

A GATHERING ABOUT



GATHERINGS

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A GATHERING ABOUT GATHERINGS

On November 29th and 30th, about 25 experienced organizers who are also experienced gatherers came together for 2 days to explore how we can make our gatherings more transformational.

For organizers, gathering plays a central role in growing community, building skills and nurturing our leadership. By gatherings we mean meetings, of course - but so much more.

We know that organizing entails important tasks like decision making, base building, securing commitments, and strategizing but we often attend less to the so called softer elements of our meetings that can help build the relationships, purpose and morale to sustain ourselves through tougher times.

Gathering well may even have higher stakes today as we struggle over shaping society for the good of all over authoritarianism and destruction.

This brief reference guide is composed of practices shared by participants at the retreat hosted by The Action Lab and Future Currents (formerly Social and Economic Justice Project) in November-- Gathering About Gatherings. In that sense, it is not intended as a comprehensive overview of how to lead powerful gatherings but it is a quick reference tool capturing some of the best, and most easy to use learnings that came out of this convening. It is meant to inspire us to re-invest our time in gathering well.

To help you address your attention and purpose to each practice, one of the main conveners, Deborah Axt, as part of Future Currents, offers some of the moments during the cycle or process of organizing [here](#) and some ways and spaces in which we gather [here](#).

HUMANS (AND ORGANIZERS) WHO GATHER



The best thing for a human nervous system is another human and the worst thing for a human nervous system is another human.

DR. LISA FELDMAN BARRETT

- Humans love to gather: we are social and relational animals.
- We co-regulate together. Connection stimulates co-regulating signaling hormones. Studies and research show that we are the caretakers of each other's nervous systems because it is how we evolved. Are we going to be a savings or a tax on each other's nervous systems?
- Therefore we might really need to be intentional and purposeful about how we gather for the sake of a shared, tuned-in nervous system in tune with others for good.
- We all want safety, dignity, and belonging and will strive to organize ourselves around this. So say Staci Haines and Spenta Kandawalla, formerly from generative somatics. Can we tune in around belonging, mutual recognition, mutual dignity and mutual care over just the self care promoted by today's corporate wellness industries?
- Research shows that after you account for watering, sleeping and feeding, predictors on creativity and innovation performance depend on the extent to which people feel trust in their teams and leaders.
- Famous sociologist Emile Durkheim called our capacity to gather around the sacred "collective effervescence"-- our capacity to gather for ritual and to make meaning.
- Organizing history has had many spaces and traditions of coming together: in song, dance, protest, march, rally, vigil. In churches, mosques, synagogues, shop floors, buses, fields right under the nose of enslavers and union halls.
- Organizers as a group emanating from many lineages might share a conditioned, schooled, habitual and intuitive sense of the psychology of gathering for change and its positive effects. We know we regulate one another and help each other build morale and unity through gathering.
- But we too as organizers on the left and as humans in society are affected and even afflicted by the conditions of the times.

A FEW FIRST PERSON ACCOUNTS FROM HISTORIC GATHERINGS



The Second Baptist Church in Watts glowed with colorful African patterns and fabrics—the women were “traditional” long dresses of red, purple, orange, and yellow; the men wore bubas that rivaled in every way the fiery beauty of the women’s clothes. The walls of the registration room were alive with poster art that hailed Blackness as an ancient and peerless beauty.

It was November of 1967, and my exhilaration was as bright and intense as the colors that dappled the room. I was a stranger to this kind of gathering and found literally staggering the energy and resolve of the people attending the Black Youth Conference. London and San Diego had been sad miniatures compared to this massive display of strength. I walked around calling everyone sister and brother; smiling, elated, high on love.

DR. ANGELA DAVIS



CHUDE ALLEN (2010)

[As told to the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the student-led sit-ins of 1960, the rise of youth-led activism, and the founding of SNCC. Main library, San Francisco, March 27, 2010]

TRANSCRIPT

Atlanta, 1964, Easter weekend.

The room is packed; people are hugging each other and laughing. I can see how happy they are to see each other. I am at the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's Spring Conference. I've come to the conference because I want to volunteer for the Mississippi Summer Project. SNCC is recruiting students to go to Mississippi, to work in voter registration and in Freedom Schools. I am here to learn more about Mississippi.

People are coming onto the stage. They are men and women, former and current members of the Freedom Singers. They lead us in singing.

Then one of them shouts: ***What do you want?***

We yell: ***Freedom!***

When do you want it?

Now!

What do you want?

Freedom!

When do you want it?

Now!

The room goes wild! We are clapping; we are stomping out feet. We are yelling: ***"Freedom! Now!"***

TRANSCRIPT (CONTINUED)

The room quiets. The chairman of SNCC comes to the podium. It is John Lewis. **"Ladies and gentlemen, honored guests and my fellow warriors for freedom,"** he begins. **"It is the hope of all of us that this conference will have some deep meaning for each of you."**

It is the fourth spring conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and John reminds us of SNCC's founding in Raleigh, SC in 1961 and of the freedom rides, sit-ins and community struggles that have taken place.

Then he turns to Mississippi, and begins to talk about conditions in Mississippi, people who've been killed. He talks about the Congressmen and Senators. In 1964, all but one of the Representatives and Senators from Mississippi have been in Washington for 20 years. That one has only been in Congress for 16 years. Since Congressmen get power on committees according to how long they have been in Congress, Mississippi Congressmen are some of the most powerful people in Washington.

John reads descriptions of two lynchings that happened earlier in this century. Both occurred in Senator Eastland's district. In the first, it is Senator Eastland's father who leads the mob and determines how the couple — a man and a woman — will be tortured and then murdered. The mob cut out chunks of flesh with a corkscrew before burning the man and woman.

He then goes on to read of a lynching that happened less than 20 miles from Senator Eastland's home. The mob burns this man slowly. It is horrible. The whites are so cruel. They are so sick. They cut off pieces of the man for souvenirs. Most do it after he dies, but one cuts off his ears while he is still alive.

My mother and father believe ours is a good country, yet I am sitting here listening to how Senator Eastland's father was a murderer.

