

# 5. Community Organising

Community organising is about finding ways to put your ideas into action. It is about learning from the work of other community organisers, learning about the tools that exist to help empower communities to take action, and learning about how to create lasting change, be this in the form of a food cooperative, a skill sharing platform or by getting involved with your local council.

- [Overview](#)
- [A Vision for a New Democracy in The UK](#)
- [Intro to Flatpack Democracy or How to Reclaim Your Council](#)
- [More Resources](#)
- [Community Organising for the Corona Crisis](#)
- [Online Learning Resources for Community Organising](#)
- [Useful Community Organisations and Initiatives](#)

# Overview

## Why community organising?

Community organising is what enables communities to put their ideas into action; it will enable you to shape your local community, and perhaps even the greater society, so that it responds to the needs and desires of the people. It is a way of organising and acting effectively, so that you have a say in how money is spent, can make the most of any grants available, and can even hold politicians to account. Organising effectively as a community and creating lasting change is incredibly empowering – it enables people to find and use their agency, to draw on their courage, and to understand that their views and voices matter.

If we can come together to organise COVID-19 mutual aid projects, why not food, land and housing cooperatives? The climate crisis is real and our communities have to learn to adapt to a world in flux. That will only happen if we learn to work together. This is the moment to do exactly that.

## Useful Links

- Imagination aphrodisiacs:
  1. Sundial: [The Imagination Sundial](#)
  2. Guide: [XR Guide to the Impossible](#)
- Ideas for a new world:
  1. Stories: [21 stories of Transition](#)
  2. Platform: [The Alternative](#)
- Building the New Economy: [Resource Library on starting a Cooperative](#)
- Reclaiming Your Local Council:
  1. Guide: [Transform Your Local Council](#)
  2. Podcast: [Peter Macfadyen, former mayor, renegade, legend of local politics](#)
- Take Direct Action:
  1. Reading list: [compiled by the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination](#)
  2. Manual: [Earth First! Direct Action Manual](#)

# A Vision for a New Democracy in The UK

Here's a vision for what could emerge from our decentralised community democracy building projects across the UK. But first, some quick bits on vision, its uses and abuses:

*"When activists mistake heaven for some goal at which they must arrive, rather than an idea to navigate Earth by, they burn themselves out, or they set up a totalitarian utopia in which others are burned in the flames. Don't mistake a lightbulb for the moon, and don't believe that the moon is useless unless we land on it."* ~ **Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark**

*"Vision without action is useless. But action without vision does not know where to go or why to go there"*

*"More than that, vision, when widely shared and firmly kept in sight, brings into being new systems"* ~ **Donella Meadows**

*"Perfection is a stick with which to beat the possible. "* ~ **Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark**

## Building our web

By connecting all of our different communities who are using local assemblies, we will be able to coordinate, communicate and engage in mutually beneficial collective decision making.

*"In the long term, a system of dual power would transform into what we call communalism or democratic confederalism: an allied network of interdependent communes or regions that work together in a directly democratic way.*

*On the local level, the neighbourhood assembly makes the decisions and decides the course of action. On a bigger level, these organisations band together in what is called a confederation: a body of recallable delegates with imperative mandates, directly accountable to their communities.*

*This body would allow communes to exchange resources, support each other, and make democratic decisions. Without this kind of networking, collaboration, and interdependence across borders, local movements are just that: local, isolated, and doomed to fail, again and again. But through international confederation, we can pose a real threat to global capitalism and the ruling class" - Symbiosis Research Collective (article)*

*"What, then, is confederalism? It is above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages,*

*towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities. The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. Their function is thus a purely administrative and practical one, not a policymaking one like the function of representatives in republican systems of government.” - Murray Bookchin, The Next Revolution: direct democracy and the promise of popular assemblies*

This is how we could build our power without needing to be cookie-cutter copies of one another.

## Connecting Neighbourhood Assemblies

How could assemblies connect? They would need a standard criteria for legitimacy, elected delegates and could connect over specific shared issues. E.g.:

*Criteria for legitimacy:*

- All reasonable effort made to invite everyone in an area.
- Regularly attended by over 150 local residents.
- PA process closely followed.

*Delegates:*

- Are elected by the assembly with precise mandates
- Are recallable by the assembly
- Are for administering the decisions of the assembly not setting the agenda.

*Different types of assemblies for different issues:*

- Assemblies can divide into themes:
  1. Health
  2. Education
  3. Etc
- Delegates from these smaller themed assemblies can then meet at higher levels

## Higher level councils

Higher level councils (district, county, etc.) could be reformed so that all councillors are delegates from “lower level” neighbourhood assemblies. This would allow them to coordinate and collaborate on matters that affect the whole region. They would make efforts to give as much power, resources and decision making to the bottom layer (the neighbourhood assemblies) as possible. See the image to the right explaining the Rojava model.

## Dual Power and local authorities

Dual Power is the idea that parallel systems of government and power are crucial for catalysing system change: without an alternative, we cannot withdraw our participation in the existing

system.

