FLOOD the system

a VISION for movement momentum
We drew inspiration for this booklet from the 1986 Pledge of Resistance Handbook, the 1999 WTO Direct Action Packet and the 2014 Ferguson Action Council Booklet.

This booklet was edited by Arielle Klagsbrun and Nick Stocks. It was written and drafted in consultation with many people, including Sandy Nurse, Lisa Fithian, David Osborn, Janelle Treibitz, Rachel Schragis & Ahmed Gaya.

Graphics designed by Emily Simons, Rachel Schragis, Nick Stocks, Emma McCumber & Erin McKelvy. Layout by Emily Simons.

Many of the materials at the end of the booklet were taken from other movement publications. They are cited individually.

This booklet was produced by Rising Tide North America for Flood the system. RTNA is a grassroots, decentralized network of groups fighting the root causes of climate change.

acknowledgments
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>contents</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>why a FLOOD: the crisis</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what is the flood?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the aquifer</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>systems of oppression</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guiding principles</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowing like a River:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizing structure</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizing plan</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local action councils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the river council</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working groups</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>watersheds</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the role of rising tide</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how a river becomes a Flood</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rapids</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Flood</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>things to keep in mind</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the Flood</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stronger than ever</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how to Get involved</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact information</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action councils</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action council graphic</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
contents

support ........................................ p. 42
media ........................................ p. 42
arts & culture ................................... p. 43
legal ............................................ p. 45
training ........................................ p. 45
Funding ...................................... p. 46

organizing toolbox ......................... p. 47
why & what .................................... p. 48
plugging people in ............................ p. 51

building an action ............................ p. 53

strategy ........................................ p. 54
planning an action ............................ p. 55

legal issues ................................... p. 58

facilitation .................................... p. 60
role of facilitator ................................ p. 60
running meetings ............................ p. 61
consensus ..................................... p. 64

sample agenda ............................... p. 66

anti-oppressive organizing ................. p. 67
strategies ..................................... p. 67
principles ..................................... p. 70
personal practices ............................ p. 71
organizational practices ....................... p. 72
meeting practices ............................ p. 73

media resources ............................. p. 75

narrative tools ............................... p. 79
narrative graphic ......................... p. 80
FLOOD the system
a vision for movement momentum

WE ARE IN A MOMENT OF INCREDIBLE MOVEMENT. Hundreds of thousands of people are demanding better wages, an end to police brutality, a different economic system and real systemic solutions to a changing global climate. From the Climate March in New York to the fight against Big Oil, Big Banks and wars; from Occupy and the Fight for $15 to the Movement for Black Lives, we are beginning to build collective pressure on a system that doesn’t work for most of us. Our social climate is changing rapidly and we need to find ways of increasing the pressure on the pillars of power.

Flood the System is both a call for escalation and a call for movement building. To build pressure for change, we need to escalate tactically. To sustain that pressure, we need to create structures and relationships that allow us to continue to build momentum.

This Fall, we are asking coalitions, organizations, and affinity groups, to Flood the System by engaging in a series of escalating actions across the continent targeting the root causes of injustice.

Beyond the fall, through the relationships and networks we create collectively, we hope to continue the work of building a movement that has the power and coordination to create real change.

Flood the System is made up of all those who choose to participate and see themselves within this vision. We follow the leadership of grassroots groups and frontline communities which have been resisting for generations. We believe in collective liberation, in work and relationships anchored in solidarity and the recognition that our movements are bound together by deeper root causes. We are committed to resisting systems of oppression as well as creating and valuing community-based solutions.

We envision Flood the System as a step towards building the DNA of a robust movement that has the collective power to challenge global capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and oppression.

We have named this project Flood the System because there is a lot of power in water. It forces its way through the cracks. It presses against dams, eroding them over time. And if there is enough of it and it’s moving fast enough, it can cause great change.

This booklet is designed to give you a sense of why we need to escalate, what Flood the System might look like, and what structures we will all use to organize.
why a FLOOD?
the crisis

This December, the United Nations will host their 21st year of climate negotiations in Paris. This is being touted as a big deal, as the moment when countries will come together to fight climate change. But we’ve seen this script played out 21 times now: climate negotiators from different nation-states meet, corporations sponsor the talks and use their clout to lobby, and the United States, Canada and other countries attempt to silence the voices of those from the Global South. In the script, nation-states and corporate partners say that they are debating a global response to climate change. But we’ve watched this play out enough to know that their underlying purpose is merely to offer small adjustments that sustain capitalism and divert attention away from the destructive consequences our current economic system is having to people and lands around the world.

The climate crisis reaches beyond increased temperatures and parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The climate is the environment in which we live. And right now, the climate is pretty grim for most living things on this planet.

We have seen the destruction of our food system, our cooperatives and our labor unions. We have seen our environment divided by fences and borders where Brown bodies are deemed illegal, but money crosses freely. We have seen Black bodies repeatedly criminalized and shot down by police. We have seen massive displacement of communities of color through gentrification. This is the climate in which we live, and it is unacceptable because it is unsustainable.

This is the climate that has fueled the melting of glaciers, the rising seas and increased floods and droughts. These disasters are from human choices that value profit over people and nature. These choices have been codified in laws since the founding of the United States to ensure that the 1%, predominately white, male and corporate, accrue all the benefits and privileges capitalism has to offer.

The climate negotiators in Paris won’t be discussing true solutions for healthy communities and ecosystems, or a just transition for communities hit the hardest. They certainly won’t be discussing the systemic origins of the crisis: white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy and greed.

BUT WE CAN.

Flood the System is about exposing the true nature of the corporate and governmental world we live in, elaborating on the connections between climate change, poor wages, unjust economic practices, and the unequal and racist foundation upon which this system is built. Through our actions we will show that we can build the power to fundamentally disrupt the systems that threaten our existence, and shift power back to local communities. We will rise like the mighty waters, a human flood of resistance to undo racism, patriarchy, heterosexism, ableism, ageism and more.
Flood the System arose from conversations within the Rising Tide North America network and allied organizations on what escalation could look like coming off of the People’s Climate March and Flood Wall Street in September 2014. Rising Tide North America is a decentralized network of grassroots groups fighting the root causes of the climate crisis.

As we talked to various groups, the consistent piece of feedback was the need for Flood the System to be much broader than just about escalation within the climate movement. Groups articulated the need for an escalation framework that addressed deep root causes and could connect with and be owned by members of the migrant justice, racial justice, gender justice, labor, and other powerful and growing movements in the US and Canada.

The climate movement has a history of seeing the climate crisis as a giant umbrella issue under which many other issues could fit. Flood the System is attempting to break this pattern. By articulating the climate crisis as merely a symptom of a system that is much more fundamentally screwed up, we hope to create a broader framework that helps us connect with other movements and deepen (or begin to build in some cases) relationships rooted in solidarity that will continue beyond Flood the System.

Imagine in the Fall of 2015 hundreds of self-organized groups of artists, activists and people who care about our future, taking collective action together. Imagine us washing over, occupying, blockading, shutting down and flooding the institutions, corporations, government buildings, police stations, pipe and rail lines and extraction sites that directly exploit us and threaten our survival.

We will start now. We will build slowly, like a small trickle of a stream. We’ll reach out to our allies, encourage new friends and partners to join us, educate ourselves on the history, plan smaller actions, and get the word out.

Moving into September and October, more and more organizations and affinity groups will start taking action to Flood the System. Our trickle will start turning into the fast-moving power of rapids. There will be more of us working together, bringing in new groups, planning and executing smaller-scale actions.

In November, right before the opening of the international summit to pave the way for capitalism in the coming decades, we will engage in a series of coordinated, decentralized mass direct actions targeting the institutions that threaten our collective survival. This is our Flood. Banks, immigration detention centers, rail and pipelines, extraction sites, police stations, government buildings will be overwhelmed as we expose the root causes of injustice in all its forms. Together, we’ll Flood the System.
the aquifer

drawing up our power

Our power lies in people in self organized groups and organizations that are already fighting for justice. Our power lies in our willingness to withdraw our consent from an unjust system. We do this through taking direct action and preparing ourselves for new relations and a new world.