He was never tried or punished for the torture and lynching of that man and woman. I am hearing that Senator Eastland did nothing about other lynchings. I am hearing that Senator Eastland is Chairman of the Judiciary Committee and probably the single most powerful person in Washington. How can this be a good country if this man, given what he represents, is a leader of our government?

I can barely hear John as he continues. I am overwhelmed with the horror. I knew there were lynchings, but I had never heard that women were lynched as well as men. I didn't know people were cut up before being hung or burned. I didn't know that white people took chunks of flesh as souvenirs.

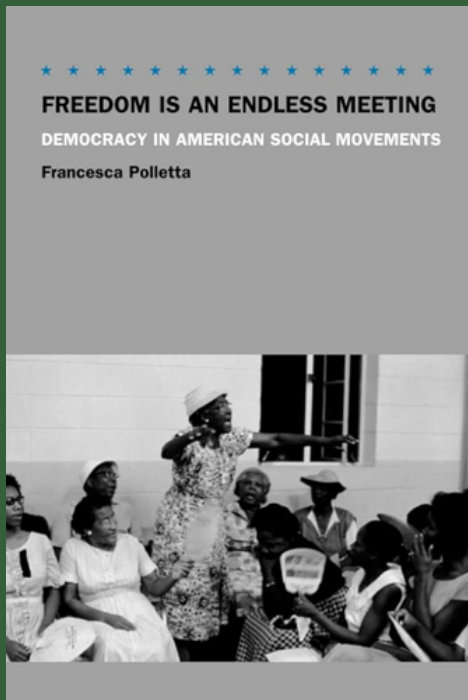
I feel alone, so alone. I look down at my white hands. Then as John finishes his talk, I hear him say: **"Today, in 1964, in the State of Mississippi, you have a Negro voting population of more than 400,000. If they could vote, Senators Eastland, Stennis, and their counterparts in the House would be put out to pasture, and the biggest roadblock in the way of progressive legislation would be removed."** That, I think, would be worth dying for.

The Freedom Singers come back on stage, and we begin singing. We sing songs of freedom and struggle. We sing of courage and hope. We sing all the rest of the night. When we sing SNCC's theme song, "We Shall Overcome," we stand clasping hands, singing and swaying back and forth to the music. We are one living, breathing, hopeful group of men and women.

When we sing the verse, "Black and White Together," we sing: [Singing] **"Black and white together, black and white together, black and white together now!"** And we raise our hands above our heads, and I look and see there are brown and black and white hands clasped together! I am no longer alone!

[Applause]

[VIDEO HERE](#)



**FREEDOM IS AN ENDLESS MEETING:
DEMOCRACY IN AMERICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
FRANCESCA POLETTA**

(2002) p. 56

Former Mississippi [SNCC] project head Bob Moses outlines the organizer's task: "How are you going to, as clearly as possible, move in the direction of [local] people taking ownership? One of the first areas is the meeting- that's your tool for building. So how do people take ownership of meetings? And there you get into what has come to be called *participatory democracy* ... in which people who are meeting really get more and more of a feeling that this is [their] meeting." p.80

Hollis Watkins was a recent high school graduate when he joined SNCC. "To me," he later recalled, "understanding was the most important part. Through the participatory process, all of the things that we were dealing with would be brought out, explained, and talked about." Unanimity was often reached by collectively deferring to the judgment of the organizer most involved in the question. "A basic principal [sic] in decision making is that people who do the work make the decisions," staffers at a 1964 meeting affirmed. Then why even deliberate?

It was a way of trading information, solving problems and highlighting issues that might come up elsewhere.

"There were many cases where we would be discussing issues in references to Mississippi in the SNCC staff meetings, where you got people from all of the different states trying to resolve how we're going to deal with this [issue]," Watkins remembers. "And there would be some timers when we wouldn't resolve that, and we would simply say, now that we all understand what's involved, who's involved, the implications of all this, and since we can't come to any general agreement, we who will be most directly involved will make that decision. And the same kind of thing would take place, for example, if we're having a statewide meeting." Staffer Casey Hayden describes discussions going on "until some level of understanding was reached, I didn't argue with people about what they should do. There was more than enough to do, and plenty of room for experimentation."

FORCES + CONDITIONS THAT SHAPE **HOW WE GATHER**

Capitalism has had a long assault on collectivity and instead uplifted individualism.

Jodi Dean, in her book, *Crowds and Party*, speculates on how American cowboy and bootstrap individualism defines itself against groupthink and crowds with an inbuilt liberal suspicion of gathering in a disciplined way for the purpose of justice. This cultural norm might have become even more established in mainstream culture through the neoliberal turn of the 70's and the rise of social media.

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But authoritarianism, ignoring that, has counted on gathering in a bonded, disciplined way through aggressive, othering messaging and distorting and spinning experiences into digestible lies. They know how to minimize their own differences and maximize the differences between themselves and whom they blame for their losses in society. The right wing effectively gathers, including in places of worship and online. Authoritarianism is rising and makes good use of gathering. It is a magnet for ordering loneliness into a dangerous kind of groupthink.



- People protecting democracy have long fought over the limited, shrinking infrastructure for gathering without permission, whether in public spaces or the commons and whether in urban infrastructure or online.
- Commodifying and addictive aspects of social media have forced us into islands of alienation and a kind of colonization by the extreme few of the minds of the many. We are also in a culture of self branding. All of this distorts our gathering spaces and our shared purpose.



There is in our future a TV or Internet populism, in which the emotional response of a selected group of citizens can be presented and accepted as the Voice of the People.

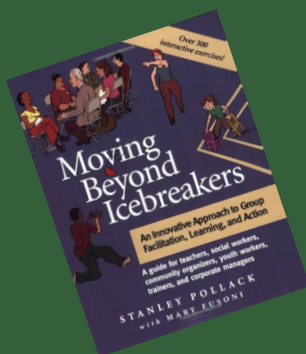
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- The COVID Pandemic generated a sense of isolation, a fear of one another as potential disease agents and a kind of spiritual defection or abandonment of shared purpose on a deeply embodied level. Our sense of safety, connection and baseline public physical and mental health toppled. Grief about climate collapse might also be turning us inward with the feeling that our love for other humans, animals, nature and life itself has less and less actual places to go. Connection and trust and care might have to be rebuilt from scratch at least partly through gathering again, more intentionally, for our times.