*“A revolutionary transfer of authority to popular organs of radical democracy requires the preexistence of such participatory institutions, not a naive faith that they will be conjured into being out of a general strike, mass retraction of public support, or insurrectionary upheaval.” - John Michael Colon et. al.*

### **Community, Democracy and Mutual Aid (essay)**

It is an open question whether our new democratic structure would best exist separate from the existing council system (the “dual power” method), or as a new way of managing it. Here are some scenarios for how local assemblies could interact with the local council:

- **Good:** the local assemblies input and shape a local council’s policy.
- **Better:** a parallel council of delegates from neighbourhood assemblies input directly into decision making, where they elected individuals are just conduits.
- **Best:** the council structure is changed so that it is only made up of recallable delegates from the local assembly.

As higher and higher levels of the council system are “reclaimed” by a popular democratic movement, this movement will gain influence, support from the people. This influence could be used to demand that power, decision-making and resources are devolved from the state to the locality: a re-localisation of politics and democracy.

## Creativity

One of our biggest threats is fulfilling the mainstream perception of more democracy as more boring, deadening meetings. If we want to build a democratic revolution we will have to draw on all of our resources of creativity, play and joy.

*“Revolutionary moments are carnivals in which the individual life celebrates its unification with a regenerated society,” wrote Situationist Raoul Vaneigem. The question, then, is not so much how to create the world as how to keep alive that moment of creation, how to realize that Coyote world in which creation never ends and people participate in the power of being creators, a world whose hopefulness lies in its unfinishedness, its openness to improvisation and participation.” - Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark.*

*“Every one of us who has experienced a meeting, or a seminar, or a conference, or a class which was exciting, enabling, or even transformatory knows exactly*

*what real democracy feels like. It feels like the moment when the meeting is as thrilling as a good party; or conversely, when the party seems as potentially meaningful and significant as a good meeting. Perhaps it feels like the moment when the distinction between a party and a meeting seems harder to sustain, or at least unimportant.” - Jeremy Gilbert*

**Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism**

We need a structure that allows maximum creativity and play, just the bare minimum to ensure accountability, inclusion, efficiency...

*“...political and social institutions should be judged at least partly in terms of their creativity, which is to say in terms of the extent to which they facilitate the expression of that creative potential which is implicit in any set of social relations. How far do schools enable collaborations between students and teachers to develop new and innovative forms of learning and knowledge? How far do clinics enable patients and doctors to find innovative ways of improving public health? How far do broadcasters and other cultural institutions enable genuinely new ways of thinking and feeling to emerge?*

*These would be the criteria for judging political institutions according to this logic: as opposed to the neoliberal managerialist demand that such institutions be judged in terms of their ability to meet a predetermined set of ‘targets’, or the conservative communitarian demand that they enable given communities merely to remain exactly what they already are, these democratic criteria would ask how far they enable any given collectivity to explore its own potential.”*

**- Jeremy Gilbert Common Ground: Democracy and Collectivity in an Age of Individualism**

# Intro to Flatpack Democracy or How to Reclaim Your Council

## Intro

Around the UK, something beautiful is happening: a radically new way of doing local politics is emerging. **Communities are reclaiming their councils** from the deadlock of party politics and using them to implement the projects and policies that they want to see. They do this by running as **independent councillors who seek only to represent the views and wishes of the community, and to put them into effect through the council.**

What's more, this is really not hard to do: usually **very few people vote in council elections** making them readily winnable for independents, with as little as a few months of local campaigning - and most councils don't even have enough people to stand for there to be elections at all!

Around 20 towns have realised this and are now fully run by groups of independents working together; at least another 100 are part of the way there. Inspiring examples include Frome, Buckfastleigh, Newham, Dagenham, and Portishead. In Bideford, who have reclaimed their council with the Torridge Common Ground project, it takes only 200 votes to get into the council!

Your town could be next! Use the resources in this document to learn all you need to attempt an independent councillors campaign.

## Resources

Before you begin engaging with the following content, we recommend having a notebook or journal to note down your ideas and reflections. Whilst many of the activities are independent, it is also worth discussing the content and your responses with others, when possible.

### 1. Learning from Others (Flatpack Democracy Stories & Case Studies)

Get inspired by these pioneers from around the country.

- Videos:

1. [Flatpack Democracy in a Nutshell](#)
2. [Flatpack Democracy: the New English Political Revolt](#)

### 3. How to set up an Independent Town Council

- BBC Radio show: [The Spark - Flatpack Democracy](#). *Flatpack pioneer Peter Macfadyen of Frome describes how he and a group of independents took over the local council - with historic results.*
- [Newham](#) (London Borough)
- [Torridge Common Ground](#)
- [Be Buckfastleigh](#)
- [Independents for Frome](#)
- [Portishead Independents](#)
- [Monmouth](#)
- [Ideal Bradford](#)
- Interviews with Independents from around the country [here](#).
- Peter Macfadyen's [Flatpack Democracy blog](#).
- [Queen's Park Community Council](#) (the first in London)

Could your hometown be next? Of course! Well then, it's time to get organising...

