

## **Climate Emergency Manchester**

### **Report for Information**

**Report to:** Necessary Extra Scrutiny and Capacity Building 27 May 2020

**Subject:** Active Citizenship Toolkit

**Report of:** Marc Hudson of Climate Emergency Manchester

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### **Summary**

Without prolonged, radical and expanding pressure, policymakers tend to keep doing what they have been doing, and society keeps doing what it is doing (see disclaimer at the very end of this document) There is enormous inertia (passive and enacted) in these systems. We know this. Exhortation and performative spasms are not going to get us to the promised land. We've tried that, repeatedly.

In order to create the outside possibility of prolonged, radical and expanding pressure, active citizens need to develop their own skills, knowledge and relationships, around a broad range of elements, be it writing press releases, collective psychological resilience, giving 'no comment' interviews, welcoming new folks, social media skills, and more.

This might seem daunting. Climate Emergency Manchester is developing - and using - an "Active Citizenship Toolkit" to help us figure out what skills we need, what skills we have (and at what level - novice, practitioner, expert and ninja) and where our "absolute gaps" and "single points of failure" lie. The task is huge. We would appreciate help, at whatever scale.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Ask questions about the ACT, and force us all to think more clearly.
2. Come up with a series of concrete aims/plans/objectives that can be implemented soon to slightly slow down the inevitable and accelerating slide towards the apocalypse.

**Wards Affected:** All, if they wanted

**Contact Individuals:**

Name: Marc Hudson

Position: Core Group member of Climate Emergency Manchester

Email: marc@climateemergencymanchester.net

**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents provide further background to the issues in the report and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available online.

Two websites

[www.askfortheworld.wordpress.net](http://www.askfortheworld.wordpress.net)

[www.healthymovements.wordpress.com](http://www.healthymovements.wordpress.com)

Get your game face on

<https://dwrighttowers.wordpress.com/2010/11/09/get-your-fucking-game-face-on/>

Social movement learning (Partisan)

<https://marchudson.net/2016/07/03/social-movement-learning-partisans-collective-and-activist-skills-and-knowledge/>

This from Peace News, “Going in for the Skill” which doesn’t quite come off.

<https://peacenews.info/node/7792/going-skill>

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Many social movement organisations have little idea what resources they have at their disposal, or what they want and need to be more effective - both as individuals within the group, but also as a group as a whole. This lack is one of the factors that can lead to groups falling victim to despair, co-optation, self-martyrdom and - all too often - collapse.
- 1.2 The consequence of this is that every few years a new bunch of citizens - who either don't know about the previous efforts or think that those efforts are not worth knowing about - stumble along and have to learn those same skills and lessons (the hard way). They then fall victim to despair, co-optation and self-martyrdom and... the big wheel keeps on turning, Ibn-Khaldun etc etc.
- 1.3 CEM believes that
  - a) This is stupid
  - b) This is dangerous
  - c) This can (must) be changed - it's not a law of nature.
- 1.4 This report gives the background to repeated failed/semi-failed efforts by Marc Hudson (a CEM core group member) to present ways out of this mess, followed by an examination of the "Active Citizenship Toolkit's" format, current status problems and future prospects
- 1.5 CEM cannot - must not - go it alone on this project. We need the advice, support, criticism, intelligence and talent of other individuals and groups in Manchester. We hope they will work with us to break the cycle.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 For as long as there has been public awareness and protest about global environmental degradation, there has been a pattern of environmental movements (made up of groups large and small, reformist and radical) going up like a rocket and down like a stick. Like the struggle, the issue-attention cycle, and the 3-year-spasm are both real...