NOTES ON GATHERING TIME + ATTENTION FOR NEW PRACTICES

- Since the pandemic reordered our experience and use of time, many claim that the quality of their attention has shifted too. Sometimes this is for the better for some of us who found new ways to narrow focus, but often many of us talk about feeling distracted and scattered instead.
- Talk has been in the air about more spacious meeting times, allowances for later starts and longer lunches to help reorient us to our new capacities for attention and thereby re-engage our generative work in a more expansive way. Some say less is more and that we need to pace ourselves differently. Others believe that we need to move and act more efficiently. Questions and debates on the theme of organizing our time differently, besides allowing for more balance or more responsiveness, center around how best to engage and sustain our attention, rigor, innovation and generativity in social justice work.
- Practice, which is the repetition of a desired action to build muscle memory, can help reorganize time. This can include intentional shared practice and a set of rituals that go into gathering. The more that we attend to intentional practice the more we do it and the more reps we make the more it is embodied. The more embodied, the more it becomes a new habit. Embodied habits or rituals happen whether we experience time passing or not. Like brushing our teeth or making a pot of coffee. Shared practices may take time but can become part of the necessary ritual of gathering and can change our experience of time. We can repeat them to embody them as habits until we intentionally choose to refresh or change them.
- Sometimes, practices like rote and routine ice breakers can feel like habits that we've ceased to question as to their use and purpose. They point to an under actualized possibility. Instead we might want to consult our purpose for using them. In other words, we can think of more meaningful ways in which we can connect the embodied energy, practices and processes in our meetings to the purpose and outcome of our meetings.



For inspiration on this, check out the book *Moving Beyond Icebreakers* by Stanley Pollack with Mary Fusoni

NOTES ON GATHERING IN PLACE + SPACE

- Places have memories. They “feel” like movement spaces or hotels or corporate meeting rooms. The choice of place and how a space is set up contributes to the mood and culture of a gathering.
- Places breathe history. Having a place that your team or group returns to allows the walls to soak in the ghosts of your past time together. Each return will evoke the dynamics, accomplishments and challenges of the past.
- Music can expand space and time as people walk in or when they are immersed in collective work.
- Setting up fewer chairs than needed can make a room feel more crowded at an event and strategically uplift the energy.
- Getting rid of tables and planting chairs in a circle allows for more open and potentially disarmed connection. It can impart the feeling of a conversational process to a space whereas tables can feel like we’re ready to get down to business.
- We might need windows and light in a space to allow moving through conflict or tension well. People do not like feeling trapped.



MÍSTICA MÍSTICA MÍSTICA

The word *mística* is used by the MST, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra or the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil. It refers to practices and rituals that are a daily, popular part of movement building work. Their aim is to build connection, morale, lineage, the spirit of resistance and people power or what Left Roots has called “resilient protagonism.” These practices can enter into the prep work for organizing and movement building through popular education techniques, as lifted up by Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. They can take the form of poetry, chants, songs or theater. Here we offer three powerful poems shared at different Action Lab convenings beginning with a chant by Assata Shakur that our delegation offered at the MST’s Florestan Fernandes School in São Paulo, Brazil.

**It is our duty to fight for our freedom.
It is our duty to win.
We must love each other and support
each other.
We have nothing to lose but our chains**

ASSATA SHAKUR



THREE POEMS

A Few Words on The Soul by Wisława

Szyborska

offered by Joseph Tomás Mckellar

*Translated from the Polish by Stanislaw Baranczak
and Clare Cavanagh*

We have a soul at times.
No one's got it non-stop,
for keeps.
Day after day,
year after year
may pass without it.
Sometimes
it will settle for awhile
only in childhood's fears and raptures.
Sometimes only in astonishment
that we are old.
It rarely lends a hand
in uphill tasks,
like moving furniture,
or lifting luggage,
or going miles in shoes that pinch.
It usually steps out
whenever meat needs chopping
or forms have to be filled.
For every thousand conversations
it participates in one,
if even that,
since it prefers silence.
Just when our body goes from ache to pain,
it slips off-duty.
It's picky:
it doesn't like seeing us in crowds,
our hustling for a dubious advantage
and creaky machinations make it sick.
Joy and sorrow
aren't two different feelings for it.
It attends us
only when the two are joined.
We can count on it
when we're sure of nothing
and curious about everything.

Among the material objects
it favors clocks with pendulums
and mirrors, which keep on working
even when no one is looking.
It won't say where it comes from
or when it's taking off again,
though it's clearly expecting such questions.
We need it
but apparently
it needs us
for some reason too.

Imagine the Angels of Bread by Martin Espada

This is the year that squatters evict landlords,
gazing like admirals from the rail
of the roofdeck
or levitating hands in praise
of steam in the shower;
this is the year
that shawled refugees deport judges,
who stare at the floor
and their swollen feet
as files are stamped
with their destination;
this is the year that police revolvers,
stove-hot, blister the fingers
of raging cops,
and nightsticks splinter
in their palms;
this is the year
that darkskinned men
lynched a century ago
return to sip coffee quietly
with the apologizing descendants
of their executioners.
This is the year that those
who swim the border's undertow
and shiver in boxcars
are greeted with trumpets and drums
at the first railroad crossing
on the other side;
this is the year that the hands
pulling tomatoes from the vine
uproot the deed to the earth that sprouts the vine,
the hands canning tomatoes
are named in the will that owns
the bedlam of the cannery;
this is the year that the eyes
stinging from the poison that purifies toilets
awaken at last to the sight
of a rooster-loud hillside,
pilgrimage of immigrant birth;
this is the year that cockroaches
become extinct, that no doctor
finds a roach embedded
in the ear of an infant;

this is the year that the food stamps
of adolescent mothers
are auctioned like gold doubloons,
and no coin is given to buy machetes
for the next bouquet of severed heads
in coffee plantation country.
If the abolition of slave-manacles
began as a vision of hands without manacles,
then this is the year;
if the shutdown of extermination camps
began as imagination of a land
without barbed wire or the crematorium,
then this is the year;
if every rebellion begins with the idea
that conquerors on horseback
are not many-legged gods, that they too drown
if plunged in the river,
then this is the year.
So may every humiliated mouth,
teeth like desecrated headstones,
fill with the angels of bread.

