want. A more effective approach is to pause, take a deep breath and work out what our need is, and then communicate it. The other person will better understand where we are coming from, and we are more likely to get our need met or have a constructive discussion about it.”

Feelings are clues as to what our needs or others’ needs might be. For example, a person might feel irritated and distressed if their need for respect is not being met. Pleasant feelings are clear signals that our needs are being met; painful feelings indicate unmet needs. Being able to recognise feelings will help us to uncover needs.

### Some Needs We All Share

PLAY	MEANING	LOVE	COMMUNITY	SUBSISTENCE
Engagement	Purpose	Care	Belonging	Food
Fun	Contribution	Nurture	Connection	Water
Freshness	Awareness	Affection	Support	Light
Spontaneity	Beauty	Closeness	Friendship	Air
Stimulation	Mystery	Intimacy	Contact	Space
Rhythm	Wholeness	Touch	Inclusion	Warmth

PLAY	MEANING	LOVE	COMMUNITY	SUBSISTENCE
Variety	Adventure	Sexual Expression	Participation	Movement
Comfort	Challenge		Solidarity	Rest
Ease	Creativity		Loyalty	Health
Relaxation	Growth		Help	Hygiene
	Learning			
	Achievement			
	Completion			

CLARITY	AUTONOMY	PROTECTION	EMPATHY	EQUITY
Knowledge	Independence	Containment	Understanding	Equality
Awareness	Freedom	Safety	Sympathy	Fairness
To understand	Choice	Security	Acceptance	Sharing
Reassurance	Control	Peace	Acknowledgement	Cooperation
Simplicity	Power		Recognition	Collaboration
Order	Authenticity		To be valued	Honesty
Accuracy	Integrity		Consideration	Movement
Competence			Respect	Openness
Efficiency			Trust	Keep to agreements
Skill			Celebration	Reliability
			Mourning	Consistency
				Justice
				Tolerance
				Balance
				Harmony
				Unity

## Different Ways of Saying Needs:

I need...	Do you need...?
I would like...	Would you like some...?
I value...	Do you value...?
I want...	Does...matter to you?
I love...	I'm wondering if you might be wanting some...?

It's important for me to have...	Is it important for you to have...?
I would be really grateful to have some...	Would you be grateful for some...?
I really enjoy...	I'm guessing that you're longing for...?
I long for...	Are you hoping for some...?
I'm hoping for some...	Is this all about...for you?
I could really do with some...	Is this issue to do with...for you?
...is fun for me	Would some...make a big difference for you right now?
...matters to me	
Some...would mean/do a lot for me	
Some...would be really helpful to me	

## Activity 2: What is my need here?

Consider the question, 'What might my need be if I had the following thought in my head during a meeting?' Have a go at translating each statement into a possible feeling and need.

1. "She's irresponsible. We all agreed to let someone know if we weren't going to show up."
2. "Everyone else here knows more NVC than I do."
3. "He always takes more time than everyone else."
4. "People needing therapy ought to get professional help. We can't handle that level of dysfunctionality here!"
5. "This is boring."
6. "There should be a rule against using offensive sexist language in a group like this."
7. "There he goes again...someone should just shut him up!"
8. "This group of people is so cold and rigid."

*Please see the end of the guide for sample responses.*

## Activity: Exploring Feelings and Needs

- Take a blank side of paper and at the top, write down something somebody said to you that you didn't like hearing.
- Write down how you're feeling when you think about what they said.
- Write down what you were needing and not getting the moment you heard the words.
- Then, write down what you imagine the other person was feeling when you heard what they said.
- After identifying their feelings, write down what you imagine the other person was needing and not getting in the moment you heard their words.
- Check in with yourself and see if you notice a shift in how you feel about what was said to you or how you feel toward the person that said it.
- Finally, explore what actions you might both take in order to better meet the needs you identified.

# Reflective Listening

To connect with the feelings and needs behind any message, it helps to listen with empathy. Reflective listening shows you understand what another person is saying and meaning. It especially involves paraphrasing in your own words and using their 'key words' when they carry emotional charge. This kind of empathic listening can also have a profoundly clarifying effect. As psychologist Carl Rogers put it: 'When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in a new way and to go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens, how confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard.'

Philosopher Eugene Gendlin describes the steps involved in reflective listening:

- "To show that you understand exactly, make a sentence or two that gets at the personal meaning this person wanted to put across. This will usually be in your own words, but use that person's own words for the touchy main things."
- "People need to hear you speak. They need to hear that you got each step. Make a sentence or two for every main point they make."
- "Sometimes what people say is complicated. You can't get what they say, nor what it means to them, all at once. First make a sentence or two about the crux of what they said. Check that out with them. Let them correct it or add to it if they want to. Take in, and say back, what they have changed or added, until they have agreed that you have it just as they feel it. Then make another sentence."

