










XR Western Mass Affinity Group Welcome Pack

This document is modelled off of the XR UK AG Welcome Pack: <http://bit.ly/xruk-ag-welcome>

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1. 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 30 years of feminist, anti-nuclear, environmental and social justice movements around the world. They were first used 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 approximately 8-12 people, with a minimum of 4, and are autonomous to do the actions they want to in the name of XR as long as they adhere to XR US **Principles and Demands** (<https://extinctionrebellion.us/demands-principles>) and register with the XR W Mass Affinity group Network Coordinator.

AGs can get involved by either:

- 1) joining in one of Extinction Rebellion's mass actions (e.g., blocking a bridge together),
- 2) by joining with other XR AGs to do an action or
- 3) by undertaking your own actions as an AG (e.g., blocking the entrance to a petroleum conference).

In each case, the AG decides how it wants to engage with the action (e.g. arrestability, style, spirituality). For all actions, AGs need to adhere to our P&Vs **action agreement** at <https://xrwesternmass.squarespace.com/s/XR-Action-Consensus.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.

- Info on [different kinds](https://xrmass.org/wiki/org-structure/#decision-making) of decision-making: <https://xrmass.org/wiki/org-structure/#decision-making>
- Info on [consensus decision](https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus) making: <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>

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

You can get together with other XR W Mass members, a group of friends interested in XR actions, or attend an AG building workshop (which may be part of a NVDA training). Before you can participate in an XR action, you will need to attend a non-violent civil disobedience (NVDA) training. If you'd like to join an existing AG in your area, contact the Affinity Group Network Coordinator. The rest of this guide is intended to help new groups set up and get prepared for the rebellion.

2. **Affinity Group Network Coordinator** (Your main point of contact with the XR W Mass chapter. Based within the Action working group). Direct questions here: xrwm.ag@protonmail.com

3. Organizational roles within affinity groups

These roles cover communication and meetings as your affinity group gets to know each other and plans for actions. If someone is unable to fill their role (whether short or long-term), they are responsible for finding someone to take over their role. We suggest that your AG cycles these roles between members every 4-6 months.

- **AG coordinator:** coordinates the general activities of the AG. Responsibilities include:
 - scheduling AG meetings and finding members to fill the roles for the meeting: host, facilitator, and someone to design the agenda
 - making sure communication between group members is set up
 - ensuring that all the necessary roles are being filled
- **Action Liaison:** AG's point-of-contact with the Affinity Group Network. Responsibilities include:
 - attends the AG Network meetings on behalf of the AG (see the action alignment process, section 8).
 - presents the AG's action proposals and report back to the AG
 - gives feedback on other AG proposals
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- **Well-being coordinator:** AG's point-of-contact with the Regenerative Culture Working Group, and coordinates well-being on actions. Responsibilities include:
 - passing on information about trainings and arrestee support to the AG,
 - ensuring that the well-being roles on actions are filled.

4. **Forming Your Affinity Group**



Starting out: Your AG coordinator should be chosen when the AG forms. They should:

- Create a way for the AG to keep in touch (See [communications](#) section)
- Organise your first meeting. You can use the agenda templates provided below!
- Contact the Affinity Group Network coordinator to tell them about your new group- they will brief you about upcoming actions and link you up with other AGs in your area.

2. Have meetings: AG meetings are to be framed as a chance for people to build trust, get to know one another, share skills and expectations and vulnerabilities.

- For heart-opening practices to help you get to know your affinity group, check out <https://xrmass.org/wiki/working-groups/regenerative-culture/trust/>



Undertake your own AG action, or take part in a large coordinated XR W Mass



Debrief your action: In XR, we value reflecting and learning. Debriefing your action helps you process and learn for the next one. You can find documents that guide you through a debrief on the template here

(https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nPZfEPcoGBu-sEfBqhN9IwgAtOLG_p3P/view)



Keep it up! A good goal is for your affinity group to meet once a month and do an event/action together once a month.

5. Affinity Group Meetings

Organizing an Affinity Group Meeting

- AG coordinator should arrange first meeting (others can take on role next time)
- Agree location to meet – e.g., someone’s house, community centre, hired room - bear in mind privacy, convenience, and accessibility (e.g., noise level, mobility)
- Set time and length of meeting; determine people’s flexibility, as length of meeting will structure agenda
- Depending on the time of day, agree whether you will bring food to share, snacks etc.

