INFRASTRUCTURE, PART 2: ROLES & COORDINATION
[2 HOURS]

OVERVIEW
In this second session devoted to infrastructure, we’re really going to zoom in on roles. Having clear and established roles can help our organizations maintain long term structures, keep people engaged, and provide transparency around decision-making and who does what work.

Roles also serve as one of our “guard rails” against a host of ills: cliquishness, unaccountability (not doing what we said we’d do), and power hoarding, to name a few. This is because they are grounded in function and skills, rather than in the position or personality of individuals.

We know that some of the most emotionally fraught and interpersonally tumultuous challenges we face in our organizations are actually the result of how our structures are built and maintained. When we fail to address structural issues at the structural level, then they become personalized and tear at the fabric of relationships we know we need to fortify us and sustain our work.

GOALS
• To unpack the value of clear and consistent roles in the work of democratic groups
• To inventory current practices against clear metrics of success
• To give groups time to make proactive, forward looking infrastructure plans

TIME NEEDED
2 hours

MATERIALS NEEDED
Flip chart, markers, writing tools for participants. Pre-made scenario sheets. Plotting Our Future handout (p. 80).

READINGS/RESOURCES
• Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown (p. 250)
• Preparing the Space: Facilitation Tips & Tricks (p. 5 of this workbook)
• The Revolution Will Not Be Funded by INCITE Women of Color Against Violence

FRAMING
Open by asking folks to share what came up for them since the last meeting in regards to question 5, p. 76: How do we become collectively thoughtful about who needs to know what? Have folks respond in large group. Then forecast where this session is headed: an in-depth exploration of the role of roles.
SCENARIOS

Next, break people into groups of three or four. Write up each of the following scenarios on butcher paper, and give each group a different scenario to respond to:

Scenario 1: This group is only making decisions on a single WhatsApp thread, and even people that only came to one meeting are included.

Scenario 2: As a member of group 2, you run into someone at the grocery store who says they signed up with your group somehow a long time ago. They confront you about never hearing back.

Scenario 3: The person in group 3 with the most experience has their hands in everything.

Scenario 4: This group has endless internal meetings but little or no outward-facing work. Meanwhile, people are waiting in the wings, eager to plug in.

Scenario 5: It’s a Google Doc hellscap! Everything this group has made is everywhere and nowhere.

In small groups, ask folks to discuss:

• What are the roles needed to address this scenario?

• What are the skills that really exist within your group to address this?

• What are the skills that would still be needed within your group to address this?

• Finally, bring a proposal for how the group in the scenario could move forward.

PLOTTING OUR FUTURE

Print out or write up the following prompts, and break people out to chart and discuss one of them:

1. How will it function?

Based on what we did in the last workshop and the scenarios above, how could we better track and engage:

• Our outreach work?

• The people we actually bring in?

• Our individual and team structures? (What are the roles and what is the flow?)

Pick one area to focus on and apply some of what we’ve just learned.

2. What are your metrics for internal success with your team?

They might be implicit and need to be made explicit, or they might need to be clarified or negotiated. Consider:

• Does everyone have everyone’s contact info?

• Are people on top of their cross-talk, or is one person asked to be the switchboard between people?

• Who has access to your list of contact information, and how often is it updated?

• When do people get added to your communications platforms, and by whom?

• Where are your materials, minutes, etc.? Are they organized? Can we find anything?
PLOTTING Our Future

How can we better track and engage our outreach work? How can we better track and engage the people we actually bring in? How can we better track and engage our individual and team structures? What are the roles and what is the flow?

What are the metrics for internal success we will use? Check the ones that are already true, and add your own metrics. Write notes about what’s needed or what’s working well.

___ Everyone has everyone else’s contact info

___ We cross-talk with ease and no one has to play switchboard

___ We know who has access to our contact list

___ Our contact list is regularly updated

___ We have clarity about when and by whom new people get added to our communications platforms

___ We all know how to access our filing system, including meeting minutes

___ Our filing system is well organized

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We don’t want to be stars
MAKING SENSE OF “NON-PROFITIZATION”

Groups and organizations aren’t the same as non-profits. Non-profits have 501(c)3 tax exemption, a distinction made by the IRS and federal government to make “charitable” organizations a place for foundations (often formed as tax shelters for the super wealthy) to invest their resources.

Now, with a shredded safety net, nonprofits are being asked to do the work of the state, providing essential services to people on the margins of our economies. They are often controlled, explicitly or implicitly, by foundations and that can push toward centrist and moderation. Foundations are tax shelters for the 1%, and come with rules, bureaucracy, and controls on how ‘we’ can use ‘their’ money (though we know the wealth they have was stolen from our people to begin with). Additionally, the vast majority of foundations only fund 501(c)3 work: “charity” work that effectively forbids (c)3s from doing anything “political,” including endorsing or condemning politicians or those running for office. This often ties our hands, and this is by design. There are strings attached with foundation money that are nonexistent when we do grassroots fundraising.

Non-profitization has in some cases also led to the professionalization of organizing, and people expecting that all organizing work can or should come with a paycheck. Within movement, there is a loathing and criticism of non-profit structures sometimes coupled with a contradictory expectation that all non-profits should pay everyone or anyone for any work they ever do with an organization. That simply isn’t the case, and it isn’t possible. The number of organizers and leaders and people we need in order to bring about the changes we seek to make in this world far exceed the number of non-profit organizing jobs. Organizing is a vocation, a calling, and a mandate, not a just a job. Looking to history and to people’s movements in other parts of the world reminds us of this.

A group can be any set of people organized around a common interest, goal, or purpose, from a cop watch to a play group to a dance team to a committee working to get someone elected. You don’t need to be a nonprofit to organize! You can get a fiscal sponsor: a 501(c)3 non-profit group that lends their tax status (like an umbrella) to another, usually smaller and more grassroots group, so the latter can get grants. Or, figure out other creative ways to deal with money!

HOMEWORK

Make three sample working agreements about your group’s infrastructure: information, communication, decision-making, roles, or coordination. Then, have a one-on-one conversation about your three sample agreements with someone else in the group. From the six you’ve made between you, choose your top two or three, and bring them to the next meeting as proposals for long-term group working agreements. Alternatively, call someone over 60 and interview them about how they used to organize themselves in analogue times (in terms of information, communication, or coordination). Draw a picture of how they did it, and bring it to the next meeting to share.

BUILDING THE TEAM OF THE WILLING