## Listening Empathically

A key ingredient of empathy is presence; this distinguishes empathy from mental or intellectual understanding or sympathy. 'When we are thinking about people's words and listening to how they connect to our theories, we are looking at people - we are not with them.' Empathic listening is being "fully present to what the other person is feeling and needing, and not losing that through a fog of diagnosis and interpretation". The listener needs to focus their awareness - and keep it focused - on the other person. This requires a degree of inner stillness in the listener, so that their focus does not switch to themselves whilst they are empathising. This is a matter of being so focused on the feelings of the speaker that our own reactions, preconceived judgements, analysis or interpretations do not intrude.

Rosenberg describes the following analogy to explain the nature of the focus that empathy requires: 'Recall a time when you had a pain in your body, perhaps a headache or a toothache, and you became totally engrossed in a book. What happened to the pain? You no longer felt it. You didn't suppress it; rather the focus of your attention was so fully on what you were reading that you were not aware of the pain. In empathy our attention is so fully focused on the feelings and needs of the other person at that moment that we are not aware of our thoughts about the person.'

'The presence that empathy requires is not easy to maintain... Instead of offering empathy, we tend instead to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling, [or believe we have to 'fix' situations and make others feel better]. Empathy, on the other hand, requires us to



focus full attention on the other person's message. We give to others the time and space they need to express themselves fully and to feel understood. There is a Buddhist saying that aptly describes this ability: "don't just do something, stand there."

There are some common behaviours that prevent us from being sufficiently present to connect empathically with others. The following are examples:

- Advising: "I think you should ... " "How come you didn't ... ?"
- One-upping: "That's nothing; wait'll you hear what happened to me."
- Educating: "This could turn into a very positive experience for you if you just ... "
- Consoling: "It wasn't your fault; you did the best you could."
- Storytelling: "That reminds me of the time ... "
- Shutting down: "Cheer up. Don't feel so bad."
- Sympathising: "Oh, you poor thing ... "
- Interrogating: "When did this begin?"
- Explaining: "I would have called but ... "
- Correcting: "That's not how it happened."

*'While we may choose at times to sympathise with others by feeling their feelings, it's helpful to be aware that during the moment we are offering sympathy, we are not empathising.'*

## Deep Empathic Listening for Feelings and Needs

In situations of conflict, people can react with intensity, and their words do not reflect their feelings and needs. You can use the components of NVC to tune in to the feelings and needs of others, 'in contrast to either (1) blaming yourself by taking the message personally, or 2) blaming and judging them.' Rosenberg describes how empathic listening can help us to uncover what is truly alive in another person:

"In NVC, no matter what words others may use to express themselves, we simply listen for their observations, feelings, needs and requests...If I'm using NVC, I never, never, never hear what someone thinks about me. Never hear what someone thinks about you, you'll live longer. You'll enjoy life more. Hear the truth. The truth is that when somebody's telling you what's wrong with you, the truth is they have a need. Isn't getting met. Hear that they are in pain. Don't hear the analysis."

Here is an example of Rosenberg putting empathic listening into practice to uncover the needs underneath what people say:

"I was working in a refugee camp in a country not very pleased with the United States. There were about 170 people assembled, and when my interpreter announced that I was an American citizen, one of them jumped up and screamed at me, "Murderer"!

Another one jumped up and shouted: "Child killer!"

Another: "Assassin!"

I was glad I knew NVC that day. It enabled me to see the beauty behind their messages, to see what was alive in them.

We do that in NVC by hearing feelings and needs behind any message. So I said to the first gentleman, "Are you feeling angry because your need for support isn't getting met by my country?"

Now, that required me to try to sense what he was feeling and needing. I could have been wrong. But even if we are wrong, when a person trusts that we're sincerely... trying to connect with their feelings and needs in that moment, that shows the other person that no matter how they communicate with us, we care about what's alive in them. When a person trusts that, we're well on our way to making a connection in which everybody's needs can get met.

It didn't happen right away because this man was in a lot of pain. And it happened that I guessed right, because he said: "You're #@&%! right!" adding: "We don't have sewage systems. We don't have housing. Why are you sending your weapons?"

I said: "So, sir, if I'm hearing you again, you're saying that it's very painful when you need things like sewage systems and housing - and when weapons are sent instead, it's very painful."

He said "You're #@&%! right! Do you know what it's like to live under these conditions for 28 years?"

"So, sir, you're saying that it's very painful, and you need some understanding for the conditions that you're living under." So I heard what was alive in the guy, not that he thought I was a murderer. When he trusted that I sincerely cared about what he was feeling and needing, he could start to hear me.

Then I said, "Look, I'm frustrated right now because I came a long way to be here. I want to offer something and I'm worried now that because you've got me labeled as an American, you aren't going to listen to me."

He said, "What do you want to say to us?" So he could hear me then. But I had to see behind the human being behind the names he was calling me."

