

Climate Camp Meetings, Facilitation, and Organisation / Process

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Introduction

This document is based on a workshop I gave in Dublin in November 2008, about how the UK Climate Camp is run. I hope that other groups planning to run similar (or maybe not so similar!) events will find this useful.

The organisation of the Climate Camp is constantly changing. This document doesn't really give a realistic picture of how the Climate Camp is run, rather it is a simplified and idealised version of the Climate Camp process.

Furthermore, this is just one person's view and it doesn't necessarily represent the views of anyone else involved in the UK Climate Camp. If you asked someone else how the Climate Camp works, you might get a completely different answer!

Nevertheless I hope this will give some ideas to other groups who are evolving their own ways of working together non-hierarchically.

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Feel free to copy, distribute, and change this. As your group develops its own way or working together, you might want to re-write your own version of this document!

Climate Camp organisational process – before the camp

There are two main kinds of Climate Camp group: local groups and working groups.

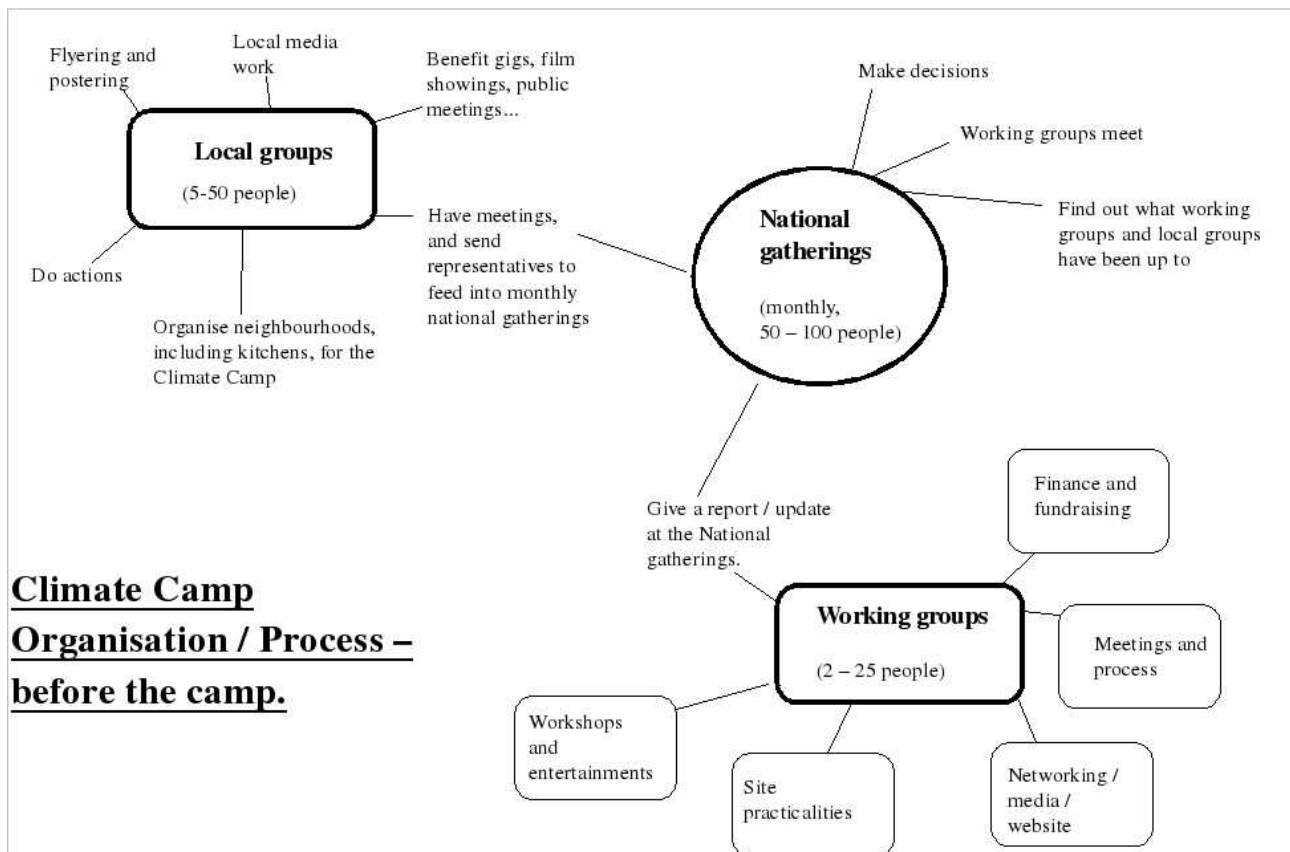
Local groups:

- Run benefit gigs, film showings, public meetings
- Do local media work
- Flyering and postering
- Direct action
- Organise Climate Camp neighbourhoods, including a kitchen
- Have meetings and send representatives to the monthly UK-wide meetings.

Working groups are a group of people who do a particular task. Some examples of working groups are:

- Site practicalities
- Finance and fundraising
- Media / networking / website
- Meetings / facilitation / process
- Workshops and entertainment

All of these groups have to be able to talk to each-other, find out what everyone else is doing, and make decisions together: all of this happens at the monthly UK-wide gatherings.



The organisation *during* the Climate Camp is completely different (and quite complicated!) I haven't written about that here but I will try to do that for a future version of this document, or get someone else to :-)

Running the monthly national gatherings

Each national gathering is hosted by a different local group. Many of the local groups are based around a social centre, and the gatherings are often (but not always) held at social centres. They run over 2 days, and roughly 50-100 people attend.

Who runs the gathering?

All the practical work of dealing with food, venue, etc., is done by the local group hosting the gathering.

For the agenda-setting and facilitation side of it: we have found that it's best if the group that does this is a mix of people from the Process group, who have run lots of gatherings before, and some people who just help with a specific gathering but don't have that as their on-going role. This is because if the same people always run the gatherings this can become an entrenched role, with the 'Process / Facilitation' people seen as being separate from everyone else, and with few opportunities for new people to learn these skills. On the other hand, it's useful to have one person who has an overview of what happened at previous meetings, and knows how previous meetings were run.

Ideally the people who set the agenda should be the same people who facilitate the gathering, because these people have spent quite a bit of time going over the proposals, and they understand why the agenda was set up a certain way.

Things to do before the national gathering

- Plan practicalities – venue, food, sleeping space etc.
- Send an email call-out for agenda items / proposals 3 or 4 weeks in advance, with a deadline for agenda items to be sent in.
- Once the deadline has passed the facilitators gather the proposed agenda items and create the agenda.
- Send out the agenda by email and put it on the website at least a week before the gathering. This is crucial because it gives individuals and groups a chance to talk about the agenda items before the gathering, and it means that people who can't make it to the gathering can still participate by asking someone else to pass on their ideas.

Example list of things to put on the national gathering agenda

- Welcome and quick review of consensus and hand signals
- Go over the agenda
- Feedback from working groups
- Feedback from local groups
- Any items carried over from the last meeting
- Decisions or discussions based on agenda items that people sent in
- Time for Working Groups to have a meeting

Decide time and place for the next gathering, and choose a group of people to run it
Announcements

Deciding which of the agenda items people send in to include on the agenda

I would have to say this is a judgement call, but here are some things that would be considered:

-A proposal that came from a working group or local group (agreed by the whole group, rather than just an individual from that group) would definitely get on the agenda.

-If two or more people sent in similar proposals, that would definitely get on as well.

-If we think lots of people are interested in talking about the item. We do sometimes just ring up a few people we know to see whether they think something is important.

-If a proposal doesn't go with the aims and principles of the group, and we are pretty sure most people in the group would not be interested in it, we don't include it.

-Sometimes we postpone an agenda item for a later gathering, because that decision doesn't need to be made yet, or because we don't yet have enough information yet to make it.

