



Affinity Group Welcome Pack

We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.

Ella Baker

BASIC INFO

Background

Affinity Groups (AGs) are civil disobedience support groups. AGs developed as an organising structure during the Spanish Civil War and have been used with amazing success over the last thirty years of feminist, anti-nuclear, environmental and social justice movements around the world. They were first used as a structure for a large scale non-violent blockade during the 30,000 strong occupation of the Ruhr nuclear power station in Germany in 1969.

They are made up of 8-12 people and are autonomous to do the actions they want to in the name of XR as long as they adhere to the [Principles and Values](#) (P&Vs). There needs to be 4 people minimum in order to create an effective AG. The ideal number is between **8-12 people**.

AGs can get involved by either joining in with one of Extinction Rebellion's mass actions (e.g being able to block a road together), by joining with other local AGs to do an action or by undertaking your own actions as an AG (such as blocking the entrance to a petroleum conference). In each of these cases, the AG decides for itself how it wants to engage with the action (e.g arrestability, style, spirituality). For all actions, AGs need to just remember to adhere to the P&Vs e.g remain nonviolent and to read the [action consensus](#) beforehand (<https://rebellion.earth/action-consensus>).

For more general background on AGs check out <https://seedsforchange.org.uk/affinitygroups.pdf>

How do Affinity Groups make decisions?

AGs can decide how they make decisions- they can do so by consensus (everyone agrees with what is to be done) or by delegating the decision to a few people to work it out. Delegating the decision can often mean that the meetings are faster and more efficient. You should all have a shared idea of what you want individually & collectively from the action/campaign, how it will conceivably go, what support you will need from others, and what you can offer others. For more info on consensus decision making see <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>



How do you join an Affinity Group or create a new one?

You can join an existing Affinity Group in your area or you can create a new one by joining a Non Violent Civil Disobedience training. These run regularly and can be found on the events page of the website. The rest of this guide is intended to help new groups set up and get prepared for the rebellion.

Related Resources:

- [AG Formation Workshop Plan](#)
- [AG Formation Workshop Welcome Sheet](#)

Affinity Group Basic Follow Up after Civil Disobedience (NVCD) workshops

1. Create a **Group Chat/Email Group** to keep in touch ([Signal.org](#) is a downloadable app and is good for group chats, this is a more secure way of staying in touch regarding actions, planning, etc.)
2. **Organise a meeting**- AG meetings are to be framed as a chance for people to build trust, get to know one another and to practice taking low-risk Civil Disobedience in preparation for joining other national AGs to create meaningful disruption for the April Rebellion weeks
3. Decide who your **AG and Wellbeing coordinators** are
4. Contact the AG support team on xraffinitysupport@protonmail.com to let them know about your new group- they will contact you with a full briefing about any upcoming actions and how to link up with other AGs in your area.

Meetings Tips

Organising a Meeting

- Coordinator to arrange first meeting (others can take on role next time)
- Agree location to meet - eg someone's house, community centre, hired room - bear in mind privacy, convenience, accessibility eg noise level
- Set time and length of meeting and ascertain peoples flexibility, knowing length of meeting will help structure agenda
- Depending on the time of day agree whether you will bring food to share, snacks etc.

Meeting structure



- Choose a **facilitator** (person who keeps an eye on time, agenda points being covered and making sure everyone gets to speak) and a **note taker** (to write down important points, questions, actions to take forward from meeting)
- Use template agenda (below)
- Explain any [Hand signals](#) for meetings (we don't really use the "I'm Confused" or "Veto")
- Check in – this is a chance for people to share how they're feeling
- Go through agenda points- note any Action Points (things people say they will do) from this
- You can end with giving a gratitude for something in your life /day or with something you're looking forward to or an appreciation for the person to your left/right (this can be good for grounding yourself after a hectic meeting/a good way to stay connected to your group)

Roles

Before taking on a role in organising action, there are two key points to bear in mind.

1. Actions, by their nature, can be potentially volatile situations of potential confrontation with the authorities and/or the general public, that present an increased risk of personal physical harm. Do not take the risks lightly. Careful planning and organisation using the information below will reduce the risks and help you carry out actions in the safest possible way.
2. The purpose of an action is essentially to draw the media's (and public's) attention to an issue. Therefore: a) your actions must be **carefully chosen and designed** to achieve this effectively and b) they should be **communicated carefully** to the media to make sure your message is clear. Remember: you are investing time, energy and some personal risk in this activity, so do your best to **make it count!**

The roles listed here are common roles on actions, but shouldn't be regarded as a blueprint list for all actions. Different actions will need different roles, and it's important to think about what you'll need as a group (and how you're going to ensure it gets done) early on in the planning stage.

