

How To Organize a Neighborhood Popular Assembly

Members of the Black Rose/Rosa Negra Housing and Territorial
Committee

June 2 2025

Contents

Introduction	3
Fundamental Building Blocks	3
Building Block 1: <i>Structures of domination, like capitalism and the state, exist at numerous levels, but ultimately exercise their power locally.</i>	4
Building Block 2: <i>Confronting these structures and their consequences requires organizing people, motivating them to build and wield collective power they otherwise wouldn't have as individuals</i>	4
Building Block 3: <i>Direct decisions must also mean direct actions</i>	4
Building Block 4: <i>Trust—in each other, the project, and in the possibilities of a better world—motivates action</i>	5
Getting Started	5
Step 1: Get to Know Your Neighbors	6
Step 2: Meet Potential Supporters	7
Neighbors, Assemble!	8
Step 3: Schedule a meeting and spread the word	8
Set your Agenda, Set Your Goals	9
Step 4: Clear goals , inclusive facilitation , and collective decision-making empower people	9
Include Everyone	10
From Deliberations to Decisions	10
Democracy, Consensus, or Something Else?	11
Step 5: “Find the Cracks” in the system and figure out how your leverage can widen them	11
Deciding Our Future, Together	12
Step 6: Build for today—and tomorrow	12
Step 7: Listen for new concerns and experiment flexibly	13
Building Popular Power, One Neighborhood at a Time	13

This is a basic guide on how and why to build structures for decision making and collective action at the neighborhood level, what we call popular assemblies. We emphasize the need for popular assemblies to be rooted in a defined geographic area and aimed at organizing the people who live, work, or stay there to develop the power to confront social problems together. This guide draws directly on knowledge and experience of past experiments in building popular assemblies.

Introduction

Scroll social media or a 24-hour news service, and what do you see? Assaults on too-meager social safety nets. Rollbacks of civil rights. Crumbling infrastructure. Immigration police grabbing people off the street. Politicians casually promising to eradicate entire peoples.

It's a bleak moment in history, and there seem to be few avenues to escape it.

How did we get here? Elite politicians and businesspeople built their power over us, in part, by battering us with beliefs about our powerlessness. Isolation from each other internalizes those beliefs inside us. We encounter what feels like an unending crisis—alone.

We can catch each other, though—but only with the requisite nets of **mass organizations**.

Mass organizations can bring us together to identify, address, confront, and one day replace the ruling classes' power over us in our backyards.

Stunned by Trump's first election in 2017, communities across the United States turned to each other to figure out how to survive—and resist—the incoming administration. Long-time organizers and newly activated residents gathered in neighborhood and sometimes citywide meetings to share their fears about the promised federal attacks and what they were going to do about them—together.¹ These meetings became the foundations of **popular assemblies**.

As one organizer with the central Los Angeles-based Koreatown Popular Assembly put it, a popular assembly is “an open decision-making space in a neighborhood where people can come together [to] talk about their problems and how they are going to solve the problems together as a group, not just by lobbying the government.”

Despite widespread interest in popular assemblies as a strategy for resistance and revolutionary struggle, few materials answer why these mechanism can get us there and how to organize a group of people to assemble one.

Drawn from conversations with organizers and related literature about these participatory experiments, this introductory article outlines some step-by-step instructions and general considerations to start building neighborhood democracy from the ground up.

Fundamental Building Blocks

A popular assembly strategy for social change is built on a few fundamental assumptions.

¹ Sarah Lazare, “Why Popular Assemblies Sweeping the Country are Building Blocks of Resistance,” *AlterNet* (blog), March 1, 2017, <https://www.alternet.org/2017/03/why-popular-assemblies-sweeping-country-are-building-blocks-resistance>.

Building Block 1: Structures of domination, like capitalism and the state, exist at numerous levels, but ultimately exercise their power locally.

National administrations, transnational firms, and international governmental bodies shape on-the-ground social reality in outsized ways. With signatures and declarations, their decisions reverberate devastating consequences in far-off places. Ultimately, though, on-the-ground agencies, firms, and individuals must execute those decisions in specific locations like office space, governmental buildings, and hotel conference rooms.

