

## Getting It Together: Organizing Collectives for the Real World Workshop Curriculum with Facilitator Notes

**Time required:** 3hrs 50mins (including three 10-minute breaks)

**Materials needed:** Flipcharts, sticky notes, markers, and tape

**Advance preparation:** Make copies of the handout, have plenty of snacks on hand, write the agenda up on a large piece of paper in a prominent location, and set up the room in such a way that participants can divide easily into groups of 4-5 people.

### SECTION A (50 minutes)

#### 1. Welcome

**Duration:** 10 minutes

- Facilitator introductions
- Territorial acknowledgement
- Accessibility & space orientation:
  - Washrooms
  - Childcare
  - Translation?
  - Other things?

#### 2. Introductions

**Duration:** 20 minutes

***Note for facilitators:** In our experience, many people came to the workshop to meet other people and seek out potential collaborators for their own initiatives. We suggest acknowledging this in framing the introductions, and we suggest putting up a large piece of paper in the room on which interested people can write their contact information. In addition, you might want to do other things to facilitate people having conversations about potential collaborations.*

*Activity:* Soon we'll explain what we have planned for the next few hours. To start, though, we want to ask you to go around and say your name, one thing you're hoping to get out of this workshop today, and anything else you want to say about your preferred gender pronoun or other needs you'd like us to know about.

- Introduce Punch Up and individual members

***Note for facilitators:** Since we facilitated this workshop as a collective, many participants had questions about us - our history, activities, and organizational practices. If you are facilitating the workshop with other members of a group, we encourage you to provide some background about yourselves and consider sharing some of your lessons and practices during the workshop.*

### 3. Workshop Overview

**Duration:** 10 minutes

- *What it is:* an introduction to collectives with a focus on practical tools for effectiveness for people who are in, or interested in, starting a collective or group
- *What it isn't:* a workshop on organizing or organization-building more generally, an anti-oppression workshop, a workshop on anarchism or radical politics in general...

Our goals and hoped-for outcomes:

- More collectives and other organizations in Ottawa
- More conversation and collaboration across the river

*Note for facilitators: We suggest developing your own goals and hoped-for outcomes and presenting them in this section.*

Lay out outline for this workshop:

- Our pitch for collectives & our definition of what they are
- Why we think collectives should be built on anti-oppression analysis & practice
- Features of effective collectives
- Tools for effective collectives
- Questions, comments, and discussion
- Closing and evaluation

Notes:

- This workshop will include parts in which we put forward some ideas and resources, mixed with parts in which we'll generate ideas and resources together.
- We will have breaks! And you should take other breaks as you need them
- Also: there are no stupid questions here. If you don't understand something, please ask! You likely won't be the only person wondering.

### 4. Our Pitch for Collectives

**Duration:** 10 minutes

Organization is important:

- Our actions as individuals matter, but we can't change society without organizations – intentionally structured groups of people with shared goals and activities.
- Organizations help us to take action with other people, take care of one another, set goals, make plans, develop vision of a better world, learn from previous experiences of struggle, evaluate our own activities, maintain accountable relationships with other groups and communities in struggle, develop new skills, and stick around between high points of struggle.

- Organizations, at their best, are more than the sum of the individuals involved: they make it possible for people to be more visionary and courageous, do more things, and be more focused and effective.

Collectives have been useable formations in left history:

- They were crucial in the women's liberation movement, early gay liberation efforts, and women of color feminist organizing.
- More recently activists have used them in the anti-globalization movement, Indigenous solidarity activities, and migrant justice organizing.
- Radicals have also often used collectives to run institutions (bookstores, households, etc.) and publications.

Starting a collective doesn't require significant resources or large numbers of people:

- It's something you can do with a handful of people you see regularly and with whom you share some values.
- In circumstances of widespread isolation and disorganization, building a collective is a low-stakes entry point for those with limited time and energy who are trying to figure out how to engage in activism.

To be clear: We think there are other useful formations besides collectives!

- These include affinity groups, activist groups, cadre organizations, membership organizations, and others.
- We're focusing on collectives here because we don't see much intentional discussion and skill-sharing in our city around this particular formation.

## **BREAK #1 (10 minutes)**

## **SECTION B (60 minutes)**

### **5. What is a Collective?**

**Duration:** 40 minutes

*Group Discussion:* What does a collective mean to you?

*Note for facilitators:* If you have a large group, you can also have this discussion in break-out groups. If using break-out groups, ask one person of each group to take notes and a volunteer to report back to group, or use popcorn style to hear small group ideas when you come back together as a big group.

*If it doesn't come up in discussion:* Generally speaking, a collective is a non-hierarchical formation or organization of individuals in which all members have equal decision-making power. Even within progressive or radical spaces organizing structures can often be hierarchical where certain people, whether formally or informally, hold more power than other members of the group.

Delineating between different kinds of collectives:

Collectives can take many different forms; key distinctions include:

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

### **Why it's good to distinguish between them:**

*Group discussion:* Different kinds of collectives have different purposes, strengths and weaknesses. How do you think these differences will affect the a) effectiveness, b) sustainability, and c) the experience/enjoyment of participating in that collective?