Why direct action? Because it works.

Direct action has been an essential part of every successful social change movement in US history – abolition of slavery, war, labor, women’s suffrage, civil rights, anti-war, anti-nuclear, environmental, lesbian/gay rights, AIDS advocacy, Central America solidarity, environmental, Occupy and more. When the established channels fail to respond to our needs, as they inevitably do, these movements are forced to raise the social and political cost to the powers that be. Well planned nonviolent direct action intervenes in political processes that exclude ordinary citizens, showing the depth of our opposition and forcing the issues into the public agenda.

Flood the System is asking you to organize with others in your community on the frontlines of struggle to escalate in September, October, and November. Get louder, get bolder, get direct! The climate and our communities need direct resistance to the attacks they face.

Will your community be a part of the flood? Will you engage in broad based, decentralized, strategic and targeted direct action in the lead up to November in a style that fits your groups and issues?

When we resist the current system of power by engaging in direct action, we can recognize the power within us. Once we recognize our power, we see that a whole new world is possible and that we can, through direct action, shift the power back to where it belongs – the people. The questions are how do we withdraw our consent visibly, how long can we sustain it, and by what means?
systems of oppression
the backdrop to our work

We know that racism, sexism and the police are ready and willing to step up to demobilize us. If we are not paying attention to internal power dynamics, then privilege (whether it’s from class, race, gender or other systems of oppression) will trip us up. But when we work together across lines of traditional divide, we build power.

WE MUST MAKE A COMMITMENT TO GET EDUCATED, learn our history and have conversations, about racism, privilege and oppression. Pay attention to who is and is not in the room. Develop a contract or agreements for how our meetings will work and how our groups will navigate the tensions that arise in the work. We must decide who we are accountable to and in what ways. We’ll all make lots of mistakes, but that is how we will grow!

Flood the System has adopted a set of guiding principles for this effort. We have also included some resources in the end of this booklet on how to put anti-oppression and anti-racist principles into practice while organizing.

climate justice and the movement for black lives

There is incredible energy and organizing coming from the Movement for Black Lives. The demand for justice coming from those marching in Ferguson, Staten Island, Baltimore and so many other places have inspired and transformed all of us. We stand in solidarity with those on the frontlines of the fight for Black liberation. For too long, the US climate movement has been overwhelming white and has been slow to make the connections between climate justice, indigenous rights and racial justice. Flood the System is committed to doing it differently.

We know the fights for climate justice and racial justice are intricately connected. For decades now, Black and Brown people in the Global South and in North America have been raising the alarms about the impacts of climate change and fossil fuel extraction. However, the Global North, which is both historically and (through our massive corporations) currently responsible for massive carbon emissions, has not changed our practices. In the United States, we have seen when climate-fueled disasters happen, like Hurricane Sandy and Hurricane Katrina. It is people of color that are impacted the most and whose lives are irreparably damaged by greed and unchecked corporate power. The system of white supremacy is a social construct that was put in place to maintain power for white people and has fueled capitalism and the exploitation of people and the entire planet.

Much of the Rising Tide network is historically white within a historically white climate movement. In this moment, we are hoping to move the climate movement to more closely align itself and partner with the Black liberation movement. We are excited by the work of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) and their principles of: calling people in instead of out, taking risks, making mistakes and continuing the work, white mutual interest and accountability through action.

We look forward to seeing how Flood the System actions can support campaign work coming from the Movement for Black Lives and SURJ this year and moving forward.
FLOOD the system

anti-capitalist
anti-racist
anti-patriarchal
anti-colonial

Many of the crisis we face are based on hierarchical social systems that promote domination and exploitation. Addressing these crisis at their roots means joining with and supporting those who are fighting for liberation from these and other oppressive systems.

community based alternatives

We see alternatives to extreme energy and the climate crisis arising out of social struggles which challenge and seek to replace these institutions and their logic, such as demanding a Just Transition to an economy where workers and communities are in charge.

guiding principles

governmental
accountability & transformative practices

We encourage groups to make agreements on accountability, and to develop anti-oppressive practices. This might include holding a time for history, culture and storytelling as well as meeting practices like step up step back, progressive stack to center marginalized voices, and calling-in oppressive behaviors.

Flood the System prioritizes the leadership of communities on the frontlines fighting extreme energy and injustice.

governmental

grassroots led

At the core of Flood the System is you and your friends, groups, and organizations. Your choices and your needs will affect what your actions will look like. Actions will look and feel different in different places, but this variety is exactly what makes up the Flood.

Rising Tide North America (RTNA) is committed to supporting groups to develop local structures and plans that can help them fit into Flood the System in ways that make sense. This organizing structure is meant to help weave together the different organizations and actions that will be taking part in Flood the System across the continent.

Below you’ll find a lot of information on the structure itself, and in the “How a River Becomes a Flood” chapter we’ll lay out the plans for actions.

We are encouraging the use of action councils as centers of coordination for Flood actions. RTNA organizers are already helping local action councils develop action ideas, targets, make art, and do all the things necessary for building large direct actions. In some places folks may decide to organize a city-wide Action Council (like New York City or Chicago perhaps). In other places, a larger geographic area may want to coordinate a single action (New England, for instance, or Northern Idaho and Western Montana). Action Councils can also be formed with existing networks of people doing similar work that want to host an action that spreads beyond local or regional geographic lines: such as folks fighting pipelines doing a coordinated action at the same time across the US and Canada. But hey, the continent is huge, and RTNA is small. If you think there should be a regional or thematic council that doesn’t exist yet, we definitely need your help making it happen.
The River Council

The central coordinating body for Flood the System is the continental spokescouncil, or River Council. The River Council is made up of representatives from action councils that have formed across the continent, as well as representatives of working groups that are tasked with coordinating different pieces of the Flood the System work.

The hope is that the needs, strategy and vision of as many local groups as possible will be represented in the River Council. Where there is a need to have regional coordination of actions, RTNA and the River Council will host calls with action councils within a region.

Because each region, city, county will differ in its ability to hold down all the necessary pieces of an action, RTNA and the River Council will help coordinate between different groups interested in participating in Flood actions to make sure actions can be deployed effectively and safely, and so they provide a sense of escalation and momentum.

Working Groups

Any members of local action councils are welcome and encouraged to participate in continental River Council Working Groups! These Working Groups are geared toward providing the logistical support for Flood the System. Working Groups are populated by folks in local action councils, as well as individuals who are super awesome at a specific area of work. Each working group has a clear plan of action to get us through the Flood. You can find Working Group contact information in the “Getting Involved” section below.
Watersheds

From June through September, Rising Tide North America and the River Council are planning a series of trainings and outreach events to help existing organizations and groups find their way into Flood the System. The floodthesystem.net website will act as the clearinghouse for information about upcoming Watershed.

These Watershed events are designed to give folks information about Flood the System vision and plans, and help encourage new groups to take action.

We are looking for anchor groups that are interested in planning a Watershed gathering in their region, and groups that can help facilitate regional action council meetings. If this is you or your groups, please let us know by emailing info@floodthesystem.net.

the role of Rising Tide North America

Because Flood the System originated as a project from Rising Tide North America (RTNA), much of the organizing for Flood the System has been incubated by folks within the RTNA network. As we build the Flood, and more people become involved, the work will live in the hands of the people taking action.

RTNA has been, since its inception in 2006, an all-volunteer network. After taking on this project, we decided to stipend two organizers to coordinate, push forward and support Flood the System organizing -- Sandy Nurse and Ahmed Gaya. Sandy is based in Brooklyn, New York and organizes with Rising Tide NYC. Sandy is helping to support groups in the Gulf South and along the East Coast. You can reach her at sandy@floodthesystem.net. Ahmed Gaya is based in Seattle and works with Rising Tide Seattle and the sHell No! Action Council. Ahmed is helping support groups on the West Coast and in the Midwest. He can be reached at ahmed@floodthesystem.net.
how a river becomes a FLOOD
organizing together for momentum

There are two broad categories for Flood the System actions:

The first category of actions we’re calling Rapid actions. These are actions that can be taken by single organizations or affinity groups at any time and are declared as part of Flood the System. Rapid actions are integral to the build-up to the Flood. They help escalate local campaigns and throughout September and October will generate the energy and attention needed to Flood the System in November.