## 2. Resources for Running your Own Council Campaign

- First things first. The UK council system is hella confusing. [This page](#) breaks down the different types of council. It might help to read this [Quick Guide to Local Government](#). Extremely useful guide for understanding the UK council system!
- [Guide to Parish and Community Council Elections](#) in England and Wales (from the Electoral Commission).
- **Facebook Group:** [Flatpack Democracy Group](#). This is a group for discussion with people wanting to stand as Independents in local elections in the UK..... using the direction and ethos of 'Flatpack Democracy' (as set out in the book of the same name).
- **Book:** [Flatpack Democracy](#). An immensely practical guide on how to reclaim your council, written by Peter Macfadyen of [Independents for Frome](#), the pioneering group of regular people who reclaimed their council and transformed the town of Frome.
- See the [Local Governments Association](#) for advice on [becoming an independent councillor](#).

- A wealth of practical resources around UK councils and being a councillor can be found at [NALC](#) (National Association of Local Councils).
- [This guide](#) provides basic information about engaging with UK councils.
- **Book:** [Flatpack Democracy 2.0](#) - Power Tools for Reclaiming Local Politics
- It might be the case that you actually don't have a local parish or community council. If so, [you can create one!](#) "Local councils are the first tier of government – they're at the very heart of the community, giving neighbourhoods a voice and helping people feel more involved in the decisions that affect them. They take localism to the next level by giving people a democratic voice that goes beyond just voting in elections. And yet, only a third of the population is covered by one." [See what happened in Queen's Park, London.](#)
- Resources on "Big Organising" or "Distributed Organising".
  1. This is the grassroots organising model used by the Bernie Sanders campaign which mobilised X volunteers to make X phone calls, emails, and X . You can apply the models and practices to your council campaigns for big results!
  2. [A wealth of incredible practical guides](#) from Blueprints for Change, particularly the [Distributed Organising Guide](#).
  3. **Article:** [Six building blocks of distributed organising](#).
- [Presentation](#) from a Surrey local group planning a 2021 campaign. [Presentation](#) from the local Extinction Rebellion group discussing a campaign. Feel free to copy / edit / adapt these to your purposes.
- This document is connected to the **Trust the People Community Transformers Programme** as a resource for the **Community Organising** module. It's a crowdsourced programme of free workshops designed to help regular people become active and confident community organisers. All are invited to join a nationwide peer support network.
- **Article:** [How to Organise a Community](#)  
Practical guidance on community organising from scratch.
- **Guide:** [How to Create a Volunteer Program](#)
- **Article:** [Building a Citizens' Action Network](#) Pioneered by the Alternative UK, Citizens' Action Networks are a way for communities to go beyond local organising and create a collaborative network of local movements, organisations and key players.

- **Guide:** [How Reclaim Empty Buildings for Community Projects - the Climate](#)

**Emergency Centre Model** Use this guide to learn how to build a self-funding Climate Emergency / Community Project Centre, which can bring together diverse groups and individuals to build solutions, relationships and resilience in the face of the Climate and Ecological Emergency. Read an [overview of the CEC project here](#).

## First Steps

- Check if you have parish elections this year on **your council's website**. [This page](#) allows you to enter your postcode to check for upcoming elections.
- Find out what other elections are in your area this year - there might district and county seats up for grabs. Get onto the slack channel to find your regional group.
- Research what the council is doing now and how much difference an independent takeback would make (probably a lot!).
- You can register to stand as **individual councillor** as late as early April. A group of you may do this together, and use the text on the election ballot to name your local independents group, e.g. "Independents for Yourtown". [Government advice](#)
- An even more effective route is to **register your community group as a minor political party** ([application form here](#)). There is a cost of £150.
- The next step is launching a campaign so you actually win the election. Decide a catchy, locally focussed name (like *Be Buckfastleigh*, *Independents for Frome*, or *TorrIDGE Common Ground*, *We Stand for Todmorden*). See resources above, particularly the Flatpack Democracy book.

## Some More Info

### 1. How do you scrutinise your council to tell whether it is worth launching an independent (flatpack democracy) campaign?

The view of the flatpack democracy community is that **if councillors don't commit to represent the will of the entire community they are not good enough**.

About the independents that already claim to represent the will of the people, you can use the following question to assess them: **are they running successful participatory/consultation processes?** By successful, we mean that they have been able to reach the whole community. This is the only way to know the will of the local community - otherwise they are merely "representing" the people and it puts them in the same category as the good party councillors.

The only way for councillors to do it right is by knowing the will of the community, full stop. If they haven't implemented processes to find it out or are not up for implementing them then there are enough reasons for launching an independent campaign. Even if you have great councillors, are they using genuinely inclusive democracy to enact the will of the local people? Probably not! If you already have good independent councillors, you may offer well-facilitated community assemblies to bring them into closer contact with their constituents and XR's demands in new ways. These are the discussions you need to have in deciding whether to engage, and if so, to what extent?

