

# FROM THE BOTTOM UP: STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES FOR MEMBERSHIP-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Sylvia Rivera Law Project

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Women Prisoners  
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# Introduction

In 2007, the members of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) formed a committee to investigate how to add new dimensions to SRLP's membership structure. We aimed to intentionally create more points of entry for community members whose ongoing experiences of state violence, poverty, ableism, racism, and transphobia produced obstacles for them to consistently participate in community organizations. We set out to learn the following:

- What are other organizations doing to build and sustain their membership models?
- How can we create organizational models that build skills and leadership within community members?
- What organizational models support grassroots fundraising of organizations?
- How might we best utilize ally energy?
- How can we address the common obstacles that come up in doing radical work to fight oppression while also facing oppression?

In 2007, SRLP had been operating for five years. During SRLP's early days, we had determined that a collective governance model matched our commitments to racial, economic and gender justice. We had developed our model by studying the structures of existing collective organizations and asking questions of their members. After five years of innovating and experimenting with what we had learned, we realized it was time for a new round of research into these new questions that our work had brought up.

*We hope you will use and share these ideas and build new models that further expand the transformative imaginations of freedom all of our communities are working to build and practice*

As we began to formulate a list of organizations to contact and questions to ask, we found that many of the organizations we reached out to were asking similar questions and desiring similar information as they continued to develop their own membership structures. Some of these organizations joined our research team: California Coalition for Women Prisoners and Justice Now; and others requested that we make this information available after completing our research. This report is our attempt to boil down the key insights we gained about organizational models during the many hours of interviews and conversations we had during our research period. Needless to say, because of the wealth of innovative projects that exist, our research just scratches the surface. Nonetheless, we found helpful information that has already been of great use to several organizations and that we believe may support work to develop accountable, effective organizations. We hope you will use and share these ideas and build new models that further expand the transformative imaginations of freedom all of our communities are working to build and practice.

# I. EMERGING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE NON-PROFIT INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

This report is a part of a broader ongoing conversation in social justice-focused projects about the limitations of what has come to be called the “non-profit industrial complex” or the “NGO-ization”<sup>1</sup> of social justice work. Many activists and scholars have been raising questions about how the move toward models of organization that are funded by philanthropy has impacted social movements in the last several decades. Specifically, some of the major concerns about non-profitization are:

- It has shifted social movement work away from radical demands, strategies and methods towards limited reform goals and service models that sustain systems of oppression.
- It makes organizations accountable to funders rather than to people most impacted by the organizations’ work. Philanthropists serve on boards, funders set guidelines for grants, and elites operate as executive directors. Directly impacted people have little say in the organizations that supposedly focus on their issues.
- Philanthropy is a way that wealthy people avoid tax liability and retain control of their funds, so as organizations become dependent on this type of funding we participate both in maintenance of the wealth gap and in the reduction of public funds.
- It has moved organizations toward business models of governance so that people with educational, race, and gender privilege hold more power, get paid more, stay longer, and make the decisions.
- The emergence of non-profitization has shifted the culture of movement work toward professionalism, competition for funding, and lack of long-term vision.

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<sup>1</sup> NGO, or non-governmental organization, is often used synonymously or in conjunction with non-profit to describe this entire sector of work that has its origins ostensibly apart from state-sponsored and corporate-sponsored entities.

Activists and organizers have developed critical understandings of how non-profitization affects our organizations and, consequently, our political action and demands. Many organizations have been striving to create ways of doing the work that resist racist, sexist, hierarchical, ableist, and classist norms that dictate “running your organization like a business.” In our research, we identified some key principles for doing this work accountably that were shared by many of the groups we interviewed. We found that these groups aimed for the following qualities in their work:

- Leadership by those directly impacted;
- Ongoing development of new leaders;
- Use of an intersectional anti-oppressive framework which takes into consideration multiple forms of oppression without focusing on one to the exclusion of others;
- Practicing what we preach by dismantling oppression in the work as we go;
- Being process-oriented by using ongoing reflection in all our work because we know anti-oppression work is perpetual;
- Understanding that meaningful change comes from below (rather than top-down change granted by elite media, courts or politicians);
- Accountability within the organization, to one another, to the constituency, and to allied organizations and movements;
- Transparency throughout, both in terms of the decision-making process and in *who* is making the decisions; and,
- Strengthening and building relationships as the underlying support system of the work and change it seeks.

Our research also found that certain key questions and concerns are motivating many of the organizations who are creating innovative structures and processes. These include:

- How might we maintain autonomy from institutional funders?
- Is it possible to create financial sustainability?
- How can we ensure that people with the most time/resources don’t run things?
- How do we avoid allies becoming central leaders just because they tend to have certain kinds of skill development, free time, transportation, and presumed authority? How can we use ally resources effectively without takeover by allies?

- How can we keep organizational resources within the population directly impacted (i.e. rather than outsiders getting paid to do the work)?
- How can we avoid/address harmful business-like management models and create new models that embody our values?
- How can we organize when our communities are under attack and lives are unstable?
- How can we make the work accessible to people frequently excluded (people with psychiatric disabilities, homeless people, youth, immigrants, and non-English speakers)?
- How might we combat issues of overwork and burnout?
- Can we connect local work being done across the country through coalitions and national organizations while ensuring that this local work remains autonomous?
- What is the role of organizational boards?
- Should we have paid staff?
- What decision-making models are accountable, efficient, inclusive, and weighted toward the most impacted people?
- How might we build political awareness and educational tools to develop the decision-making and leadership capacity of directly impacted members?

The sections that follow describe some of the key methods of structuring organizations that the organizations we interviewed reported using to address these concerns. In each section describing a strategy, we have included some specific examples of how particular organizations are implementing it.



# The Organizations

Below is a brief description of each of the twelve interviewee organizations that are discussed throughout the Strategies section.<sup>2</sup>

The **Audre Lorde Project** (ALP) is a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Trans and Gender Non-Conforming People of Color center for community organizing, focusing on the New York City area. Through mobilization, education and capacity-building, they work for community wellness and progressive social and economic justice.

**Desis Rising Up and Moving** (DRUM) is a multigenerational, membership organization of South Asian immigrants in New York City. DRUM was founded in early 2000 to build power of South Asian low wage immigrant workers, families fighting deportation, and youth in New York City.

**FIERCE** is a membership-based organization building the leadership and power of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth of color in New York City. FIERCE develops politically conscious leaders who are invested in improving ourselves and their communities through youth-led campaigns, leadership development programs, and cultural expression through arts and media.

**Generation FIVE**'s mission is to end the sexual abuse of children within five generations. Through survivor leadership, community organizing, and public action, Generation FIVE works to interrupt and mend the intergenerational impact of child sexual abuse on individuals, families, and communities.

**Good Old Lower East Side** (GOLES) is a neighborhood housing and preservation organization that has served the Lower East Side (LES) of Manhattan since 1977 and is dedicated to tenants' rights, homelessness prevention, economic development and

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<sup>2</sup> Because our research was completed in 2008 and 2009, we are writing about these organizations as they existed then, with the acknowledgment that each organization is dynamic and evolving and may operate differently now. Where applicable, we are also including updated information about SRLP, which, in part, reflects changes we made to the organization because of what we learned by doing this research.

community revitalization. GOLES accomplishes our mission by working with community residents to advocate and organize.

**INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence** is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and our communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing.

**Jews For Racial and Economic Justice's** mission is to pursue racial and economic justice in New York City by advancing systemic changes that result in concrete improvements in people's daily lives. JFREJ engages individual Jews, key Jewish institutions, and key Jewish community leaders in the fight for racial and economic justice in partnership with people of color, low-income and immigrant communities.

**Causa Justa :: Just Cause** is a membership-based organization building a powerful voice for Oakland's low-income tenants and workers. Their mission is to create a just and diverse city and region by organizing Oakland residents to advocate for housing and jobs as human rights, and to mobilize for policies that produce social and economic justice in low-income communities of color.

**Justice Now** works with women prisoners and local communities to build a safe, compassionate world without prisons. They promote alternatives to policing and prisons and challenge the prison industrial complex (PIC) in all its forms.

**Rights For Imprisoned People with Psychiatric Disabilities (RIPPD)** confronts a system set up to oppress people who have a mental illness and who have been in jail or prison. RIPPD believes that organizing is about more than the tasks at hand and the projected outcomes, it is also about the process that membership goes through as individuals unite and take action together.

**Southerners On New Ground (SONG)** is a membership-based, Southern regional organization made up of working class, people of color, immigrants, and rural LGBTQ people. SONG envisions a world where the 3<sup>rd</sup> shift factory worker and the drag queen at the bar down the block see their lives as connected and are working together for liberation.

**Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP)** works to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine their gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination, or violence. SRLP, based in New York City, is a collective organization founded on the understanding that gender self-determination is inextricably intertwined with racial, social and economic justice.

**Transforming Justice** is a national alliance of organizations and individuals working to address the causes and consequences of trans imprisonment. Transforming Justice is

dedicated to supporting trans prisoners, halting the cycles of poverty and imprisonment that plague trans communities, and being part of struggles opposing imprisonment.

# Strategies

## I. SUSTAINING THE WORK: HOW MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURES CAN SUPPORT GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING

In 2007, the publication of INCITE!'s book, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, sparked conversations in progressive movements about the relationship of our organizational budgets to grassroots community accountability, and state or corporate control and cooptation.<sup>3</sup> The book, and the 2004 conference of the same name, raised a number of key questions, including:

**How has reliance on foundation funding impacted the course of social justice movements?**

**Are there alternatives to the most popular nonprofit models for building viable social justice movements?**

**How do we resource our movements outside the non-profit structure?**

The conversations that emerged highlighted the inspiring models of membership-funded organization such as CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador). CISPES is supported almost entirely by a base of members and supporters, receiving over 95 percent of funding from individuals. Inspired by such models, many organizations are working toward enhancing their grassroots fundraising to lessen dependence on foundations, as well as state and corporate funding.

