

## ACF COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

A practical guide for determined citizens to take collective action against pollution and destruction and for a more beautiful world.

# How to organise a local group in your community



**AUSTRALIAN  
CONSERVATION  
FOUNDATION**

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How to change the world by organising a local group in your community.

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# Why active communities matter

"We need in every bay and community a group  
of angelic troublemakers."

– **BAYARD RUSTIN**

## A note from the ACF team

This guide was written by campaigners, communicators, organisers and government relations advisors. We've spent years advocating directly with elected representatives and know how to run strategic, effective campaigns. We've also worked extensively with communities and know just how powerful activated communities can be.

We are also people who are deeply concerned about the urgency for action on unchecked pollution and extinction, and we are determined to scale up action. We know that a handful of experts or one group alone will never have enough impact. We need a wave of collective action all over the country.

We created this toolkit because the inaction has gone on for too long.

Big polluting companies damaging our climate. Politicians who forget they represent the people. The reef is bleaching on our watch. We have work to do. People like us must step up, get involved and come together to demand change.

We want to hear your stories, questions, comments and feedback, so please feel free to ping us on the ACF Slack Channel if you use it. On Twitter: >> [@AusConservation](https://twitter.com/AusConservation). Or by email >> [action@mail.acf.org.au](mailto:action@mail.acf.org.au)

Please spread the word! Only people who know this guide exists will use it. And when we work together, we can create a tomorrow that's even more beautiful than today.

*So let's get on with it!*



People's Climate March. Photo: James Thomas.

# What is ACF Community?

"We are nearly half a million people who speak out, show up and act for a world where rivers, forests.. people, reefs and wildlife thrive."

# What is ACF community?

ACF Community is a network of independently organised Australian Conservation Foundation groups taking local action as part of ACF's national purpose and shared values. ACF community groups speak out, show up and act for a world where forests, rivers, people and wildlife thrive.

Individual action alone won't solve the pollution and extinction crisis we face. To make real change, we need collective action. When small groups connect into a much bigger whole, we're powerful.

We're blown away by the incredible passion, commitment and determination of volunteers in our community. When we unleash the power of our community by connecting people and sharing strategies and skills, we can create change faster.

## Why do ACF Community groups matter?

We all need to work together to stop pollution and destruction so our living world can thrive – and volunteer teams are crucial to making this happen.

The ACF community is nearly half a million people strong and when we work strategically together, we can have a massive impact.

We know we're more effective when we are focused and strategic. Rather than taking on a hundred local campaigns that stretch us too thin, we focus on core goals to make the biggest difference.

While we don't have enough staff to give individual support to ACF Community groups all across the country, our core team have created systems and tools to scale up and empower volunteer groups to self-organise. We also give extra support to groups that are working in areas of high strategic importance.

## How can ACF staff support ACF Community groups?

- In-person and webinar trainings in story, strategy, teams and action.
- A shared theory of change and strategies to build people power, change the story and fix the system – and stop dirty fuels and shift to a sun-powered country.
- Toolkits like this one to guide people everywhere to take action and win specific local outcomes.
- Centralised mobilisation moments, like weeks of action, to give momentum and unity to local efforts.
- A web platform for groups to register local events which can be promoted to other ACF supporters locally.
- A web platform for groups to register their local group meetings and a way to share messages. Groups who want their own website or Facebook page or group need to arrange this themselves.
- Catch ups to reconnect, re-strategise and connect local groups to something bigger.
- A new way of engaging in the political process, where you have a voice to stand up against pollution and destruction, and for our living world.

# ACF Community principles

## **1. WE ARE PURPOSEFUL & FOCUSED**

The ACF Community advocates against pollution and destruction, and for our living world. We are aligned with ACF's platform outlined in ACF's National Agenda – Our Choice: Ten actions to protect people, rivers, reefs, forests and wildlife, found at [www.acf.org.au/our\\_policy](http://www.acf.org.au/our_policy). Our current priority campaigns are to speed the shift out of coal and into clean energy. Community groups respect the necessity of national purpose and focus, and have agency over local tactics and local campaign goals.