Once we have heard the feelings and needs of the person we are communicating with, they are much more able to listen to what we have to say.

### Activity 3: Empathy Exercises

You can use the following scenarios to practice empathic listening and expressing empathy.

1. Someone at work says to you: "I couldn't sleep until 3 a.m. last night, thinking about our presentation today. So this morning I figured I'd better drink lots of coffee to keep me awake and alert... but now my head is killing me! Why do I always get hit with headaches when something important needs to be done?!"

- Give a reply that demonstrates intellectual understanding of the situation by addressing the speaker's question (last sentence.)
  - Give a reply that demonstrates sympathy rather than empathy.
  - Give a reply that offers advice.
  - Give a reply verbalising empathy.
2. At a meeting, while you are in the middle of a sentence, someone turns to you suddenly and says, 'don't you ever let someone else have a chance to talk?' Respond to this person with empathy by:
- Sensing and reflecting back what the person might be observing.
  - Sensing and reflecting back what the person might be feeling and needing.
  - Sensing and reflecting back what the person might be requesting.

*Please see the end of the guide for sample responses.*

3. Recall an experience you had of 'listening to someone with your whole being.'
4. What are some conditions either internal (inside yourself) or external that support your ability to be empathic? What are conditions that work against it?

## Observing Without Evaluating

The NVC process typically begins with neutral observation. 'Observations are what we see or hear that we identify as the stimulus to our reactions. Our aim is to describe what we are reacting to concretely, specifically and neutrally, much as a video camera might capture the moment. This helps create a shared reality with the other person. The observation gives the context for our expression of feelings and needs, and may not even be needed if both people are clear about the context.

The key to making an observation is to separate our own judgments, evaluations or interpretations from our description of what happened. For example, if we say: "You're rude," the other person may disagree, while if we say: "When I saw you walk in and I didn't hear you say hello to me," the other person is more likely to recognise the moment that is described.' Evaluations can be received as a judgement or attack, and can provoke a reaction, resistance and counter-attack from the other person.

NVC trainer Dian Killian suggests we can mostly easily make neutral observations 'in conversations...by recapping what someone has said, without emotional input. That means not attaching any "story" to your response... Comments that begin in the first person, i.e. "I hear you say..." work better than "You just said..." For example:

Person 1: "We have to do something about the illegal immigrant problem, because they're taking away our jobs, and people like you don't care."

Person 2: "I'm hearing you say that you're worried about your job security and that other people in this country are ignoring that concern."

Re-capping what we have heard 'slows the pace of conversation, and forces both sides to reflect and clarify. It does require practice; Killian point outs: "It's a muscle to develop, because what we usually do when we're disturbed by something is start disagreeing right away.'" It can also be instinctive to respond with judgements and diagnosis. Rosenberg gave an example of some teachers he worked with who were having a conflict with their administrator. He asked them: "What does he do that you don't like?" They initially responded by saying: "he has a big mouth", "he talks too much", and "he thinks he's the only one with any intelligence." After some prompting, they described specific behaviours that did not meet their need for efficiency: during staff meetings, regardless of the agenda, the administrator would relate it to one of his war experiences or childhood experiences. As a result, their meetings lasted much longer than scheduled. This is a clear observation without any evaluations mixed in. Here are some more examples:

Evaluation	Observation
"You are so rude!"	"When you tell me to get lost..."
"You're selfish!"	"I asked if someone could help me and you carried on with the task you were doing."
"This place is a pigsty!"	"There are clothes and toys covering most of the floor."
"When I hear you yelling at Dad..."	"When I hear you and Dad talk like that..."

Making clear, non-judgemental observations can:

- clarify what you are reacting to (what triggered you)
- establish common ground
- separate your interpretations from what actually happened
- be part of taking responsibility for your actions.

## Activity 4: Observation or Evaluation?

For the following statements, do you regard the speaker to be making an observation free of evaluation? If not, please give an example of an evaluation-free statement that matches the situation.

1. "They are destroying the environment."
2. "One of the best ways to learn NVC is simply to practice, practice, practice."
3. "You lied to me about your grades."
4. "You are arguing with me for the fourth time this week."
5. "You drove the car without first getting my permission."

*Please see the end of the guide for sample responses.*

## Making Requests of Others

'The fourth component of NVC involves making a request to others. We are asking them to do something to satisfy a need of ours. Our requests are strategies through which we might get our needs met. Needs are universal. The strategy through which we are asking to get our needs met is

specific - we are asking to get our need met by a specific person, in a specific way, often at a specific time.

In ordinary communication we often confuse the level of 'needs' with the level of 'requests'. We don't mention our need but ask for the strategy as if it were a need, e.g. 'I need you to turn off your radio.' (Our actual need here is for peace and quiet.) Confusing the need with the request can contribute to conflict. Separating our need from the request helps us to be determined about getting our need met, and flexible about the way in which that need is met. This in turn gives the person we are in conflict with the opportunity to be flexible - to meet our needs in a way that will also meet any needs they have'. A useful and clarifying rule to return to is: hold tight to the needs, and loose to the strategies.

