

# 4. Community Assemblies

Community Assemblies are a structured and democratic way for a group of people to share ideas and feelings, discuss problems and generate solutions collectively. Assemblies are organised in such a way as to ensure that no one person dominates, and that all voices are heard and valued equally. They promote active listening, inclusivity and trust.

- [Overview](#)
- [Community Assembly Manual](#)
- [Rebels' User Guide For Zoom](#)
- [Online Community Assembly](#)
- [In Person Community People's Assembly](#)
- [Reflecting on Your Community Assembly](#)

# Overview

## Why use community assemblies?

Assemblies build community by enabling communication and collaboration across cultural, economic and political divides. Their inclusive and structured nature creates a safe space in which people can share their perspectives and ideas. This not only enables people to better understand others and their needs, it also creates a fertile space for problem solving and collective decision making.

As democratic processes, assemblies also help promote and build democracy. Their structure, which values all voices equally and champions collective decision making, gives those who participate a direct experience of a functional and inclusive democracy. They offer a clear and hopeful alternative to the established way of doing things and the hierarchical, dominant and exclusive cultures that permeate our politics, workplaces and social lives. When used effectively, they can help communities develop as self-organising, self-directing and self-managing bodies, which make decisions democratically and work for the advancement of the collective.

People's assemblies are also incredibly powerful tools for personal empowerment and bonding with others. Being actively listened to is a transformative experience and helps people realise that their words and ideas matter, whilst meeting with strangers and sharing feelings helps to build trust and to establish genuine emotional connections.

## Useful Links

- [Community Assemblies](#)
- [How to Run Participatory Democracy Community Assemblies](#)

# Community Assembly Manual

## How to Organise and Run Assemblies in Your Community

*'Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it' - Goethe*

The past year has shown us that waiting for top-down democratic change is not enough, we need to proactively build the system we want to see, a system based on grassroots, community-level democracy: a politics for and by the people. But to do this, we need to create spaces in which we can share ideas, listen to each other and grow together. This is where people's assemblies come in.

First and foremost, people's assemblies are democratic exercises that allow people to share thoughts and feelings, discuss problems and generate solutions in a highly structured way. The structure facilitates participation and inclusion, and gives people a voice – everyone is listened to and everybody listens. People's assemblies thus work to build trust, community and connection, whilst facilitating participatory and deliberative democracy.

This manual outlines the various steps that you can take to run a people's assembly in your local community. It has been created by people in XR's Future Democracy Hub, however, it is not their work alone. This manual collates best practice from the people throughout history and from all over the globe, who have used People's Assemblies to come together and achieve great things.

## Background on People's Assemblies

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 a 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.

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, Torridge 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

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](http://www.takethesquare.net)

## A Note on Capacity

Everything in this manual requires a time and energy commitment. Evaluate your resources and choose the paths and practices that work for you, and that can be maintained in the longer term. Many great community endeavours fail due to a disparity between the time and energy resources available over time, and the ambition of the activities initiated – you need to be able to maintain the activities, after they have been initiated, and following through with any commitments made. It is helpful if all of the roles are backed up by at least one other person, so that people can take breaks as and when they are needed. Create a model that works for your own resources and needs, and evaluate it regularly to check that it is still maintainable.

To learn more about sustainable community development, take a look at Nurture Development's information on [Asset Based Community Development](#).

## Creating a Team

**'I can't change the world on my own, it'll take at least three of us'** - Bill Mollison.

You may start with a tiny group of interested folk who want to bring a deeper sense of democracy and connection to their community, or you may have a whole room full of people ready to take on roles. The working groups listed here are suggestions for getting started and form the basic team for bringing a community together in assembly. You may have three people covering the whole thing or a large team making up each group. The important thing is to select your approach based on the capacity of those involved, whilst creating and maintaining a pathway for bringing new people into the project.

## Team Working Groups

- **Process Working Group:** Ideally you should have a Working Group focused specifically on organising and delivering community people's assemblies. The Process Working Group liaises with all the other working groups to organise and publicise the assemblies and is the point of contact for all things relating to them. This may be a full working group, or just one or two people who take on the role of being the point of contact for assembly coordination.
- **Facilitators (part of the Process Working Group):** 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. We therefore suggest that:
  1. Facilitators are rotated often, and experienced facilitators work to train and support others to move into facilitation roles.
  2. 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.
  3. 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.
  4. Facilitators maintain radical inclusivity, active listening and trust, with all voices being heard and valued equally.
- **Media and Messaging:** Even in a small group, you should have at least one or two individuals who take on the role of media and messaging. The role of this group is to create advertising and information around the assembly, and to coordinate publicising it through all appropriate channels such as social media, newsletters, printed media and posters/fliers.

- **Outreach and Onboarding:**

1. You could separate these into an outreach and an onboarding team, but as much of the work will have crossovers, it would make sense to coordinate as one working group.
2. The outreach team focuses on community engagement around the assembly. They aim to get out into the community, attend events to engage with people and link in with other existing groups and organisations to promote the assembly, community democracy and participative practices.
3. The onboarding team handles the integration of new members into the project and monitors the success of inclusion and accessibility in that process.

## Connecting with the Community

Before you attempt to bring a community together in Assembly you need to actually familiarise yourself with that community. Who makes up the community in question? Where are they? Who are the obvious future participants? Who are the less obvious ones? Which communities are hidden to you? Where are the community connections that already exist happening? Are those connections deliberate or organic/cultural? Who are the influencers, or the stakeholders, or the 'Elders' within this community?

This initial engagement is a vital part of the process of creating community assemblies, and shouldn't be rushed or overlooked. It's also important to remember that whilst we are connecting with the community we need to connect with ourselves as well. We need to ask ourselves what assumptions we carry about the community we are trying to reach. What fears or blocks might we carry that may be consciously or unconsciously acting on our ability to effectively connect and listen? We must challenge our own blind spots and prejudices at every opportunity, and continue to do so throughout the process.

It is also vital to develop active listening skills, so that when you are engaging with others in your community, you are taking time to understand them, their needs and their wants, rather than trying to push your own agenda. Properly listening to someone lays the foundations for empathy, understanding and trust, and creates the opportunity to learn from others.

