

A STUDENT GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

By Itzel Calvo Medina



“

Love and study cannot exist without struggle, and struggle cannot occur solely inside the refuge we call the university, being grounded in the world we wish to make is fundamental.

—Robin D.G. Kelley

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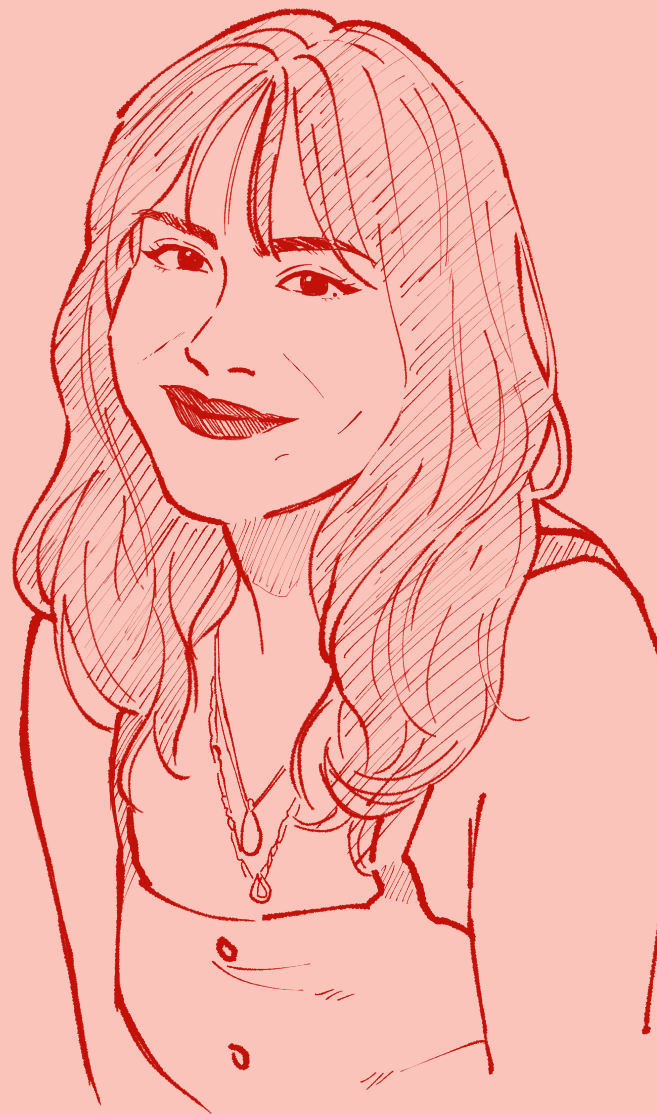
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Thank You



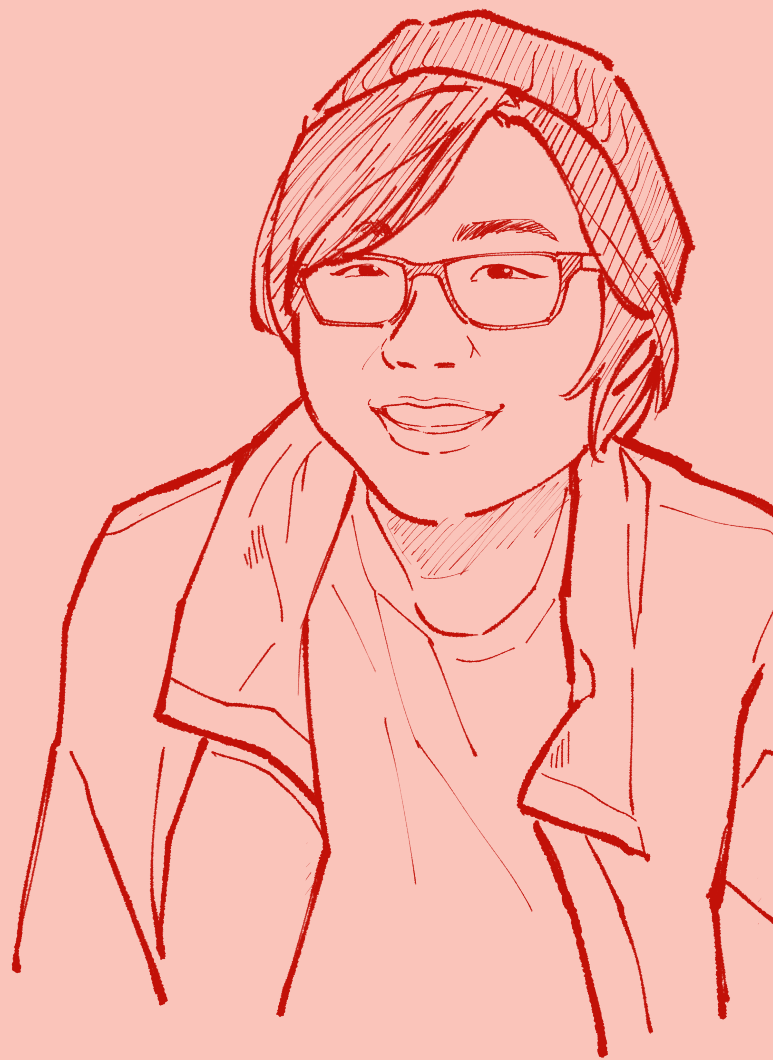
About the Author

Itzel Calvo Medina is an Ethnic Studies Major and Education Minor at the University of California, Berkeley. She is a transfer student from City College of San Francisco and has been an immigrant rights organizer since 2013. She migrated with her family from Oaxaca, Mexico in 1999 and currently resides in San Francisco.



