



# Team Roles & Structure

Your team members have come together to create a more just and sustainable world. By working together as a team, you can create a force more powerful than the sum of its parts - or you can get caught up in miscommunication and end up devoting most of your energy to dealing with challenging interpersonal dynamics. No matter how much all of your team members like each other, working together effectively with other people can be challenging, because every person has a slightly different understanding of the world. That's where roles and structure come in: by determining who is responsible for completing which tasks, as well as deciding how you will make decisions, you can clarify accountability and simplify the transfer of information.

There is no-one-size-fits-all template team structure. Every team that will ever exist is different, because any group of people will have a different collective purpose, interpersonal dynamic, skillset, and distribution of capacity. To come up with a unique system that works for your team, read this guide together, and try to apply the concepts to your project! Then, continually be reflecting on whether the roles and structure of your group are working, and be open to adaptation when needed. Overall, with roles and structure, the most simple design is the best.

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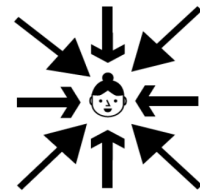
# 1. Why Do Teams Need Roles & Structure?

Have you ever been in a group of people who were excited for a project but had no form of internal organization, and struggled to get anything done? Maybe you've participated in a team before that felt overly structured - the roles mimicked corporate roles, and you felt like you couldn't figure out how to contribute.

Roles are a way for teams to divide up responsibility for a task, project, or activity. Without clear roles and responsibilities, a team will lack structure and will be unable to turn their shared purpose into meaningful action. This is because nobody will be consistently responsible for ensuring that something gets done. If nobody has the role of planning agendas for meetings, it won't be long before meetings lack an agenda! Roles allow everyone to know exactly what they are responsible for.

Holding a role means that you are responsible for consistently **"bottom-lining"** a task. Bottom-lining means that you are accountable for ensuring the task will get done. It's your job to either get the work done, or coordinate others to complete it.

But roles aren't necessarily explicit. In group situations, people often assume roles unconsciously. For example, in a grassroots team it's not uncommon for one or two people to assume the role of leader and for others to fall into the role of follower. This can be effective for a short period of time, but tends to be unsustainable over the long haul, because it creates a leadership "bottleneck" which does not allow for ongoing growth, and creates bitterness among people who dislike the hierarchy - even if they aren't stepping up to leadership positions themselves.



## 1.1 STRUCTURELESSNESS AND HIERARCHY IN TEAMS

How much structure does a team need? Does too much structure lead to undesirable power imbalances or hierarchies within a team? Interestingly, a lack of structure can just as often lead to hierarchy. This phenomenon - of groups unavoidably creating some level of power structure within them - is best known as being described in Joreen's famous essay ["The Tyranny of Structurelessness"](#).

Written in the context of the women's liberation movement of the 1970s, the essay explains why the "structureless" group that many progressive movements try to

create can actually be more oppressive than a formally structured group. It explains:

*“Structurelessness’ is organizationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group, only whether or not to have a formally structured one.... If the movement continues deliberately to not select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power. All it does is abdicate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it.... For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can happen only if they are formalized.....We must accept the idea that there is nothing inherently bad about structure itself -- only its excess use.”*

These are just some key quotes, but try to take the time to read the whole essay - it will save you the time of needing to remake the mistakes that every other grassroots group has made before you!

Essentially, if you don't create a formal form of structure, the informal structure that will inevitably arise will be worse, because a) it will often replicate traditional (and often oppressive) hierarchies - e.g. already privileged voices, such as white men, with the loudest voices will have the most influence and b) team members will not have any control over the power structure, because it doesn't technically exist.

You may be worried that a formal form of structure will stifle your group and make it, well, formal. But in reality, when everyone knows their role and how decisions will get made, your team will have greater trust, and thus even greater freedom and creativity! To be successful, you must pair your democratic structure with intentional efforts at relationship building and creating a fun culture! Check out the Y4CA [Relationships & Team Culture](#) guide for more information about how to do this.

