

An assembly is a space for us to talk about participatory community initiatives—about concrete things that we can do together to address our shared needs. Our hope is that in two hours, we will all understand each other better and have a sense of what we can do together.

# How to Organize an Assembly

Preparing to Respond in an Era of Disasters and Despotism



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## Ingredients

- communities? How do we respond when they murder another person or seek to soak up more resources?
- What forms of solidarity and support can we enact to preserve reproductive autonomy, whatever the laws may be?
- A COMFORTABLE MEETING SPACE
- A LARGE WHITEBOARD OR FLIP PAD, PLUS MARKERS
- PENS AND PAPER TO HAND OUT
- SNACKS
- NAMETAGS OR TAPE AND MARKERS FOR MAKING NAMETAGS

## Before the Assembly

First, talk with the people you already work closely with. Get on the same page about what kind of assembly you want to organize, who you want to invite, and what you want to achieve together.

Is your chief goal to enable people to get to know each other better? To draw new people into existing projects? To establish new working groups around pressing issues? To formulate a collective strategy spanning different groups and tendencies?

Then announce your assembly. Nowadays, everyone relies on social media to spread the word—but if you want to reach people outside your usual circles, you should also make handbills that you can distribute in person. If you want to organize with a modicum of confidentiality rather than turning out the largest possible crowd, you could limit your announcement to handbills and Signal messages. Generally speaking, you'll want to maximize the number of earnest participants while keeping your assembly off the radar of people with bad intentions.

Hopefully, you're already connected to local projects that have some reach through which to make the announcement. These could include mutual aid projects, community spaces, bands, Signal loops, reading groups, DJs, student groups. Consider approaching other groups at the outset and inviting them to help organize or at least publicize the assembly. The more different groups are on board from the beginning, the wider the range of people you will bring together, and the less the gathering will feel like the private property of any one group.

Timing is everything. If you want to bring people together in response to urgent news, you have to announce your assembly while the news is fresh and people are still prepared to change their priorities. Ideally, they should hear about your assembly within a few hours of whatever news you are responding to, and it should take

place soon enough that it will still feel urgent.

In the announcement, make it clear what the subject and character of the assembly will be and what people should bring with them (e.g., a chair, a snack, a proposal, a question).

Choose a space that will be accessible to everyone who might want to participate. Will people be warm enough, comfortable enough? Is there seating? A public park with covered areas and restrooms could work—or, if inclement weather could be an issue, consider a community center. You might be able to reserve a room at a library or arrange with someone who runs a music venue to let you use the space during off hours. Whatever you choose, the space should feel equally inviting to everyone you want there.

Prepare for success. Don't underestimate the number of people who might come. This might be your only chance to make contact with some of them. You'll want to impress them with the quality of your organizing, and you'll want it to be easy for them to identify a role they can play. Make sure you have enough fliers, zines, snacks, and masks for everyone.

Make sure people will be able to hear each other. How are the acoustics in the space? Is there likely to be background noise? Should you bring a microphone and portable speaker? Is there reliable electricity, or will you need to bring a power source, as well? Will you need a visible place to write important information? Will people need to be able to make notes themselves?

If you are in a multilingual community, consider accommodating multiple languages. Don't promise more than you can deliver—if you advertise the assembly in multiple languages, make sure that there will be translators prepared to interpret in each of them. If it's just a matter of translating for a few people, a couple skilled translators may be able to quietly offer simultaneous translation. If there are many people participating who don't share a language in common, you'll have to have an interpreter offer consecutive translation; bear in mind that this will more than double how long everything takes.

Have a plan to deal with disruption. One of the few advantages of a private venue is that it will be considerably easier to remove people who should not be there.

example, mass disruptive mobilization could count as a "win" whether or not it changes a specific policy in the short term.)

- What medicines are likely to be threatened? What specific medicines do our community members need? Can we manufacture them? Can we get them prescribed and stockpile them? How can we distribute them? Are there other ways we can support community health?
- How can we start preparing to impede mass deportations? What can we do to make every deportation a spectacle and to encourage mass non-compliance with the mercenaries deputized to carry out these orders?
- What networks already exist to resist the criminalization of migration? Do we know people who are familiar with the terrain? What infrastructure already exists in these communities and what resources would be helpful? (For example, communications networks, vehicles, housing, data management, lawyers.)
- Beyond specific state functions, what enables, emboldens, and extends Trump's presidency into our everyday lives? How do we fight Trump and small-time fascists simultaneously, in such a way that a victory against one will aid us against the other?
- We have seen speech and dissent violently repressed from the demonstrations in solidarity with Palestine to the Stop Cop City movement. How can we organize collective defense and solidarity in the face of increased criminalization of social justice movements? What infrastructure can we create now?
- As we face a worsening economy, likely including the return of inflation and the consequences of new tariffs, how can we assure that rage is directed towards those exploiting workers rather than towards scapegoats? How can we expand organization among tenants, workers, and others?
- How can we make sure that trans and queer people are safe? How can we ensure adequate medical care?
- As civil society ceases to be an arena for people to resolve disagreements and we increasingly live in a world determined by heavily armed police, how can we protect our

- What is a sustainable level of engagement for you? What risks are you willing to take? Which fights are you willing to make sacrifices to participate in? Which fights will you sit out?