About the Designer

Maria Hu Wu is a queer chinese immigrant from Mexico, currently living in Oakland. She graduated from San Francisco State University with a B.S in Industrial Design after transferring from City College of San Francisco. Maria started organizing for immigrant rights in 2015 and is now a freelance designer and illustrator.



Land Acknowledgment

I would like to offer a Land Acknowledgement.

Berkeley sits on the territory of Huichin, the ancestral and unceded land of the Chochenyo speaking Ohlone people, the successors of the historic and sovereign Verona Band of Alameda County. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Ohlone people. By offering this land acknowledgment I affirm Indigenous sovereignty and am committed to holding the University of California Berkeley more accountable to the demands of American Indians and Indigenous People. I recognize that this student guide will benefit students at UC Berkeley and outside of the university; my intention is to ensure that I acknowledge how the university is a colonial tool. We must remain critical of the kind of relationship we have with the University. While recognizing the importance of renaming buildings that were named after colonizers and offering land acknowledgments, we must also sit with knowing that this is not enough. We must educate ourselves on the original people of this land and offer our support in every action we take.

One way to offer our support is by contributing to the voluntary land tax at [Sogorea Te' Land Trust](#). To learn more about what action steps we can take to support please visit [Native American Student Development](#).



The Future is Here

As we are finalizing edits for this student guide, a world wide pandemic has brought me to realize that nothing is set in stone. Organizing is constantly changing and adapting to the nature of our political environment. As shelter in place orders began to happen all over the country, digital organizing took front stage. With so much uncertainty of the future it is important to document how organizing has shifted not stopped. Especially after the killing of **George Floyd**, a Black man by a Minneapolis police officer, protests continued on the streets with masks and as much physical distance as possible. This upsurge is contrasted by the thousands of people protesting the government to reopen the economy so they could go back to work, with complete disregard of the human impact of COVID-19 specifically on Black, Indigenous, and people of color. This pandemic has materialized itself into another social issue that is impacting the most vulnerable people. Houseless people have nowhere to “shelter in place,” people inside prisons and detention centers are being exposed to the virus at disproportionate rates and, while some social distancing regulations have forced the release of some individuals, the folks who have prior convictions are labeled as mandatory detention, during a pandemic that has already killed millions worldwide, the dehumanization of Black and Brown people in cages continues. There should be no mandatory detention during a time that public health is at risk. How we move forward from this pandemic is up to us—to create and imagine a better world than the one that existed before.

The Future is Here

While the future might be uncertain, it is clear that people in power are no longer able to ignore systemic racism. We are seeing a need for reprioritization of public education and a need for service workers to experience changes in material conditions, not just appreciation and a label of being “essential workers.” Organizing for a just world is essential at this time and everyone has a role to play.

We are currently witnessing the gains come into fruition from decades worth of organizing by Black, Indigenous and people of color. We are seeing symbolic monuments of colonizers torn down, the defunding of police departments and ending of contracts with public schools. People are fighting inside prisons and contracts between ICE and private corporations are being dismantled. Young people are taking to the streets demanding justice. I feel an immense amount of pressure having the access to write this student guide to community organizing during this civil uprising. This tool has to be made accessible to the people yearning for resources. I am only one of many in this fight for liberation and am incredibly honored to share this piece with the world.

Framework

I wrote this guide as a collection of anecdotes and lessons I have learned from being an undocumented, working-class woman of color who is also an organizer and a student. I want this guide to inspire people to organize in their communities and develop the tools they need in the ongoing fight for liberation and freedom.

I chose to write this guide as a form of resilience. Over the past six years, I have been an organizer and have had to balance school, work, and being an activist. At times I had to prioritize my organizing over my own academic goals, and I am now just understanding how to balance each part of my life.

