

# XR NYC SOS Constitution

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*Approved by XR NYC Coordinators Working Group (aka Anchor Circle) on March 2, 2020.  
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## Related Resources

- [Working group map](#) with mandates and links to further information
- [Policy Index](#) with all guidelines and agreements relevant to the XR NYC community

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# I. Introduction

This document defines the organizational structure and practices of Extinction Rebellion New York City (XR NYC). It first reviews the demands and core principles of Extinction Rebellion. It then describes how our organization is structured as a decentralized but coordinated network of small teams, called circles or working groups, according to the principles of “self-organizing systems” adopted by Extinction Rebellion (specifically Extinction Rebellion United Kingdom) and informed by principles of sociocracy/holacracy, [Sociocracy for All](#), and other non hierarchical practices. Finally, it provides some basic ground rules for how these circles operate and relate to each other to maintain efficiency, transparency, and equivalence between members.

To ensure the coherence, coordination and consistency of the XR NYC organization, membership by any individual in an XR NYC circle requires an agreement to work within the system described here.

This is a living document, open to revision as we learn and gain experience. The maintenance and evolution of this Constitution falls within the mandate of the Anchor Circle of XR NYC.

## II. Demands and Principles

### Our Demands

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.
2. **Act now:** Government must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025.
3. **Beyond Politics:** Government must create and be led by the decisions of a [Citizens' Assembly](#) on climate and ecological justice.
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.

### XR International Founding Principles

1. ***We have a shared vision of change:*** creating a world that is fit for generations to come.
2. ***We set our mission on what is necessary:*** mobilizing 3.5% of the population to achieve system change - using ideas such as "Momentum-driven organizing" to achieve this.
3. ***We need a regenerative culture:*** creating a culture which is healthy, resilient and adaptable.
4. ***We openly challenge ourselves and our toxic system:*** leaving our comfort zones to take action for change.
5. ***We value reflecting and learning:*** following a cycle of action, reflection, learning, and planning for more action. Learning from other movements and contexts as well as our own experiences.

6. ***We welcome everyone and every part of everyone (but not all behaviors):*** working actively to create safer and more accessible spaces.
7. ***We actively mitigate for power:*** breaking down hierarchies of power for more equitable participation.
8. ***We avoid blaming and shaming:*** we live in a toxic system, but no one individual is to blame.
9. ***We are a nonviolent network:*** using non-violent strategy and tactics as the most effective way to bring about change.
10. ***We are based on autonomy and decentralization:*** we collectively create the structures we need to challenge power. Anyone who follows these core principles and values can take action in the name of Extinction Rebellion.

### III. XR NYC's Structure

#### A) Background

At their best, horizontal structures are creative and adaptive, empowering individuals and small groups to act autonomously. This is extremely valuable for a movement like ours, which aims to inspire and mobilize many, many people and respond quickly to changing conditions on the ground.

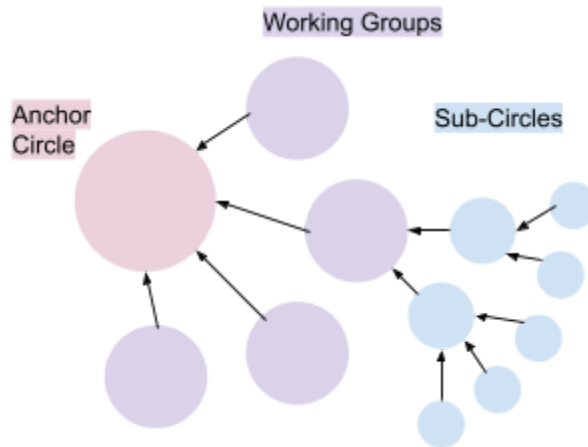
But “decentralized” doesn’t mean “without structure.” Many of us have been in organizations with confusion about their aims and strategies. They spend an enormous amount of time and energy arguing about the right approach, rather than allowing those that agree on an approach to get to it. **For a decentralized movement to work, there has to be widespread understanding and clarity around its vision, strategy and principals.**

We also know that non-hierarchical groups are often plagued by a “[tyranny of structurelessness](#).” Because we live in a deeply unequal society, just declaring something to be “horizontal” doesn’t magically wipe clean the prejudices and privileges we all carry. Without formalized power, leadership will still emerge—but it will be informal, unspoken, and unaccountable. We don’t want to discourage leadership or initiative. Rather, **we want to encourage leadership—and spread it around—with practices that make sure every voice gets heard and that make power transparent and accountable.**

Because we are so used to top-down, command and control organizations, this system takes some explaining. But with application and practice, these ideas will become more familiar and intuitive.

