

Toolkit      for  
Cooperative,  
Collective,      &  
Collaborative  
Cultural      Work

PRESS PRESS & THE INSTITUTE FOR EXPANDED RESEARCH

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

Sharing Our Process 4

## 1 PREP WORK

Working Definitions & Key Words 8

## 2 GROUND WORK

Roles & Hierarchy 14

Distribution of Labor 16

Money, Time, & Energy 18

Authorship, Credit, & Visibility 22

## 3 GROWTH WORK

Accountability & Intention 26

Communication & Conflict 29

Personal & Collective Growth 33

## 4 EXPANDED WORK

Build Your Own Toolkit 36

Resource List 40

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

## INTRODUCTION

# SHARING OUR PROCESS

In the fall of 2018, Press Press initiated a process of expanding our practice to both the west and east coasts of the United States, creating a new home base in Los Angeles, California, while investing in our existing home base of Baltimore, Maryland. In this moment of transition, growth, and inevitable change, the organization, in partnership with the Institute for Expanded Research, decided to hold space for learning and reflecting on our past projects since we started in 2014. As part of this process, in January 2019, during Press Press's residency at the the George Peabody Library,<sup>1</sup> we gathered two groups of Baltimore-based cultural organizers, artists, musicians, and community-oriented practitioners who have largely worked through cooperative, collective, and collaborative models for two evenings of dinner and conversation at the library. Throughout the evenings, we talked about collectivity and community. We talked about why we choose, or are often compelled, to do our work through collective models, the challenges we face, and advice we can offer on how to address our various difficulties. Most importantly, we talked about the circumstances, intentions, and desires that drive the collective work models we engage with, thrive within, and sometimes struggle through. We do this work because:

*"We want to make something larger than ourselves. Sometimes you need people to hold you. Survival. We feel connected to a shared struggle. We challenge ourselves and others to learn and grow. There is power in solidarity. Collective work means shared resources and skills. We are working to create utopian experiential educational structures. It's nourishing to work with others. Knowing how to work cooperatively is a basic building block for resisting the state. Non-transactional*

<sup>1</sup> The George Peabody Library is a partner site to the Institute for Expanded Research, which acted as a studio and programming space for Press Press in 2017-2018 to facilitate research for this project.

<sup>2</sup> These quotes were collected from different participants in the workshops Press Press hosted in Baltimore when considering the question "Why do we work in cooperative, collective, or collaborative ways?" Workshop attendees are mentioned in the credits of this publication.



*love, emotional work, anti-capitalism. Personal growth. Support and safety. Multiple perspectives enable more nuanced work. We need to address urgent problems together. In order to reflect on yourself, you need to know yourself in the context of others. Letting go of our egos. It's fun to socialize with a purpose. Shared voice. Sharing privilege and sharing power."*<sup>2</sup>

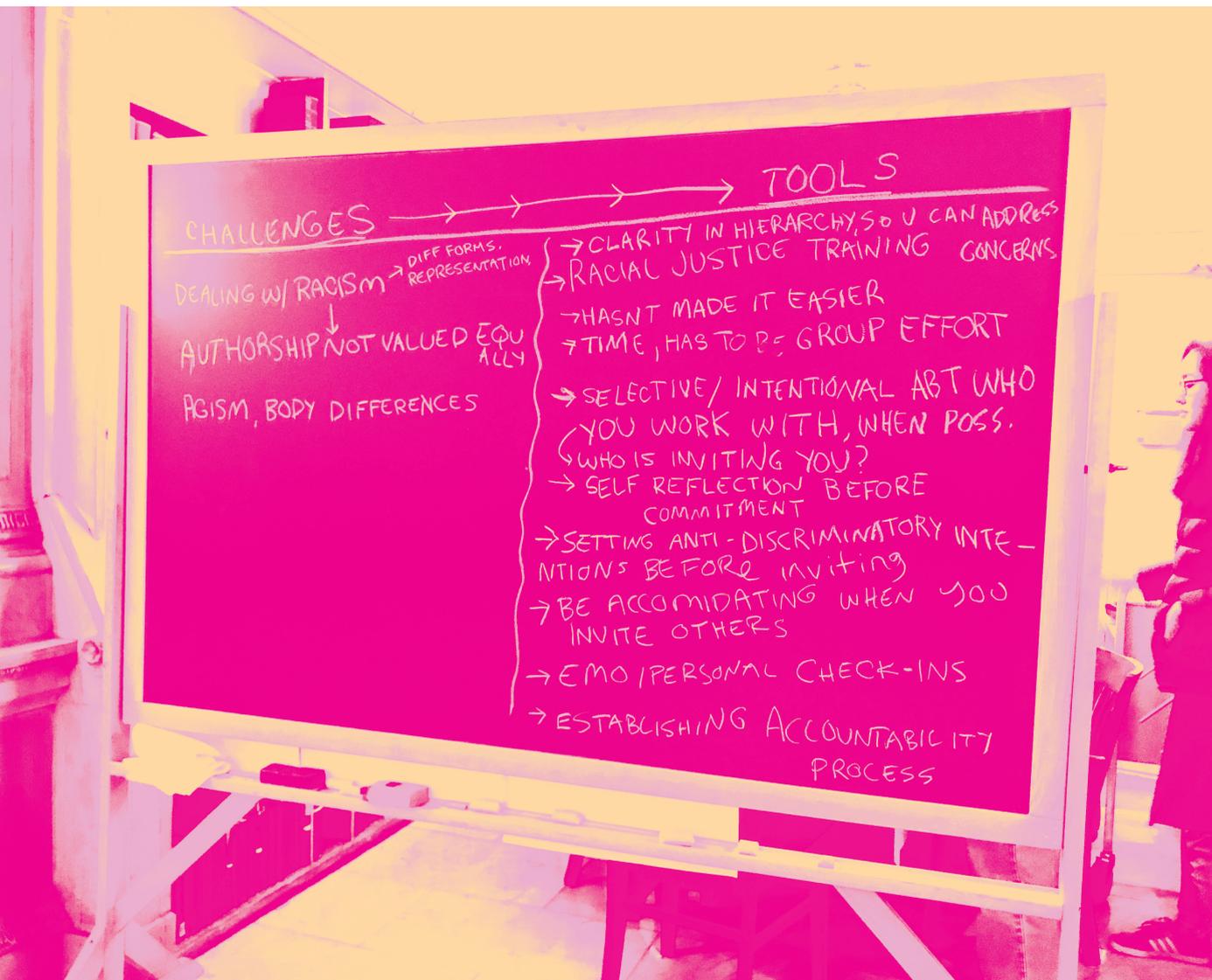
The motives that drive this kind of work are broad, ranging from desire to survival, or even a combination of the two, from the joy that may emerge from working with others to fostering a sense of belonging for our own self-preservation. In doing this work that is so counter to the ideologies and frameworks we encounter in our day-to-day lives, we insist on the need to embrace our fundamental interconnectivity and interdependence as human beings. We do this by honoring multiple perspectives, picking up the slack when others can't, understanding that individual wellness is a collective responsibility, challenging one another, sharing our power, and more.

This publication is organized into four main sections. 1. Prep Work: Working Definitions & Key Words outlines working definitions of terms that will reappear throughout the toolkit. 2. Ground Work considers challenges that may arise around collective organizational structures and includes several subsections: Roles & Hierarchy; Distribution of Labor; Money, Time, & Energy; and Authorship, Credit, & Visibility. 3. Growth Work focuses on cultural, spiritual, and communication challenges within collective organizations and includes several subsections: Accountability & Intention; Communication & Conflict; and Personal & Collective Growth. Finally, 4. Expanded Work aims to inspire further research and exploration of these topics and includes two subsections: Build Your Own Toolkit and Resource List.

This toolkit is designed by and for cultural practitioners whose work is grounded in the values of equity, liberation, integrity, and difference. Throughout the toolkit, we include references, quotes, and resources from organizations and individuals we admire in order to complement the ideas that emerged more directly from our gatherings and inspire further research.

