



extinction
rebellion

PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLIES MANUAL



People's Assemblies are part of the escalation strategy that XR will follow in the lead up to International Rebellion Day on April 15. This grass roots method of self organising and direct action, was at the centre of the Arab Revolt that spread from Tunisia to Egypt in 2011 as well as the Spanish 15M movement, the Occupy movement, the Y En A Marre in Senegal, and the Democratic Federation of Rojava. In January 2019 the Gilets Jaunes movement in France established 18 People's Assemblies nationwide to organise and focus their movement.



By necessity these demands require initiatives and mobilisation of similar size and scope to those enacted in times of war. We do not however, trust our Government to make the bold, swift and long-term changes necessary to achieve this and we do not intend to hand further power to our politicians. Instead we demand a Citizen's Assembly to oversee the changes, as we rise from the wreckage, creating a democracy fit for purpose

The third demand of Extinction Rebellion

Traditional representational democracy is not fit for the purpose of addressing the climate emergency, as politicians represent many competing interests before they represent the interests of people and planet. XR see radical new forms of democracy, that put decision making back in the hands of the people, as the only way by which we can take back control from the corporate captured system currently failing us.

The third XR demand for the use of Citizen's Assemblies chosen by Sortition shows one way that this broken system can be made obsolete. We trust ordinary people, chosen at random and put through a deliberative democracy process, as being more able to address the realities of the climate emergency than the current political system can ever do. And there is no time left. A way of seeing democracy in motion and on the streets, is through People's Assemblies, where people can begin to reclaim power and address what global politics and the system that drives it is failing to do.

People's Assemblies are simply a crowd of people talking in an organised way, sharing their feelings and ideas about change. As the world becomes more and more atomized, meeting with strangers and sharing your feelings is itself transformative. In the context of Extinction Rebellion, assemblies will be constructed in a way where people are safe to share the grief and loss they feel for a world that is rapidly collapsing. The assemblies will hold that grief with respect and allow people to work together to organise towards rebellion and a shift away from the system that has brought us to this crisis of all crises.

As a tool running up to International Rebellion Day, assemblies will have specific uses which this manual will explain. Assemblies are not an alternative to non violent direct action but they will complement that process. We continue with peaceful civil disobedience at the centre of all we do.

People's Assemblies are also part of the deep adaptation that communities will have to go through in order to face together the growing impact of climate and biodiversity breakdown. As societal structures collapse, we are going to have to reclaim power for our communities and these forms of participatory democracy will become essential to the way we organise.

WHAT ARE THEY?

A way for a group of people to discuss issues or make decisions collectively, where all voices are heard and valued equally and no one person or group are able to dominate the process. Assemblies can be a form of direct action if they are being held in a space designed to be disruptive or during occupations.

People's assemblies are not to be confused with citizens assemblies, in which randomly chosen citizens are put through a process of learning by a wide range of experts leading to an in depth knowledge and perspective about a specific issue before voting on it.

Three ways that People's Assemblies can be used:

- Assemblies held in public spaces can act as a way for members of the public to be drawn into joining the conversation and add their voice to discussion and debate around the climate emergency (Movement building)
- Assemblies can form part of a direct action when they are held during occupations, road blocks or other forms of non violent civil disobedience involving groups of people holding spaces any length of time (Direct action)
- Groups of any size can meet and discuss issues or make decisions collectively in regards to moving the aims and actions of XR forward. The basic participatory democracy method can be used by direct action groups to make emergency decisions, regional groups to make decisions on how to organise themselves or for affinity and working group meetings (Organising and decision making).

FPeople there wanted to raise their voices and state their opinions and there was a facilitator, people were taking notes. It was being done in an orderly way to ensure everyone could speak... Now everyone can say, 'We have the right to say that we are tired of things and want change.' We know now that we have the strength that comes from being many people

A member of 15M recalls her first assembly



THREE NECESSARY ELEMENTS

Three key elements of People's Assemblies are radical inclusivity, active listening and trust.

1) Effective assemblies achieve radical inclusivity, where the emphasis on all being heard and valued equally means no voices are dominating and the collective wisdom of the assembly can be reached. People can participate safely and openly, without fear of judgement or ridicule. Radical inclusivity is a practical step to widening a movement through providing agency to all who participate.

2) It is easy to start mapping out in your mind what your response may be while someone is still talking. Active listening is focusing on hearing someone all the way through before developing your responses. Assemblies are not an arena for intellectual jousting or point scoring but a place that recognises that no one person or group holds all the answers and that through the wisdom of the crowds we achieve powerful intelligence about the core issues being discussed.