To help you better connect with your community, take a look at the following modules in the Community Transformer Program:

- **Personal Processing:** This module encourages you to think about your identity, your biases, and your relationship to society; it is focused on helping you gain a better understanding of who you are so you can better understand others. It is also about taking time to consider your needs - and building up the courage and confidence needed to connect with strangers. Here are some of its many resources:
  1. **Deep Reflection: Understanding Ourselves and Understanding Others**
  2. **Reflecting on Identity Privilege**
  3. **Active Listening Guide**

- **Engaging Communities:** This module supports you in reaching out to others and forming relationships founded on trust. It has suggestions on how to practically connect during isolation, how to create genuine connections and how to engage with diverse communities. Here are some of its many resources:

1. **Deep Hanging Out Guide**
2. **Door to Door Listening Guide**

To help boost your ability to connect with those in your community, consider the following:

- Hold meetings in open and oft-frequented places (i.e. a local pub or cafe), so that many can easily participate.
- Be visible and open to conversations – find ways to bring those around you in.
- Attend existing community events – if relevant, you might run a stall.
- Contact existing community groups and connect to their issues and experiences.
- Organise events such as seed swaps, ‘free’ markets, community meals, music evenings, **Empathy Circles or Cafes.**

Much of the promotion section below can also be integrated as part of the Connecting with Your Community phase even if you do not have an upcoming assembly to promote.

## Preparing to Hold an Assembly

### Assembling

So, you’ve hung out within the community. You’ve met with people on their own turf and on their own terms. You’ve identified different demographics within the community and how to effectively deliver information about the assembly to them. Now, you need to create a space to bring everyone together in a well facilitated conversation. In short, you need to assemble. There are several ways to do this, but we recommend doing so using a people’s assembly (though other methods you may want to consider are **Open Space Technology** or **Goldfish Bowl**). Although this manual focuses on the people’s assembly process, almost all of the information around framing, promoting and organising an assembly is applicable to any other appropriate model.

### Framing, Scope and Process

The exact framing, scope and process for the assembly needs to be agreed upon before any promotional work can occur. The destination and legitimacy of the results of the assembly should be discussed and decided upon prior to convening the assembly, and it is important that all assembly participants are made aware of this information before the assembly begins.

### **An Assembly for Sharing and Community Building**

If, for example, you are planning to host an assembly designed to bring community members together to discuss issues that are important to them in the spirit of creating community bonds and



finding common ground, then the framing, scope and process are as follows:

- **Framing:** The event is open to all members of the community to provide space for discussion around local issues.
- **Scope:** No decisions are being made, so the scope is limited and does not extend beyond the sharing of ideas and feelings. The ideas and issues generated in the assembly should be fed back to the community through social media and serve as a starting point for future conversations.
- **Process:** A people's assembly.

### **An Assembly for Discussing a Specific Topic and Generating Ideas**

If you are convening an assembly which focuses on specific issues and where what is discussed will be shared beyond the local community with an external body, such as a council, then the scope would be broader. Say, for example, a local sustainability group advertises an open assembly on their facebook page and social media channels to discuss how the local council can act after declaring a Climate and Ecological Emergency, then the framing, scope and process would be as follows:

- **Framing:** The event is open to anyone who chooses to participate to share their ideas on what the council can do.
- **Scope:** The ideas and issues generated in the assembly could be published on the local group's communication channels (i.e. their facebook page or their newsletter), and also be emailed to the local Councillors asking them to take the suggestions to the next Council meeting.
- **Process:** A people's assembly.

### **An Assembly for Making Decisions and Proposals**

Assemblies can also be convened to ask for the opinions of members of a group and to make decisions. Say, 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, and they advertise it to all members through every channel of communication, then the framing, scope and process are as follows:

- **Framing:** The event is open to the members of the group so they can share their ideas on what they would like their group to do in the action.
- **Scope:** The assembly has the legitimacy to make the decision on behalf of that group, and the decision made during that assembly will be reported to the group and acted upon. The assembly, however, would not have the scope to make decisions beyond their own group. If, for example, that same group holds an assembly to decide if they, as a region, should combine with another region in the same manner, then the results of that assembly would be fed into a larger decision making process that would affect other

groups within the region as well.

- **Process:** A people's assembly.

## What to Discuss

Bringing people together around a common cause is more likely to generate enthusiasm and engagement than initiatives centred around issues identified as a priority by the local authority, or abstract debates to identify shared values and visions. Find out what people care about or want to change in their local community, and use that as a starting point for discussion.

You may have gathered a good sense of this through your community engagement practices, or you may want to hold your first assembly as an invitation to the community to hear people's concerns and priorities.

Simple online digital democracy tools like [Your Priorities](#) can be used to allow people to choose or suggest subjects for assemblies, as well as to continue community discussion and to help prioritise ideas. Whenever you use digital tools you must always consider inclusivity issues around the [digital divide](#) and make steps to ensure those in the community not able to access information digitally are still able to take part in those conversations.

An assembly agenda could include:

- A discussion point (e.g. 'How can we support local food producers?')
- A proposal (e.g. 'We should create a local Food Hub')
- Organising (e.g. 'Feedback and possible next steps in an ongoing project')
- Decision making (e.g. 'Shall we put forward community members to stand in the next council elections?')

## 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 election campaign may not be approved by the assembly, but a popular point made suggesting that some time and resources are put into supporting independent candidates could see the proposal returning with adjustments. \_ 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.

## Promotion

The more actively engaged you are with your local community, the more engagement you will create. That said all promotion and engagement activities require time and energy. The following suggested means of promotion are, therefore, ordered in terms of capacity, so that you can try methods that fit in with your schedule.

### Low Capacity

- Request all those already engaged make a 'commitment' to inviting two friends along to the assembly with them.
- Hold the planning meetings in public spaces to create curiosity around the project.
- Create an 'event' on social media and sharing through existing local pages and groups, and encouraging peer to peer sharing.
- Put a notice in a local paper.
- Put a notice in the parish magazine or on parish notice boards.

### Medium Capacity

- Put up various posters and literature in prominent places i.e. community notice boards, in the Post Offices, in the local shops etc.
- 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.

### High Capacity

- Take a stall at local markets, at existing events, or on the high street of the town you are planning to hold an assembly in.
- Approach existing community groups and offering to come and speak to them directly about the Assembly plan.
- Engage in door to door 'canvassing'.
- Identify 'less visible' demographics and what the points of contact are 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.
- 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.

Remember, you will create a far more genuine connection to the local community by going to them than by expecting them to come to you.

## Assembly Planning

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.

