

# Regenerative Cultures Shared resources

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A place to bring together regenerative culture info for the affinity groups and working groups and offering support if they need it. Written for Oxfordshire groups, but sharing with others.

If you would like to comment / add / offer something, please do (please use the comments or suggestions functions though, don't change directly!)

With gratitude and thanks to the social change collective commons: all the groups, organisations, traditions and people that have been using, sharing and developing these practices and incorporating their experience over the years.

## Brief description:

**Regenerative culture** is a core strand of Extinction Rebellion. It's basically about going about our campaigning in a way that is deeply respectful of our mutual humanity, encouraging a culture to emerge which is collaborative and inclusive.

## Key XR documents:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kgKJM01R15emKohanrjnS-2DODJgJbJxJltd1K8qujyw/edit#heading=h.5f4zirxifssr>

**RISE CWUP - Pre-Action and Arrest Preparation** - RISE CWUP , Emotional, Practical, Legal, <http://tinyurl.com/RISECWUP>

## Wellbeing bundle for affinity groups:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1q3xUGQo47ihXULVz13i1eXh0WtprmV2K8B0bf1SKSKk/edit>

Good document: [Being prepared for a variety of police tactics - responding nonviolently](#)

Email contact for Oxford XR Regen Group: [XrOxfordRegen@gmail.com](mailto:XrOxfordRegen@gmail.com)

## Overview of this document:

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## 1. Introduction

A very notable feature about the interaction which is XR is the way in which a culture of collaboration and connection is naturally emerging. The more we learn to nourish and foster this spirit then the greater is our capacity for peacefully communicating the message of XR to the people and institutions we engage with. The not so very distant hope for the human experience is that it rapidly develops the capacity to recognise the blessings that are delivered through collaboration at a deep level. The process of healing the scars within the human family is probably our one opportunity for helping the planet we live on to heal itself. Most people involved in XR have been struck by the simple goodness that is present when we meet together.

All the various groupings in which the people of XR meet are so obviously not just decision making forums but research projects in which we are exploring the geography of our collaboration, from which initiatives emerge. Many of us have developed resources and facilitation experience, whether this is from professional work or simply the quality of life experience. What follows is a series of resources and insights that are simply suggestions that might help oil the wheels of group meetings. Some of it is pretty obvious but still worth noting. And this is a gathering of resources from all of us, so if you feel there is something you would like to add then please make it known. If there is feedback you would like to give, then please give it.

If you feel your group would benefit from having the attendance of someone experienced in facilitating group dynamics, then please make your wish known. If you are experienced in facilitation of a kind you might feel is useful, and you are willing to make yourself available for facilitation then also please make yourself known. None of this is about setting up hierarchies as no one has a patent on a right way of doing things. In many ways it is breaking down those dynamics and discovering real ways of caring for each other.

## 2. Wellbeing within Affinity groups and wellbeing co-ordinator's role

Experience has shown that it is extremely helpful for rebels to belong to an affinity group ( a group of people who choose to support each other in taking action together), both for mutual support and for encouraging the building of an intelligent and purposeful culture. If you're not already involved in an Affinity Group, there will be upcoming opportunities to join one.

To find out how to collaborate and support each other, it is important to get to know one another. So meetings have importance beyond deciding strategy. Working groups are naturally meeting more regularly but the regularity of affinity groups meeting seems to vary a lot. Feedback from people shows that those affinity groups meeting more regularly, say once a month are developing a real coherence. There are also reports where when groups

are not meeting at all there are some people who are feeling a sense of loss. Affinity groups are naturally more personal, and the basis for entering actions. To hold the kind of group conversation that creates a cohesive energy means from experience that numbers could be capped at between 10 and 15 people. Strike a balance between the 'doing' (i.e. planning actions...) and the 'being' ( getting to know each other, exploring how you feel about climate change, taking action etc, or just sharing a bit more about yourself).

