

Introduction to Neighborhood Assemblies

Usufruct Collective

March 2017

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What are Neighborhood Assemblies?

Neighborhood Assemblies are ways for people to get together to talk about political and economic issues and solve common problems and meet common needs without being ruled over by representative politicians, bosses, and other kinds of power over people. They can do everything from pooling skills, tools, resources, needs, and ideas together, to direct action, to mutual aid, to popular education, to infrastructure building. Neighborhood assemblies build people power at the expense of hierarchical power.

How do Neighborhood Assemblies Organize?

People delegate a facilitator who is rotated and recallable, make an agenda of what to talk about, and people talk about things relevant to how the community is organized. People bring up relevant action items, projects to start, etc and then make collective decisions that are implemented by those who agree to do so. Committees can get formed and committees that get formed report back to the general assembly.

At decision making meetings, people deliberate and bring up proposals, amendments, objections, critiques, alternatives, and make decisions together that affect the entire group. It is directly democratic and aimed towards inclusivity and organizing on an equal footing (making sure that the content of decisions maintains egalitarianism). Various committees are formed that carry out decisions, but policy itself remains in the hands of people directly. All committees and delegates are mandated from below and recallable and make policy with people not over people. The decisions should be rooted in non-hierarchical practice and towards non-hierarchical ends.

Neighborhood assemblies organize from the bottom upwards, from the neighborhood, to city level, to intercity level. Directly democratic community assemblies can organize together to manage the commons at various scales to create more resilience throughout communities. At such meetings of multiple communities, delegates are sent to discuss things, and bring back information to the people directly who make the decisions. Further, bylaws should be created that keep the basic form of horizontality, direct democracy, and participation for all. When such structures are formal and open, people can be held accountable to them (and such structures can be accountable to people).

These assemblies can do everything from building community gardens, to childcare collectives, to neighborhood self defense, to forming direct action collectives, to police abolition collectives, to creating tool libraries, to forming community co-operatives, to making sure that everyone has enough food, to fighting high rents/wage theft/exploitation, to providing alternative education, as well as working on various local and regional issues by linking up with other assemblies and collectives.

What are shared practices that Neighborhood Assemblies should have?

A good “points of unity” for shared practice is important to make it so that assemblies can be truly free. There are many variations of good points of unity but one example is:

1. Horizontal Community Democracy, meaning people getting together on an equal footing to make decisions with rules without rulers. Hierarchical decision making destroys communal self management, is psychologically harmful to society, as well as constantly in need of decisions that maximize the power of ruling classes over the public (in part through maximizing their ability to use violence through hierarchical security forces).
2. Communal Cooperative economics, meaning that economics should be done directly democratically and in a self managed way by communities and people directly. Political freedom without economic freedom would still lead to an un-free society.
3. Making public property really public, meaning that all policy over public property should be made by the public directly instead of by bureaucrats, representative politicians, and economic elites who buy the city.
4. Aiming towards free necessities of life for all people and decommodification of the economy
5. For an ecological society, which includes but is not limited to the replacement of fossil fuels with alternative energy.
6. Against all forms of oppression from racism, to misogyny, to transphobia, to ableism etc.
7. Solidarity across communities and across borders, this is not just about our backyard we want freedom throughout the globe.

Why form Neighborhood Assemblies? Aren't Affinity Groups sufficient? Isn't workplace organizing sufficient?

Affinity groups, small clusters of people that organize based on shared ideals and practices, are necessary but not sufficient. For one, they are privatized and cliquish and do not reach out and are not designed to do so. Various anti authoritarians, since the First International and beyond, advocated for a public face to organizing to build people power. Building infrastructure that is managed without hierarchy requires going beyond affinity groups and into dialogue with neighbors and workers, to build affinity throughout one's community and beyond.

Workplace organizing is important, and is not done enough. However, there are people who are neither worker nor employer (such as the unemployed, the unemployable, reproductive laborers, students, some artisans, professionals, people discriminated against in the economy etc.). Community assemblies bring everyone within a community together on an equal footing, and build organizations that are community based and not just workplace based. The management of the city (politics) is different than just the production and distribution of goods and services.

Neighborhood organizing, workplace organizing, and affinity groups, aimed towards similar goals of a good society, can work in tandem to achieve shared goals.

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