AG Meeting structure suggestion (see template agenda below)

- **Roles:** Choose a facilitator (to keep an eye on time, agenda points being covered and make sure everyone gets to speak) and a note taker (to write down important points, questions, actions to take forward from meeting).
- Explain any **Hand signals** for meetings (<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/handsig.pdf>). Along with a facilitator, this helps make sure everyone can give input in discussions.
- **Check in:** this is a chance for people to share how they’re feeling
- **Cover agenda points:** note any Action Points (things people say they will do)
- **Grounding and connection:** 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

Sample Agendas for New Affinity Groups

Meeting 1: Groundwork agenda (please contact AG Network Coordinator if you'd like assistance with this meeting)

Note-taker:	Facilitator:	Present:	Absent:
Introductions and check-ins (5mins)			
Read out agenda- Anything to add? (5mins)			
What will help you participate in your affinity group meeting space? Any community agreements to make?			
Share thoughts on the initial talk/event that brought you to this AG, or how you got involved. Share why you feel drawn to civil disobedience.			
Name your affinity group. How will you go about making this decision? What works, what doesn't?			
Discuss organizational roles within group; clarify general coordinator, action liaison, and & wellbeing coordinator, recap what these roles are and their tasks within your affinity group.			
Read the XR NVDA Intro . anything that needs clarification?			
Review our online resources for affinity groups (https://xrmass.org/wiki/affinity-groups/). Is there anything you'd like to know more about? If there are questions, send to AG Network Coordinator			
Encourage everyone to read the wellbeing resources (https://xrmass.org/wiki/affinity-groups/wellbeing/ , https://tinyurl.com/Wellbeing-bundle)			
Make sure everyone is connected with others and comfortable using Cyrtpad, Signal, Proton mail etc.			
Agree on action points and review them - each person to say theirs (5mins)			
Next meeting (5mins)			
Date and time:			
ACTION: _____ to send a message to group members with next meeting details, and text absent group members to let them know the next meeting time ASAP			

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

Some suggestions for subsequent Meetings:

Note-taker: Facilitator: Present Absent:

Check-ins (5mins)
Review of the Minutes of the last meeting - NOT A DISCUSSION (5-10mins)
 Action points that were not completed:
Anything to add to agenda? (5mins)
Present your thoughts on actions and local actions ideas.
Watch videos of actions eg how to road block (<https://tinyurl.com/xr-roadblock>) chalk spray etc.
Get people's feelings on which action to do, by doing some continuum exercises

If you are preparing for an action:
Cover action roles- arrestable/non arrestable, well being, media, props etc
Pre action roles: writing a press statement, making banners/printing off fliers/gathering props/learning songs, recruiting others to join the action, advertising event (or not), organising buying resources eg chalk spray.
Depending on the level of risk for the action, have time to discuss the legal and support aspects of the action. Consider:
 have you arranged for XR-NLG liaison to set up legal observers & have a lawyer to represent you after arrest?
 Have you reviewed the NVCD support document that you received at NVDA training?
 Have you filled out an arrestee support form, and shared it with your support person?
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 debrief (very important!)
Don't forget your buddy!
Agree on action points and review them - each person to say theirs (5mins)
Items for next meeting: Next meeting is an action!
Next meeting (5mins)
 Date and time:
 ACTION: _____ to send a message to group members with next meeting details, and text absent group members to let them know the next meeting time ASAP
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

6. Affinity group resources



Digital resources

XR Western Mass Calendar:

<https://www.xrwesternmass.org/act?view=calendar&month=03-2020>

Arts/flyers resources (find XR logos, font, and more): <https://xrmass.org/wiki/working-groups/arts/resources/>



Peer mentoring

We are developing a peer mentoring system, in which members of more established affinity groups can give guidance to newer affinity groups and help get them started:

- A member of an established AG can attend your AG's first meeting to give advice and answer questions
- A new AG member may attend an established AG's meeting to learn about their

process

If you would like to participate (either as part of an established or new AG), email the Affinity Network Coordinator.

7. Communications Platforms

Signal (<https://signal.org/>): for secure texting

Cryptpad (<https://cryptpad.fr>) for document sharing

Protonmail (<https://protonmail.com/>) for email.

8. Affinity Group Network

When planning an action, you should get feedback from a variety of groups and people.

Feedback helps your affinity group and XR Western Mass as a whole make its actions as effective as possible. Each AG and the Action WG send a representative to the AGN. You put a lot of work into planning actions, let's make them count!