Our structure and ways of working are not perfect. It is everyone’s responsibility to always reflect and give constructive feedback so that the system improves. Stagnant systems die.

## B) The Circle Structure



*This diagram illustrates the general principles of the structure, and doesn't reflect the actual make-up of XR NYC. See the [XR NYC Working Group Map](#) for the current circles and their mandates.*

1. Our organization is made up of small teams, called circles or working groups. (We use these terms interchangeably.) A circle size of under 10 people is recommended so everyone has a chance of being heard.
2. Each circle has a mandate, which is a defined set of aims and an area of responsibility called a domain. Within its mandate, each circle is autonomous and self-governing, meaning it decides for itself how it will organize to accomplish its aims. If a circle is over 10 people, consider creating sub-circles to keep circle size manageable and to distribute work and authority.
3. Mandates are nested which means that one mandate can break down into smaller mandates held by sub-circles; each circle's mandate is part of the larger mandate held by its parent circle. When a mandate becomes too big to manage, form sub-circles and hand off parts of the big mandate to those sub-circles.
4. Each circle has an internal coordinator and an external coordinator. Both coordinators sit on the next broadest circle, ensuring flow of information between levels of the organization. (See the [Circle Roles](#) section below for more on these and other roles.)
5. Each circle can dissolve its sub-circles or change their mandates. (This would require the consent of the coordinators of a sub-circle, who are full members of the broader circle).
6. The broadest working groups send their coordinators to an Anchor Circle, which is the steward of the overall aims of the XR NYC organization. The Anchor Circle defines the mandates of the broadest working groups to ensure there are no gaps or overlaps between them.

## IV. Decision-Making

### A) Circle Policy

Group decision-making has a cost: it takes a lot of time to make and keep track of. Therefore, a circle should focus its decision-making time on *policies* that guide its work. The goal is to empower individuals

to make decisions and get work done outside of meetings, without having to constantly check back in with the group.

The following types of decisions are considered circle policy, and must be made using the Integrative Decision-Making Process defined in the following section.

1. Creating and changing sub-circle mandates.
2. Forming and dissolving sub-circles.
3. Creating a role and defining its mandate. (Use the integrative nominations process to select a person to serve in the role.)
4. Workflow processes that guide a circle in getting work done, if the processes are not within the mandate of an individual role.

These types of decisions must always have a term: a period after which the circle will review the decision and decide if it needs to be changed or extended. Whenever a policy decision is made, the end of its term should be added to the circle's backlog so that it is reviewed at the proper time.

## B) The Integrative Decision-Making Process

### Objections / Consent

In this process, a decision goes forward in the absence of an objection from any member of the circle who is present. An objection is defined as a reason that the proposal would harm the ability of the circle to fulfill its mandate. The objector should be able to give some specific reasons why they believe this to be true, or a reason why the proposal is not safe enough to try.

The goal of this style of decision-making is to encourage circle members to think about decisions in relation to their *range of tolerance*, rather than *personal preference*. It frees us up to consent to a decision even if we don't think it's perfect or exactly the way we'd want it, as long as we don't think it would damage our ability to fulfill our circle's mandate. If we're not sure about a decision, we can always try it for a short time and then reevaluate. **Our mantra is "good enough for now, safe enough to try."**

### The Process

The steps of the integrative decision-making process are:

|                               |                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Present Proposal           | How you arrive at a proposal is up to the facilitator. An individual might come up with one, or the circle might go through a more collective process.   |
| 2) Clarifying Questions Round | Each person has the opportunity to ask questions to clarify the proposal. These are informational questions, not judgments or opinions. That comes next! |

|                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3) Reaction Round                      | Each person, one at a time gives their reaction to the proposal. No discussion or cross talk.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 4) Amend & Clarify                     | The facilitator and/or other proposer can amend the proposal if they want to based on questions/reactions. They can also clarify their intent if they want to. Both of these are optional. Only the facilitator and/or proposer speaks at this step; no other discussion or feedback.                                                                                                                                                           |
| 5) Objection / Consent Round           | <p>The facilitator asks each person if they have any objection to the proposal, as defined above. If someone has an objection the facilitator writes it down where everyone can see, and seeks to understand and harvest the wisdom of the objection as it relates to the circle's mandate.</p> <p>If there are no objections, then the circle has consented to the proposal and it is recorded in the minutes and wherever else necessary.</p> |
| 6) Integrate Objections (if necessary) | Adapt proposal, or address objection to satisfaction, so that the objection no longer exists and the original intention of the proposal is still met.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 7) Objection / Consent Round           | Repeat objection round for the integrated proposal. Once there are no further objections the circle has consented to the proposal.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