### Local Context

- What resources, skills, and capacities do we already have covered? Which ones do we need to cultivate?
- How do we conserve our energy to be able to intervene decisively when it is necessary, instead of reacting to every indignity?
- Who are the people around us who are isolated? How do we cultivate connections with them?
- Who is most likely to be targeted and affected by Trump? What can we do to build power with them?
- How do we make the most of our resources? How can we add to them?
- What is our collective sense of what makes life worth living? What increases our joy?
- Which Trump policy is most likely both to affect your local community and to be unpopular? How can you begin organizing to subvert it?
- How do we prevent the normalization of fascism?

### Systems Thinking

- Do you think Trump can effectively govern? If not, what are the state functions that we most want to collapse, and are any of them likely to be compromised by Trump either intentionally or through dysfunction? What are the state functions that we depend on most, and how can we build alternatives to them?
- What new possibilities open up with a second Trump presidency? What is different, what remains the same?
- Given a coming Trump presidency, what are the things that need immediate attention? What can we begin planning longer responses to?
- What will Trump likely do in the first 100 days, and which moves are we best situated to fight back against? Which issues or tactics are most likely to deliver us a decisive win early on? What is our definition of winning? (For

Think about how to create an environment that will make people feel at home and bring out the best in them. Snacks, warm drinks, and tasteful décor can go a long way. If you want to offer reading material, you can choose from a wide array of zines to print from [crimethinc.com/zines](http://crimethinc.com/zines)

At the beginning of the event, you'll want to welcome everyone and make it clear what the parameters of the space are. For example:

Welcome everyone! We are so glad each of you has come. In order to ensure that everyone will be comfortable, there will be no filming or recording here. This is a space for us to talk about participatory community initiatives—about concrete things that we can do together to address our shared needs. We will not be talking about or recruiting for political parties of any kind; there are plenty of other spaces for that. Our hope is that in two hours, we will all understand each other better and have a sense of what we can do together.

Spell out how you intend to structure the time. Don't overschedule! Make time and space for informal conversation before and after the main event. Often, the most important initiatives arise out of informal conversation by the snack table.

Be clear from the outset whether the assembly is intended to be a decision-making space, and if so, what the process for making decisions will be. It can be difficult to reach consensus in an open assembly comprised of a diverse crowd without preexisting shared commitments; it may make more sense to focus on sharing information and ideas so that the participants can make decisions and take on commitments autonomously. If you are organizing an open assembly, it may not make sense to think of it as a single social body, but rather as a space of encounter where multiple social bodies can form, interchange perspectives, and embark on projects.

Plan your time according to your goals. If your objective is to connect people to local organizing in the face of an emergency, you could begin by inviting organizers to announce existing local projects and upcoming events, then invite

people to propose new projects, then break out into groups to discuss the proposals, and conclude by coming back together to share the results and planning for the future. Alternatively, if your goal is to formulate a collective strategy, you could begin by opening a space to propose questions, then break out into groups to discuss them.

Be clear about how much the participants should trust each other. If you are putting strangers in contact who have no real basis for trust, make sure that no one shares compromising information or overextends themselves. If necessary, have someone speak about security culture at the beginning of the assembly.

If the assembly is intended to plug new people into ongoing organizing, think about the things that you take for granted that may not be familiar to newcomers. For example, if you are using Signal for encrypted communication, you could circulate handbills with a QR code for downloading Signal, a second QR code directing the user to instructions for how to use Signal, and perhaps a third QR code leading to an announcements-only Signal thread.

**Facilitation** Aim to keep your assembly under two hours, with one or two breaks. Better for everyone to leave with unfinished business and enthusiasm than to leave everyone exhausted. The idea is to create a situation in which everyone will want to gather again. And again.

Avoid unstructured large group conversation and back-and-forth exchanges between two people that reduce others to spectatorship. As a general rule, the more people are speaking, the more people will be engaged.

What follows is not a full meeting facilitation guide, but an example to help you design your own plan. You can consult this source for more ideas and points of departure. Peter Gelderloos has also written a guide to consensus decision-making.

- Solo Reflection: Ask a question and instruct people to think about it for one minute, then to write about it for a minute or two. This can be a standalone tool, or be followed up by a pair-share or group discussion. The goal is to get the brain working.
- Pair-Share: Ask a question. Encourage peo-

ple to turn to a neighbor and answer the question to each other.

- 1-2-4-All: This is an effective way to crowdsource and refine group brainstorms and help strong ideas float to the top. Ask a question and instruct people to think about it for one minute, then to turn to a neighbor and share their responses for two minutes. Then combine pairs into groups of four, and have people share their answers and refine them into a list. Finally, ask each group to share a few of the responses they developed, and list the responses on a whiteboard or flip pad.
- Breakout Groups: Divide into smaller groups, each tackling different questions, topics, or challenges. Then come back together to report back.

As an example, this is a list of questions, divided into personal reflection, local context, and broader systems-scale thinking, about how to prepare for the second Donald Trump presidency. These questions can be used to facilitate large or small meetings, to help think together in order to orient to the present and start making plans.

You could pick a few questions from each category and use them to facilitate assemblies and meetings. Choose the ones that are inspiring, troubling, or thought-provoking, and use them to help develop a shared orientation to the present moment.

#### Personal Reflection

- What do you need to stay calm, collected, and able to act on your own timeline according to your own capacities, instead of being forced to react according to the tempo of the Trump administration?
- Outrage and moralism have limited uses, and have already been channeled by Democrats to no great effect. How might we keep our outrage and anger in reserve, acting upon them when we choose to, on our own terms?
- If you were to take all of your fears about what might happen seriously, what would you do differently than now?
- If you were to take all of your hopes about what is possible seriously, what would you do differently than now?

#### Questions