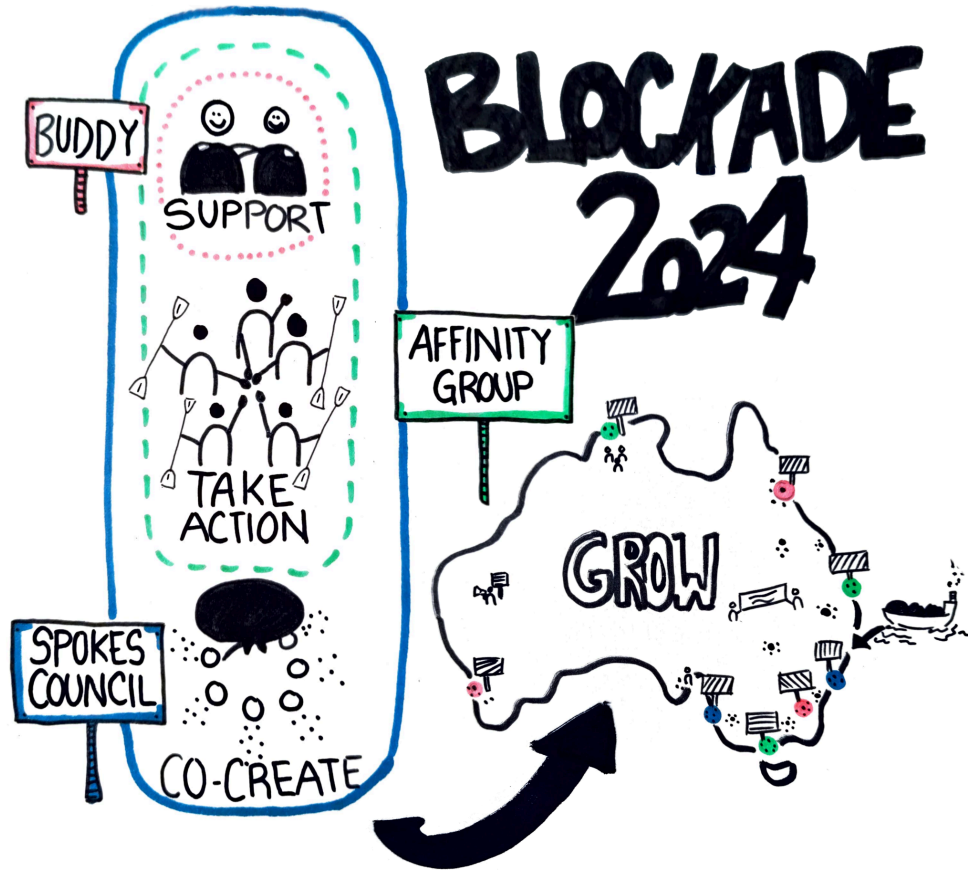


# Rising Tide

## Affinity Groups and Spokescouncils Guide



Communication and consensus at the People's Blockade -----	2
What's a Spokescouncil, Affinity Group, and why do I need a buddy? -----	2
How it works -----	4
Power and privilege -----	6
Consensus and the decision-making process -----	6
Next steps, now -----	9
Additional resources -----	11

# 1. Communication and Creating Consensus at the People's Blockade 2024

We will shape the People's Blockade 2024 together by using **Affinity Groups** and **Spokescouncils**, which are methods that facilitate mass communication, conversations, and decision-making via consensus. These methods have a long and storied history, going back to the Spanish Civil War and many direct action movements for environmental and social justice! An important aim for Rising Tide is to have everyone represented without hundreds of people needing to speak at a meeting to arrive at a consensus decision during the People's Blockade.

## 2. What's a Spokescouncil, an Affinity Group, and why do I need a Buddy?

In line with Rising Tide's principles, we believe that by working in small collectives, we can create a strong and diverse culture of community care – where we look out for each other before, during and after the **People's Blockade 2024 (PB24)**. Moreover, we will work collaboratively to reach consensus in our decision-making. To help achieve these aims, Rising Tide suggests everyone at PB24 engage in three levels of connection with other participants.