For example, the Department of Homeland Security Secretary can set a policy from Washington, D.C. to increase migrant deportations across the country. Ultimately, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) field offices deploy agents to snatch people from their communities. These operations continue in part because we do not see them unfold from our backyards.

It's imperative, then, as one news service once put it, we know the facts and name the names. If we understand those facts and names, their patterns and addresses, we can disrupt them.

Building Block 2: Confronting these structures and their consequences requires organizing people, motivating them to build and wield collective power they otherwise wouldn't have as individuals

What do we mean by "organizing people?" Here's an answer taken from "*Survival of the Organized: Critical Reflections on Organizing and Mutual Aid*":

*"Organizing [means] working with ordinary people to shape ourselves into a fighting force that is capable of standing up to and eventually dismantling capitalism, the state, and other structures of domination. ... [It] is a question of power: building the power of our coworkers, neighbors, classmates, and other "actors of struggle" (i.e. people who share common problems and social locations) to dismantle the ruling class's dominating, atomizing power over us. To do so, we build people's confidence to make demands and directly act against bosses, politicians, landlords, administrators, and other class enemies in order to win specific goals and shift relations of power in our workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, and other arenas of social life. We encourage everyday people to run these struggles with formal, directly-democratic bodies—what we call mass organizations—that we can one day use to run all of society."*²

Ultimately, **a popular assembly is** a place-based, directly democratic body that brings together people who live, eat, and sleep near one another to collectively agree about the problems they face, their shared interests that are threatened, and actions they can take to address their problems.

Building Block 3: Direct decisions must also mean direct actions

Once we directly decide how to solve our problem, we don't push that solution onto some other body like the government, a nonprofit, or a corporation to do it for us; we do it ourselves.

² Alexandria H., Juan Verala Luz, and Charles W., "Survival of the Most Organized: Critical Reflections on Organizing and Mutual Aid," *Black Rose/Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation* (blog), March 25, 2025, <https://www.blackrosefed.org/survival-organized-mutual-aid-2025/>.

However we decide to fight, we must prepare ourselves to take it on. That might mean learning new skills, developing new techniques, and committing to what can sometimes be boring work. We don't need to—nor should we—reinvent wheels and learn everything by ourselves; we should draw from existing pools of knowledge, skills, and services to help get us off the ground.

We can't expect to do all the work of these decisions ourselves, either; we should make sure to spread it among the people who decide them. However we distribute that work, we must commit to actively building the new world together, one task at a time.

Building Block 4: *Trust—in each other, the project, and in the possibilities of a better world—motivates action*

Often, strong emotions are seen as what moves people to act: injustice ignites anger to upend the world; sorrow motivates action to bring relief; we promise each other joy in fighting together.

In our experience, emotional appeals may initially motivate people's interest in struggle. What *keeps* them in it is **trust**: trust in reliable co-organizers and comrades who have their back when it's time to act; trust that their efforts plausibly build to something better; trust that they can change the world.

Popular assembly organizers must cultivate trust among people who live near each other so they have the potential to make their slice of the world better. Even more, popular assemblies help lay the foundations for a social revolution that can completely transform it.³

Getting Started

Stemming from a post-war boom in single-family housing designed to boost capitalist productivity,⁴ increased churn in employment and living situations spurred by economic instability,⁵ and cultural warnings that danger lurks behind every corner,⁶ we in the United States rarely know the people who live next door to us.⁷

To make a popular assembly successful, you'll want to know the people you're organizing, especially what can motivate their interest and trust to continually come together, make decisions, and execute them.

For many encountering these practices for the first time, these steps might seem irrelevant, dull, or not worth the effort. Alternatively, momentary upsurges sometime sweep lots of peo-

³ Popular assemblies are one kind of mass organizations that figure into a general strategy for social revolution based on the popular power of everyday people; learn more about it at Black Rose Anarchist Federation, "General Strategy," *Turning the Tide: An Anarchist Program for Popular Power*, <https://www.blackrosefed.org/about/program/4-general-strategy/>.