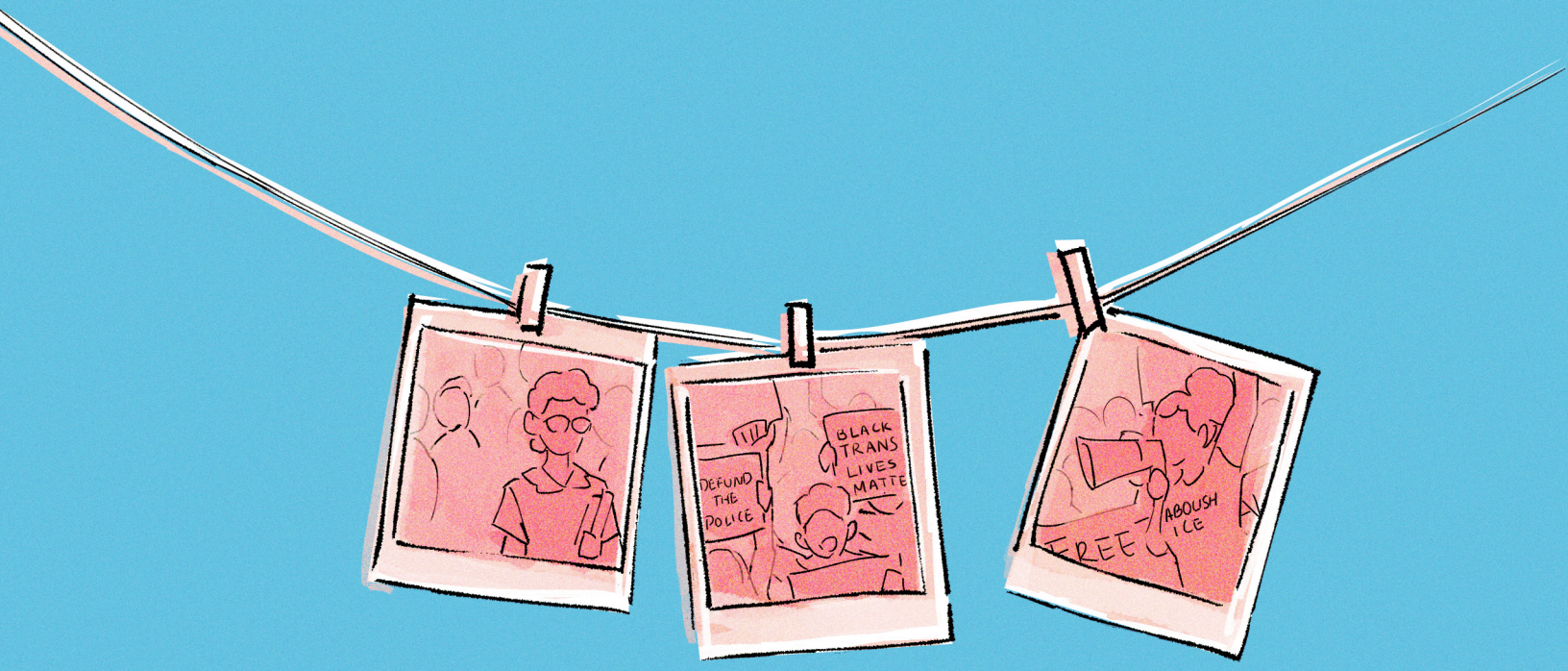
Throughout this experience I gained a family composed of resilient and determined individuals who will stop at nothing to ensure our people and communities are liberated and able to become their best selves. In a time when it all seems too much, and we want to give up—We don't. This is for the organizers I have been inspired by, and I hope the lessons in this guide will inspire the next generation of organizers coming into this work to find balance and healthier ways of organizing.

I come from an immigrant rights organizing standpoint with an abolitionist perspective. I have navigated academic, community, and non-profit spaces, all of which have different missions and visions for change. These experiences shape how I see the world. I have been purposeful in maintaining my roots in community. This guide is filled with lessons I've learned through my own experience, however, everyone's journey in organizing is different.

Framework

Organizing for me has allowed me to become more in tune with myself and has radically changed the way I see the world, but organizing has not been an easy experience. Throughout my time being an organizer, I have seen how, within a movement, people can lose sight of their values and cause harm to others. Friendships have been broken and trust has been broken within movement spaces because we exist within a system that was not created with us in mind. Our everyday experiences impact us in ways that matriculate into our organizing efforts; as we fight against a system that is created to break us, it is only a matter of time before we realize we are capable of hurting the movements we are in. As someone who started organizing at a young age, I never thought I would experience disappointment from people I once admired. While this did not deter me from organizing, it put a dent in my work. I have learned to see those dents as reminders to myself and others that we are not always right, and we have to learn from our past mistakes.

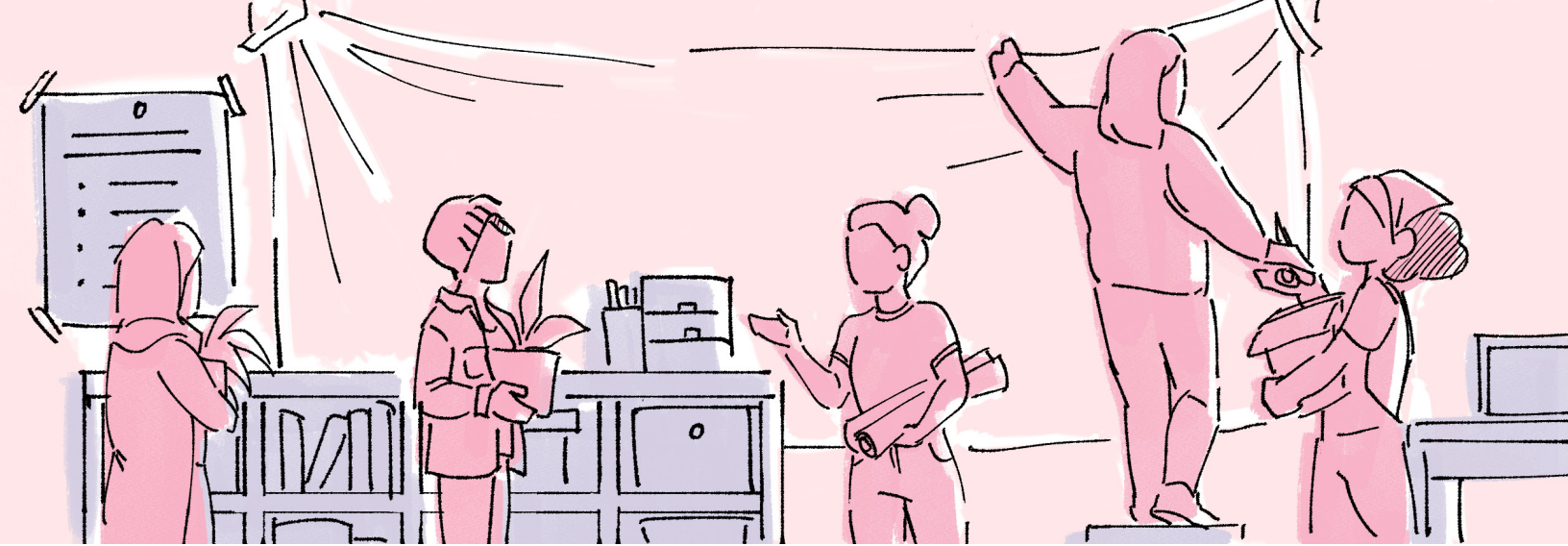
This guide is not a step by step manual for you to join a movement and be successful, but rather a testimony to the many things you can and will face when you're starting to organize. There are not enough archives of people doing the work and documenting what works and what issues arise while organizing; I hope this is a helpful tool for someone who can see themselves in this process of radicalization. My experience is one of many, I can only honor those around me that I continue to learn from by creating this, to make space for those coming into movement work.