**The most important thing is that councillors are truly representative and prioritise participation and deliberation, responding to the will of their communities through democratic sessions.** This is only true for a tiny minority of councillors - and we are hoping to change that.

You may actually find that your main town does not have an election, but outlying villages or nearby communities do (they happen at different times all over the country).

Even if you don't win, running as independents can catalyse councils to get their act together.

## 2. This sounds great, but what can I do if my council doesn't have elections?

- If your council has the wrong number of councillors, you can call an election with as few as 10 signatures.
- Forming a town or parish council if you don't have one.
- Build local participatory democracy and community organising structures anyway. We need these to be in place, whether or not they work with What's more: this is long-term work and the further in advance you can prepare for council elections, the better. Even if they're two years away, laying the groundwork now will stand you in good stead later.
- Pressure and petition your local council to respond to, and to utilise participatory democratic processes.

## 3. The defining features of Flatpack Democracy are:

- A group of individuals working together
- An ethos setting out how they work together
- A focus on local needs and action
- Informality and accessibility
- Participatory methodologies

Enlarging briefly on each of these:

### **A group of individuals working together**

Preferably with as wide a range of ages, skills & experiences; gender and backgrounds. They may be members of political parties, but this is part of their experience, not what defines them or their decisions. An ethos setting out how they work together

All the groups that are really making a difference have some form of 'Ways of Working'. These include things like listening, empathy, a willingness to change position etc. They tend to cover both the culture of the group and the limits to what they will and will not accept.

### **A focus on local needs and action**

The underlying ethos is that the council should facilitate action and ideas coming from the community.... Their job is to say 'yes' not 'no' and to develop 'our council' not 'the council'. The aim is to create a council which is one body amongst many in a community, with a flat hierarchy and recognition of the value of all roles and inputs.

### **Informality and accessibility**

Ruthless removal of layers of formality and rules is a core element. Nothing should survive from the past unless there is a clear and good reason for it to do so. Anyone and everyone should feel welcomed and valued.

### **Participatory methodologies**

At the core of decision making must be genuine participatory engagements whereby the political literacy of the community is constantly developed and they are enabled to take back control.

### **Representative decision making**

A key skill of Flatpackery is recognising when a group of well informed people needs to make a decision. The whole community does not need, or want to be, involved in every decision.

### **Flatpackery is not:**

- A methodology that works well in higher levels of government, especially with 'First Past the Post'.
- Rigid. It's a constantly evolving set of experiences, to adjust and use differently as fits the community.

# More Resources

- For an immensely practical guide on how to reclaim your council, read [Flatpack Democracy](#), written by Peter Macfadyen of [Independents for Frome](#), the pioneering group of regular people who reclaimed their council and transformed the town of Frome.
- Join the [Flatpack Democracy UK Facebook group](#) open to anyone interested in attempting an independent council campaign.
- See the [Local Governments Association](#) for advice on [becoming an independent councillor](#).
- [This guide](#) provides basic information about engaging with UK councils.
- Here's a [google slides presentation](#) sketching out a local flatpack strategy (from South-East England); you are welcome to copy and adapt it to your region.

# Community Organising for the Corona Crisis

## How to start cooperatives and mutual aid projects

*Please share widely.*

[Short link for this doc.](#)

*In times of crisis, communities can come together to support one another. This is a list of practical ideas and resources to help you do that by forming cooperatives and mutual aid projects.*

*If you'd like support in doing this work, join our regular zoom meetings:*

## **C19 Community Response and Mutual Aid: Reflect, Learn and Support**

Regular meetings to share our experiences, ideas and questions on how we are supporting and organising in our wider communities in this time of crisis. This session is open to anyone involved in corona mutual aid work. They are run by facilitators from the Here Comes Everyone local democracy alliance.

**Public health reminder: “Prioritise safety:** Community care is about preventing the spread of Covid-19 and providing support for the most vulnerable. **Before engaging in a mutual aid project, please familiarise yourself with [Queercare’s guidelines](#) on how to support others without spreading the infection.** Those who are self isolating can get involved in online or phone based organising.” (lovingly copied from <https://covidmutualaid.org/> )

## Communications

The first step to getting organised as a community is **setting up communication channels**. This could be a Facebook, Whatsapp or Telegram group.

A [COVID-19 Mutual Aid group](#) may already exist in your area (UK list [here](#), USA [here](#)). Advice [here](#) on setting one up yourself. Advice on setting up online meetings [here](#).

A good place to get started is the **Community Organising Unofficial Guide** [here](#). Take the lead - [become a street champion!](#)

You might distribute mutual aid leaflets ([template here](#)) or notes locally. They could include a written URL link to a **weekly community zoom meeting**. This meeting can be used to connect the community, listen to one another's needs, and establish how you might organise to support one another. **Facilitation** is a simple but powerful way to have these meetings in a way that is inclusive, efficient and democratic; where certain views don't dominate and everyone gets a turn to speak.