## 2. Creating team roles

→ USE WITH WORKSHEET: This section will give you all of the information you need to know in order to fill out the [Team Roles Worksheet](#)

Instead of separately delegating every action item, it can be useful to have permanent roles: team members always responsible for certain types of action items. Consider - what function does your group need regularly fulfilled? What areas of responsibility are needed for the project? Your team may have both consistent and project-based roles.

PROJECT BASED ROLES - these are temporary roles you'll need to create specifically for the current project you are working on. For example, if you are planning an event, the event planning guide lists a number of suggested roles. After "basic logistical team roles", these are probably the first roles your team will establish, and maybe eventually develop into consistent roles.

CONSISTENT ROLES - these are roles that are always needed for your group to function, no matter what project you are working on. The consistent roles you will need are based on what your team's purpose is.

Note: even if the role is permanent, the person who holds it can rotate. For example, the role of meeting facilitator is permanent, but the person who holds that role could rotate every two weeks or every month. This is a good way for everyone in the group to learn more. Moreover, most of these roles should be filled by one or more people.

A person can hold multiple roles, as long as each does not require too high of a commitment.

### 2.1 SUGGESTED CONSISTENT ROLES

Note: As your group gets bigger, many of these individual roles can grow into working groups composed of multiple people. Each of these teams can go through the same team building process as the initial team, facilitated by one or two coordinators who were part of the initial group.

ROLE & when you need it	TASKS & RESPONSIBILITIES This role must “bottom-line” the tasks below	RESOURCES
<u>ESSENTIAL LOGISTICAL ROLES FOR ALL TEAMS</u>		
<b>Facilitator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Writing the meeting agenda</li> <li>★ facilitating the team meeting</li> </ul>	<a href="#">“Writing the agenda”</a> and <a href="#">“Facilitating The Meeting”</a> section of the Team Meeting Guide
<b>Meeting logistics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Scheduling meeting</li> <li>★ Finding location for meeting</li> <li>★ Reminding all team members about the meeting</li> </ul>	<a href="#">“Planning Logistics”</a> section of the Team Meeting Guide
<b>Notetaker</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Taking clear and useful notes at every meeting</li> <li>★ Keeping track of action items during meetings and reminds team of them afterwards</li> </ul>	A guide to <a href="#">taking good notes</a>  <a href="#">Action items &amp; sharing tasks</a> section of the Team Meeting guide
<b>Team culture coordinator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Making new members feel welcome</li> <li>★ Developing relationships with all team members and informally checking in with them regularly to get a sense of the general energy of the group (ex - is everyone feeling really stressed and over capacity? Are the relationships in the group really fractured?)</li> <li>★ Being someone who every team member knows they can talk to if they have concerns</li> <li>★ Based on the energy of the group, suggesting meeting activities to the facilitator</li> <li>★ Organizing social events</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Relationships &amp; Team Culture</a> guide
<u>OPTIONAL OR POTENTIAL ROLES</u>		
<b>Recruitment coordinator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Depending on the extent of your recruitment, this might include varying levels of complexity.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Recruitment</a> guide

(if you <b>are recruiting new people</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ At its most basic level, this role would be to greet new team members and help them get involved.</li> <li>★ It might also include publicity for recruiting new people (either through social media, or through in person canvassing), and planning and running intake sessions.</li> </ul>	
<b>Finance coordinator/ Treasurer</b>  (if you <b>have money involved</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Making decisions about where money goes is challenging. In a smaller group, it is probably something that the whole team should be involved in, but the finance coordinators should bottom-line holding all the information about the financial situation of the group. However, as you get bigger - especially if you have multiple teams of people - it is not practical for every team member to be involved in every single financial decision.</li> <li>★ It is a good idea for at least two people to have full access to the financial information.</li> </ul>	
<b>Outreach coordinator</b>  (If you <b>are working with other groups</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Acting as primary contact for external groups, responsible for holding most of the relationships with partners.</li> <li>★ Performing outreach to groups that align and would be good to work together with, and maintaining these relationships.</li> <li>★ Keeping a look out for projects from some of these groups to support. Solidarity is a two way street.</li> </ul>	
<b>Social media coordinator</b>  (If you <b>have a social media account</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Responding to direct messages</li> <li>★ Sharing relevant content from other accounts and groups</li> <li>★ Planning what the outward facing “look” and messages of the team are.</li> <li>★ Planning and creating regular posts.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Y4CA Social Media Guide</a>

