OUTREACH IN CYNICAL & LONELY TIMES (3 HOURS)

OVERVIEW
"If our organizations are not growing, we are dying." This is a mantra that was drilled into many of us as young organizers. How do we do this inside of - and not just in spite of - the conditions we live in? How do we confront the plague of cliquishness and boldly go out and find our people across difference, politics, and experience? The question of growing the organization is the responsibility of all members, with different people playing different parts. This workshop begins to address some of these questions and practices.

GOALS
- To learn how to think about and do outreach
- To learn to make and use an outreach plan
- To troubleshoot issues or challenges your team faces around outreach
- To learn how to organize our teams to best recruit and retain new people

TIME NEEDED
3 hours, or can be broken up over multiple sessions

MATERIALS NEEDED
- Flip charts, tape, markers to capture conversation, writing tools and blank paper for participants if needed
- Handout: Outreach Worksheet (p. 55)

FRAMING
We will use this time to talk about finding our people and making a plan to bring them into our work, team, or group. We believe in organization, we believe that our power lies in our numbers, and we know that most people aren’t part of organizations right now. Part of our ongoing, sustained work in our groups is to bring more people in so we can achieve our shared purpose. It is one of the hardest things, and also one of the most important things. Otherwise, we are just a clique.
THE LOW ROAD
MARGE PIERCY

What can they do to you?
Whatever they want...

They can set you up, bust you,
they can break your fingers,
burn your brain with electricity,
blur you with drugs till you
can’t walk, can’t remember,
they can take away your children,
wall up your lover;
they can do anything you can’t stop them doing.

How can you stop them?
Alone you can fight, you can refuse.
You can take whatever revenge you can
but they roll right over you.
But two people fighting back to back
can cut through a mob
a snake-dancing fire
can break a cordon,
termites can bring down a mansion.

Two people can keep each other sane
can give support, conviction,
love, massage, hope, sex.

Three people are a delegation
a cell, a wedge.
With four you can play games
and start a collective.
With six you can rent a whole house
have pie for dinner with no seconds
and make your own music.

Thirteen makes a circle,
a hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity
and your own newsletter;
ten thousand community
and your own papers;
a hundred thousand,
a network of communities;
a million, our own world.

It goes one at a time.
It starts when you care to act.
It starts when you do it again
after they say no.
It starts when you say We
and know who you mean;
and each day you mean
one more.

Full group go-around:
• When have you joined something?
• Who invited you?
• Why did you join?
• Did you stay?

If time or interest allow, you can also ask:
• When have you done outreach before?
• What did you do?
• How did it go?

This could also be done in pairs or groups of three.

Pull out themes around the reasons people joined,
such as:
• They were asked/invited
• Friends/social relationships
• Interests
• Particular political urgency
• And more

OUTREACH: WHAT IS IT?
Ask the group or just share definition:

• Getting the word about your work out to
your audience or base and creating an on-
ramp for people to join in that work.
• Outreach is sometimes used interchangeably
with base-building, advertising, or
recruitment. All groups do outreach unless
they are secret societies, cliques, or cadres.
However, not all groups build base. Many
groups are not necessarily looking for new
leaders or to increase their numbers.
• Remember our power comes from people!
We are organized people going up against
organized capital.
NAMING THE CONDITIONS OF THIS TIME
Ask these questions in the full group and scribe answers on flip chart paper:

• What is true about organizing in this time and how does that affect our outreach?
• What are we dealing with right now that makes it easier and harder to do outreach than in past eras (such as before the cell phone, or earlier)?

Consider:

• Phone addiction and isolation
• Folks are working many hours and sometimes multiple jobs
• Many people are not in organizations, but are more interested in “networks”
• High rates of alcohol and substance addiction
• Suicidal tendencies are also very high
• Folks are over-reliant on social media to “get the word out.” While social media can allow us to reach a lot more people, we know personal connections and offering folks meaningful ways to get involved is how we recruit future leaders. It’s a double-edged sword.

• Given these truths and based on these times, how do we need to think and act differently with our outreach?
• Where must we be extra vigilant and proactive?
You can also come to these questions at the end.

Consider:

• The world is shrinking because of social media, and at the same time people are more lonely
• We lack rigor, persistence, and follow-up in our outreach practices
• Fear results in folks not doing outreach or only talking to friends or people “like us”
• Internally, we’re pretty disorganized and bad at delegating and having things for people to do, resulting in some people acting like activist martyrs while others drift away
• We talk too much and don’t know how to observe, listen, and see context clues (when we engage new people, we should be listening 80% of the time and talking only 20%!
• For middle- and upper-class whites, folks have been trained to be comfortable in homogeneity and racial entitlement. Discomfort with or fear of Black people (which can look like lack of eye contact, white folks lacking situational awareness or monologuing, and other behaviors) means folks don’t do outreach out of desire to obscure that fear.

• What are some best practices we can do organizationally or institutionally to ensure that building new relationships and recruiting new people is a constant part of the work?
• What are some “guard rails” we can put in place to prevent us from slipping into insularity?
Consider:
- Is recruitment built into our theory of change and organizing model? Looking back at WOZA, we see that recruiting new people and fully welcoming them into the organization (in this case through training) is central to their organizational DNA.

