

XR NYC Key Messaging Overview and FAQ

The purpose of this document is to help all Rebels communicate effectively about Extinction Rebellion. It's to help you explain our demands, answer frequently asked questions, and talk about relevant issues in a way that's aligned with XR messaging.

XR messaging is designed to do two things: to communicate our demands and principles, and to grow the movement. It aims to appeal to as many people as possible while also honoring our commitments to truth-telling, nonviolence, and regenerative culture.

Because we are decentralized, each of us is an XR brand ambassador. When we all embody the principles, objectives and spirit of XR in our language, we present a coherent, life-affirming, urgent and radically honest message that is incredibly attractive to people and impossible to dismiss or ignore. Doing this is essential to achieving our goals.

XR Principles in Messaging

Of our [10 principles](#), the following are often most relevant to messaging:

We avoid blaming and shaming: We live in a toxic system, but no one individual is to blame. *In terms of messaging: we call out systems, not individuals, so for example, the US Gov't, not Donald Trump, the NY State or City Government, not Andrew Cuomo or Bill De Blasio. Also, Chase Bank not Jamie Dimon. Individuals can easily be replaced but it is the systems that have given them power that need to change.*

We are a nonviolent network: Nonviolent strategy and tactics (and language) are the most effective way to bring about change. *In terms of messaging: True nonviolence is not just an absence of violence (in thought, word and deed) but actually an emphasis on love and empathy. If we respond with anger, hate or fear, we are feeding into the toxic system we seek to dismantle.*

We openly challenge ourselves and our toxic system: Leaving our comfort zones to take action for change. *In terms of messaging, this may mean emphasizing self-sacrifice. Our toxic system also means government. Our demands all target the government, so the government, along with the systems that support it, should be the target of our messaging. That means connecting disruptions to our theories of change.*

We welcome everyone and every part of everyone: We work actively to create safer and more accessible spaces.

In terms of messaging, we seek to find language that includes and invites, not that is overly academic or exclusive in meaning and tone.

Talking Points

How to Describe Extinction Rebellion

“Extinction Rebellion is an international **movement** that uses nonviolent direct action to compel governments to act on **ecological** and climate breakdown.”

We refer to XR as a “movement” because that word calls to mind a collection of people gathered together in shared inclination, intention, passion and purpose. We don’t refer to XR as an “organization” because that word can sound corporate, passive, and is often associated with traditional NGO’s, nonprofits and businesses.

It’s important to include the word “ecological.” While ecology and climate are related, they aren’t the same thing, and ecology often gets left out. “Climate” breakdown refers to the destruction of weather systems. “Ecological” breakdown refers to the annihilation of biodiversity and the destruction of ecosystems. XR demands that governments address both.

How to Describe the Emergency

In general, the stronger the language, the better. “Crisis” is better than “change,” and “emergency” is better than “crisis.” The reason “emergency” is one of the best descriptors is that it contains the imperative to act.

“Ecocide” is also a good word. It literally means the killing of ecosystems which sustain human life, and in that way is more direct than terms like “ecological breakdown” or “ecological crisis.” It’s fewer syllables and can be good for social media / banners, where characters are limited.

Balancing Anger with Love in Speeches

Many everyday people think of activists as angry. Whether that’s an accurate perception is less important than the fact that it can turn people off, even when they agree with our cause. Injustices must be named, and to feel anger about them is human, so we shouldn’t necessarily try to restrict that kind of speech.

Instead, we should pair it with speech highlighting radical love, compassion, empathy, conscience, our shared humanity, the beauty of all life, the beauty in self-sacrifice and standing up for each other, the beauty of living in harmony with the natural world, the beauty in Indigenous wisdom, sadness and grief at the loss of life, and/or any other form of regenerative

speech. This is especially important when speaking in a public forum, whether through a megaphone at a street rally or microphone onstage. We can work together at actions or anywhere else to make sure we never have one kind of speech without the other.

Our 4 Demands: How to Explain Them in a Conversation

1. TELL THE TRUTH

Government must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change.

How to explain Demand 1

This is the truth: we are in an EMERGENCY situation. This is an existential crisis. We are facing a climate and ecological breakdown, and in turn, the collapse of our economic and social systems. By covering up the truth, governments are failing us. Lives, jobs, homes, planetary resources, biodiversity, and sustenance of millions are at risk. It is only by declaring an emergency that governments can truly reflect the urgency for change. It is only by committing to truth telling, no matter how difficult it sounds and feels, that we can address the emergency head on.

2. ACT NOW

Government must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025.

How to explain Demand 2

We need to treat the emergency as an emergency. Unfortunately, admitting the truth about our climate emergency is not enough. We must pressure governments to act now to protect biodiversity and fulfill greenhouse gas reduction targets. While 2025 net zero greenhouse gas emissions is more aggressive than targets from other climate movements, it is based on what is necessary, not what “seems” feasible. This demand has changed the [overton window](#) in the UK and beyond. WWII mobilization had industries change overnight. The emergency does not call for gradualist reform, it calls for a revolution.

3. BEYOND POLITICS

Government must create and be led by the decisions of a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice.

How to explain Demand 3

Beyond politics does not mean we are apolitical, but rather we are not politically affiliated. Why? Too often, elected politicians cannot see beyond their next election campaign. With careers on the line, party politics, billionaire donors, and corporate lobbying, the U.S. has accelerated towards climate catastrophe in the last 40 years despite scientists increasingly sounding the alarm.