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<sup>3</sup> INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, ed., *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

We asked the groups interviewed for this report how their fundraising relates to their membership structure:

**Does their membership model help them to move toward grassroots fundraising and away from foundation/state funding dependence?**

**Do they have a formal dues structure? Is there a sliding scale according to income?**

There were some key themes that stood out overall in our interviews about grassroots fundraising:

- Some organizations that have membership dues struggle to accommodate members who cannot pay, and to strike the balance between flexibility and ensuring that the dues structure is effective.
- Many organizations also encourage donors (members *or* allies) to become monthly donors, regardless of whether the organization has a dues structure. This has been best accomplished through various automatic payment formats, since asking people to send monthly checks often doesn't work.
- Some organizations report that their membership structure, including their dues structure, is less fundraising-oriented and more about building and tracking members' investment in the work.
- Many organizations report that grassroots fundraising is one part of their leadership development work. Having members engaged in organizing fundraising events and asking for dues or donations is one part of helping members build leadership skills in the organization.

Specific organizational examples help illustrate these trends:

**SONG** has a formal membership structure with dues at a sliding scale of \$15-150/year. In recent years they have grown from 150 to 700 members. Members get an annual reminder to renew membership, but on a regional scale the organization finds it hard to hold members accountable to paying dues while also being sensitive to members' financial realities. One response to this challenge: **SONG's** website encourages becoming

a member by donating time *or* money, recognizing multiple ways for members to contribute their resources to the organization.

**JFREJ** has a formal membership structure with 1,400 Base Membership constituents, but not all members pay the sliding scale dues of \$54-108/year. Some people do everything members do except donate. After a member goes two years with no contributions, they receive a printed note with the newsletter, and JFREJ has found that through one-on-one meetings and direct asks, dues-paying membership increases. They believe that getting members comfortable with asking others for dues and donations is part of being a membership organization. JFREJ earned about \$18,000 from dues in 2009. Overall, JFREJ brings in one third of its income from foundations, one third from events, and one third from individual giving.

At **DRUM**, membership costs \$20/family and new members also sign a membership form. The fee is waived if a family can't afford it, but dues can also be paid in installments and 99 percent of members do pay. DRUM also holds fundraisers including an end of the year party and a summer picnic. The majority of DRUM's income comes from foundations, but they also hold individual donor fundraising drives and the board fundraises. DRUM has found that having membership dues supports a sense of commitment from members that keeps them coming back to meetings and getting more involved. It is especially useful for helping members come to a first meeting, because when they have already paid dues they tend to show up.

**GOLES** does not have a formal membership/dues structure. As a neighborhood-based housing justice organization, their work requires specific local leaders for each campaign, such as tenant associations for specific buildings. GOLES calls these groupings "Cluster Member Groups." Many of GOLES' members stay involved long-term, but involvement is tracked more closely by activity than by donation. GOLES is creative about identifying alternatives to dues, such as tracking volunteer hours as in-kind donations. Members get points for hours of volunteer involvement, and that volunteered time is recognized and appreciated through incentives such as gifts of GOLES bags, hats, and attending conferences or other events as GOLES representatives.

**SRLP** does not have a formal dues structure but does raise about one quarter of its funds through grassroots fundraising strategies including: earned income (training fees, speaking honoraria, sales of a documentary DVD, t-shirts, and posters); a number of annual events organized by host committees (an art auction, a reception for allies in the legal profession, house parties); regular fundraising mailings and online communications; major donor phone and email campaigns (SRLP classifies donors as "major donors" if they give \$250 or more in a year.) Once a year at SRLP's summer retreat, collective members fill out forms asking about their ability to help generate

organizational resources through donations or various kinds of in-kind support like hosing parties, donating auction items, providing translation and more.

SRLP's Collective staff includes a part time Grassroots Fundraising Coordinator as well as a part time Development Coordinator who focuses on institutional (foundation) fundraising.

These groups are working to creatively, yet critically build membership models that both stress accountability and are sustainable. Through reimagining membership models as a way to bolster grassroots fundraising, these organizations are exploring ways to address the problem reliance on foundation and state funds. They have also incorporated grassroots fundraising models into other areas of their work, including leadership development, membership retention, and the encouragement of initial group involvement.

## II. DECISION MAKING AND PARTICIPATION

Decision making is a critical, inescapable part of organizational life. Individual members, committees, leaders, and organizations as a whole must constantly make choices about what to do and how to do it. Decision-making practices are also ways to implement, experiment with, and model anti-oppression behaviors. Two key questions that form the basis of any decision-making approach are: “**Who makes decisions?**” and “**How are decisions made?**” The first question is about who gets to participate and to what extent, and the second question asks how participation is transformed into decision.

How are decisions made? Do we vote?  
Come to consensus? Something else?

The organizations we interviewed have developed a wide range of practices and decision-making models that foster accountability, are inclusive, and are weighted toward those most impacted by the organization’s work and/or vision of transformation. They use a number of strategies and practices such as collective governance structures, consensus and modified consensus decision making, open meetings, and special advisory boards of specifically impacted groups.

### a. Collective governance structures

**SRLP** is governed by a Collective made up of both staff and volunteers, all of whom have equal decision-making power. There are five equally important teams that divide the organizational work, and each team is made up of staff and volunteer members.

- The *Direct Services Team* runs the legal clinic, makes determinations about how to take and handle cases, advocates for policy reform within institutions that impact the constituency, and sustains relationships with allied service providers.
- The *Public Education Team* creates and implements trainings for other groups and organizations, creates and distributes public education materials, develops and maintains the website, and creates and implements SRLP’s media advocacy work.

- The *Fundraising and Finance Team* is responsible for raising money for operations, coordinating the budget-planning process, maintaining relationships with the donor base, creating fundraising events, and administering the financial systems.
- The *Collective Development Team* is responsible for recruiting staff and collective members, making policies and programs regarding SRLP's diversity, and developing policies and procedures for SRLP staff and collective members.
- The *Movement Building Team*, the newest SRLP team, works to develop and expand SRLP's membership and community organizing work, coordinating with other membership-based organizations and aiming to develop the leadership of SRLP constituents with a focus on those who are most vulnerable.

*People are more likely to fully engage in implementation when they have fully participated in decision-making and had their concerns heard and addressed*

The teams prepare annual workplans that they present every summer at an all-collective retreat where other members can ask questions, raise concerns, suggest changes and ultimately approve each other's plans. The teams are then charged to do that work and make whatever decisions they need to make to implement the plans during the course of the year. At the winter retreat, the collective evaluates updates to the budget and workplans that were approved six months before. The teams all meet together at the all-collective meeting where cross-team updates and business can take place. All-collective meetings and retreats are also used for political discussions about the direction of the work, as well as for proposals that concern the entire collective, such as the annual approval of the budget. The budget is created by the Fundraising and Finance Team after pulling together the separate smaller budgets from each team, in order for all collective members to gain skills and experience creating and understanding budgeting processes. All-collective meetings and retreats are also places where white and people of color caucuses<sup>4</sup> are utilized, and other racial justice organizational development work and relationship building occurs.

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<sup>4</sup> SRLP developed our white caucus and people of color caucus through our Racial Justice Organizational Development process which began in 2004 and was supported by consultants from Dismantling Racism Works. For more information about Dismantling Racism Works, see <http://dismantlingracism.org/process.html>.



SRLP uses consensus decision-making processes in all of its meetings. The book *On Conflict and Consensus* is the guide it uses to train members in working by consensus.<sup>5</sup> SRLP's collective handbook<sup>6</sup> outlines its collective structure and functions, and specifically includes a decision-making chart (Appendix A) that operates as a quick guide on which teams and bodies should initiate which decisions, who must be consulted, and how a decision can be finalized. This is a very useful tool for organizations adopting non-hierarchical decision-making processes.

## b. Consensus and modified consensus decision making

A number of organizations working to challenge and transform oppression have implemented alternatives to adversarial majority rule decision making. Consensus decision making honors the value and perspective of each voice while promoting the practice of dialogue, compromise, and cooperation. Using consensus supports a value system that suggests that even if a minority of people experience a particular harm or

People are more likely to stay engaged with a group when they know they will be listened to and taken seriously

hold a particular concern, it may be very important. Even if only a few people are concerned about something, making sure this concern or harm is fully discussed has several benefits. First, it will improve group buy-in—people are more likely to stay engaged with a group when they know they will be listened to and taken seriously. Second, it will help avoid reproducing marginalization. For example, if a small number of people with disabilities are in a group and a group decides to overrule their concerns about ableism related to a particular decision by majority rule, the group will reproduce the broader ableism in

society and make the space unwelcoming to people with disabilities. Third, consensus helps the organization more fully implement any decision it comes to because everyone will have had a chance to voice their concerns and come up with a proposal that addresses them. People are more likely to fully engage in implementation when they have fully participated in decision-making and had their concerns heard and addressed. **SRLP**, **INCITE!**, and **DRUM** are all using the practice of consensus-based decision-making to foster anti-oppression practice.

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5 C. T. Lawrence Butler and Amy Rothstein, *On Conflict and Consensus: a handbook on formal consensus decisionmaking* (1987).

6 Available at [http://srlp.org/files/collective handbook 2009.pdf](http://srlp.org/files/collective%20handbook%202009.pdf)

**INCITE!** has implemented a modified consensus decision-making strategy that enables decision makers to balance the value of consensus decision-making with the need for efficiency and time management. INCITE!'s ten member national steering committee, made up of individuals living in different parts of the United States, makes all decisions via in-person meetings or conference call.