⁴ You can read more about the state and capital's role in transforming living arrangements in Maya Gonzales, "Notes on the New Housing Question," *Endnotes 2* (2010), <https://endnotes.org.uk/articles/notes-on-the-new-housing-question>.

⁵ Matt Desmond's *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* paint an especially compelling picture about how economic insecurity and housing instability prevent people, especially those in poverty, from developing strong bonds.

⁶ For one datapoint of this trend, see Alana Wise, "A quarter of U.S. Adults Fear Being Attacked in Their Neighborhood, a Poll Finds," *National Public Radio* (blog), September 8, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/08/1120099696/americans-fear-attacked-neighborhood-poll>.

⁷ For evidence of declining contact among neighbors, see Thomas O'Rourke, "The Decline of Trust and Neighborliness," *Institute for Family Studies*, 2023, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-decline-of-trust-and-neighborliness>.

ple into the streets, opening them up to forcefully challenge the status quo. Indeed, that's what happened in 2017, but as one Koreatown Popular Assembly organizer put it, "that was a unique moment when we could just flyer the streets and random strangers who had never come to an organizing meeting before would show up."

We don't recommend waiting for that kind of popular swell because 1) we can't predict when it will happen and 2) when the temperature turns up you can more sharply strike—proverbially and literally—with the trusting relationships you've already built. At some point, you're going to want to make and take riskier decisions that are more possible with strong foundations of trust.

Step 1: Get to Know Your Neighbors

In all organizing, your first step is to meet the people you want to bring together and better understand their stories. In this case, knock on your neighbors' doors, shake their hands, and tell them your name and why you're there.

In these conversations, you're trying to learn what makes them tick and what they care about so that you can **agitate** them. That doesn't mean browbeating or riling them up about the worst aspects of this system, nor does it mean winning them to a set of values, beliefs, or revolutionary project right off the bat. It means asking them to think deeply about their lives and the kinds of social problems that worry them. Those experiences and that information will get you thinking about the kind of shared issues that your neighborhood's popular assembly may aim to solve.⁸

Don't get us wrong; what seems so self-evidently simple is not. Even more, these kinds of conversations are so foreign to our daily lives that they often feel awkward. Like any other skill, you'll want to practice them, perhaps by writing some prompts that your friends and co-organizers can workshop together.

One we've used before is:

Hi, my name is _____ and I live in the neighborhood. We are living in scary times, so I'm meeting everyone near me to learn how we can look out for one another. What's your name, and what's on your mind these days?

As you meet your neighbors, you'll find lots of different perspectives on a range of issues, as well as different levels of interest in doing something about them. Many will believe there's nothing they can do about them, some will report that they will act when others do, and still others are ready to change the world yesterday.

When you find people who are eager to do something about the issues, you should consider recruiting them to help launch the popular assembly. Hosting and organizing something as time-intensive as a community-wide meeting has lots of moving parts, and we can't do it alone. We'll also eventually want to organize ourselves out of a job (you'll learn more about that in Step #7). Recruiting people to develop the assembly early on will lighten your load while nurturing wider investment in its success.

⁸ Learn more about agitation and the other aspects you should try to address in organizing conversations at Fire with Fire, "An Introduction to 1-on-1 Organizing Conversations," 2020, <https://firewithfire.blog/2020/04/19/an-introduction-to-1-on-1-organizing-conversations/>.

Step 2: Meet Potential Supporters

“There were people who had a lot of connections in the neighborhood, but [KPA] was put together without much background, without much reorganizing. We built connections to the church later. If you have that kind of history and those kinds of connections, then you can build something like this. Otherwise, I think it’s quite hard in our political context and in a context where people aren’t very used to neighborhood assemblies.”

– Organizer, Koreatown Popular Assembly

Alongside building relationships with the people who live near you, you also want to build them with already existing **popular neighborhood organizations**.

By popular neighborhood organizations, we mean any group in an area that brings together people who might not otherwise have a relationship with each other. These connections will help spread the word about the meetings you want to call and encourage their members’ participation. They might also be able to provide resources that will make meetings more accessible like physical infrastructure or translation services (see Steps #3 and #4 below for more considerations).