The second category of action for Flood the System are Flood actions. Flood actions are meant to be broad and participatory, but include an aspect of Direct Action or Civil Disobedience. Imagine hundreds of people in small towns, or thousands in a larger city or region, occupying capitol buildings, police stations, corporate offices or financial districts, or rail lines carrying oil trains.

Both Rapids and Flood actions are critical to the success of Flood the System -- and so it’s up to you, your groups, and your action council to make the call about which kind of action (or both!) you’ll make happen -- this depends entirely on what kinds of escalation will serve to build your local work.

Rapids

Rapids are the actions that help us all collectively escalate this fall. They can be held by any organization or affinity group that declares itself to be a part of Flood the System. Rapid actions can occur at any time, anywhere that makes sense for you and your organizations. Taken collectively, these actions help tell a story of the breadth of injustices we are facing and of people who are fed up with it. As these actions begin to pop up across the continent, they help build excitement, energy, and awareness of the coming Flood.

If each of our campaigns is a stream toward Flooding the System, think about how you can engage your work in the Summer and Fall and help it find a home in Flood.

If you are developing or executing rapid actions it might be a good idea to coordinate with your local action council to make sure your allies are aware of the action, even if they don’t have all the details and are not actively participating in the creation of the action itself.

If you are planning a rapid action and want it to be part of Flood the System, please feel free to let us know by contacting our Media Working Group at Media@floodthesystem.net.
the FLOOD

mass actions organized through local action councils in November

Flood actions are at the core of Flood the System, the high point of our planning. Because flood actions are big, they will require the coordination of a local action council and probably multiple groups. Like rapid actions, flood actions may occur at any time but we hope that action councils will orient their Flood action to be a part of the November push to mark the building momentum across the continent.

Our vision is for Flood actions to be mass, participatory direct actions that target a central element of injustice in our system.

Flood actions could also be sustained action taken by affinity groups. The targets will be different for different communities, and each council will make its own strategic decisions. It could be a government building or capital. It might be a rail line or pipeline or fossil fuel extraction site, or it could be the financial district, a police station, an immigrant detention center, or a jail in your community. We hope that local councils will be able to find targets appropriate to their work, which also act as direct or symbolic spaces that represent the systemic problems we face. What Flood actions look or feel like is up to local councils.

Because action councils have representation on the continental River Council, the Flood actions that local councils develop will have the support of the entire Flood the System network. Media and outreach for Flood actions can be coordinated both by the local action council as well as at the continental level through the outreach that’s been done as a part of Flood the System more broadly (the River Council is building a large list of folks across the continent that want to be a part of Flood actions!). Because we want to include a lot of people in the actions themselves, we ask that the local organizers think about and create space for the involvement of many people. The River Council can support and advertise your Flood action, but the logistics and the design are yours to develop.

Things to Keep in Mind While Organizing

TRAINING: We are asking all local action councils to identify folks within their circles who have some action experience and would like to participate in a Flood the System Training for Trainers sometime in late summer or early fall. These trainers will then be available to your council and Flood action to train up new folks who want to participate in your action. Our goal is to have actions be direct confrontations to the systems of power, occupations, sit-ins, shutdowns, and we want to make the spaces as safe as we can within the boundaries of actions that might have an element of risk. We believe that mass trainings are an important organizing tool for bringing new people into Flood the System.
LEGAL SUPPORT: The River Council can help troubleshoot legal support, but building a secure support structure for folks to participate in action is a local need, and should be done by each local action council. The National Lawyers Guild, the ACLU, and local legal collectives (if you have them) can all help answer legal questions and support activists that are engaging in civil disobedience and direct action and could face arrest. At the very least, they are good places to start building your local legal support network.

ARTS & CULTURE: In your action council, you’re going to have tons of conversation about what you want the action to communicate, but when it comes down to it, a big chunk of how the event looks and feels rests on a handful of things: what the banners and signs that people carry say and look like, what people sing and chant, how we arrange ourselves in space, what pictures we take and share of the action. At any moment your group is doing outreach or recruitment, think about asking painters, musicians, dancers, poets, DJ’s, etc. you know if they want to be involved. A key to unleashing the awesomeness is inviting people to the table early who are there to think about the role of creativity. They might come up with some bizarre ideas that are totally the wrong thing for your plan... but they might just be the right ones, too. If you’re not sure where to start, think about what arts institutions might be in your region that you could reach out to for contacts or support, and feel free to reach out to the Arts and Culture working group at artsandculture@floodthesystem.net for help thinking through a recruitment strategy!

At the end of this booklet we provide links to some other material that can help you both design your action, as well as build the support structures like legal support you need to make your action as safe as possible.
One goal of Flood the System is to, well, Flood the System in the Fall. It’s concrete and action specific. The other goal of Flood the System is to build a horizontal movement made up of groups and organizations which will coordinate their work to have the most impact. We feel like the spokescouncil process is the best way for achieving this goal because it allows us all to communicate broadly, with a diverse number of groups fighting many different causes, but essentially pointed in the same direction and working with the idea that to achieve true change we need to fight the root causes.

We believe that movements have both low tides and high tides, the times when we are reorienting and reflecting and the time when we are moving and building momentum. Both are important, and we need to remember that both are part of the movement building processes.

Flood the System will be a “high tide” -- a period of intense building, action, and movement. The high tides allow us to actually feel what it’s like to work together pointed in a similar direction, with a common goal. We get to see what we’re like in action, and what our needs are. These periods also give us the data to figure out what has to come next: what we’re up against in the world and what we’re struggling with in our organizing.

After our flood actions, we’ll be in low tide, and we’ll retreat for a period of rest and reflection. We will gather with our groups and communities and have space to celebrate our successes and unpack the hardships. This is a time for sharing visions and making choices about how to move forward together.

This is also the space for organizational building! We need to think about ways to absorb the momentum and enthusiasm we create so when we move into the next high tide we will be stronger and more prepared. This Flood our targets will be broad, next time they might be very narrow and specific. No organizing process is perfect, but we know we have to build together with vision and alignment to be strong enough to take on the really really powerful forces we’re up against.

During the work of building Flood the System, we will be initiating conversations about what the next step is with local and regional action councils and groups. Obviously, the movement doesn’t end with the conference in Paris. RTNA is not under the illusion that Flood the System is going to be the singular thing that washes away the entire system. We think by coordinating this wave, we can build stronger relationships and communication channels that allow us to decide on the next High Tide together.

Every low tide and high tide is part of a movement building cycle that allows us to grow stronger and bolder with each successive surge. During the build up to the flood, we should all be thinking about how we move forward. Let’s practice being visionary and strategic in our targeting, and bold in our tactics and solidarity. The road forward is probably rocky, and filled with muddy waters, but the organizing process we’ll use to Flood the System can lead us to widespread movement work in the future. Keep an ear out for communication about how we envision the next High Tide together -- we don’t know what this should look like yet, all we know right now is that we’ll definitely need your help making it happen.
how to get involved in building the FLOOD

Support the Media Blitz!
Please promote the idea, the literature, the website, and the presence on social media! We want this idea spread far and wide, talk about it within your network, share it with your friends, help spread the word!

Twitter: #Floodthesystem
Website: floodthesystem.net
Facebook: facebook.com/events/706014719510757/
Online Booklet PDF: floodthesystem.net

Participate in a training or action!
If you are just looking to attend an FTS training or action in the fall, sign up online at floodthesystem.net and let us know that that’s what you want to do. The River Council and RTNA will send you information about upcoming actions, Watershed Summits, and trainings in your area so you can get prepared to Flood the System!

Hold a Rapid Action!
Rapid actions are key parts of Flooding the System. They provide momentum, and give voice to local struggles. Any group can hold a rapid action at any time or tie in an existing action as part of Flood the System as long as it supports the principles. Out tools are yours to use. If you are planning Rapid actions and want them to be a part of Flood the System please let our media working group know so we can make sure we get the info out there!! We are collaborating with artists and cultural workers to create graphics, images, presentations and replicable art for FTS Flood and Rapid actions. Please use them!
Plug your affinity group, organization, church group, or community organization into the planning process!