In a real democracy every voice must count, as everyone who will be affected should be able to participate in decision-making. A Citizens' Assembly is formed from a cross-section of everyday people, selected by civic lottery, who reflect the makeup of the general population in race, ethnicity, gender, and economic class. Once members have been selected, the process includes four key phases: listening, learning, deliberating and deciding. This strips out voting based on party politics, sensationalism, knee-jerk opinion polls, whatever "sounds good", and replaces it with informed decisions.

Examples include [Ireland](#), [Canada](#), [Australia](#), [Belgium](#) and [Poland](#). Citizens' Assembly has broken political gridlock on same-sex marriage, abortion and climate change in Ireland. Texas—one of the original gas and oil states—is now the nation's leader in renewable energy due to a similar process of deliberative polling, where polls jumped 30% in favor of renewable energy upon informed decision making.

To learn more about messaging around Citizens' Assemblies [click here](#).

4. JUST TRANSITION

We demand a just transition that prioritizes the most vulnerable people and establishes indigenous sovereignty; establishes reparations and remediation led by and for Black people, Indigenous people, people of color and poor communities for years of environmental injustice, establishes legal rights for ecosystems to thrive and regenerate in perpetuity, and repairs the effects of ongoing ecocide to prevent extinction of humanity and all species, in order to maintain a livable, just planet for all.

How to explain Demand 4

In the past, periods of great change have left the most vulnerable people at the greatest risk of poverty. Unless climate and social justice objectives are united, the most vulnerable, frontline communities, indigenous and people of color, and poor communities will unfairly bear the brunt of ecological and climate breakdown.

This is an additional demand from XR US and adopted by XR NYC. This is not to detract from Extinction Rebellion globally, where it is argued that Demand 3 embodies Demand 4, but rather to place emphasis on a *Just Transition*.

Frequently Asked Questions

“How do you connect general disruption with system change?”

Government is created by society to protect, yet it has failed, therefore the social contract is broken. Thirty years ago the UN and the world’s scientists made crystal clear that the human race was heading for catastrophe if carbon emissions were not cut drastically. Three decades on and emissions have risen by 60% and are still rising.

Government will only respond to disruption of the political and economic system that generates their wealth and power. Blocking roads, occupying spaces, and other acts of nonviolent civil disobedience do exactly that: they cost financial elites money and threaten the authority and influence of political leaders. That’s the only way to get them to really listen, and their listening is necessary for system change.

“Is XR anti-capitalist? If not, why not?”

We simply aren’t anti-capitalist because we are to be led by a Citizens’ Assembly. Explicit anti-capitalist messaging will also limit our growth and harm our chances of success. While it’s a fact that endless growth is incompatible with maintaining a liveable biosphere and social justice, the average person who encounters XR is just as likely to be turned off by aggressive anti-capitalist messaging as attracted by it. Public opinion polling is clear: capitalism is less popular than it’s been in decades, but it’s still more popular than explicit anti-capitalism. This is likely because people are not well-educated about capitalism and its alternatives, and associate anti-capitalism with highly oppressive, authoritarian societies. The aim of all outward messaging is to bring as many people as possible into deeper discussion with us. Once they join the movement, they’ll come to art builds, planning meetings, social events, etc, where they are much more likely to be curious about and receptive to ideas they aren’t already on board with. *So in the interest of not limiting our membership, we refrain from explicit outward anti-capitalist messaging.*

“Are you supporting the Green New Deal?”

We don’t endorse individual politicians or policies because we believe our current political system as a whole is incapable of adequately addressing the emergency. The latest science suggests very clearly that mitigating disaster requires swift, radical, and immediate change. Our electoral system, which is heavily influenced by corporate lobbying, weak campaign finance laws, gerrymandering, and other corrupting factors, can’t realistically be expected to achieve this. For that reason, we advocate the formation of Citizens’ Assemblies: Groups of everyday



people from all walks of life, selected by lottery, who are demographically representative of the population. These Assemblies will be thoroughly educated on the emergency, hear a wide range of expert testimony and possible solutions, and then make policy recommendations which the government must follow. Citizens' Assemblies have been successfully used in the past to quickly break political deadlock, and are more democratic than our current system.

“What policies have you changed so far and what do you plan to put in place?”

In June 2019, after rallies, hearings and direct actions at which dozens of Extinction Rebellion NYC activists were arrested, New York became the largest U.S. city to declare a climate emergency. The City Council overwhelmingly voted for the resolution calling for an immediate emergency mobilization to restore a safe climate.

XR NYC is working now to press the city to follow up the resolution with clear, actionable steps, and Citizens' Assembly to mitigate the issues identified in the declaration.

“Why don't you advocate veganism?”

We don't outwardly message about veganism or other individual behavior because we focus our efforts on government-level system change. That doesn't mean that many members of XR don't think it's important for individuals to consume less animal products or otherwise reduce their individual footprint. In order to succeed, we need to use our messaging opportunities to talk about system change and our demands, and we need to make clear that XR welcomes everyone, including those who eat meat and use other animal products. There are many groups focused on advocating veganism (XR affinity group Animal Rebellion is one) and other important practices, and we aim to ally with and welcome them into XR as part of our [“movement of movements”](#) approach.