Organizing 101

Interested in Getting
Involved?



Interested in Getting Involved?

VALUING COMMUNITY WISDOM

As students and academics we hold a certain place in our communities. We might have institutional knowledge (knowledge that is produced in universities) that is helpful in our understanding of the world, but the knowledge that community has—regardless of academic background—is rich and rooted in lived experiences that are often not documented in scholarly work but hold immense value.

LISTENING & RESEARCHING

When entering community spaces where we are beginning to learn the issues that a community is advocating for, it is important to listen closely. Take note of the things you have questions about so you can do some research on your own. It might be confusing

at first and it is okay to feel like you are lost sometimes. There are going to be people that explain things in a more profound way—if you listen. It is our job as students to supplement the work we are doing in the community. We as students have access to libraries, databases and experts that can support the needs of the community. It is important to note that just because you are impacted by an issue, doesn't mean you will automatically know how to fight that issue in community spaces. There are many strategies used by different organizing spaces and you will have to do a lot of listening and learning when you are first starting to organize.

TRYING AND MAKING MISTAKES

One of the things that I learned along the way is that sometimes

you are just going to learn things by doing them and making mistakes. Sometimes you have to be open to trying new things, like speaking at a rally for the first time... and then realizing you don't like it! Perhaps speaking at a rally is not your thing, but writing down talking points for the speaker is. Or maybe you enjoy making sure that the rally's momentum keeps going by doing chants. Finding what feels right with you and what compliments your skills and the efforts of the group, is how you can figure out how to contribute.

Guiding Questions To Ask Yourself Before Getting Involved in Organizing:

When I got involved in organizing, I was new to the Bay Area, but what I found is that the Bay Area is FULL of resources and organizations fighting for social justice and social change. It can become pretty overwhelming, especially if you are just beginning to figure out what you want to do. As I began organizing in immigrant rights, I realized that my struggle is intersectional and that, not only is my immigration status important, but also racial justice, housing accessibility, and workers rights are important and interconnected to immigration. With that lens, I was able to grow in my own political consciousness, and I was able to meet a lot of other people that were in the movement that had similar values.

As you explore what makes you want to get involved, self-reflection is important. Think, journal, or talk to a friend about the following questions. These questions can guide you in finding the space you are looking for as a new organizer or an organizer finding space in a new community.



Guiding Questions

What moves you?



What angers you?

What is something that you're confused about?

What is IMPORTANT to you?



What/who do you see daily?

What do you get excited about?

What moves you to celebrate?



What do you hope for?



Intersectionality and How It Impacts Your Presence in a Community Space

As students, it is important to acknowledge our intersecting identities as we begin to learn about issues that impact our community. When I started learning about immigration issues, I realized that policies impacted me not just due to my immigration status but also because I was working-class. My race impacted where I could live with my family, the types of jobs that were available to my parents because of their immigration status, and the lack of access they experienced as young adults with children. "Intersectionality" is when a set of social and political structures impact you and the way you see the world. Each identity you hold also impacts the other, which makes me think of "simultaneity," a term used in the Combahee River

Collective statement:

"The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives."

By acknowledging our intersecting identities, we are able to place

ourselves in relation to the people we want to work with. Our presence in a community space shapes the kind of work we are willing and able to do. Regardless of our identities, we all have different privileges, and it is important to know that those privileges create power dynamics that we might not be aware of.

Guiding Principles for Digital Organizing:

As resources and guides for plugging into organizing become increasingly available through social media, it is crucial to remain critical. We encourage asking questions about which organizations or individuals are the creator or originators of the content and who is the intended audience of the tool. We can consider how we engage with those tools before re-sharing, commenting, and critiquing. Some posts, resources, or tools, while well intentioned, can distract from crucial information that Black organizers and educators want to make sure is heard and spread in the community. Here are some questions to ask yourself.





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Guiding Principles for Digital Organizing

Who is creating this tool, resource, information, call to action? Have they organized in their community? Do they know what the community needs are?

Who is the audience?

Whose voice is centered?

If I share this information on social media, what is my goal?

Have I credited the author?

Finding Community Strengths; Finding Our Strengths

Sometimes in communities we find ourselves focusing on what is missing or what we need instead of what we already have. We have our own agency and self-determination, and we bring many gifts and skills. We can take inventory of the skills and resources that exist within the community. Then, we are in a stronger place to invite collaboration, allyship, and outside support.



What are the strengths, capacities, and resources I bring with me?



