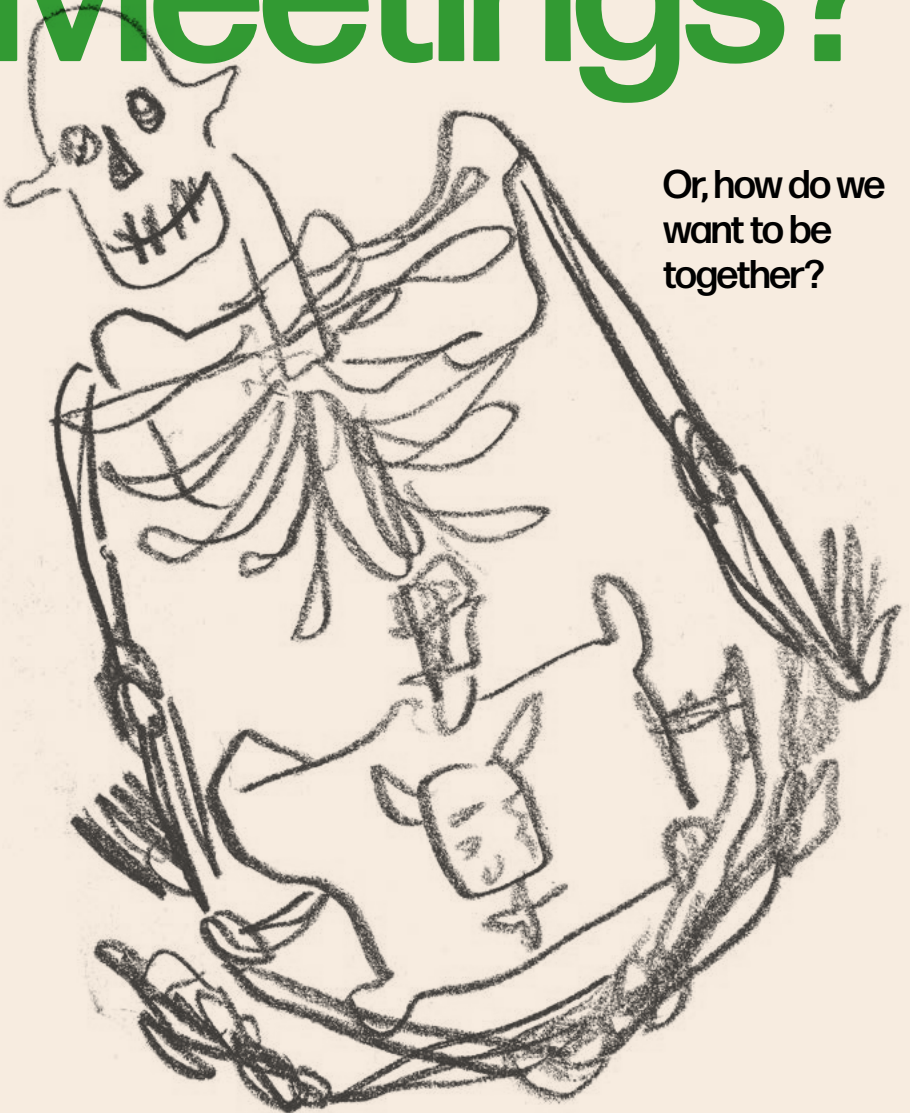


SYLLABUS

# What Are Meetings?

Or, how do we  
want to be  
together?



FACILITATED BY **Danny Spitzberg**

This syllabus for “What Are Meetings?” is based on a learning group & reading club organized and facilitated in November/December 2024 by Danny Spitzberg. Danny is a sociologist interested in cooperatives, personal narratives, resisting cultural assimilation, and community research methods. He currently works at UC Berkeley on a study about how worker ownership improves job quality and firm performance in historically low-wage sectors. Before that, he facilitated worker-led research with a staffing and training co-op. Danny lives in San Francisco with his wife.