To create the toolkit that follows, we transcribed the notes and audio recordings of the questions that were raised within our conversations and the advice we shared with one another. After composing these materials into a shared document, contributors added edits and made adjustments to the text. Then, we gathered insights from other cultural practitioners, collectives, and organizations, either directly through editorial advice, or indirectly from research and reflection on past encounters, in order to produce a more extensive and pragmatic toolkit. This toolkit does not serve as a comprehensive guide to all problems that may arise within collective work. Rather, it reflects those who gathered together on those evenings, as well as those who shared editorial advice, along with some of the challenges we have faced and tools we've developed to address them.

Simply said, collective work is messy. Although Press Press holds many of the ideas on the pages ahead as values, we recognize that they are much easier said than done. We often struggle to negotiate the challenges of collective work and our biggest resource is advice from other practitioners in our expanded community. For this reason, we invite you to take these ideas and build, change, and redefine them as your own: Why and how do you build cooperative, collaborative, or collective-oriented practices that are grounded in equity, liberation, integrity, and difference?



# WORKING DEFINITIONS & KEY WORDS

Different people, groups, and fields define the terms we'll be using in various ways. In the following pages, these words and themes reappear often. The following working definitions may offer clarity on how these keywords can be understood in the context of this toolkit. In order to define them, we used Dictionary.com, notes and conversational materials from the workshops, as well as other specific sources cited within certain definitions.

**Authority:** Taking influence from the field of Group Dynamics and Group Relations,<sup>3</sup> the notion of authority refers to a right delegated or given for a certain member or members to work on a specific task. Authority might be given or taken in three basic ways: 1) *formal authority* describes authority that is acknowledged in an explicit way, 2) *informal authority* describes authority that may not be explicitly acknowledged, but nonetheless exists, 3) *authority from within* refers to one's individual capacity to authorize one's self. Trust is a necessary building block of authorization. These ideas around authority are related to explicit and embodied hierarchies; see "Hierarchy" defined below.

**Authorship:** An "author" refers to the maker of anything; the creator or originator of a thing. The notion of "authorship" may refer to the process by which someone or a group of people create something and to the experience of feeling a sense of authorship, as in feeling that you created or co-created something.

<sup>3</sup> The Tavistock Institute. "What is a Group Relations Conference? The Leicester Conference." Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, 2016, [tavistock.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/about-Group-Relations1.pdf](http://tavistock.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/about-Group-Relations1.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Trần, Ngọc Loan. "Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable." BGD, December 18, 2018, [bgdblog.org/2013/12/calling-less-disposable-way-holding-accountable](http://bgdblog.org/2013/12/calling-less-disposable-way-holding-accountable).

**Belonging:** The notion of belonging refers to the feelings of understanding, acceptance, respect, care, and membership to a certain community, collective, place, or individual.

**Calling In vs. Out:** Calling out is a public process of holding someone accountable with the hope that it will end their toxic behavior. In her article Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable,<sup>4</sup> published on Black Girl Dangerous, Ngọc Loan Trần describes "calling in" as "a practice of pulling folks back in who have strayed from us. It means extending to ourselves the reality that we will and do fuck up, we stray, and there will always be a chance for us to return. Calling in as a practice of loving each other enough to allow each other to make mistakes, a practice of loving ourselves enough to know that what we're trying to do here is a radical unlearning of everything we have been configured to believe is normal."

**Care:** Generally, care refers to having concern about another person or thing. In this toolkit, care implies different actions a person or group can take to support and accommodate the needs and desires of others. Much like the notion of "safety," care can look like a lot of different things to different people and is important to discuss with specificity among group members. Learning from the teachings of the book Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, it is crucial to understand care for one another as a collective responsibility.

**Collaboration:** Collaboration means being a co-author of the work in some way. Collaboration may feel closer to your heart.

**Collective Work:** Collective work is a broad term that can be used to describe different types of processes and structures that involve a group of people working together in some way. It may imply a longer-term working relationship that spans multiple projects.

**Cooperation:** Cooperation is an act or instance of working or acting together for a common purpose or benefit. Cooperation can happen with many people and may include a more hierarchical structure.

**Courageous Space:** Defining a space as courageous means encouraging folks to be challenged and challenge one another by engaging in material and conversation that may be uncomfortable.<sup>5</sup>

**Equity vs. Equality:** Equity is the notion of folks being equipped with what they need to be successful, while acknowledging that folks are positioned differently in social spaces and have different needs. This notion understands that people are not starting from a level playing field. Equality might aim to promote the notion of fairness, but in reality only furthers existing inequitable social relations.

**Expressions of Power:** Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller describe four main expressions of power in their book *A New Weave of Power, People, and Politics: the Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*: **Power over** describes a dominating type of relationship where one person or group has access to resources, can act, or make decisions, while the other person or group does not; **power with** describes a process of working together to build collective strength, solidarity, or mutual support; **power to** describes each individual's potential to enact change in the world; and **power within** describes a person's sense of self-worth, dignity, and recognition of their power that comes from within.<sup>6</sup> For further explanation on forms and expressions of power, review the article "Power and empowerment"<sup>7</sup> by Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller, published by Participatory Learning Action 43: Advocacy and Citizen Participation.

**Followership:** Followership refers to the act of following the leadership or initiative of another group member. As different roles and hierarchies emerge within the group, group members may be tasked with following and leading in relationship to different tasks. At its

5 This was brought up by Bilphena Yahwon, one of Press Press' core members, during one of the Sanctuary Manifesto Workshops Press Press hosted throughout 2018.

6 VeneKlasen, Lisa, et al. *A New Weave of Power, People, and Politics: the Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Practical Action Pub., 2007.

7 Veneklasen, Lisa, and Valerie Miller. "Power and Empowerment (PLA 43)." 2002, pubs.iied.org

8 Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton Univ. Pr., 1990.

core, followership is based in trust, reciprocity, and respect.

**Hierarchy:** A hierarchy is a system of people or things ranked one above the other. Hierarchies can be determined in different ways and may take both oppressive and supportive forms depending on many factors addressed in the toolkit. There are different forms of explicit and embodied hierarchies that may emerge in groups. Explicit hierarchies are ones that we may acknowledge or agree to, such as allowing certain group members to take on certain tasks on behalf of the group, while embodied hierarchies, which sometimes overlap with explicit hierarchies, can be understood as forms of entitlement that are either unconsciously or consciously internalized by group members.

**Integrity:** Integrity can be understood as a state of being whole, accepted, and undiminished. In an ideal collective, cooperative, or collaborative group, everyone involved can operate from a place of integrity.

**Liberation:** Liberation can be described as the act or fact of gaining equal rights or full social or economic opportunities for a particular group. Liberation work can take many forms and is often premised on the understanding that none of us are free until all of us are free.

**Ownership:** Ownership refers to the process and experience of possessing or owning something. It may be seen as kindred to feeling a sense of belonging. The experience of ownership may relate to the experience of authorship and authority, but is not a necessary product of the two. Authoring something does not necessarily mean owning that thing. In collective work, it is especially important to address this distinction because often folks co-author materials that are owned by none or all of the group members.

**Politics of Difference:** In her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*,<sup>8</sup> Iris Marion Young's notion of a politics of difference emerges as a critique of a commonly endorsed Western ideal of justice that "defines liberation as the transcendence of group difference,"

or more simply: justice as assimilation. This ideal understands the equal treatment of all as its primary principle. However, as Young argues, “equality” often means overlooking the ways in which people are situated differently in social space, for example, in terms of their socioeconomic status, opportunities, health, culture, and so on. The call for “equality” is therefore often an ideological veneer form reasserting the dominant identity. Alternatively, Young proposes an egalitarian politics of difference, which defines our differences as fluid and relational products of various social processes. This politics of difference argues that equality may sometimes require different treatment of different people. Embracing a politics of difference in cultural work might mean embracing and accommodating individual and group differences as a means of solidarity.

**Power:** There are many ways that power can be defined. Throughout this toolkit, when the word “power” is mentioned, it will often be used to describe access to resources and/or the ability to act or make decisions by an individual on behalf of the group. However, it’s important to understand the different facets and interpretations of power as it is a big theme within cooperative, collective, and collaborative work. The website [Powercube](http://powercube.net)<sup>9</sup> offers extremely helpful resources for analyzing and defining power that may be helpful as you make your way throughout this toolkit.