### The main structure:

1. The **Buddy** system is about two people having one another's backs and looking out for one another during an action, especially among a big crowd like the one we expect for the People's Blockade 2024.
2. **Affinity Groups** are groups of 6 to 16 people who are connected by anything they choose – a group of friends, a theatre troupe who will perform at the Blockade, a group of "Parents Rising" who commit to looking after their children together, a bunch of people who will run

sandcastle workshops on the beach – literally anything that binds you all together. Have some fun naming your Affinity Group – ‘Riff Raff Marching Band’, ‘Lismore Legends’, ‘Good Trouble Troupe’, ‘Feeding the Revolution’, whatever tickles your group.

3. A **Spokescouncil** is composed of people selected by each Affinity Group, called a ‘Delegate’ or a ‘Spokes’, to represent that group’s thoughts and decisions in the Spokescouncil meetings, where consensus decisions are made during the Blockade about important matters.
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### **Other types of groups:**

You may see references to three other types of groups in this document. All may send representatives to the Spokescouncil.

1. A **Caucus** is a collective of people that come together based on a shared identity or lived experience, to best support each other separate from the larger group. Examples are the **People of Colour Caucus (PoCC)** and the **Queer Caucus (QC)**.
2. A **Cluster** is a group of Affinity Groups with some shared characteristics – such as coming from the same town or region – that agree to send a smaller number of delegates to the Spokescouncil to save time and energy. This requires a degree of trust between the Affinity Groups in the Cluster. An example would be a **Northern Rivers Cluster** of approx. 20 Affinity Groups who select 3 Spokes to represent them. Bear in mind there will be thousands of us at PB24, and potentially hundreds of Affinity Groups present at any one time, so we invite smaller Affinity Groups to join a Cluster and send fewer Spokes. That means fewer meetings for most of us, but our voice is still represented.
3. A **Working Group (or WG)** is a group of people with a shared area of work. Examples are the **Media WG** and the **Food WG**. Working Groups

may have critical information to present to the Spokescouncil and take part in consensus decision-making.

### **3. How it works**

#### **Buddies**

Find a buddy, either in your existing Affinity Group or ask someone you want to form an Affinity Group with. Buddies should be prepared to:

- Agree on how often you will check in with one another, and agree to stick to it.
- Know whether your buddy has any particular needs (e.g., medical, mobility, etc.).
- Check whether your buddy is with you/your Affinity Group or is informed whenever the group is moving.
- Make sure your buddy is physically ok, and find water/food/sunscreen/shade/clothing/medical attention if they aren't.
- Keep an eye on your buddy's emotional state.
- Support your buddy if they want to leave and be prepared to leave with them if needed - or find someone who can.
- Provide support if your buddy is involved in civil disobedience, or gets arrested.

#### **Affinity Groups:**

Affinity Groups are extremely important as they will form the basis of mass communication across the PB24.

Affinity Groups:

1. provide members with mutual aid and distributed responsibility;
2. create space for groups to contribute as a community, and to the wider community; and
3. democratise decision-making in a Spokescouncil.

Building an Affinity Group is also about asking your friends, family, colleagues, or neighbours to join you in saying 'no' to new coal and gas or whatever action you are taking for greater social and climate justice. So consider reaching into

your cherished personal networks and creating the invitation to build up our collective agency with those you share personal affinity with.