Joining the organizing process for a Flood action or local action council is easy! You may have already heard of work in your area and that’s great. If not, and you might want to plug your group into the action council organizing process or attend a Watershed event let us know via our online sign-up process and we can direct you to the local work in your region.

Anchor an Action Council and host a Flood action!

If you feel like your group is up to anchoring a local action council and hosting a Flood action, please do so!!! You are the core of the Flood the System plan and will receive no end to the praise for all your hard work and commitment!!

Read through the action council and principles section of this booklet carefully to get an idea of what it’s all about and then an email to info@floodthesystem.net to get plugged into the Flood the System organizing work.

Forming a local action council can be an intimidating process. There are folks working with the River Council and Rising Tide who can help you begin to think about how to organize your Action Council and troubleshoot some of the issues you might run into.

In general, it’s a good idea to think about who you want to work with in your community, what other organizations are there and what kind of work they do. As you read through the Flood the System principles, be aware of issues and relationships that already exist in your local organizing work. Send folks the FTS call to action and maybe this booklet and then host an initial discussion about Flood the System and see who’s down for building a Flood action. Also be aware of who might be interested in hosting smaller Rapid actions in the lead up to November. Even if they don’t participate in organizing a Flood action they are still important elements of the movement we’re trying to build.

The River Council and RTNA are keeping running lists of folks in a region who are interested in plugging their organizations and affinity groups into a local action council process but who might not have the time to start a local council from scratch. If you are anchoring an action council please info@floodthesystem.net for list of groups in your region.

If you want to get involved, here’s some contact information!

Arts and Culture Continental Working Group: artsandculture@floodthesystem.net
Trainings Continental Working Group: training@floodthesystem.net
Media Continental Working Group: media@floodthesystem.net
General Questions: info@floodthesystem.net

For organizing in the Midwest, Southwest, Rockies, West Coast, Western Canada: contact Ahmed: ahmed@floodthesystem.net
For organizing in the Gulf South, South, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, Eastern Canada: contact Sandy: sandy@floodthesystem.net
An action council is a model of organizing actions through a horizontal and democratic process. An action council is a loose association of organizations, affinity groups, working groups and collectives that agree to coordinate a specific action or series of actions while avoiding the rigidity of a formal coalition. Action councils were first used by the Anti-Nuclear movement of the 70’s and 80’s and again in the Anti-Globalization movement in the late 90’s and early 2000’s.

We use action councils because they allow room for movement growth. They also help make action planning accessible to a broad range of people. We need our social movements to be able to grow at rapid speed -- and have structures that can do that too!

An action council is the core unit of coordination for a Flood Action. Of course, we hope to see organizations, affinity groups, and church groups all hosting escalating FTS actions in the lead up to November, but for the purposes of clarity, we’re calling those actions Rapid actions. The purpose of the action council is to coordinate a Flood action that is broad, participatory, and a direct confrontation to the existing powers that allow an unjust system to continue.

An action council is made up of one or two representatives from the member organizations, affinity groups, community groups, church organizations, and logistical working groups (medics, media or communications, art build, legal etc.) that have all decided to help co-plan a piece of the Flood. The reason we ask that only one or two representatives sit at the council table is to help easily facilitate a conversation that can then be shared and vetted with all of the members, participants, organizations and friends that those individuals are connected to. If you are an individual who wants to be involved in an action council, then we recommend that you form an affinity group of your friends, co-workers, band-mates, or whoever you are connected to and send a representative to the meeting. This process is about organizing each other as much as it is about getting the right groups to the table.

Caucuses are also important groups that have a seat at the action council table and speak with the voice of the community that they represent. A people of color caucus, women’s caucus, trans and queer caucus can all add a great deal of power to often disenfranchised voices and help marginalized groups be heard. They also help establish a balance of power in the council where otherwise only the strongest voices might be heard.

A local action council may choose to form a coordination team of individuals who will help administer the council, take minutes, send out reminders and invitations, and make sure the process is moving forward. This coordination team could also act as the logistical center for organizing a Flood action, leaving broader decisions to the entire council, but taking care of the details of action planning. Along with the coordination team, a council may choose to form Working Groups that can take broad pieces of organizing work and then report back to the council. Examples of common working groups are medics, legal, media, outreach, and training.

Action councils are often run by the consent of all of the parties participating, and decisions that affect the entire group should be made keeping that in mind. Working together toward a common goal can be a challenge, and maintaining a good process and an enthusiasm for the success of the group can go a long way. Some groups may choose to use formal consensus to reach decisions in their action council. There are more resources on decision-making and facilitation at the end of this booklet.
Action Council

Groups clustered behind spokes

Group members communicate through their spokes, either by passing notes or during caucuses.

Participating groups include coalitions, organizations, affinity groups, faith groups, artists, youth groups, cultural workers, media makers, and action support including legal and medics.

Action council meetings may include periods of spokes discussion, followed by discussions among spokes and their groups, followed again by spokes discussion. The meetings are dynamic.

Coordination team

Spokes represent their groups

Spokes are responsible for agenda planning, council logistics and facilitation. Anchor the council.
**Support Offered**
by RTNA & the River Council

**Media**

Direct actions can be used as a “hook” to get the press to focus on often unreported injustices or to provide an alternative framing around an issue like solutions to climate change. But given corporate control over the mass media, we must also be telling our own story through photography, videography, and utilizing social media to distribute powerful images and stories of resistance.

A good first step for action councils is to identify who has media and communications experience and form a working group with a division of labor. Who will do research on the media outlets and reporters in your area? Who knows videographers and photographers who can take on roles during actions? Who’s super active on Facebook and Twitter, and can help with outreach and to share real-time updates from your action/s? A working group can begin to address these questions and ensure that the story of your action ripples far beyond your own networks and community.

On a larger level, the Communications Working Group (media@floodthesystem.net) coordinates overall media relations, website and email maintenance, and our presence on social media. If you are planning an action and have a question about media don’t hesitate to reach out, although keep in mind that we are a small group of volunteers.

The Center for Story-Based Strategy has some wonderful tools on narrative strategy at www.storybasedstrategy.org. There are additional resources in the Further Reading at the end of this booklet.

---

**Arts & Culture**

Shifting the culture is a huge component of what it means to make change. It takes all of us to do this. Consider these two statements:

**Culture is made of experiences.**
It’s informed by the things we see, hear, do, feel. Shaping culture is a skill that requires vision, training and practice. Let’s call people who cultivate these skills artists.

**Culture is everywhere,** we create it together. Creativity is in all humans and we need everyone’s visionary selves to build the new world in the shell of the old.

The overlap of these two statements is where we live and how we organize. The Arts and Culture working group is here to unleash the huge potential of cultural organizing within Flood the System.

We’re going to do this by making cool stuff and experiences that everyone who makes up Flood the System can participate in. By “cool” we mean transformative, good looking, resonant, fierce, weird, nourishing, transcendent, badass and fun. Some of these things will build buzz and momentum for Flood the System (like posters, or videos?). Some of this will make the gatherings that are already planned more impactful (like performances and activities at summits and conferences) and most of it will be woven deep in to the planning of the Rapids and Floods action. Our vision is on point, good looking, unexpected and strategic action across the country.
The only way we’re going to get there is by engaging a huge range of creative folks. This could mean your friend who’s a painter, that DJ you know, or YOU. The Arts and Culture Working Group is working hard to build systems for artists and cultural workers where there is real support, respect and inspiration.

**our engagement strategies**

ways to stay in touch: arts & culture conference calls, so we can help each other make spaces in Flood the System organizing where the arts are central.

regional arts coordination and continent-wide projects, so there are opportunities to learn new skills, connect to mentors, and get better at what we do.

a core team of arts coordinators committed to cultural equity, so we can all keep an eye out to make sure Flood the System is a space where diverse styles, approaches, norms and histories are given space to shine.

metaphors to riff off of: You’ll notice all the water imagery at the end of this booklet? that’s the arts and culture working group, geeking out hard on the poetry of water systems. This whole project is built around a water metaphor, right? There’s a lot of places we can go with this.