## **In-depth Plan with Timings**

### **One Month To Go:**

- Agree time, date and venue.
- Book venue and any necessary equipment such a PA system or kitchen equipment.
- Think about back-up venues in case of any issues nearer the day, especially if it is being hosted outdoors.
- Create an event page on Facebook and share on:
  1. Local Facebook groups, inc. local community social media pages and community groups (make a list of those relevant to the area you are organising in).
  2. Instagram.
  3. Twitter.
- Organise hosts and facilitators, along with others to take appropriate roles such as:
  1. Organising play area.
  2. Refreshments.
  3. Meet and greet team.
  4. Media and messaging (both leading up to the event, and to document and share during and after the event).
- Create print media such as posters and flyers.
- Think about advertising:
  1. Make a list ahead of time of all those relevant to your area and decide which are worth pursuing.
  2. Ask people where they look for events.
  3. Try a few places and get feedback on where people see the information.
  4. Many people read their community newsletter or free paper but not the local paper.

5. Find out where the important information such as local bin days and recycling is routinely published and try those first!
  6. Every community will have different habits, and different publications will reach different demographics within any community.
- Sort any advertising with a long lead in time such as:
    1. Community newsletters.
    2. Parish magazines.
    3. Monthly publications etc.
    4. Any places you identified by asking those in your community.

### **Two Weeks to Go:**

- Re-share on all social media platforms, and be prepared to check for questions and comments. Be responsive.
- Put up posters. Think about points of contact such as libraries, cafe's, noticeboards, supermarkets etc. Think of the less obvious places such as Youth Centres, Homeless Shelters, Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Identify and invite **stakeholders** and influencers in the community.
- Check there are no issues with the venue that might affect the event such as road works etc.

### **One Week to Go:**

- Check in with all crew - Make sure you know who is responsible for:
  1. Bringing equipment for the play area.
  2. Refreshments supplies.
  3. Ways to capture contact details for future events
  4. PA equipment etc.
- Check all roles are still covered.
- Agree a running order with the host and facilitation team, and circulate it to all crew.
- Reshare on social media.
- Ask interested parties to share within their own networks, perhaps challenge everyone already wanting to attend to bring one or two people along with them on the day.
- Ask people to share with those they think should be involved.
- Ask people to identify places that the information should be shared to reach those less likely to see it.
- Door knocking and flyering.
- Hand out flyers in prominent places such as high streets or any other community events.
- Re-check there are no issues with the venue that might affect the event such as road works etc.

### **One Day to Go:**

- Last shout out reminder on social media.
- Re-check there are no issues with the venue that might affect the event such as road works etc.

- Check in with anyone holding a role that they are all good to go and agree to meet an hour before start time to set up.

### **One Hour to Go:**

- All crew meet at the venue at least one hour before the advertised start time.
- Host, facilitators and the media and messaging crew run through the assembly plan together.
- Set up and test any PA equipment being used.
- Set up food and hot drinks, and any information that is being displayed.
- Ideally all the crew should wear something to identify them as being part of the organising team. This will make it easier for people to ask questions about the event or the process.
- Set up the children's area.
- Circulate pictures of the assembly being set up through social media channels to generate interest.

### **During the Assembly:**

- Be available to greet anyone coming in and make them feel welcome/explain the process to them.
- Be aware of tensions and needs.
- Be available to support anyone. Many people may find themselves moved by the experience of listening to others, or having their own voices heard, and some may need space or support.

### **After the Assembly:**

- Be available to answer people's immediate questions about the assembly process or what happens next.
- Collect emails and contact details to ensure that people can be kept in touch with (make sure your process for doing this is GDPR compliant).
- Pack away all the equipment and tidy up the venue.
- Plan for a feedback and reflection meeting with facilitators and crew, ideally following the assembly. This can be scheduled for another day, but don't leave it too long.
- Have a party with everyone remaining.

## **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. 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!

If you would like the process broken down into more detail, please use a script. We have versions for both [online assemblies](#) and [in-person assemblies](#).

# 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):
  1. They are responsible for the overall running of assembly, time keeping, and the delivery of all relevant information.
  2. 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. The destination of what is generated in assembly needs to be clearly defined before the start.

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 input phase, the deliberation phase and the integration/feedback phase.

### Input 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 input 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 input 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.

### 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.
- 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 Input 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.

## What Next?

After holding a community assembly, it is really important to think about what next? What will be done with the ideas and information discussed? This takes you to community organising. To learn about different ways to organise as a community, about the different tools in existence and about what others around the world have done, check out the Community Organising module.

# Rebels' User Guide For Zoom

## New Zoom account on a computer/laptop:

- Visit the Zoom Web Page at: [Zoom: Video Conferencing, Web Conferencing, Webinars, Screen Sharing](#)
- Enter your email address on the page and click on the orange **Sign Up Free** button
- You will be shown your email address, click **Confirm**
- You are then offered the opportunity to receive other resources (i.e. marketing) so choose whether you want to do that.
- Check your email for a mail **Please activate your Zoom account** (check your spam box)
- Click **Activate Account**
- Enter your name and a password - Click **OK**
- You are now set up with a zoom account! Follow steps below for Joining a Zoom Meeting.

## New Zoom account on a tablet or phone (individual rebels)

- Go to the Apple or Google store, then find and install the **Zoom Cloud Meetings** app.
- **Open** the Zoom app
- Click on **Sign up**
- Fill in your email, first name and last name and agree to the Terms of Service
- Click on **Next** (it's at the top right-hand side of the screen)
- Check your email for a mail called **Please activate your Zoom account** (check your spam box)
- Click **Activate Account**
- You are now set up with a zoom account! Follow steps below for **Joining a Zoom Meeting**

## Join Zoom meeting with link:

The person or group who is 'hosting' the meeting has sent you an invitation with a link that looks similar to this: <https://zoom.us/j/173621927> You just have to click on that link and it should start Zoom and take you to the meeting.

## Join Zoom link with a Meeting ID:

Depending on how you log in to Zoom, you may be asked for a Meeting ID if the invitation link doesn't take you straight to the meeting. In this case, the Meeting ID is the number at the end of the invitation link. So if you have been given <https://zoom.us/j/173621927> then the meeting ID is 173-621-927.

**TIP:** If you do not have a very good connection and the sound is breaking up, turning off your video may help.

## Guidance and tips for participation:

- We usually ask all participants to keep their microphones on Mute unless they are speaking. Our microphones pick up a lot of background noise and when everyone has the microphones unmuted, it can get really noisy. The facilitator might remind you to mute it if you've forgotten.
- In most Zoom meetings, we use the normal hand signals you are used to in Extinction Rebellion. This is particularly important in Zoom calls because it can be very difficult to know who is speaking. So be sure to raise your finger first if you want to make a point. Jazz hands are often used to get temperature checks of the group.