**Role:** One’s role refers to one’s position in a group or relationship to a certain task. There are formal roles, as in roles that are acknowledged and formally given by the group to certain members, and there are informal roles, as in roles that may be unconsciously given or taken by group members.

**Safety:** Safety can mean many different things to different people. Generally, it refers to the state of being safe; freedom from the occurrence or risk of injury, danger, or loss. Some people’s notion of safety is others’ notion of harm. For this reason, it’s really important to explore the specific meanings of safety with the different members of your collective.

<sup>9</sup> Powercube: Understanding Power for Social Change, [powercube.net](http://powercube.net)

<sup>10</sup> Brenner, Abigail. “8 Things the Most Toxic People in Your Life Have in Common,” *Psychology Today*, 29 Aug., 2016, [psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-flux/201608/8-things-the-most-toxic-people-in-your-life-have-in-common](http://psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-flux/201608/8-things-the-most-toxic-people-in-your-life-have-in-common).

<sup>11</sup> Brown, Adrienne Maree. *Emergent Strategy*. AK Press, 2017.



**Toxic Behavior:** Generally, toxic behavior is behavior that manipulates, takes advantage, or negatively affects other people. In a *Psychology Today* post titled “[8 Things the Most Toxic People in Your Life Have in Common](#),”<sup>10</sup> Abigail Brenner writes, “Toxic people are manipulative. Their modus operandi is to get people to do what they want them to do. It’s all about them. They use other people to accomplish whatever their goal happens to be. Forget what you want; this is not about equality in a relationship—far from it.”

**Trust:** Trust refers to the reliance on integrity, strength, or ability of a person or thing. Hope is necessary for trust. In her book *Emergent Strategy*,<sup>11</sup> Adrienne Maree Brown suggests that impactful relationships and projects “move at the speed of trust,” implying the necessity for trust as a basic building block of cooperative, collaborative, or collective working structures.

## ROLES & HIERARCHY

### How do you negotiate the explicit or embodied hierarchies that exist within groups?

There are different forms of explicit and embodied hierarchies that may emerge in groups. Explicit hierarchies are ones that we may acknowledge or agree to, such as allowing certain group members to take on certain tasks on behalf of the group, while embodied hierarchies, which sometimes overlap with the explicit hierarchies, can be understood as forms of entitlement that are either unconsciously or consciously internalized by group members. When explicit hierarchies are not acknowledged, we revert to the embodied hierarchies that exist in the group. These may be based on socioeconomic categories, such as class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and so on.<sup>12</sup> It is crucial to build a culture of open and courageous communication between group members in order to be able to thoughtfully negotiate the tensions and anxieties that may arise around explicit and embodied hierarchies. If you regularly check in with group members and critically consider your role in the group, you may be able to preempt issues around social hierarchies that may arise. It's also helpful to regularly reflect on your own role in the group: *What roles do you find yourself in, intentionally and unintentionally? What conditions and identities allow you to take up space in the way that you do? What power do you hold? What kinds of situations and conversations make you feel comfort and discomfort?*

<sup>12</sup> For a helpful framework for understanding how power may be negotiated, see "Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis" by John Gaventa. November 2006, IDS Bulletin Volume 37 Number 6, [powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/finding\\_spaces\\_for\\_change.pdf](http://powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/finding_spaces_for_change.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> These ideas take influence from the field of Group Relations. For more information, see "What is a Group Relations Conference? The Leicester Conference." Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, 2016, [tavistock.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/about-Group-Relations1.pdf](http://tavistock.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/about-Group-Relations1.pdf).

### Can hierarchies be useful? Can hierarchies be oppressive?

Hierarchies can be oppressive when they are unacknowledged and when people abuse their power, taking advantage of, manipulating, or neglecting their group members. Some hierarchies can be productive, if people who take on specific tasks on behalf of the group can be held accountable by their group members. For example, if one group member has been part of a specific community or project and is bringing other collaborators in from outside, it may be helpful to have the person who has been involved with the community prior to the collaborative process, to guide or lead the group. Hierarchy doesn't mean one person has all the say; it can simply mean acknowledging and trusting the different sets of skills and expertise each collaborator brings to the table and trusting group members to fulfill their roles in the group.

### How do you negotiate anxieties around role differentiation, authority, and followership?

It may be helpful to have clarity as a group around the distinctions between role differentiation, authority, and followership, especially as they relate to embodied or explicit hierarchies. As outlined in the definitions section, group members take on or are given different roles in the group which grant them authority over different tasks. Taking on different tasks on behalf of the group does not necessarily imply having authority over the group. Rather, it can be understood as the group trusting the individual to do certain types of work that align with the interests of the broader group. In this way, different group members may become leaders as well as followers in different capacities. At its core, followership is based on trust. This is another reason why putting effort into building a shared culture and open communication within the group is so important. Roles that involve accessing or distributing resources to group members can be framed as service roles and can be rotated among group members to avoid anxieties around evolving hierarchies.<sup>13</sup>

# DISTRIBUTION of LABOR

## How can you distribute the workload through the lens of equity, considering how power and privilege play out in the working dynamics?

Equity means that different people have different needs and are able to contribute to collective work differently. In order to distribute workload through the lens of equity, it may be helpful to have a conversation around power, privilege, and capacity with group members. Although it may be challenging for group members to openly acknowledge their social positions, this will inform how and in what capacity they are able to contribute to the work. It will also help group members better understand where each person is coming from and build empathy. These types of conversations are important in order to push the work forward. It doesn't serve the group to shy away.

## How do you create a dynamic where individuals can work through multiple roles and/or choose the role they want to play?

Individuals working in various forms of collective work often fall into the same types of roles within the group according to their personalities, skill sets, and various socioeconomic factors. Sometimes, these are not the roles those individuals actually want to play within the work. Group members can check in often about individual responsibilities and shifting roles. It's important to hold space for growth for one another. If someone wants to try a new role, support the learning process that comes along with that. It's helpful when all group members can pick up a task and work on it. Every time you do a task, share the skills you learned from that process so that eventually everyone can do everything. This is also a way of working towards dismantling hierarchies around specific skills or expertise held by certain group members. Keep in mind

that collaborations, collectives, cooperatives and the projects they pursue change. There is opportunity to step into leadership positions with different facets of the work.

## How do you navigate uneven distribution of labor?

If one or a few group members are taking on the majority of the work, feelings of resentment and burnout may arise. In these cases, clear communication is key. Others in the group may be unaware of this dynamic until someone points it out. Often, there is way more work to be done than folks are realistically able to do. If the group cannot shift the workload more equitably, consider ways of focusing the operations to accommodate capacity. Ultimately, the wellness of the collective rests on the wellness of each individual involved. Keep this in mind as you make decisions about overall scale, focus, and workload.

Additionally, when someone else does much more of the labor, it may bring up feelings of inferiority or inadequacy by some group members who have less capacity to be involved. It can also be difficult to know how much to contribute and in what way. In these situations, if you start to feel anxious about your level of contribution, take it upon yourself to contribute. Don't wait for someone to ask you to do something. If others around you want to be accountable to the work, they will pick up the slack as much as they can. If you can't contribute on the level that you want to, be direct with your collaborators about what your capacity is. Let them know when they can and can't depend on you so that negative feelings don't arise. People don't know how you feel until you communicate with them.

## How do you keep up with the administrative aspects of the work?

Administrative work may be daunting and boring at times, but is essential for keeping your project moving smoothly. Try finding ways of building joy and structure into administrative work. For example,

you could set aside 30 minutes a day to do small tasks and reward yourself after completion, meet a friend to do administrative work together, stagger less interesting tasks with more interesting tasks, and remind yourself consistently of why you are engaged in this work.