Examples might look like:

- Cultural centers
- Labor unions
- Local churches
- Parent meetups
- Reading groups
- Student clubs
- Sports leagues
- Knitting circles

Not all organizations are equal, though. Some are unequivocally opposed to our principles, like collective self-management, mutual aid, and direct action, and may be barriers to trying to solve our social problems through means that are bottom-up, directly-democratic, and collective.

For example, you’ll notice we didn’t say political parties or nonprofits. The most important reasons we do not advocate outreaching to these “usual suspects” are 1) these organizations typically aim to solve the problem *on behalf* of the people seeking solutions, 2) they often aim to absorb organic efforts into their programming, and 3) they rarely have deep pull in communities.⁹

As you make contact with these organizations, keep a list of their **affiliations**, the **organic leaders** in them who can help you, and the kind of **support** they might be able to provide (e.g., meeting space; sound equipment; financial support). We also recommend keeping a list of

⁹ Sociologist Josh Pacewicz describes how a deindustrialized economy and so-called political expertise uprooted the Democrats and Republicans’ previous “community leadership” inside—and thus deep on-the-ground connections within—American heartland communities, with broad reverberations throughout the rest of the country. Josh Pacewicz, *Partisans and Partners: The Politics of the Post-Keynesian Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

those neighborhood organizations which hesitate or are outright hostile, in order to minimize backtracking on your future outreach. Organizational interest can and might change, so this kind of list should be always up for revisions.

Neighbors, Assemble!

Now that you've started to get a picture about what troubles your neighbors, especially where there might be alignment among them, you can help them understand they're not alone with their concerns and they can do something about them.

In this section, we discuss the nuts and bolts of planning, facilitating, and executing decisions made at the primary building block of a popular assembly, the neighborhood meeting.

Step 3: Schedule a meeting and spread the word

When you have a sense of your neighbors' concerns, it's time to bring them together to discuss.

Logistics are an important consideration, most pressing of which is space to meet. Keep in mind the following to find somewhere that can accommodate your needs:

Size: A rough estimate of how many people you anticipate will attend the meeting helps identify the size of the space you'll need.

Proximity: We recommend finding a place that is nearest to people you're trying to organize. A meeting place that is far away from the neighborhood will make accessibility difficult for people without cars or reliable public transportation. If access is in question, we recommend coordinating carpools to the meeting 1) to ensure people can join and 2) deepen trust among and strengthen relationships with each other.

Accessibility: We'll discuss more of these considerations for running a meeting in Step #4, but for now we'll say that you should keep at the front of your mind accessibility to *all* your neighbors.

That looks like considering a space's ability to accommodate people with different physical abilities (e.g., Is it wheelchair accessible? How difficult will it be for people to share and receive feedback in it?) and schedules (e.g., Is the space only available for people who work specific kinds of hours like 9-to-5 schedules? How long can you be in it and will that give you enough time to accomplish what you intend for the meeting?). Planning for everyone's diverse needs beforehand decreases the likelihood that the assembly will leave out anyone.

Supportive popular neighborhood organizations can usually help you secure physical space to meet. If not, think creatively: public parks, schools, and libraries can often be rented for small fees, and employees at those institutions might be able to access them after hours for free or at low cost.

Once you've scheduled the time and place of the meeting, you'll want to get out the word about it. Social media can be a relatively low-lift way to widely spread information about the meeting, but not everyone who you want to reach is tapped into it. Even more importantly, you'll want to leverage the trusting relationships you've begun to build to turn them out to these meetings where they can make real impacts on their lives.

We strongly encourage distributing details about your first meeting with a brief, inviting flier online and in person. Here are a few tips for key ways to share the information:

Online

- Post an event page with clear information on a web based events board such as EventBrite
- Advertise on a local newspaper's online events page
- Ask popular local social media accounts to share a flier

In Person

- Revisit each neighbor you previously contacted
- Ask each person to bring someone else to the meeting
- Hang up posters around restaurants, grocery stores, and laundromats

Like with logistics, lean on existing popular neighborhood organizations to get out the word and invite their people to the upcoming meeting. Mailing lists, phone trees, and event announcements can be great ways to reach people you might not otherwise contact.