3) Once the system and process for People's Assemblies has been agreed on, it is essential that all participants trust the process, trust the facilitators and trust the various working groups involved. It is not meant to be a perfect system and can only be effective if people trust that those involved have come together in humility, to work towards decisions and actions that are best for all.

Diversity in opinion will pay you back in the long run socially... if we don't fix this problem to start with we are simply going to replicate existing power structures

Eleanor Saitta, hacker and designer

It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it

Aristotle

I see the 15M assemblies and neighbourhood organising in retrospective and I'm amazed how it could work and most importantly all the trust that it meant

Carolina, a founder of 15M and www.takethesquare.net

HOW DO YOU ORGANISE A PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY?

Choose the venue

People's Assemblies are usually held in public spaces like town squares or outside prominent places like a city or town hall. They are designed to be as open as possible so that members of the public can easily join in. They are also held in community centres or other public buildings, particularly during the winter. Assemblies can be located outside (or inside) somewhere that may link to the issue being addressed by the assembly. For example, if the assembly is looking at the effects of climate and biodiversity breakdown on the agricultural industry, an assembly outside the local National Farmer's Union, where the process group have invited the key members, is a way of forcing a response. All assemblies are held in venues that are fully wheelchair accessible.

A week before

A 'process working group' is responsible for the overall organising of the assembly and will be preparing for each new assembly as it is coming up.

The media and messaging team advertise the assemblies a week in advance, if possible creating local media coverage.

Messaging of the assembly includes stating the agenda and any proposals, giving people time for consideration or research.

The process group:

- Plan for a play area where the assembly will be held so that parents know they can attend and there will be a safe place where their children can be cared for during the assembly.
- If the assembly is expected to be over 100, plan for a PA system so that elderly people or people who are hard of hearing are included.
- Organise who the two lead facilitators and assembly note taker will be and confirm with them the date and time and the agenda.
- Organise a team of greeters who will be available on the event to welcome all people as they arrive, answer questions and provide hot drinks and snacks.
- Make sure social media are ready to cover the assembly and arrange livestreaming if possible.

A day before

The process group:

- Meet with the facilitators and make a plan for how the assembly can be run most effectively.
- Check the venue is still open and has not had road works start or any other unexpected change.
- Make sure the greeters are prepared and have food and hot drinks organised.
- Check the people running the child care area are prepared.
- Test the PA system if using one.

An hour before

- The process group, facilitators and media and messaging team meet and run through the assembly plan.
- The assembly team all wear clothing making them easily identifiable.
- The greeting team set up food and hot drinks and any XR stalls
- The PA is set up and tested
- The children's area is organised
- Social media team starts sending out pics of the assembly being set up, using #XRAssembly.

During the assembly

The process group:

- Support the facilitators in keeping the assembly being run as planned and on time.
- Make sure people in the assembly are supported.
- Answer any questions on the process, one to one, aside from the assembly.

After the assembly

The process group:

- Support greeting team in collecting any sign ups from new people.
- Answering any questions about the process or about the assembly schedule or how to volunteer to help with assemblies.
- Have a detailed feedback and reflection meeting with facilitators.
- Make sure PA equipment is packed and returned.
- Have a party with everyone remaining.



Photo by Ruth Davey

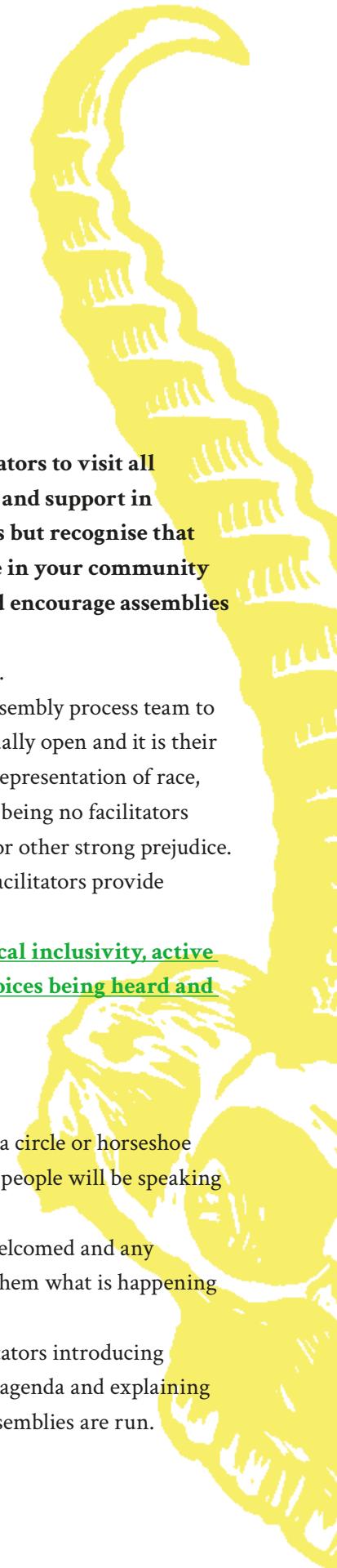
XR will be providing facilitators to visit all regional groups for training and support in running effective assemblies but recognise that there are likely many people in your community with these skills already and encourage assemblies with facilitation where:

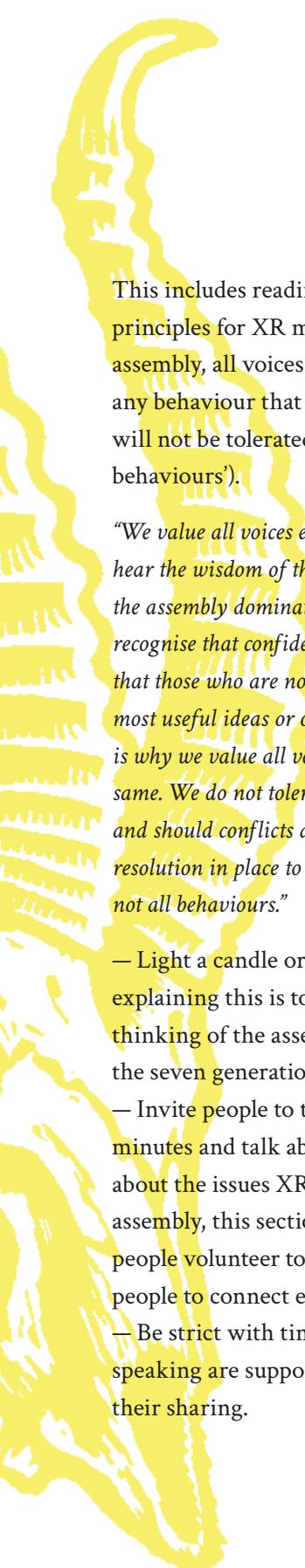
- Facilitators are rotated often.
- Volunteering through the assembly process team to be a facilitator remains continually open and it is their responsibility to ensure equal representation of race, gender and age as well as there being no facilitators with entrenched political bias or other strong prejudice.
- Neutrality and diversity in facilitators provide effective assemblies.
- Facilitators maintain radical inclusivity, active listening and trust and all voices being heard and valued equally.

Starting an assembly

The facilitation team:

- Help the crowd assemble in a circle or horseshoe shape with a clear space where people will be speaking from.
- Make sure that people are welcomed and any newcomers have explained to them what is happening and how they can take part.
- Start on time with the facilitators introducing themselves, going through the agenda and explaining the principle ways by which assemblies are run.





HOW DO YOU FACILITATE A PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY?

This includes reading out the regenerative culture principles for XR meetings and emphasising that in assembly, all voices are valued and heard equally and any behaviour that seeks to violate these principles will not be tolerated ('we welcome all people but not all behaviours').

"We value all voices equally in the assembly, as the aim is to hear the wisdom of the crowd gathered here and not to have the assembly dominated by individual voices or groups. We recognise that confident speakers are not always right and that those who are not confident speakers will often have the most useful ideas or opinions to put into the discussion. This is why we value all voices equally and we ask you to do the same. We do not tolerate any calling out, abuse or shaming and should conflicts arise in this way, there is a conflict resolution in place to resolve this. We welcome all people but not all behaviours."

— Light a candle or flame at the centre of the assembly, explaining this is to keep present in the collective thinking of the assembly, all children living today and the seven generations to come.

— Invite people to take the microphone for two minutes and talk about how they feel personally about the issues XR are addressing. In an open public assembly, this section can be drawn out as long as people volunteer to speak. It opens the space up for people to connect emotionally.

— Be strict with timing but ensure that people speaking are supported and made completely safe in their sharing.

