

## **OUT OF THE TOOLBOX**

### **Assemblies**

Across the world, social movements are experimenting with assemblies as a form of self-governance and direct democracy. At Standing Rock we had an Action Assembly that was dedicated to meeting every day. Occupy Wall Street called it a General Assembly. Others call it a People's Assembly. Whatever the particular form these assemblies take, there is a growing awareness that our elected officials are not accountable to the people most affected by their policies. Assemblies are a political space where many voices can contribute and create, collectively informing a course of action. At the most basic level, people want the power to determine their own lives, and assemblies are a space and process that allow people to get a sense of their own power.

Convening an assembly is not rocket science, but it requires planning and intention. Here are the basics:

- Find a large space
- Invite people to join

- Form a big circle where people fill the whole space
- Get a good sound system or use a people's mike
- Begin with time for people to express problems, concerns, or fears
- Develop a shared analysis of why these problems are happening
- Seek out ideas on what people want
- Synthesize the ideas
- Have an open discussion on what we can and are going to do to get what we want
- Make a collective decision about a few key action steps
- Create ad hoc working groups if needed
- Close with a clap, song, whoop, or prayer!
- Reconvene the assembly at a regular time and place to update, reflect, and plan more action

The process of working together builds power and hope. We develop new relationships with people who have a common cause. Assemblies create momentum and a sense that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. We are exercising our power in the moment and practicing direct democracy, the very act of which inspires and ignites the changes we seek.