

A Statement of Principles from DC Organizers and Activists: A guide for out-of-towners on effective organizing in DC

As the nation's capital, DC is the center of an imperialist government responsible for countless atrocities across the globe, and a necessary locality for national and international protests in opposition to U.S. foreign wars of aggression and domestic state violence that span the country. At the same time, DC is home to human beings confronting these issues as well as structural violence at the local level. DC is home to Black and Latinx communities that face forced displacement, gentrification, and systematic police violence. It is the home of immigrant communities, including populations forced to flee their country as a result of U.S. imperial intervention and now facing a hostile White House. It is also home to people who have been organizing in resistance to these injustices, fighting for justice and liberation for decades.

Often there is a great disconnect in D.C. between local and national groups, even though we are working on the same issues, run up against similar challenges, and often have similar goals.

Often there are class and racial divides between local and national organizers, adding to the power dynamics and complicated relationships.

DC is not a state, which means we lack the power to make basic decisions about our city or to hold elected representatives responsible. DC's systematic disenfranchisement comes out of a legacy of racism and bigotry – educate yourself to find out! When outsiders ignore the knowledge, needs, and desires of locals, they play into a larger neocolonial framework that we live in every day. We've seen a similar dynamic in other cities that

play host to national mobilizations (such as conferences, RNC mobilizations, etc.) or gain national attention due to political events (such as Ferguson, MO, or Baltimore, MD).

What can we do about this dynamic? What is the impact of “parachute activists” flying in when an issue gets media attention? How can we actively stand in solidarity when we’re organizing in someone else’s city? How can we leave local movements stronger than before?

This document is an attempt to address this problem by laying out best practices for organizers in DC who see the power in building connections on a local, regional, and national level, and want to build a unified movement for change.

OUR REALITIES

We are really good at what we do! There are many D.C. organizers who are well-trained, experienced, and committed. We’re in it for the long haul.

D.C. organizers and activists really understand D.C! Concerned about the many different police forces and their jurisdictions? Want more information about risking arrest in D.C.? We have been there and know about any recent changes.

We are impacted! D.C. has one of the widest income inequality gaps in the country and is facing rapid gentrification and displacement. Your big issue - from affordable housing to climate change - is being felt here in D.C. Your big mess? We deal with that too. The fallout and retaliation by authorities after your action will be felt here long after you go home.

D.C. has a population of nearly 680,000 people in the city limits and 5.5 million in the metro area, yet **national organizations bus in people for events that only a handful of locals show up for!**

Often, national mobilizations use the time, energy, and resources of D.C. organizers, who serve as a de-facto host community, at the expense of crucial local organizing on these same issues.

D.C. is not a state and Congress often overrides our wishes. This makes us extra sensitive to outsiders who come in thinking they know more than we do about how to run things in our city.

There must be a way to utilize the organizing power and hopeful energy that goes into national mobilizations so that the host city's social justice movements grow stronger!

SO WHAT DO WE WANT?

In a show of solidarity, we ask both local and national organizers to use this list of principles to guide their organizing and decision-making.

Talk to Local Organizers!

Value the opinion of D.C. organizers, especially those of us who are Black lifetime and longtime Washingtonians, Black trans, nonbinary, queer, formerly incarcerated, and use those opinions to inform decisions about actions in D.C.

Check in with and consult local organizers and community organizations before planning events in our city.

Include D.C. organizers and community members in a meaningful way - Bring us into the decision-making process **before it starts and during.**

Understand the difference between **nationally focused groups based in D.C.** versus their local affiliate or a local group working on

that issue in the local context. Make the effort to coordinate with locals working on the ground.

ADVANCE LOCAL ORGANIZING!

Be aware of the consequences of your actions and decisions - local organizers and marginalized DC residents will deal with the repercussions from the police and other authorities long after you're gone.

Do your best to give support to local organizing - Empowering the local movement is building the movement as a whole.

Include locally organized events and actions in your calendar for out-of-town activists.

Ask local organizers how a national event can advance their work.

- Provide training for their group or speak at their event

- Ask local organizers to speak at your event to connect local and national struggles

- Have a strategy session to build relationships and share ideas

- Add a local action to your mobilization plan

- Add a local demand to your asks

Realize that one-time deals - whether mobilizations or direct service opportunities - have only limited impact when sustained commitment is what is needed to make change.

One measure of success for any action held in D.C. should be whether the local organizing on that issue has been advanced in a real way, for example, by increased volunteers, donations, resources, and skills.

There are often items from the event left over such as sound equipment, electronics, chairs, tables, staging items, office supplies,

etc. and local groups should be offered these items at no cost after the event.

DON'T JUST USE OUR CITY - STRENGTHEN IT!

Support local Black businesses by buying tools and resources locally. Hire local Black organizers, trainers, artists, and activists when you have work in the area.

Pay local Black organizers, trainers, artists, community members, and activists a living wage.

Attempt to leave the D.C. activist community stronger than when you came - there will always be a “next action” that will require similar resources, time, and energy provided by local folks!

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT YOU?

Local organizers bring so much to the table! Experience, community connections, and intimate knowledge of the area are all assets of D.C. organizers. Meanwhile, national groups bring the power of large bases of supporters, stronger financial backing, and structure that can really help smaller, local organizing efforts when local folks are involved.

Examples of support and resources DC organizers have offered in the past:

Be cognizant, that if we offer our connections to you, we do this with the understanding that you will enter into a respectful, intentional, and compensated collaboration.

A network of local organizers, organizations, trainers, artists, etc, who can help organize, provide resources, and connect you with local allies.

An intimate logistical knowledge of D.C. can help to maximize impact while minimizing cost.

Photographers & Videographers

Interpreters List for both ASL, Spanish, and Captioning

Local Entertainers, Performers and Grassroots Artists

Caterers

Childcare

Know Your Rights & Direct Action Training

**These principles are largely adapted from the Washington Peace Center Building Our Movement: A Statement of Principles From DC Organizers and Activists (DC Organizing Principles), 2015 revision, and years of experience and input from seasoned organizers and activists across movements in DC.*