Affinity Group Network is a meeting where your affinity group can do that, as well as coordinate with other groups and the larger chapter. This is the forum for making decisions about actions that involve multiple affinity groups.

- Affinity groups can also join an Extinction Rebellion mass action, or work with other local affinity groups.
- Action proposals can be brought to the Affinity Group Network by the action WG or affinity groups
- For large chapter-wide actions, the action WG will develop an action framework laying out possible options and what is necessary to accomplish them, and then AGs figure out whether, where and how they want to fit in.
- AGs can coordinate with each other at a Affinity Group Network to put on a mid-sized action

9. Considerations for Action Planning and Participation

Action roles

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

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.

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 in 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 first-aider might also be a police liaison or 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. You can also rotate roles between actions.

- **Action support:** Provides direct personal support for arrestable people. This person tries to avoid arrest, but knows the possibility of arrest exists, since the actions of authorities cannot be predicted. Depending on the nature of the action this means bringing water, food supplies, blankets, tissues, etc. and keeping everyone spirited. Leads chants, give out snacks and back rubs, etc. (You can learn some good songs here: <http://bit.ly/thrive-songbook>)

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 locating 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, water whatever people will want when they are released.

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 should be prepared for the possibility of arrest as police can be unpredictable. This person is NOT the group's decision maker. 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 if AG is doing its own entire action (i.e., not coordinating for a larger chapter action). 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.

- **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 decision-making:** There needs to be a way for the affinity group to make quick on-site action decisions -- the precise way this is done is up to the affinity group and the other groups they are coordinating with. It may be useful to have a point-person to make quick decisions with other onsite affinity groups. Maybe your group wants to come to quick consensus (page 6-7 of this [document](#)).

People risking arrest: The people climbing, locking on, sitting down, trespassing, etc. Should be technically prepared for everything they plan to do, well rested, fed and calm.

Legal Observer: XR Western Mass can get trained legal observers from the MA chapter of the National Lawyers' Guild to attend actions. Contact our XR-NLG Liaison to schedule this well in advance.

LEGAL OBSERVERS MUST BE TRAINED BY THE NLG, CANNOT TAKE ON ANY OTHER ROLES YOU MUST BE ASSIGNED THIS ROLE IN THE ACTION. THEY MUST BE ASSIGNED THE ROLE FOR THIS ACTION BY NLG.

Other Action Points to discuss:

- **Look & Feel:** XR's strategy is to be open and accountable when it comes to actions. We want to be visible doing what is right, since 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 (www.deescalate.info)
 1. Approach them proactively and respectfully
 2. Inform them of what we are doing and highlight that it is nonviolent.
 3. Explain the reason for your action to the public (i.e., the urgency of the climate and ecological emergency, the necessity for civil disobedience) and explain that you are sorry for the inconvenience you are causing. We have found that flyers

can be useful, e.g.: <http://bit.ly/apologyflyer>

4. Be friendly but practice not sharing any personal or action details (where, when, who is involved, etc.).

- Security culture -Discuss the extent of the security you will keep in your AG you can:
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- Movement Care within an Affinity Group
 - Package for Wellbeing Coordinators (being developed)
 - Group agreement: 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 a short version of it back (in pairs)- is a useful tool for starting meetings and beyond.
 - Think about accessibility for meeting places, about people's health and access needs.
 - Setting up a Buddy System (See below)
 - Look at this handout on '[self care and avoiding burn-out](#)'
- Legal info: The Western Mass chapter will try to have a meeting prior to a mass action with the National Lawyers' Guild to cover the legal aspects of action. At least one person from each AG should be assigned to attend and report back, but the more people that can attend themselves, the better. The NLG may also provide legal observers and representation in court but you must coordinate this through the XR-NLG liaison.
- Action Safety Guidelines
 - Check in with your affinity group;
 - Appropriate clothing; Wear several layers; Remove jewellery; Tie up hair; Cut nails;
 - Carrying Water (plastic bottle not glass), tampons, medication (with prescription, if you would need it in custody), snacks, reading matter.
 - Not carrying knives, weapons, drugs, names & addresses (including cellphone contacts), laptops, briefing sheets;
 - Don't be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs;
 - If you are risking arrest, you should pair up with someone else also risking arrest of the same gender. Trans folk are encouraged to check with the NLG about specific considerations.

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 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 or other) 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 buddy's 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. Check in with your buddy after a action.