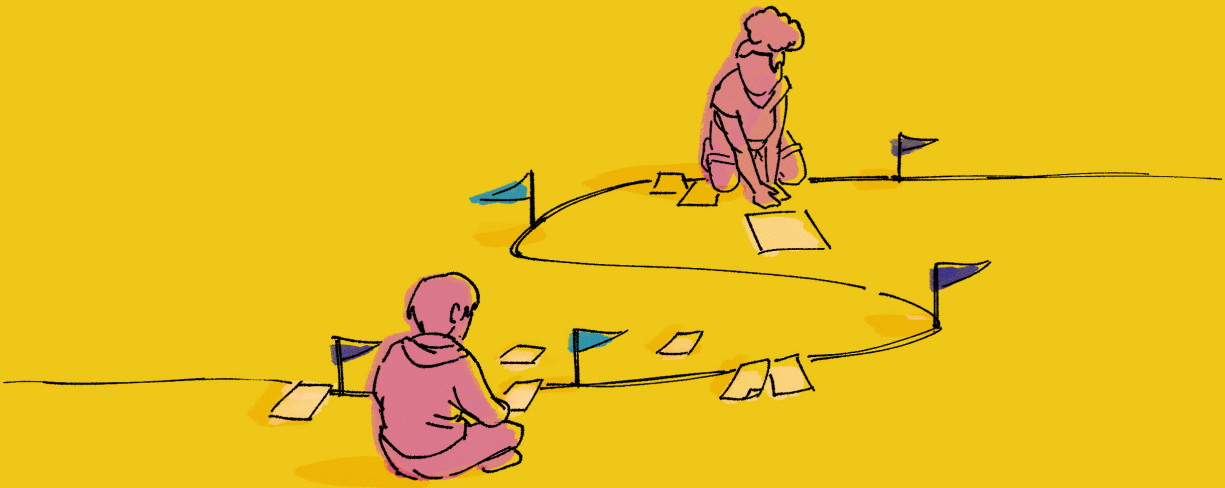
What are the strengths, capacities, and resources of our community?



Are there opportunities to connect those strengths together and build what we want to see?



Once we do this, we are in a stronger position to ask for help from our allies and other community members.



Short Term vs. Long Term Goals

Setting a goal for yourself is important when joining a group. It will help you set boundaries and let your group know your intentions when joining. It is important to be honest with yourself and the group about your intentions. This allows both parties to be clear on the outcome of participation. If you are going to be interning for a short period of time (like the summer or a semester), it might make sense to focus on a current campaign or a short term project where you can learn while supporting the organization, particularly considering the training and investment they will offer you.

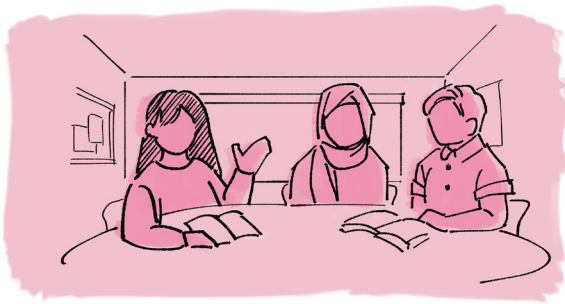
Remember that community organizers have ongoing campaigns... sometimes a couple at the same time! They are very busy. If you are meeting with them and make commitments, be sure to honor them and respect their time. Follow up with them and show enthusiasm. If you decide you can't commit to new projects, be sure to let them know. It is much better to know sooner than later. Here are some questions to keep in mind:

- Are you joining a student organization that you will end up leaving after you graduate?
- What is the length of the internship/fellowship/volunteer position?
- What are tangible goals to reach before you leave? Are you setting benchmarks with your group?
- Is this experience going to help your long term career goals?

How Do I Find Community?

Now that you have established the reasons that you want to get involved in community work and have decided which type of groups you want to join, you can start exploring what groups are already doing the type of work you believe in. Remember: there have been organizations or individuals that have been organizing in communities for years. You can learn from and add value toward their efforts instead of trying to create something from scratch.

Here are some ways to get started:

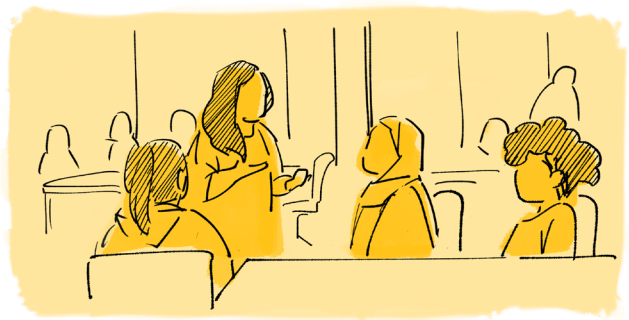


Go to a club meeting

Some campus organizations might have connections to community organizations, and they can help connect you to them and resources.

Attend a community forum outside of campus

Even if the topic is something you already know, there is always room to learn more about an issue and build relationships with community leaders.



Get to know your classmates, your professor, and staff on campus

Go to a rally and learn about different organizations

At rallies, folks will mention which organization they're from, and this is a good way to hear about organizations and meet folks directly.



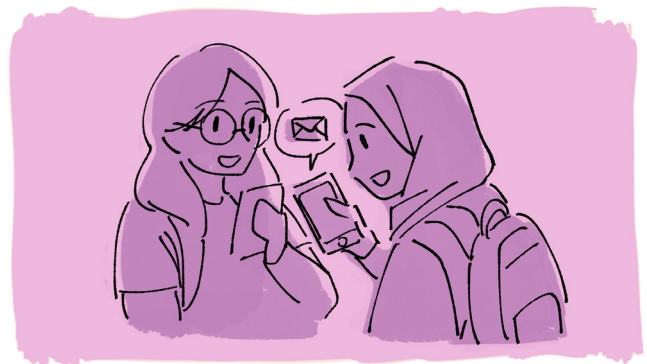
Registering for webinars and presentations are great ways to learn about issues and meet the people organizing around those issues

Sometimes webinars are recorded and sent out after the event, so even if you can't attend, you can still receive the recording afterwards!