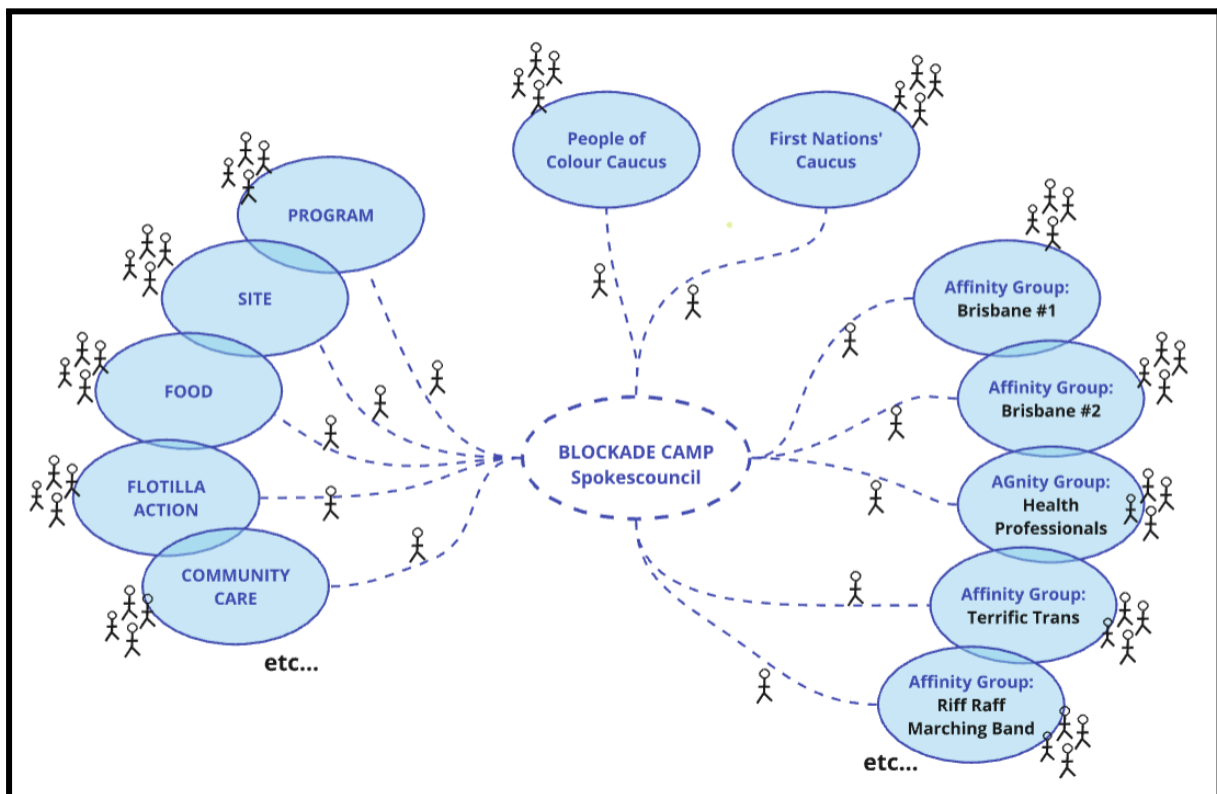
You are strongly encouraged to self-organise your own Affinity Group before you come to the Blockade from your established local networks. For those not able to do this, for example, if you are coming on your own (you LEGEND!) space will be created at the Blockade during the preparation phase (Wednesday and Thursday) to create Affinity Groups.

If you are interested in setting up or joining an Affinity Group at the Blockade, make sure to say so when you register at the Welcome Tent.

### Spokescouncil

The Spokescouncil meetings will be built by Affinity Groups and other types of groups choosing a member to be their "Spokes". **You can register your Spokes if you have at least 6 members in your Affinity Group, so that your Spokes can formally be part of the Spokescouncil meetings.**

Here is an example of the types of groups that might send a Spokes to the Spokescouncil.



## 4. Power and Privilege

First, in order to realise social and climate justice, it is important that each of us has a critical awareness of how power and privilege intersect with our lives. With an understanding of our relative privilege in mind, we help build a proactive movement of ally-ship and solidarity by stepping forward in support roles, and stepping back appropriately in order to make space for everyone in our movement.