…and more stuff we haven’t even thought of!

E-mail us at artsandculture@floodthesystem.net to plug in!

---

**Legal**

Every action council planning a Flood the System action, or individual group planning a Rapid action should be thinking about the legal consequences of taking risks in the fight for justice. Local groups, like the National Lawyers Guild and the ACLU, are good starting places to begin to plan a legal strategy for your actions. Look them up in your local area, give them a call, and begin a conversation about what your group is thinking.

An addition, the Civil Liberties Defence Center and Midnight Special Law Collective are both good online resources for know your rights training, information about moving through the legal system, and how to build a legal support structure that can help protect you and your activists. Check out these resources and look in the Further Reading Chapter of this booklet!

CLDC: http://cldc.org/organizing-resources
Midnight Special Law: http://www.midnightspecial.net

**Training**

Over the Summer and fall RTNA and the River Council will be coordinating regional trainings and training for trainers to help get folks prepared to take action to Flood the System. Watershed summits are good places to learn some basics about Flood the System and how an action council works. Then, in the fall Flood the System will host a series of Direct Action trainings to get folks plugged into the actions that are in motion.

To find out about available upcoming trainings and Watershed events, please sign up on floodthesystem.net and let us know you’re interested in attending. We’ll send you information about upcoming events in your region. If you’d like to get a hold of the training working group directly please contact training@floodthesystem.net.
Funding

Rising Tide North America and the River Council Fundraising Working group are committed to providing some resources for local action councils, artists, and actions. While we can’t promise to be the sole source of funding for everything that will be connected to Flood the System, we do promise to be transparent with local action councils and organizations through the River Council coordination process. If you have questions about funding please email: Info@floodthesystem.net.
Why Organize?

What is Organizing?

Chances are, if you are reading this booklet, or have come to a training, you are among the small fraction of people who mostly took their own initiative in getting involved. Flood the System is not about those of us who are the perfect activists who get together and “throw down,” we are about promulgating our analysis and hard-hitting tactics to tens of thousands (and hopefully millions of people). All of us are capable of putting our bodies on the line and most of us understand that the current climate is failing 99% of us.

In order to scale up to hundreds of thousands, we need Flood the System folks to be thinking and acting like organizers more than leaders. Think back to how you got involved in organizing? Was there someone who kept inviting you to meetings or actions? Did they check in with how you were feeling after the event? Did you get a reminder call or text and then you realized you should show up, when you were meaning to do something else? Did someone ask you to speak? Take a risk? If you can remember any of those things happening, someone was organizing you.

Most likely, because we generally learn by example, you are organizing yourself. There is the new person who comes to a meeting that you make a point of chatting with them afterwards. There is someone you call and ask them to come to an event out of town because you think they have potential. And there is someone else you got testy with at an event, and you made a point to get coffee or a beer and clear the air in a way that got through some difficult issues and moved you forward.

There are many techniques to organizing, but most importantly it is a mindset of growth, inclusion, participation and power that makes you an organizer. We all need each to be organizing. We need action councils the represent thousands, and actions so big they disrupt the everyday. Below are some thoughts on the role of an organizer, and some rules of the road for how to be most inclusive to new people. If you are in the mindset and open, everything else is just the hard work of follow-through and perseverance, combined with the excitement of developing new leaders, and organizers.

Some Organizing Sayings by Fred Ross, founder of the Community Service Organization who is most known for his work with Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta, founders of the United Farm Workers:

* An organizer is a leader who doesn’t lead, but gets behind the people and pushes.
* A good organizer is a social arsonist who goes around setting people on fire.
* A good organizer must be able to charge an issue with a supreme sense of urgency.
* Don’t tell the people—ask them.
* Don’t talk at people—put them to work.
* If there is something to be done, do it now!
* A good organizer delegates responsibility, but is always ready to jump in and do the job him or herself if necessary.
* When you’re able to take responsibility for failure, you’re on the way to becoming a good organizer.
* Good organizers never give up; they get the opposition to do that.
on leadership development:

* We educate people in order to organize them. We don’t organize people in order to educate them.
* Organizing is providing people with the opportunity to become aware of their own capabilities and potential.
* You don’t develop new leaders, you push people into taking action by refusing to do it yourself.
* Usually people who can spare some time for the cause will give it a lot more if you just ask them.
* Never get so hungry for volunteers that you do their work for them instead of insisting that they do it themselves.
* People are infinitely more appreciative of what they do for you than what you do for them.

on the organizing process:

* When you are tempted to make a statement, ask a question.
* 90% of organizing is following up.
* It’s the way people are that counts, not the way you’d like them to be.
* It’s not the quantity of pressure we exert that counts, it’s the quality.
* There is a time for sound and a time for silence, and a good organizer needs to be able to differentiate between the two.
* Reminding is the essence of organizing.

Three Tips
For Plugging People In

From Beyond the Choir (www.beyondthechoir.org) and #OccupyWinning (www.occupywinning.org)

1. Greet and get to know newcomers.

When someone shows up at your occupation, march, rally, or action, they are indicating an interest. Greet them! Find out about them! And don’t just invite them to come to your next meeting. Even the most welcoming and inclusive groups tend to develop their own meeting culture that can unintentionally make new folks feel like outsiders. To increase your new participant retention rates, take a few minutes to stop and talk with new folks. Get to know the person. Find out about what attracted them to your effort. You might ask about what kinds of tasks they enjoy doing, what they are good at, etc. If that goes well, you might ask them how much time they have. You can tell them more about what’s going on with the effort — and discuss with them what their involvement could look like. While this level of orientation requires some time in the short-term, it saves you time in the long-term — because more people will plug into the work faster, and stick around longer. It may make sense a working group to take on the ongoing task of greeting, welcoming, and orienting new folks.
2. Accommodate multiple levels of participation.

In short, some people can give a lot of time, and some can give a little. Organizers with more time on their hands should avoid projecting their own availability as an expectation onto others. A foolproof way to drive new folks away from your occupation or group is to consistently ask them to give more time than they are able to give.

Instead learn what kind of time commitment is realistic and sustainable for them. Help them plug into tasks and roles that suit their availability. Check in with them about how it’s going. Are they feeling overextended, or would they like to take on more? Take responsibility for helping new folks avoid over-commitment and burnout.

3. Make people feel valued and appreciated.

If you want to inspire people to stick with this burgeoning movement for the long haul, make them feel valued and appreciated. It’s basic.

People like to be around people who respect them, and who are nice! If we want to compete with the myriad of often more appealing options for people’s free time, then we have to treat each other well and take care of each other.

Notice and acknowledge new folks’ contributions, however small. Make time to check in with them outside of meetings. Ask their opinions often: What did they think about the meeting? the event? the action? Bounce your ideas off of them and ask for their feedback.

“The power of the action is in the reaction.”

- Saul Alinsky

community organizer

Building an Action

Produced by the Root Activist Network of Trainers

Organizing actions is not rocket science. Nor is it as simple as baking a cake. There are many elements that go into making your action successful. If you take the time at the front end to be really clear about what you are trying to do and why, it can make the difference between building real power and feeling like a flop.

If your plans are good, if you have a realistic assessment of your numbers and your resources, and if the people working on it are accountable, the only thing to be worried about is the weather. And this is no small matter and should be factored in. Sitting on a street in January in Michigan is not going to quickly move people to stronger actions. So be smart about what you are asking people to participate in. After all, we’re assuming that you want them to come back again!

Most often actions are part of a larger organizing effort or campaign. If this is true for you action it is important that actions build in energy and excitement over time.
some thoughts on strategy...

* Strategy means looking at the big picture.
* Strategy means knowing what your overall vision and immediate goals are.
* Strategy is about concentrating resources in the right place.
* Strategy is knowing when to use your resources as well as what kind to use.
* Strategy is knowing who has the power to make the decision.
* Strategy means knowing your own and your opponents’ strengths, weaknesses, allies, opposition, constraints, and opportunities.
* Strategy is knowing what story you are trying to tell, who are the sympathetic characters, how do you frame the conflict, create moments of drama, and a happy ending.

some questions to consider when planning an action...

