

BUILDING OUR MOVEMENT!

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, Washington D.C. is a lightning rod for national organizing. But it is also home to 650,000 people, including a thriving local movement of committed activists, organizers and community members struggling with issues on a local level. **Often there is a great divide 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 who spring to 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!** Need a permit for an action? 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 over 650,000 people in the city limits and 5.8 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 and use those opinions to inform decisions about actions in D.C.
- Check in with and consult local organizers before planning events in our city.
- Include D.C. organizers in a meaningful way - Bring us into the decision making process.
- 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 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 a 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.

Don't Just Use Our City - Strengthen It!

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

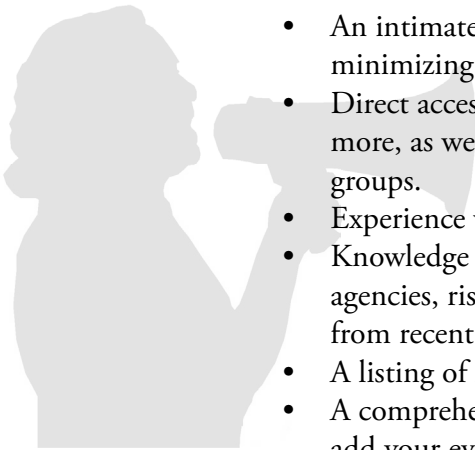


WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU?

Local activists 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 locals are involved.

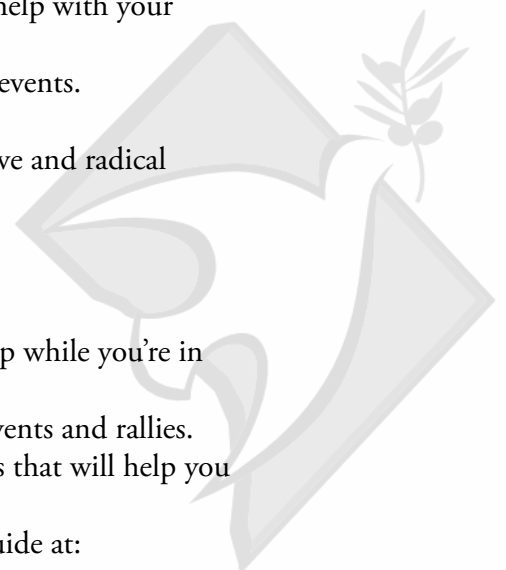
What Can Local Organizers and Activists Offer?

- A network of local organizers, trainers, artists, etc, who can help organize, provide resources and connect you with local allies.
- An intimate logistical knowledge of D.C. that can help to maximize impact while minimizing cost.
- Direct access to physical resources such as stages, sound systems, signs, and much more, as well as knowledge of best places to host events and house out-of-town groups.
- Experience with permit applications for the myriad of jurisdictions in D.C.
- Knowledge and experience dealing with the many different law enforcement agencies, risking arrest in D.C. and the legal process, including updated experience from recent actions.
- A listing of local organizations you can connect with.
- A comprehensive calendar of progressive events in the DC/MD/VA area for you to add your event to and for you to find other events to support while you're here.
- Access to communities of people in the area willing to come out for actions.



What Can the Washington Peace Center Offer?

- **We are happy to talk with you about your plans and to provide local expertise on location, permits, march routes, local allies and more!**
- Connections to local trainers, organizers and event planners to help with your event.
- Sliding scale rentals of sound systems, stages, and bullhorns for events.
- Discounted B/W and color photocopies for activists.
- A searchable Organization Directory of over 300 local progressive and radical groups so you can find your local allies!
- DC permit process overview and tips.
- Lists of local event and meeting spaces for free or cheap.
- An overview of DC Law Enforcement Agencies.
- Mass Housing Resources - Where to find housing for your group while you're in D.C.
- Outdoor locations for events - A guide to D.C. area parks for events and rallies.
- Legal Support for Direct Action - Documents and organizations that will help you know your rights and do legal support.
- For more information, please check out our online Resource Guide at: washingtonpeacecenter.org/dc-resource-guide.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

Case Study #1: Re-inspire and encourage local organizers!

The coordinator of a national network was coming to D.C. for a conference. She contacted the head of their local chapter and asked if there was something she and her colleagues could do while in town, such as provide a training or speak at an event. Since the local chapter already had an upcoming event and couldn't organize another one on short notice, the chapter head suggested meeting with some of the core chapter members instead. **They met and discussed common challenges that chapters were facing across the country, got helpful advice, learned more about upcoming plans and got great feedback on their work.** It was a fantastic way to take advantage of a knowledgeable, connected person coming to town that supported and advanced local organizing.

Case Study #2: A missed opportunity...

A national environmental group was coming to D.C. for a week of action protesting at federal buildings. They had some national organizers based in D.C. or who had lived in D.C. but they were mostly doing outreach to people in other states and hadn't connected to groups with local bases. They paid to fly in trainers and artists from other states to lead trainings and build props. **Even though the issue they were protesting had a big impact on communities in the D.C. area, they didn't reach out to the groups who work on it locally, and very few people came out besides those who had flown in for it.** There was no local media coverage and no trending social media coverage within the D.C. community. The props were beautiful but were destroyed at the end of the week since there wasn't anyone local to house them or use them again for another action. The activists who came in from out of town didn't meet any D.C. locals or build new relationships. The main impact of the week was a few press photos for the national organization to use in promotional material.

Case Study #3: Advance a local campaign!

An anti-war rally had brought thousands of people into town, as well as many D.C. area residents out into the street. From the stage at the rally, one of the leaders of a national group asked everyone to take their cell phones out and call the D.C. Mayor's office to tell them to deny permits for a defense contractor that was trying to move into D.C. **This was a campaign that local activists were fighting and this action flooded the officials' voice mails with messages in support of their demands.**

Case Study #4: Bruised alliances.

National organizers against police brutality were coming to D.C. for an action pushing for police reform. They didn't include local organizers in the planning process until the last minute when they expected them to bring out their members for the event. **Local organizers who had been working on this issue felt slighted and disrespected - some even called for a boycott of the action.** Despite high rates of police brutality in D.C. and an ongoing campaign against specific police practices, no local issue was part of the demands that were put out to the media. The national action was smaller than it would have been, relationships between national and D.C. activists were fractured, and local organizers felt further marginalized by the movement of which they were a part.