Set your Agenda, Set Your Goals

Next, we review some important tips for running a successful meeting of your popular assembly, including developing goals, facilitating inclusively, and moving to make decisions.

Step 4: Clear goals, inclusive facilitation, and collective decision-making empower people

Put together an **agenda** with clear goals and objectives to accomplish during your meeting.

Goals should be clear enough and given enough time within the meeting to accomplish. Using action verbs to describe what you plan to do can encourage widespread involvement among meeting attendees. When you write the goals, you should ask yourself whether you could ask participants at the end of the meeting whether they felt they accomplished them.

An example set of goals might look like:

By the end of this meeting we will,

- *Discuss with our neighbors our concerns about _____.*
- *Share ideas with each other about how we can do something about it.*
- *Decide one step that we, together, can take to address it.*

To give your meeting cohesion, your goals should flow directly into draft agenda items and activities.

We often hear concerns that setting the first agenda means we set the terms of the discussion and therefore “impose” readymade perspectives, issues, and solutions onto people. While we understand the concern, we take issue with it. First, we are also members of these communities and should thus bring our ideas for what to do about the issues that worry us. Second, we do

not demand everyone follow our lead; instead, we should present the goals, items, and activities that we have put together as preliminary. Asking questions like “Does anyone want to change anything in the agenda?” and “Can anyone not live with it?” invite participants to shape it and then take a vote to approve the agenda before beginning.

Include Everyone

Ensuring your meetings are places where everyone can contribute is paramount for participants to directly decide their futures.

Language is a primary consideration for ensuring full participation: if you can’t understand what each other is sharing, how can you arrive at a decision to do something about them? You should preemptively plan to meet your neighbors’ language needs by making available translated written information and real-time interpretation during meetings. Koreatown Popular Assembly organizers chalk up the project’s success largely thanks to planning early for Spanish and English participation. Don’t just consider spoken languages, either. Sign language interpreters can better ensure that our neighbors who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can fully participate.

Skilled facilitators who keep the engagement rolling while focused on the agenda item will ensure that participants’ time and contributions are respected. Anyone can learn how to artfully navigate discussions, but it may take some time and hands-on support to learn (see Step #7 about the importance of mentorship). Adopting a mechanism like progressive stack—prioritizing contributions from people who have not shared yet or are from marginalized backgrounds—is one way to address how some people feel more comfortable and willing to share.

Similarly, people draw energy differently from and have different levels of comfort with individual, small group, and large group ways to generate and share input. Creating multiple ways to contribute to the discussion can provide opportunities that work best for everyone.

From Deliberations to Decisions

Facilitating conversations among your neighbors is a major part of this process. As we explained above, we and our neighbors often barely know each other, let alone talk about major social issues. Discussing the issues is only part of the task. Our popular assemblies must be committed places to make decisions and later execute them.

One way we prepare meeting attendees to get in decision-making mindsets and practices is by approving the agenda at the top of the meeting. Asking attendees to vote on whether to accept and move forward with the agenda shows our commitment to making this space all of ours.

You’ll also want to develop criteria for when your popular assembly adopts a decision. Voting thresholds can range from unanimous or modified consensus to supermajority (e.g., 66%+ or 75%+ agreement) or majority-plus-one votes. Like setting an agenda, you might recommend a set of rules to the assembly’s participants, encouraging input before adopting and codifying your protocol for decision making.

Democracy, Consensus, or Something Else?

Consensus decision making—the practice of discussing and debating a proposal until all participants are in agreement—is often the preferred decision making mechanism of radicals.

While consensus has its merits, we encourage readers to consider its drawbacks and limitations in the context of a neighborhood popular assembly. For example, many of those participating in a neighborhood popular assembly will not be able or willing to regularly devote hours of their limited free time to prolonged discussions. While deliberation is critical, so too is the ability to actually arrive at a decision.