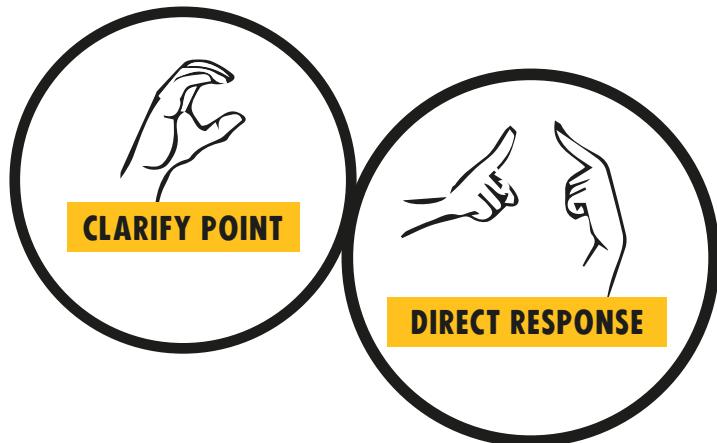
Main section

The facilitation team:

Run through the agenda (agendas could include a discussion point ('what will the effects of climate breakdown be on our community over the next three years?') a proposal ('we should support the local anti fracking camp with a day of non violent civil disobedience at the drilling site next Saturday'), organising ('feedback and updates from the working groups') or decision making ('shall we go to London for April 15th or create our own actions here in our town or do both?')

- Present the agenda and check if anybody puts up their hand in the 'clarification' signal and will relate the agenda more clearly if that is needed. If this is clarification about a proposal, the person or people who have made the proposal can give clarification.
- Divide the assembly into 'breakout groups' ideally of eight. Facilitators need to try and ensure this is roughly the size of each group and encourage people to sit in groups with people they don't already know.
- Are clear about how long the breakout groups have to discuss. Stick to timings throughout an assembly as many people who are attending have work or family responsibilities that have to be respected.

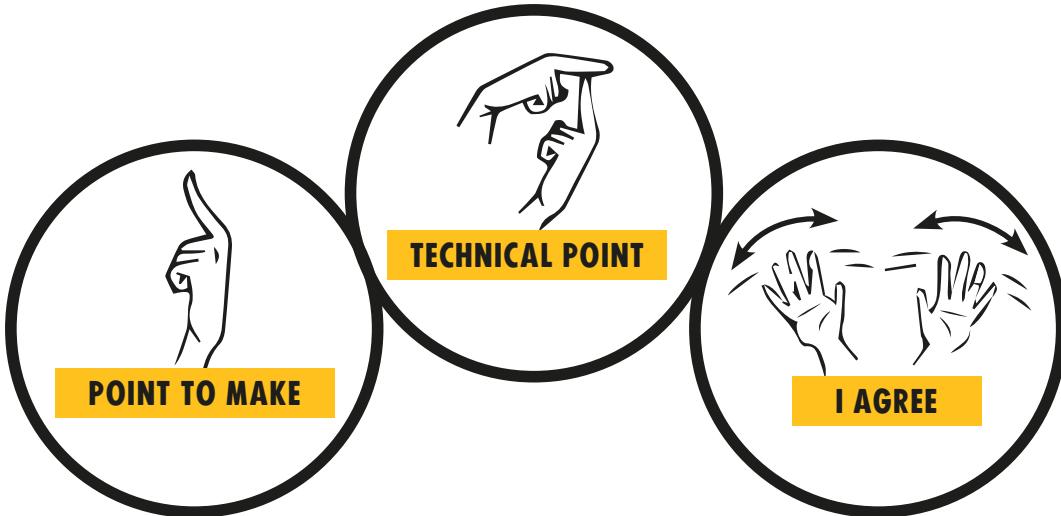
HOW DO YOU FACILITATE A PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY?



Breakout groups

- These groups now have the task of discussing the proposal, question or issue in depth.
- Each group must elect a facilitator and a note taker.
- The break out group facilitator needs to be sensitive to the practise of radical inclusivity and active listening, ensuring that all are heard equally and with respect.
- The note taker will have to summarise in their notes what is being said in very basic bullet points. The ideal for a twenty five minute break out group is to aim for five key bullet points. Most practised note takers will write a set of notes as people speak and will have time at the end to then boil their notes down into bullet points.
- When someone in the group wants to say something they put their finger up and wait for the facilitator to let them have their turn in speaking. It is vital that people do not talk over anyone else and waits their turn. Facilitators must ensure that people do not speak for more than two minutes each time.
- If some people put their finger up to speak and have not yet said anything while others have spoken a lot, then the facilitator gives that person priority over the 'stack'.
- If someone says something that you agree with, it is important to give the 'wavy hands' signal of approval. This instantly indicates how much consensus there is towards something being said. If everybody erupts into a forest of waving hands, the note taker can see that this is one of the more popular points made and it will become one of the key bullet points fed back.