**Puerto Rican Obituary By Pedro Pietri
(continued)**

They worked
They were always on time
They were never late
They never spoke back
when they were insulted
They worked
They never took days off
that were not on the calendar
They never went on strike
without permission
They worked
ten days a week
and were only paid for five
They worked
They worked
They worked
and they died
They died broke
They died owing
They died never knowing
what the front entrance
of the first national city bank looks like

Juan
Miguel
Milagros
Olga
Manuel
All died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow
passing their bill collectors
on to the next of kin
All died
waiting for the garden of eden
to open up again
under a new management
All died
dreaming about america
waking them up in the middle of the night
screaming: Mira Mira
your name is on the winning lottery ticket
for one hundred thousand dollars
All died

hating the grocery stores
that sold them make-believe steak
and bullet-proof rice and beans
All died waiting dreaming and hating

Dead Puerto Ricans
Who never knew they were Puerto Ricans
Who never took a coffee break
from the ten commandments
to KILL KILL KILL
the landlords of their cracked skulls
and communicate with their latino souls

Juan
Miguel
Milagros
Olga
Manuel
From the nervous breakdown streets
where the mice live like millionaires
and the people do not live at all
are dead and were never alive

Juan
died waiting for his number to hit
Miguel
died waiting for the welfare check
to come and go and come again
Milagros
died waiting for her ten children
to grow up and work
so she could quit working
Olga
died waiting for a five dollar raise
Manuel
died waiting for his supervisor to drop dead
so he could get a promotion

**Puerto Rican Obituary By Pedro Pietri
(continued)**

Is a long ride
from Spanish Harlem
to long island cemetery
where they were buried
First the train
and then the bus
and the cold cuts for lunch
and the flowers
that will be stolen
when visiting hours are over
Is very expensive
Is very expensive
But they understand
Their parents understood
Is a long non-profit ride
from Spanish Harlem
to long island cemetery

Juan
Miguel
Milagros
Olga
Manuel
All died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow
Dreaming
Dreaming about queens
Clean-cut lily-white neighborhood
Puerto Ricanless scene
Thirty-thousand-dollar home
The first spics on the block
Proud to belong to a community
of gringos who want them lynched
Proud to be a long distance away
from the sacred phrase: Que Pasa

These dreams
These empty dreams
from the make-believe bedrooms
their parents left them
are the after-effects
of television programs

about the ideal
white american family
with black maids
and latino janitors
who are well train—
to make everyone
and their bill collectors
laugh at them
and the people they represent

Juan
died dreaming about a new car
Miguel
died dreaming about new anti-poverty
programs
Milagros
died dreaming about a trip to Puerto Rico
Olga
died dreaming about real jewelry
Manuel
died dreaming about the irish sweepstakes

They all died
like a hero sandwich dies
in the garment district
at twelve o'clock in the afternoon
social security number to ashes
union dues to dust

They knew
they were born to weep
and keep the morticians employed
as long as they pledge allegiance
to the flag that wants them destroyed
They saw their names listed
in the telephone directory of destruction
They were train to turn
the other cheek by newspapers
that misspelled mispronounced
and misunderstood their names
and celebrated when death came
and stole their final laundry ticket

**Puerto Rican Obituary By Pedro Pietri
(continued)**

They were born dead
and they died dead
Is time
to visit sister lopez again
the number one healer
and fortune card dealer
in Spanish Harlem
She can communicate
with your late relatives
for a reasonable fee
Good news is guaranteed
Rise Table Rise Table
death is not dumb and disable—
Those who love you want to know
the correct number to play
Let them know this right away
Rise Table Rise Table
death is not dumb and disable
Now that your problems are over
and the world is off your shoulders
help those who you left behind
find financial peace of mind
Rise Table Rise Table
death is not dumb and disable
If the right number we hit
all our problems will split
and we will visit your grave
on every legal holiday
Those who love you want to know
the correct number to play
let them know this right away
We know your spirit is able
Death is not dumb and disable
RISE TABLE RISE TABLE

Juan
Miguel
Milagros
Olga
Manuel
All died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow

Hating fighting and stealing
broken windows from each other
Practicing a religion without a roof
The old testament
The new testament

according to me gospel
of the internal revenue
the judge and jury and executioner
protector and eternal bill collector
Secondhand shit for sale
learn how to say Como Esta Usted

and you will make a fortune
They are dead
They are dead
and will not return from the dead
until they stop neglecting
the art of their dialogue—
for broken english lessons
to impress the mister goldsteins—
who keep them employed
as lavaplatos
porters messenger boys
factory workers maids stock clerks
shipping clerks assistant mailroom
assistant, assistant assistant
to the assistant's assistant
assistant lavaplatos and automatic
artificial smiling doormen
for the lowest wages of the ages
and rages when you demand a raise
because is against the company policy
to promote SPICS SPICS SPICS

Juan
died hating Miguel because Miguel's
used car was in better running condition
than his used carMiguel
died hating Milagros because Milagros
had a color television set
and he could not afford one yet

**Puerto Rican Obituary By Pedro Pietri
(continued)**

Milagros
died hating Olga because Olga
made five dollars more on the same job
Olga
died hating Manuel because Manuel
had hit the numbers more times
than she had hit the numbers
Manuel
died hating all of them
Juan
Miguel
Milagros
and Olga
because they all spoke broken english
more fluently than he did

And now they are together
in the main lobby of the void
Addicted to silence
Off limits to the wind
Confine to worm supremacy
in long island cemetery
This is the groovy hereafter
the protestant collection box
was talking so loud and proud about