## MONEY, TIME & ENERGY

### What if there are financial barriers to having the time or capacity to be involved?

Financial barriers often get in the way of people contributing to unpaid collective projects. If you are someone who has the financial stability to dedicate extensive amounts of time to the collective project, consider dedicating some of your time to finding ways of eliminating those financial barriers for others by, for example, finding grants or developing ways to turn a profit from aspects of the work. Before pursuing the task of bringing resources in, it is important to have an open conversation about how this may change, complicate, or heighten existing tensions or problematic dynamics within the group. There are a few potential situations to keep in mind:

1. Consider a group where there is already an inequitable distribution of labor, where certain members do not contribute to the “boring,” or less exciting, administrative, or behind-the-scenes work, and certain other members do most or all of those aspects of the work. When an opportunity that is perceived to be more “fun,” such as an exhibition invitation or a grant to do a project, presents itself, which members of the group enjoy those opportunities? This situation can become especially tense if the resources that make those “fun” opportunities possible are obtained by group members who are unhappily occupied with the more “boring” work and are not able to participate in the opportunities themselves. When money is involved, it becomes even more important to have clarity on different group members’ needs, expectations, goals around the work and the roles that they wish to play.

2. It’s important to recognize that some people genuinely enjoy and find meaning in administrative work, such as communications, grant writing, or accounting. However, some people take those tasks on because they recognize their necessity in sustaining the broader collective work, but still find more meaning and joy in other aspects of the work. In order to learn to recognize these distinctions, group members can ask themselves and have a conversation around a few simple questions: *Where is there opportunity for joy and growth in the different aspects of the work for group members? Why do certain group members fill certain roles and are those the roles they want to be playing? What strategies can the group use to accommodate the diverse needs, expectations, and goals of different group members?*

3. Another conflict that may emerge when access to resources or money becomes available is around hierarchy within the group. Sometimes, the person or people who act as the direct vehicle to the new resources for the group may be seen as more powerful by other group members. Anxieties around the formation of a new hierarchy in the group may arise. In this situation, it is important to recognize the distinction between authority and power. This distinction implies that even if one person works on behalf of the group to take on the task of obtaining new resources, it does not mean that person necessarily has full control over how those resources are allocated within the group. The group can choose to make decisions around resource distribution collectively, or intentionally allocate that task to one or a few members to work on.

4. On the contrary, sometimes getting paid for doing administrative work can actually help group members who are more occupied with those tasks not feel a sense of resentment toward other group members. There are some collectives that set up paid administrative roles that are perceived through the lens of service rather than through the lens of power.

## How do you ensure the collective holds accessibility as a value and a practice, both when considering current members, potential members, and external community members?

Recognizing care as a collective responsibility,<sup>14</sup> collectives working through issues around access and disability justice can look to the knowledge and expertise of disabled collective and community members. Mia Mingus, a community organizer for Disability Justice and Transformative Justice, advocates for more than access, for moving toward what a just world and liberation would look like for everyone.<sup>15</sup> She writes about the notion of access intimacy, “Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else ‘gets’ your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level. Sometimes it can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over years. It could also be the way your body relaxes and opens up with someone when all your access needs are being met.”<sup>16</sup> Understanding access and care as crucial tenants of the work is crucial to actually practicing it.

Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice<sup>17</sup> by Carolyn Lazard offers a helpful guide to how small arts organizations can meet the needs of disabled communities, even if they struggle with limited or no budgets. As explained in the guide, small-scale arts organizations—which can include collectives—are uniquely capable of meeting their audience’s needs because of their often nimble, flexible, and personal structures. Throughout the guide, which is freely accessible online, Lazard shares pragmatic actions collectives and organizations can take to support their capacity in meeting the needs

14 Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah Lakshmi. *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018.

15 Mingus, Mia. “Mia Mingus on Disability Justice (Interview).” *Equitable Education*, 2013, [equitableeducation.ca/2013/mia-mingus-disability-justice](http://equitableeducation.ca/2013/mia-mingus-disability-justice).

16 Mingus, Mia. “Access Intimacy, Interdependence and Disability Justice.” *Leaving Evidence*, 27 Apr. 2018, [leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/access-intimacy-interdependence-and-disability-justice](http://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2017/04/12/access-intimacy-interdependence-and-disability-justice).

17 Lazard, Carolyn. “Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice.” 2019, [promiseandpractice.art](http://promiseandpractice.art).

18 Shaw, Cameron. “Watching the Sunset: An Interview with Deana Haggag.” *Pelican Bomb*, 27 Nov. 2018, [pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2018/watching-the-sunset-an-interview-with-deana-haggag](http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2018/watching-the-sunset-an-interview-with-deana-haggag).

of disabled communities, while stating that real change happens when disabled art workers are in positions of leadership. In the introduction, Lazard states, “There is often a striking discord between an institution’s desire to represent marginalized communities and a total disinvestment from the actual survival of those communities. The ideal arts space is simple: it’s one in which art and culture are not sequestered from the lived experience of artists and their communities. The creation of accessible spaces cannot be done without dismantling the pernicious liberalism that pervades our lives and our relationships with each other, not just as artists and art workers, but as subjects of the state. To commit to disability justice is to redefine the terms of subjecthood. It’s to undo the rampant individualism that is a fiction for both disabled and nondisabled people: everyone has needs.”

## How do you hold open the potential for change and fluidity within the working structure and dynamic?

Collectives, unlike large and formalized institutions, are well suited for change and fluidity because their operations are often less standardized and bureaucratic and their collective members are often more rooted within the communities they represent. While change may be frightening for certain group members, it is often an inevitable part of long-term projects and partnerships. Sometimes the group needs to change how it works in order to pursue the same ongoing goals of their work. In other situations, the group may realize it has actually met its goals, or its goals are no longer relevant. In that instance, it’s helpful to keep in mind that the organization may want to thoughtfully shut down its operations. In a conversation between Cameron Shaw, founder of Pelican Bomb in New Orleans, and Deana Haggag, the former Executive Director of The Contemporary in Baltimore, the two speak about the significance of sunset organizations and share advice for going through that process.<sup>18</sup> Whatever the specific situation, it’s helpful to incorporate ongoing conversations that ground the group in shared goals and remind them of why they do this work. When change is on the horizon, clear communication is more important than ever. Make time to check in with one another and remember that fluidity and change are sometimes necessary for meeting your goals.

What if you realize the collective is more about shared circumstances rather than a shared vision? What if you can't just leave?

Sometimes circumstance and vision may go together. If group members share a certain circumstance, but have wildly different perspectives, try to find ways where each perspective can be embraced or coexist in the same group. Diverse perspectives can strengthen the group if group members allow it to. Try to find ways the group can engage in a multiplicity of projects, ideas, and initiatives, where different group members can take leadership roles in guiding their different visions of the work. Respect and learn from the differences in the group.

## AUTHORSHIP, CREDIT, & VISIBILITY

How do you negotiate how credit, recognition, and visibility are distributed internally and externally?

Credit and recognition for the work can be pre-negotiated in a contract before entering the project or work relationship. For some, this can be as serious as getting paid. When some members of the group are brought to the forefront and others to the back, make sure to examine closely what the causes of those relations are and address them with your group members if needed. Apply your understanding of structures and systems of oppression to the hierarchies of credit, recognition, and visibility that emerge in the group, both internally and externally. Closely consider the politics at play. If you see a discrepancy, call it out and actively work to address it by centering group members who may feel left out, creating new leadership and support roles, and continuously opening the door to communication and change.

Who owns a collective project? When is it okay for members of the group to use collective work to further personal career goals through applications, public interviews, social capital, or other means?

Ownership, authorship, and boundaries around the usage of the work towards personal career ends should be pre-negotiated before entering the project, cooperative, or working relationship. Make sure to address this at the beginning and throughout the project's duration. It's always helpful to ask your collaborators before using the material for personal career goals through various means and credit your collaborators in every use of the materials. Tensions often arise for group members who represent the broader group in settings outside of the group work itself. This is because those group members may be embodying the symbolic capital of the group itself. In order to navigate this tension, those group members can mention and center the contributions of their collaborators, share their direct contacts, and share any resources that emerge from the outside interactions with their group members who were not there. It's important to give space for each group member to represent their broader group in some outside setting that makes sense for that person.