## Using Meeting Controls

Larger zoom meetings might make use of **Meeting Controls** to ask yes or no questions or for participants to raise their hands digitally (rather than using a finger as in our normal meetings).

To access the Meeting Controls, you will first have to go to the **Participants** view. Below the list of participants' names, you will see the controls shown below, which are fairly self-explanatory. Please note that not all meeting facilitators are aware of these controls and they may not be monitoring them, so don't use them unless directed to by the facilitator.

## We wish you happy Zooming!!

This guidance will be continuously updated as rebels give us feedback on it. Please send your questions and ideas to [suzanne.savage@protonmail.com](mailto:suzanne.savage@protonmail.com)

## Privacy and Zoom

Please note Zoom is in no way affiliated with Extinction Rebellion and has relatively weak privacy and security protections in place.

When you sign up you are providing your personal data to a 3rd party which may use your information for marketing purposes or hand over information to the government when pressured.

Extinction Rebellion hosts its own more secure systems for Online Meetings with an Open Source solution using [Jitsi](#). This is hosted using 100% renewable energy on a secure server hosted in Switzerland, unlike Zooms setup. If the information being shared is secret or you are uncomfortable handing over your information to a 3rd party please consider using XR's installation of this [here](#)/ Zoom's platform should be considered insecure.

For support using this system please contact [tech@rebellion.earth](mailto:tech@rebellion.earth)



# Online Community Assembly

## Important Things to Consider

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 things to note:

- The two facilitators should be of different genders if at all possible.
- Ensure radical inclusivity! Allow time at the start of the assembly to get everyone familiarised with using the tech. Think about the language you are using. Is it academic or vernacular? Are you communicating in a way that speaks to everyone within your community?
- 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.
- People's assemblies are widely used in action groups and civic democracy groups. For example, the Extinction Rebellion '[People's Assembly Manual](#)', provides loads more hints, tips and background information on PAs.

## Logistical Advice for Hosting Assemblies Online

For an online PA, it can be good to have 3 facilitators: 2 Assembly Facilitators, one of whom might also be the Assembly Note-taker. It is also helpful to have a Technical Facilitator, someone who manages the breakout rooms and muting people, but it isn't necessary and it isn't difficult.

**BEFORE THE MEETING, SET ZOOM UP:**



- Under MY MEETINGS, click on the meeting you are facilitating. On the left you will see SETTINGS. Under SETTINGS make sure the following are on:

1. **Participants video:** Start meetings with participant video on. Participants can change this during the meeting.

Mute participants upon entry Automatically mute all participants when they join the meeting. The host controls whether participants can unmute themselves.

2. **Chat:** Allow meeting participants to send a message visible to all participants.
3. **Auto saving chats:** If you wish to capture the chat, maybe as a way to get people to leave their emails for follow up etc, you can automatically save all in-meeting chats so that hosts do not need to manually save the text of the chat after the meeting starts.
4. **Co-host:** Allow the host to add co-hosts. Co-hosts have the same in-meeting controls as the host. A technical facilitator managing breakout rooms will need to make the other facilitator co-hosts.
5. **Nonverbal feedback:** Participants in a meeting can provide nonverbal feedback and express opinions by clicking on icons in the Participants panel.
6. **Breakout room:** Allows the host to split meeting participants into separate, smaller rooms. For information on how to set them up, check the breakout room - technical advice section of the script below.
7. **Share screen:** In the host controls, click the arrow next to Share Screen and click Advanced Sharing Options. Under “Who can share”; choose “Only Host.” If needed, this can be changed back to allowing others to screen share

- Computers or Laptops are best for online Zooms, but it can be done on smartphones too. Tech Facilitators need to be on Computers or Laptops, as you can’t always create Breakout Rooms on phones.

- Ask people who have used Zoom before to sign in 5 minutes before the start time, and those who have not used Zoom before to sign in 10 minutes early and work out how to use the buttons on the screen.

- [This](#) is an excellent guide on using Zoom that could be circulated to participants before hand

## Input Phase

### FACILITATOR 1: Introduction

Welcome everyone and run through the use of the tech:

- Explain to participants how to mute and unmute themselves when speaking.
- Invite anyone with a poor connection to stop their video to improve audio.
- Check people have the name they would like to be referred to in their profile box and explain how to rename themselves if needed.

- Explain the chat function and where to locate it.
- Explain how to use the icons in the participants channel to provide non-verbal feedback or as a way to raise a hand etc. if they don't have a video.

Facilitators introduce themselves, perhaps say a little of your background and experience with PA's and Community Organising or Projects - Brief but inspiring!

Explain that People's Assemblies have three 'phases':

- Input (includes introduction)
- Deliberation (discussion)
- Integration (Feedback)

## **Input Phase**

During the input phase, we explain the process and structure of the assembly, we introduce the hand signals, and frame the focus of the assembly, as well as what will happen with the outcomes from the 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 too)*

## **Deliberation Phase**

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

## **Integration Phase**

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

## **Facilitator 2: Hand Signals**

*(Demonstrate the hand signals used in assembly to allow people to use them during the introduction and input phase of the assembly.)*

We use hand signals to facilitate a discussion in which all voices get heard, no one dominates and we don't speak over each other. We will outline the hand signals you will need to take part today. Don't worry if you can't remember them as they will be repeated later in the session.

*(Hand signals rely on visuals, so be sure to explain possible on line alternatives to some of the hand signals, in case if anyone present doesn't have a video, or has to turn their video off due to poor connection.)*

## **HAND SIGNALS**

(As you verbally outline the hand signals, physically show them to ensure people fully understand them).

- **Make a point:** One index finger pointed upwards.
  1. The facilitator will stack, but they can choose to stack out of order to ensure RADICAL INCLUSIVITY and ensure all voices are heard.
  2. *If people do not have their video turned on, they can type STACK in the chat, or use raised Hand in the participants panel, or say 'Stack' for their name to be stacked.*
- **Agreement:** Wavy hands for agreement.
  1. This is to help note taker, who can record the level of agreement, and to make sure people are not interrupting others...remember it's all about ACTIVE LISTENING.
  2. *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:** Create a c shape with one hand.
  1. This is to ensure all are able to fully participate. It is useful if people do not understand anything, particularly important if unfamiliar terms and acronyms are used.
  2. *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:** Two index fingers pointing upwards.
  1. This is not for responding, this is just for extra added information that is directly relevant to what is being said – people must be careful not to misuse this to jump ahead in the queue!
  2. *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:** Create a t-shape with your hands.
  1. This is used for technical information such as breaks or timings.
  2. *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: Create a circle with both hands.**
  1. Do this after 2 minutes to make sure that those who are more comfortable speaking don't go on and on...remember: RADICAL INCLUSIVITY.
  2. *If people do not have their video turned on, they can use the 'time' icon under 'more' in the participants panel*
- **Speak up:** Move your hands upwards with their palms facing upwards.
  1. 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 you will need to explain to the whole assembly what that icon means so they know to increase their volume if speaking.
- **Temperature check:** Jiggle fingers at a level that corresponds with feelings i.e. upwards - support, horizontally - ambivalent, downwards - don't support.
  1. This can be used to quickly check the feelings of the group.