**Find out if there are existing cooperatives** in your area, reach out and get involved. Some more information, inspiration and support can be found [here](#).

## Food cooperatives

**Shopping coops.** Many in self-isolation are unable to do their own shopping. Communities need to systematically find out who needs their shopping done, when, and who's going to do it. A shared spreadsheet might help you organise.

**Food waste coops.** Head round to food businesses in your area and ask staff if they are throwing food away. In a time of empty shelves, this is especially unacceptable. Request that you can save this food. Find a way to redistribute the food so that it will get eaten - take it home yourself, cook a big meal and share it round if there's lots; offer it to a homeless shelter.

**Food banks and food sharing coops.** Not everybody can afford to stockpile food and household goods; many people will be facing empty shelves at home. We can support one another through this.

We can share food *directly*:

- People with excess food can notify the community, as can people who are running low. When your neighbour runs out of pasta, but you have a full cupboard, why not head round and share it? They might just do the same for you, later down the road.

Or via *food banks*:

- Find out if there is a [food bank near you](#). They will very likely be struggling with both volunteers and donations - your support could really make a difference. If there isn't, this is a perfect time to [set one up!](#)

Or *digitally*, using foodsharing apps like [OLIO](#) (corona guidelines on main page) and [TooGoodToGo](#).

**Community kitchens.** Cooking and delivering meals for the community.

**Community Gardening and Veg Planting.** We're feeling the strain on our food system - what better time to get outside and plant some veg? If you'd like to plant veg on your land, why not shout out to your community to help? Or tell your community that you'd love to get outside and planting, and would be happy to come round and help in somebody else's garden?

You could reach out to your council and request they provide more land for community food growing. Many self-isolated elderly people will have allotments that they now cannot tend. It's worth asking around to find out who this is, and offering to maintain their veg patch - perhaps in return for some sweet summer carrots!

**Seed Swaps** are as simple as exchanging seeds so that everyone gets a good spread of different vegetables to grow!

## Funding

**Crowdfunding** allows communities to come together to fund projects, and to invite donations from all around the world.

## Exercise and Health

**Prescription collecting.** People in self-isolation can't access the medications they need, and the community can support by purchasing and delivering it to them. You can ask in your mutual aid leaflets, whatsapp or facebook groups if anybody needs help with this. You can also go directly to your nearest pharmacy and ask if there are any prescriptions that need delivering to self-isolated people.

**Exercise meetups.** Self-isolation doesn't mean you need to be immobile. It's a great chance to get fit! Get outside for a run or bike ride. You could do this together (keeping a safe distance). If you want to stay inside, you could do a zoom call.

**Group Meditation.** It's important that we're staying calm, grounded and present in these trying times. Why not set up a daily meditation call and practice together? Someone in the group might have confidence and/or experience to run a meditation; otherwise you could listen to a guided session together. It might be nice to share how you're feeling as the session closes.

## Resource sharing cooperatives

**Sharing coops.** Members of the community post when they have either a **need** or **resource**. And that could be books, DVDs, tools, bikes, electronics... whatever it is, communities can get much better at sharing. Particularly helpful when the shops are closed!

**Skill sharing.** Many of us have skills to offer - foreign languages, playing instruments, knitting, yoga, meditation... whatever it is, we can come together to teach one another how to do enjoyable and beautiful things. In a time of self-isolation, you might do this via zoom calls.

**Book clubs / reading groups and community education projects.** You could set up a weekly online call to share views, learnings and feelings about a particular book or article!

**Online platforms.** Freecycle, craigslist, gumtree, and facebook marketplace are all great websites for rapid local resource sharing.

**Free shops.** Leave items outside on a table with a “Free - Take Me!” sign. Be sure to disinfect items beforehand!

**Home manufacturing.** Why not try upcycling your trash into useful items? Or perhaps someone in your community has a 3D printer. When someone needs a basic item - a bottle opener, a keyring, a child’s toy - why not print it?

**Energy cooperatives.**

## Volunteering

**Homeless charities.** The homeless are particularly vulnerable in times of pandemic and food crisis. The best way to help them is to volunteer and support existing homeless charities. Google ‘homeless shelters in my area’ or go via national charities such as [Crisis](#).

**Volunteering with the NHS.** The NHS is approaching breaking point. Volunteer [here](#).

## Money and Labour

**Timebanking Schemes /Local exchange trading systems** are systems for community exchange and/or volunteering. Timebanking measures trades with hours, LETS are more flexible. Neighbours do things like lawnmowing, shopping, rideshare, babysitting, decorating. You could learn/teach skills like cooking, languages or playing a musical instrument. You can set one up with a [simple shared spreadsheet](#).

Free online platforms like [this](#) can be requested [here](#).

Some more advice [here](#).

**Income and Local Businesses.** Are there any cooperative business plans that would respond to the needs of your community in this time? This is a perfect time to come together to [start a worker’s coop](#).

