

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 http://awea.org.nz/allies_resources

The term ally

Value of using the term ally

- It gives people a powerful, positive, active role in things they think they do not have a role in or where they might be defined as a problem.
- It is concrete—you can discuss how to act like an ally in particular circumstances.
- It allows for connection with the history of allies and how allies work.
- It provides a positive way of inviting people into the struggle.
- It can be a way to consider how to have ethical, accountable, transparent ways of working with indigenous peoples/marginalised groups.
- It is used across a range of oppressions and is useful for connecting between oppressions.
- In Canada there is an ally tradition for First Nations people and indigenous metaphors - making it good language to use.
- It makes you consider who you are in alliance with.

Limitations of using the term ally

- The concept can become meaningless if its use is not aligned with action. What matters is practice. Practice is ongoing and evolving. You are only an ally for as long as you keep acting as an ally.
- The term can provide a way of talking without recognising and addressing privilege.
- Can you self-proclaim that you are an ally? Is it for you, or the people you're in an alliance with, to decide?
- What is the motivation for wanting to call yourself an ally? Is it about wanting approval or recognition from indigenous people, people of colour or other white people?
- The term has 'them' and 'us' connotations.
- It is based on a Western Christian model of individualism and interpersonal rather than organisational relationships. It creates a focus on heroes not movements.
- It places a focus on moral intentions rather than impact. It can be problematic in situations where people become involved from a place of guilt and want to restore themselves as a 'good person' through the work.
- It does not inherently deal with accountability.

Alternative terms for this work

- Solidarity/'be in solidarity with'—this has traditionally been used for work in support of international rather than domestic struggles.
- 'In support of'/supporter
- 'Standing with'
- Accountable relationship/s
- 'Bystanders'—used mainly in anti-violence work (is about responding to situations not addressing systemic issues).

Key points: Being an ally is a practice and a process—not an identity. It is an on-going practice that is learned and developed through experience.

Any term that is used to describe this work will only uphold its integrity if those who use it act in alignment with the intended meaning of the term.