**PREPARING FOR AN OUTREACH PLAN**

- **Decide on your systems** for recruitment and absorption so they are baked into your infrastructure, not just based on the personal interest or enthusiasm of individuals.
  - Clarify your on-ramp(s) to participation for new people and roles for your team members from beginning to end. For example, you could have one role be to coordinate the outreach team and another to welcome and load people in.
  - Consider having one person (or a pair of people) hold onto your big contact list and be responsible for data entry. With one person to coordinate and delegate, a bigger team can be mobilized to do outreach.
  - Update your list of volunteer / member needs quarterly, so it’s clear where people can plug in.

- **Decide how social media will be part of** your outreach strategy, not be the outreach strategy

- **Clarify your base and constituency** if needed. Your constituency are people who are impacted by whatever it is you work around; base are people that already know about you. You can dig deeper into this if helpful for your group:
  - Who is your constituency?
  - Who isn’t in your constituency?
  - Who is part of your base (follows you on social media, is on your email list, etc.)?
  - How does your social location/identity and experience shape your understanding of outreach and your approaches?

- **Confirm audience, constituency, event or outreach goals.** We need goals! We tip towards being so relational that we refuse to have goals or metrics. We can be relationship-focused and still have target numbers, because we have countless people to organize and invite into movement.
  - Who are you targeting?
  - If organizing outreach for an event, what’s your attendance goal?
  - **Observe this general rule of thumb for events:** If you want 50, you have to get 100 commitments, and to get 100 commitments, you need 200 invites.
THREE WAYS TO LOOK AT OUTREACH AND RETENTION (Keeping the people you got)

We will be focusing on #3 for much of this time, but #1 and #2 need to be attended to as well.

1. **How will we retain and/or engage our existing list?** What do we know it takes to turn our people out? What is the difference between outreach, retention, engagement? Come up with examples.

2. **How will we reach out to and engage aligned organizations, groups, and institutions?** What are the existing relationships that each person in the group can leverage (see worksheet opposite)?

3. **How will we find our people we haven’t met yet?** This is sometimes called cold or street outreach. What are the ways we can do this?
   - Street preaching
   - Guerilla theater
   - Public performance or spectacle
   - Tabling
   - Making announcements at clubs, parties, or events
   - Standing on a street corner
   - Door knocking / canvassing

FINDING OUR FOLKS MAPPING ACTIVITY

Before beginning this mapping exercise, establish for what you are recruiting and your target constituency.

First, break people into groups of three or four. Begin with solo brainstorming: *Where in your town or area are your people self-organized?* (This is helping us address questions #2 and #3 from the list above.) Then, work as a small group to make a map together of places, organizations, or events where our people gather and self-organize.

Your map should change based on the seasons, political conditions, and many other factors. You can invite people to share their actual relationships to your constituency and target audience in their small groups, so they can identify people’s relationships (and, in some cases, lack of relationships).

Finally, prioritize the brilliance on your map into your best outreach plan, filling in the worksheet opposite!

Consider: Specific social service agencies or state agencies, public transportation hubs, specific bars or clubs, specific neighborhoods, specific public spaces. Domestic worker organizers often do outreach at parks, libraries, and bus stops or on public transportation where a lot of their constituency is. Queer and trans youth of color organizers in Atlanta used to go to Piedmont Park during and after school, as well as a new shopping district in a wealthy part of mid-town, because that is where that constituency gathered.
What is your target constituency? (who are the people you need?)

Where are they?

What are the locations, spaces, organizations, or institutions where these folks congregate or consistently are?

How does timing (of the day, week, or month) or seasonality affect this?

How many people do you need?

What is your target attendance, turn out, or participation?

If ___ is the target, multiply that by two:

This is how many confirmations you need.

Now, multiply this number by two:

These are the number of invitations you need to circulate!

Now, go through your phone...

List the names of ten people you know you could reach out to:

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Some options for report-backs:
- Teams could present and you could all vote on the best plan.
- Teams could present and your outreach team (or new outreach point person!) could collect and synthesize the work.
- Teams could present and you could play a game where the team gets a point for one place or idea that no other group had.

SUMMARY & KEY TAKEAWAYS
Write these key takeaways up on a flip chart. To be successful you need to:
- **Plan ahead and build routine practices.** This is a time to be like the Jehovah’s Witnesses: always have literature, be profoundly consistent, and go to where the people are (such as, at home!).
- **Make a good tracking system for data.** When meeting people, always collect contact information, and have one consistent place all that contact information actually goes.
- **Build coherent systems around roles.** Clarify on-ramps to participation and roles for team members from beginning to end.
- **Bake it in.** Like WOZA, ensure recruiting new people and fully welcoming them into the work is central and systematized.
- **Have goals.** Make them specific.
- **Look for your people where they are.**
- **Practice makes perfect, and it will always be hard.**

NEXT STEPS
- Invite people do the Outreach Worksheet for identifying their individual contacts and leveraging resources.
- If the group hasn’t yet, make space to address the question: How will our outreach plan function?

CLOSING QUESTIONS
- What’s giving you hope?
- Where do you see promise?
- How is that connected to outreach?