Check online, join groups or listservs

Sometimes it can be intimidating to go up to people or show up to events, and a good way to transition is by joining or following groups online and staying informed on what's happening. Most organizations have ways to contact them through social media but keep in mind that not all organizations have designated people running these tools, and it might be harder to reach them only through these avenues. I.e. Instagram! Twitter! FB!



The background is a solid dark blue color. Scattered across it are various small, colorful geometric shapes: yellow squares, red squares, blue triangles, red triangles, yellow diamonds, red pluses, blue chevrons, yellow zigzags, red zigzags, blue dots, yellow dots, and blue arcs. The shapes are distributed across the entire page, creating a pattern of abstract symbols.

Organizing 102

Organizing and
Balancing Life



Sustainable Organizing Tips

While creating this guide I reflected on the unhealthy patterns that I had when starting to organize. In hopes of finding alternative solutions to these unhealthy ways, I have collected a few tips on how to be a healthy organizer.

Organizing can be a choice for some people, but for some of us, we have had to organize because our survival depends on it. Organizing is a commitment of love to your community, so of course you are going to go above and beyond for them. Something that I always think about is one of my mentors telling me: "Take care of yourself, because we're in it for the long run." I think of this every time I have to make a compromise. I have missed a lot of special events, opportunities, and even lost some relationships because I prioritized organizing over everything.

Organizing has been essential to my personal development and I don't regret my decisions, but I also realize that the decisions I was making were not balanced. As people who are directly impacted by the systems that we are trying to abolish, we can find ourselves prioritizing the work we are doing over the people we are fighting for.

As I see new folks coming into organizing I have seen a shift to be more intentional in the work we do. The self-care component that is present now was not at the center of organizing when I started. I am thankful that folks have been learning and incorporating healthy habits into organizing.

The following tips are some that I have personally learned and have witnessed with my fellow organizers.



You don't have to say yes to everything!

As you start organizing you will get invited to different spaces, remember that your energy is precious and that you need to take breaks in order to process new learnings. When you say yes to something, think about all the other things you are already doing and are putting on the backburner because you continue to put more things on your plate.



If you're having a long day, remember to take snacks and a water bottle

There's nothing worse than having a long day and having to spend extra money on coffee and pastries or water in between meetings. Especially if you are traveling long distances, be sure to remember that your health comes first. You can't fight the power on an empty stomach! Look out for your college resources—there are tons of events on campus and in the community with free food and healthy options at a cheap price.



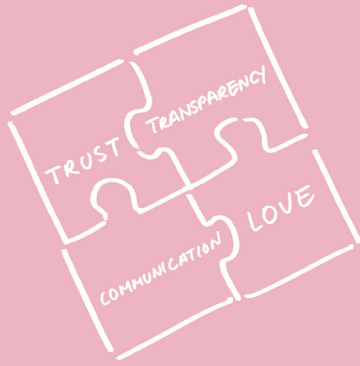
Don't forget about your personal goals and dreams

I spent years organizing for access to education, and it took four years to transfer from community college because I often prioritized my time in organizing instead of taking classes. Yes the struggle needs you, but the struggle will continue after you, so don't forget that your personal goals are as important as organizing. College will end one day for you, so enjoy it while you're there!



Checking in with loved ones while organizing

Remember that you are not an organizing robot and make time for friends and family. Sometimes being an organizer can disconnect us from our personal bubble and we forget that those relationships need nurturing as well. It is also vital to check in with your comrades on a personal level. I find that building trust with the people you're organizing with is essential to sustaining a movement. Go grab coffee, watch a movie, have a potluck. Enjoy each other!



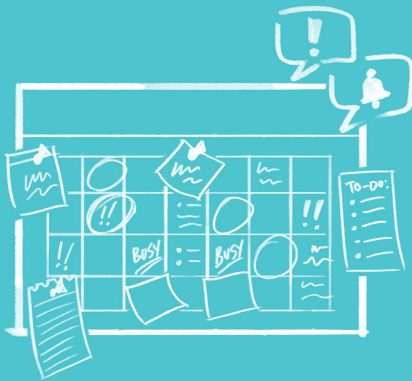
Organizing should not be transactional

Organizing isn't just about showing up; it's about being in community with each other. Relationships are the key to sustainability in our movement work. We are creating a better world for each other, it is essential to build community with the people we are fighting alongside.



Delegate, delegate, delegate!

There are many ways to split up tasks, big or small. Delegating tasks will help others in stepping up and can also serve as a way to see the development of new leadership.



It's okay to take a break!

Living in a capitalist world, we are conditioned to always stay busy. Don't compromise your health by always showing up to everything. There are always people that can and will continue to do this work when we need time off. We deserve to have fun, we deserve to take time for ourselves, we deserve freedom, and—most of all—we deserve to have autonomy over our bodies and time. When we take care of our mental and physical health, we come back stronger!



Creativity is everything

Seasoned organizers have their way of doing things, but there is always room for creativity. Don't let jaded people put your energy or new ideas down. Sometimes seasoned organizers get tunnel vision and forget that there can be new ways of doing things.



Celebrate your victories!

The purpose of organizing is to create change inside and outside of our communities, so when you win a campaign, reach your goal, or make any change they are worth celebrating. Recognizing our victories gives us the energy we need to continue organizing.

Types of Conflict

As we get deeper in organizing, we make new friendships and develop relationships with organizations. Sometimes people we meet will become so important in our lives that we continuously learn and grow from them. Conflict is the outcome of not being mindful of our positionality in organizing spaces and when we don't address different issues that arise and let them linger.