It is all of our work to actively decolonise our movement and our lives for greater justice and equality. Each of us contributes to understanding and dismantling racism and all systems and behaviours that use 'power over' behaviour, so we help create a climate justice movement underpinned by First Nations and all forms of Social Justice.

Expressly, for example, the **People of Colour Caucus (PoCC)** will have representatives in the Spokescouncils alongside the Affinity Groups Spokes. Let's make a point of talking about what solidarity and being an ally looks like within our Affinity Groups.

## 5. Consensus and the decision making process

**Consensus** is a process for making decisions in a group which aims to find solutions that work for everyone (or at least that everyone can live with), rather than simply going with what the majority rules.

You can imagine that consensus-building could be a lengthy and LOUD process, given that we expect thousands of people to consider questions or proposals simultaneously. To make the process quicker and quieter, there's a series of hand gestures commonly used in this type of consensus-building methodology. They are shown in the diagram below.

We will use these hand gestures in Affinity Groups and in Spokescouncil meetings at the PB24. If your Affinity Group agrees with the statement just made by the Spokes of another Affinity Group in a Spokescouncil meeting, twinkle your fingers up, and when you are called on to speak on the issue, just

say “We agree with So-and-So’s position.” Keep the discussion as short and targeted as possible.

You can get some practice using basic meeting hand signals and the consensus decision-making cycle by practising in your Affinity Group or doing some facilitation in a local Rising Tide meeting. Check out this [quick consensus guide](#) resource for more information.

### Basic Meeting Hand Signals for Consensus



For example, the ‘Direct Response’ signal is to be used sparingly if you need to **directly** respond to someone to correct or add vital information about something they have just said, or, use the ‘Process Point’ signal if you feel the agreed process is not being followed, such as an agenda item out of order, or a proposal not being responded to.

### Affinity Group Roles and Process

Every Affinity Group will appoint a **Spokes** who will represent the group in the Spokescouncil. Each Spokes comes to the Spokescouncil with an agreed mandate from their Affinity Group.

If you are the Spokes, the **mandate** is knowing what your Affinity Group wants and has agreed upon together by consensus on whatever question or proposal is on the table. This might be to only carry forward the views of the group, or the mandate might include making decisions on behalf of your Affinity Group within agreed limits.

Other roles an Affinity Group needs include a **Facilitator** – someone who manages the group’s discussion by recognising people who have raised their hand to speak, pausing the discussion to address a process point, posing “take the temperature” questions – to which the group can respond with ‘twinkle fingers’ (or finger clicks) UP for YES, or twinkle fingers DOWN for NO. The facilitator or a buddy should orate the temperature check to ensure anyone with a visual impairment is included.

Affinity Groups should also have an **Alternate Spokes** and then also perhaps a Community Care Facilitator, or specific Support Person for any member who may take part in civil disobedience.

### **Spokescouncil Meetings**

Similar to Affinity Groups, there will be a Spokescouncil Facilitator who manages the group discussion, calls for taking the temperature on a certain question or proposal, etc. Affinity Group (and other group) Spokes who have registered will make up the Spokescouncil, however, Affinity Group members are encouraged to attend and sit just behind their Spokes to support them and give them direct input into supporting and amending proposals. Note: If you are not in an Affinity Group you can still observe the Spokescouncil, and we expect there will also be some briefings outside of the Spokescouncil format.

Spokescouncil meetings will be used to disseminate information and to come to consensus around key decisions for the PB24.

For example, information-sharing examples could include:

- Updating people on police conversations
- Notice to meet at a certain time, ready for a big launch
- Blockade teams with big volunteer deficits

An example of key decision-making could be:

- Police have given us a warning that they are planning to cancel our permit and want to move us in 4 hours – what do we do?

Quick check-ins & updates from PB24 working groups.

## **6. Next Steps, Now**

Talk to friends, family, colleagues, or anyone else you want to have in your Affinity Group. Get together and watch [“The First Wave”](#) film to get inspired by the joy at the 2023 Blockade or share your personal experience from 2023.