While it should ultimately be left up to the assembly itself to determine what decision making practice makes the most sense for its specific context, we encourage a balance between discussion, opportunity to dissent, and efficiency. In our experience, we’ve found that a simple majority voting mechanism is often the most conducive to achieving our immediate objectives, while remaining consistent with our dedication to the principle of direct democracy.

Whatever voting arrangements you decide, encourage the popular assembly to regularly make decisions together. Direct decision-making is the bedrock of collective self-management, a principle of libertarian socialism that popular assemblies can help bring into existence. Doing it regularly helps the popular assembly fulfill its key function.

Be sure to keep notes that track what you discussed and, hopefully, decide in the first and subsequent meetings. Running notes in descending chronological order makes it easier to follow collective discussions as they develop and to revisit or catch up with what happened at the most recent meeting. It will also help keep track of the action items to complete between meetings.

Step 5: “Find the Cracks” in the system and figure out how your leverage can widen them

In a popular assembly, an organizer’s two immediate goals are 1) getting our neighbors to see that we have shared interests and problems caused by powerful institutions, agencies, and individuals and 2) finding ways to do something about them.

Especially at the first meeting, at least one agenda item should include discussing the shared issues and interests that you heard from your neighbors. You might report some of the issues that you heard during outreach and ask people to raise their hands if it worries them or ask neighbors to speak to them. You might also open the floor for attendees to bring any issues to it. No matter how you do it, getting neighbors to hear, see, and experience that they are not alone in their concerns is integral to building a shared sense of what the neighbors want to challenge.

As the popular assembly narrows on an issue plaguing the community—fear of ICE raids, neighborhood displacement and gentrification, police harassment, disaster relief, or anything else in between—you’ll want to, in the words of the KPA volunteer cited in this sub-header, “**find the cracks**” in the system.¹⁰ Where are the holes you can poke in the system? Where can communitywide pressure be put and action taken against them? You’ll likely need to learn about how these systems operate to do something about them, so finding resources, research, or bringing in experts can be a good next step.

¹⁰ Quote from Armando, a volunteer with Koreatown Popular Assembly, cited in Charles Davis, “Meet the Grassroots Organizers Who Stood Up Against ICE’s 7-Eleven Raids,” *In These Times* (blog), January 25, 2018, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/grassroots-organizers-ice-7-eleven-raids-immigration-koreatown-deportation>.

Once you find those cracks, find ways to exploit them and offer potential solutions with **collective action**. Consider what short, medium, and long-term structures and practices can directly challenge them, and get to work taking the action. Any specific solution might require multiple people-packed teams to make it work. Don't be afraid of starting subcommittees to complete work between big meetings, but always document what you did, what worked, what didn't, and any lessons learned you can pass down to future participants.

The Koreatown Popular Assembly Offers an Example by Confronting ICE Terror

Assembly participants understood they wanted to protect themselves and their neighbors from ICE, actively and directly. They decided three primary ways to do it: share information about their rights with their neighbors; train educators and hospital workers on how to make their workplaces “sanctuary sites” that refuse ICE entry into them; and develop a rapid response network to document and ultimately mobilize community members to disrupt ICE activity.

When participants learned that ICE were staging raids in a grocery store's parking lot, they started patrolling the area and tapping workers and nearby businessowners to share tips about the agency's movements, then later shared confirmed evidence with the public about the ICE hotspot. Eventually, the agency had to find a new location to launch operations.

Its rapid response network required three teams with dozens to hundreds of volunteers: trainers to onboard new participants; dispatchers to take in tips about ICE activity; and first responders to visit the areas of reported activity to confirm reports. Eventually, the massive effort required to run the rapid response network became KPA's primary focus.¹¹

Deciding Our Future, Together

A popular assembly is not just intended to solve one discrete problem with a group of neighbors. It is a building block of a new world; one where everyday people collectively take control over their communities and lives.

In this final set of steps, we describe two longer-term considerations to keep a popular assembly meeting, planning, deciding, and acting: recruiting and retaining new organizers and making space for addressing new widespread concerns.