TARGET:
* Who are we trying to impact/move/influence?
* Message/Demands: What is our message?
* Who are the other audiences besides the target, what do we want them to know, what do we want them to do?
* Do the message and target fit together in a way that is easily understandable?

MOBILIZATION:
* How many do you need/want for the action?
* How many people can you mobilize?
* Do you have turnout goals?
* Is there a good turnout plan for the action, including last-minute reminder phone calls, email blast etc?
* How will you change the plan if you don’t have enough people?
SCENARIO:

* What will happen?
* What does it look like?
* Is the action symbolic or disruptive?
* Will your action be fun and powerful?
* Is your group comfortable with the plan?
* Will the plan be outside the experience of the target?
* Does it have a beginning, middle and end?
* How does the scenario communicate your message without words—where the visuals alone communicate your message?
* Consider timing. Is your event competing with other things, can people come?
* The more your event/action contains novelty, conflict, new data, simplicity, humor, prominent figures involved, civil disobedience, bright props and images, local impact, holidays, anniversaries the more coverage it will get.

COMMUNICATIONS:

* How will we communicate during the action?
* What equipment will we need?
* Where will we get it?
* What are the protocols?

COORDINATION & PREPARATION:

Do you have a prep meetings planned to review scenario, communications, maps, and make sure teams working together are familiar with what needs to be done?

ROLES:

* Team/march leader
* Police Liaisons
* Marshall, PeaceKeeper, Security, Traffic
* Leafletters
* Media Liaisons
* Photographers/Videographers
* Twitter and/or celly loop point person
* Organizational spokesperson
* Set up crew
* Clean up crew
* Drivers
* Chant leaders
* Art & Props distribution & collection
* Art & Props staging and repairs
* Equipment distribution & collection
* Sign-in team
* Get out of jail people, lawyers

DEBRIEF:

* Who will debrief the action?
* Where will the debriefing occur?
Legal Issues & Risking Arrest

The decisions that we make are political, not legal. The reaction of the government to what we are doing, to what we stand for, will also be political. We can have quite an impact on what happens to us in jail, in court and during processing, if we are prepared. It can be as important a part of our nonviolent opposition as anything that comes before the arrest.

In a large demonstration, the police may separate us from each other, breaking up affinity groups and possibly isolating individuals. In order to maintain our spirits and effectiveness, we must develop an ability to deal with the legal system, while trusting in the solidarity of other demonstrators. Solidarity is, in reality, more a state of mind that unites us through a long struggle than a specific course of action that everyone follows. Solidarity does not demand that everyone make the same choice in every situation. It is an internal force within each of us and among us as a group. It is our commitment to one another and to our common cause; it is our dedication to support one another and to pursue our common goals at all times, in every situation, to the best of our ability. Solidarity cannot be broken by courts, jails or other external forces. If we hold fast to it, it is ours.

Our approach to the legal system is up to us. We retain as much power as we refuse to relinquish to the government - city, state or federal.

The criminal "justice" system functions to alienate and isolate the accused individual, to destroy one’s power and purposefulness and to weave a web of confusion and mystification around any legal proceedings. If we are well prepared for our contact with this system, we can limit the effect it has upon us, both personally and politically. It is extremely important that we be firmly rooted in our own spirit and purposes, our commitment to one another and history and tradition of social struggle of which we are a part. We should try to maintain our attitude of honesty and directness while dealing with law enforcement officers and the courts.

Getting to know your local laws, and legal resources are important steps to building a legal infrastructure that can support your activist community.

There are tons of legal support resources on the web that you should look at if you’re planning local actions for Flood the System. You can find advice on setting up legal collectives and find legal flow charts that will help your groups get oriented to the process of arrest. Good places to start are:

Civil Liberties Defence Center: http://cldc.org/organizing-resources/

Midnight Special Law: http://www.midnightspecial.net
advice on Facilitation

the role of the Facilitator

In a practical sense, the job of a facilitator is to help create a space that is comfortable and productive for a group of people. It’s important to make sure that everyone is involved in the process of building your organizing strategy. So hold discussions and meetings with your group and to make sure your group uses their time most effectively follow the steps below.

Also, as a facilitator, if you want to say something, call on yourself in turn, but make sure you don’t use your role to dominate the discussion. Furthermore, you should not allow people with race, class, gender, or other subtle or unsubtle privilege to dominate a meeting. As a facilitator, you should encourage everyone to participate while moving the meeting along to meet time limits. Before a meeting begins, the facilitator should make the following things clear to the group:

1. The goal of the meeting and the organization:
   Describe the purpose of your organization and its purpose/priorities. What is its potential impact you hope to have in the coming year? How can your campaign build your current group, and act as a tool for change on a local level? If you do or do not already have an established group, an important factor is making sure people have a clear understanding of how the issues you are organizing around can be a catalyst for the group’s positive growth.

2. The agenda for the meeting and how long it should take.

3. We are working to make this a safe space where all participants can feel comfortable, important, and respected. The facilitator should help the group establish ground rules, which are just a clear set of rules that apply to the group and help the conversation run effectively. (ex. people who speak less should try to speak up and people who tend to dominate a discussion should step back and leave space for others to contribute).

4. Group decisions are made democratically, with input from many different voices.

**tip & tricks for running a meeting**

**AGENDA**

At every meeting, clear goals and an agenda should be set beforehand. Prepare a complete agenda based on your goals. Ask people for input on the agenda and confirm it with people beforehand. Set time limits for each agenda item and try to stay under 1.5 hours for the whole meeting. If you must go longer, the facilitator should make sure everyone is alright with adding extra time onto the meeting.

**PEOPLE**

Get the right people in the room. Remind everyone who needs to be there more than once. Ask a different person to be responsible for preparing and introducing each agenda item. Having multiple voices leading the meeting will make everyone feel more welcome.
Everyone should feel like they can voice their concerns, their excitement and their ideas. It’s up to the facilitator to make sure that these concerns and ideas come at the appropriate time.

ASSIGN ROLES:

Distribute roles in order for everyone to have their say and to build leadership within the group. These may include:
* Presenter (for specific agenda items)
* Note Taker
* Time keeper
* Scribe (writes notes on butcher block paper for everyone to see)
* Vibes Watcher (assesses mood of group and asks for breaks)

OTHER SUGGESTIONS:

• Schedule short breaks

• If people are having a hard time thinking of ideas or direction, feel free to pose a question/choice to the group and have them do a go around, where each person gives their brief answer. It always important to go back and remind people of the desired outcome for your organizing goals.

• Small breakout groups are another great way to generate lots of ideas quickly, or basic popcorn discussion to start things off.

• Remember silence is good sometimes. It often means that people are thinking. But, a good trick if you need discussion is to say, “Turn to the person next to you and discuss this.”

• Discussions are bound to go off track at times but here are some examples and ways to help get people redirected (e.g. People may get stuck on certain tactics and whether they will work or not, or specific details like what time to host an event) In these cases, bring them back to the goal of your Campaign and in cases of an event, bring them back to the event goal. For example, ask the group does this tactic or this detail fit in with our goal? Will this advance our goal in the best way possible?
  • Summarize fairly often. Elicit responses from each member when addressing a key topic.
  • Consensus does not mean that each person gets to say the same thing five times. If people seem to be saying the same thing in different ways, try to summarize and move forward. Ex: “So what I’m hearing people say is that we’re not quite prepared to rally outside the president’s office but that there is interest in putting increased pressure on him within the next week. Do people have other ideas for a more strategic next step?”

CONCLUDING A MEETING:

• Spend a few short minutes recapping your plan of action at the end of the meeting. Did you meet your goals? What are the next steps? Who’s doing what?

• Assign roles for next time and schedule the next meeting.

• Get a sense of how people feel about the action plan. What direction do people want it to go in? Is there a common direction or is it split? It’s important for everyone to be on the same page so that there is a buy-in that creates excitement and a lot of involvement around the events to follow.
Consensus goes beyond majority rule. It replaces traditional styles of top-down leadership with a model of shared power and responsibility.