- 2.2 NGOs, know that they must pay lip-service to “capacity-building” and “grass roots organisation.” And they mostly suck at it. Most “training days” are a chance for individuals or organisations to preen to each other, using the information deficit model, in ‘workshops’ which amount to nothing more than mini-lectures. And this is from the allegedly progressive/edgy ones.
- 2.3 Less structured/funded groups big and small, engage in little (or zero) effective prolonged mentoring, little strategic analysis of what is needed at a group level. There is always another protest/camp/rally/march to organise. “After that we might think about doing some of that airy-fairy bourgeois stuff, comrade (but not if it undermines our monopoly on crucial skills).” Even those who quote Jo Freeman’s *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* seem to think that it doesn’t apply to their group. Meanwhile, throughout, when it comes to learning, the wrong unit of analysis is being used. Everyone’s focussing (for various reasons) on the individual, instead of the group.
- 2.4 The idea for a “formal” peer-to-peer mutual mentoring scheme (then known as Climate Activist Development Scheme) with skills and knowledge categorised at four levels, to be used by grassroots groups, was first dreamt up in 2007 or so, by the author, who had been exposed to the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework. It became obvious though that most climate campaigners were having too much fun riding what would later be described as the emotacycle... Between 2012 and 2014 the author developed it a bit further, with his friend Marc Roberts, with what was now “Activist Skills and Knowledge - ASK for the World.” Check out [www.askfortheworld.wordpress.net](http://www.askfortheworld.wordpress.net) and [www.healthymovements.wordpress.com](http://www.healthymovements.wordpress.com). Again NGOs were found to be largely unreceptive, (perhaps because it doesn’t direct all attention to whichever policy wonk and glossy report they are touting as The Most Important Thing du jour). The author ran a good session using the “Novice Lines” at a climate event in London, and another, bespoke, one for the Manchester Partisan collective in 2016. In 2019 the author offered a session to a very well-publicised group: they said yes, then changed their minds because they were having a Revolution, and figuring out who has what skills and how to share them doesn’t fit with that.
- 2.5 CEM decided at its January 2020 Away Day to pursue what is now known as “Active Citizenship Toolkit - ACT” (note the disappearance of both the words climate and activist over time - this is not a coincidence). We were not going to start until the Petition was done (i.e. 4000 signatures collected), but “events dear boy, events” - then came the virus. Now seemed the moment to ACT.

### 3.0 What is going well

- 3.1 We (CEM) have come up with a long (but by no means exhaustive!) list of “elements” (see second appendix document). We have figured out which ones are currently core to what we (think) we are doing and which ones are peripheral or not-necessary. We have figured out where each of us are currently on those elements (from novice to ninja). We have mostly figured out what levels we need these core elements at (there is some mopping up to do) and have come up with a list of absolute gaps and single points of failure (see the first appendix - the “jargon buster” for more details on how we define all these terms). The four absolute gaps are as follows:
- Taking feedback (we think we need it at expert level)
  - GDPR (we think we need it at practitioner level)
  - Local authority - understanding and explaining its budget and budget making processes (we think we need it at expert level)
  - Lobbying councillors (we think we need it at expert level)
- 3.2 We have assigned members/pairs of members of the CEM core group to write element descriptors and level descriptors for those core elements currently lacking them (see 3rd document in the appendix for advice on writing EDs and LDs), and to plug the absolute gaps in CEM.
- 3.3 We have a list of peripheral elements, non-CEM elements and additional elements, and a set of sources for finding more elements. We have a shared awareness that this project will take at least 18 months to “complete,” but that there are enough interim benefits to keep us going.
- 3.4 A thousand years ago, i.e. in February or early March, we ran a kind-of ACT session with some switched-on University students, who “got it” straight away. We have had expressions of interest from various people who want to know more and to be involved in making it all happen.
- 3.5 This is of course against a backdrop of the pending ecological debacle, but then, everything is, and what can you do?

#### **4.0 What is going badly/could go badly**

- 4.1 Getting the EDs and LDs written for the core elements is taking a little while. A cattleprod has been brandished, and the next stage is to charge that sucker up (but it's okay - we will use renewable energy).
- 4.3 The whole language of 'citizenship' needs to be treated with extreme caution. Basically citizenship can be a dog whistle meaning rich white hetero able-bodied men get to talk and everyone else gets to listen if they are lucky. Who is allowed to be a citizen (de facto and de jure) and for how long and under what circumstances is something that many scholars don't really go into.
- 4.4 It may be that CEM's gamble - that it has the resources to work with others to pull this off - doesn't come off. It may be that the short-term rewards of the emotacycle prove too alluring to too many individuals and groups, and the latest wave of climate action which began in mid-2018 has been prematurely (by a year or so) curtailed. We shall see.