For example, imagine you are in a room with another person who is feeling too hot, but you are feeling cold. The other person wants to open the window to let in a cool breeze, but opening the window is a strategy that does not meet both your needs. Instead, you could put on a jumper, and the other person could put on some lighter clothes. By flexibly exploring other strategies with a focus on needs, everyone's needs can get met.

Our requests are more likely to be met with a 'yes' if they:

- **Are specific** - specifying exactly what you want, and when, with who, and where, makes your request easier to act on.
- **Offer choice** - people enjoy the respect involved in being asked. The phrase 'would you be willing to...?' captures the spirit.
- **Are positive** - are in the form of a 'do' rather than a 'don't'.
- **Are doable** - in manageable, bite-sized chunks.
- **Take the other person into account** - getting a sense of what is going on for them is important for making requests that meet our needs as well as theirs.

There are three types of request we can make of others:

- **Request to connect empathically:** "How do you feel when you hear what I just said?"
- **Request for another person to connect with you:** "Would you be willing to tell me what you understand me to have said (so I can check I've made myself clear?)"
- **Action request (for them to actually do something):** "So, would you be willing to...(e.g. Take your shoes off when you come into the house)?"

## Activity 5: Making Requests - Incorporating All Four Components Into NVC

Imagine situations where someone utters the following statements. In each case, translate the statement using all four components of NVC, paying special attention that the request is positive, concrete, and immediately doable.

1. "Your dog just made a mess on my lawn." (Translate to: "When I see your dog...[observation] I feel... [feeling], because I need [need], and would you be willing

to...[request]?")

2. "Yelling obscenities isn't going to get you what you want."
3. "By putting your money in mutual funds, you're just supporting guns and tobacco and sweatshops and all the things we're trying to change in this world."
4. "This soup is much too calorific."
5. "At this company, we require teamwork. If that's not a priority for you, you'd better be looking for another job."
6. "But you told me two weeks ago that it would be fine if I were to take a long weekend this month."

*Please see the end of the guide for sample responses.*

## What to do should conflict arise

Should conflict arise, connecting with peoples' feelings and empathically reflecting back to them what they are saying is an effective starting point. Studies done in labour management negotiations indicate that the time needed to settle disputes can be considerably shortened if one simple rule is followed: each participant must paraphrase what the previous speaker has said before saying anything in rebuttal.

Once you have heard the feelings and needs of those involved in the conflict, you can use the steps below to communicate your needs and explore strategies to meet them, as well as the needs of others.

**1. Connect with your intention - to create an empathic connection with yourself and the other person, so all your needs may be met!**

**2. Express Yourself Using the Four Ingredients of NVC:**

**Observation:** *"When I see / hear..."*

**Feeling:** *"I feel..."*

**Need:** *"Because I need / would like..."*

**Request:** *"Would you be willing to..."*

**3. Hear their (imagined) difficult response:**

**4a. Connect empathically with them. Try:**

**Reflective Listening - mirror back what you are hearing them say.**

**4b. Connect empathically with them. Try: i. Connecting with the needs underneath what they are saying:**

"Are you needing...?"

## **ii. Connecting with their feelings, if their feelings seem strong:**

"I'm sensing you're feeling...?"

(N. B. You may need to do any of these things two or three times until you have connected fully to their needs and they sense that they have been heard.)

## **5. Put all their needs and your needs on the table:**

"I want you to get your needs met for...

**...AND...**

I also have a need for... (your original need(s) that you expressed with the four ingredients in part '2' above)."

## **6. Look for solutions / strategies:**

"Do you have any suggestions for how we could resolve this so you get ... (your need/s)... and I can get... (my need/s)? OR "How about if we...?"

## **Suggested practice: NVC Journaling**

To support your NVC learning and practice, you can journal the incidents that happen each day.

- Write down what happened (practising using observational language).
- Then write down your judgments of the other person and yourself. Translate your judgements into feelings and needs as you do this.
- Then write down what the other person's feelings and needs might be.
- Finally, consider what actions you could take to meet the needs you identified.

## **Sample Responses for Reviewing the Activities**

### **Activity 1: Identifying Feelings**

**Please note - these are not examples of NVC, but only of the feeling component.**

1. 'I feel anxious when no one at work responds to my suggestions.'
2. 'I feel very puzzled about how you can do such a thing.'
3. 'I feel concerned that this happened to you. I would have been furious if it had been me.'
4. 'I feel exhausted.'
5. 'I feel pleased and proud to have my own car and paycheck.'
6. 'I feel regret in how I am behaving toward them.'
7. 'I feel upset because I think you are annoying me on purpose.'