- If someone says something that is unclear, people will hold out their hand in the 'clarification' signal which the facilitator will pause the discussion for until clarification is made.
- If someone says something that another person has directly relevant information to add, that person makes the 'direct point' hand signal and the facilitator will let them provide that relevant information immediately after the person has finished their point. Direct points have to be absolutely relevant in terms of adding critical information that a speaker is not aware of ('the date of the action has now been changed to Wednesday'). This is not an excuse to jump the stack just to make your point. Don't abuse this as people will lose trust in the process.
- If someone has information that is immediately relevant to the well being of the entire group, they make a 'technical point' signal with their hands. This is only used for immediate concerns to the well being of the whole group ('this room is being used by another group in five minutes time').
- Just as someone is reaching their two minutes, the facilitator needs to make the 'rounding up' hand signal. This must be done sensitively but at the same time be firm.
- Being a facilitator means that you are constantly watching the group, ensuring that nobody dominates the conversation, being sensitive to prioritising those who do not speak out for a long while or who are nervous of speaking, ensuring that mutual respect and equal valuing of all voices is maintained and always keeping an eye on the time.



- Five minutes before the end of a breakout session, the facilitator needs to bring the discussion to a close and allow the note taker time to run through their minutes, identify what they considered to be the key bullet points and then have time to feedback to the group so that they can all agree that it is a fair representation of the discussion.
- The lead assembly facilitators will call all the groups back into the assembly and note takers to come to the front to feedback.
- Each note taker feeds back their key points as agreed from their particular breakout group. It is important that the whole assembly is encouraged to show ‘wavy hands’ when they agree with something, both hands held high and waving wildly shows full approval. This helps the overall note taker for the assembly to identify the most popular points that have been made.
- Facilitators are encouraged to ask the assembly to show their appreciation for the people who facilitated the breakout groups and who took the notes for the breakout groups.

Proposals

- If the assembly is focusing on a proposal, the facilitators go for a ‘temperature check’ where the proposal is read out again (after being discussed in the breakout groups) and the assembly use their hands to show agreement or not.
- If only a few people are showing agreement then the proposal is taken back and can either be adjusted to fit the ideas that have emerged from the points made in the assembly or is dropped altogether if it has no support or no way of being adjusted to meet the collective vision of the assembly. (A proposal for

putting all the group’s time and resources into a local anti-fracking campaign may not be approved but a popular point made from a group that some of the time and resources be put into the local group could see the proposal returning with that adjustment).

- Facilitators check with the assembly note taker that the exact wording of the proposal is noted.

Rounding up

- Towards the close of an assembly, people are encouraged to make ‘shout outs’. These are brief informational statements ('there's a film night and fundraiser at the local cinema on Sunday') or requests ('there's a media and messaging group meeting on Thursday and we need a venue'). These need to be kept short and should be arranged with the facilitators before hand if possible and all shout outs together should not take up more than ten minutes in all.
- The two lead assembly facilitators need to summarise the outcomes of the assembly, thank all those who have helped the assembly take place and clearly state where and when the next assembly will be held and where the notes will be published.
- Once everyone has started to pack up, have a party with those who are remaining



Assemblies during direct action or occupations

- Depending on the size, duration and police presence, these assemblies can either be quick decision making assemblies ('the police have given us these options, what should we do?') These will not involve breakout groups but will rely on facilitation towards the whole assembly, taking in immediate hand signal based reactions.
- If the action or occupation is going on for any long period of time, they can be longer assemblies where people are able to discuss the key issues related to the action ('we are occupying the offices of a major extraction corporation, in what other ways can we disrupt the fossil fuel industry?').

HOW DO YOU FACILITATE A PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY?



On the first XR Rebellion Day around 400 people took part in an assembly during the occupation of Westminster Bridge, with 27 breakout groups discussing 'in what ways can the UK move to net carbon zero by 2025?'





Photo by Kay Michael

On Declaration Day 31st October 2018 a few hundred people moved into the road at Parliament Square in London and held a quick collective decision making assembly deciding to stay in the road as non violent civil disobedience.