#### **5.0 Next Steps and measuring future progress**

- 5.1 CEM will be finishing off its balloting what levels it needs the core elements at sooner rather than later, and plug its absolute gaps, "showing its working as it goes." It will then tackle its single points of failure, and move on to the rest of the core elements.
- 5.2 We want to work with individuals and groups who want to be part of making this all happen, either as writers and researchers, or as guinea pigs.
- 5.3 Email us at [contact@climateemergencymanchester.net](mailto:contact@climateemergencymanchester.net) with "ACT your age, dammit" in the subject header. Academics working on pedagogy included, but you better know your Freire, Schor, Clark et al.

#### **6.0 Recommendations**

- 6.1 Individuals and groups who want to help CEM develop the ACT, or who want to just get cracking with using it themselves, are invited to take part in this discussion, and future discussions.
- 6.2 We're looking for guinea pigs, especially groups, who want to take the whole thing for a spin, along the lines of the 2016 workshop mentioned in the blog post on [marchudson.net](http://marchudson.net) (but maybe not the Peace News one). Individuals who want to be guinea pigs are welcome to- check out the Personal Development Plan which is the final appendix item.

# Appendices

## Jargon buster

(but let us know if any of this is still unclear).

Term	Definition	See also
Absolute gaps	The lack of anyone in a group having an element at the level agreed as necessary for fulfilment of the core mission(s) of the group	single point of failure
Assessment resources	Assessment resources are resources - quizzes, tests etc - which enable an individual or group to have some sense of whether they are indeed functioning at a given level. They are indicative, not prescriptive	development resources
Compound	A group of elements which interact, and should be taken as an interaction. e.g. writing press releases and forming relationships with journalists - you can have one without the other, but why would you?	elements
Core elements	Elements which are central to a group - the group will fail to meet its goals if it does not have these elements, and at the appropriate level	Elements
Development resources	Development resources are resources - found or created - which enable individuals and groups to either maintain a level or move towards a new level of an element	assessment descriptors
Element descriptor	A brief summary of 'what the element is' - often accompanied by a short thought experiment on what would happen if an individual/group did not have the element	
Element Overview Essay	An essay which sets out why the element matters, what it would mean to (co)develop the ability to be at a higher level on this element, how to combat skill decay and spread the love generally	
Elements	Elements are skill, knowledge, or more rarely relationships, which an active citizenship group might need to function. They can be either individual or group level. They are then described as existing at four levels	compounds
Group Development Plan	A plan for a group to identify its core and peripheral elements, assess its absolute gaps, single points of failure, and scope for improvement	personal development plan, absolute gap, single points of failure



Legitimate peripheral participation	Participation by supporters of a group, who may or may not be 'paid up' members in ways which are valorised, validated, and - as appropriate - assessed.	
Level descriptors	Elements are described at one of four levels - novice, practitioner, expert and ninja. These are relational and provisional. Ninjas mostly don't exist, and are a two-edged sword if they do	
meta-elements	Elements which are about the construction, reconstruction and spread (?) of the Active Citizenship Toolkit	
nongroup elements	Elements from the larger long list which simply don't matter (at the present) to the group, and can be ignored	
Personal Development Plan	A plan for an individual to maintain or increase their level at a number of elements, both for their own pleasure, but also to increase the robustness of a group (e.g. plugging absolute gaps and single points of failure)	Group Development Plan, Absolute gaps, single points of failure
Peripheral elements	Elements which, while nice to have, will only speed the group on its way to the sunny uplands. Not having them will slow things down, but not stop the glorious march of the proletariat	
Scaffolding	The supportive structures in place to enable an individual/group to achieve an improvement (consolidation in one level or moving to a next), within an element.	Zone of Proximal Development
Single Points of Failure (spf)	Only one member of the group has the required element at the required level, leaving the group vulnerable if they leave, fry, turn out to have been an undercover cop all along	absolute gaps
Skill decay	Inevitable (times's winged chariot and all that) decay of skills because of either time, or because the task gets more complex and having a certain level of skill no longer makes you a ninja or an expert	
Zone of proximal development (ZPD)	out of your depth, but wiith armbands and a lifeguard hovering... "the distance between what a learner can do without help, and what they can do with support from someone with more knowledge or expertise ("more knowledgeable other")"	

List of elements CEM has decided are (currently) core.