Everyone within an affinity group is naturally concerned with the practical and emotional well-being of each other. It may well be a good idea to have a person or persons within an affinity group who take on the role of **well-being co-ordinator**. Their role is to *collaborate* in focussing attention on a group's needs before, during and after actions. At the very least there can be a person with oversight of the various resources available either within or outside the immediate group to support its well being.

You may also wish to see the [XR Affinity Group pack](#) for more detail on different roles.

### 3. Group process: Some thoughts and guidelines for good practice in meetings:

Focussing on meetings themselves, what follows are some ingredients that seem to work well. Maybe worth experimenting with.

- **Getting settled:** A group can start with a period of silence or meditation in the spirit of this being a true ground for what emerges later in the group. One Oxford group starts with at least 15 minutes silence before conversation. It is also not uncommon for a group to end in this manner, perhaps with a shorter period.
- **Checking in:** Subsequent to this is the commonly held group check in or 'stringing the beads', which is possible with small groups. Each person can take an uninterrupted period of time to describe what is alive in them. Some people like to have an object to pass around like a 'talking stick' to indicate that the floor is theirs. It has proved important that this process is entirely uninterrupted, that there is no comment or conversation between each person speaking. The spirit is one of respectful listening. Two factors are particularly conducive to building a collaborative body. One is a person speaking truthfully about what is moving in them, without feeling the need to conform to any particular culture and without them trying to push for any outcome. The other is developing the group quality of listening, which pays great dividends. No one during the check-in should feel they have to speak. It needs to be a safe space for everybody.

## Meeting dynamics:

Group timing seems important. Beginning on time, ending on time and having an agenda that is stuck to really helps. If things are really important and need more focus they will come around again.

**Main body of a meeting.** We are trained from birth to have defining ideas of how we believe things should be and to back up these beliefs with a great deal of energy. We end up dividing into individual and social tribes whose friction with each other is often a major cause of social conflict. Hopefully XR is not just another tribe! Few of us are free of this energy and it is worth remembering when a group comes to the main body of a meeting where people will have differing ideas of what they would like to happen. It is well worth grounding the conversations about 'what to do' in the groundswell of spirit generated in the silent periods and the check in. 'Action mode' arises more naturally and more genuinely from 'being mode', which creates a commonality of energy through a group. Staying with this 'being mode' also gives more space to people in the group who tend to be quieter. It seems important that a group is sensitive to this and not just driven by the need to take action. Allowing a culture to build itself is the infectious spirit which connects us with the world which we are perhaps learning to love more deeply with all its ingredients.

**Collaboration during main group conversations.** Collaboration means that all the ingredients that people bring are accepted and meaningful. People can be heard and listened to with real neutrality. Collaboration is often misunderstood as a majority vote on a position which people put more weight behind than any other. This is not very collaborative as it narrows down the options to predetermined positions. It seems to work much better that groups start with an open page when discussing options so that a group feeling emerges that sits well. Options have so much more 'magic' when they emerge from unencumbered collaboration which includes diverse feeling rather than doing whatever the perception of the 'right thing' is. Once there is genuine trust, then it becomes much more possible to give honest feedback. We live in a world where institutional dynamics are about power. We try to demonstrate the compassionate power of the human spirit rather than the power of 'do it my way' that so infects the modern way of life.

**Developing Trust, Resolving Conflict and Facilitating Communication.** It is quite natural that any group will contain different points of view and different needs. Learning to collaborate includes the realisation and practice that all of this is the rich mix through which we can communicate rather than exclude. The emphasis is on providing a mutual space in which people can express their needs freely and have them accepted with openness. Where conflict becomes apparent it is important to work with it sooner rather than later, and work with it in such a way that connection

becomes a more important need than 'rightness'. In the spirit of an environment where trust is to the fore then feedback becomes an effective way of 'oiling the wheels'.