## FACILITATOR 1: Introduce the concept of a People's Assembly

### 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, Torridge 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. We welcome all people but not all behaviours.”

We want to hear your voice, if you want to speak, no matter what. 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

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 floor to anyone who wants to speak. Ask for a woman to speak 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 is timing and doing the 'round up' signal as necessary.
- After 15-30 minutes, move into the remainder of the PA...

## FACILITATOR 2: The Three Pillars

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. 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 expressing one's own.

In an assembly, the focus is on personal feelings and experiences. 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:** Effective assemblies achieve radical inclusivity, where the emphasis on all being heard and valued equally means no voices are dominating and the collective

wisdom of the assembly can be reached. People can participate safely and openly, without fear of judgement or ridicule. 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: Framing the Topic - 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 it 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.*

*For example, if you would like to engage people around the topic of buying local produce, you might ask:*

*'Should we start a Food Hub?*

*This question is very narrow, and really requires a yes or no, so it is unlikely to generate a lot of great ideas.*

*'How can we improve access to local produce?'*

*This question is broader, still focused on local access, gives scope for creativity. 'What can we do to reduce food miles? - Too broad, this could encompass all manner of different approaches and likely to lead to the conversation jumping from local to regional to national issues.*

## Deliberation Phase

### Breakout Room Technical Advice

#### Breakout Rooms

- For the deliberation phase, we use BREAKOUT GROUPS, which Zoom allows us to set up online, as it gives people space to discuss their ideas in smaller groups.
- **Technical Facilitator:** while the other facilitator is explaining what to do in the break-out groups, the Technical facilitator, who must be the person who logged in as the host, or who the host has transferred hosting to, looks at the control panel at the bottom of the screen for the button BREAKOUT ROOMS. If you haven't got it, you are not logged on as the host.

#### Create Rooms

Divide the number of participants in total by the number of people you want in the group, and ZOOM will automatically assign people to group rooms. Once you have done this, look at the lists to check that all rooms have the right number of people.

#### Options

- You can set the options for the breakout rooms.
- You can communicate with all the groups by using the BROADCAST button to send messages about timing to the groups.

- If you feel a bit nervous, get a few friends and give it a test run before you do your People's Assembly.

## **FACILITATOR 2: How does a People's Assembly work?**

You will discuss the PA question in breakout groups of 8-10, then feedback to the entire assembly.

Each group needs a facilitator and a note taker:

- It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that all voices are heard (radical inclusivity). To do this, allow two minutes per statement (maximum) and if people go over, give them the round up symbol.
- It is the role of the note taker to make notes on what is discussed, and to share their group's key points of discussion in the integration phase i.e. when all of the groups have returned to the assembly.
- When the note-taker is taking notes, they can do so in bullet points for ease of recording. Try to capture exactly what someone means, rather than adding any personal interpretations.

For an online assembly you can share a live 'Harvest Doc' for each breakout room's note taker to use. This keeps all the notes in one place and allows participants to look back at the notes from discussions in the other groups. You can make your own Harvest Doc or copy the Template [here](#) into a live doc (such as a Google Doc) to be shared and edited.

Use the hand signals to communicate in your groups and to ensure radical inclusivity. (*recap hand signals here*)

- **Make a point:** One index finger pointed upwards.
- **Agreement:** Wavy hands for agreement.
- **Clarification:** Create a c shape with one hand.
- **Direct point:** Two index fingers pointing upwards.
- **Technical point:** Create a t-shape with your hands.
- **Round up:** Create a circle with both hands.
- **Speak up:** Move your hands upwards with their palms facing upwards.
- **Temperature check:** Jiggle fingers at a level that corresponds with feelings i.e. upwards - support, horizontally - ambivalent, downwards - don't support.

10 minutes before the end of your allocated time, the note-taker should summarise the group's notes, then use temperature checks to identify the points that have the most support or acceptance.

The group should then work together to reach agreement on the main points to feed back to the Assembly.

*Decide how you want the feedback to happen. For larger assemblies ensure each group has fewer points to feed back verbally.*



*Then decide what you will do with this feedback. Will the main assembly note taker make note of the most popular points? Or will the note takers from each breakout group give written points to the assembly Facilitator/Notetaker?*

- *Potential integration structures* - select the most appropriate: We would like the notetaker to share the top [insert number here] points with the whole assembly after we reunite as an assembly.
- *Or if time is tight or the assembly is huge* - We would like the notetake to share 1 sentence or 10 words to the whole assembly
- *If there is no time for verbal delivery* - We would like 3 key points delivered in writing

Ask for clarifications on the process and then restate the questions being discussed.]

Technical Facilitator under MANAGE PARTICIPANTS unmutes everyone (in preparation for break out rooms, so those getting to grips with zoom don't need to spend time looking for the unmute button).

GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! (send into break-out groups)

### **Discussion (25 mins or whatever your allocated time is)**

Use BREAKOUT ROOMS > BROADCAST to give timings and other instructions to the groups.

*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 (or however many you are asking for) which had the most support. This process is facilitated as well.
- Prepare the feedback for delivery by whichever method you stated at the start - Either for verbal delivery in the main group, added to the Harvest doc, or summarised into a short sentence etc

When you click CLOSE GROUPS the default is that they will have 1 minute and then be automatically returned to the main group. You can change this in BREAKOUT ROOM settings.

## Integration/Output Phase

### FACILITATOR 1: Ending

- **Feedback (15 minutes)**

- Note-takers to deliver feedback, (or whatever form you have decided the feedback will take)
- If it is important to capture the content in written form, the notetaker can capture this in a google document and then SCREEN SHARE at the end to show the notes, or better still add it to the end of the Harvest Doc which every participant will have access to.