Here lies Juan
Here lies Miguel
Here lies Milagros
Here lies Olga
Here lies Manuel
who died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow
Always broke
Always owing
Never knowing
that they are beautiful people
Never knowing
the geography of their complexion

PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE
PUERTORRIQUENOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE

If only they
had turned off the television
and tune into their own imaginations
If only they
had used the white supremacy bibles
for toilet paper purpose
and make their latino souls
the only religion of their race
If only they
had return to the definition of the sun
after the first mental snowstorm
on the summer of their senses
If only they
had kept their eyes open
at the funeral of their fellow employees
who came to this country to make a fortune
and were buried without underwears

Juan
Miguel
Milagros
Olga
Manuel
will right now be doing their own thing
where beautiful people sing
and dance and work together
where the wind is a stranger
to miserable weather conditions
where you do not need a dictionary
to communicate with your people
Aqui
Se Habla Espanol
all the time
Aqui you salute your flag first
Aqui there are no dial soap commercials
Aqui everybody smells good
Aqui tv dinners do not have a future
Aqui the men and women admire desire
and never get tired of each other
Aqui Que Pasa Power is what's happening
Aqui to be called negrito
means to be called LOVE

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(continued)**

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Manuel
will right now be doing their own thing
where beautiful people sing
and dance and work together
where the wind is a stranger
to miserable weather conditions
where you do not need a dictionary
to communicate with your people
Aqui
Se Habla Espanol
all the time
Aqui you salute your flag first
Aqui there are no dial soap commercials
Aqui everybody smells good
Aqui tv dinners do not have a future
Aqui the men and women admire desire
and never get tired of each other
Aqui Que Pasa Power is what's happening
Aqui to be called negrito
means to be called LOVE

SONGS

offered by Cicia Lee

Why Did We Stop Singing?

A guide for teaching and leading songs

Why Songs:

- **Songs are a form of messaging.** They can convey the message and tone of your action and movement powerfully because they are succinct and emotional.
- **Songs help us feel connected.** Singing together is a powerful way to cut through isolation. They are an important social technology to shift the “state” or mood of a group quickly.
- **Songs connect us to history.** We sing songs of other movements to connect to a sense of lineage and solidarity. We adapt songs from our shared cultural architecture (hymns, popular songs, folk songs, etc) to connect us to where we come from.
- **Songs make things better.** They can bring joy, energy, purpose, unity, participation, and all around good vibes to actions and gatherings. Also, some people prefer singing to talking or are good at it. In the culture we create we want space for different people to shine and belong.

The Set Up:

- Always have **words written up** to add access to the words.
- **Teach the song’s origins**/where it comes from. We do this to honor their histories.
- **Set the intention** for the song: What is the deeper meaning to hold while singing?
- Choose a song that **matches the tone** you want in the moment: somber, energizing, confrontational, reflective, etc.

Teaching Your Song:

- **Line by line, repeat after me:** a phrase at a time, try to keep each phrase short enough to remember
- **Sing it over and over** until people get it, then ask people to harmonize!
- **Sing the melody without words** for a while, and then add the words once people know the tune
- **Explain any additional components:** for example, where you can swap out words, if you can sing any sections simultaneously, if the song can be sung as a round, etc (ie: with Courage, people can swap in other words or names besides “courage”)
- **Pro-tip:** If you don’t feel confident singing, ask the room who can help lead songs with you ahead of time. The best song leaders don’t have to be amazing singers, but they need to be able to 1) hold down the melody, and 2) hold down the beat, 3) project their voice, and 4) know when to help the whole group start and end the song. It’s helpful if song leaders don’t try to show off but make the singing as accessible as possible.
- **Pro-tip:** The group always sounds better the second or third time singing the song together. Try teaching a song and using it a few times throughout a training or action.

End Your Song:

- **Say “last time!”** at the start of the round you want to end on
- **Slow it down** and hold out the last word or phrase.
- **Use hand motions** to indicate the song is coming to a close
- If you’ve been clapping or stomping or doing something to hold down a beat, stop doing that during the last round to show that it’s coming to a close



Movement songs to sing:

Underlined words or phrases can be swapped out

01

We're gonna rise up, rise up til it's won (x2).
When the people rise up, the powers come down.
(x2)
They try to stop us, but we keep comin' back. (x2)

Original melody by Chance the Rapper, remixed by Akin Olla & Momentum trainers in 2016

Recording

02

Went down to the courthouse and I took back what they stole from me.
I took back my dignity. I took back my humanity.
And it's under my feet, under my feet, under my feet,
Ain't nobody gonna walk all over me.

Originally by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union choir, during a march to dramatize violations in Economic Human Rights in 1999. Brought to Momentum by Nelini Stamp; popularization sometimes attributed to the Ohio Students Association while protesting the shooting of John Crawford III in 2014.

Recording

03

Courage my friend, you do not walk alone.
We will walk with you and sing your spirit home.

Adapted from the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement. Protesters sung this to each other as they were taken off to jail or execution, substituting people's names in for the word 'courage'.

Recording

04

Freedom side:

Ella Baker was a freedom fighter and she taught me how to fight.
So we're gonna fight all day and night until we get it right.
What side are you on my people, what side are you on? (We're on the freedom side!)

"Freedom Fighter" is from Freedom Side, which is a black-led youth organizing project put on by Ohio Students Association and Dream Defenders, among other organizations. "What side are you on" is by Florence Reece - activist and organizer, poet and songwriter - in 1931. It was intended specifically as a song to be sung by the United Mine Workers in Harlan County, Kentucky. It was revived during the Civil Rights movement, with verses changed and updated to fit the times.

Recording

05

Let the life I lead speak for me, let the life I lead speak for me, When I get to the end of the road, and I lay down my heavy load, Let the life I lead speak for me

- *Originally a spiritual song, recorded by Joe Carter in 2003. Originally "Let the work I've done."*

Recording

06

Light is returning even though this is the darkest hour, No one can hold back, hold back the dawn.

