

An illustration of four hands of different colors (blue, red, light blue, and grey) reaching from the top and sides to hold a black banner with white text. The banner is positioned at the top of the page.

OUR DEMOCRACY

ACT AS IF WE OWN THE PLACE.

This guide is to help you run your own Act As If Council. The template format is simple, but feel free to change it up if you have your own ideas for how to make the event work for your community. We are here to help, so let us know what we can do to support you!





Before you start, there are some things you need to have!

- 1 MATERIALS** Plenty of pens and sticky notes at a basic minimum. Extra note paper and larger sheets of paper to document group conversations will also be helpful. A projector and screen will allow you to show the event timeline, which can help keep the council focused..
- 2 DOCUMENTER** Councils will have the maximum impact if everyone can learn from them. This might be by sharing council minutes, short video interviews with attendees, or next steps of the council on the **OUR DEMOCRACY** Facebook group. Who will document your event?
- 3 FACILITATORS** Vital members of councils, facilitators encourage dialogue, keep the conversation on track, take group notes, and maintain focus on the ultimate goal of each section. A helpful guide is to aim for one facilitator for every six attendees.
- 4 GUEST EXPERTS** These can be local people, coalition members, or even council representatives. Invite people to share their knowledge for the learning phase of the council. Get in touch if you need inspiration!
- 5 THE PEOPLE!** A council is not a council without the people. Reach out into your networks and beyond to get a broad and representative spread of attendees.

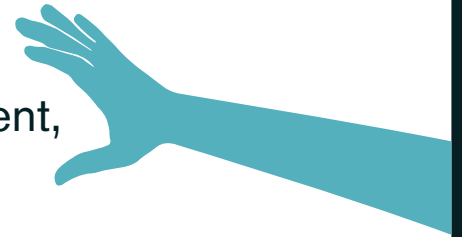




5 minutes

Introductions

Introduce the hosts and facilitators of the event, then take 5 minutes for an icebreaker.



A simple choice is to have everyone tell a stranger why they came along to the event and what they hope to get out of it.



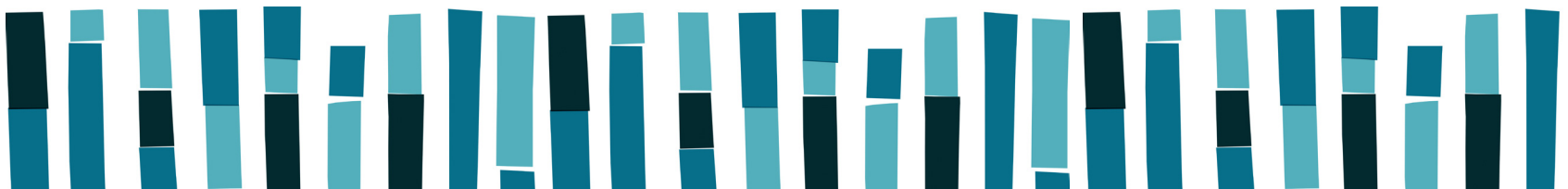


25 minutes

What are our key local issues?

To know where to start, we need to know the major concerns of our community.

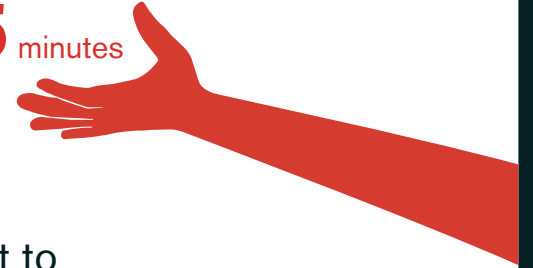
- 1** With plenty of sticky notes, designate a wall in the room (or other such similar surface) and prompt people to write down and stick up their **key issues** or problems to the wall. People can add as many or as few as they like. There are no right or wrong answers.
- 2** A facilitator will **read out** all of the issues when people have finished.
- 3** As a group, **categorise** all of the problems into common themes. These might be big topics like participation or corruption. They might be specific, like a department in the council with recurring problems, or a local problem you face as a community.





Learning Phase

25 minutes



To get from moaning to making, we need to get to grips with how our local democracy works, and become inspired by examples of how we can do things differently.

- 1 Invite 3-6 guests to give an **elevator pitch** (no more than 1 minute) for their area of expertise. Topics could be something like:

Local democracy in other place and countries, for example France or Norway

New ideas about local democracy, for example participatory budgeting and direct democracy

A successful community initiative in your area

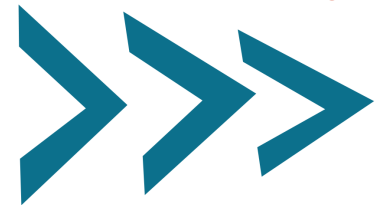
How the current council works in practice

- 2 In small groups, think of **questions** you want to ask each guest.

It is important to note that you won't have all the answers to all the questions. This is okay. The group should keep a note of questions that couldn't be answered, to help build knowledge in the future.



- 3 Guests rotate to visit each small group for five minutes. A facilitator will signal when the five minutes are up and guests need to move to the next group.



FACILITATORS!

At the end of the first hour, it is vital to move onto Section 4 of the event, even if you haven't had all the time you need in the learning phase. There will be more time for these questions after the council!




45 minutes



Finding solutions: Act as if you own the place

At the core of the Act As If council is a dedication to imagining a better future for your community. How are you going to get there?



1 With the help of facilitators, **prioritise** the key issues on the wall into topics that feel manageable for the size of the group. If there are 20 of you, maybe split into four groups. If there are 3 of you, maybe you can focus on one big topic at a time.

5 minutes

2 Spend as much or as little time as you want in these smaller focus groups discussing the concerns around the issue and possible strategies for addressing them. Imagine what an **action plan** for solving the issue would look like.

25 minutes

3 **Report back** to the room – what ideas did your group generate?

15 minutes






30 minutes

What next?

Some of you might feel satisfied having learned some new ideas and discussed possible community-driven solutions. But if we want to change our local democracy, we need to act. What are you going to do to change your local democracy?

You might decide to really get the ball rolling with one or more of the ideas you had as a group—how can you organise to make this happen?

Maybe you want to focus on campaigning in advance of the council elections. Maybe some of you might stand for election in the 2017 Council Elections.



These are only suggestions, and only your community can decide the best way to move forward.