### **Activity 2: What is my need here?**

1. Example translation into an observation, feeling and need: 'When I hear that none of us got a call from her, I feel discouraged because I want to be able to count on us carrying through with agreements we make together.' Universal needs: reliability, trust, integrity.
2. Universal needs: competence, acceptance, respect
3. Universal needs: mutuality, consideration, efficiency
4. Universal needs: safety, integrity, competence
5. Universal needs: stimulation, purpose, challenge
6. Universal needs: respect, community, support
7. Universal needs: consideration, connection, stimulation
8. Universal needs: inclusion, warmth, community

### Activity 3: Empathy Exercises

- 1. "It's probably because you have a lot of tension when you are anticipating something important. Or maybe it's a combination of stress, lack of sleep, and the caffeine that's causing your headache."
  2. "I really feel for you. it's the worst thing to have a horrible headache when you are about to do an important presentation!"
  3. "Why don't you take this ice pack and lie down for about 10 minutes?"
  4. "Are you frustrated because he would really like to be feeling energetic, healthy, and clear-headed for this presentation?"
- 1. "Are you referring to my going 'Oh no, oh no, oh no' when Peter pointed to the map?"
  2. "Are you feeling irritated because you want everyone to be heard?"
  3. "Would you like for us to go around and hear from everyone before I speak again?"

### Activity 4: Observation or Evaluation?

**Please note - these are not examples of NVC, but only of the observation component.**

1. "They have clear-cut over 90% of this territory, and are still continuing."
2. "All the people in my practice group say that one of the best ways to learn NVC is simply to practice, practice, practice."
3. "I heard you say you passed all your courses but this report card shows two F's."
4. "This is the fourth time I'm this week that you stated you disagree with something I'm saying."
5. If both parties (e.g. parent and teenager in a family) are in clear agreement regarding what constitutes 'first getting permission' then I would consider the speaking to be making an observation free of evaluation.

### Activity 5: Making Requests - Incorporating All Four Components Into NVC



1. "When I see your dog leaving turds on the lawn, I feel upset. We have kids who play here and I want the yard to be a safe, clean space for them. Would you be willing to use this plastic bag to remove the turds?"
2. "When I hear you addressing me like that, I feel agitated because I need cooperation and a peaceful resolution of our differences. Are you willing to tell me what you are feeling and needing right now instead of what you think I am?"
3. "When I hear you have put your money in mutual funds, I feel dejected because I'd like to see us put our resources into what we value, rather than to support guns, tobacco and sweatshops. Would you be willing to tell me what you were feeling when you hear me say this?"
4. "I am worried about the calories in this soup because I really need to take care of my health. Would you be willing to give me a bowl of noodles instead?"
5. "When I read this report you wrote, I feel troubled, because I value teamwork and I need some reassurance that we are on the same page. Would you be willing to make an appointment so we can discuss how we each see the priorities for this job?"

# Door-to-door Listening

## Why Door-to-door Listening?

Door-to-door listening can be an incredibly powerful community-building tool that enables you to meet members of your local community and better understand the issues that matter to them. The process of knocking on people's doors and simply listening to what they have to say is both humbling and empowering, and if done with care and consideration, it can foster strong links across a local area, helping to initiate a local movement and/or help an existing one gain momentum.

## What Do I Need to Consider?

Throughout the door-to-door listening process it is important to remember that you are approaching people's homes and that people may not be able to talk or may not want to. If someone does not feel like they have time to engage with you, then listen to them and respect their wishes – their home is their private space, and they are entitled to feel safe and free from hassle.

It is also important to try to avoid making assumptions: avoid judging someone on their race, gender, religion or age, and/or what their house looks like or the area in which they live. Everyone is different, knock on someone's door with an open mind and with a willingness to connect and learn.

With door-to-door listening it is vital not to have an agenda, do not knock on the door with content that you want to peddle through as this will prevent you from being able to actively listen. Listen, genuinely listen, and let the person whose home you have knocked on guide the interaction. Do not try to equate their experiences with yours or interrupt with questions. Questions you might have will be related to your perspective and they will work to interrupt someone's flow or make the conversation change direction.

## Step by Step Guide

1. Knock on the door. Take a step back once you have knocked so that people can open the door without feeling like their space is being invaded.
2. If a child answers the door, do not introduce yourself, ask to speak with an adult.
3. Introduce yourself slowly and clearly, making eye contact and avoiding making fast movements. Think about your body language – having your arms by your side and visible will make people feel more relaxed than if you have your arms crossed or your hands in your pockets. The aim is to make people feel at ease.
4. Explain who you are, why you are there and outline whether or not you are representing a community movement or organisation – it is important to be transparent. If you are

knocking to understand issues that matter to people, on behalf of a local charity, for example, you could state “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am here on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ and I am knocking on doors in to better understand the issues that matter to people and their families in the local area.”