-If someone proposes an agenda item and we don't include it, we email that person to let them know the reasons why not. Sometimes the person says: 'OK, fair enough', other times they say: 'Hang on, you didn't really understand my proposal!'

At the gathering

It's important for the facilitators to have a list of previous decisions – this could be put on flip chart for everyone to be able to see.

At a workshop I ran in Dublin several people said that one problem with meetings is that people don't understand the consensus process – especially blocks and stand-asides. It was suggested that throughout meetings the consensus process could be up on flip chart, visible all the time, might help.

Make sure someone takes minutes.

There are some notes about Consensus Decision Making further down.

The agenda is made beforehand, so can it be changed during the gathering itself?

We try to stick to the pre-planned agenda. With a group of 20 or so people it's fine to start a meeting by deciding an agenda together, but it is very difficult for 50-100 people to jointly create an agenda, and you can end up spending a large part of the meeting just planning the meeting.

On the other hand of course if the people in the meeting are unhappy with the agenda and want to change it, then it has to be changed.

At the beginning of the meeting the facilitator shows the agenda to the big group, and her attitude is basically, “a few people put quite a lot of time into making this agenda so that it fits all the different

concerns of the group, and to change it now we would have to take some time out from the meeting, but if people have a big problem with it then we'll change it”.

The best thing is to make sure people have plenty of opportunities to feed into the agenda beforehand, and really try to make an agenda that everyone will be happy with, so that not too many changes will need to be made at the gathering itself.

Things to do after the gathering

-Both the full minutes and a summary of decisions are sent out by email and put on the website. The summary of decisions is important because the full minutes are so long it's unlikely many people will read them.

-Hand-over: make sure the new group of people who have taken on running the next gathering, have any information they need in order to do this.

Making Proposals

Proposals come up in two ways: they can be written up and sent in beforehand, or they can arise in the course of discussion.

Proposals that are written up beforehand are usually much too long and detailed. They are also sometimes too vague, so that it's hard to understand what the proposer is asking the group to agree on.

A good proposal should be just 2 or 3 lines long. It should be boiled down to just the essential points that the whole group needs to agree on. All the details can be worked out later, after the main points have been agreed. If a proposal contains lots of detail, then it's possible the group will get bogged down in arguing over the details, and they might fail to get consensus even if there was agreement on the main points.

Another reason why proposals should not be too detailed is that it should be up to the people actually implementing the decision to decide the detail of how it should be carried out. It can be very frustrating for a working group to feel that they are being micromanaged by the larger group.

It's very difficult for a large group of people to decide the details of how a decision should be carried out. It's better if the big group decides the big important questions, with the details left to smaller working groups.

Of course a person writing a proposal might want to include lots of background information and that is fine, as long as the proposal itself is nice and short and separate from the rest of the text so it's clear what the proposal is.

When should you try to get consensus?

YES – try to get consensus	NO – don't try to get consensus
<p><u>It's important</u> – e.g. deciding a name for the group.</p> <p><u>It affects the whole group</u> – e.g. some people want to do a an action a day or two before the camp, that might change the way the police behave at the camp.</p> <p><u>It's controversial</u> – e.g. deciding whether NGO's and political parties should be invited to have an official presence at the camp.</p>	<p><u>It's not important or controversial</u> – e.g. deciding whether the flyers should be A5 or A6, or deciding whether the break should be at 2:30 or 2:45.</p> <p><u>It doesn't affect the whole group</u> – e.g. some people in the group want to organise a benefit gig, or an action. They don't need to ask permission to do this – they can just go ahead and do it.</p>

The Consensus Process

State the problem or question to be solved

Are there any clarifying questions?

Brainstorm: throw out ideas, even crazy ideas – no criticism yet

Discussion: the main part of the meeting. The group shares ideas, and tries to come up with a proposal that uses all the best ideas, and addresses all the concerns

Proposal

- discuss further and make amendments

Test for consensus:

- **Re-state the proposal.** It's a good idea to write it down on flip chart

--- Are there any clarifying questions?

