

Key Takeaways and Additional Resources

In this handout we share what we think are some of the key takeaways from the workshop as well as useful resources for further information. This isn't necessarily what you will find most useful, but we hope it will be a helpful starting point nonetheless! These are based primarily on our own experiences of organizing in collectives, and we recognize that they may not reflect your experiences or the experiences of others.

What is a Collective?

A collective is a non-hierarchical organization, usually with fewer than 20 members. Collectives generally make decisions using consensus or highly deliberative democracy, and many collectives emphasize skill-sharing and mutual support.

Collectives can take many different forms; key distinctions include:

- Membership: Open, closed
- Focus: identity-based, project-based, campaign-based
- Duration: ongoing, for particular moment or defined period

Anti-oppression: A key ingredient of effective collectives

We define "anti-oppression analysis" as an understanding that social relations always involve vectors of oppression and benefit; that the power relations involved in our experience of disability, citizenship, gender, racialization, Indigeneity, poverty, class, and more are always intertwined; and that those intermeshed social relations also have specifics (one kind of oppression cannot be reduced or analogized to another). "Anti-oppression practice" means that we try to hold the needs and political demands of the people most affected by multiple vectors of oppression at the core of our organizing practice – both in how we interact with one another within collectives and in our work for broader social transformation.

We believe that any collective aiming to do meaningful, effective political work over more than short-term timelines needs to be built on an anti-oppression praxis.

Some important starting points:

- Everyone comes to collective work with different histories, experiences, confidence, skills, and resources. These differences are

- significantly shaped by social relations of oppression and benefit.
- There will often be ongoing differences in the material realities of people's lives and experiences.
 - All of these differences bring valuable insight and help collectives decide what they're working on and how they'll do that work.
 - Pretending that differences aren't there can undermine collective work in a lot of ways, including people being shut out of organizing materially or psychically.
 - People often have difficulty perceiving how oppression affects others, and simply trying to be better often fails. More intentionality and clarity around practices and structures in collectives can really help shift this. That is, social infrastructure can sometimes do more than conscious intention alone can.

Other features of effective collectives

- A sense of warmth, solidarity, and mutual support
- Explicitly articulated shared aims/goals as well as politics/values
- Agreed-upon practices for membership, decision-making, behavior, dealing with conflict or disagreement
- A clear process for internal communication
- A shared sense of responsibility and mutual accountability, alongside enough support and redundancy so that when people need to pass on a responsibility they can do that without harming the work.
- A shared understanding of the skills and capacities of the people involved and active work on building people's skills and capacities further.
- An understanding of functioning in relation with other organizations and broader movements.

Tools to be an effective collective

A big part of creating and sustaining an effective collective is not just about organizing we do, but also about being organized. It's about thinking about and embracing the tools, skills, structures, and policies that our collectives need to get things done and stay active over the long haul.

Each collective will determine for itself what sort of tools and structures make the most sense, but here are some roles and broad structures that we think are typically part of a wide range of effective collectives:

a) Roles

There are several roles which are common to many collectives, including specific meeting/event roles and longer-term roles involving the groups infrastructure. These include:

- Meetings: facilitator, note taker, vibes watcher, timekeeper
- Infrastructure: bank account holder, bookkeeper, new member welcome/orientation, spokespeople, tech support, continuity, keeper of the files

Having defined roles doesn't automatically entail a hierarchical, 'power over' dynamic. BUT some roles do come with greater acknowledged or unacknowledged power and/or differing levels of responsibility. Some roles are more suited to being shared or rotated than others. Things like bookkeeping or tech support roles may involve skills that only one or two people in your group have. Some people may also have an affinity or skillset for a specific role. If you're committed to sharing roles, you must also commit to training and supporting members who take on new roles. Either way, it's important to think about who is taking on what work, how often, and why, and how the collective can address concerns.

b) Policies

It can also be helpful to have some explicit, agreed upon practices (policies). This contributes to sharing power and collective leadership by making it plain and transparent to all collective members what is expected of them and their comrades, how decisions are made, who is responsible for what, etc. And it contributes to staying in the fight over the long haul if the collective isn't re-inventing the wheel all the time or leaving issues unresolved due to lack of clarity. Some key policies you might want to think about include: conflict resolution, media, membership eligibility, decision-making, money and fundraising, accessibility, political alliances/coalitions/endorsements, accountability

c) Structures

Roles and policies contribute to the structure of the collective. But there may be other structural elements that your collective embraces that are not explicit policies. What these might look like will depend in part on the kind of collective you're in.

Some examples include:

- Having a welcome team or a practice of taking 30 min at the start of the meetings to bring new members up to speed
- Always starting each collective meeting with a shared meal
- Having a continuity/operations crew to ensure things are moving forward and the logistics of meetings are taken care of
- Making sure to always include reflection and debrief discussions after projects or events conclude

- Having a communication structure or process, particularly when working with other organizations or individuals outside the collective
- Dedicating time on a regular schedule for advance planning, visioning, and/or goal setting

Suggested Further Reading

Cold B and T Barnacle, *Building a Solidarity Network Guide*, available at: libcom.org/library/you-say-you-want-bui...

Virginia Coover, Ellen Deacon, Charles Esser, and Christopher Moore, *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution: A Handbook of Skills & Tools for Social Change Activists*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1985)

Chris Crass, "Strategic Opportunities: White Anti-Racist Organizing and Building Left Organization and Movement: An Interview with the Heads Up Collective," in *Towards Collective Liberation: Anti-Racist Organizing, Feminist Praxis, and Movement Building Strategy* (Oakland: PM Press, 2013), 179-196

Chris Dixon, "Vehicles for movement-building: Creating Organizations," in *Another Politics: Talking Across Today's Transformative Movements* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 199-219

S.K. Hussan, "You can't change the world alone, but all of us can together," available at: <https://medium.com/@hussansk/you-cant-change-the-world-alone-but-all-of-us-can-together-473fb43001ba#.cjqb37tk>

Bruce Kokopeli and George Lakey, *Leadership for Change: Toward a Feminist Model* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1984)

Jeremy Louzao, *Someday We'll Be Ready, and We'll Be Enough: Building Anti-Authoritarian Movements With the Size and Resilience to Win*, available at mutualinspiration.org

Starhawk, *The Empowerment Manual* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2011)

Sylvia Rivera Law Project, *SRLP Collective Member Handbook*, available at srlp.org/files/collective_handbook.pdf

Harsha Walia, "Overgrowing Hegemony: Grassroots Theory," in *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2013), 173-202