Invite those people to an upcoming Affinity Group training or other [Rising Tide event near you!](#)

### **Some other ways to build your Affinity Group include:**

1. Pitching the idea to a friend who is a natural organiser to bring your social circle along.
2. Pitching to members of a community group you're in (a church, sports team, theatre troupe, choir, etc.) to attend as that group.
3. Hosting a potluck dinner with people you think would be receptive, and inviting them to join you at the Blockade.

You may have to step outside of your comfort zone – but this is what's exciting about the People's Blockade! We can only make it powerful if we all pitch in. Remember, you're not asking them to do work – you're asking them to join the best party of 2024!

Once you have (most of) your Affinity Group members:

### **1. First Affinity Group check in**

- Get to know each other (experiences, worries, hopes, limitations, motivations).
- Plan a film night, picnic, small social gathering for your Affinity Group.
- Have fun with naming yourselves!

### **2. Make some basic agreements**

- Are we open for more people to join our Affinity Group?

- What do we want/expect from each other?
- Are we going on the water or staying on the beach? Are we only participating as long as it is legal or are all or some of us planning to undertake civil disobedience?
- How do we make decisions? Does our Spokes have our agreement to make determinations on their own in a Spokes council meeting? If so, what are the parameters?
- What do we do when someone really feels the need to leave or has a difficult time?

### **3. Planning for the Blockade**

- How do we want to help in the lead up to the Blockade (e.g. handout flyers, host film screening, recruit people, prepare banners, volunteer for kitchen/security/sanitation/transport/etc.)?
- What skills or ideas do we want to bring to the Blockade (e.g., volunteering, putting up a kayak repair station, bringing musical instruments, offering child care support)?
- Does someone already have a role in the Blockade? How can we support that person?
- How much time/capacity do we each have before and during the Blockade?
- Are there any skills we want to learn beforehand? Do we have any skills we want to share?
- What are the next steps we are planning to take?

### **4. Last Affinity Group meet up before the Blockade**

- Make sure everyone is partnered up with a Buddy (an immediate support person) and knows their buddy's basic needs.
- Check-in about any concerns or uncertainties and make sure everyone feels sufficiently prepared.
- Practise quick consensus decision-making, use the consensus-building hand gestures.
- Make sure you have nominated a Facilitator and a Spokesperson for your Affinity Group.

# **We can't wait to be with you at 2024's Best and Biggest Protestival for the Climate!**

## **Additional Resources:**

XR Affinity Group Welcome Pack

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1c5mI0ohru2b-8mTwyEGsV7D0W\\_QZ3buDQ0Pr6cf\\_pSI/edit?userstoinvite=hasakat@gmail.com](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1c5mI0ohru2b-8mTwyEGsV7D0W_QZ3buDQ0Pr6cf_pSI/edit?userstoinvite=hasakat@gmail.com)

The Commons Library - Check-list for Affinity Groups

<https://commonslibrary.org/check-list-for-affinity-groups/>

The Commons Library - Affinity Groups for Non-violent Direct Action

<https://commonslibrary.org/affinity-groups-for-non-violent-direct-action/>

Seeds for Change - Affinity Groups

[www.seedsforchange.org.uk/downloads/affinitygroups.pdf](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/downloads/affinitygroups.pdf)

Direct Action Movement - Starting an Affinity Group

[www.thedirectactionmovement.com/starting-an-affinity-group](http://www.thedirectactionmovement.com/starting-an-affinity-group)

Starhawk - Training Resource on Affinity Groups

<https://web.archive.org/web/20060828113336/http://www.starhawk.org/activism/trainer-resources/affinitygroups.html>

The Anarchist Library - Affinity Groups

<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/shawn-ewald-affinity-groups>

Seeds for Change: The Spokescouncil

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

Seeds for Change: Quick Consensus

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

Glossary – Coming Soon!