## **2. WE ARE BOLD & CREDIBLE**

We champion big ideas for real change. We hold decision makers to account. We speak truth to power. We are informed by science.

## **3. WE FIND COMMON GROUND WITH UNLIKELY PARTNERS**

We seek to build common cause with others, and create strong alliances and networks.

## **4. WE ENGAGE POSITIVELY IN POLITICS**

We will create a democracy we want to be part of – holding our representatives accountable, encouraging participation in our political system and strong democratic values.

## **5. WE'RE RESPECTFUL & INCLUSIVE**

We are respectful of all individuals, even those we disagree with. We're willing to work together with others to make change. Our care for nature includes people, social

justice and equity. We respect the rights, interests and perspectives of Australia's diverse communities.

## **6. WE ARE INDEPENDENT & NON-PARTISAN**

We hold all political parties to the same standards of protecting our environment and give them all equal opportunity to respond to our demands.

## **7. WE SPEAK OUT WITH UNITED BUT INDEPENDENT VOICES**

People who are part of the ACF community speak out as ACF community members and concerned citizens, but do not speak on behalf of ACF the organisation.

## **8. WE ACT LAWFULLY**

We engage in lawful advocacy including peaceful protest. ACF will do everything we can within the law to stop pollution and protect our living world.

## **9. WE CHERISH LIFE**

We recognise that the great diversity of life on Earth has intrinsic value and we share a deep urgency for action so that nature and people can thrive.

## **10. WE RESPECT CULTURE AND COUNTRY**

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this country and recognise the continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay respect to elders past and present and acknowledge the pivotal roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in caring for country and wildlife across Australia.

# How to start an ACF Community group

“If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.”

– **AFRICAN PROVERB**

# How to start an ACF Community group

If you agree with the ACF community principles, you are welcome to call yourself an ACF community group. Here's how:

## Check out the ACF Community principles

The ACF Community principles guide how volunteer groups work. They include important things like being non-partisan (our independence from political parties is vital!), acting lawfully and being respectful and inclusive. If you agree your group will follow the principles, keep reading!

## Should I create an ACF Community group?

There's no need to reinvent the wheel – if an advocacy group or activist network is already operating in your local area on similar issues, you might like to join them.

Depending on the size of your local representative's electorate, it also may make sense to have more than one group. You can look up your electorate to see how many suburbs it contains over here >> [www.electorate.aec.gov.au](http://www.electorate.aec.gov.au).

If you look around and can't find a group working specifically on local action focused on your Members of Parliament in your area, then start your own! It's actually quite simple, you really just need two things:

- A handful of people who are geographically nearby – ideally in the same federal or state electorate.
- A commitment from those people to devote a few hours per month to advocate for Australia to get out of coal and into clean energy.

## Co-branding

You're also welcome to co-brand your group – connecting the ACF Community identity to the name of another community or not-for-profit group which also agrees with the ACF Community Principles. For example, an event could be jointly hosted by ACF Community Richmond and Elders for Climate Change Action. We don't allow co-branding with businesses or political parties.



Photo: Bette Devine.



### **How to describe your relationship with ACF**

When you describe your group, you can say:

*“We’re part of a network of independently organised, volunteer-run groups in the Australian Conservation Foundation community, taking local action in Richmond.”*

You can also say:

*“ACF Community North Brisbane is an independently organised, volunteer-run group that is part of the Australian Conservation Foundation community.”*

### **What if an ACF Community group wants to run a campaign or project not initiated by ACF?**

If the campaign is aligned with ACF’s *National Agenda* ([www.acf.org.au/our\\_policy](http://www.acf.org.au/our_policy)) we encourage your ACF Community group to run local campaigns, but ACF staff can’t support or resource these.

If your ACF Community group wants to run a values-aligned community project – like a community garden or bulk solar purchase – you are also welcome to do so and link your efforts into stronger advocacy for the laws and policies that will create a systemic shift, but it is not ACF’s core purpose to work on this kind of project.

### **Can I fundraise?**

Yes! You can fundraise for your group or for ACF – just make it clear who you’re fundraising for.