Support roles are vital to the success of an action, and to the safety of the participants. These roles often aren't seen as being as “glamorous” as doing the direct action itself, but should be valued equally – without them, the action can't take place.

Sometimes people can take on more than one role, e.g. a legal observer might also be a first-aider, or police liaison, or even media contact. The key is to make sure that all necessary roles are covered, that



everyone understands the extent of their commitment before you begin, and no one takes on tasks (support or otherwise) which they are unable to carry out.

- **Action support:** Provides direct personal support for arrestable people - sometimes referred to as "Action elves" in the US! This person may risk arrest, but tries to avoid it. Depending on the nature of the action this means bringing water, food supplies and keeping everyone spirited and informed. Leads chants, gives out cigarettes or back rubs etc. For lock-ons it is best to have at least one support for every two people getting arrested.
- **Legal/Arrestee support:** They should have all pertinent information about each member of the group such as your name, and contacts for your parents or loved ones, so that they can let people know where you are. Will take the call from the police station, co-ordinate post-arrest support etc. Post arrest support will involve chasing up any arrestees, and picking people up from police stations. Should have transport to reach all the police stations in the area, and know how to get to them. Have snacks, cigarettes, water whatever people will want when they are released.
- **Legal Observer/Arrest Watch:** Stays on the fringes of the action- must be seen to be **independent** i.e. not "involved" in doing things. Responsible for observing a particular group/activity, and takes detailed notes of interaction with police including names, badge numbers, license plate numbers, what takes place and exactly when. Should be ready to be called over by those taking part in the action if the police are being unreasonable. A camera or video recorder can be helpful.
- **Police liaison:** Conveys information and demands between the police and the group. Should be articulate, calm and able to communicate diplomatically with the police. Tries to de-escalate the situation as much as possible. This person risks arrest as police will sometimes think that the person speaking for the group is the group's leader. This person is NOT the group's decision maker, decisions can only be made by the group as a whole. Communicate clearly early on that this is not the case.
- **Media Liaison:** Helps facilitate the interactions between the group and the media. Prepares press releases and makes calls to get desired media on site at the time of the action. Should know issues and sound bites and be able to speak clearly and articulately to reporters and TV cameras. May wish to dress more conservatively to convey an impression of respectability if interviewed on camera. Contact press@risingup.org.uk for support and coverage
- **First Aiders:** The more people who know medical care of any kind the better, but in many types of action it is wise to have at least one person who knows basic first aid and CPR (resuscitation).
- **Action participants:** Quite simply the people carrying out the actual action (climbing, locking on, sitting down, trespassing, etc.) Should be technically prepared for everything they plan to do, and hopefully well rested, fed and calm.



- **Welfare on actions:** this role looks after the welfare kit, and distributes things as needed, looking after the welfare of the activists. Welfare kits should include things like water, snacks, blankets, mats and tissues. A welfare person checks in with the activists and makes sure they are comfortable and have what they need.

Other Points to discuss:

- **Look & Feel** - Remember, XR's strategy is to be open and accountable when it comes to actions. We want to be visible doing what is right, this is what attracts others.
 - Try and have some fun with each other before the action and get grounded
 - Remember we are nonviolent, peaceful movement - use *Nonviolent Communication*, or moderate language, when dealing with Police or Public
 1. Approach them proactively and respectfully
 2. Inform them of what we are doing and highlight that it is nonviolent,
 3. Be friendly but practice not sharing any personal details/details of any planning/actions (where/when etc).
- **Security culture** - Discuss the extent of the security you will keep in your affinity group, you can:
 - Use **Signal** for group chats
 - Have **code names** eg names you use in front of police/on action etc; Not referring to any personal details of another member of the AG to the police/ media **if** you so choose.
 - Choose not to carry personal identification/ phones/ laptops to actions
- **Movement Care within an Affinity Group**
 - See the **Wellbeing Bundle** for Wellbeing Coordinators (<https://tinyurl.com/Wellbeing-bundle>)
 - **Group agreements**, eg XR policies around equality, diversity, representation, self awareness, conflict resolution, etc. (<https://tinyurl.com/xr-group-agreement>)
 - **Active Listening**- listening to someone for several minutes and then reflecting as short version of it back (do in pairs)- is a useful tool for starting meetings and beyond.
 - **Hand signals/facilitators**, so everyone gets a chance to speak/be heard.
 - Think about accessibility for meeting places et
 - Think about people's' health needs/individual access needs.
 - Setting up a Buddy System (See Appendix 2)
 - Look at this handout on '[self care and avoiding burn-out](#)' (<https://tinyurl.com/XR-Regen-Statement>)
- **Legal info**