This learning group & reading club included many wonderful individuals, some of whom contributed to the creation of this syllabus:

Claire deVroede

Brenna Fitzpatrick

Eli Cohen

Kailee Sharpe

Megan Grant

Tessa Stapp

Sasha Leitmann

Kelly Pendergrast

Brad Borevitz

Chris Lezama

Elizabeth Meiklejohn

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Cover illustration created at the final meeting by  
Tatiana Luboviski-Acosta

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# WHAT ARE MEETINGS?

*Or, how do we want to be together?*

This is a syllabus for a series of meetings about meetings. It is based on a Fall/Winter 2024 learning club & reading group in the inaugural program at Bathers Library in Oakland, California. If you're reading this syllabus, you may be interested in meetings, too!

I organized this learning club & reading group because I had intended for several years to read the civil rights era social history book "Freedom is an Endless Meeting" (2002) and other material that felt alive and exciting, almost requiring in-person discussion. It also seemed silly to read about the importance of meetings alone, out of context, in a vacuum.

So, what are meetings? I believe we learned that meetings are how we want to be together.

But, take note! Different contexts, groups, and desires can lead to very different meetings. Twelve of us came together for four 90-minute weekly meetings. We were almost all strangers to one another, mainly familiar with Bathers Library. Our group included many identities, including locals and immigrants, newcomers and longtimers, baristas, clinical nurses, film producers, and textile engineers. In addition to the reading material, we also made reference to Occupy meetings, Quaker meetings, union meetings, Zoom meetings, and more. I structured our first meeting for participants to reflect on past experiences, discuss our interests, and designate themes for three subsequent meetings: 2) objectives and procedures, 3) feelings and relationships, and 4) materiality and embodiment.

After our fourth and final meeting, a participant who works as a tenant attorney said, "I joined in part because I really fucking hate meetings deep in my bones but also unfortunately for me my politics sort of fall on the side of endless meetings, so it was somewhat therapeutic to explore that razor's edge."

While this syllabus is based on our experience, we made it for you to use. It probably works best for a group of 12 to 18 participants holding three to six weekly meetings. However, if you want to go on field trips or organize, build skills, or organize a campaign together, you might need more meetings, and more time. If you want to do a lecture, you might invite more people for just one meeting. In any case, let me know how it goes! My email is [daspitzberg@gmail.com](mailto:daspitzberg@gmail.com).

Danny Spitzberg, Spring 2025

*Freedom is an Endless Meeting*  
by Francesca Poletta  
argues that meetings  
are the fundamental unit  
of democracy, and the  
book cover gestures at  
that ideal. Meanwhile,  
ancient television  
enjoyers remember  
Alec Baldwin as a cliché  
corporate executive  
on *30 Rock* quoting from  
*Meetings Magazine*. What do  
we want from meetings?  
What do they want from  
us? Suggested readings  
and light snacks  
provided.

# STRUCTURE AND FLOW FOR OUR FIRST MEETING

## MEETING #1: WELCOME

12 of us gathered at 6:30 on a Tuesday. We sat in a mix of chairs arranged around two folding tables with plates of freshly-baked chocolate chip sesame cookies that most people agreed were delicious and not too burnt.

We also passed around printed packets of initial reading materials, which we also stored and shared digitally before the meeting.

EXCERPTS FROM *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*  
by Francesca Poletta, 2002

EXCERPTS FROM *The Participant*  
by Chris Kelty, 2019

It's Not 'Them' – It's Us!  
by Betsy Leondar-Wright, 2006

Who Invited Robert?  
by Taylor Hines, 2024

There are three types of meetings  
by Cam Daigle, 2022

*How to Hold a Good Meeting: Rusty's Rules of Order*  
by the IWW, 2021

Our meeting began with introductions and intentions, and ended with themes for three future meetings and co-curators. Along the way, we shared experiences in past meetings and explored common interests.

To start, I set intentions:

“We’re all here out of an interest in a history and theory of meetings, but most of us don’t know one another yet. So,



let's set a few intentions: 1) Assume good intentions, and 2) try not to get too self-conscious about being in a meeting about meetings!"

Then, we did introductions:

"Go around in a circle and say your name, where you're coming from or how you're arriving at this meeting, and your favorite sauce."