If you’re fundraising for your ACF Community group, you can use crowdfunding platforms like:

- [www.chuffed.org](http://www.chuffed.org)
- [www.mycause.com.au](http://www.mycause.com.au)
- [www.pozible.com](http://www.pozible.com)

Fundraising for your local group is independent of ACF and you are responsible for promotion and follow up. Donations to your group will not go through ACF or receive a tax deductible gift receipt.

If you’d like to fundraise for ACF, use the community fundraising platform Everyday Hero. ACF will receive donations directly, and tax receipts are sent to each donor >> [www.acf.org.au/fundraise-for-acf](http://www.acf.org.au/fundraise-for-acf)



ACF Community groups, Brisbane.  
Photo: Eddie Safarik

## Get your group up and running!

Here are some tips on starting a local group dedicated to making your local representatives aware of their constituents' opposition to dirty energy.

**Start where people are.** If you're in an existing group with lots of people who want to do this kind of thing, then start there; if you're not, then look for people elsewhere. You could start a subgroup of an existing activist group or create a new group – it really depends on your circumstances. The most important thing is that this is a LOCAL group. Your band of heroes is focused on applying local pressure, which means you all need to be local.

**Identify a few additional co-founders** who are interested in participating and recruiting others. Ideally, these are people who have different social networks from you so that you can maximise your reach. Make an effort to ensure that leadership of the group reflects the diversity of opposition to dirty energy.

### Set up your first meeting

You can launch your group by creating your first group meeting on our community website. Event hosts need to create a username and password, then login at [www.acf.org.au/signup\\_events](http://www.acf.org.au/signup_events) and post all the event details on a simple form.

### Invite people to be part of the group

**Email your contacts and post a message on your Facebook page** or any local Facebook groups you're a member of and/or other social media channels you use regularly. Say that you're starting a group for people in your electorate dedicated to getting out of dirty coal and into clean energy, and ask people to email you to sign up.

**Invite interested people to an in-person kickoff meeting.** Use this meeting to agree on a name, principles for your group, roles for leadership, a way of communicating and a strategy for pressuring your local political representatives and businesses to get out of coal and into clean energy. You might not get through all this at your first meeting so if you need to, make another meeting to work out the strategy and tactics. Get people to commit to come – they'll want to because so many people care.

*Rule of thumb: 50% of the people who say they will come will actually show up to your meeting. Aim high!*

### Add some public events on the ACF website

You can post group meetings and public actions on ACF's website in the Events section. Just log in at [www.acf.org.au/signup\\_events](http://www.acf.org.au/signup_events) and type in your event details. Write an engaging event description so people want to come and know what to expect. Write a line or two about your group. Remember – by posting an event, you're agreeing to the ACF Community principles.

Events are great opportunities to recruit new people to be part of your group. ACF volunteers will help to publicise your event to others in the ACF community nearby, but we can't guarantee personal support for every event!



Stop Adani rally.  
Photo: James Thomas.

## Run a great first meeting

**Manage the meeting.** Keep people focused on the ultimate core strategy: applying pressure to your MP to get out of coal and into clean energy. Other attendees may have other ideas and it's important to affirm their concerns and feelings, but it's also important to redirect that energy to make sure that the conversation stays focused on developing a group plan of action.

**Agree on principles.** This is your chance to decide what your group stands for. We recommend two guiding principles:

- By supporting more polluting energy like coal and gas, governments and businesses are putting our future at risk, and this must be stopped.
- To work together to achieve this goal, we must model the values of inclusion, tolerance and fairness.

We strongly recommend you stick to a simple strategy shared with other groups in the movement and focus pressure on your local political representatives and businesses rather than spreading yourself too thin.

**Volunteer for roles.** Figure out how to divide roles and responsibilities among your group. This can look very different depending on who's in the room, but at a minimum, you probably want:

- 1-2 people in charge of overall group coordination
- 1-2 people in charge of communications including a designated media/social media contact
- 1-2 people in charge of tracking your local representative's office schedule and events ,and
- 1-2 people in charge of public event and action coordination.