- *Originally written in 1984 by Charlie Murphy, a gay rights and anti-Vietnam war activist.*

Recording

07

Woke up this morning with my mind, set on freedom (x3); hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah

Written in the 1960s by Reverend Robert Wesby of Aurora, Illinois, in the Hinds County jail during the freedom rides, a Civil Rights movement campaign to desegregate public buses. It was adapted from an old gospel song, "I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on Jesus".

Recording

08

Solid as a rock, rooted as a tree, I am here standing strong in my rightful place

- *Written by songwriting duo Ashford & Simpson in 1984. Often used in climate justice.*

Recording

09

The people gonna rise like the water, gonna calm this crisis down. I hear the voice of my great granddaughter, saying climate justice now!

- *Written by the Peace Poets, an artist collective in NYC that has written many contemporary movement songs.*

Recording

10

Eyes on the prize:

Well the one thing we did right was the day we started to fight,

Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

Hold on, hold on,

Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on.

- *Excerpt from the Sweet Honey and the Rock song, "Eyes on the Prize."*

Recording

11

When the world is sick, can't no one be well, But I dreamt we were all beautiful and strong.

A remix of a song by Silver Mt. Zion, a Philadelphia punk band.

Recording

12

How The Light Gets In:

Forget your perfect offering, (repeat)

Just ring the bells that still can ring (repeat)

There is a crack in everything (repeat)

That's how (That's how) the light (the light) gets in
(That's how the light gets in)

Adapted from Leonard Cohen's song "Anthem" from his album "The Future"

Recording

More songs at:

- [IfNotNow SoundCloud](#)
- [Sunrise Movement SoundCloud](#)
- [Thrive Choir Song Spreadsheet](#)
- [Ceasefire songs](#)

A THROWBACK ENERGIZER: HANDS UP TO 85

offered by Nsé Ufot

OVERVIEW

This is a concentration game that can be fun and interactive and encourages participants to pay attention and listen to one another to avoid elimination.

MATERIALS NEEDED + PARTICIPANTS

This fast paced game of listening and concentration can be played with groups as small as 2, or as large as the facilitator can manage.

No materials are needed.

ACTIVITY

Participants stand in a circle to play this game.

Players hold the palm of their hands on the palms of the hand for the person standing to their right and to their left.

Each person claps her own hands two times and then returns the palms of their hands to the palms of the person to their right and their left.

A lead is designated who will choose the Category or Theme for each round.

Players chant the opening introduction in unison.

ACTIVITY

Hands up to 85 (clap clap)

Gonna give (clap clap)

Names of (clap clap)

[Lead Yells Out the Name of the Category]
(clap clap)

For example: Fruit

One apiece (clap clap)

**Note this number can be higher and players are responsible for giving the correct number of correct answers to advance.*

No Repeats (clap clap)

No Hesitation (clap clap)

No Duplication (clap clap)

Starting with (clap clap)

[Name of person to go first] (clap clap)

Ending with (clap clap)

[Name of person to go last] (clap clap)

When it is her turn, a player is "OUT" if she fails to call out a noun/word that fits into the category identified out loud by The Lead.

A player is also OUT if she hesitates to call out a name/word (takes too long and misses the beat) or if she repeats a name/word that has already been given.

If they play the game long enough, this game becomes a partner hand clap game (with the two partners facing each other and taking turns calling out a name). The last person in that competition is the winner.



GATHERING OUR PEOPLE GATHERING OUR POWER

offered by Daniel José Gaztambide

Gathering our People ✨



APPROACHING A DIRECT ACTION TRAINING

offered by LJ Amsterdam



I love direct actions trainings more than many other types of gatherings because:

1. They put people in motion and onramp them into action beyond the gathering.
2. They create opportunities for exploring risk and shared risk builds relationships.
3. They offer a felt sense of collectivity: when people learn together, practice together, and act together, they move together as a unit. This is the brick and mortar of movement building.

My trainings are predicated on the principle that our bodies are the source of our power. In order to embed that principle into a training, I use the body as the actiLJ AMSTERDAMve basis for agenda design. When people leave this training, what are they ready to do? That's where I start from.

When designing trainings, I generally use this compass to direct the flow of my practices and material.

How to connect the:

- Body → voice
- Body → purpose
- Body → space
- Body → other bodies

This provides me with an arc: what practices, learnings, or activities offer, for example, participants an ability to connect to their surroundings. A situational awareness activity, a walking practice with varying levels of speed, a simulated action scout, etc.

A small smattering of best practices for designing dope trainings:

- **Form follows function:** design the format, flow, and timing of your training based on outcome or impact. What do you want folks to walk away with? Everything stems from there.
- **Dynamism:** modulate the form and vibe of practices and material from big group high-energy activities to small intimate moments and strategically placed silences. Vibe-wise, move between levity and gravity, the sacred and the profane, the hilarious and the frightening.
- **Have your own learning agreement for participation:** mine is "bring your can-do attitude." Have a touchstone to set your tone for the space to remind people why they're here.
- **Create space for figuring out:** don't just deliver information, design activities for people to problem-solve with each other before they receive the information
- **Deprioritize talking:** encourage problem-solving through physical demonstration or drawing
- **Discipline:** if you're workshoping something, drill it, drill it, then drill it again. Even if folks understand the material, allow them the experience of learning how to do it better.
- **Gamification:** create teams, team names, and chants, use a stopwatch, a scoreboard, an applause-o-meter. Encourage [healthy] trash talking, rivalries, and competition. Folks build connections by completing a challenge together. Get them hype!
- **Respect the house by respecting time:** play with shorter (5-10 mins) or longer (50-60 mins) blocks for break out groups, instead of the middling 20-30 minutes. Start and end on time, even if everyone isn't there. It demonstrates that you have your shit together (folks respect that)

A GUIDE ON CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

offered by sujatha baliga

INTRODUCTION

These notes come from a session on what to do when harm/conflict arise in the midst of a gathering. The aim of conflict transformation is not to resolve as is implied by the term "conflict resolution." Instead of beginning with ascribing blame, ideally we find ways to develop a deeper understanding of what has happened and what needs to happen, as peacemakers say, in order to move forward in a good way.