The following three types of conflict are the ones I have come across, and it is good to keep these in mind for when you are in spaces and come in contact with conflict.



Interpersonal Conflict

Is when you encounter conflict with another person you are organizing with. It can also be a person you are working with but not directly organizing with. Issues that might come up could be as difficult as a disagreement in strategy or tactics in organizing.

Organizational Conflict

Being in an organization will help you understand the political context of the world you are entering and with that comes the history of your organization and other organizations working on the same issues. You might be surprised at first at how an organization that looks amazing on the outside has a lot of organizational issues internally. Those can range from organizational structure to misrepresentation of community and mission values.



Internal Conflict

One of the things that will happen when you start organizing and learning about the issue you are passionate about is internal conflict. The ideas you have of the world will be challenged. You will question everything, including things about yourself that you thought would never change.



Conflict Resolution

Putting this in practice is harder than it looks, it takes a lot of courage and often the help of many people to repair/heal from the harm done. Our communities are not immune to the systemic issues that create harm within our communities. It is important that we are gentle with ourselves when navigating conflict resolution.

As an abolitionist, I have learned that those that cause harm have been harmed by their environment and are also harming themselves. We must remove ourselves from the punitive system of accountability that this society pushes on us and find alternative solutions for our community. There are multiple ways to address harm and conflict. See the resources page for more resources on conflict resolution by amazing organizers!





Organizing 103

Bridging Organizing
and Academia

Bridging Organizing and Academia

This portion of the guidebook is dedicated to transfer students and/or those that began organizing in the community prior to entering a 4-year university. Your experience is unique and has allowed you to learn the multiplicity of your role in community building. Coming into Berkeley as an Ethnic Studies Major opened my world to new teachings and learning opportunities. For the first time in my academic experience was supplementing my community organizing, and quite frankly, my organizing experience had exposed me to a lot of the practices that I was reading about. I was finding the theory to my practice connect in ways that I can see. This project is an example of how my organizing experience outside the university led me to the creating of this manual that will be used in an academic setting.

HOW DO I HOLD BOTH ORGANIZING + EXPERIENCE IN THE CLASSROOM?

A lot of what I was learning in the classroom in classes applied to my organizing experience, and in some ways it informed my understanding of the issues I was organizing around. "*Community Engaged Scholarship*" is something I learned my first semester at Cal, although I had been doing it, it had a name to it now. I see community engaged scholarship and community-engaged learning as ways to bridge community organizing and academia, allowing your academic goals to contribute to your community organizing experience and vice versa.

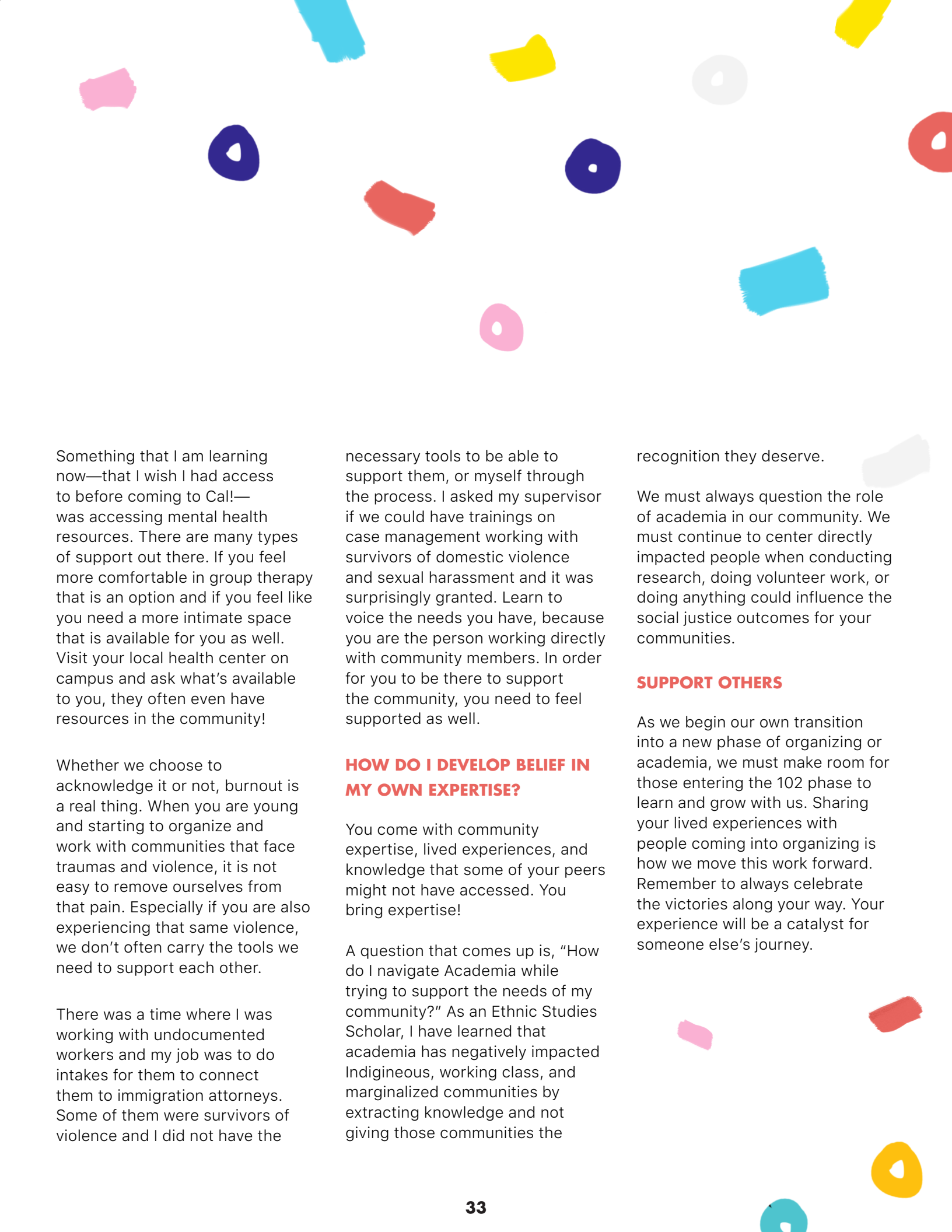
I learned to bring the questions I have seen in community into the classroom. I learned to push against concepts in class that I

do not see as "true" or "factual" based on lived experiences. And I learned new knowledge that informs the work I do.