What do you do if you lose yourself or your identity in the collective work or collective identity?

It's important to invest in your personal growth and identity. If you feel you've lost yourself in the collective, take some time to invest in yourself in other ways. Collectivity can be everything, but when it doesn't feed you in the ways that you need, it's okay to take some time away. Your stepping back may allow for others to take on more central roles, for the collective to change and reinvigorate you in new ways when you return.

we do this work because...  
= WE WANT TO MAKE SOMETHING LARGER  
THAN OURSELVES. SURVIVAL. WE ARE  
CONNECTED TO A SHARED STRUGGLE. THERE  
IS POWER IN SOLIDARITY. SHARED RESOURCES.  
SHARED SKILLS. RESISTING THE STATE. MULTIPLE  
PERSPECTIVES = MORE NUANCED WORK. LETTING  
GO OF OUR EGOS. SUPPORT AND SAFETY.  
NON-TRANSACTIONAL LOVE. EMOTIONAL WORK.  
ANTI-CAPITALISM. SHARED VOICE. =

### 3 GROWTH WORK

## ACCOUNTABILITY & INTENTION

### What is the role of contracts or shared agreements in setting intentions, expectations, and priorities in the group, as well as holding folks accountable?

Always create contracts or shared agreements before entering the project, collective, or working relationship. Contracts or shared agreements can focus on the general themes of needs, expectations, and accountability, as well as anything else that seems significant to the group. These can be broken down in the following ways:

1. Needs: Needs can be understood from two (or more) perspectives; group members can consider what need their involvement in the group fulfills for them as individuals, as well as what their needs are from the group as members. *What are group members looking to get out of the work? What are everyone's different or overlapping needs for being thoughtful group members? What conditions are group members operating out of within their lives? It's helpful to communicate these as clearly as possible at the beginning so that group members can have an understanding of the perspective and conditions each person is coming from and build a ground from which empathy can grow.*

2. Expectations: Creating a set of shared expectations with the group is helpful in establishing accountability at a later point as well as understanding if there is alignment among group members. *What do group members expect of one another in the working relationship? What can and can't group members commit to? How is credit, payment, and labor distributed among group members? What specific roles do group members want to play? What level of priority does the collective work take in each individual's life? Is there a set of basic expectations that group members are*

*required to meet in order to be part of the group? Group members may want to start with high expectations for one another and make time to adjust them together as the working relationships evolve. It may also be helpful to set boundaries for involvement: Some people have a tendency to get overly involved and take on too many tasks for the group. After establishing expectations for one another, group members can have a more expansive conversation around accountability processes and how the group can better support, care, or respond to group members who do not meet the basic expectations. If there is misalignment in the expectations, for example, if the priority or stake in the work varies for different group members, this could be addressed through different types of credit, payment, or roles that group members hold. Because misalignment in level of priority or stake in the work may become a point of tension within the working relationship, it is very helpful to address this at the beginning of the project, as well as through regular check-ins as the group evolves.*

3. Accountability: Establishing an accountability process from the start is important so folks have a system for addressing issues as they arise. Being tender and understanding to your collaborators' needs, conditions, and life experiences is essential to any meaningful accountability process. It's equally important that each group member is rigorously honest and reflective on their own position and what they can genuinely take on within the project. Create regular check-ins outside of the group's "work" specifically to reflect on the expectations the group set for one another, how each person is doing in meeting those expectations, and if they need to be readjusted. If there is a discrepancy between what group members say they can take on and what they can actually take on, acknowledge it with care, using a decolonized nonviolent communication method or other communication methods outlined in the resources section (page 40). Collectives, like organisms, are born, they live, and they die. Sometimes the group work no longer serves you and it's OK to step away.

## How do you negate the negative associations with contracts?

Contracts are an organizational tool. They are agreements between people for setting boundaries for the work and ourselves. They can be used for accountability processes. It's helpful to set intentions together with your collaborators and lay out your personal goals directly and clearly. If people feel uncomfortable sharing directly, find anonymous ways of sharing and having open dialogue. You can find ways to make contracts more fun and less serious. Take time to reflect and talk throughout every part of the contract process. Check in on one another throughout every part of the process,



making sure the other person or people feel heard and accommodated. Make sure to include payment, credit, ownership, and rights to the materials as part of the contract.

<sup>19</sup> Lerman, Liz. "Critical Response Process: A Method for Giving and Getting Feedback." [lizlerman.com/critical-response-process](http://lizlerman.com/critical-response-process).

## COMMUNICATION & CONFLICT

### How can you facilitate and contribute to meaningful conversations within the group, especially when disagreements or interpersonal issues arise?

Interpersonal issues come about at various points in the work. It's not always easy to anticipate what issues you may have with someone until you start working together. There are a few techniques for communicating through differences:

1. Use Yes, And. Instead of shutting down ideas you are not excited about, you can add your idea to the mix. It's important to process information and brainstorm together. Ideas are also allowed to change throughout the discussion.
2. Use specific language, avoid using language that is dismissive or dominating. Think about how you are being present in the group.
3. Frame ideas as open-ended and actually be open to others' perspectives and the potential for your own idea to not be a great fit.
4. Use neutral questions and have open communication when brainstorming and discussing. Taking inspiration from Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process,<sup>19</sup> you can set specific time aside to ask permission to share opinions on in-process ideas. It's helpful to be open to listening and to the potential to be wrong.
5. Practice reflective listening. Learn about the group and its members' histories, and try to build on those histories with your perspective.
6. Stand up for what you believe in! Observe how group members respond. In a healthy group, even if folks disagree,

they will try their best to understand your perspective and come to a healthy resolution.

7. Mention others' ideas and try to build off of them within the conversation. Amplify others' contributions, especially if their voices are new or have been historically repressed or misrepresented.<sup>20</sup>

8. Always keep in mind that collaborating and working cooperatively is a survival skill, it's not always a choice. There are some members of the group who have different levels of stake in the project, depending on their circumstances and personal experiences.

9. Try stepping back before stepping in when there is a conflict. Reflect on your own role and responsibility in the group.

10. Find ways of addressing toxic behavior directly with your group members by following the steps outlined in the next question, including: 1. Hold space for learning and growth, 2. Apply a restorative justice approach, 3. Ritual, reset and reconcile.

In addition to the techniques we suggested above, using a decolonized practice of nonviolent communication, as developed in the publication *Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication*,<sup>21</sup> by Meenadchi, may be an extremely helpful tool.

What do you do if you observe toxic behavior? How do you know when to call someone out and when to call someone in?

20 The practice of “amplification” is a tool that has been used to center the voices of folks who have been historically suppressed. One example of its use is written about in, “White house women want to be in the room where it happens,” by Juliet Eilperin published in the Washington Post, and can be read here: [washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/09/13/white-house-women-are-now-in-the-room-where-it-happens](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2016/09/13/white-house-women-are-now-in-the-room-where-it-happens/).

21 Meenadchi. *Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication*. Co-Conspirator Press, 2020.

22 The teachings of transformative justice may be applied within the culture and labor practices of the collective. The organization GenerationFIVE offers helpful resources and advice that can be accessed at [generationfive.org/resources](https://generationfive.org/resources).

23 This is a quote from Bilphena Yahwon who talked about solidarity strategies in the workshop this toolkit is based on.

If you observe toxic behavior such as, for example, that someone's intentions in doing the work are more based on personal gain, when the collective's intentions are based on social or political goals, you can call someone in several ways before calling them out publicly.

1. Hold space for learning and growth: Toxic behavior is embedded in us through the toxic culture we live in. It's helpful to approach toxicity from a place of curiosity rather than assumption. If someone is showing signs of toxic behavior that may come from a place of ignorance, hold space for learning and growth through a conversation that centers the unmet needs of group members, especially those who may have experienced harm, rather than blame.