- **Feedback:** 'Offering and receiving feedback, when done well, can be a powerful way to nourish relationships and make your group more effective. This guide from Transition Network explains how you can do this in a positive and constructive way: [offering and receiving feedback](#)
  
- **Checking out, and space for unresolved tensions:** It's good practice to allow a space of time before the end of a meeting for people to check out (say how they felt about the meeting, what they have taken on etc), and if there are any tensions that are unresolved. This could be anything from feeling overwhelmed by the task they said they'd do, or that there was a comment that was unhelpful / undermining / hurtful etc. It's good to have a space for this to be at least aired, and the facilitator can ask what could help resolve it (e.g. have a conversation with X, bring an issue to the next meeting).
  
- **Developing a healthy group culture:** see this resource from Transition Network: [Healthy group culture exercises](#); , which is summarised here:  
Most groups will have an implicit, or explicit, group culture. This will influence how you do the things that you do, such as running meetings, carrying out activities, and interacting with each other, that is unique to that group. This culture is developed during conversations amongst the group as a whole or the group can also split into smaller numbers, such as pairs of people. The following questions may be useful:
  - 1. What do I enjoy, or find easy, bringing to a group?
  - 2. What do I find hard, or tend to hide, bringing to the group?
  - 3. What supports me to bring more of myself (including the hard parts) to a group?. You can do in 30 mins, or it may open up space for more fruitful discussions.
  
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- During these sharings it has proved very helpful for one person to speak and the other or others to listen. It cannot be over-emphasized, just how much *developing the power to listen really matters*.

- [Suggested meeting agreements](#). It is really useful that the group mutually decides how it agrees to run a meeting and that these agreements are kept to. Agreements will include the running order of the various ingredients, the agenda for the day and the various processes that the group wishes to stick to. One of the jobs perhaps of a well-being coordinator is to point out when agreements are being broken without consent of the group.

## Group safety

Be aware that different group members will have different levels of comfort with exploring or sharing personal feelings. Encourage members to do the exercises they feel OK about doing, there's no obligation to do anything they'd prefer not to.

Where there are reflective periods with sharing in pairs, any sharing to the wider group of that process is purely voluntary. There is no obligation to share. People do not have to give a reason for passing on an invitation to share.

## Awareness of burnout and the signs.

Burnout is the condition where we stop functioning well, due to stress, insufficient balance or support, or taking too many things on. It's a prime cause and symptom of group conflict, and is an 'occupational hazard' of being involved in campaigning. See this [handy briefing on Sustainable Activism and avoiding burnout](#).

## How we feel about climate change

Turning to face climate change, and all its implications, can bring up many feelings. These can be attached to the implications for ourselves, future generations and the more than human world, and the responses needed by governments and all sectors of society. These feelings can influence our approach to, and relationship with, how we take action, and how we talk about the issues. Here are some exercises to explore your feelings about climate change, which you can do on your own, in pairs or in a group situation. There is further detail in the handout '[Talking about climate change](#)'.

### Reflective questions:

1. On your own, in silence write down one word that expresses how you feel about climate change. Notice any thoughts and feelings that might accompany it.
2. Another question – what do you do with those feelings? Do they ever get spoken? Do you push them down, or do something else with them?

3. Now take a moment to notice if how you feel influences your approach to engaging with climate change, however you define that engagement (it could be listening to or reading about it, coming to a meeting, taking a form of action, being involved in a group).

Share your responses (or the parts you are happy to share) with someone else or as part of a group.

Working out from individual responses to climate change, it's important to consider how feelings can impact communication and action, either as a one-to-one conversation, part of a group, or part of an organisation.

#### 4. Communication.

It has proved important for group cohesion and support that everyone has the ability to communicate to the whole group outside meetings. By whatever method people can share an ongoing conversation and inform each other as to events and resources. During actions it is helpful that everybody can be reached, including those who are not on the action. Support can be offered much more readily if the need is known. Most groups seem to use WhatsApp but people may know of alternative methods.

#### 5. Wellbeing before, during and after actions.

Tensions, and workload, tends to rise when actions are being planned, or in the process of actions. We are all well-being co-ordinators, but each group may well need a couple of people with this specific function who can facilitate:-

Before

##### **Emotional wellbeing:**

If you're meeting to discuss next steps or actions, have a go-round where people can say how they are feeling first. Whilst this may take a little time, it will enable people to show up and bring feelings that may influence decision making.