- Every member of the AG needs to take responsibility for being as informed as possible before an action- for full legal Briefing see [here](https://tinyurl.com/XR-Legal-Briefing) (<https://tinyurl.com/XR-Legal-Briefing>)
- Get **NVDA handouts** here: <https://www.risingup.org.uk/nvda-handouts> (You Can find an online version of this document there)

Appendix

1. Practical Tips before an Action

- Check in with your affinity group;
- Appropriate clothing;
- Wearing several layers;
- Removing jewellery;
- Tying up hair;
- Cutting nails;
- Carrying Water (plastic bottle not glass), tampons, medication (potentially with prescription, if you would need it in custody and plan on revealing your identity), snacks, reading matter, bust cards, change for phones/travel;
- Not carrying knives, drugs, names & addresses (including mobile phone address book), briefing sheets;
- Don't be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs;
- Using backpack to protect neck, spine, and kidneys;
- Sitting down in front of police horses

2. The Buddy System

"Buddying up" on actions means agreeing in small groups (generally 2-4) to look out particularly for each other's well being. Buddying should mean you are never alone on the action – you are less likely to get lost, and have someone to leave the scene with you if you need to stop for any reasons. Buddying up is generally a good idea whether your joining a larger mass-action, or acting within an affinity group.

Buddies should be prepared to:

- Know if their buddy has any special (e.g. medical) needs
- Check that their buddy is still with them whenever a group is moving around



- Make sure their buddy is physically OK, and find food/drink/warm clothing/medical attention if they aren't.
- Leave with their buddy if they want to stop for any reason
- Keep an eye on their buddies emotional state, and try to calm them down / comfort them when necessary
- Tell legal support if their buddy gets arrested
- Call for observers if their buddy is getting hurt

This might make it all seem rather formal and cumbersome . In reality it isn't – it's just a way of making sure no one gets forgotten in the confusion of an action, and everyone has a mate to look out for them.

Use the [check-in script](#) when calling a buddy if it helps.

3. Agendas for new affinity groups:

Meeting 1: Agenda

Minutes:

Facilitator:

Present:

Absent:

1. Check-ins (5mins)
2. Read out agenda- Anything to add? (5mins)
3. Share thoughts on the initial talk/lecture that brought you to the NVDA training, or how you got involved
4. Share motivations for attending the workshop and why you feel drawn to civil disobedience. What will help you feel safe in your affinity group meeting space?
5. Discuss roles within group; clarify coordinator & wellbeing person, recap what these roles are and their tasks within your affinity group
6. Either look at together or make action point for everyone to go away and read Legal, Briefing , Likely Charges , Guidelines for Legal Support before taking any NVDA (all available at <https://tinyurl.com/XR-Legal-Briefing>)
7. Encourage people, especially the Regenerative Culture coordinator for your AG to read the wellbeing bundle (<https://tinyurl.com/Wellbeing-bundle>)
8. Arrange next meeting time/place



9. Items for next meeting:
10. Next meeting (5mins)
 - a. Date and time:
 - b. **ACTION:** _____ to post on Facebook/Signal group, and text absent group members to let them know the next meeting time ASAP
11. 1 or 2 word check-out go-round/Share appreciations/gratitude for someone sitting to your left/right or for something in your day/life

Meeting 2 Agenda:

Minutes:

Facilitator:

Present:

Absent:

1. Check-ins (5mins)
2. Actions review of the Minutes of the last meeting - NOT A DISCUSSION (5-10mins)
 - a. Action points that were not completed:
3. Anything to add to agenda? (5mins)
4. Present your thoughts on actions and local actions ideas
5. Watch videos of actions eg how to road block (<https://tinyurl.com/xr-roadblock>) chalk spray etc.
6. Cover action roles- arrestable/non arrestable, well being, media, props etc
7. Pre action roles: writing a press statement, making banners/printing off fliers/gathering props, recruiting others to join the action, advertising event (or not), organising buying resources eg chalk spray.
8. Agree specific meeting place near the target, time, who brings what etc. How long the action will be and **where to meet after for a de-brief** (very important!)
9. Don't forget your buddy!
10. Agree actions and review them - each person to say (5mins)
11. Items for next meeting: Next meeting is an action!
12. Next meeting (5mins)
 - a. Date and time:



- b. **ACTION:** _____ to schedule GoToMeeting and post on Facebook/Signal group, and
text absent group members to let them know the next meeting time ASAP
- 13. 1 or 2 word check-out go-round/Share appreciations/gratitude for someone sitting to your
left/right or for something in your day/life