2. Apply a restorative justice approach: Apply the learnings of restorative justice in instances when one group member does direct harm to another. By inviting an outside facilitator, or applying these practices on your own, hold space for group members to share the impact of each other's actions and come up with a specific plan for restoration.<sup>22</sup>

3. Reconcile, ritual, and reset: After the toxic behavior, conflict, or misunderstanding has been addressed, hold space for a group ritual, reset, or reconciliation process, so that the group is able to put the conflict at rest, while keeping in mind the learnings that emerged. This can take various forms, from a reflection on what group members are grateful for, a shared meditation, movement-based practice, or a shared meal.

Going through these steps and kindred processes can be a way of building solidarity around recognizing systemic and cultural problems. If you are fearful of losing your place in the group or placing yourself in a position of harm by bringing these issues up, think about peers or allies you can reach out to or who may reach out to you. You can use people's proximity to power and privilege to call for change collectively. Use solidarity strategies from social justice work: “If you want to fire one of us, you'll have to fire all of us.”<sup>23</sup> Find your allies or be an ally. Remember that calling someone out or in is not a one-time thing, it is a process.

## Can you encourage the removal of people who may be toxic to the group or project?

No one person in the group should have the responsibility of deciding who stays and who leaves. If it comes to this, you can try several approaches: Bring an outside person in to facilitate a conversation and consult on the problem from a restorative or transformative justice perspective; create a new contract that outlines future needs, expectations, and an accountability process; bring in folks from other organizations to learn about how they navigate problems.

If one person needs to be removed, it should be the responsibility of the group together to make that decision. Sometimes there is no resolution. If the collaboration no longer serves you, it's OK to leave. Accept the ephemeral nature of the work. Sometimes projects are no longer what you need them to be.

## Sometimes it's harder to hold close friends accountable than people you only have professional relationships with. How do you address this with care?

Having both professional and interpersonal relationships with your collaborators can be difficult. It is helpful to acknowledge both types of relationships that are at play. If one group member does not have the capacity or interest in the work, bring it up to them with care and respect. Explain your own stake in the work and why you are concerned. It's not about blame. It's about having clarity on your expectations of one another; what you can and cannot depend on the other to do. Clarity in all aspects of the work is necessary for accountability.

## How do you navigate unwanted romantic advances with people you work with, especially if you don't want to end the working relationship?

When you start to sense a romantic tension, try approaching it directly. Explain your intentions clearly and be as genuine and sensitive as you can be to the other person. If the issue continues and becomes a form of harassment, bring in your other group members or an outside facilitator to address the issue. The steps outlined in the earlier section on how to address perceived toxic behavior may also be altered and applied in these situations.

# PERSONAL & COLLECTIVE GROWTH

## How do you build a shared culture in the group?

Often, group members come from different backgrounds and hold different sets of experiences, knowledge, and sensitivities. Gathering and distributing various reading materials, articles, and books to introduce group members to new ideas are one way of getting group members on the same page. It's important to collect a diverse set of materials that reflect the different perspectives of each group member.

It can be helpful to coordinate social justice trainings—such as political education workshops on the manifestations of racism, white supremacy, patriarchy, or homophobia within leftist or liberal spaces, restorative and transformative justice facilitation trainings, or facilitation from an anti-oppression lens—with all members of the group as a prerequisite for joining. All members should have at least a basic understanding of the structures that produce our different social positions and be equipped with a set of tools to help them navigate challenging situations with care and respect.

Building a shared culture in the group also comes from prioritizing your relationships as part of the work. Prioritizing relationships as part of the work can mean a multiplicity of things, including critically acknowledging the socioeconomic conditions that our relationships are based in; knowing what's going on in collaborators' lives; learning how to best support, care for, and anticipate one another's needs; hearing life updates before delving into the "work" (if time allows); doing "non-work" activities together; and more.

It would be great to assume that everyone involved in the collective work is doing their best to be engaged and accountable. However, it's not always possible for all group members to hold the collective work at the same level of priority within their lives. This is an important factor to consider openly with group members and possibly even negotiate with a contract at the beginning of the working relationship. This consideration is addressed in the section *Accountability & Intention* (page 26) where we delve into setting expectations, intentions, and contracts with group members.

### How does the group treat the personal growth of its members?

Being a part of a cooperative project, organization, or collective means being committed to other group members' personal growth and wellbeing. Personal growth and wellness is necessary for the overall health of the collective. If people aren't learning and growing together the work will fall apart. Share resources with one another. Support and embrace one another by sharing of yourself in the ways that you can, both within and outside of your shared work. Understand that the nature of the work may change as members of the group also undergo changes.

### How do you balance life and work in the group?

Be reflective about your life and what you can take on, and then be honest with those around you. If you can't find a balance, maybe you've taken on too much. Prioritize your needs and then go from there. If you build a culture of open and consistent communication, group members will be more likely to understand your perspective and the circumstances that you operate within.

24 Drawing from Iris Marion Young's notion of a politics of difference, outlined in the book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, may be helpful here. As you build your collective, especially if it is inclusive of people of multiple backgrounds and life experiences, remember that people are positioned differently in social space, and have different needs, skills, and perspectives. How can you find ways of embracing and accommodating those differences within their working processes?



### How do you invite sustained participation from new collaborators or group members?

People participate in group work in various ways and at various levels. In order to increase and sustain participation, try creating more and less involved ways people can contribute that include small and large time commitments and skill levels. People have different skills and ways of expression. How can you be accommodating of those differences?<sup>24</sup>

## 4 EXPANDED WORK

# BUILD YOUR OWN TOOLKIT

This section includes the workshop plan Press Press used to facilitate two workshops in January 2019 at the George Peabody Library in Baltimore, Maryland. The conversations that occurred within these two workshops are the basis of this toolkit and inspired directions for further research. A sample workshop plan is included below for your reference. We invite you to build on our work by hosting a version of this workshop with your collaborators, peers, and community.

### Sample Workshop Plan:

In this small gathering, Press Press invites individuals involved in cooperative, collective, or collaborative work to exchange expertise, experiences, and advice on cooperative processes. Through conversation and group brainstorming, we will collaboratively create a toolkit for cooperative, collaborative, and collective work. We invite you to participate in a small gathering where we can exchange our experiences with cooperative work and workshop through the challenges we have faced.

### Materials:

- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Writing and drawing utensils
- Drawing and collage materials
- Speaker for music
- Dinner, food, snacks
- Name tags
- Two colors of paper
- A box or hat to collect small sheets of paper

### Challenge & Tool Note-taking Strategy:

Challenge → Tool

Scheduling → Communication

Interpersonal relationships → Restorative practice

### Helpful Questions:

*What are examples of meaningful cooperation or collaborations you have been part of in Baltimore? Why did these experiences leave an impact on you? How have you used cooperative, collective, or collaborative processes to achieve goals, cultivate projects, and maintain organizations? What challenges have you encountered and overcome? What issues are you still working through?*

### Folks to invite:

- A range of people you have worked with closely & a few people who offer different perspectives or are representative of other disciplines
- People who are or have been deeply involved in collective, collaborative, or cooperative work right now or in the past
- People who have generously contributed to Baltimore community

### Workshop Plan:

#### Social & Snack Time: 20 Minutes

People come in, get food, catch up, get settled. It's nice to build in unstructured time at the beginning so people make themselves at home.

#### Intentions & Motivations: 10 Minutes

Facilitators share motivation for gathering, set a goal or intention for the night together: to learn from each other about cooperation, collaboration, and collective work by sharing our challenges and our insights. As a facilitator, it may be helpful to mention:

- This isn't about being an expert, it's about sharing our challenges and learning from one another.
- We are curious and excited to learn from your experiences and share our own.
- What is our shared goal? In our case, it is to try to compile what we know, and work through challenges that we have, to make a toolkit that can be helpful to ourselves and others.

#### Introductions: 10 Minutes

Let everyone get a sense of who else is in the room, especially if they don't already know each other. We like making this part fun by asking folks to answer a goofy question like, what fruit or vegetable best describes you today? And a more serious question, what cooperative, collective, or collaborative project(s) are you involved with or have been involved with in the past?

#### Shared Agreements: 10 Minutes

Facilitate a shared agreements process by asking folks what they expect and need of one another in order to be able to have an honest, open, and courageous conversation. Make a distinction between a courageous and safe space. You can suggest or bring forward some of your own agreements as an example if folks struggle to come up with them at first.