In the formal consensus process, once a topic is introduced the group engages in discussion about that topic. If through the discussion the group seems like it’s arriving at a common understanding of an outcome a person may make a proposal that clearly states that understanding. The proposal will act as the basis upon which the group will seek consensus. Once a proposal has been made clarifying questions can be asked and amendments can be offered to the proposal. After questions have been asked and amendments have been made, and it still seems like the proposal is still good, the group can move into the decision making process. The facilitator will call for any blocks. A block is a formal declaration that the decision will not move forward with the participation of that individual and group. Generally a block is reserved for a deep moral disagreement with a decision that is on the table. At this point the council can revisit the original proposal and alter it or move ahead without the participation of the one who blocks. Moving ahead, the facilitator can call for stand asides. The stand aside is to allow a space for those who do not formally endorse the decision, but do not feel strongly enough to block. Those who stand aside may be given space to state their reasons, but a stand aside does not halt the consensus process. Moving on, the facilitator will call for consensus in which all those who agree will indicate their agreement. After consensus is reached it’s generally a moment for cheering regardless of the size of the decision.

Hosting a good action council meeting can be hard, and it helps if you develop some common expectations of how the meeting will flow so participants know what to expect and when certain information can be introduced or decision can be made.
Intros or check-ins

Updates from:
  working groups  
council organizations

Work that occurred since the last meeting

General discussion

Proposals for moving forward

Discussion on proposals

Decision on proposals

Review of tasks and who is doing them

Check-out

simple, sample agenda:

suggestions & strategies for anti-oppressive organizing

Many of the problems we run into in movement groups are those of domination within the movement.

People join a social change movement in order to alleviate an external problem. Too often we are confronted with the same kind of behavior we find in our everyday lives. We’re all too often stifled by heavy-handed authority: bosses at work, parents or spouse at home and teachers at school.

People want not only to be accepted in these groups, but also to make a contribution and be active participants. In order to work successfully to change things we must also pay attention to our own behavior. More often than not, men are the ones dominating group activity. Such behavior is therefore termed a “masculine behavior pattern,” not because women never act that way, but because it is generally men who do.

Men are beginning to take responsibility for their behavior. These are some of the more common problems to become aware of:

* Hogging the show. Talking too much, too long, too loud. Problem solver. continually giving the answer or solution before others have had much chance to contribute.

* Speaking in capital letters. Giving one’s own solutions or opinions as the final word on the subject, often aggravated by tone of voice and body posture.

from Working Together for A Change
* Defensiveness. Responding to every contrary opinion as though it were a personal attack.

* Nit-picking. Picking out minor flaws in statements of others and stating the exception to every generality.

* Restating. Especially what someone else has just said perfectly clearly.

* Attention seeking. Using all sort of dramatics to get the spotlight. Task and content focus. To the exclusion of nurturing individuals or the group through attention to process and form.

* Put downs and one-upmanship. “I used to believe that, but now...” or “How can you possibly say that ... ?” Negativism. Finding something wrong or problematical in everything.

* Focus transfer. Transferring the focus of the discussion to one’s own pet issues

* Self-listening. Formulating a response after the first few sentences, not listening to anything from that point on, and leaping in at the first pause.

* George Custerism. Intransigence and dogmatism; taking a last stand for one’s position on even minor items.

* Condescension and paternalism

* Running the show. Continually taking charge of tasks before others have the chance to volunteer.

* Graduate studentitis. Protectively storing key group information for one’s own use and benefit.

* Speaking for others. ‘A lot of us think that we should...” or “What so and so really meant was...”

---

**Ways we can be responsible to ourselves and others in groups**

* Not interrupting people who are speaking. We can even leave space after each speaker, counting to five before speaking.

* Becoming a good listener. Good listening is as important as good speaking. It's important not to withdraw when not speaking; good listening is active participation.

* Getting and giving support. We can help each other be aware of and interrupt patterns of domination, as well as affirm each other as we move away from those ways. It is important that men support and challenge each other, rather than asking women to do so. This will also allow women more space to break out of their own conditioned role of looking after men’s needs while ignoring their own.

* Not giving answers and solutions. We can give our opinions in a manner which says we believe our ideas to be valuable, but no more important than others’ ideas.

* Relaxing. The group will do fine without our anxiety attacks.

* Not speaking on every subject. We need not share every idea we have, at least not with the whole group.

* Not putting others down. We need to check ourselves when we’re about to attack or “one-up” another. We can ask ourselves, ‘Why am I doing this? What am I feeling? What do I need?”

* Interrupting others’ oppressive behavior. We should take responsibility for interrupting a brother who is exhibiting behavior which is oppressive to others and prohibits his own growth. It is no act of friendship to allow friends to continue dominating those around them. We need to learn caring and forthright ways of doing this.

- from an article by Bill Moyers, taken from the School of the Americas Direct Action Handbook
In order to build a world free from domination, we must use these principles and practices in our lives and in our work:

**Anti-Oppression Principles & Practices**

* Power and privilege can play out in our group dynamics in destructive ways. We must challenge supremacist practices which marginalize, exclude or de-humanize others. Privilege, like power can be used for positive purposes but should be used with awareness and care.

* We can only identify how power and privilege play out when we are conscious and committed to understanding how white supremacy, patriarchy, classism, heterosexism and all other systems of oppression affect each one of us. Each person who enjoys privileges granted by systems of prejudicial power (no matter how radical or revolutionary) must recognize the benefits and costs of their privileges. We must take responsibility for our prejudices and actions which perpetuate oppression.

* Until we are clearly committed to anti-oppression practice, all forms of oppression will continue to divide our movements and weaken our power.

* Developing anti-oppression practices is life-long work and requires a life-long commitment. No single workshop is sufficient for learning to change one’s behaviors. We are all vulnerable to being oppressive and we need to continuously struggle with these issues and behaviors.

* Dialogue and discussion are necessary and we need to learn how to listen non-defensively and communicate respectfully if we are going to have effective anti-oppression practice.

**Personal Practices**

* Challenge yourself to be honest and open and take risks to address racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia head on.

* When you witness or experience an abuse of power or oppression interrupt the behavior and address it on the spot or later, either one on one, or with a few allies; this is about ways to address oppressive behavior that will encourage change.

* Challenge the behavior, not the person. Be sensitive and promote open dialogue.

* Don’t generalize feelings, thoughts, behaviors, etc to a whole group. Recognize the when someone offers criticism around oppressive behavior, to treat it as a gift that it is rather than challenging the person or invalidating their experience. Give people the benefit of the doubt and don’t make assumptions.

* Be willing to lose a friend but try not to “thrown away” people who fuck up because you don’t want to be associated with them. Help them admit what they did and help them take responsibility for making reparations for their behavior.

* Challenge “macho bravado” and “rugged individualism” in yourself, your friends and in activism.
* Take on the “grunt” work of cooking, cleaning, set up, clean up, phone calls, e-mail, taking notes, doing support work, sending mailings. Take active responsibility for initiating, volunteering for and following through with this work.

* Understand that you will feel discomfort and pain as you face your part in oppression, and realize that this is a necessary part of the process of liberation and growth. We must support each other and be gentle with each other in this process.

* Don’t feel guilty, feel responsible. Being part of the problem doesn’t mean you can’t be an active part of the solution.

* Maintain these practices and contribute equal time and energy to building healthy relationships, both personal and political.

organizational practices

* Commit time for organizational discussions on discrimination and oppression

* Commit time to learn about each other, to share stories about our lives, our history, our culture, our experiences

* Set anti-oppression goals and continually evaluate whether or not you are meeting them

* Promote an anti-racist, anti-heterosexist, anti-transphobic, anti-ableist message and analysis in everything we do, in and outside of activist space

* Remember these are complex issues and they need adequate time and space

* Create opportunities for people to develop skills to communicate about oppression.

* Promote egalitarian group development by prioritizing skill shares and being aware of who tends to do what work, who gets recognized/supported/solicited.