To gather and organize shared interests, we formed groups of three to discuss past experiences with meetings for about 20 minutes. The discussion prompt:

"Think of the most unenjoyable, unproductive meeting you've witnessed at work, as part of a job. It may have been an hour, in-person, with coworkers. You may have been part of a captive audience, not facilitating the meeting, but also not taking notes. What was it like? How did it feel? Describe a few reasons that made that meeting unenjoyable and unproductive. Now, think of the most unenjoyable, unproductive meeting in a neighborhood or community context. Describe a few more reasons."

On sticky notes, we wrote down the reasons we distilled from discussion about why past meetings were so unenjoyable and unproductive. Most of us had two or three reasons, some had over a dozen.

Then, to generate topics and themes for future sessions, we shared a few examples out loud with the whole group. We placed all of the sticky notes on one table and organized them into clusters, many hands making light work of the awkward task.

To help cluster the reasons together, I put down stickies with more abstract themes:

Relationships

Proposals/Motions

Material Interests

Discussion/Deliberation

Goal/Agendas

Conflict and Power

Facilitation

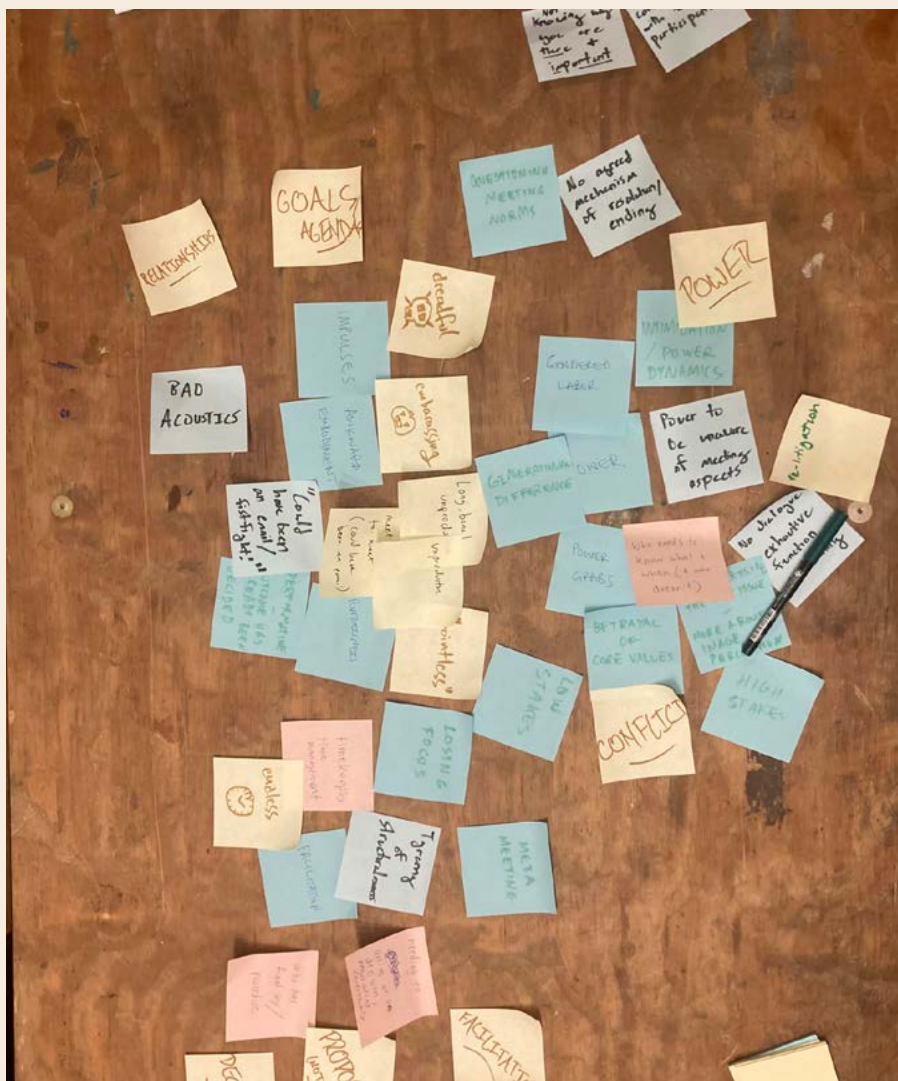
Decisions/Resolutions



Based on the clusters of sticky notes we organized, we came up with several collective ideas for our next three sessions, in order of what's most interesting and most developed, with names of people who offered to co-curate/co-facilitate:

2. Objectives and procedures, with Elizabeth
3. Feelings and relationships, with Brad
4. Materiality and embodiment, with Chris

Each theme inspired selections from initial reading material, plus new material.