#### Why do we do this work? Discussion: 20 Minutes

Before delving into the details of our challenges, we want to briefly discuss why we do this work in the first place. *Why do we care to sustain cooperative, collective, or collaborative working structures? What are examples of meaningful cooperation or collaborations you have been part of in Baltimore? Why did these experiences leave an impact on you? How have you used cooperative, collective, or collaborative processes to achieve goals, cultivate projects, and maintain organizations? What challenges have you encountered and overcome? What issues are you still working through?*

If folks have a hard time starting, you can share a few of your own reasons. For example:

- Different people offer different perspectives
- It's more fun brainstorming with others
- Social and political work is most impactful when working together with others

#### Individual Reflection: 20 Minutes

Write down any challenges you face within cooperative work that you want to bring to the group on small sheets of paper. Then, write out the tool(s) you have to offer regarding cooperative work on a different color paper. After giving folks some time to reflect, pass around a box where all of the challenges can be placed inside anonymously. Later, when these are shared, participants can choose to say if they belong to them or not.

#### Group Discussion: 45 Minutes

As we pull out challenges from the box, ask the group if anyone's tools can solve or add insight to the challenges shared. As folks share, write out the challenges and tools on the board using the note-taking technique outlined above.

#### Optional Creative Activity: 30 Minutes

If folks want to stay late after the discussion, they can choose their tool or another person's tool and make a collage or design that represents it that will go into the toolkit.

#### Closing: 10 Minutes

Give thanks to everyone for coming! Facilitate a closing activity or reflection. This can take several forms, like asking everyone to share one adjective describing their emotional state or one highlight from the evening. Let folks know that you will be sharing a document of the materials compiled from the conversation for them to edit, adjust, and OK.

# RESOURCE LIST

1. Anti-Oppression Resource Training and Alliance (AORTA) is a worker-owned cooperative devoted to strengthening movements for social justice and a solidarity economy. AORTA's website offers several resources that may be helpful for growing and investing in your collective's culture and working practices. You can access helpful resources such as webinars, handouts, and toolkits at [aorta.coop/resources](http://aorta.coop/resources) and check out their Theory of Change, a working document that defines AORTA's shared vision for working towards equity and justice for all, at [aorta.coop/about/theory-of-change](http://aorta.coop/about/theory-of-change).

2. Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha maps histories and politics of disability justice, a movement that centers the leadership and expertise of disabled queer, trans, Black, and brown people. Leah writes about creating what she calls "collective access," understanding access and care as a collective responsibility and pleasure, and shares tools and experiences that may aid in building sustainable collectives, projects, and communities of liberation.

3. Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice is an accessibility guide geared toward small-scale arts nonprofits written by Carolyn Lazard and commissioned by Recess Art. As written in its introduction, the guide "details specific ways in which disabled people are excluded from cultural spaces and offers possible solutions to those barriers. Moving away from historical and juridical definitions of accessibility, this guide considers the unique capacity of small scale arts organizations to meet the needs of disabled communities. It engages principles of disability justice to think through what can urgently be done to create more equitable and accessible arts spaces." You can read the guide online or download a PDF at [promiseandpractice.art](http://promiseandpractice.art).

4. GenerationFIVE is an organization that works to interrupt and mend the intergenerational impact of child sexual abuse on individuals, families, and communities and focuses on a transformative justice

approach. The teachings of transformative justice may be applied on a small scale within the culture and labor practices of the collective. Their website offers helpful resources and advice that can be accessed at [generationfive.org/resources](http://generationfive.org/resources).

5. The field of Group Relations offers a helpful framework for understanding how power, authority, and leadership may operate within various group dynamics. A glossary of terms may be found at [chaosmanagement.com/images/stories/pdfs/Group%20Relations%20Glosary%20of%20terms2-08.pdf](http://chaosmanagement.com/images/stories/pdfs/Group%20Relations%20Glosary%20of%20terms2-08.pdf)

6. Powercube.net is a website created by The Participation, Power and Social Change team at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, that offers amazing resources on power analysis. These may be helpful for developing strategies for meaningful working dynamics both internally and externally to the group.

7. "Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis" by John Gaventa offers a thoughtful look at different forms of power that appear both interpersonally and structurally in society.

8. In her book, De-Facing Power, Clarissa Hayward offers a thoughtful analysis of how power operates within the public education system in the United States. Her analysis may be helpful further research on the theme of power in groups within different contexts.

9. Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process is a method for giving and receiving feedback on works of art in progress. Although it was created as a specific process for artists, it can be useful for cultivating healthy communication and culture within collectives. Learn more at [lizlerman.com](http://lizlerman.com).

10. "The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture," from Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, offers a list of characteristics of white supremacy culture within organizations. As stated by the authors, "Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify. The characteristics listed

below are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group. They are damaging because they promote white supremacy thinking. They are damaging to both people of color and to white people. Organizations that are people of color-led or a majority people of color can also demonstrate many damaging characteristics of white supremacy culture.” Learn more at [showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html](http://showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html).

11. Homie Ethics by Homie House Press shares a short and sweet list of values the organizers hold dear when working with their collaborators. The list includes, Hang, Heal, Listen, Dance, Read, Walk, Feed, Pillow Talk, Netflix + Chill, TLC (Tender Loving Care), among others. An image of the piece can be found on Instagram ([instagram.com/p/B7mMr\\_-Fi8E](https://www.instagram.com/p/B7mMr_-Fi8E)) and you can learn more about Homie House Press at [adrianastories.com/homiehousepress](http://adrianastories.com/homiehousepress).

12. Women’s Center for Creative Work’s Core Values outlines a set of values the organization aims to follow within their work. Creating a collaborative organizational vision may facilitate a meaningful process of learning, exchange, and coming together among collective members. It may also support the focus and intention behind the work the collective takes on. Learn more at [corevalues.womenscenterforcreativework.com](http://corevalues.womenscenterforcreativework.com).

13. Pleasure Activism by Adrienne Maree Brown explores the politics and practice of the healing and joy that can exist within social justice work. In the book, she addresses questions such as, “How do we make social justice the most pleasurable human experience? How can we awaken within ourselves desires that make it impossible to settle for anything less than a fulfilling life?” It’s a worthwhile read for anyone involved in collective work.

14. Experiments in Joy by Gabrielle Civil is a book that celebrates Black feminist work, both collaborative and independent, in essays, scores, images, performances, and more. Addressing questions such as, “What can people do together that we can’t do alone? What can we discover in ourselves only by way of other people?” Civil’s

work on finding and cultivating joyful practices can also be found in the zine published by Co-Conspirator Press, Experiments in Joy: a Workbook, which includes contributions by Call & Response Artists Gabrielle Civil, Duriel E. Harris, Kenyatta A. C. Hinkle, Rosamond S. King, Wura-Natasha Ogunji, Miré Regulus, and Awilda Rodríguez Lora.

15. Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication is a workbook of activities and ideas that explore communication, bodies, and relationships, written by Meenadchi, edited by Nicole Kelly, and published by Co-Conspirator Press. As the publishers described it, “Using a trauma-informed approach, this workbook encourages readers to deepen our emotional vocabularies so that we can work towards a more enlivened, healthy interdependence.”

16. Peace Learning Center is an organization that supports communities in redefining peace through equity, social emotional learning, and the implementation of innovative practices. They offer a range of online resources that may be helpful in times of conflict through restorative practices, as well as other issues that may come up in collective work. Their Practitioners Toolkit for Restorative Practices can be found at [peacelearningcenter.org/doe-resources](http://peacelearningcenter.org/doe-resources).

17. The Allied Media Conference (AMC) is a large gathering of media, technology, and art practitioners working in media-based organizing and social justice work. Reflecting on their two decades of work, the AMC outlined nine essential traits of media-based organizing. This document shares helpful strategies for both media-based organizers as well as collectives building meaningful accountability and communication processes internally. The nine essential traits include root problem analysis, holistic solution-building, collective vision/purpose-development, essential question-asking, deep listening, facilitative leadership, synthesis with integrity, power/resource-mapping, and iteration. Access this document and other resources at [alliedmedia.org/media-based-organizing](http://alliedmedia.org/media-based-organizing).