Even if you are not taking any classes that have a community component aspect to it, you can always find a way to take what you are learning and apply it to what you are learning in your community organizing. You can become a bridge between the University and the community, and, when necessary funnel tool, research and resources to meet your community's needs.

GETTING SUPPORT!

One of the biggest things that helped me in shaping my organizing experience was getting support from community members and teachers in organizing spaces.



Something that I am learning now—that I wish I had access to before coming to Cal!—was accessing mental health resources. There are many types of support out there. If you feel more comfortable in group therapy that is an option and if you feel like you need a more intimate space that is available for you as well. Visit your local health center on campus and ask what's available to you, they often even have resources in the community!

Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, burnout is a real thing. When you are young and starting to organize and work with communities that face traumas and violence, it is not easy to remove ourselves from that pain. Especially if you are also experiencing that same violence, we don't often carry the tools we need to support each other.

There was a time where I was working with undocumented workers and my job was to do intakes for them to connect them to immigration attorneys. Some of them were survivors of violence and I did not have the

necessary tools to be able to support them, or myself through the process. I asked my supervisor if we could have trainings on case management working with survivors of domestic violence and sexual harassment and it was surprisingly granted. Learn to voice the needs you have, because you are the person working directly with community members. In order for you to be there to support the community, you need to feel supported as well.

HOW DO I DEVELOP BELIEF IN MY OWN EXPERTISE?

You come with community expertise, lived experiences, and knowledge that some of your peers might not have accessed. You bring expertise!

A question that comes up is, "How do I navigate Academia while trying to support the needs of my community?" As an Ethnic Studies Scholar, I have learned that academia has negatively impacted Indigenous, working class, and marginalized communities by extracting knowledge and not giving those communities the

recognition they deserve.

We must always question the role of academia in our community. We must continue to center directly impacted people when conducting research, doing volunteer work, or doing anything could influence the social justice outcomes for your communities.

SUPPORT OTHERS

As we begin our own transition into a new phase of organizing or academia, we must make room for those entering the 102 phase to learn and grow with us. Sharing your lived experiences with people coming into organizing is how we move this work forward. Remember to always celebrate the victories along your way. Your experience will be a catalyst for someone else's journey.



Transformative Justice

CREATING A TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE INFORMED SEXUAL HARASSMENT PROTOCOL

// Ejeris Dixon / Vision Change Win

TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE AND DISABILITY JUSTICE

// Mia Mingus

HOW TO SURVIVE THE END OF THE WORLD PODCAST

// Adrienne Maree Brown

OUR RELATIONSHIPS KEEP US ALIVE: LET'S PRIORITIZE THEM IN 2018

// Ejeris Dixon

THE ANATOMY OF AN APOLOGY

// Raina

10 TIPS ON RECEIVING CRITICAL FEEDBACK: A GUIDE FOR ACTIVISTS

// Brooke Anderson

FUMBLING TOWARD REPAIR: A WORKBOOK FOR COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY FACILITATORS

// Mariam Kabe

BEYOND SURVIVAL: STRATEGIES AND STORIES FROM THE TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

// Ejeris Dixon & Leah Lakshmi

Piepzna-Samarasinha

CONFLICT: A FORCE FOR BREAKTHROUGH SOCIAL CHANGE

// OpenSource Leadership Strategies



Books About Community Organizing

MOUNTAIN MOVERS: STUDENT ACTIVISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

// Russell Jeung, Karen Umemoto, Harvey Dong, Eric Mar, Lisa Hirai Tsuchitani, Arnold Pan

EMERGENT STRATEGY: SHAPING CHANGE, CHANGING WORLDS

// Adrienne Maree Brown

TOOLS FOR RADICAL DEMOCRACY

// Joan Minieri & Paul Getsos

STIR IT UP

// Rinku Sen

Inspiration for This guide

LETTER TO MY FAMILY OF DISPLACED PEOPLES

// Written by Kemi Bello, artwork by Julio Salgado



Thank You

This guide would not have been possible without the vision of Victoria Robinson. She entrusted me with this project and believed in me to bring this guide to life. I have been incredibly grateful for this opportunity to share some of the lessons learned from my experience as a student and a community organizer. Although it is hard to balance movement work with school, I am starting to engage both aspects of my life. I am now realizing that every space I go, I am intentional about making it a space to create change. Organizing has been fundamental to my growth as a person and I cherish those who have nurtured that part of me that continues to grow and learn.

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I would also like to acknowledge professor Lisa H. Tsuchitani who worded something so beautiful while I was in her class; while addressing our class on community agreements she said, "Building community is an *active practice*." These words are a gentle reminder that building community does not take you following a couple of steps in this manual, or even the amount of time you spend in a community. It is an active practice you have to commit for yourself and those you are building community with.