* Respect different styles of leadership and communication

* Don’t push historically marginalized people to do things because of their oppressed group (tokenism); base it on their work, experience, and skills

* Make a collective commitment to hold people accountable for their behavior so that the organization can be a safe and nurturing place for all.

* Look at who is in the room and make a point to reach out to those who are not, but should be. Do this in the spirit of coordination and invitation. Understand when group can’t or don’t want to participate.

meeting practices

* It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that the space safe and welcoming for everyone and the responsibility of each group’s member to contribute to this.

* Become a good listener

* Don’t interrupt people who are speaking

* Be conscious of how your use of language may perpetuate racism, sexism, homophobia or ageism
* Try not to call people out because they are not speaking

* Be conscious of how much space you take up or how much you speak in a group. Practice “stepping up, stepping back” so we can each contribute to equal participation.

* Be careful of not hogging the show, speaking on every subject, speaking in capital letters, restating what others say or speaking for others

* Respect different views and opinions

* Balance race, gender and age participation

* People who haven’t yet spoken get priority

* It is the group’s responsibility to challenge racist, sexist, ageist, homophobic remarks.

* Use of the Space:

This space / meeting is open to all people who abide by our principles and practices. This space / meeting is not open to law enforcement officers or to the media without the consent of all participants. No violence or threats of violence (verbal or physical) will be tolerated. Violence includes racist, sexist, homophobic, and any oppressive remarks/behaviors. Respect for the health and well-being of everyone in the space, and the space itself. No actions or substances are allowed that would jeopardize this climate. Everyone is responsible to take part in maintaining the space. Leave your workspace / meeting space cleaner than you found it. This space, and all activities in it, are non-sectarian and non-authoritarian.

This document is compiled by Lisa Fithian from the “Anti-Racism Principles and Practices” by RiseUp DAN-LA, Overcoming Masculine Oppression by Bill Moyers and the FEMMAFESTO by a women’s affinity group in Philadelphia.

How to pitch reporters: grassroots communication tips pt. 1 by Jonathan Matthew Smucker

To “pitch” a reporter or assignment editor on a news-worthy story is to call them up-typically after sending them a news release-and attempt to persuade them that they should come out (or send a reporter) and cover whatever you want them to cover (probably an upcoming event that you’re planning). A good pitch call is at least as important as sending a good news release. With a call, unlike a news release, you are creating a memory of a human-to-human interaction. It’s your opportunity to make a strong impression so that when the reporter or editor goes into their morning or afternoon meeting-where they’re deciding which stories to cover-they are more likely to suggest covering your event.

Reporters and editors are busy people. They typically sound as if they are unhappy that you reached them by phone, and you’re lucky to get a full minute of their time. An effective pitch call makes a strong impression within the first five seconds, and makes at least the start of a compelling case within ten seconds.

Here’s an example of an ineffective pitch call:

Hi. My name is [name]. I’m calling about an event that we’re organizing. The event will be here in Manhattan. We’ll be doing performance in the streets, protesting the Iraq War. Iraq Veterans Against the War is organizing the event, along with their allies...

I would have been lucky to get that far without being interrupted.
Now, here’s an example of an effective pitch call:

Hi, I’m [name], calling on behalf of Iraq Veterans Against the War. Tomorrow combat veterans who recently returned from Iraq will be patrolling the streets of Manhattan, dressed in full uniform. They’re staging mock combat operations similar to what they experienced in Iraq - to show New Yorkers the realities of military occupation. Did you receive our press release?

While the second pitch is actually slightly longer than the first, it is packed with words that command attention and stimulate the imagination. Everything in the pitch floods the mind with powerfully vivid images. The first example, on the other hand, is bland. There’s no indication of what I’m even talking about until a few sentences in.

The effective example ends with a question: “Did you receive our press release?” The reporter or editor has to respond, and will typically do so in one of three ways: 1. Yes 2. No, 3. Maybe/I don’t know. You can respond to their answers in the following ways:
   Yes: Great. Will you be sending someone to cover it?
   No or Maybe: I’ll resend it right away. What email or fax number shall I send it to?

No matter how they have answered, you should close the call by making another brief, compelling pitch, this time one that speaks more explicitly to production considerations:

You should see these veterans in their uniforms doing these operations. It’s a very powerful visual - definitely send a photographer [if print]. They served their country, and now they want to show their fellow Americans what war is like. Will you be sending someone?

If the reporter or editor is non-committal, ask them if there is any additional information you can provide that would help them decide.

Writing an effective news release has some things in common with making an effective pitch call. It’s important to stack the most exciting stuff at the top: the most exciting language possible to describe the most compelling people and to spotlight the most captivating visuals. In a press release though, it is also important to weave the issue more substantively into the story. The modern media tends to be disturbingly lazy, and sometimes they simply quote from-or even print whole sections of-news releases rather than send a reporter. A good news release starts with the strongest news hooks (the stuff that catches them - an idea I’ll be exploring more in part 2 of this series) but weaves in the campaign message (what you want to communicate about your issue), so that, ideally, any one sentence could stand strongly on its own if that were the only sentence a news outlet chose to print.

A few more media tips:

When to hold your event: Late morning on a Tuesday or Wednesday is often the best time for an event to attract media attention. Monday can be bad because reporters are figuring out their schedule for the week. Tuesday or Wednesday gives you a day or two beforehand to make your final round of pitch calls. Fridays are typically a terrible day to try to attract media attention, as reporters are wrapping up their weeks, and the weekend skeleton crew is arriving. (This is why, when a company or government agency has negative news that they must make public, but they want to minimize news coverage, they typically release it on a Friday at 5pm.) If your event must be at another time (e.g. on the weekend or in the evening), then be sure to pitch all the harder, as they may have to go to greater lengths to send a reporter.
When to call: Early and often. If you’re calling about an event, and you know about it a month ahead of time, send your first advisory then to get it on editors’ radar screens (and calendars) early. Make your first round of calls to accompany the advisory. Send it again at two weeks out, perhaps with a little more info. Send it a week before; then two days before; then again the morning of. Always send the release and make follow-up calls first thing in the morning (7-8am) when possible - to hit morning meetings where assignments are often determined. Additionally, if you are organizing an event where you want a lot of people, then find out if your local papers, weeklies, etc. have a public community calendar where you can list your event.

Who to call: If you don’t already have a press list, see if you can “borrow” one from another grassroots organization that does. If you can’t borrow a list, don’t worry, just look up all your local media outlets online or in the phone book, and start calling. The default is to call and ask for the assignment editor. However, pitching specific reporters can be more effective. So, it pays to familiarize yourself with the reporters for your local news outlets; notice who covers what “beats”; and start calling the reporters who you think will be interested in your story. Once a reporter has covered you once, be sure to call them next time around. Think of your press list as a dynamic document. Keep good notes, including links to past coverage.

Who should call: Ideally the folks who are doing the pitching are folks who can speak compellingly about the issue; who are prepared to do an interview on the spot, should the opportunity arise. When possible, it’s good for the pitch caller to have a level of authority on the issue. In the example I provided above, of Iraq Veterans Against the War, it would be ideal for the person doing the calling to be a veteran. However, anyone making pitch calls is better than no one making pitch calls. And it’s important to train new people too. One thing you can do is assign “lower priority / lower stake” news outlets to new folks, so that they have the opportunity to make their first pitch calls without as much pressure. Role playing pitch calls is also helpful for building confidence and refining your pitch.

Narrative Tools

Excited to tell folks about Flood the System?

We’ve created a narrative image that uses a water metaphor to explore the dynamics of escalated action with simple symbols and universal concepts. These include rain, storms, rivers, streams, floods, and tides. Not all of us share the same movement language or organizing vocabulary, but these words and symbols can help us get on the same page about what Flood the System is, how to engage with it, and why it matters.

Copy the last page of this booklet and use the water story to bring people into the work. Download a slideshow that walks you through the graphic symbols at floodthesystem.net. Email artsandculture@floodthesystem.net with questions!
FLOOD the system

why
clouds
storms
muddy waters
aquifer

how
pressure systems
rain
streams
watershed gatherings
action councils (pools of people)
continental river council

what
rapids actions
low tide
flood actions
high tide
2016

a VISION for movement momentum