- Each major decision is deliberated over the course of two in-person meetings.
- Technical decisions are made using conference call voting.
- Voting is done using five finger-ranks.
  - Five fingers means a block.
  - Four fingers signals a conflict and requires an explanation by the participant.
  - Two and three fingers are “Oks.”
  - One finger signals the participant’s support for the proposal.
- If a proposal results in too many two and three finger votes, the group revisits the issue. This strategy enables individuals to register their support or disapproval in degrees, while simultaneously fostering the degree of consensus necessary for moving forward respectfully and with acknowledgment of all voices and perspectives. This proposal process can also happen initially over email, allowing decision-makers to “test” out an idea first, and then learn that certain ideas are going to require more discussion.

### **c. Open meetings**

Frequently, community members who are highly vulnerable due to homelessness, disability, poverty and interaction with detention systems have a hard time making a commitment to attend meetings consistently or cannot check email or phone messages to find out when meetings are scheduled. Regularly held open meetings provide opportunities for participation from community members and people most targeted by systems of oppression. Consistent time and location every week or month means that people can come when they can make it, can bring new people with them, and the organization can easily spread the word about meetings to service providers, arts or community media groups, and others. Most organizations also have one or more closed meetings of organization members, committees, or staff to do specific work, but open

meetings serve as a key entry point into the organization. Open meetings offer opportunities for organizations to:

- Develop relationships with new, interested participants;
- Explain the organization's work, approach, and vision;
- Build leadership and other capacities in participants;
- Learn about the concerns, experiences, and ideas of new participants; and,
- Build organizational capacity by bringing in new members.

Providing bus, taxi or subway fare or rides to meetings, as well as food at meetings, is another key element to making open meetings accessible to highly marginalized members.

**RIPPD, Audre Lorde Project, and Transforming Justice** have all used regular, same-day-every-week meetings that are open to everyone. People who attend these meetings often become members of the organizations. Some of the activities these groups reported from their open meetings are as follows:

- Existing members have one-on-one interactions with new arrivals to introduce them to the organization and start a relationship, and have the opportunity to catch them up on what will be going on at this specific meeting so that they can participate;
- Political development workshops (discussions of oppression issues and dynamics, political history info sharing, theories of social change and organizing);
- Skills trainings (how to facilitate a meeting, computer skills, organizing skills, fundraising skills);
- Campaign development and updates;
- Identifying people who want to go to upcoming conferences or meetings and speak and connecting them with opportunities;
- Hearing from allied organizations about their work or actions that they are looking for involvement in; and,
- Preparing for actions (making posters for

**RIPPD's meetings also frequently include discussion about the appropriate role for allies and/or differently impacted community members**

marches, planning attendance at an event.)

**RIPPD** reports that their open meetings often include “Organizing 101” elements. RIPPD members who are psychiatrically disabled people who have survived imprisonment often need great encouragement to believe that they can be leaders take up active resistance due to the trauma and conditioning they have survived. As a result, RIPPD regularly focuses its meetings on teaching about and discussing organizing. RIPPD’s meetings also frequently include discussion about the appropriate role for allies and/or differently impacted community members. Because family and friends of formerly or currently imprisoned psychiatrically disabled people are also part of the meetings, the group regularly openly discusses dynamics where the formerly imprisoned people are less likely to speak up or where allies or family members take up more space. These dialogues promote an implementation of RIPPD’s values of being governed by psychiatrically disabled people, along with their families and friends.

#### **d. Advisory boards of specifically-impacted groups or all directly-impacted boards**

Some organizations that partner with and advocate for specifically targeted or impacted populations, like currently or formerly imprisoned people, seek to center the leadership and participation of those most impacted. Having advisory boards composed mainly or completely of members of specifically or directly impacted groups formalizes a structure and process for such participation. This is especially critical, while also often a difficult challenge, because those most impacted often have the most obstacles to participation, such as not being able to attend meetings in person because of imprisonment. **Justice Now** and **SRLP** are two organizations that have developed successful advisory and leadership boards to put decision-making power directly into the hands of those at the center of the struggle.

**Justice Now**, a prison abolitionist legal advocacy non-profit organization, has a ten member Board of Directors. The Board of Directors exercises ultimate control over all major organizational decisions including campaign strategy, scope of direct service work, fundraising, leadership, and staffing. Justice Now has eleven people on the board: four of whom are currently in prison; three who were released within the last two years; two who were released in the last six years; and two who have never been in prison (of these two, one has both a brother in prison and a father who has been in and out of prison and the other has worked on and off in the sex industry and has faced criminalization.) Because imprisonment makes it impossible to meet as a whole group, individual imprisoned Directors meet in multiple rotating rounds with the non-

imprisoned Directors and informally with each other in order to facilitate everybody's equal participation and input.

- One Director meets with board members in a Southern California prison, brings updates and administrative reports, and describes ongoing projects. Feedback from imprisoned Directors is recorded and shared with other Directors either through legal mail or visits. The same happens for those in Central California prisons.
- One Director who has legal access to those Directors, all of whom are in the same Central Valley prison, meets with them in "speed dating" fashion.
- Voting is carried out through a similar process. When major issues are up for a vote, information is sent in by mail ahead of time, and then the vote is taken during the in-person meetings.
- Directors in prison often find ways to communicate with each other about the substance of the meetings.
- If a follow-up vote or conversation is needed, the outside Directors will make a second "speed dating" visit.
- Formerly imprisoned Directors who are on parole or have other mobility or associational restrictions are able to stay apprised and provide input through conference calls with the Directors who are liaisons with the Directors in prison.

The process actualizes  
a commitment to  
leadership by those  
most directly impacted

Though this process is time and resource intensive, and the Board is never able to meet or dialogue simultaneously, the process actualizes a commitment to leadership by those most directly impacted. Justice Now's bylaws require that one third of the board is currently or formerly imprisoned, but their goal is to include as many people directly impacted by imprisonment as possible.

**SRLP** created a Prisoner Advisory Committee (PAC) to address barriers to communication and political participation for people who are currently imprisoned. SRLP wants its work, much of which relates to criminalization and imprisonment, to be accountable to and governed by people directly impacted. PAC was created to provide a specific entry point for currently imprisoned people to become part of SRLP's work. PAC currently has sixteen members who are enthusiastic about sharing their time, passion, and expertise with SRLP. These members are trans, intersex, gender non-conforming people, and allies who are currently imprisoned. Members of PAC work together with

members of the SRLP collective to develop workplans. PAC members have helped with a national position statement on transgender healthcare in correctional settings and provided comments to the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission. They are developing creative ways to work on changing policies, building community, and sharing information and strategies. They also collaborate with SRLP staff to publish a newsletter called *In Solidarity* that highlights their work and keeps currently imprisoned folks connected and informed.

### **III. MEMBERSHIP**

Membership structures of organizations are what determines how the organization will be governed, who can make what decisions about the organization's work, and what steps have to be taken before a decision can be made. We asked the organizations some specifics about how they structured membership in their organizations.

**Who can be a member of your organization?**

**Are there different types or levels of membership or are all members the same?**

**What role do staff play in relation to members—are they like other members, or are they different?**

**What do you do to attract members to the organization? Particularly, do you provide any services that the community needs and does that help bring members into the organization?**

**What role does your membership structure have in creating an organizational culture?**

The organizations we interviewed have varying membership structures, each with innovative features that help their work to be governed according to their principles.

#### **a. Who can be a member?**

The organizations we interviewed prioritize membership of the people who are most directly affected by the issues the organization works on. Some groups include ways for allies to participate, sometimes as members and sometimes with a different status. The organizational structures we studied aim to either limit membership to people directly impacted by their work, or to make sure that governance power stays in the hands of people directly impacted by ensuring that they remain in the majority. Many of them

have worked on specific methods for incorporating the energy of allies in the organization's work while focusing membership on directly impacted people.

For example:

- **FIERCE** members are LGBTQ youth of color. Allies are not members but can take on other roles.
- **SONG** has no requirements for membership, but 95 percent of members are LGBTQ people.
- **RIPPD** members are people directly affected by prison and psychiatric issues. This includes people who have psychiatric disabilities and have been imprisoned or detained, as well as family members of those who meet that criteria.
- **DRUM** members are low-income South Asian people, and allies are middle-class South Asians, non-South Asian immigrants and/or people of color. Members pay a \$20 fee per family to join. There are two main programs, YouthPower! And the Adult Program. Members are typically members of one sub-group or another. Youth Power! Members are low-income immigrant South Asian youth, ages 15-21.
- **ALP** members are all LGBTSTGNC people of color. Allies cannot be members. All ALP members are also members of a working group: the Safe Outside the System (SOS) group, the TransJustice group, or the Organizing Coordinating Committee (OCC). Each working group has its own approach to structuring membership, but every working group includes at least one staff person.
  - SOS has a three level structure, with general members, active members, and leadership.
  - TransJustice has a general membership and a leadership committee.
  - The OCC is responsible for overall program coordination. The OCC is made up of at least one volunteer member, one member from each working group plus the staff member from that working group, the executive director and a representative from the Board.
- At **SRLP**, the collective must always be at least 50 percent plus one person people of color and at least 50 percent plus one person trans, intersex or gender non-conforming. The subgroups within the collective, such as the staff and each team, are also required to fit the 50 percent plus one guideline. SRLP collective members attend two retreats annually, and attending quarterly meetings and anti-oppression trainings. Each team includes at least one staff member.



The SRLP Collective has ranged in size from about 15-35, including staff. Currently, SRLP has three part-time staff members and four full-time staff members.