--- Are there any amendments?

- **Are there any blocks?**

--- If anyone blocks, they are asked to give reasons, and the proposals stops there.

- **Are there any stand-asides?**

--- If people stand aside they are invited to give reasons, but the proposal can still go ahead as long as there aren't too many stand-asides.

- **Active agreement:** could everyone wiggle your hands if you agree with the proposal.

Some comments about testing for consensus

When it comes time to test for consensus, it can feel a bit silly to re-state the proposal, because the group has been talking about it already for some time. However ideas move by quickly in a discussion, and especially if there have been a few amendments, people might not all have the same idea of what the proposal is. I'd recommend not only re-stating the proposal but writing it on flip chart so everyone can see. Similarly asking for clarifying questions and then amendments seems silly because the group has already discussed these things, but it is worth going through this to make sure everyone is on the same page.

A **block** is a fundamental ideological disagreement: it says 'this proposal goes against the aims and beliefs of this group and if the proposal goes ahead I will leave the group'. Blocks (if used properly) are very rare. A block stops a proposal dead.

A **stand-aside** means 'I disagree with this', or 'I won't participate in this'. So a stand-aside might mean 'I'm happy for the group to do this but I can't help because I'm at work that day', or it might mean, 'I think this is a silly idea and I'm not going to participate.' If there is a stand-aside the proposal can go ahead, but if there are lots of stand-aside, this shows the proposal might need some more work.

It's crucial for the facilitator to ask for **active agreement**. If there are no blocks and not too many stand-aside to a proposal, it might mean that the group agrees... or it might mean that everyone in the group is asleep and they haven't even noticed that the facilitator is testing for consensus. So the facilitator asks for people to wave their hands to show active agreement.

Does a proposal really have to stop just because one person blocks it?

In practice there are a few possibilities. It may be that the person blocking has different aims from the rest of the group. This could happen if a person is new to a group: an example is a person who walks into an open meeting of a group planning direct action, and blocks the action because it is illegal. A block means 'if the proposal goes ahead I will leave the group', so in this case the group might say, 'OK, see ya!'

Another, more common example is when a block is really a stand aside – the person disagrees, but it isn't a fundamental principled disagreement. For instance, if someone blocks an action at Target A because they think an action at Target B would be more effective, the facilitator should suggest that that is a stand-aside and not a block.

For excellent resources and briefings on consensus decision making and facilitation I can't recommend Seeds For Change enough: check out <http://seedsforchange.org.uk/free/resources>. They are also amazing facilitators and can run facilitation workshops for any group size or skill level.

A few pitfalls to watch out for in meetings

Micromanaging

If a worker says her boss is 'micromanaging' her, she means that her boss is leaning over her shoulder, telling her how to do every little thing, and leaving her no autonomy to make her own decisions.

In the Climate Camp process, Working Groups occasionally feel that they are being micromanaged by the national gathering, when the gathering gets caught up in deciding the small details of how a certain job should be done. This disempowers the Working Group, takes up a lot of time at the National Gathering, and is ineffective – it's very hard for 100 people to decide anything in detail, and really the people actually doing the work have the best idea of how to do it. So make sure national gatherings are just for big decisions, and leave the details to the Working Groups.

Writing the Law

Another pitfall is getting caught up in spending lots of time making little changes to the wording of proposals (as if we were writing the Law). The exact wording of Climate Camp decisions isn't important and it doesn't have to be written in the most elegant prose – the important thing is that we all understand each-other and agree, so we can move on to the important part – implementing the decisions and taking action!

Lobbying

Consensus relies on everyone taking responsibility for helping the whole group move forward. This means we have to listen to each-other and look for a solution that addresses everyone's desires and concerns.

A 'lobbyist' is someone who has a definite idea of what they want the Climate Camp to do, and goes into a meeting intent on convincing the rest of the group to do this one thing – without listening to anyone else's ideas, or looking for a creative solution that addresses everyone's concerns. People with a background in working with NGO's may be used to lobbying government, but no-one should lobby the Climate Camp.