5. It is important to give people the option of whether or not to engage, so follow this short introduction with a question, such as “do you have some time to talk to me about the issues that matter to you?” If people do not want to engage, move on. This is their home and you are a visitor.
6. If people want to engage with you, then actively listen to what they have to say, keeping in mind your body language throughout the process. Let them guide the interaction. Do not interrupt, argue with them or outline your opinions. If you need to take notes, then explain why you would like to and check that this is ok with those you are listening to. Ideally, however, do so after the process as this will ensure you are fully present when you are listening.
7. Be engaged. You may wish to highlight that you have heard what they have said by nodding along or making small sounds of agreement.
8. If someone asks you questions, engage with them, but try to ensure that you avoid stressing your opinions if it may make people feel uncomfortable about expressing theirs. If a natural point arrives at which you can ask a question, prioritise asking probing questions that seek to understand their perspective better. Do not ask prying questions about personal information – people are entitled to privacy and such questions can alienate.
9. Thank the person for their time and for sharing their views and feelings.
10. If you feel there has been positive engagement and a genuine connection, then before you depart you may wish to give the person more information about your organisation or any local events happening. However, if there is no right time to do so, then leave this step out.

## Top Tips:

- Arrive open and ready to actively listen.
- Speak only to adults.
- Speak slowly and clearly, maintaining eye contact.
- Be transparent: introduce yourself, who you are representing and why you are there.
- Give people the choice about whether or not to engage.
- Listen to them, avoid equating their views/experiences with yours.
- Ask probing questions, not prying questions, if an opportunity arises – do not interrupt their flow.
- Speak 80% less than you think you should.
- Ask what is worrying them and listen: a lot of people are not looking for solutions, they want you to hear them. If you can listen, people are more likely to meet with you again.
- Thank people for their time.

# Practical Steps To Community Engagement During Lockdown

This guide offers ideas on how to both reach out to community members during lockdown, and on how to connect with others who are socially organising during lockdown, such as your local Covid Mutual Aid Group or other community organisations. We recommend working to build trust with those you reach out to above all else and being an active listener (see this [active listening guide](#) for further information).

Whilst you might wish to discuss the Trust the People community democracy project and to promote grassroots democracy, timing these discussions is very important – if they are done too soon, people might feel that you are trying to push an agenda, and you might subsequently alienate them.

## Reaching Out to Members of Your Community

### Where Do Community Members Interact?

The first question to ask is: where do community members interact? Here are some ideas about where you can reach members of your community:

- Facebook or other social media platforms community pages
- Parish and town websites, online mag's and local newspapers
- Nextdoor.com
- Look on council websites for local offerings
- Community noticeboard in a supermarket, post office etc.
- Mutual aid and community support groups
- On the streets - posters, flyers, stickers

Be sure to reach out to those who may traditionally be forgotten about - the more vulnerable and isolated cohorts of your community. Focus on identifying 'less visible' demographics and on what the points of contact might be e.g. homeless charities, 'Refugee's welcome', Youth Workers, etc. Ask those actively engaged in these organisations for input on how to engage with the communities they are involved in.

### Practical Means of Reaching Out

Once you know where the people you want to reach are, consider the ways to reach out to them. Here are some suggestions:

- Leaflets and flyers in letterboxes:
  1. Use safety protocols - [Queercare's](#) are very thorough.
  2. See pre-designed flyers for reaching out during Covid-19 [here](#).
  3. See pre-designed flyers for publicising a Community Assembly [here](#) and [here](#).
- Posters in community noticeboards, supermarkets, food banks or any other identified areas for reaching people. Take notice, as you move through the local area, of where things are routinely advertised and what catches your eye, and replicate the approaches you see.
- Online events such as games nights, neighbourhood cups of tea and/or listening circles.
- Setting up a community engagement facebook page or forum to organise online events.
- Finding existing facebook groups / pages and advertising your online events/assemblies there.
- Create new content: consider making 'info' videos or podcasts on what you are doing, blogs by those involved, and/or mini 'testify' videos that to be shared on social media.

When you are reaching out initially, make an effort to build trust and connections. Spend time getting to know people in your community.

## Reaching Out to Organisations in Your Community

When communicating with other groups, especially groups who have been doing really fantastic work such as Mutual Aid, it's important to make sure we are communicating effectively, but that we enter these spaces in a spirit of service and humility. Listen to those you encounter and work to build trust before you begin discussing community democracy.

## Making Contact

- Check to see if you know anyone who is already involved with your local Covid Mutual Aid group or whichever community organisation you are reaching out to.
- Think about asking your neighbours, or people in your local XR group. If you know others who are in contact or have personal connections, then it's good to start there.
- Inform those members that you would like to offer a talk on a new Community Democracy project called Trust the People, which wants to support the growth of grassroots democracy in the UK. It is important to explain that Trust the People has been created by people in Extinction Rebellion's Future Democracy Hub, so they understand who is working on this project. But equally explain that others outside of the movement are working on the project too.