# THEMES AND AGENDAS FOR OUR SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

Over the coming three weeks, we explored new themes and readings through new approaches.

## MEETING #2: OBJECTIVES AND PROTOCOLS

### READING MATERIAL

“There are three types of meetings”  
by Cam Daigle, 2022

Good Documentation Practices  
by University of Rochester OHSP

We explored this theme by discussing, choreographing, and performing the three types of meetings described in Cam Daigle’s article “There are three types of meetings” (2022): a ‘status’ meeting, a ‘feedback’ meeting, and a ‘decision’ meeting.

We shared by doing two rounds with everyone welcome to share thoughts on the readings for about 40 minutes. Then, we spent 20 minutes discussing, choreographing, and performing the three types of meetings. The prompt for the ‘status meeting’ was, “How is this reading group going so far?” We stress-tested the ‘status meeting’ until the format broke and flowed into a ‘feedback meeting’, which subsequently broke into a ‘decision meeting’.

Along the way, and especially towards the end, we had some animated, even agitated discussion about the highly-structured nature of what we were actually doing in our meetings so far, which gave way to an excited proposal for organizing the third meeting with an intentional structurelessness in the form of a dialogue.

## MEETING #3: FEELINGS AND RELATIONSHIPS

### READING MATERIAL

EXCERPTS FROM *On Dialogue*  
by David Bohm (2004)

We explored this theme by following the principles of dialogue as put forth by David Bohm in “On Dialogue” (2004), suspending judgement but following frustration around conflicts in identity to explore how to be together.

Brad sent around the following blurb before the session: “Identification with our opinions leads us to have conflict and feel (negative) emotions when in conversation with others who hold different opinions. The practice of dialogue is finding other more creative ways to hold differences in a group... to expect conflict and reaction, and learn to do something interesting with it together. Dialogue is really not a meeting, per se. It is not meant to be deliberative. It’s what might happen if deliberation is set aside.”

Before the meeting, we removed the tables and arranged the chairs in a circle. There were no timed portions or breakout groups. We all discussed the reading, the role and stakes of rules and objectives in a meeting, and whether or not it was possible to truly create a meeting devoid of them. Brad noted several conflicts that arose during the meeting, which led to a discussion around frustration and the suspension of judgment, with the diffuse aim of exploring new ways of being together.

## MEETING #4: EMBODIMENT AND MATERIALITY

### READING MATERIAL

Some of Us Had Been Threatening Our Friend Colby  
by Donald Barthelme (1973)

Meetings as Performance Art  
by David Layton (2021)

We explored this theme through yet more dialogue, with our chairs arranged in a circle. Our conversation ranged from venue and space/place for meetings, an extended analysis of “side eye” and DMs and other subtle or secret communication among peers, and ways we build trust with certain people and groups. This meeting felt relatively effortless, and even therapeutic.

At this point, we were no longer strangers in a reading group & learning club. To celebrate our time together, I arranged a variety of cheesecakes and a vegan custard on an orange metal utility table and wheeled it into the circle. We spent another half-hour or so just being together. After discussing the embodied and material aspects of in-person meetings, it made for an important moment, a transition out of structured meetings and into whatever would come next. We committed to come back together in a few months for a reunion, just to be together.

# READING LIST

EXCERPTS FROM *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*  
by Francesca Poletta, 2002

EXCERPTS FROM *The Participant*  
by Chris Kelty, 2019

It's Not 'Them' – It's Us!  
by Betsy Leondar-Wright, 2006

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by Donald Barthelme (1973)

Meetings as Performance Art  
by David Layton (2021)

Access copies of all readings in our shared [Google Drive](#)  
and feel free to add your own!







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in my bones but also  
unfortunately for me my  
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