- **Critical Resistance (CR)** is chapter based. While CR has an organization-wide membership structure, each chapter is responsible for implementing it locally and is encouraged to bring in members that reflect who is impacted by the prison industrial complex where the chapter is located. CR also works with some individuals that do not live in a place with a local chapter who participate in national work groups that maintain the organization's health and wellbeing.
- **INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence** is chapter based. A national collective body which has a specific set of members governs the national coordinating. Beyond that, there are no formal membership structures or requirements other than agreement on INCITE! Points of Unity. Chapters are local and autonomous.

## b. What role does staff play?

Questions about whether to have paid staff and the relationship of staff to a membership structure are central to the organizations we interviewed, and they address them differently. Most organizations use a mixture of volunteers and staff.

SONG has created a membership structure that aims to reward members who consistently contribute to the organization over time. These members earn the label "Amantes," because they are lovers of the organization

Doing organizational work with a mixture of staff and volunteers raises a number of challenges. One challenge involves the consolidation of decision-making power by those in the organization with privilege. For example, **SONG** has identified that the balance of staff and volunteers within the non-profit structure ends up dictating the way that things go in the organization, particularly the direction of the work and leadership development. SONG highlighted that nonprofits have put in place a system where paid staff and board decide who is worthy of leadership, particularly who is qualified and who is paid. As a

result, leadership is often determined by educational and other forms of privilege rather than by who will do the work with integrity and a commitment to long-term participation. To address this, SONG has created a membership structure that aims to reward members who consistently contribute to the organization over time. These members earn the label “Amantes,” because they are lovers of the organization.

Another challenge facing these organizations is the allocation of work between staff and volunteers. This is a problem for at least two reasons: 1) because staff are paid and often on-site, they end up doing a lot of the work of the organization; and 2) as a result, staff can end up with more information and more decision-making power than volunteer members.

At **SRLP**, staff often wrestle with tremendous workloads because volunteer members are unable to take on time-intensive work, and because supporting the work of volunteer members ends up requiring a lot of time and attention. The need for SRLP’s legal service work is extremely high—more than the organization can meet—and much of this work must be done by staff who can deal with government offices and courts during business hours and/or who have specific training in legal advocacy. SRLP’s current structure aims to address the distribution of work in three ways.

First, SRLP Core Collective Members are required to make a 15 hours per month commitment to the organization, which ensures a significant enough commitment from volunteers to make it worth the time and resources that training takes. While this was initially a required contribution, over time SRLP added other levels of membership that do not require a full 15 hours per month contribution because we recognized that this requirement can be an obstacle for members facing the most challenging circumstances caused by poverty, racism, ableism and transphobia.

Second, SRLP makes workload discussions a part of its annual retreats when workplans are being evaluated, and has also made workload discussions a part of the organizational culture such that workload is almost always discussed when any new project is proposed.

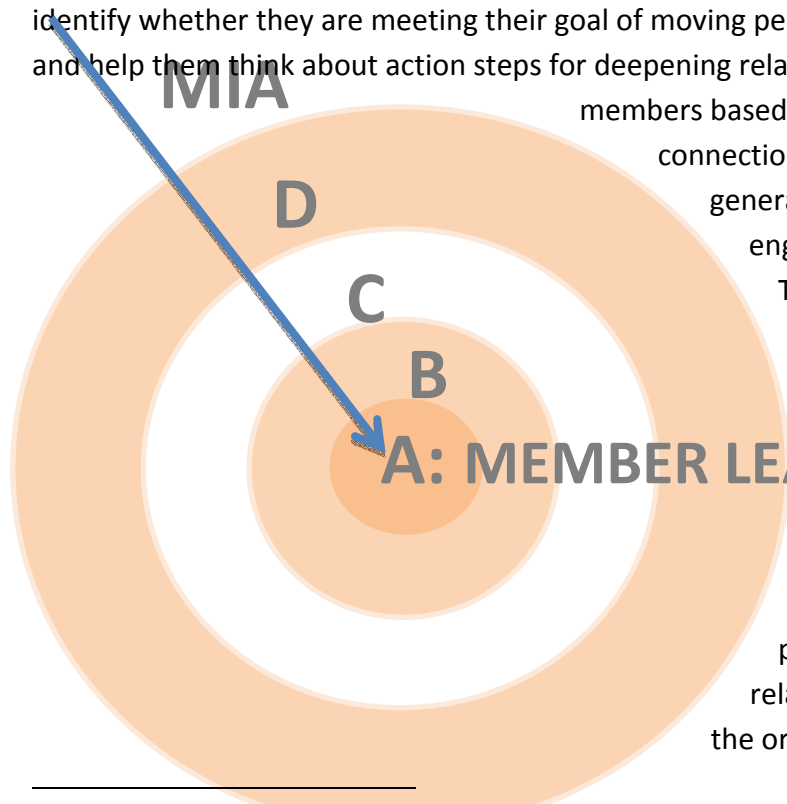
Third, SRLP’s collective decision-making structure, two annual retreats, and monthly meetings are designed to ensure that all members are fully informed about the work so that they can actively participate in decision making. Meetings are often held at night because that is when volunteer members can come, but this can also create long work days for staff. A comp-time system is in place so that staff can take off daytime hours to make up for night and weekend work time. Despite these intentional ongoing efforts, SRLP still consistently faces challenges of high staff workloads.

**INCITE!** made a conscious decision not to have any staff members—they have never wanted to be an organization that pays people or works within the 501©(3) structure.<sup>7</sup> They did not want to create an organization that provided for someone’s livelihood and then have fundraising and program decisions tied to that. One drawback to this approach is that the unpaid volunteers, especially those in the national collective, often find the workloads very large and overwhelming. This can mean that the role is not accessible to people with children or other dependents, people with disabilities, and people without a significant amount of time to volunteer.

### c. Membership levels

Several of the organizations have created tiered membership structures to help support, build, and sustain their membership base.

At **FIERCE** staff and member-leaders use an internal chart (Appendix C) for identifying the different stages of leadership that various members are at with the goal of bringing members into more and more leadership in the organization. The levels are A (member-leader), B, C, D, and MIA. These membership levels help the staff and member-leaders identify whether they are meeting their goal of moving people into greater leadership, and help them think about action steps for deepening relationships with specific



members based on their current level of connection to the organization. The general goal is to increase engagement for each member. This could first be to bring members who attend a few events into greater attendance and participation. Next, the goal is to bring members who attend regularly into leadership development programs to deepen their relationship with the work and the organization and to develop

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<sup>7</sup> 501(c)(3) structure refers to the section of the Internal Revenue Code that gives federal tax-exempt status to non-profit organizations. There are many requirements for achieving this status, including keeping detailed records, as well as limits on activities deemed to be “political engagement” or campaigning.

their skills. Finally, the hope is to bring developed leaders into the role of developing new leaders. Members who drop in for one or two meetings do not have decision-making power, even if they are directly affected by the work of the organization. Instead, they must attend a certain amount of monthly meetings. FIERCE is currently figuring out the criteria for how many meetings a member must attend before they take on decision-making power. At the time of the interview, the proposal was for three consecutive meetings.

At the **Audre Lorde Project**, both of the organizing projects have a multi-level membership structure that has been developed by each project. Individuals become members of a project by coming to the meetings of that project.

- The SOS project has three levels: general members, active members, and leadership. General members are people who have expressed that they are interested and have come to one event or more, active members are people who are more involved, regularly come to meetings, and are involved in decision making about the program. The leadership of SOS rarely has separate meetings but rather conducts its business at the general meeting that occurs weekly.
- The TransJustice group has a general membership and a leadership committee. If an individual member wants to take on more leadership in TransJustice, they will attend the separate leadership committee meeting in addition to the general meeting.

**DRUM** also has membership levels, though the gradations are not as clearly delineated. At DRUM, leaders who are identified from the general membership may be brought onto the steering committee. The members of the steering committee are considered the leaders of the organization. This is the body that makes major organizational decisions, rather than the Board, which takes on more of a fundraising role.

Similar to DRUM's model, **JFREJ** has Member Leaders. These members have a higher level of responsibility than other general members (called Base Members and Active Members.) Member Leaders can take on responsibilities such as co-chairing, representing JFREJ in a coalition, or organizing an event. With the creation of the leadership development program, graduates are recognized as a new member category, Member Organizers, and may take on responsibilities that would typically be done by staff or Board Members.

At **SONG**, there is a specific program in place regionally that distinguishes between general members and the more committed members. These more committed members are part of the Amantes program. These members are passionate members who always show up and who will stick around through easy and hard times. The idea of Amantes is

to formalize that relationship by conferring extra power and responsibility on these members. Amantes put in two to five hours per week, get together with other Amantes once a year for a retreat, have year-long workplans both as individuals and as a group, represent the organization, and have freedom in selecting and initiating projects. Amantes are also invited to write a letter every year to the Board to offer their perspective on SONG's work. This provides the Board with a direct line of feedback from an important and knowledgeable group.

At **SRLP**, a volunteer who has attended three SRLP meetings of the Collective and/or any team may be considered for Collective membership. In addition to Collective Members, the organization engages volunteers who are sometimes allies and sometimes community members who do not or cannot make the commitment to collective membership, for many different tasks ranging from supporting a specific team consistently to dropping in for envelope stuffing or phone banking. All decisions are made within the Collective, with every member having formally equal decision-making power. Non-member volunteers generally do not govern the organization and therefore are usually not part of important decision making, especially since they do not attend the two annual retreats where major workplan and budget decisions take place. However, at open quarterly meetings, volunteers and community members who have not joined the collective are invited to attend and to offer input on decisions before and during the consensus process. The hope is that decisions will be made with as much input from affected individuals as possible. SRLP undertook the research represented in this report because we were considering proposals to add another level of membership that does not require the 15 hour per month commitment because many community members who SRLP wants to include in the governing of its work cannot make the commitment due to the ongoing impact of oppression and violence in their lives.