- Remember to get the names of the people giving feedback, and show appreciation.
- Thank everyone for participating. Then explain what will happen to the results of the assembly, including any possible 'next steps' that people could take, or plans for further 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 meetings 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 1 - Dealing with Difficult Interactions

### **A collection of thoughts and ideas on how to approach difficult interactions and behaviours:**

- Stress that *"we welcome all people, but not all behaviours"*.
- Move in when people are interjecting, challenging or talking too much.
- Make it obvious that we need to have equal sharing and hear of others.
  1. *"The points you are making are really interesting and important but it is also important to hear from other people here."*
  2. *"There is always a danger that the we only hear from the most confident voices - let's make sure that we also hear from the people who haven't spoken so far"*
- Thank people for their input and seek the positive intention of their behaviour (what are they seeking to achieve that is positive?)
- Remember, discussions can be won by people who make the most noise. Your job is to ensure all voices are heard.
- Explain the situation
  1. *"I am conscious of time and our agenda - what is the final point you want to make?"*
- Radical inclusivity - we want time for everyone.
- It's important for people to feel listened to without interrupting.
- You can offer to talk to them in more detail in a break or afterwards. If you need someone to behave differently it can be an expression of Radical Inclusion to connect with them in a break or afterwards to keep in relationship with them.
- Sometimes with someone who is very unconsciously in need of attention and can't be satisfied with a short interaction, avoiding eye contact may keep them quiet or let them know they have been talking for too long.
- If necessary, overtly clarify the objectives of the session again and what is needed to achieve those objectives.

# In Person Community People's Assembly

## Important Things to Consider

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 things to note:

- The two facilitators should be of different genders if at all possible.
- Ensure radical inclusivity! Allow time at the start of the assembly to get everyone familiarised with using the tech. Think about the language you are using. Is it academic or vernacular? Are you communicating in a way that speaks to everyone within your community?
- 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.
- People's assemblies are widely used in action groups and civic democracy groups. For example, the Extinction Rebellion [People's Assembly Manual](#), provides loads more hints, tips and background information on PAs.

## Input Phase

### FACILITATOR 1: Introduction

- Welcome everyone.

**Facilitators introduce themselves, perhaps say a little of your background and experience with PA's and Community Organising or Projects - Brief but inspiring! If you want to bring people into the space, perhaps do a short visioning exercise, inviting people to imagine something or think about what brought them to the space.**

- Explain that People's Assemblies have three 'phases':
  1. Input (includes introduction)
  2. Deliberation (discussion)
  3. Integration (Feedback)

## **Input Phase**

During the input phase, we explain the process and structure of the assembly, we introduce the hand signals, and frame the focus of the assembly, as well as what will happen with the outcomes from the 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 too)

## **Deliberation Phase**

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

## **Integration Phase**

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

## **Facilitator 2: Hand Signals**

(Demonstrate the hand signals used in assembly to allow people to use them during the introduction and input phase of the assembly.)

We use hand signals to facilitate a discussion in which all voices get heard, no one dominates and we don't speak over each other. We will outline the hand signals you will need to take part today. Don't worry if you can't remember them as they will be repeated later in the session.

## **HAND SIGNALS**

(As you verbally outline the hand signals, physically show them to ensure people fully understand them).

- **Make a point:** One index finger pointed upwards.
  - The facilitator will stack, but they can choose to stack out of order to ensure RADICAL INCLUSIVITY and ensure all voices are heard.
- **Agreement:** Wavy hands for agreement.

- This is to help note taker, who can record the level of agreement, and to make sure people are not interrupting others...remember it's all about ACTIVE LISTENING.
- **Clarification:** Create a c shape with one hand.
  - This is to ensure all are able to fully participate. It is useful if people do not understand anything, particularly important if unfamiliar terms and acronyms are used.
- **Direct point:** Two index fingers pointing upwards.
  - This is not for responding, this is just for extra added information that is directly relevant to what is being said – people must be careful not to misuse this to jump ahead in the queue!
- **Technical point:** Create a t-shape with your hands.
  - This is used for technical information such as breaks or timings.
- **Round up:** Create a circle with both hands.
  - Do this after 2 minutes to make sure that those who are more comfortable speaking don't go on and on...remember: RADICAL INCLUSIVITY.
- **Speak up:** Move your hands upwards with their palms facing upwards.
- **Temperature check:** Jiggle fingers at a level that corresponds with feelings i.e. upwards - support, horizontally - ambivalent, downwards - don't support. This can be used to quickly check the feelings of the group.

## FACILITATOR 1: Introduce the concept of a People's Assembly

### 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, Torridge 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. We welcome all people but not all behaviours."

We want to hear your voice, if you want to speak, no matter what. 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**

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 floor to anyone who wants to speak. Ask for a woman to speak 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 is timing and doing the 'round up' signal as necessary.\*
- \*After 15-30 minutes, move into the remainder of the PA...

## FACILITATOR 2: The Three Pillars

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. 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 expressing one's own.

In an assembly, the focus is on personal feelings and experiences. 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:**

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

For example, if you would like to engage people around the topic of buying local produce, you might ask:

- *'Should we start a Food Hub?'*

This question is very narrow, and really requires a yes or no, so it is unlikely to generate a lot of great ideas.

- *'How can we improve access to local produce?'*

This question is broader, still focused on local access, gives scope for creativity. 'What can we do to reduce food miles?' - Too broad, this could encompass all manner of different approaches and likely to lead to the conversation jumping from local to regional to national issues.



# Deliberation Phase

## FACILITATOR 2: How does a People's Assembly work?

You will discuss the PA question in breakout groups of 8-10, then feedback to the entire assembly.

Each group needs a facilitator and a note taker:

- It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that all voices are heard (radical inclusivity). To do this, allow two minutes per statement (maximum) and if people go over, give them the round up symbol.
- It is the role of the note taker to make notes on what is discussed, and to share their group's key points of discussion in the integration phase i.e. when all of the groups have returned to the assembly.
- When the note-taker is taking notes, they can do so in bullet points for ease of recording. Try to capture exactly what someone means, rather than adding any personal interpretations.

Use the hand signals to communicate in your groups and to ensure radical inclusivity. *(recap hand signals here)*

- **Make a point:** One index finger pointed upwards.
- **Agreement:** Wavy hands for agreement.
- **Clarification:** Create a c shape with one hand.
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- **Technical point:** Create a t-shape with your hands.
- **Round up:** Create a circle with both hands.
- **Speak up:** Move your hands upwards with their palms facing upwards.
- **Temperature check:** Jiggle fingers at a level that corresponds with feelings i.e. upwards - support, horizontally - ambivalent, downwards - don't support.