Practical tips:

- The circle is as wide and strong as the people in it. Always invite people who are committed to moving forward in a good way to your conflict transformation gathering
- Make it optional to come
- Use a space with windows so people have light and don't feel trapped, and in a room large enough to have a single circle for all who come
- Remove tables from between people; this allows us to see each other's body language and embrace our whole selves
- Feed people well – hangry people don't move forward in a good way
- Have a clear purpose and agenda that's explained at the top of the event, even if it's very open. "For the next 2 hours, we're going to take some time to talk about what arose for folks in the larger group session at 10am this morning. We'll open with some grounding exercises, take time in the circle to talk about what we experienced and understand of the situation, take a short break to eat some snacks and stretch, and then come back together to figure out how we can move forward. We'll start to wrap up with 15 minutes to spare so we can close out in a good way and leave room for next steps if necessary.



- Use neutral language like this so you're not perceived as being on a side.
- Name any process as a beginning and that the objective is not to solve or fix but to move forward in a good way
- Keep time well and name explicitly when an agenda runs over an agreed end time so people don't get anxious or angry. Give people options about reconvening or continuing, and honor people's time commitments.
- Have a healing room or space on site that people who need to leave can go to (this is particularly true for large conferences taking on issues of trauma)
- Start any process in joy or love, or with a feeling of the potential for hopefulness if the situation being addressed is dire
- One tool that can be helpful in moving past binaries is having people engage in exercises that involve Vent Diagrams. Ask them, early on, to draw vent diagrams about what they are experiencing, so that they can understand there are multiple ways to view the same situation. Be careful to not use this tool too quickly, or at all, when we're talking about something that's pretty clearly not okay, like a racial epithet or a sexual assault at the gathering... But this is a very useful tool when thinking about two camps who are dug in about their differing strategies, views of who should lead, etc.
- Always work with a co-facilitator, and ideally another healer on hand, so that if things go off the rails you can manage separate groups or attend to individuals who need to step out

Other things to keep in mind:

- There is always at least one survivor of intimate violence, sexual abuse, and other forms of unseen trauma in any room
- There is always a healer in every room
- Acknowledge discomfort throughout the day: it will be there. Naming it helps people be aware that they are collectively experiencing it; make it a shared experience rather than one "side"'s fault. I.e. at the start of a break: "Woooo, people, we are in it, aren't we! I'm proud of us for hanging in there. Let's take a 10 minute break, get our needs met, get a snack, stretch.. Do what you need to do to come back in 10 and keep doing the brave work we're doing..."
- Be clear on who is the person who can best hold the process of conflict transformation. Is it you? It is rarely the org head or leader as they're usually a part of the situation and definitely hold power within it.
- Is this discomfort, conflict, harm or violence? Or a mix? This is something to ascertain through individual meetings with all involved before you bring everyone together, if at all possible.
 - Note that as you dig into the situation, what originally felt like discomfort might unearth harm. Or deeper understanding that arises might de-escalate the situation from a perceived harm to discomfort... Be prepared for the fact that every conversation might morph into other things, in any direction. Ergo conflict *transformation*.
- You may need outside facilitators to help you address the situation, and you definitely do if it involves you.
- This isn't a practice for the midst of harm, but one to try with your team at time there's not active difficulty:
 - Give everyone two sets of post it notes that are two different colors.
 - First, instruct them to think about a time in which they were harmed. Glve them a few minutes to think about it. Then ask them to write on one color of post it notes, "what did you need then? What do you need now?" Each post-it is for need, either past or present.
 - Repeat with the other color, but this time thinking about a time they caused harm. What did they need then? What do they need now.
 - Invite participants to put the post its up on the wall and try to cluster them next to others that seem similar
 - Ask them to reflect on the experience.
 - After several people have shared, if they haven't yet said it, point out how the colors are all mixed together, there is no blue side and pink side of the wall. The needs are actually aligned. From here, we can best learn to move forward in a good way.

PRIYA PARKER OFFERS A WORKBOOK ABOUT **THE ART OF GATHERING**

PRIYA PARKER WORKBOOK 



Describing Your Gathering

A good place for us to begin is for you to define your gathering as you know it today. By the time you've completed this course, it might look very different and we want to make sure that we're keeping track of where we started.

Gatherings appropriate for this course will tend to be higher stakes - occasions, events, recurring meetings, and other types of get-togethers that you want to be more thoughtful and intentional about designing and hosting.

WHAT IS THE TITLE OF YOUR GATHERING?

WHY DOES YOUR GATHERING EXIST? WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

DESCRIBE YOUR GATHERING

DATE OF YOUR GATHERING

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE THERE?

Gathering Prompts

LOOKING FOR HELP FIGURING OUT YOUR
GATHERING? HERE'S WHERE TO START

This course is designed to help you ground the ideas and lessons in an actual gathering in your life, and the more context you have the better. And, don't worry! If you don't have an actual gathering you desperately need to fix/re-imagine or host, here is what we suggest to do:

Option 1: Identify a gathering you semi-regularly attend and use that as the "gathering" you're workshoping even if you don't end up actually changing anything. It's still good to use an example from real people in your own life.

Think about an ongoing gathering that you are a part of, even if you are not in charge of it. You may be a guest at this gathering, not a host. It could be:

A weekly staff meeting, a volunteer meeting, a regular hangout with friends or neighbors you belong to, an annual holiday with extended family.

Choose a real gathering you are a part of, in part because as you get deeper into the course, you'll need to know the different people and guests and needs involved, rather than trying to makeup a hypothetical example.

OR:

Option 2: Think about a need in your life that you have a craving to bring people around for, but you're not exactly sure what to do or have never considered gathering people for. Let me give you some examples:

An upcoming birthday (even if it's not a "big" one) or half birthday.

An occasion in your life that you'd like to mark but doesn't have it's own form (the marking of an accomplishment that's important to you (or funny to you), an important moment in the life of a child or a friend that you'd like to mark, a divorce party or separation ritual in community, an adoption ceremony, a housewarming celebration).