**Business networks.** We are facing recession which means a shortage of money & jobs. If a group can still make and consume useful stuff, they don’t need money but can do multilateral exchange (barter). Free business barter platforms from <http://opencredit.network>

Starting a local currency provides another way to detach local trade from the global financial system. More info [here](#).

### **Housing Cooperatives.**

More at the [Mutual Aid Economy section](#) of the [CoronavirusTechHandbook](#)

## Emotional Support and Social Connection

**Active Listening and Authentic Relating.** Set up a regular (daily?) zoom call for your community to check-in with their thoughts, feelings, ideas and emotions. One person speaks at a time; everyone gets as long as they like without anyone else commenting, interrupting or replying. Everyone else listens. Once you've been around everyone, you can do another round or transition to general discussion.

**Outdoor walks and gatherings.** We can still come together at a safe distance outside. Why not organise a walk through your local park or nature area, to get everyone outside together? In order to talk, you could gather in a wide-spaced circle, and do a go-around (each person takes their turn to speak) of how everyone is doing in this unusual.

## Land and Regeneration

**Volunteer** at your nearest ecovillage or community farm.

<https://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk>

**Planting trees, flowers and seeds.** Our lands are in desperate need of regeneration. We can come together to

**Cleaning up.** Why not get together to clean your local parks, forests, fields of litter and trash?

## Working with your Council

**Contact your council to ask what they are doing to support local mutual aid efforts.** If you know about local mutual aid projects, tell your council what's happening so they can consider supporting it. Councils have resources (like money!) that can be mobilised to support communities through this crisis - check out the example of Newmarket, UK, [here](#).

**Local procurement.** Pressuring your council to supporting local businesses and cooperatives in place of multinational corporations. Known as the '[Preston model](#)'.

[FixMyStreet.com](#). Sends hyper-local problems and issues directly to your council.

**Mapping those in need.** See methods [here](#).

**Participation and consultation.** You might suggest/request that your council consult their communities on their needs via zoom meetings. It's also a chance to push for online community engagement and participation tools. This might involve digital voting, polling, surveys, deliberation around council decisions. [Decidim.org](https://decidim.org) is an example platform.

## Community Democracy

Corona Mutual Aid groups are popping up all over the country. Many are governed in a hierarchical and exclusive way. They are not seeking to actively empower, engage and listen to every single member of the community who gets involved. It doesn't have to be this way! We can transform these groups - and our communities by bringing **facilitated meetings, regenerative culture practices (such as check-ins and active listening), decentralised organising (working groups, roles), digital working (zoom calls) and democratic sessions (people's assemblies).**

## Networking with other cooperatives

**Midcounties, the largest regional co-operative in the UK, has a new community strategy in place with 20 regional community groups providing support and bringing colleagues and members together to identify relevant opportunities in their communities, and collectively taking action to make a difference.**

So far 9,000 colleague-volunteering hours have been completed and over 1,000 young people have engaged in activities ranging from **Fairtrade** workshops to learning about employability skills. Members, colleagues and customers have donated over 24,000 products to local food banks, providing meals for over 450 families. Some 40 members are currently involved in supporting regional community projects, ranging from input on local Steering Groups to community events.

## Arts, Culture and Entertainment

**Community publications.** You could launch a community newspaper / gazette / magazine, which anyone can contribute to. A great way to share, stay connected and entertained for people in self-isolation. This could have a specific focus, for example by bringing together everyone in the area who writes prose and poetry into a community literary publication. Get creative!

**Zoom choirs.** Part-time jazz and blues singer Suzanne Noble has formed a Facebook group for musicians whose gigs have been cancelled, and **Corona Concerts** gained more than 500 members in its first day.

**Participatory art.**

## Digital

[Coronatechhandbook.com](https://coronatechhandbook.com) is an incredible, internationally crowdsourced bank of resources.

[Nextdoor](#) is an app purpose built for communities.

**Digital skill sharing.** Perhaps someone in your community needs help setting up a website, marketplace, or even just a social media account? If you have the skills, you can help!

## Direct Action

**Rent strikes.** [Article about rent strikes](#)

**Adapting your actions** to public health in crises.

## Campaigning at the National Level.

**Universal Basic Income** campaigns have been launched to support financially vulnerable businesses and individuals in these times of crisis.

**Mutual Aid Training.** OrganizingTogether is a development collective of technical experts in organizational management. We have created a living library of mutual aid. You can also request your own space to train your staff, volunteers, and members just email

[charla.burnett@otconsultancy.org](mailto:charla.burnett@otconsultancy.org)

[Living Library of Mutual Aid](#)

# Online Learning Resources for Community Organising

There are countless amazing organisations doing community organising work, providing imaginative ideas and invaluable resources on how to start community organising.

This is just a snapshot of some you may find useful, but do talk to your regional Gardener too, who will have some local knowledge of supportive organisations. Please bear in mind that this list is not comprehensive and is not regularly updated. It is just a starting point for ideas and assistance :)

## Act, Build, Change

- Act Build Change is an **online learning community** for change makers. They provide **training** for people interested in community organising.
- Use their online training programme, **Essential Community Organising** to learn the basics of community organising, including how to **build effective teams** and develop **leadership skills**.