### C) The Integrative Role Selection Process

It is highly recommended that roles be selected by consent as detailed in the table below. This process works for selecting one role or multiple roles at once. We do this rather than asking for volunteers, to make sure we have the full insight of the group in finding the most qualified person for the role. It also acknowledges that roles come with both responsibilities and power, and thus this ensures a person is selected by consent from the full group (including the nominee) and with a set term limit. It may be useful to track nominations on a chart visible to the whole group. While this process is recommended for all roles, it is required for the following Working Group roles and should be done with a specified term limit:

- Internal and External Coordinator
- Facilitator
- Scribe
- Regen Advocate

|                 |                                                                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Present Role | The role's mandate should be well defined, and approved by the circle |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                        | using the Integrative Decision-Making Process described above. Specify a term.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2) Qualifications      | Before thinking about who might best fulfill the role, the circle should brainstorm generic qualifications of a person who would successfully fulfill the role's mandate. After gathering the input of the circle, the facilitator proposes a list of qualifications and gets consent before proceeding.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 3) Written Nominations | <p>On a sheet of paper, each circle member writes down their nomination for the role. The facilitator collects the sheets.</p> <p>For virtual meetings, nominations should be submitted to the facilitator via private chat.</p> <p>A person may self-nominate.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 4) Nominations round   | Going around the circle, the facilitator reads each person's nominations aloud and asks the nominator to explain their thinking.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 5) Change Round        | After hearing everyone's initial thinking, each circle member has the option to change their nomination and explain why they made that change. Unlike the first nominations round, circle members do not have to write down their choice and can make a decision when it is their turn in the change round. This allows for coalescing around a "good/safe enough" member to fill the role.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 6) Proposal            | The facilitator makes the choice of whom to propose for the role and explains their reasoning. The role selection process is not an election, so the facilitator is not bound to proposing the person with the most nominations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 7) Objection Round     | <p>The facilitator asks each person if they have any objection to the proposal, as defined above. If someone has an objection, the facilitator writes it down where everyone can see and seeks to understand and harvest the wisdom of the objection as it relates to the circle's aim. Then tests it. The nominated individual must consent as well as all other members(usually the nominated individual goes last in the round).</p> <p>If there are no objections, then the proposal is consented to and recorded in the minutes and wherever else necessary. If there are objections, follow steps 6 and 7 in the Integrative Decision-Making Process described above.</p> |

## V. How Circles Work

### A) Circle Mandates

The mandate for the entire XR NYC organization is held by the Anchor Circle, which distributes pieces of that mandate to the Working Groups or Circles. Each circle has its own mandate which is a combination of the following:

- **Aims:** The reasons the circle exists, or what it is working towards, as a smaller part of the aims of the whole organism. These should be specific, actionable and measurable.
- **Domain:** A circle's area of responsibility for policy making and operational activities.

### B) Circle Membership

#### Criteria for membership

1. Circles are meant for the people doing the work of planning, coordination and decision-making required for building a mass movement in New York City. In this system authority is earned; people earn the right to be a member of a team and attend meetings if they are actively filling a role and working on at least one project for that team as seen on a team's project board (if using a project board). This prevents meetings being clogged up by people attending and sharing their views about how things should happen if they aren't actually involved in any work.
2. For a person to join and maintain membership in a circle, they need to agree to and act in alignment with Extinction Rebellion's Principles and this Constitution. Individuals with a history of repeatedly violating the principles, or failing to cooperate with a conflict resilience process are not eligible to join a circle.
3. Any rebel is eligible to join an XR NYC circle, regardless of their personal, social or cultural background.

#### Process for Becoming a Member

1. For someone to join a circle they need to be invited by the Internal Coordinator of the group, on the basis of there being an identified fit between some piece of work that is needed and a person's ability to meet the need.
2. To help in assessing the fit of a potential member, they may be invited to observe a circle meeting.
3. The current members of the circle must consent to a new member before they can officially join the circle. The circle can ask the potential member to speak to why they want to join, their strengths and weaknesses, their capacity and commitment, and anything else deemed relevant.