Social movements - understanding and explaining why the “information deficit model” is so wrong and so harmful

Social movements - Morale maintenance (individual)

Social movements - Morale maintenance (collective)

Social movements - dealing with despair & abyss staring in self

Social movements - dealing with despair & abyss staring in others

Social movements - Giving feedback

Social movements - Taking feedback

Mentoring

Social movements - GDPR

Social movements - Strategising (includes scenario building)

Social movements - maintaining list of jobs and roles which need doing/filling

Social movements - volunteer management

Computer skills (wordprocessing and data management)

Information management

Research

Project management

Copy editing for different audiences (tone policing)

Proofreading

Post-mortems and evaluation

Data - scraping

Data - security, access

Producing reports

Time Management

Problem solving skills

Social movements - Intragroup conflict, Seeing it, Accepting it/mediating it and the underlying issues

A theory of change, change in practice (i.e. how MCC has been moved in the past)

Understanding policymaking processes

Understanding pressures/incentives for bureaucrats

Understanding pressures/incentives for politicians

Social movements- understanding motivations to participate in social movement organisations, and how they shift

Social movements - Privilege (white, male, CLASS, ableist etc)

Social movements - becoming and remaining an ally

Social movements - coping with fanatics, zealots etc)

Social movements - coping with disruptors and disruption

Social movements - accountability (minimising 'lunching out')

Social movements - understanding the role of emotions in social movements (including emotacycles and abeyance)

Social movements - community organising

Social movements- understanding power within social movement organisations

Social movements - Meetings - online - facilitating

Social movements - Meetings - online - business/internal meeting

Social movements - Meetings - online - public - advertising and preparing

Social movements - enabling legitimate peripheral participation

Social movements - meetings, minute taking and action tracking

Social movements - Meetings - meatspace, design

Social movements - Meetings - meatspace, facilitation

Social movements - Meetings - welcoming new folks without seeming cult-y

Social movements - Meetings, post-mortem (online and meatspace)

Social movements - Speaking at public meetings

Social movements - meetings - Attending them - (organised by other people) and how to survive with dignity/sanity intact and ALSO be useful to your group and to the wider movement.

Social movements - Petitions

Social movements - Dealing with punctuality as a “problem”

Social movements - Workshop design

Social movements - Workshop delivery

Local authority - understanding and explaining its structure

Local authority - understanding and explaining its budget and budget making processes

Local authority - Understanding planning processes

Local authority - lobbying politicians

Local authority - engaging with officers

Local authority - engaging with scrutiny processes

Local authority - reading council documents, no limited to scrutiny and planning processes

Local authority - FOIAs

Mainstream media - cultivating journalists

Mainstream media - writing a press release

Internet - website maintenance

Internet - blogging

Internet - Youtube video-making

Understanding White supremacy

Understanding Patriarchy

Understanding Ableism

Understanding class (UK)

Understanding intersectionality

Issue - Understanding/being able to explain climate science - (understanding and being able to explain it)

Issue - Climate policy - local

Issue - Climate policy - national

## Advice for writing Element Descriptors and Level Descriptors

First pass by Marc, 28th April. Please add comments, suggestions, critiques etc.

First thing is - **don't overthink** this: as Jason Bourne tells Nikki in Tangier "[It gets easier](#)"  
Second thing is - **don't worry**, all EDs and LDs you draft will be seen/improved by all other members of the core group before they go live.

### Element Descriptor

This should be relatively short (80ish words or less?)