<b>News checker</b>	<p>This person is responsible for staying up to date on all recent community happenings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Telling team members about cool and important events your team should all attend (for example, solidarity protests, or even interesting educational events)</li> <li>★ Remaining informed about new information, especially any that your team should potentially respond to (for example, if the BC government creates new climate legislation, or if there's a comment period open for a proposed LNG terminal)</li> </ul>	
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## 2.2 IDENTIFYING ROLES

Some groups get stuck trying to figure out what roles/teams they need. If you don't feel like you can fill out the worksheet below after going through the suggested roles above, here are some tips:

- ❖ One way to determine the roles you need is to write a list of all the tasks your team is currently collectively doing, or are planning to do, and figure out how these can best be grouped into areas of responsibility for individuals or teams to take on.
- ❖ Roles (individual and teams) can be fluid and will change over time as your project and the size of your team evolves. If you're feeling stuck, the only way to move forward is to try out one arrangement of roles for a specific amount of time (for example one month) . During that time, pay close attention to what is working and not working. At the end, come back together and discuss whether/how you need to rearrange the roles.
- ❖ When thinking about roles, it's important to be realistic about what people are actually capable of doing. While one person could conceivably do outreach to every local business in the neighbourhood, they may get exhausted pretty quickly. For more, check out the Y4CA guide about [Setting Boundaries](#).

## 2.3 PICKING ROLES

The process of determining roles should not just be based on people signing up for the first thing that needs to be done. People will be most effective in a role that they are good at, want to build the relevant skills in, or find joyful!

Once you have a list of roles generated, each team member should reflect on the areas below. Discuss as a group what you each came up with, collaboratively determine which role fits best for each person.

- ❖ **Needs of project** - what roles are needed for the project to function?
- ❖ **Skills** - what skills do team members hold?
- ❖ **Passions** - what sorts of tasks nourish team members? Which are they most excited about taking on?
- ❖ **Capacity** - how much capacity do you have? It's much better to be upfront about this when you're initially assigning roles, than committing to a role that you realistically do not have capacity for.

You should re-evaluate your roles before launching into any new project. Is everyone still happy with where they are? Do you need to reallocate how many people are working in different roles? Do people want to learn new skills in different roles?



### 3. Decision Making

Before members have any tasks to complete in their roles - and for the rest of your time together - your team will need to make many collective decisions. Some of these will be miscellaneous day-to-day choices, while others will determine the future of your project.

#### **Examples of decisions your team will need to make**

- ★ Internal decisions, like what snacks you'll have at a meeting
- ★ Overarching directional decisions, like what goal your team will focus on
- ★ Event planning decisions, ranging from the main goal of an event, to which company to rent a sound system from, to how big a banner should be
- ★ Solidarity decisions, like whether or not to work together with another group, or to show up to a specific solidarity event

Try to think about a time when you made a decision in a team. For example, with your current team or with a team for something like a group project at school or work. How was the decision made? What was challenging about the process?

Maybe one person made a decision for the group. Maybe two people had very contrasting opinions and could not agree on what decision to make. Maybe the process was challenging because no one really had ideas about what the best choice was.

#### **Goals of effective decision making**

- ★ **Efficacy:** Make effective decisions that move your team closer to your bigger goal
- ★ **Inclusivity:** Ensure that every relevant voice is included, so that the decision will be effective for a diverse range of people
- ★ **Team culture:** Minimize lasting conflict between team members
- ★ **Efficiency:** Make decisions in an efficient amount of time while not sacrificing inclusivity, culture, or efficacy

To make this process as simple as possible and to be intentional about how decisions are made, your team needs to create norms about who makes which decisions, and how. This is the question of how power (meaning - the ability to make change, in this case within the team) is distributed in the group.