- a. Groups are entitled to modify this specific point for their circle depending on the needs of the circle.
4. Upon joining a circle, a new member's orientation by Internal Coordinator should include:
  - a. Extinction Rebellion's Demands & Principles
  - b. The XR NYC SOS Constitution
  - c. The XR NYC [conflict resilience process](#)
  - d. The circumstances in which they may be asked to leave the group
  - e. Attending HFE talk, Orientation call, and NVDA training
  - f. Conduct an Integration call
  - g. [Review security materials](#)
  - h. Join relevant communication channels (keybase, etc), with support as needed

### Process for Being Asked to Leave a Circle

1. If a circle member believes that another member is not properly fulfilling their role/mandate, or is not keeping their agreement to act in alignment with Extinction Rebellion's Principles and Values, the Rebellion's aims, and its constitution, they can:
  - a. Raise it directly with the person to see if it can be resolved that way;
  - b. And/or raise it with the internal coordinator of the group and request support from the Conflict Resilience Sub-Circle to call-in the member to dialogue as outlined in the [conflict resilience process](#).
2. Any Circle member may propose that someone be removed from their circle. Such a proposal will follow the steps of the integrative decision-making process, except the person being proposed to be removed cannot object to their own removal. No one may object to a proposal for removal being placed on the agenda of the circle. Rationale: this shifts the power from an individual Internal Coordinator to the Circle as a whole.

### Visitor Policy

1. All circle meetings are open.
2. Only members of the circle participate in decision making.
3. Visitors are invited to participate at the discretion of the internal coordinator, or the facilitator in the internal coordinator's absence.

## C) Circle roles

It is recommended that circles define internal roles with clear mandates **for all ongoing work**. This increases clarity and reduces potential confusion about who is doing what. When a circle defines roles with mandates, the authority for what is included in the mandates is then delegated from the circle level into a role. This means that whatever is in those mandates no longer gets decided at a circle level, instead it gets decided by the role-holder. Anyone serving in any of the below roles is expected to attend circle meetings and be an active member of the circle (helping to do the work of the circle).

Each circle should select members to fill the following "process roles" for a specified term.

## **1. Regenerative Culture Advocate**

- a. Advocates for regenerative culture practices within the circle and is in communication with the Regen Circle.

## **2. Facilitator**

- a. Creates agenda in consultation with the internal coordinator. (Agenda is consented to by the circle.)
- b. Runs meetings and structures decision making processes. Maintains equivalence of voices on the circle.

## **3. Scribe**

- a. Takes meeting minutes, focusing on decisions, action items and project updates.
- b. Ensures minutes are properly stored and visible by all members of the organization (not just the circle).
- c. Maintains a record of the circle's current mandate, policies, and roles.
- d. Maintains the backlog of topics in need of discussion, including the term ends of existing policies.
- e. Interprets past policy and mandates upon request.

## **4. Internal Coordinator**

- a. Pays attention to the big picture, the circle's operations in relation to its mandate and the context of the next broadest circle.
- b. Oriented to the *future*: what needs to be done, who agreed to do it? What decisions are upcoming? Give input to the facilitator about the agenda before each meeting.
- c. Check in with circle members to offer support and accountability. Do they have what they need to do what they've agreed to do? Are they encountering any confusion or challenges?
- d. Invites new members to join the circle in alignment with [membership policy](#).
- e. Keeps the list of circle members up to date so it's clear who is in the circle. Adds new members to any communications platforms as required. Ensures there's a list of emergency contacts for all active members.
- f. Listens to feedback from circle members and asks people to leave if they aren't fulfilling the responsibilities in the membership policy.
- g. Sits on the next broader circle. Serves as the voice of that broader circle in the circle they coordinate.
  - i. For anchor/coordinator circle, *either* the Internal or External coordinator will represent the working group (to be decided between the coordinators, with External being the default).
- h. Schedules circle meetings.

## **5. External Coordinator**

- a. Sits on the next broader circle. Serves as this circle's voice on the broader circle and responsible for reporting back relevant information from parent circle.
  - i. For anchor/coordinator circle, *either* the Internal or External coordinator will represent the working group (to be decided between the coordinators, with External being the default).

- b. Assists and supports the Internal Coordinator with the above listed tasks, to be agreed upon between the coordinators.
- c. Serves as a public face of the working group as needed.

#### D) Circle Attendance

1. Reasonable notice is required to be given to all circle/circle members before a meeting happens by whoever schedules the meeting.
2. There is no required quorum or number of members for a circle meeting to happen, it happens with whoever shows up unless otherwise specified in a policy that a certain number or mix of people are required to be there.
3. If decision-making and frequent absences create issues on a regular basis, circles are encouraged to make policy on how to proceed around consent and absentees. A pragmatic policy is to require absent circle members to raise objections to decisions made based on the minutes within 48 hours after the meeting. After that time frame, all members' consent is assumed. Objections are brought to the internal coordinator and together the objector and the internal coordinator decide how to proceed.