Working groups should:

- Be open for all to join
 - Give an update on what they are doing at national gatherings
 - Submit a budget to the finance group
 - Have an email address listed on the website, and answer emails
 - Have advertised meetings that anyone can come to
 - Rotate roles (not have the same person doing the same job for years on end)
- National gatherings include time for working groups to meet. This is the main chance for new people to get involved in working groups, so working groups should meet at national gatherings, (of course they might meet at other times as well).

Making sure that new people can get involved in working groups

Many groups follow this pattern: in the beginning it feels very open, and anyone can get involved in any aspect of the group's work... but after some time has passed, it seems like some people are entrenched in their roles, and new people feel like they are not welcome to get involved in some of the most interesting jobs.

If we want to allow our movement to grow, there has to be a constant flow of 'new' people into all aspects of the Climate Camp's working. This really means that the more experienced people need to act as teachers, helping more people to learn their skills.

People who are experienced at doing a certain job often complain that when they get someone else to do it, it takes 3 times as long as if they had just done it themselves! This is always true: a person who has been doing a job for months will always be better at it than someone who has just started. Taking time to pass on skills definitely takes longer in the short term, but in the long term it lightens the workload as more people are able to do the job.

Of course there is a balance to be struck: it's fair enough for the Media group to say that a person who just joined yesterday and has never done an interview before, is not going to go on Newsnight. But people should see that there is a way for them to learn to do any role they want, as long as they are willing to put in the effort and are reasonably good at it.

Openness, communication, autonomy

If you use your personal email address when communicating about something to do with the Climate Camp (maybe you are hiring a marquee, or ordering 3000L of soja milk), you have become an information bottleneck: no-one else can find out about arrangements that have been made, without going through you. **DON'T BE AN INFORMATION BOTTLENECK!** Every Climate Camp working group should have an email address. Use your Climate Camp email address and that way anyone else in the working group can go into the email and find out about the arrangements you made. If you made arrangements by phone or in person, send an email about it to the rest of the group, so that everyone in the group knows what is going on.

Everyone Working Group should have an email address listed on the website, and at least one person in the group should agree to check the group's email address at least once a week, and answer all the ones that aren't spam. **ANSWER EMAILS!** If someone asks you to do something and you're not going to do it, because you don't have time or it's not your job, or for some other reason, that is fine but do answer the email say so. It's incredibly frustrating to ask for something and just get no response.

Working groups are trusted by the larger group to work autonomously. The flip-side of this is that working groups have to be accountable. This means that anyone should be able to ask a Working Group a question (eg. 'Does the site plan include space for live-in vehicles?', 'Were those flyers printed with biodegradable ink?') and get an answer in a reasonable amount of time.

Working groups are also asked to give an update on what they are doing at monthly national gatherings.

Some Tips for Giving Criticism

With all these different groups and individuals doing different jobs to make the Climate Camp happen, sometimes we might want to give constructive criticism to a group or individual. Here are some tips:

-Check that the criticism really is constructive. If you are feeling really angry at a certain person, it might be a good idea to wait till you're feeling calmer before offering criticism.

-Check that it's the right time – a person who's tired or stressed will have a hard time hearing criticism, or might be too busy to think about it.

-Recognise the person's hard work, and recognise that everyone makes mistakes. Praise the person more than you criticise – if you work hard on something for a long time without receiving any praise, and then you get criticism, it can be really hard to take!

-Criticise the action not the person, be specific, and show a clear positive way forward.

EXAMPLE 1: “You are really dominating and you don't listen to anyone else!” - this will make the person feel they are being attacked, but it doesn't offer any constructive way forward.

EXAMPLE 2: “You talk a lot in meetings and you sometimes interrupt other people. I can understand that you do this because you're passionate, but I would like it if you would not interrupt, so that other people can have more space to speak.” - in this example it's clear what the problem is, and there is a constructive way forward.