- If you don't know anybody who is involved with your local Covid Mutual aid group then you can find your local mutual aid group on their [website](#). From there, if one exists, you'll be prompted to join the relevant Facebook pages and/or Whatsapp group, and then you will be in direct contact with those you would like to speak to. If one doesn't exist, then why not start one?
- Equally, if you don't know of anyone personally involved with community organising groups in your area, then consider starting a local community democracy group using the steps outlined in the [Reaching Out to Members of Your Community](#) section at the start of this document.

## Useful Resources

- [Covid Community Organising Guide](#)
- [Covid Mutual Aid Resources](#)

# Resources for Reaching Out to Others in Your Community

## Deep Hanging Out

*The point of this guide is to frame an attitude to engaging different communities, impart confidence and share important skills, but this is not a roadmap. This work needs to be authentically connected to the people who undertake it. There are no cheats or shortcuts. To do it well will mean honestly interrogating your assumptions and overcoming fears. Sit with yourself and ask, given my interests, what could I do in my area? Am I comfortable with longer deeper chats? Is door-knocking more my thing?*

*It's important not to spend too much time debating the strengths and weaknesses of an approach. None of us are experts, get out there, start trying things!*

## What is Deep Hanging-Out?

Originally a tool in Anthropology developed by Clifford Geertz, meaning to “immerse oneself in a cultural, group or social experience on an informal level”. We’re repurposing the idea.

## Why does it matter that we do it?

Deep Hanging-out helps us form a deeper understanding of an area. It helps us to break down assumptions that we hold consciously or unconsciously. It also makes us a more closely connected member of a community, a vital thing for people to trust you.

Importantly, no community is a blank slate needing to be filled with any one understanding of community and/or democracy. Places are filled with formal and informal relationships between individuals, groups and organisations. Understanding these will help determine the role you might be able to play and how to support a community’s democratic culture without needing to reinvent the wheel. Consider the permaculture principle of causing the *least change for greatest effect*.

## Who should we be hanging out with?

### **Usual suspects: us**

Look for people who have been constructing a new system of operation for a while. Civil society, social enterprise, volunteer networks. See this list for national organisations who may have local chapters. Find out what their area of work is, what problem are they trying to solve?

Try to connect with members of these organisations in person. They will be able to explain a thorough picture of the other similar institutions in the area and save you a lot of time.

### **Excluded people who share our values**

These are people who are open to ideas of pro-democracy and pro-community but aren't otherwise engaged. Find out what the barriers are for these people becoming more involved?

### **People who don't share our values**

These are people who are excluded and don't share your values. Why have they been excluded? What are the differences between their worldview and yours? What common ground do you share?

## **How do we do it?**

You can think of the possibilities for Deep Hanging-out in two ways: (1) joining conversations (2) starting conversations.

### **1. Joining conversations**

Before inviting people to meet you, go to where people are. Where in the community are people already interacting with each other? Think of places like cafés, the post office, schools, faith centres or the barber shop. Break out of your comfort zone and go to these places. Listen, observe and make friends.

Listening is a skill in itself, rarely cultivated in mainstream society. Practicing listening means really hearing what people are saying and rejecting the instinct to assume. Active listening is a practice to help us do this.

*Active listening* means overcoming the urge to judge, analyse, diagnose, question what someone else is saying whilst they're speaking. It means, instead of thinking about your response, pay close attention and be present to what someone is saying. Reflecting back the essence of what you're hearing to the person speaking proves you're listening and helps build trust.

Real learning, authentic relating and actual understanding of others requires space for slower conversations. These are spaces where people have the time to build real relationships and are more likely to share their interests, anxieties and ambitions.

Don't rush your attempt to learn about your community and any person within it.

### **2. Starting conversations**

The community assembly is a fast-paced, transformative way to learn about a communities' needs, but there are other slower forms of conversation that need to be had too. These other spaces are not 'focus groups' to inform your community building project, but part of the community building itself. All of these conversations will involve mutual learning, but they will also build trust.



Part of the feminisation of politics is creating spaces for discussions that are not competitive or ego-driven. In practice this could mean bringing in the arts, food and friendliness to a conversation. This might be a community feast, a games club or a conversation cafe.

These spaces need to be co-created by the new attendees who visit them. Ask them to edit the invitation (flyer, poster etc) in terms that would appeal to them more. Invite them to host their own gathering or join you in hosting one.

Many of those excluded from community conversations are people unable to attend events in the daytime or unlikely to visit public places. One way to try to reach these people is going door-to-door knocking. If done well, this method of engagement also allows for longer, more intimate conversations. See here for guidance on [listening on the doorstep](#).

### **Who isn't here?**

Always ask who is not yet in your field of vision. Are there people you are unconsciously ignoring or afraid of?