## The Alternative UK

- The Alternative UK is a political platform based in the United Kingdom. Through curation, editorial, public events, commissioning and research, they aim to **transform the language and practice of politics** on these islands.
- They promote the creation of **Citizens' Action Networks**, which are a way for communities to go beyond local organising and create a collaborative network of local movements and organisations.
- Read the Alternative UK's guide on **Building a Citizens' Action Network here**.

## Beautiful Trouble

- Beautiful Trouble is a book, web toolbox and **international network of artist-activist trainers** whose mission is to make grassroots movements more creative and more effective.
- Check out their **Direct Action Tactics list** for advice and ideas on how to create an action to instigate change in your community.

## Blueprints for Change

- The grassroots organising model used by the Bernie Sanders campaign, which mobilised 100,000s of volunteers to make 75 million phone calls, send 8 million text messages, and hold 100,000 public meetings.
- Apply their models and practices within your community to radically upscale your community organising efforts!
- See the wealth of **incredible practical guides** [here](#).
- If you have **limited time**, focus on the **[Distributed Organising Guide]** (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yO-cDdNDvGzNRMzbnfrDVkzn6OXyXFCuFefzj7milOc/edit>).
- Learn more about distributed organising by reading this article: [Six building blocks of distributed organising](#).

## The Change Agency

- The Change Agency Education and Training Institute is an independent social movement initiative based in Australia that provides resources to support effective community action. Check out their community organising resources [here](#).

## The Commons: Social Change Library

- The Commons online library is a space for education and learning. Their collections include articles, manuals, training materials and practical guides. Their resources **inform and equip you to influence public policy and engage in political structures**.
- They gather the best campaigning and organising resources from Australia and around the world.
- Unsure of where to start? Why not check out the Loomio co-founder, Richard Bartlett's [Resources for Decentralized Organising](#).

## Community Organisers.org.uk

- Community Organisers is a national charity, and the **membership body and training organisation for community organising in England**. It is led by its members and is inspiring thousands of people to get involved in community organising practice to join the growing movement of people up and down the country coming together. It supports people in taking action – whether this is setting up a new community-led housing project, lobbying for better public transport, challenging cuts to health services, or establishing **community-owned enterprises**.
- Check out some of their resources for community organising [here](#).

## Get Fully Funded

- Get fully funded is an organisation with over fifteen years experience in fundraising. It shares its expertise on raising funds through a range of resources, services and programs.
- Check out their guide on [How to Create a Volunteer Program](#)

## Global Freedom Movement

- The Global Freedom Movement shares ideas, tips and resources on **how to change the world through non-violent, democratic engagement**.
- See their post for practical guidance on How to Organise a Community [here](#).

## Self-Organising Systems Open Learning Series

- An open learning series from Extinction Rebellion's Self-Organising Systems Working Group teaches you all you need to know about self-organising.
- Find out how self-organising practices can help you run a community organising movement, so that you have all bases covered and so that your project can achieve success.

## Transition Network

- Transition is a movement that has been growing since 2005. It is about communities stepping up to address the big challenges they face by starting local. By coming together, they are able to crowd-source solutions. They seek to nurture a caring culture, one focused on supporting each other, both as groups or as wider communities.
- Read their [Essential Guide for doing Transition](#) to understand everything you need to know to start Transition in your community.

Please note: If you have any questions about organising alongside umbrella, support organisations in your community, drop a line to **[XRGardeners@gmail.com](mailto:XRGardeners@gmail.com)**

# Useful Community Organisations and Initiatives

Use this resource library to learn about the different kinds of community centred organisations and initiatives which are active in the UK. Many of the organisations listed here are available to reach out to for assistance, expertise or inspiration.

## Business

Different business organisations that can assist you with social enterprises or businesses with a community focus.

- **Social Enterprise UK:** We are the national body for social enterprise – business with a social or environmental mission.

## Energy

Different community led initiatives concerning energy and renewable energy.

- **Ovesco** is a community group run by local volunteers for the local community in East Sussex. We create community owned renewable energy projects so our local community can become zero carbon.
- **South East London Community Energy (SELCE)** is a not-for-profit social enterprise. It was formed by residents of Greenwich and Lewisham who want to play an active role in shaping the energy future of South East London. Taking action on climate change and fuel poverty lies at the heart of our business model.

## Finance & Funding

Different kinds of finance initiatives and funding sources available for community projects.

- **Co-operative and Community Finance:** Industrial Common Ownership Finance Ltd (ICOF) was set up in 1973 and we have since created a number of related funds, all of which are democratically owned and controlled by the members. We provide sympathetic loan finance to help people take control of their economic lives and create social benefit. We exclusively serve the co-operative and social enterprise sector, and for over 45 years we have supported hundreds of businesses ranging from small community-run enterprises

to large award-winning organisations.