- ❖ [This resource](#) gives an overview of the main different types of decision making structures. As you can see, there is no perfect way to make a decision.
- ❖ To learn more about how to resolve conflict that arises during decision making processes, read the Y4CA [Conflict Resolution](#) guide. Especially, read through the “[Dialogue vs Debate](#)” section for information about maintaining constructive communication during decision making.
- ❖ Keep in mind that decision making looks very different depending on how many people you have. On a small team (4-12 people) on which every person knows and trusts each other, decisions can be mostly made all together. A very big team with varying levels of engagement will mean that some people are making more decisions than others.

### 3.1 DEMOCRATIC DECISION MAKING: WHY AND HOW?

Your group is (presumably) working on creating a fair world in which all voices - specifically those that are traditionally ignored - are heard and respected. It's important that the way your group functions reflects these values. When you are deciding how to make decisions as a group, it's important to figure out how you can do this democratically. Everyone should ultimately have an about equal amount of say in what choice is made.

However, many progressive groups don't function this way. Some groups may be run by one or a small group of coordinators that make all the decisions for the rest of the group - either formally, or informally (see - “[Structurelessness and Hierarchy](#)” above). Since your team is composed of motivated members committed to building your team together, you should aim to intentionally avoid this undemocratic dynamic as much as possible.

It is also important to recognize that even a very democratically structured system is still influenced by the whims of social roles, and the impacts of societal patterns of oppression and exclusion. Not everyone will feel comfortable sharing their voice in the same way, even if they have just as much formal authority or power within the team as others.

*This is why team building needs to give equal thought to a democratic structure and an inclusive culture - you can't have one without the other: because an actively democratic structure - one in which every voice is truly heard - needs thoughtful relationships and an actively anti-oppressive environment maintained carefully by each member in order to function. And, an inclusive culture - one where every*

member feels a sense of belonging within the team - needs democratic structures to hold the group accountable to their values and to take action.

### 3.2 DEMOCRATIC DECISIONS AND INCLUSIVITY

A common challenge when groups try to create a democratic structure is navigating the balance between shared commitment and inclusivity. Sometimes, team members will want to have a lot of control over decisions, but aren't willing to put in the work to implement the decisions. This is a challenging situation, because it's hard for a team member to have useful insight on what the next best step for a project is if they haven't been involved in the hours of planning and work that have already happened. Because of this, including a team member in decision making who is less committed might be harmful to the project.

However, if a team requires members to devote endless hours of work towards the project in order to have input in all of the decisions about it, they might end up excluding many voices from the decisions that need to be included. This is because the capacity to commit to a project is a privilege: it is impacted by many factors in team members' lives and, often, people with higher levels of societal privilege (types of privilege include racial and class - learn more in the Anti-Oppression guide) are the ones able to devote more time to the team's work.

#### **Examples of how privilege impacts capacity**

- ★ Team members with physical or mental health challenges might have less time and energy to devote to the team than those without, and these challenges might affect the type of work they are able to take on.
- ★ Team members who need to work more in order to support family members or to pay for university might have less time to devote to the team than team members from more affluent families.
- ★ Team members living with parents who are less supportive of their involvement in a grassroots volunteer team (especially from immigrant or BIPOC families) will have more barriers than a team member living with parents who completely support their involvement.

Of course, you have no way of judging whether someone isn't working because they're less committed to the team, or because of something going on at home. Many of the example situations above are highly personal, and team members may not feel comfortable sharing with the team the reason their capacity is lower - nor should they be expected to. However, it is important for everyone to have

contextual understanding of this underlying dynamic when discussing how decisions will get made.

Ultimately, some decisions will need to just be made by the people doing more work, but you can intentionally facilitate bigger picture strategic planning sessions to accommodate as many different capacity levels as possible - so that people who aren't able to participate in as much work can still have a significant impact on the general focus areas of the group.

### **3.4 CREATING DECISION-MAKING NORMS**

It's important for team members to understand all of the principles about decision making above. To apply these ideas, you can create team agreements - called norms - that will stipulate how your team will make decisions.