A transition in your life or someone you care about's life that you might want to create a gathering around (someone's graduation, a courageous decision, a coming out, a shedding of, a dissertation, a successful surgery, a promotion, quitting a job that wasn't working, etc.).

A need in your life that you'd like to gather around: feeling lonely, reconnecting with old friends, wanting to get to know your neighbors better, reconnecting with a childhood hobby, bringing a part of your identity or experience more centrally into your life with your community.

It doesn't have to be perfect, but it should feel relevant and real. And you don't have to host this thing when you're done (unless you want to, then by all means, do!) ;)

“The single biggest mistake we make when we gather is we skip defining the purpose. We assume that the purpose is obvious and shared.”

Gathering Starts with Purpose

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Here's what to expect in Lesson 1. You'll learn to:

- Understand the anatomy of a good, helpful purpose.
- Draft a specific, disputable purpose for your gathering.
- Use your purpose to guide all of your planning decisions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The single biggest mistake we make when we gather is that we skip defining the purpose.
- A purpose should be specific, unique and disputable.
- A category or an activity is not a purpose.
- A helpful purpose serves as a decision-making filter. Make it your bouncer.
- The essential question to determine a purpose: What is a need around which a specific group of people might be able to address by coming together?

PARKING LOT

Below are common questions that we'll address in future lessons.

- **What's my role as the host?** We'll be spending a lot of time on the role of the host towards the end of this course. So much so, I've broken it into two parts!
- **How do I make sure people are on board?** We'll go in depth on this in Lesson 3 on the invitation—one of my favorite sections.
- **What should we actually do with our time together?** Such an important question, but it's not the FIRST question to start with when planning your gathering. The first and most important foundational factor for all gatherings is...Purpose. We'll address this question in the next lesson on The Math and The Poetry.

Setting the Table: Definitions

01

LESSON 1:
GATHERING
STARTS WITH
PURPOSE



Definitions

Gathering

Any time three or more people come together for a purpose with a beginning, middle, and end.

Purpose

The underlying, animating reason for your gathering. A helpful purpose is specific and disputable.

A POPULAR CLOSING PRACTICE: **TAPS**

A consensual contact based activity at the end of a gathering to show appreciation

Materials:

- Music

Instructions:

- Have group sit in circle with their eyes closed
- Start gentle, reflective music
- Once the music starts playing, tap on 4 people's shoulders and ask them to stand outside of the circle
- Then ask series of questions (Questions below; 5-6 each round)
- Have the person outside of the circle "touch someone" who has (respond to question)
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to play both roles

Possible Questions:

Someone who makes you laugh • Someone you wish you knew better • Someone who is a leader • Someone you admire • Someone who has taught you something important • Someone who has shared a secret with you • Someone who is a friend • Someone you trust • Someone you respect • Someone who really lives out loud • Someone who is a good listener • Someone who has helped you when you need it most • Someone who can really brighten your day • Someone you can depend on • Someone who really carries the team • Someone who you learned something from • Someone who you believe has something special to offer • Someone who has made you try harder • Someone who has inspired you • Someone who is fun to be with • Someone who you feel supported by • Someone you have told a secret with • Someone who gives it their all • Someone who has given you good advice • Someone who is very special to you • Someone who is very strong • Someone who does a good job • Someone who challenges you • Someone who you appreciate • Someone who you would like to know better • Someone who has recently done something nice for you • Someone with a good sense of humor • Someone who is creative • Someone with good ideas • Someone who is reliable • Someone who is patient • Someone who is forgiving • Someone who is passionate • Someone who represents the group well • Someone with dreams and ability to make them happen • Someone with values that you admire • Someone you believe in • Someone who shows compassion • Someone who has touched your life

A CLOSING PRACTICE: APPRECIATION + GOOD GOSSIP

- **Explain activity:** It's time to offer some appreciation. We will be moving around the room as a way to recentre ourselves in connection with one another and then enter into 4 rounds of appreciation in pairs.
- Instruct the group to stand up and move in the room. When they move in the room invite them to connect to their breath and their feet on the floor but also to play with eye contact while connecting with others and connecting with themselves.
- Adjust your tone based on the purpose of the group's gathering, the work accomplished and the mood of people in the room whether joyful or somber. Depending on this you can use music or not while they move around the room. If using music, choose it in advance of the session. The tone of the activity can be more or less boisterous depending on what the setting is. Make the choice beforehand.
- Say: find a partner, say hello and introduce your name and pronoun (if this is necessary) and turn towards me silently.
- When everyone has a partner and you have their attention,
 - Say: You have 4 minutes. Two minutes each. Partner A speaks then partner B. I will call switch after the first 2 minutes so both people have a chance to share.
 - If you don't have their attention, raise your fist so people gradually stop talking and turn their attention to you.
 - Say: Speak the virtues of someone else in the room (good gossip)
- After 4 minutes, instruct participants to thank their partner and move in the room silently. Invite them to breathe and connect with people as they pass them. After about 30 seconds, find a new partner. Repeat the instructions on Partner A and B.
- When everyone has a partner and you have their attention,
- Say: You have 4 minutes. Two minutes each. Partner A speaks then partner B. I will call switch after the first 2 minutes so both people have a chance to share.
- If you don't have their attention, raise your fist so people gradually stop talking and turn their attention to you.
- Say: Speak the virtues of the person in front of you.
- Repeat instructions to walk in the room and find a new partner. When everyone has a partner and you have their attention,
- Say: You have 4 minutes. Two minutes each. Partner A speaks then partner B. I will call switch after the first 2 minutes so both people have a chance to share.
- If you don't have their attention, raise your fist so people gradually stop talking and turn their attention to you.
- Fourth pair share content instruction: Speak the virtues of the person in front of you: Speak the virtues of someone whom you can never repay
- Use your judgment based on the people in the room when it comes to the content of instructions on virtues. You might want to repeat some of these instructions like the good gossip one, which everyone loves. To sweeten it, let everyone know that they can tell the person gossiped about what they heard about them on the appreciation grapevine.



THANK YOU

A GATHERING ABOUT



GATHERINGS

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