Photo by Ruth Davey

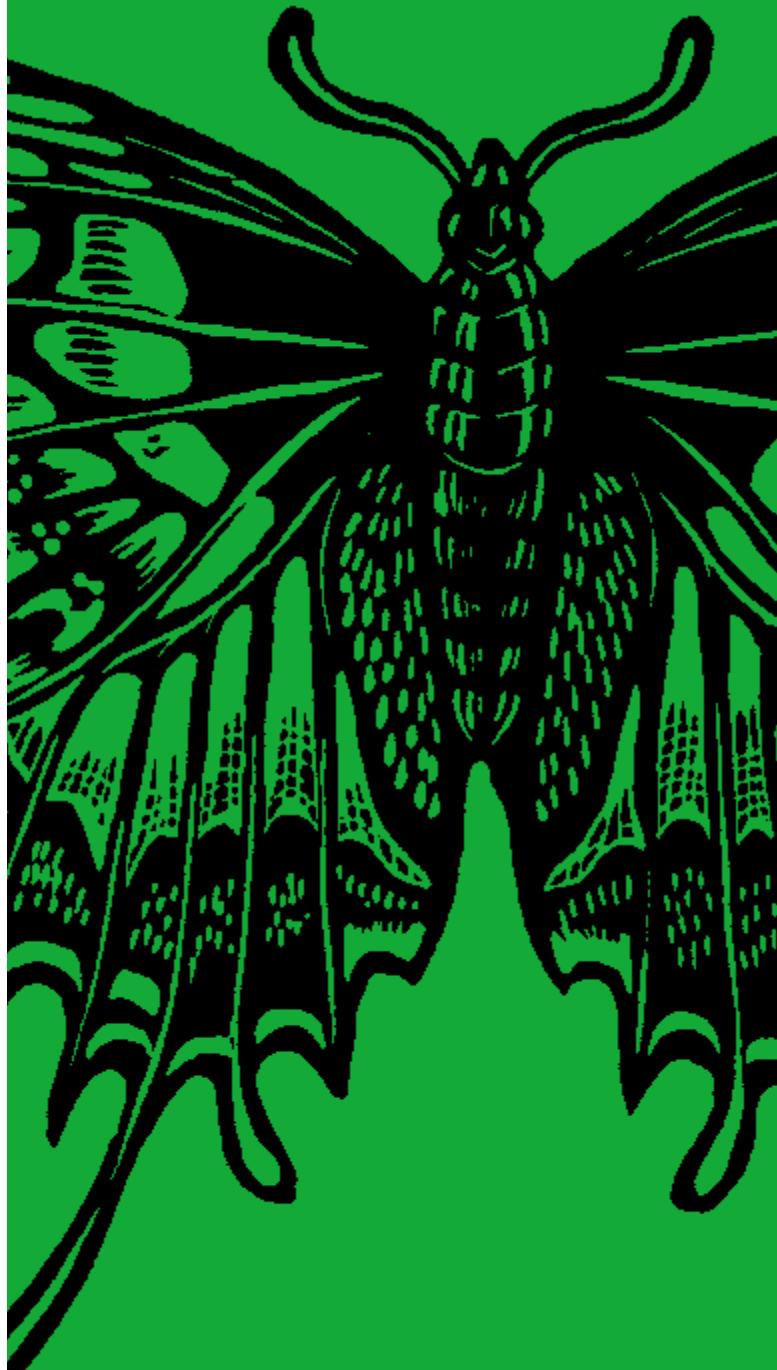
SUBJECTS FOR ASSEMBLIES

Regional organisers, the assembly process team and spokespeople from working groups choose the subjects for assemblies which are most relevant to furthering the aims of the rebellion. Any participants in the assemblies can suggest future subjects.

Simple online digital democracy tools like <https://citizens.is/> can be used to allow people to choose or suggest subjects for assemblies as well as continue community comments and prioritising ideas.

Immediate topics in lead up to April 2019:

- Preparations in the lead up to April 15th
- Actions to take during the International Rebellion.
- Pressuring the local authority to support a Citizen's Assembly on the Climate Emergency.
- Organising towards the local authority declaring a Climate Emergency.
- How can this assembly support XR International Solidarity?





This manual has been produced with input by activists from 15M, Stop the G8, the Fearless Cities global municipalism movement and majority world activists from Ghana and Senegal.

The manual is not written to be prescriptive to majority world XR groups where existing cultures of assembly are already practised. Neither are the areas of discussion for assemblies meant to be prescriptive to majority world cultures of resistance.

Further Reading:

<https://takethesquare.net/>

<https://howtocamp.takethesquare.net/>

<http://www.aamindell.net/worldwork/>

<https://rhizomenetwork.wordpress.com/resources/#Facilitation>

<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/resources>



www.rebellion.earth