

# Engaging Diverse Communities

## SOLIDARITY GUIDELINES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## QUALITIES OF GOOD SOLIDARITY

### 1. Humility

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **4. Collective Liberation**

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

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

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

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

Not just organisational connection between the 'leaders' and a transactional arrangement; fostering empathy, compassion and a sense of service to others in a personal and organisational level are important to open up trust and loyalty.

## TEN PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

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

- Understand XR's failings in the past, and why its reputation is damaged, and why other groups don't trust us, and how defensiveness doesn't rebuild any trust. For example, frequent XR messaging about a climate Armageddon that will happen in the future effectively rolled back the concerted efforts of many groups over decades to get wider recognition among environmental organisations that climate change is actually happening now (and predominantly to the Global South). Other examples of previous XR messaging that intended to resonate with anti-migrant sentiments and nationalism has actively contributed towards the abuse and attacks on people in our society who are already on the frontline of the climate crisis (for example, many BME people, migrants groups), forever alienating them from Extinction Rebellion. The focus on arrest was also given heavy attention as a strategy which did not provide room for marginalised people, and showed a lack of recognition that the police are dangerous to marginalised peoples. The police are an institution that murder, they ruin peoples' lives (especially those of migrants who can be deported for being at a protest) and while they are in uniform they will be dutiful in shutting down our protests.
- Understand and argue persuasively the case for intersections between climate and other issues. Racism is one of the main reasons people don't care about climate change - because it mainly hits people of colour in the Global South. The system we fight as environmentalists involves extraction, limitless profit, unregulated markets, extreme inequality, brutal class and international division, unchecked corporate power and fatal exploitation. This is the system that drives climate change, and it is the system that divides its victims from each other. The way our climate and nature is being destroyed is simply another way our political and economic system rears its head, whilst modern-day colonialism, poverty, war, and oppression are other ways. Solidarity is a way of building strong relationships of unity, and unity scares those who want to protect the way things are.
- Understand what parts of XR culture can be alienating to other groups. It's important to remember that being overly-spiritual can be alienating. Being nice or being spiritual is not the secret to worldwide social, cultural or political renewal. The bonds of solidarity, directed at those truly responsible for the crisis, boldly aiming for a true system break, and backed up by reliable action and practice, are what will get us to where we want to be. Focussing on nature and the environment too much can be alienating elsewhere (for example, if a community is facing the direct onslaughts of a brutal police force such as black people in the west, or if a community is facing total eradication or forced relocation such as the people of Palestine, Kurdistan or West Papua, then they have other existential crises to be focussing on). The belief that climate change is the biggest issue, rather than part of a wider issue, is too simple and binary. Use of XR-specific terms that describe our strategy ('rebellion', 'whirlwind moment', 'momentum-driven organising'), or our inner workings ('rebellion weavers', 'the hive', 'movement of movements') can be alienating too because no one knows what they mean. Some institutions within XR can also be alienating in terms of lack of disclosure, structural inequalities and putting those already privileged in positions of facilitation/coordination.

- XR is not the only movement or best movement, NVDA and momentum (US) organising is not the only or best strategy. There are multiple strategies in existence, many have much more success than XR's DNA gives them credit for. The belief that "everything else before us has failed" is completely wrong. There are multiple strategies in existence and they can either work together or work apart. Solidarity is forging true relationships of mutual assistance across broad divisions.

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

## Some further pointers

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