## **d. Services as a part of organizing**

Some organizations offer some kind of legal or social services in support of their organizing projects. These services may also be tied into membership structures in some way.

**SRLP** is primarily a services-based organization. It was founded with the intention of providing legal services to help transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex people who are low-income or people of color meet their basic survival needs. However, the mission of SRLP frames these services as part of a larger whole, and not as an end in themselves. SRLP seeks to increase the political voice and power of the communities it serves by helping people access identity documentation, immigration status, food,

income, safety from violence, and shelter. It is the hope of the organization that individuals whose needs are met in this way will be better supported to participate in community organizing projects to get to the root causes of harm and violence. Thus, SRLP provides services *in support* of community organizing. As part of that work, SRLP also connects community members who come in for services to organizing opportunities and tries to make all aspects of its work (fundraising events, legal services, public education work, etc.) into strategies for building participatory, grassroots-based change.

**FIERCE** maintains a drop-in space where LGBTQ youth of color can hang out, gather, and generally have somewhere to go. Every day from 4 to 8 p.m. the office is open and community members can hang out there. During this time, there is membership orientation and other opportunities to build leadership and learn about the work of the organization. At all times, there is someone in the office who can do a new member orientation. The members and leadership of FIERCE hope to facilitate an organizational culture where people want to stay involved. Providing a drop-in space meets a key need of homeless or marginally housed youth to have a place to go, and creates an entry point for building a relationship with the organization.

**DRUM** also provides services needed to support its community members. The organization offers support on immigration issues and referrals for lawyers. One of the problems that DRUM leadership had identified over the years is that people would come for services when in crisis and never end up getting involved in the organizing

The SONG culture is a sharp contrast to the business-like professional culture that many non-profits encourage in their workers and volunteers, and it has created a more sustainable organization that is healthier for members and staff.

work of the organization. As a result, DRUM has taken two steps to draw the services and organizing together. First, in order to access services, people must become members. Members pay \$20 per family to join. This money is used to support the services. Second, DRUM has started to provide services specifically on Saturdays, at the same time as the member meetings. People get used to the idea of coming in on Saturdays and those who come in for services are included into member meetings.

## e. Organizational Culture

As a part of their work, many community and membership organizations have created an organization culture that is unique, compelling, or otherwise has the effect of increasing participation and buy-in.

A stunning example is **SONG**, an organization that reports no burnout amongst staff and members. The organizers at SONG suspect that the organization's ability to avoid burnout is grounded in personal relationships between members. They describe the organizational culture as being like family, with people looking out for each other. SONG members and staff are encouraged to bring their whole selves to the organization, sharing what aspects of the work are triggering or difficult for them, and getting support from other members. Many intergenerational friendships have been created that provide guidance, love and support across the membership. SONG members eat together, share stories, relate to each other's kids, and take breaks together. At every Board meeting, they talk about sustainability and how they are doing personally, and about the toll that coping with the trauma experienced by other members sometimes takes on their lives. This culture of family making prioritizes relationship that create a stable "big picture" when conflict comes up between members. There is also a lot of space for creativity in the organization; new ideas are not met with distrust. Negative feedback is also okay because the organization is committed to experimenting with ideas and being honest and what works and what doesn't. Similarly, there is a spiritual dimension, which serves as inspiration for the work. The SONG culture is a sharp contrast to the business-like professional culture that many non-profits encourage in their workers and volunteers, and it has created a more sustainable organization that is healthier for members and staff.

Another example is **DRUM**, which reports that many of the members who attend meetings end up getting involved in the work and returning to successive meetings. They believe members stay active because of the strong community environment at the organization, the political investment by the members and the feeling that the work of the organization affects them personally.

**FIERCE** has an organizational culture that caters to political organizing with young people of color who are LGBTQ. Part of this may be due to the drop-in environment, the energy put into accessible meetings, and the emphasis on peers educating each other. The environment centers youth culture in terms of aesthetics like fashionable FIERCE apparel, music, dance, and hosting events. Intention is also placed on making sure youth get other specific needs met, such as access to computers, food, and an atmosphere that acknowledges dynamics like the occurrence of flirting that exists in queer community organizing. Youth enjoy the space, feel ownership over it, and find

community there. FIERCE members believe that the culture itself facilitates people wanting to stay.



## IV. NATIONAL ORGANIZING

Some of the organizations we interviewed have developed or are in the process of developing national structures that support local work around the country in various ways. This model of national organizing supports the development of semi-autonomous local chapters and connects these chapters to each other through adoption of a shared vision or mission. Individual local chapters, drawing on support from the central national committee where it exists, help inform and determine the direction and focus of the broader organization and can share resources and members with each other.

**INCITE!** has a decentralized national collective in addition to local chapters. The national collective is composed of 10 members each serving three to four year terms with the possibility of an extension. The national collective meets in person three times per year for two to three days each time, but communication is constant through phone calls and email. The national collective's purpose is to connect disparate organizations (chapters and affiliates), amplify local work, and share networks and strategies. INCITE! strives to maintain a dialectical relationship between local and national formations. Local chapter members sometimes become national collective members partly to increase communication with people in local networks. People want tools and resources from the national collective, and the national collective can sometimes provide those.

As noted previously, INCITE! has no paid staff. INCITE! national members recognize that membership in the national collective requires a commitment of time and resources that may be impossible for many working class people. It is difficult to strike a balance between accessibility and acting out the principles of collective community input and not having paid staff; the workload and time commitment for national collective members has been seen as "inaccessible and unsustainable." Even so, INCITE! national members say that they ultimately support the decision to do it this way because it is in line with their principles.

INCITE! is an 'open-ended' organization. With the exception of the national collective, there are no formal membership structures or requirements other than agreement on INCITE! Points of Unity. Open-endedness has encouraged the birth of a number of local INCITE! chapters with diverse practices and approaches to the work. Because the national structure exerts little direct influence over local INCITE! chapters, even the mission and goals of these chapters can be quite distinct. Many of the local chapters function as social/political/emotional support resources for members who are engaged

in other activism, but who seek to recharge, share, and be supported by others who identify with the INCITE! Points of Unity. Other local INCITE! chapters take on their own projects and activities beyond providing support to participants. INCITE! also has “affiliates” who are allied organizations who sign on with INCITE! Points of Unity and have leadership and a membership majority that is women/transpeople of color. One noted drawback to this decentralized national collective form of organizing is that expectations of participants in local chapters may be unclear or unstable. INCITE!’s national ability to provide resources or leadership to individual chapters creates some tension between the leadership development needs of the national organization and its participating local chapters and affiliates. INCITE! has sought to bolster supportive connections between the national organization and local chapters by developing taskforces. There are dozens of INCITE! national taskforces that bring INCITE! politics to subject area organizing and campaign work. Purposes of taskforces include knowledge production, strategy development, and analysis. The NPIC taskforce, for example, was responsible for creating the book *The Revolution Will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*.<sup>8</sup>

**Critical Resistance** is also a national grassroots organization that supports the work of semi-autonomous local chapters and strives to operate in a non-hierarchical manner. CR uses consensus decision-making across the entire organization. Nationally, CR has five workgroups, Personnel, Fundraising, Membership, Communications, and Political Education. CR has three paid staff positions, and each staff member supports the work of all the local chapters and the health of the entire organization. Staff coordinates the operations of the entire organization including offices. CR emphasizes the importance of communications between local chapters and across the organization. Local chapter members are encouraged to participate in monthly organization-wide conference calls, retreats, and national work groups. Local chapters must sign on to the CR points of unity and are encouraged to meet specific benchmarks which are described in a CR document called “Healthy Chapter Benchmarks” (Appendix B). In turn, CR provides resources to local chapters in the form of financial support, literature, trainings, staffing, office supplies, and a network of prison industrial complex abolitionists. Local chapters have the autonomy to determine their own local project and campaigns. Determining the best composition of members as well as methods of ensuring accountability is an ongoing challenge.

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<sup>8</sup> INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, ed., *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

**Transforming Justice** is a national alliance of organizations and individuals that emerged out of a national conference on trans imprisonment in 2007. The groups and individuals who gathered to share strategies and analysis about trans imprisonment at the conference have continued working to create a structure that will help support local organizing and contribute to national conversations about criminalization, imprisonment, and trans politics. In 2010, ten members of the alliance from around the country gathered in Atlanta to continue building their work and sharing ideas from their local experiences.

## V. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

For organizations striving to be accountable to communities most impacted by poverty, criminalization, deportation, and other violence, developing organizational leadership made up of people in those communities and enhancing skills generally in those communities is essential. But how should leadership be developed? How can organizations address barriers to leadership like poverty, homelessness, and lack of time to volunteer? The organizations we interviewed recounted three specific approaches to

**How should leadership be developed? How can organizations address barriers to leadership like poverty, homelessness, and lack of time to volunteer?**

leadership development that were particularly successful: structured leadership development programs, trainings, and relationship building.