*If it doesn't come up in discussion:* It's important to consider these differences and decide what kind of collective you are interested in participating in. A lack of clarity or consensus on the kind of collective a group of people want to form can be a key source of conflict, and in the end may lead to its dissolution (for example, open vs. closed membership).

*Optional activity:* Invite participants to share reflections on question A (below) on post-its and post around room. Encourage participants to move around room and read post-its; move to question B (below) and ask participants to use a different colour post-it to share any suggestions or potential solutions to overcoming them. Encourage participants to think back on the different kinds of collectives, and strengths and weaknesses discussed.

- A. What are some challenges of working in a collective? (either that you've experienced, or that you think might be a challenge?)
- B. Do you have a solution or suggestion to work through this?

## **6. Why collectives should be built on a meaningful anti-oppression analysis and practice**

**Duration:** 20 minutes

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 each other within collectives and in our work for broader social transformation.

There are groups that seem to function well enough without understanding the ways that multiple social relations interact to shape our world and our experience of it, and without building collective practices that respond to oppression. 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 considerations:

- 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, from 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 – many of our suggestions for good practices for collectives are based on this idea that infrastructure can sometimes do more than conscious intention can.

*Activity:* Provide a few sample scenarios to room and get feedback on what impacts these scenarios might have on who can participate and how, who is might be excluded, etc. If you have a large group, you can divide participants into small groups, each with one scenario to discuss, and then facilitate a larger discussion. Possible scenarios might be:

- A. your collective tends to meet on weekday evenings
- B. your main meeting space is a local coffee shop
- C. a regular activity of your group is making banners for a demonstration happening the next day
- D. your collective relies exclusively on consensus decision-making

**BREAK #2 (10 minutes)**

**SECTION C (55 minutes)**

## **7. Features of effective collectives**

**Duration:** 15 minutes

*Activity:* Invite the group to generate features and list them on chart paper. If necessary, prompt the group to include things that we think are important that don't otherwise come up.

In our view, collectives work well that:

- Have a sense of warmth and solidarity and mutual support, even if all the people involved aren't buddies.
- Are based on explicitly articulated shared aims/goals
- Have agreed-upon practices for membership, decision-making, behavior, dealing with conflict or disagreement

- Have a clear process for internal communication
- Have 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.
- Are based on a shared understanding of the skills and capacities of the people involved and actively work on building the capacities of people in the collective.
- Understand themselves as functioning in relation to broader movements.
- Have some shared politics/values

## 8. Tools to be an effective collective

**Duration:** 40 minutes

*Note for facilitators: This section has several activities. We recommend picking and using some, but not all, of them, depending on how much time you have and how large your group.*

### Intro

In our view, 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.

Of course, each collective will have determine for itself what sort of tools and structures make the most sense, based on what their group looks like, what sort of work its engaged in, and the context in which that work is taking place.

That said, there are some roles and broad structures that we think are typically part of a wide range of effective collectives.

### Roles

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

*Optional Quick Activity:* Brainstorm roles with all participants. Use two separate sheets: one for meeting/event roles, and one for infrastructure roles. When summing up, be sure to mention the following example roles (if they haven't come up already):

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

### A Note on Sharing Power

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. It's important to think about who is taking on what work, how often, and why, and how the collective can address concerns

*Optional Quick Activity:* Ask room for some quick ideas on how collectives deal with this. If they don't come up in the short discussion, be sure to mention these points:

- 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 skill at a specific role.
- If you're committed to sharing roles, you must also commit to training and supporting members who take on new roles.

## **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 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.

*Optional Quick Activity:* Brainstorm policies with all participants. When summing up, be sure to mention the following examples (if they haven't come up already): Conflict resolution, media, membership eligibility, decision-making, money and fundraising, accessibility, political alliances/coalitions/endorsements, accountability

## **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, or goal setting

*Optional Quick Activity:* Ask participants for some examples of structures from groups they've been a part of. Write these down on chart paper.

*Main Activity:* Break participants up into groups of 3 to 5. Using the example scenarios below, provide each group with the broad outlines of a collective of which they are a part. Each group will then have 5 minutes to come up with some tools, policies, and structures their group might rely on. Each group will then report back to the full room for discussion.

Some sample scenarios could include:

- A. An open collective that primarily supports and takes part in events and campaigns that they are not the primary organizers of
- B. A relatively new closed group that wants to focus on publishing critical writing on local politics
- C. An open collective aiming to organize a big demonstration in 6 months
- D. A closed collective that provides mediation and conflict resolution to other leftist organizations
- E. An open collective that owns and operates an infoshop
- F. A closed collective that seeks to run a campaign with specific goals and a timeline

**BREAK #3 (10 minutes)**

**SECTION D (35 minutes)**

**9. Open time for sharing experiences and raising questions**

**Duration:** 20 minutes

**10. Close out**

**Duration:** 15 minutes

*Activity:* Go around room and give everyone present an opportunity to offer any final thoughts or say something that they haven't had a chance to say already.

***Note for facilitators:** Depending on the size of the group at your workshop, you may want to allow some time for in-person evaluation of the workshop. We solicited anonymous feedback after the workshop using an online form that we sent to all participants.*