Mostly this will be clear by the title, but sometimes you might want to draw a distinction (e.g. facilitating is not chairing)

One easy additional and worthwhile line is to explain the *consequences of this element being absent* from an individual or group's repertoire. That should help people realise what is at stake

### Level descriptors

There are seven different axes on which element level descriptors can be assessed.

- Time, support, complexity of job, number of mistakes tolerable, amount of other stuff engaged in doing simultaneously consequences of failure, enemy action

This does NOT mean that all have to appear in each level descriptor, but they quite probably will. Do NOT worry about it seeming mechanistic/repetitive- most people will not be reading heaps of LDs in one sitting, and if they do, so what? They will see that we have been systematic if somewhat rigid. No biggie

Don't be worried if the ninja level seems outlandish and the description of a basically impossible superman/woman - it is. That's the whole point of ninjas- they mostly don't exist, don't stick around, and you should not build your group's strategy on there being one on hand.

Most groups (including CEM) can probably get by with practitioner level for most elements. (Yes, expert level might be nice-to-have, or regarded as essential on some elements: fine, but there are costs attached to acquiring and maintaining those skills.)

Novice does it effortfully, with full attention, no spare bandwidth. Ninja doesn't break a sweat, can be doing other stuff at the same time (which may or may not include mentoring in the element: but not all ninjas are good mentors!)

	<b>Novice</b>	<b>Practitioner</b>	<b>Expert</b>	<b>Ninja</b>
<b>Time available</b>	With a relatively long period of time	With some time available	With little time available	Virtually instantaneously

	available			
<b>Support available</b>	With significant support	With minimal support	With support only in unusual circumstances	Totally solo
<b>Complexity of job required and the ambiguity of its boundaries</b>	straightforward	Complicated and unusual	Very complicated and rarely seen	Extremely complex, 'off the map' wtaf, unprecedented
<b>Other stuff on plate</b>	With no other responsibilities	With some other responsibilities	With many other responsibilities	With major stressful and time-consuming responsibilities
<b>Number of mistakes/mis-steps allowed</b>	With only minor errors	With only errors that a pedant would grumble about	With no errors	Flawless, Perfect despite the verve and risks taken
<b>Consequences/ stress</b>	When failure is not problematic	With some individual and collective consequences around reputation and morale should the work be substandard	With both individual consequences of short-to-medium term for morale, reputation, finances and ability to recruit	With major-to-catastrophic long-term consequences for the group and its projects should the work be below expected standard
<b>"Enemy action" trying to throw you off</b>	In the absence of any pushback by opponents	With some predictable pushback from an opponent	With some opponents making serious efforts to scupper you	In the face of many actors' concerted and devious efforts to throw you off your game

See also

<https://askfortheworld.wordpress.com/2014/03/04/how-to-write-dimension-descriptions-for-activist-skills-and-knowledge/>

# Personal Development Plan

**Basic advice:**

- Underpromise and overdeliver - this will build your confidence and credibility in your own eyes. Yes, yes, this is (it really is) a (climate) emergency, but it has been that way for 3 years. The fact that it is an emergency (it so is) doesn't change human psychology and capacity
- Find a buddy. Multiple buddies. Support each other to get better at stuff. Nobody is an island, and islands are really threatened by sea-level rise, anyway
- You don't have to become a ninja at everything (or anything) to be a really effective citizen. The more practitioners we have, the better, basically.

Oh, and most of all, remember too, it ain't no sin to be glad you're alive.

Element	Current level	Ultimate desired level ("practitioner" is entirely adequate for 99.999% of cases)	Next actions and who will support/mentor you in these



**DO NOT READ THIS DISCLAIMER UNTIL**

- a) **You've read the rest of the document and even then, only if you're a glass half empty kinda guy or gal or prefer not to say, 'kay?**

**Disclaimer:** Look, by allowing the fossil fuel incumbency and other maniacal civilisation-killers to run the show for the last thirty years, we have left things so late that it probably doesn't much matter **WHAT** we do any more. But that's no way to run an ethical life, so you just gotta pretend, 'kay?