### a. Structured leadership development programs

Many organizations working to build movement leadership in oppressed, marginalized, and in allied communities have had success creating structured leadership development programs. Such programs, sometimes called “freedom schools,” provide a specific course of sessions for participants to go through. Such programs might be focused on building any number of leadership skills including:

- Political development that helps participants sharpen their analysis and build shared understandings about sources of oppression and strategies for change (includes studying the histories of oppression and resistance, common myths and misunderstandings that support oppressive structures, critical media literacy)
- Organizing strategy and theories of change (includes studying how organizing campaigns work, how structures of power and decision-making work that the group might want to target in their press for change, the science and practice of organizing)
- Organizational development and sustainability (includes how to build accountable and effective decision-making structures, learning how

to fundraise, how to keep an organization operating, how to understand enough nuts and bolts to truly govern an organization)

Such programs often run over a course of time with multiple sessions and a graduation at the end. Some organizations provide stipends to participants in addition to food and transportation in order to make it easier for them to attend consistently. Consistent attendance can help strengthen the relationship of the community member to the organization, build the member's confidence in taking up a leadership role, help the organization identify any areas where the member may need additional support or may have special talents that should be encouraged and developed. These programs are designed with an understanding that due to educational inequality, lack of job experience, and other obstacles, some community members may not have had a chance to develop important skills.

The following three organizations, FIERCE, JFREJ, and DRUM, are using structured leadership development programs:

**FIERCE** runs a leadership development program called the Education for Liberation Project (ELP). FIERCE's immediate concern is to build leaders for a specific campaign about gentrification and the takeover of formerly queer and trans people of color space at the Christopher Street Pier, which is particularly important to younger folks as a welcoming gathering place. ELP is structured as a paid internship and has three key aims:

- 1) Retention: building strong relationships between members entering ELP and the organization;
- 2) Empower and agitate members through relevant and interactive political education sessions; and
- 3) Increase engagement with FIERCE through one-on-ones and leadership opportunities.

ELP has three levels:

- ELP 1 runs two cycles a year. Members meet three days a week for four weeks, for a total of twelve days of training. Each week has a theme with a different political education topic. The content of ELP 1 includes: orientation to FIERCE and relationship/trust building, intro to organizing (movement history and youth organizing 101), anti-oppression 101 (intersections of racism, homophobia, ageism, and gender oppression and the concept of allyship), global justice and US imperialism, prisons and the education system, and the struggle over the pier and gentrification.

- ELP 2 also runs two cycles a year which are eight weeks each, three days a week. The days are a mix of trainings and work days. The content of ELP 2 includes: relationship/trust building; campaign development and power analysis of the current campaign; base building, effective outreach and recruitment; grassroots fundraising; workshop and meeting facilitation; and two advanced public education sessions. ELP 2 also works to advance key secondary skills including: public speaking, event planning, direct action strategies, media communication, photoshop, and flyermaking. ELP 2 also includes responsibilities for members: organizing member events, doing street outreach and phonebanking, major donor visits, and campaign support work.
- ELP 3 runs year round. It has four cycles of three month-long internships, providing two interns for each program area in FIERCE. Program staff directly supervise their respective interns. In addition to their responsibilities within their internships, ELP 3 members: attend weekly staff meetings and check-ins, are part of a study group that meets monthly, do monthly relationship building activities with other members and staff, and coordinate committee report-backs at member meetings that help general members keep updated on the work of each committee.

FIERCE's Leadership Development Model chart (Appendix C) shows a quick summary of the ELP program.

**JFREJ** began the Grace Paley Organizing Fellowship in 2008-09, a six-month leadership development program which included a series of trainings, mentor-matching, study, and committed work on JFREJ campaigns for 12 to 18 young members. Goals of the Fellowship included:

- 1) building the organizing skills, political analysis and practical experience of 12 to 18 JFREJ leaders;
- 2) engaging the skills of expert trainers and mentors in the JFREJ community;
- 3) influencing, supporting, and strengthening racial and economic justice movements in NYC through a more trained, radicalized and committed majority white, anti-racist Jewish group;
- 4) strengthening JFREJ's capacity to develop, run and win campaigns for racial and economic justice in NYC.

The Fellowship includes focus on organizing skills, analysis of systems and power and oppression, and Jewish histories of activism and organizing. Graduates of the Fellowship are ready to take on the activities and responsibilities of Member Leaders at JFREJ, the most involved level of leadership.

**DRUM** has a program called YouthPower!, where young people take leadership roles in policy campaigns on issues facing low-income youth of color. The young people in YouthPower! run two political education institutes a year; the summer institute is six weeks and the winter institute is one week. These programs use a "freedom school" model and are led by graduates of the program. Graduates also teach courses at various sites throughout the year.

Leaders from the YouthPower! and adult programs are individually coached by the staff and long-term members with the hopes of taking on leadership and responsibility in the organization. There are three basic criteria used for selecting leaders who might take on a more active role in the organization. These criteria are:

- 1) frequency of attending meetings;
- 2) understanding the mission of DRUM; and
- 3) the ability to relate to others, politicize others, and inspire others.

However, DRUM staff and steering committee look at other ways in which people demonstrate leadership as well.

Members who meet these criteria are encouraged to participate in the steering committee of the organization. The steering committee is a recent development specifically intended to increase participation of active members in the decision making of the organization. The executive director and the Board of DRUM are training these active members to take on a more active role in decisions made by the executive director or the Board, including hiring, firing, and finance.

If an individual who has been identified as a leader in the organization drops off, the staff and long-term members will check in on that person on a one-on-one basis. The hope is that investment in the individuals will help the individual develop investment in the organization.

## b. Trainings

Some organizations also use other types of training, not necessarily as part of a structured leadership development program, to support their work. These include anti-oppression trainings and trainings on specific skills that members might need (conflict resolution, media, computer skills, public speaking, etc.) Below are some examples.

**RIPPD** has extensively used training in their membership meetings. Many RIPP members have experienced the ongoing harsh discipline of psychiatric and criminal punishment facilities which can lead to difficulties taking up an assertive organizer role. At the beginning, directly impacted members often tended to follow the lead of staff or more enfranchised family members and allies in the room rather than seeing themselves as decision makers and people who could stand up for their beliefs. Organizing 101 training has helped members come to see themselves as organizers. For the first two years that RIPP was meeting, these kinds of trainings happened regularly.

**Coming to agreement on the organization's strengths and weaknesses, sharing personal stories of experiences of practicing or being subjected to racism, and building shared analysis of societal racism increased the capacity of the organization to openly discuss and address racism and to modify its ways of doing things to move toward further racial justice development**

As the group has grown and taken on campaigns, the formal trainings have become less central but political education is still a part of every meeting.

**SRLP** has used various kinds of training to support its collective members, staff and volunteers. One example is the work of its Racial Justice Organizational Development (RJOD) project. Through this project, SRLP sought to intentionally develop an organizational culture and structure that would centralize racial justice and develop awareness of racism and skills for dismantling racism in its members. SRLP developed a relationship with **Dismantling Racism Works** (DRW). The two organizations initially contracted for two years of work. DRW trainers came to SRLP's retreats (which occur twice a year) and used their curriculum to work with SRLP members on building a shared understanding of the operations of historical and contemporary white supremacy, on how racism works in interpersonal relationships, as well as in broader societal and governmental systems. The group also went



through a racial justice assessment process where members worked in groups using DRW materials and activities to assess various levels of the organization to identify SRLP’s current stage of racial justice organizational development. Coming to agreement on the organization’s strengths and weaknesses, sharing personal stories of experiences of practicing or being subjected to racism, and building shared analysis of societal racism increased the capacity of the organization to openly discuss and address racism and to modify its ways of doing things to move toward further racial justice development. The organization also formed a white caucus and a people of color caucus as part of this work, as well as a “change team,” that helped coordinate the RJOD work. These tools have remained a part of the organization, and the organization has a commitment to ongoing training on racial justice so that new members can be brought into the conversation and learn from the DRW curriculum.

SRLP has also used training that focuses on skills building for members. Two members have attended the SPIN Academy to learn about media advocacy.<sup>9</sup> Staff members working on legal services regularly attend trainings on particular legal advocacy issues. Grassroots fundraising trainings are also frequently incorporated into SRLP retreats to help members learn about doing major donor asks and other useful skills. Meeting facilitation skills trainings have also been used, and an ongoing policy of rotating meeting facilitation is designed to ensure that all members learn these skills.

### **c. Relationship building**

All the activities outlined in this report include relationship building as part of their aim and their methods, but some organizations have incorporated specific tools related to relationship building that are especially useful for building the leadership of members whose lives are made unstable by poverty and oppression.

**When a member does not make it to a meeting, someone will call them to make sure that they know what went on at the meeting, to see if they need further support for getting to meetings, and to check in about any decisions that were made at the meeting to ensure that the member agrees with them**

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<sup>9</sup> For more information, see <http://spinacademy.org/>.

One strategy for relationship building that was reported by many of the organizations we interviewed was one-on-one follow up with individual members. Organizations like **DRUM**, **RIPPD** and **SONG** report that when a member does not make it to a meeting, someone will call them to make sure that they know what went on at the meeting, to see if they need further support for getting to meetings, and to check in about any decisions that were made at the meeting to ensure that the member agrees with them. This kind of one-on-one follow up maintains the relationship with the member even if the person is facing obstacles to attendance that may relate to family obligations, disability, transportation problems, violence, harassment, or other issues. The organization may learn that the member is going through something that others can offer help or advocacy with, or that something that occurred at a meeting made the member feel unwelcome and needs to be resolved or addressed, or may simply help the member feel valued and welcomed by responding to their absence with concern and interest rather than dismissal. This strategy has deepened the relationships between members and strengthened the organizations as well as helping retain and build the leadership of those most directly impacted by the harms the organizations address.

**DRUM** relies heavily on interpersonal relationship building as an organizing tool. Their adult and youth programs both place emphasis on peers in the political education of members and in the development of individual members as leaders.

**DRUM** also relies on a community environment to help bolster relationship building. Monthly meetings on Saturdays help families get together, think about political issues together, and develop a shared analysis using events in their lives. The effect of this popular education model is building a sense of political investment and a feeling that the work affects them.