- Checking in with people in your Affinity group, seeing how they are, checking about anxieties and tensions, offering them a bit of time or listening if they need it. You could simply ask 'how are you feeling about this right now?' and *listen* to what they say, and ask them if they have any practical or emotional needs? Although these practical needs can be met with physical measures, the emotional needs are probably best met by listening without needing to fix them!

#### Finding our comfort zones

**Before any action**, take a moment to reflect on situations that support and nourish you, and situations that could cause anxiety, or trigger unpleasant associations. Here are some questions that you could explore individually, in pairs or in your affinity group. Sharing them

with other members of your affinity group will enable the group to better support each other.

- Where do I get my support from?
- What resources me?
- What helps me feel connected, empowered and safe on actions?
- What situations can cause you to feel disempowered or isolated?
- What situations can cause you to feel tense, anxious or afraid?
- If I feel scared, or anxious, what helps me?
- Are there situations that could trigger unpleasant feelings / trigger panic and anxiety / or reminders of past experiences? What support do I need if I encounter these situations?
- What situations would it be best if I avoided altogether? What do I need to do to ensure I can get out of these situations?

If you haven't already discussed this in your affinity group or with a buddy, make sure you do so, and check in with other folks in your group about how they are feeling.

## Wellbeing on actions - for everyone

On actions, the situation can be uncertain and unpredictable. We may be outside our comfort zones, we may be tired, we may be dealing with all that we know about climate change and this broken system. Whilst we don't know the outcomes of our actions, we do know that we'll need to take care of ourselves and each other, before, during and after the action.

## Feeling connected and supported on actions

Take a moment to reflect on:

- Where do I get my support from?
- What resources me?
- If I feel scared or anxious, what helps me?
- Are there situations that I know I should avoid?

If you haven't already discussed this in your affinity group or with a buddy, make sure you do so, and check in with other folks in your group about how they are feeling.

If someone is displaying signs of anxiety (e.g. hyperventilating) check in with them. Where the response is erratic then maybe see if you can get eye contact ( best to ask first, of it they'd prefer not, then ask if they can indicate they're hearing you). A good way of encouraging someone to be more grounded hi is through their breath. Encourage them to be conscious of their breath. You could model this by saying 'breathe with me' and breathing with them.



At regular points during an action, do check in with how you are all doing and feeling. It might be that you want to leave earlier than you had planned, need to change roles, or something has come up that means you need to be away from the action. See what you can do as a group, or if it makes sense to join with another Affinity Group to make sure that different roles are covered.

There is some info in the wellbeing bundle here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1q3xUGQo47ihXULVz13i1eXh0Wtprmv2K8B0bf1SKSK/edit>

There may well be tense situations. The info below may help to ground you (taken from: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R0T2-L2je07OWXYV6vGCC7aSh2NV\\_mvDHQOMz0w5pks/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R0T2-L2je07OWXYV6vGCC7aSh2NV_mvDHQOMz0w5pks/edit) )

### Action preparation that encourages connection rather than conflict

On an action, you might see or encounter someone acting aggressively, or if part of the XR action, breaching the nonviolent agreement. It's important to pay attention here, and work in a way which encourages connection rather than conflict.

1. **Notice what is happening:** don't turn your back on it. On actions 'everyone is crew'
2. **Get support:** mention to other people what your concerns are, and ask if they can help
3. **Drop attachment to the outcome:** you might have to allow something different to happen to what you want.

Notice what feelings arise in you too, and what stories they might be linked to. (This is something that could be explored in affinity groups or with buddies before actions, for example exploring situations where you feel tension / empowered / disempowered).

**\*\*You might find it helpful to familiarise yourself with some of these [tips for de-escalation](#) to use in response to challenging situations during actions.**

### Practical ways of grounding yourself in tense situations

#### Grounding

Let your attention move into the breath in your body particularly the rise and fall of the abdomen.

