

How to use this resource:

This resource is part of a series on working as allies. It is intended as discussion starter for groups or a think piece for individuals interested in this topic. You may wish to use the following questions when discussing/reflecting on this material.

- What resonates with your experience?
- Which points do you not agree with? Why?
- Which points do not make sense to you?
- What is missing?

Other resources in this series are available at:

www.groundwork.org.nz/resources/allies-discussion-starters

The ally role

Relationship based and contextual

- The ally role is negotiated in the context of the relationship/alliance.
- Political dynamics and contexts differ but the principles that underlie the relationships are the same. Ethical principles include respect, recognition (of indigenous peoples' rights and place etc.) and responsibility (in relation to your role as colonizer).
- Relationship-based work needs to respond to the changing situation of the party/parties on the other side of the relationship.

Working with 'our own'¹ and with indigenous people

- Being an ally is not about helping or 'fixing' the 'other' party but about first considering and then undertaking our own work.
- We need to recognise that indigenous people are working on their own decolonisation and settlers need separate processes. These processes need to include the identification of responsibilities for addressing injustice and the need for non-indigenous people to work on changing our own systems.
- There needs to be a balance between working with our own people and working directly with indigenous peoples so that we do not lose connection with the issues and priorities of those we are in alliance with.
- Some people are positioned as bridge-builders working between indigenous and non-indigenous communities; some are working more in indigenous communities, and others with their own. For any one person the role may change over time.

Supporter, leader, potato peeler...

- The ally role varies and can require different actions to be undertaken at different times. It can help to state at the outset what you can contribute any given context.
- Work on the aspect of the issue that is most appropriate in the context of the community you are supporting and the skills you/your organisation can offer to the alliance.
- Be useful and provide practical support, from speaking at public meetings to working in the kitchen.

¹ The terms 'we' and 'our' are used here to refer to white settler allies.

Who leads?

- This can vary between and be a mix of following the leadership and direction of indigenous leaders/elders/scholars and taking our own lead. It depends on the context.
- Determining when to step forward and when to step back is an ongoing process. In attempting not to dominate we can become too self-effacing and not be useful.
- The alliance is for the long run - good allies have to be free to take different positions, disagree or use different tactics on issues. It is not about uncritically following or falling into line with indigenous people's views.

Getting feedback

- The ally role requires on-going checking in with others, indigenous and non-indigenous people, and deep reflecting.
- Be open and confident about asking for feedback from the people you are working to support. Seek feedback from other non-indigenous allies and constantly critique your own practice.

Listen, respect, reflect

- Be open to hearing other voices. Listen intently as people are speaking from different worldviews.
- Do not speak for others.
- Enable indigenous voices to be heard.
- Work respectfully, acknowledging the gifts others have.
- Know and acknowledge your own history and the history of the land you are on.
- Be willing to go into emotionally difficult terrain and be prepared to sit with discomfort and the unsettling nature of work.
- Be self-aware and reflective.

Key points

- The ally role is relationship based and contextual—requiring flexibility and responsiveness to change.
- The role is learnt in action.