**When members stop showing up, or when someone feels disrespected by another member, or something else disrupts the relationship, the organization wants to support members in reaching out, resolving, and building**

**SONG**'s regional organizing in the South strongly depends on relationship building as an organizing tool and a strategy for leadership development. Many of **SONG**'s members report feeling isolated as rural LGBTQ people. Forming and maintaining relationships is a key element of **SONG**'s work. Forming strong, accountable relationships is especially important in keeping in touch with members who are homeless or migrant. **SONG** has a

strong commitment to challenging what they call a culture of disposability. This means that when members stop showing up, or when someone feels disrespected by another member, or something else disrupts the relationship, the organization wants to support members in reaching out, resolving, and building. This often means a particular focus on understanding how poverty and disability issues may be at play, rather than jumping to an assumption that someone is not trustworthy or is otherwise expendable. This resistance to disposability and focus on relationship building that takes into account the specific capacities and vulnerabilities of members is part of SONG's family model of building an organization.

The most recently formed team at **SRLP** is the Movement Building Team (MBT), which originated in order to expand SRLP's membership by bringing in participants through an open meeting format that is specifically targeted to trans people of color. These regularly scheduled meetings (called "Hot Stuff") feature interesting skills-building topics that allow attendees to plug into advocacy on issues that affect them directly, as well as providing a space to share their knowledge. For example, a forum on accessing emergency room healthcare allowed all attendees to share their experiences and tips about accessing this care, and to have their input heard and valued, including by allowing SRLP to be accountable to needs identified. From this point of entry, emphasis is put on building relationships by focusing on one-on-ones and moving folks into leadership opportunities, such as asking someone to facilitate the next meeting or asking what they think the next topic should be. Snacks and Metrocards are also offered to attendees. Hot Stuff meetings are advertised via fun catchy fliers that specifically showcase the upcoming topics. MBT's longer-term goal is to use these points of entry to recruit more of SRLP's constituency into collective resistance strategies.

In building up to its first national gathering, **Transforming Justice** centralized relationship building as a form of leadership development through its "Marvelous Mondays" program. Transforming Justice organizers were aware that the people directly affected by the issues the group addresses—trans people who have been imprisoned—often face many obstacles to becoming part of or retaining membership in organizations. They wanted to create an entry point to organizing that met these members where they were at, built and sustained relationships, and established trust for the work that would lead to skills building and leadership. In 2007, Transforming Justice had its first national gathering to talk about trans imprisonment. Marvelous Mondays was a weekly event with food and discussion leading up to Transforming Justice's 2007 national gathering that provided a space for people to get to know each other, to learn about the purposes of the upcoming gathering, to share ideas about how

to make the gathering fit their vision, to build organizing skills, and to take on leadership in the work. Because of the ongoing vulnerabilities faced by the members, including issues of addiction, domestic violence, criminalization, psychiatric disability, and poverty, the relationships built at Marvelous Mondays, and the regularity of the meeting space allowed people to form support networks that could help each other with any number of survival issues. After the national convening, Transforming Justice organizers have continued to strategize around how to centralize relationship building in the work.

# Conclusion

In these times of severe racial and economic violence, a dismantled social safety net, mass imprisonment, rampant homophobia, transphobia, sexism, xenophobia, ableism, and war, social movements face enormous obstacles to change. The increased dependency of social change work on philanthropy combined with the dire need for social services in vulnerable communities has added to the pressures experienced by social movement organizations. Under these conditions, many organizations are striving to make their work accountable to communities rather than funders, to provide what their constituents need most, and to make their work sustainable for as long as it takes to win the transformation they seek. Many of the organizations we interviewed about their strategies for doing this work are small and under-resourced, often because of their refusal to take up strategies and demands that are more readily supported but less effective in addressing oppression. Nonetheless, despite resource scarcity and despite the enormous obstacles faced by communities bearing the brunt of current economic arrangements, these organizations are building strong structures that directly address the limitations of “running your non-profit like a business.”

Our interviews inspired us to continue our experimentation with membership structures that address the needs of our communities, ever mindful that constant reflection and evaluation is necessary as conditions unfold and change and as new challenges are revealed. We are grateful to all who contributed this report and to all who will use this information in their work to transform.

# Appendix: Useful Tools

- A. SRLP's Decision-Making Chart
- B. CR's "Healthy Chapter Benchmarks"
- C. FIERCE's Leadership Development Model Chart
- D. FIERCE's Membership Structure
- E. FIERCE's Organizational Chart & Process for Decision Making
- F. JFREJ Leadership Development Chart

A. SRLP's Decision-Making Chart 2003-2008 (This no longer represents SRLP's structure but is included because it may be useful.)

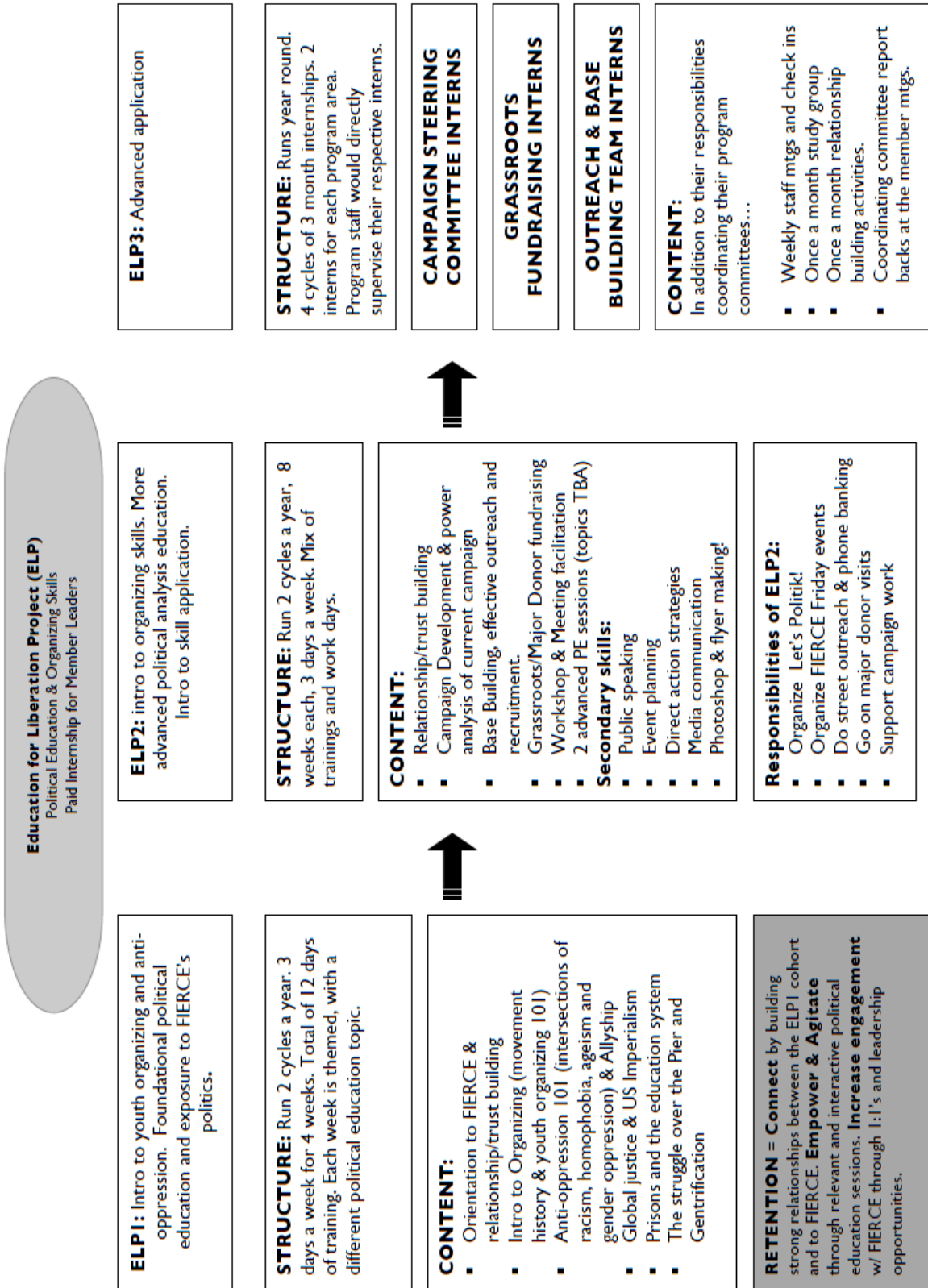
<b>SRLP DECISION-MAKING CHART</b>				
<b>TASKS OR FUNCTIONS</b>		<b>DECISION-MAKING ROLE</b>		
Who's Responsible For Initiating This Action?	Whom Should They Consult Before Acting?	Who Should Finally Approve?	Who Do They Need to Tell about the Action?	
⇒ Position Development, Messaging and Communications				
Position Keeping/Refining Mission/Vision/Values	Collective Development Team	Total Collective	Total Collective @ retreat	Total Collective @ retreat
Deciding to Take a Position on a issue	Staff	Board	Board	Total Collective
Messaging and Preparing Written Communication Products (where fast turnaround is needed)	Public Education Team	Staff	Staff	Total Collective
Communications Strategy Implementation (external)	Public Education Team	Staff	Public Education Team	Total Collective
Communications Strategy Development (internal)	Collective Development Team	Staff	Collective Development Team @ retreat	Total Collective
⇒ Organizational Goal-Setting and Planning				
Develop organizational Goal-Setting and Program Planning Process	Collective Development Team	Staff	Total Collective @ retreat	Total Collective
Teams Work Plan Development	Teams	Team Members	Total Collective @ retreat	Total Collective
⇒ Financial Planning				
Implementation of a Fundraising Strategy	Fundraising Development and Finance Team	Staff and Collective @ point people meeting	Board	Total Collective
Monitoring and Reporting about Financial Situation	Fundraising Development and Finance Team	Staff	Board	Total Collective
Developing Organizational Budget	Fundraising Development	Staff	Board	Total Collective
Developing Fundraising Strategy	Fundraising Development and	Staff	Board	Total Collective