- **Triodos:** We finance progressive entrepreneurs and influence the banking sector to become more transparent, diverse and sustainable. Our financial and banking services are for savers, investors and organisations who want to change the world for the better. Our customers are already playing their part in our positive movement, making us one of the world's most sustainable banks.
- **Ecology Building Society:** We're dedicated to building a greener society by providing mortgages for properties and projects that respect the environment and support sustainable communities, funded through our range of simple, transparent savings accounts.

## Food

Different community led initiatives for growing food, sharing food and distributing food.

- **Co-op (supermarket) Food Share:** None of us can afford to throw away good food. That's why our stores give products that are going out of date to local community groups at the end of each day to prevent food waste, so far we've given away over 3m meals and counting. If you're a not-for-profit group and could use this food then apply to be a partner with your local Co-op now.
- **Fareshares (London):** Fareshares is a non-profit-making community project that stocks simple unadulterated food (often called wholefoods) and related products. It was set up in 1988 by local people to provide good food for the community at affordable prices in the belief that decent food is a basic necessity for health, regardless of means.
- **Olio** connects neighbours with each other and with local businesses so surplus food can be shared, not thrown away. This could be food nearing its sell-by date in local stores, spare home-grown vegetables, bread from your baker, or the groceries in your fridge when you go away. For your convenience, OLIO can also be used for non-food household items too. The app is free and easy to use.
- **Sustain:** Building a network of food co-ops, buying groups and other community food enterprises across the UK; helping new groups get off the ground and existing ones to thrive.
- **The Trussell Trust** supports a nationwide network of food banks and together they provide emergency food and support to people locked in poverty, and campaign for change to end the need for food banks in the UK. To find a local food bank near you, see [here](#).  
To set one up, see

[here.](#)

## Housing

Different support networks for community housing projects and for advice on starting your own.

- **Community Led Homes:** Community led housing is a growing movement of normal people taking action and managing housing projects that build the decent and affordable homes that the country so desperately needs.
- **Community Led Housing London:** We are here to help communities take a leading and lasting role in developing and managing their homes. We work with groups at an early stage, offering advice, mentoring and funding. We also work with boroughs, landowners, and funders to create the right environment for the sector to thrive.
- **Co-op Homes:** Since being founded in 1986, Co-op homes has built up an extensive knowledge of the needs and aspirations of housing co-ops since. They are keen to help co-op members retain sovereignty and control of their own housing, so they work with them to tailor packages to their individual requirements – whether this be fully managed or digital only.
- **Radical Routes** is a network of radical co-ops whose members are committed to working for positive social change. The network is made up mainly of housing co-ops of various sizes (none with more than 17 members), a few workers co-ops and a couple of social centres.
- **The Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS)** is a members-led Community Land Trust based in South London, founded in 2009 with the aim of creating sustainable community-led neighbourhoods and truly affordable homes right across London.
- **Sanford Housing Co-operative:** Sanford is the oldest purpose-built housing co-op in the UK. Founded in 1973, there are around 125 tenant-members living in 14 houses and a block of flats. We are proud of Sanford's unique sense of community. [Find out more](#) about how to become a member of Sanford.
- **Co-operatives UK / Housing:** As businesses owned and run by their members, co-operatives offer a solution to the growing sense of powerlessness people feel over business and the economy, giving them control of the businesses they are closest to - whether they shop at them, work at them or supply them. People of all kinds benefit through membership of their co-operative. Farmers are strengthening their position in competitive and global markets. Employees are having a say in how their organisations are run. Customers are influencing the businesses they use. Local residents are saving

vital services.

## Networks

Different community led networks operating around the UK that you can become a part of.

- **Community Organisers** is a national charity, and the membership body and training organisation for community organising in England. We are led by our members and are inspiring thousands of people to get involved in community organising practice to join the growing movement of people up and down the country coming together; taking action – whether setting up a new community-led housing project, lobbying for better public transport, challenging cuts to health services, or establishing community-owned enterprises – people who are transforming their neighbourhoods for good.
- **Co-operatives UK:** The network for Britain's thousands of co-operative businesses, Co-operatives UK works to promote, develop and unite member-owned business worth £36 billion to the British economy
- **Co-operatives London:** We want to build the biggest possible co-operative economy we can. We want more co-operatives, employing more people, selling more things to more people. If we can get as many co-operatives in the city talking with each other, and talking with people who are supportive of co-operatives, we can help generate business for co-operatives.
- **Transition Network** is a movement that has been growing since 2005. It is about communities stepping up to address the big challenges they face by starting local. By coming together, they are able to crowd-source solutions. They seek to nurture a caring culture, one focused on supporting each other, both as groups or as wider communities.

### **Below are examples of Transition towns:**

1. **Brixton Transition Town** Transition Town Brixton is a community interest company with six directors – a limited liability company with a definite mission to benefit the community. We have an evolving strategy, committed to supporting the projects generated by the energy and vision of our active members.
2. **Transition Kentish Town** Part of a movement of communities coming together to reimagine and rebuild our world, focused around these simple core principles: Our Environment / Sustainability / Community / Food Waste / Energy / Growing