10 minutes before the end of your allocated time, the note-taker should summarise the group's notes, then use temperature checks to identify the points that have the most support or acceptance.

The group should then work together to reach agreement on the main points to feed back to the Assembly.

*Decide how you want the feedback to happen. For larger assemblies ensure each group has fewer points to feed back verbally.*

\*Then decide what you will do with this feedback. Will the main assembly note taker make note of the most popular points? Or will the note takers from each breakout group give written points to the assembly Facilitator/Notetaker?\_

*Potential integration structures - select the most appropriate:*

- *We would like the notetaker to share the top [insert number here] points with the whole assembly after we reunite as an assembly.*
- *Or if time is tight or the assembly is huge - We would like the notetake to share 1 sentence or 10 words to the whole assembly*
- *If there is no time for verbal delivery - We would like 3 key points delivered in writing*

*Ask for clarifications on the process and then restate the questions being discussed.*

GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

### **Discussion (25 mins or whatever your allocated time is)**

*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 (or however many you are asking for) which had the most support. This process is facilitated as well.
- Prepare the feedback for delivery by whichever method you stated at the start - Either for verbal delivery in the main group, added to the Harvest doc, or summarised into a short sentence etc]

## Integration/Output Phase

### FACILITATOR 1: Ending

- **Feedback (15 minutes)**
- Note-takers to deliver 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. Then explain what will happen to the results of the assembly, including any possible 'next steps' that people could take, or plans for further 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 meetings 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 1 - Dealing with Difficult Interactions

## **A collection of thoughts and ideas on how to approach difficult interactions and behaviours:**

- Stress that *“we welcome all people, but not all behaviours”*.
- Move in when people are interjecting, challenging or talking too much.
- Make it obvious that we need to have equal sharing and hear of others.
  1. *“The points you are making are really interesting and important but it is also important to hear from other people here.”*
  2. *“There is always a danger that the we only hear from the most confident voices - let's make sure that we also hear from the people who haven't spoken so far”*
- Thank people for their input and seek the positive intention of their behaviour (what are they seeking to achieve that is positive?)
- Remember, discussions can be won by people who make the most noise. Your job is to ensure all voices are heard.
- Explain the situation
  1. *“I am conscious of time and our agenda - what is the final point you want to make?”*  
*Radical inclusivity - we want time for everyone.*
- It's important for people to feel listened to without interrupting.
- You can offer to talk to them in more detail in a break or afterwards. If you need someone to behave differently it can be an expression of Radical Inclusion to connect with them in a break or afterwards to keep in relationship with them.
- Sometimes with someone who is very unconsciously in need of attention and can't be satisfied with a short interaction, avoiding eye contact may keep them quiet or let them know they have been talking for too long.
- If necessary, overtly clarify the objectives of the session again and what is needed to achieve those objectives.

# Reflecting on Your Community Assembly

You've had your first community assembly, well done! You're beginning an extraordinary journey with others in your community, finding ways to ensure all voices are heard and using the wisdom of the crowd to make decisions collectively.

With any luck you will have identified your next step(s), even if this is just to hold another assembly soon! Before you focus on the next steps, however, it is useful to put aside time for personal reflection and for a group debrief to reflect on how things went: What did you learn? What went well? What could be improved for next time?

Engaging in such reflective processes will allow you to gauge the needs and the feelings of your communities and brainstorm solutions to challenges going forward.

## Personal Reflection

It is often useful to reflect as an individual before coming together to debrief with others. Creating time for personal reflection will help you unpick your experiences and perceptions, so that you can share these with the group. Sometimes, if we go straight into a group debrief, we don't have time to get to the bottom of our own feelings and views.

A good framework for this individual reflection is to consider:

- Who?
- When?
- Where?
- What?
- Why?

These questions, though simple, can help you consider all aspects of your assembly and organise what you have learnt or can learn from. They don't need to be answered in any particular order, but for ease of reference we will go through them in the order listed:

## Who?

This question is about who participated. Firstly, think about who contributed at the assembly: Was there anyone who felt left out or who seemed unable to actively join in? It's important to understand those who were present, to identify who is the most enthusiastic, and who may need extra support.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Were there any voices that were heard more than others?
  1. If so, why was this the case?
  2. What impact did this have on the assembly dynamics?
  3. If necessary, what can be done to prevent this recurring in the future?
- Were there any people who seemed left out or unable to actively join in?
  1. If so, why was this the case?
  2. What impact did this have on the assembly dynamics?
  3. If necessary, what can be done to help them engage more in the future?

Secondly, focus on who came to your assembly. Was there anyone or were there any groups missing?

This is also an important consideration in terms of diversity. We are trying to reach everyone, build strong and resilient communities that serve the needs of everyone, especially those who are most vulnerable and marginalised under the current system. If these minorities are missing from assemblies, then that's a problem.

Consider who you intended to reach, who you might like to reach in future and how you could go about this more effectively. From these ideas you can analyse your channels, think if anything might need to be changed.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who was at your assembly?
  1. What groups do they belong to?
  2. Did you intend to reach out to them?
  3. How did you reach out to them / how did they hear about the assembly?
- Who was absent from your assembly?
  1. What groups do they belong to?
  2. Did you intend to reach out to them? If so, what went wrong?
  3. How can you reach out to them to invite them along in the future?

## When?

This question refers to the timing of your assembly, both in a practical sense – the time of day it was, the day of the week, any time-sensitive responses required – and in terms of where you and your group are in your journey.

Firstly, focus on the practical sense of when and think the impact that the timing had on attendance. If, for instance, the assembly was held late one evening, it might have excluded parents of young children. Equally, if it was held during the day, if it was held during the day on a weekday, it may have been inaccessible to people who are working.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- When was your assembly held?
  1. What impact would this day/timing have had on attendees?
  2. Who would this day/timing have catered for? Who would it have excluded?
  3. Does anything need to be taken into consideration when decided on the days/timings for future events?

Secondly, it is worth considering if there is anything time sensitive. Did you establish any next steps in the assembly which are urgent and need careful attention?

If relevant, ask yourself:

- What next steps were identified?
  1. When do they need to be done by?
  2. What will happen if they are not done?
  3. Who is accountable for completing these next steps?

Finally, think about your group and where you are in your journey. It is useful to think about the group relationships and foundations. For example, did everyone in the group have the necessary level of trust with one another? Is there anything that needs to be accomplished first?