Breathe down into feet.

Connect to the Earth.

Imagine roots extending under feet.

Notice how the ground (or chair) is meeting your feet (or legs and bum).

Feel your feet as if that's all there is to do.

Be curious about what's happening. (You can't be curious and afraid at the same time.)

Notice your sources of support

What in your immediate environment is a source of support right now?

(buddy, affinity group, a reassuring item of clothing, a colour in the crowd, trees or plants nearby).

Notice if you or people in your affinity group have gone quiet. Invite yourself and each other to take a breath. Breath is one of the most effective ways we can calm down an over activated nervous system. Make sure you keep breathing deeply.

If you see someone who is clearly anxious, has gone very quiet, or is looking frozen, take the initiative and check in with them..

### Practical wellbeing on actions:

- **Pre action:** who is the main arrestee support person / people on actions? Who is the anchor role?
- **If people are in arrestable roles, make sure that the anchor person has a list of people to call.** If people are considering being arrested, do encourage them to prepare their nearest and dearest beforehand so that this doesn't fall to the arrestee support person. For some, hearing that their nearest and dearest have been arrested may be fine (and they may well be supportive). For others it may be very worrying. If additional reassurance may be needed, it would be good to have a few people who can call them to check in with them, and give them updates. This could be done by people not on the action, at home in support roles. **\*\*Think about this before the actions\*\*.**
- Do members of your affinity group have any practical needs – e.g. something to sit on, a pee break, water, food?
- Do members of your Affinity group have any medical needs, or reliance on any medication, that other people should know about in advance?

#### Arrestee Support

- Make sure every AG member has solicitors number on their arm and the anchor's number on their arm or the back office number.
- If arrested: which police station are they being taken to?

- Going to the police station: Make sure you give them a good welcome! Drinks, snacks, extra clothing, extra card/oyster for their transport.

Post arrest: check in with them, how are they feeling? Are there conversations they need to have with friends? Do they need some time out?

### **Join the Oxford XR Arrestee support email group**

**[\[xr-oxford-arrestee-support@googlegroups.com\]](mailto:xr-oxford-arrestee-support@googlegroups.com)**

To connect with other people who have been arrested for support and advice. Occasional meetings which bring those going through the legal processes are helpful to share experiences, ask for advice, and potentially join with others who are going through the legal processes in the same timeframe.

### **Post action:**

Set a time to meet up post action to debrief together and support each other. Be proactive about this. If things haven't gone so well, or uncomfortable feelings come up, sometimes we don't want to share them, or may think it's only us that feels that way. If something is causing anxiety, you're probably not alone - and it'd be good to discuss and explore in your affinity group. Post action meetings are an important learning resource and set the tone for how the group moves on in a way which nourishes the people and the emergence of a vibrant culture.

## **6. Practical resources and trainings for groups and individuals in Oxfordshire**

Within Oxford XR, there are a number of people who are happy to offer their skills in support of your groups. This could involve trainings for group processes, or coming to your group to offer a specific skills or practice (e.g. see the Conscious Connected Breathing offer below).

We'll be adding to this resource as we go, or if you would like to offer something, do get in touch (see contact details at the top of this document).

**Radha Ananda:** [Conscious Connected Breathing](#): Sessions for individuals or small groups.

More info here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/107N3bs0wENFhxR-jD2KbiwDmZklwQy-B/view?usp=sharing>

**Jo Hamilton** - happy to come to groups to hold reflective processes, exploring emotions about climate change [contact: [soaringskywards@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:soaringskywards@yahoo.co.uk)]

**Derek Elliott.** Happy to come along and facilitate group process. Will also provide sessions for breathwork and restorative yoga to help ground and restore. [derekelliott@icloud.com](mailto:derekelliott@icloud.com)  
<https://www.derekelliottyoga.co.uk/Yoga/Home.html>

**Ally Stott.** Happy to come along and facilitate group process. [allysoilsoul@gmail.com](mailto:allysoilsoul@gmail.com)  
<http://www.allystott.co.uk/>