C. FIERCE's Leadership Development Model Chart

# FIERCE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MODEL



D. FIERCE’s Memberships Structure

**FIERCE MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE**

LEVELS	RESPONSIBILITIES	SKILLS/EXPERIENCE REQUIRED	TRAININGS AND POLITICAL ED GAINED	GOALS OF PROGRAM
<p><b>LEVEL MIA:</b> B, C, D members that stopped attending membership meetings and events but are still around</p> <p><b>LEVEL A:</b> At large potential members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get your ass out of the gauntlet 😊</li> <li>Have attended some FIERCE events and/or reached through street outreach, online, or in other organizations.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NONE</b></p>	<p><b>NONE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get members reactivated</li> <li>Pool for potential ELPI applicants and active members</li> <li>Get a sense of FIERCE’s politics and general consciousness raising</li> <li>Sense of empowerment</li> </ul>
<p><b>LEVEL B:</b> General Members</p> <p>★ FIERCE ID card</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attend FIERCE programs and events regularly</li> <li>Attend some outreach activities</li> <li><b>Time commitment: 2-5 hours/month</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic knowledge of the community</li> <li>Interest in social change</li> <li>Ability to be around people</li> <li>Have attended 3 FIERCE events and had a membership orientation through FIERCE Friday or by staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General anti-oppression</li> <li>Activism 101</li> <li>Know your rights</li> <li>General campaign related work/what we do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduation from ELPI</li> <li>Move members from dealing with individual problems in an isolated way to understanding the need for collective community struggle (organizing vs. activism)</li> <li>Connect queer youth to their own histories of resistance, struggle, and change</li> <li>Get a sense of FIERCE’s</li> </ul>

<p><b>LEVEL C:</b> Member Leaders ★ FIERCE ID card ★ FIERCE Tshirt</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attend membership meetings consistently</li> <li>▪ Take on some responsibility for program needs</li> <li>▪ Participate in regular outreach activities</li> <li>▪ Participate in campaign decision-making process</li> <li>▪ Facilitate workshops</li> <li>▪ <b>Time Commitment: 10+ hours/month</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Former B member qualifications</li> <li>▪ Must have attended 3 consecutive membership meetings</li> <li>▪ Good level political awareness in line with FIERCE</li> <li>▪ Strong commitment to activism and basic understanding of organizing</li> <li>▪ Ability to work in a collective process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How to facilitate a meeting</li> <li>▪ Extensive understanding of institutional oppression</li> <li>▪ Histories of peoples movements</li> <li>▪ How to do outreach</li> <li>▪ Public speaking</li> <li>▪ Media advocacy</li> <li>▪ Direct action planning</li> <li>▪ Imperialism and the global economy</li> <li>▪ Case studies in community organizing models</li> <li>▪ Training for trainers</li> </ul>	<p>program/campaign work and how to plug in as well as history</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sense of belonging and commitment to community building</li> <li>▪ Building on values of teamwork, communication, and respect</li> </ul>
<p><b>LEVEL D:</b> Member Organizers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop other members with a focus on recruitment and development of A &amp; B</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Former C member qualifications</li> <li>▪ Have successfully completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Intensive PE &amp; organizing skills study</li> <li>▪ Political theories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Graduation from ELP2 or equivalent</li> <li>▪ Develop very active &amp; consistent campaign leaders</li> <li>▪ Develop consistent and effective members of the outreach team who focus on bringing on new members through street outreach and facilitating workshops at priority organizations</li> <li>▪ Engagement in self-reflection/awareness and critical thinking skills</li> <li>▪ Build self-confidence and humility</li> <li>▪ Sense of responsibility &amp; accountability to FIERCE</li> </ul>

	<p>members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Attend membership meetings consistently</li> <li>▪ Help develop campaign strategy and take on specific program needs</li> <li>▪ Organizing events with staff</li> <li>▪ Facilitate workshops &amp; meeting</li> <li>▪ Provide trainings to membership</li> <li>▪ Participate in organizational development activities</li> <li>▪ <b>Time commitment: 12+ hours/month</b></li> </ul>	<p>ELP 1 &amp; 2 or equivalent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strong understanding of important political concepts and critical thinking skills, such as multi-issue organizing</li> <li>▪ Across the board understanding of organizing skills and application</li> <li>▪ Ability to represent the work of FIERCE clearly internally and externally</li> <li>▪ Presents self in a principled and disciplined way within membership and at all events representing FIERCE</li> <li>▪ Ability to lead a collective process</li> <li>▪ Long term commitment to FIERCE and the movement</li> <li>▪ Active member for at least 6 months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How to do 1 on 1s</li> <li>▪ How to develop a campaign strategy</li> </ul>	<p>bringing on new members and developing leadership of B &amp; C members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ability to move B &amp; some C members into more active campaign work</li> <li>▪ Conflict resolution and peer support ability</li> <li>▪ Ability to assist in implementation of campaign strategy</li> <li>▪ Assistants for ELP1 and possibly ELP2</li> <li>▪ Pool for potential member intern/staff hires</li> <li>▪ Ongoing organizing skills development support</li> </ul>
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## E. FIERCE’s Organizational Chart & Process for Decision Making

### FIERCE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART & PROCESS FOR DECISION-MAKING Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders

FIERCE recognizes the importance of all of our primary stakeholders: Members, Staff and Board. According to our by-laws, each of the FIERCE stakeholders plays a vital role in the life of an organization. Below is a breakdown of the roles, responsibilities, contributions and accountability of each stakeholder group.

Status Role	Board Governance	Director(s) Management	Program Staff Operations	Membership Actualization
<b>Responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sets policy with feedback from Staff &amp; Members</li> <li>Hires &amp; supervises Director(s)</li> <li>Meets legal standards</li> <li>Ensures financial sustainability of the organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carries out policy</li> <li>Hires &amp; supervises staff</li> <li>Plans and directs daily operations of the organization with feedback from Program Staff and Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directs logistics &amp; operations of program work</li> <li>Supervises member positions</li> <li>Carries out program work of organization, taking leadership from goals set with Membership and with support from the Director(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops &amp; designs the programmatic direction of organization</li> <li>Carries out the work of organization through campaigns &amp; programs</li> </ul>
<b>Contribution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides technical assistance, resources and infrastructure to the organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides support and direction to staff</li> <li>Provides support to the Board</li> <li>Optimizes the organization’s resources, opportunities, and infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creates space and strategies to build mass power among our constituency</li> <li>Provides support to membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides social change to society-at-large</li> <li>Engages our constituency on a mass level</li> </ul>
<b>Direct Line of Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates with Board-Member Liaisons about needs &amp; concerns</li> <li>Holds Director(s) accountable, while respecting Director(s) authority &amp; management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serves as a bridge between Board &amp; Staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Serves as a bridge between members &amp; Director(s)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates with Board-Member Liaisons about needs &amp; concerns from the Board</li> </ul>

#### Process for Decision-Making

1. Communication among all primary stakeholders identifying purpose and goals of decision.
2. Benchmarks and criteria for goals and anticipated outcomes.
3. Realistic timelines allowing for transitions among each group of primary stakeholders (i.e., members, staff, board).
4. Realistic timelines allowing for communication with all stakeholders (i.e., allies, funders, general movement).
5. Consensus decision-making among primary stakeholders
6. Evaluation.

## F. JFREJ Leadership Development Chart

### Leadership Development Chart

Members get involved with JFREJ in many different ways – through a campaign, cultural programming, fundraising, etc. There are 3 broad levels of membership.

#### **1. Base Member**

Members of our organization that make up our base. They are either just entering or simply contributing small amounts, but are in it for the long haul.

Desires to change the status quo & support JFREJ mission  
Can describe general purpose of JFREJ  
Pays membership dues  
Attends a New Member Orientation or a Quarterly Membership meeting  
Attends any other JFREJ event

Participates in an action or rally as a part of a JFREJ contingent.

#### **2. Active Members**

Leaders that show commitment and participate in events, actions, and outreach

**Everything that a member does plus...**

Identifies as a JFREJ member

Knows who JFREJ's allies are

Attends 3 JFREJ events/year  
Volunteers at least 1x/year

Is a member of a working group/committee  
Participates in phone-banking

Turns out 2 or more people for event/action  
Attends a skills or analysis training  
Attends a strategy or campaign planning retreat  
Participates in a JFREJ fundraising event  
Generates research question  
Helps compile communications materials  
Outreach to elected officials/policy makers  
Helps debrief & evaluate actions/events

#### **3. Member Leaders**

Leaders that show more in-depth commitment and participation. They are taking on more responsibility inside and outside of JFREJ

**Everything that an active member does plus...**

Sees contradictions and raises strategic questions  
Represents JFREJ in coalitions

Helps organize JFREJ events  
Coordinates campaign work

Commits to leadership roles (co-chair) in campaign working groups  
Co-facilitates member meetings and strategy retreats  
Conduct one to ones

Coordinates phone-banking or take on regular turn-out responsibilities  
Recruit 4 new members or outreach at 4 recruitment activities  
Attends at least 4 skill-bldg sessions/trainings  
Co-facilitates trainings  
Helps organize/hosts a JFREJ fundraising event  
Completes research tasks

Knows how the local and state governments work  
Preps other leaders for action  
Is a spokesperson for JFREJ on specific actions  
Reviews and gives input on funding proposals  
Represents JFREJ with funders