It is vital that you spend time building strong connections before you think about mobilising to make change. This is not to say it's a linear, one-follows-the-other requirement but that they are intrinsically linked and demand equal attention. A team that trusts each other will work together more effectively, and will be able to overcome any challenges that appear in a constructive and collaborative way.

## Where?

This question can address both the location of your assembly and can help you identify where the most work is needed.

Firstly, consider the location of your assembly and think about accessibility and suitability of the location.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Where was your assembly held?
  1. Was the space accessible to everyone? If no, who was held back from accessing the space and why?
  2. If it was a physical location, what provision did the location have (i.e. working toilets, running water, working heating)? Was this enough?
  3. If it was online, what barriers to engagement did people face?
  4. What could have made the space better?

Secondly, consider where the work and energy might come from to help the community assembly process get to where it needs to or to where it can.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Where is work most needed?
  1. Where is the energy for the project coming from? What impact does this have?
  2. Where could energy come from? How might this help?
  3. Were there any exciting resources or skills being offered?
  4. Are there any people who can support the assembly process to help it get where it needs to be?

## What?

This question is simply about what happened. Hopefully you have kept notes, or maybe even have a recording of your assembly. If you have the notes, re-read them, if you have a video, watch it. Replay the event and really ruminate on how it went.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- How was the event?
  1. What went well?
  2. What would you change or include in the future?
  3. Were there any problems?
  4. What was the atmosphere like?
  5. If you had to sum up the event in one sentence, what would that sentence be?

## Why?

This question seeks to measure your success by thinking about why you decided to have the community assembly in the first place.

Perhaps you had a specific goal in mind that you wanted an outcome for, or maybe your intention was simply for every member of your community who attended to leave feeling heard and understood. Consider what your goal was, establish if it has been met and then you can consider what steps may have contributed to your relative success or failure.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why did you decide to have a community assembly?
  1. What was your goal?
  2. Did you achieve your goal? If so, how? If no, why not?
  3. Do you need to do anything else to help secure your community assembly's success?

## Group Reflection and Debrief

Once you've had time to think on your own, turn to your group to get other people's perspectives on the assembly and debrief together. Be sure to share your personal reflections with the group

and to listen to everyone else's feedback. The principle of a community assembly is that every participant has a chance to make their voice heard, every voice is valued and that people make decisions together, so make every effort to ensure that even the reflection and debrief process embodies this.

You can ask a lot of the same questions, using the who, where, when, what, why structure. Below are some extra questions and ideas you might also want to explore.

1. **Goals:**
  - What were your goals for the assembly?
  - Were they achieved?
2. **Logistics:**
  - Were there any problems encountered along the way?
3. **Problem solving:**
  - How would you/did you go about solving these problems?
4. **Funding:**
  - Are there monetary considerations that need to be addressed?
5. **Risk management:**
  - Were there any setbacks beyond your control? (i.e. sickness, internal conflicts)
  - What impact did they have?
  - Are there any steps that could be taken to mitigate these in future?
6. **Training:**
  - Do you feel those facilitating had adequate training for their positions?
  - Were participants sufficiently prepared for the process of deliberative democracy?
7. **Expectations:**
  - Was everything made clear from the outset?
  - Or did people end up disappointed?
  - What might be needed to establish more clarity?
8. **Information channels**
  - Was all necessary information readily available?
9. **Successes**
  - Celebrate your triumphs! What went well?
  - What can you congratulate yourself and each other for?
10. **Best practice**
  - How can you replicate these successes in the future?
  - What are your standards for behaviour and interactions?
11. **Registration**
  - How effective was your registration process?
12. **Tech**
  - Are there any technical considerations?
  - Who is best placed to deal with these?
13. **Idea generation**
  - Have a brainstorm, what would everyone like to see at future assemblies?
14. **Inclusion**
  - Did everyone feel sufficiently included?
  - Who would you like to see at future assemblies?



**15. Branding**

- Does everyone feel represented?
- Or is the message and culture antithetical to the beliefs of some involved?

**16. Communication channels**

- Were you able to reach everyone in a timely manner?

**17. Deliverables**

- A deliverable is something that is produced as a result of a project. So, in terms of your community assembly this could be a report, a document, a survey or any other 'building block' of your overall plan for your community.
  - Do you have any deliverables that you need to create?
  - Are there any deliverables you would like to aim towards?

**18. Content coordination**

- Was the process of planning and sharing the content convenient and effective?

**19. Setup**

- Was the assembly itself well organised?
- Was everything available that you needed?
- Did everyone involved in setup and planning have adequate support?

**20. Time management**

- Did you have enough time? If no, why not?

**21. Infrastructure** \*Any other considerations – what you needed but didn't have. You may wish to discuss accessibility concerns, for disabled people, young children or older people who may be less comfortable using technology.

- Was everyone able to access the space?
- What can be done in the future to boost accessibility?

**22. Agenda**

- Was everyone made aware of the intentions of the assembly in advance?
- Was the agenda clear and accessible?
- Were there any scheduling issues?

**23. Interactions**

- How far did you succeed in creating a space to foster useful and beneficial connections?

**24. Critical thinking**

- What did you learn?
- How could you better further the group's knowledge and ensure well-informed decisions are being taken?

**25. Workshops**

- Did you make use of any talks and training in the run up to your assembly?
- Are there any you missed which could have been useful?

**26. Engagement**

- How was everyone engaging with the questions/content?
- What could be done to encourage more meaningful discussions?

**27. Individual experiences**

- Are there any disparities in people's experiences of the assembly?
- It's useful to reflect on different demographics here.

**28. Emotional engagement**

- Did people feel emotionally engaged?

- Did the messaging resonate?
- What narratives were identified during sharing?

29. **Continuing education**

- Are there useful development opportunities, roles and responsibilities for those interested?

30. **Social media**

- Did you post about the assembly on social media?
- What could be done to encourage more online engagement?

31. **Recreational offerings**

- Is there a need for more fun, connection activities to facilitate more successful assemblies in future?

32. **Messaging and Communication**

- What channels are being used to maintain contact with everyone involved?

33. **Event layout**

- How was your meeting space set up?

34. **ROI**

- Return on investment – did the amount of time and effort you invested into getting this assembly together translate into a favourable result?
- Is the workload being shared fairly?

35. **Attendee interactions**

- How did everyone get on together?
- Were there any conflicts?

This is by no means an exhaustive list and you can decide in your own group how extensive your reflection is. The important thing is that you do think back on what has been accomplished and establish a culture of ongoing introspection and reflection, and you proactively engage with your findings to improve future community assemblies.