

Draft harvest from conversation on Wed Nov 30, 2016 on
"How do we organize in an effective way, in the current political situation?"

I. Where we ended up:

We need to build relationships and on-going connections
between diverse people and diverse groups.

We need to find our humanity...
stop being in our heads about the division,
and find ways to relate at a human and feeling level with those who think differently...

AND ALSO... we need to stand our own ground.

We need to develop more solidarity / respect / appreciation
among various activists and activist groups.

II. How we got there:

(The following contributions from participants – different ways of seeing the situation, initial solution ideas, concerns, perspectives – are unchanged, yet have been lightly grouped or sorted into themes.)

A. How do we organize in an effective way?

Background

1. Some of us are feeling an enormous sense of frustration... we are asking ourselves, what do we give energy to? What is effective?
2. There is so much to do...Some of us feel a push-pull between larger causes and local causes.

Initial solution ideas...

Community Conversations

3. Have town-wide community conversations, bringing in real diversity. Possibly have these conversations be privately funded, if we can't get local government to support this.
4. *Concern* -- Sometimes the people who need to be at a community meeting, can't be there. They need to work, or they don't feel comfortable attending.

Work to support vulnerable populations

5. Identify where vulnerable populations are, what their needs are, and how to best meet those needs.
6. Undocumented immigrants need representation and advocacy. Spread the word about existing organizations here in the Berkshires that assist vulnerable populations, such as the Free Legal Aid services, BRIDGE, the Immigrant Center. Encourage people to donate to them.

Change / create / influence legislation

7. Build personal relationships with legislators.
8. Work politically to communicate with legislators to influence policy, by calling and writing.

Build networks

9. Build networks. Once we have networks, we can work on issues more effectively, as it gives us a broader base of diverse constituents.
10. Build networks to wrestle with specific issues: for example for climate change, bring together business groups and environmental groups and unions, and find out what we can converge on.

Build relationship and connection

11. We need to create more community gardens, places where people can connect, build relationships.
12. We need to have house parties, where we can raise funds to donate to organizations. Also dance parties, and block parties.
13. We need to pull back and see the bigger picture, so we can develop more respect for what other activists and groups are doing.

Support job-creation

14. We need WPA-type programs, that will give people work, and put people back to work. In some parts of the country, many people don't have any alternative job opportunities to the coal mines. This has created an economic underclass.

B. How do we "get the diversity" in the room? (*racial and economic diversity*)

Once we "go to where the disenfranchised are", how to communicate in a way that is welcome?

How do we design whatever we do, in collaboration with the people we want to have at the table?

Background

1. We live in a bubbled society. The time is ripe for new experimental activism.

Initial solution ideas...

2. As a first step, go to where the disenfranchised are: low-income housing, elderly homes.
3. Do outreach to Boys and Girls clubs.
4. Go to diverse groups and ask, "How can I help you?" And keep going back, because the first time we go, they may not trust that we will keep coming back.
5. We need to work with people who are "service providers", to help them see every interaction with people as an opportunity. Service providers can be educating their clients about citizenship issues.

**C. How do we get a diversity of perspectives in the room? (political diversity)
How do we make this work, not just be "our thing"?**

Background

1. Some of us want to engage in situations where there is more of a diversity of opinion.

Initial solution ideas...

2. Work hard to find the next generation of people with different opinions. Go to the Chamber of Commerce, local Republican Party. Invite them to come together and meet with us.
3. They will need to be invited by a group of people they trust and respect.
4. *Concern* – it can make a difference, who is doing the inviting.

**D. How do we overcome a mindset of distrust?
How do we create trusted networks of communication?
How do we organize in favor of building respectful community?**

Background

1. We've just had a revolution.
2. Mainstream media has let us down....
3. People no longer trust many organizations and institutions.
4. Some people no longer trust rational arguments.
5. The people who voted for T., trust the corporations.

Initial solution ideas

6. We need to listen to what the "other side" is saying.
7. We need to respect the shock we are feeling. We need to take deep breaths and listen. We need to take in other news sources, hear what Fox news is saying.
8. We need to go around knocking on doors to have conversations with people, and ask them, what changes they want to see happening.

**E. How to bridge the gaps?
How to invite a diversity of perspectives, in a way that you don't lose your own convictions?
How to create an environment where something more basic can happen, at an emotional level?**

Background

1. Bridging gaps has always been important... it is even more so, now.
2. Even though it looks impossible, there is a possibility...

Initial solution ideas

3. We need to choose some family relationships, as learning opportunities for learning to listen to the "other side".
4. We need to stand in our own self, AND, at the same time, find a way to relate in an almost inconceivable way, to those who have extremely different perspectives than we do.
5. We need to relate on a human /feeling level to those of us with very different perspectives.
6. We need to heal ourselves, to more effectively heal our communities.