In addition to these roles, ask attendees how they want to contribute to advocacy efforts: attend events, record events, ask questions, make calls, host meetings, engage on social media, write op-eds for local papers, etc.

## Stay in touch with your group

**Adopt means of communication.** You need a way of reaching everyone in your group in order to coordinate actions. This can be a Facebook group, a Google group, a Slack team — whatever people are most comfortable with. It may be wise to consider secure or encrypted platforms such as Signal and WhatsApp.

**Set up a regular group meeting.** It's really important to keep the momentum going so people stay engaged and your group is consistently kicking goals. Set up a regular meeting – we suggest weekly or fortnightly. Discuss in your kickoff meeting which days / times work best for people and do your best to accommodate the majority. Be flexible and inclusive. If someone can only make it on Tuesdays but you've decided on Thursdays, perhaps alternating Tuesdays and Thursdays could work.



## Grow your group!

*Expand! Ask everyone in your group to invite new people and reach out across their networks. Encourage every member to send out the same outreach emails and social media posts.*

### **Start an email list**

Collect the names and email addresses of people in your community in a spreadsheet so you can stay in touch. This is your email list — 100 or 200 email addresses is a great start.

### **Diversity in your group and reaching out**

If you are forming a group, we urge you to make a conscious effort to pursue diversity and solidarity at every stage in the process. Being inclusive and diverse might include recruiting members who can bridge language gaps, and finding ways to accommodate participation when people can't attend due to work schedules, health issues or childcare needs.

We also encourage you to speak with and include where possible people who are most directly affected by government and business support for dirty energy. This could include both reaching out through your own networks and forming relationships with community groups that are already working with the most affected people.

## Have conversations to encourage people to get involved

To encourage people to get involved in your local group – or to sign petitions or come to events or actions – have conversations about why this matters and what it entails.

*People might be initially reluctant to get involved, but convincing them often only takes a few minutes and a friendly chat.*

Here are some tips for having successful conversations to inspire people to take action with your group.

**Get the story.** What issues does the person care about? How would government and business resistance to shift away from dirty coal and into clean energy affect them, their communities, and their values?

**Ask open-ended questions!** People are more likely to take action when they articulate what they care about and can connect it to the action they are going to take. A good rule of thumb is to talk 30% of the time or less and listen at least 70% of the time.

**Imagine what's possible.** How can your group change your community's relationship with your MP and local businesses? How could your group, and others like it, protect our values?

**Commitment and ownership.** Ask a clear yes or no question: will you work with me to hold our representatives accountable? Then, get to specifics. Who else can they talk to about joining the group? What work needs to be done — planning a meeting, researching your local MP — that they can take on? When will you follow up?



ACF Community volunteers, Brisbane. Photo: Eddie Safarik

### Hold a social event

A great way to build your networks is to hold a fun event and invite people in your community – a coal and clean energy trivia night at the pub, a reconnect with nature picnic or a film screening are good examples. Make sure there is a link to the issues your group is connected to and a fun, social element so people have a good time.

Ask people to sign up to your email list on arrival. Follow up after the event and thank them for coming. Then invite them to your next regular group meeting, action or event.

### Register your event on ACF's website

Register your event on ACF's directory of events so we can invite others from the ACF community in your area. Our volunteer team may be able to support you with materials and answer questions. Use the 'host your own event' button on the events page on our website.

There are four steps to register your event:

- Create an account on the ACF website >> [www.acf.org.au/signup\\_events](http://www.acf.org.au/signup_events)
- Click the link in the email you get to activate your account. Create a username and click **ACTIVATE ACCOUNT**.
- Go to our [www.acf.org.au/events](http://www.acf.org.au/events) and click **HOST YOUR OWN EVENT**.
- Enter the event details and click **SAVE AND POST**.

Then share the link and start recruiting! You'll get an email with instructions on where you can edit your event.

### Tell us how it went!

Talk to your ACF community organiser, jump on the ACF Slack Channel or send us an email at [action@acf.org.au](mailto:action@acf.org.au) and tell us how your event went. We can help you evaluate the meeting and apply your learnings to the next one.



ACF Community volunteers, Brisbane. Photo: Eddie Safarik