### **Some examples**

- The talkshop
- [The empathy circle](#)
- Sports event
- Community Feast

# Games to Connect

Taken from Science of People [article](#)

## What is an Icebreaker?

An icebreaker is an activity, event, or game that is designed to break down social barriers, make others feel more comfortable, and facilitate social interaction. Icebreakers are usually performed at the beginning of a meeting or team session and involve a group of people.

From [conferences](#) to [team retreats](#), one thing learned is that an icebreaker truly can make or break an event. Here's the science on this:

- Harvard Business School professor Michael Norton gathered 221 participants and had them form groups of two to four people.
- Then, he asked them to do a campus scavenger hunt where they had to run around taking selfies in front of specific locations.
- They had precisely forty-five minutes to complete the hunt and the winners received a cash prize.
- \*There was a catch. Half of the teams were asked to do a pre-scavenger hunt icebreaker together and the other half were simply asked to read an article together. The icebreaker groups had to form a circle, perform a series of rhythmic claps and foot stomps and yell, "Let's go!"

The results were clear. The teams that did the icebreaker before the scavenger hunt got the most selfies, had the shortest completion times, and reported liking each other more in the post-event survey. This is incredible! A couple of foot stomps, a few claps, and a cliché cheer improved performance, time, AND [likability](#).

## What Are Good Icebreaker Questions?

Icebreaker questions are a fun, easy way to get to know people and lighten the mood. They are similar to icebreaker activities but usually do not require much or any preparation at all. Here are some great icebreaker questions you can ask!

## 10 Icebreaker Questions to Get to Know People

1. What is your proudest accomplishment?

2. If you could write a book, what would it be about?
3. What is the happiest moment in your life? What made it so special?
4. What is the scariest thing you've ever done for fun?
5. What is the best gift you've ever given/received?
6. What is your dream job?
7. What is something you were known for in college/high school?
8. What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
9. Where is one place you'd love to travel to?
10. What does your ideal day look like?

## 10 Fun Icebreaker Questions

11. What is your spirit animal?
12. Who would win in a fight: a horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses?
13. If you were a color, what would it be?
14. What superpower would you choose to have? Why?
15. What was your favorite television show as a kid?
16. If you had a time machine, what time period would you travel to?
17. If you could only eat one thing for the rest of your life, what would it be?
18. If you had one wish, what would you wish for?
19. If you were stranded on an island, what 3 things would you bring with you?
20. What song best describes you?

## Virtual Meeting Icebreakers

Not all meetings nowadays are in-person. Some are virtual. These fun icebreakers can be performed anytime, anywhere, no matter the distance!

### Show and Tell

This is one of my favorite virtual icebreakers. Why? Because it reveals what your teammates really value! Here's how to perform this icebreaker:

1. Ask your remote team members to grab a nearby item (or even send a personal picture through group chat!). This item should be unique to them.
2. Share! Take turns sharing your item and the story or personal meaning behind it.

For example, I recently shared in my weekly team meeting a small personal item: a llama doll I received from one of my friends! It was a great way to show to my remote team how I value small gifts from friends, and an easy icebreaker, too! Win-win!

### Meet the Pet (or child, or partner, or plant)

This icebreaker idea is super simple, and who doesn't like pets? It's best performed for remote teams that are newer and/or as a first-day icebreaker. Here's how:

1. Have your remote team grab their pets or show a picture of them.
2. Start the introductions! You can start off with the basics (name, age, where you got him/her), but make sure to throw in one personal/fun story you had with your pet.

Pro tip: If your teammate does not have a pet, ask them to describe their ideal pet. Or meet each other's kids. Or meet each other's plants. Feeling funky? Ask them what their spirit animal is!

## Partner Lunch

Want a fun way to make a meeting more... dare I say... delicious? Enter: the Partner Lunch. This icebreaker requires a bit of prep work with your team, and it'll be better if you're in similar time zones.

1. Schedule a time where you and your team can video call and eat a meal together.
2. Find a partner. Randomly assign partners in your team to talk one-on-one for 10-20 minutes before your group call.
3. Talk! Now's a great time for the partners to get to know each other over lunch. You can even have a list of [deep questions](#) to help facilitate discussion.

## Rotating Questions

In small groups, you can use great questions to get people to open up.

1. Gather a list of icebreaker questions from earlier in the article, or check out my [favourite 57 conversation starters](#) you can use.
2. Have everyone take turns answering questions. If they don't like a question, they can choose another to answer!

## Quiz Time

One of the funnest icebreaker activities is to take quizzes and compare the results with your team! Here at Science of People, we absolutely LOVE quizzes. We've got a ton of quizzes backed with science to help you and your team understand each other:

- How open are you to new experiences? Are you [extroverted or more introverted](#)? Are you agreeable? See your traits in our [Personality Test](#)!
- Are you good at figuring out nonverbal communication? See if you can spot these cues with the [Body Language Quiz](#).
- Have you ever noticed you date the same kind of person over and over again? That's because we have specific attachment styles—find out yours in our [Attachment Styles Quiz](#)!