Step 6: Build for today—and tomorrow

As any organizer will tell you, they're trying to organize themselves out of their role. We're not building leaderless movements, mass organizations, or popular assemblies; we're building *leaderful* ones where *everyone* feels empowered to practically contribute and guide their development.¹²

¹¹ Descriptions of these practices can be found in Juan Verala Luz, “Building Neighborhood Power to Defeat ICE: Lessons from KPA,” *Black Rose Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation* (blog), March, 21, 2025, <https://www.blackrosefed.org/kpa-reflection-2025/>.

¹² Juxtaposed with leader-centered leadership, where an organizing project oscillates around the stature, ego, and efforts of one or a handful of leaders, Ella Baker's practice of what Charles Payne calls *group-centered leadership* puts the people you are organizing—their capacity to understand and change the world around them—at the center of social struggle. Discussions about these juxtapositions go beyond the scope of this summary, but you can learn more about them at Charles Payne, “Ella Baker and Models of Social Change,” *Signs* 14, no.

The lone organizer, or small handful of them, can be a death knell for a popular assembly. Not only does it put lots of pressure on them to keep the project running, but it means they can quickly burn out. Even more, small groups of organizers can hold lots of tacit knowledge about the ins and outs of an assembly. In an extreme scenario, an assembly can stop operating altogether when those core organizers step back. Indeed, core organizers with Koreatown Popular Assembly stated the number one reason they eventually wound down the project after six years was due to them stepping back from it for life reasons—marriages, births, moves, promotions at work—and their inability to recruit and retain other participants to keep it running.

Consciously recruit and build up the confidence, skills, and investment of newly activated organizers throughout the assembly's development. Create accessible on-ramps for participation: gently delegate tasks to complete; offer support to see them through it; congratulate them when they accomplish it; and debrief with them when it doesn't go according to plan. That will develop an organizing practice that demonstrates 1) none of us can do this alone and 2) we must support each other to accomplish our goals.

Step 7: Listen for new concerns and experiment flexibly

In the best-case scenario, the neighbors who create a popular assembly will take collective, organized action against an institution, its policies, and the people who execute them and those actions halt harmful practices or win gains that improve our lives.

But organizing campaigns often run into walls. Sometimes they're created by the systems: there really are few opportunities to resist its particulars at a given moment or administrative and policy shifts change the emergency to address. Other times it's driven by waning interest: neighbors lose excitement to do something about the issue as other commitments or concerns take precedence. Oftentimes, the two are bound together.

In a popular assembly, we're not just building a single campaign; we're building new structures to run a future world where we no longer center corporate profits and political control, but each other's needs, aspirations, and well-being alongside sustainable life on the planet. That means that we need to recognize when we are hitting those walls or hearing new predominant concerns and facilitate discussions among each other about where or what to do about them. Don't be afraid to broach new topics and issues to address encourage the neighborhood to keep its concerns, suggested solutions, and collective action at the center of the popular assembly.

Building Popular Power, One Neighborhood at a Time

In this short article, we introduced seven steps for meeting your neighbors and changing the world with them. As we explained in it, we begin to confront the social terror and our isolating experience of it by knocking on our neighbor's front door and inviting them to discuss the issues together. When we decide to and ultimately act against them, we build the popular power we need to transform this world, once and for all.

Popular assemblies are not about any one organizer or even group of organizers; they are about developing within neighbors the beliefs, confidence, and organizational structures to chal-

4 (Summer, 1989): 885–899. https://blackwomenintheblackfreedomstruggle.voices.wooster.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/210/2019/01/Charles-Payne_Ella-Baker-and-Models-of-Social-Change.pdf; Ella Baker, "Developing Community Leadership," 1970, https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/baker_leadership.pdf. ☒

lenge and ultimately replace capitalism, the state, and other structures of domination that dictate the conditions of our lives with ones that we control.

We have the potential to build a better world—together—in part by building popular assemblies, one neighborhood at a time.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Members of the Black Rose/Rosa Negra Housing and Territorial Committee
How To Organize a Neighborhood Popular Assembly
June 2 2025

Retrieved on November 16 2025 from
<blackrosefed.org/how-to-organize-a-neighborhood-popular-assembly>

usa.anarchistlibraries.net