Remember that it's impossible to predict every sort of decision that will be made. What's most important is that your team discusses the shared values that will inform your decisions - such as democracy, inclusivity, effective research, and strategic thinking - and commits to sticking to them together.

For examples of specific norms your team could create, read the "[Decision Making](#)" Section of the Team Norms guidebook.

## 4. Leadership Structures for Growing Teams

If your team is small, the goal of creating a team structure is partially to ensure that every person has a role, or at least that every key role is filled. In small teams, decision making can mostly occur as a group, because each team member can have a trusting relationship with every other member. Once your team grows past 8-12 people (the maximum size for effective team decision making, as determined by one researcher - read more [here](#)), your group will be too cumbersome and you should break it into multiple smaller teams. However, navigating how multiple teams coordinate together can be challenging.

If your team is a consistent group of people, you will not need to think too much about how to absorb new people in, and how to create roles that allow for different levels of knowledge, because you are all pretty much at the same level of knowledge. Your team is also small enough that everyone can communicate their needs regularly.

However, once you begin recruiting new members, your team structure will become more complicated, because different team members will have different levels of commitment and experience.

### 4.1 DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

*Originally adapted from the works of Marshall Ganz*

Community organizing requires a particular approach to structuring leadership that enables individuals to develop the leadership of others, even as individuals are engaged in their own process of leadership development.

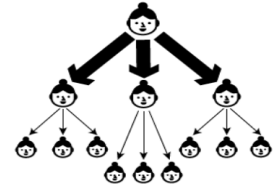
Traditionally, you may have been taught that leadership is about being the person that everyone goes to, like the picture with the arrows below. Think about:



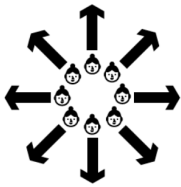
How does it feel to be the dot in the middle of all those arrows? How does it feel to be one of the arrows that can't even get through? How does the group get bigger and stronger? And what happens if the "dot" in the

middle disappears? Do you see issues with this leadership structure?

Some organizations employ a top-down leadership structure where all power and decision making is concentrated toward the top. This model tends to be more effective in the corporate environment, for example where there are strong financial incentives for people to remain in their prescribed roles. However, it is not so useful in a grassroots citizens movement where volunteers are often unwilling to take on all the responsibility of the topmost roles, or put up with all the relentless grunt work of being at the bottom.

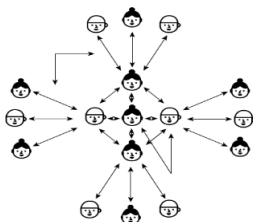


Sometimes teams think they don't need leadership at all because "we're all leaders", but that looks like this:



Who's responsible for coordinating everyone? And who's responsible for focusing on the good of the whole, not just one particular part? With whom does the "buck stop" (i.e.: who is ultimately responsible for making sure the things that need to happen, happen)? (see section above: [Structurelessness and Hierarchy](#))

Another way to practice leadership is through the "snowflake" model, whereby existing leaders aim to develop other leaders who, in turn, develop other leaders, and so on. Although you may be the "dot" in the middle, your success depends on developing the leadership of others. The snowflake model is based upon the idea that organizers can share power, decision making and responsibility more democratically within, and between teams, by assuming explicit roles tailored to each person's unique skills, preferences and abilities, and committing to being mutually accountable to one another within this structure. Our movement can grow sustainably and exponentially if organizers embrace everyone's potential for leadership, commit to explicit roles and structure teams democratically,



However, actually creating this structure is much more complicated than simply drawing it.

A common way to implement the snowflake structure is by identifying a number of team members with more experience and interest who can become team coordinators. These coordinators can a) develop their team by supporting the leadership development of all of the team members, and b) form a central coordination body that oversees the direction of the organization as a whole, and facilitates communication between the various teams.

To see this idea fleshed out and practiced, check out these structure explanations of various grassroots groups:

- ★ [Sunrise Boston team structure](#)
- ★ [Sustainabiliteens structure](#) (before forming regional groups)
- ★ [Force of Nature team structure](#)

## 5. References

<http://communitylearningpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Ganz-Marrakesh-training-guide-.pdf>