18. In “Equality Is Not Enough: What the Classroom Has Taught Me About Justice” published on Everyday Feminism, Amy Sun talks about

the difference between equity and equality in classroom settings. This distinction will be helpful for navigating some conflicts among group members. Read the article at [everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/equality-is-not-enough](http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/equality-is-not-enough).

19. In “Six Thoughts Dealing with Toxic Behavior,” published on Psychology Today, Rita Watson describes personality traits of toxic people and ways of navigating toxic relationships. Read the article at [psychologytoday.com/us/blog/love-and-gratitude/201905/six-thoughts-dealing-toxic-behavior](http://psychologytoday.com/us/blog/love-and-gratitude/201905/six-thoughts-dealing-toxic-behavior).

20. The philosopher Pierre Bourdieu developed the concept of symbolic capital as well as cultural capital, which may be helpful frameworks for understanding negotiations for the group regarding authorship, ownership, and visibility. Ed Walker shares an explanation and context for the terms in the article, “On Pierre Bourdieu Part 4: Symbolic Capital,” which can be found at [emptywheel.net/2018/01/17/on-pierre-bourdieu-part-4-symbolic-capital](http://emptywheel.net/2018/01/17/on-pierre-bourdieu-part-4-symbolic-capital).

21. In the article “Watching the Sunset: An Interview with Deana Haggag,” Cameron Shaw and Deana Haggag share advice and experiences around sunsetting their former organizations, The Contemporary in Baltimore, Maryland, where Deana was the Executive Director, and Pelican Bomb in New Orleans where Cameron was the Executive Director and Founder. This article may be helpful for those who are considering sunsetting or even just leaving their collectives or organizations. It can be read here: [pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2018/watching-the-sunset-an-interview-with-deana-haggag](http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2018/watching-the-sunset-an-interview-with-deana-haggag).

22. Generative Somatics is an organization whose mission “is to support social and climate justice movements in achieving their visions of a radically transformed society. We do this by bringing somatic transformation to movement leaders, organizations, and alliances,” as outlined on their website. In a webinar conversation with Adrienne Maree Brown, and fellow generative somatics teachers, Jonathan Stith, Mei-ying Williams, and Staci K. Haines, the group discusses somatics and Pleasure Activism, Adrienne’s most recent

book. Watch the webinar at [youtube.com/watch?v=PT-0BpVoZ4E](https://youtube.com/watch?v=PT-0BpVoZ4E) and access online resources as well as in-person trainings from Generative Somatics at [www.generativesomatics.org](http://www.generativesomatics.org).

23. The book *Making and Being*, a project of BFAMFAPhd and authored by Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard, shares “a framework for teaching art that emphasizes contemplation, collaboration, and political economy.” It is filled with strategies, worksheets, activities, and other resources for educators, arts practitioners, and especially those who are interested in working through collective, collaborative, or cooperative models. You can access the content online at [makingandbeing.com](http://makingandbeing.com).

24. BFAMFAPhd is a collective that offers a range of resources for self-organized learning, that may be helpful for collectives working to establish a shared group culture. BFAMFAPhd, as explained on their website, “formed in 2012 to make art, reports, and teaching tools to advocate for cultural equity in the United States. The work of the collective is to bring people together to analyze and reimagine relationships of power in the arts. BFAMFAPhd core members are: Susan Jahoda, Emilio Martínez Poppe, Agnes Szanyi, Emily Tareila, Vicky Virgin, and Caroline Woolard.” You can access resources from their website: [bfamfaphd.com](http://bfamfaphd.com)

25. The Study Center for Group Work is an open access library of collaborative methods created by artists and designers. They also share a range of teaching resources, events, and jobs related to collaboration. You can access their materials at [studycollaboration.com](http://studycollaboration.com).

26. ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINIST ANTIBODIES {care in the time of coronavirus} is a zine collaboratively produced by Asian American Feminist Collective and Bluestocking NYC. It features a range of stories, resources, and accounts of social and cultural workers during the rise of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It can be read in full at [static1.squarespace.com/static/59f87d66914e6b2a2c51b657/t/5e7bbeef7811c16d3a8768eb/1585168132614/AAFCZine3\\_CareintheTimeofCoronavirus.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f87d66914e6b2a2c51b657/t/5e7bbeef7811c16d3a8768eb/1585168132614/AAFCZine3_CareintheTimeofCoronavirus.pdf)

27. The International Cooperative Alliance represents and serves cooperatives across the globe. As stated on their website, “it is one of the oldest non-governmental organisations and one of the largest ones measured by the number of people represented: 1,2 billion cooperative members on the planet.” Their online library features a range of helpful resources for those interested in working through cooperative models. It can be found at: [www.ica.coop/en/online-library/resources](http://www.ica.coop/en/online-library/resources)

28. Trade School was a non-traditional learning space that used a gift- and barter-based economic model to facilitate a network of teachers and students. As stated on their website, “At Trade School, anyone could teach a class. Students signed up for classes by agreeing to bring a barter item that the teacher requested. Trade School became an international network of local, self-organized chapters with over 22,000 people in classes.” After founding and running the school for 10 years, the organizers created a manual for others interested in recreating or building on the model they developed. More information on Trade School and access to a PDF of their book can be found at: [www.tradeschool.coop/](http://www.tradeschool.coop/)

29. The Book of Everyday Instruction, published with The Operating System, is a project by artist Chloë Bass that focuses on one-on-one social interaction. As Bass states on her website, “The project investigates the particular states of flow, play, and conflict that we experience when interacting with only ourselves and one other. Conceptually, the project is the next step in my creation of performance work for no audience. The majority (if not the entirety) of The Book of Everyday Instruction’s performance aspects will be conducted without witnesses: as shared pair activities between artist and participant.” This book may be helpful to individuals working through collective models in considering their intimate relationships to others through the conceptual and artistic lens of the artist. A copy of chapter 4, A Field Guide to Spatial Intimacy, is made available by The Study Center for Group Work and can be found here: [studycollaboration.com/static/uploads/pdfs/FieldGuideSharedSpaceIntimacy\\_WOUND\\_ckMNTaI.pdf](http://studycollaboration.com/static/uploads/pdfs/FieldGuideSharedSpaceIntimacy_WOUND_ckMNTaI.pdf)

30. The United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC) is a national grassroots membership organization for worker cooperatives. In addition to becoming a member, their website offers a range of resources and information on worker cooperatives. You can access their online resources and learn more about the organization at: [www.usworker.coop/resources](http://www.usworker.coop/resources)

31. Common Field is a national network of artists-run organizations and cultural organizers that “connects, supports, and advocates for the artist-centered field,” as outlined on their website. Their network, online platform, and annual convening gathers and distributes a range of materials that may be helpful for those involved in cooperative cultural work, with an emphasis in the arts. You can learn more about Common Field at: [www.commonfield.org](http://www.commonfield.org)

32. Imaginings: A DIY Guide to Arts-based Community Dialogue is a guidebook by the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture (USDAC). As described in the guidebook, “the USDAC is a people-powered department—a grassroots action network inciting creativity and social imagination to shape a culture of empathy, equity, and belonging.” In this guide, the organization explains how to host an Imagining, a performance- and dialogue-based artwork that invites community members to imagine and transform their collective futures. In addition to this, USDAC offers a range of other resources for organizers and organizational collaborations. Learn more at [usdac.us](http://usdac.us) and read the Imaginings guide at [usdac.us/diy-imaginings](http://usdac.us/diy-imaginings).

33. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society is an organization that explores and supports how contemplative practices, or “activities that help us inquire into our experience—can make a difference in people’s lives and in the environments, institutions, and systems we create together.” In *Contemplative Community in Higher Education: A Toolkit*, the organization lays out a framework for integrating contemplative practices into higher education. However, the processes, activities, and ideas in this toolkit can also be applied to independently organized groups, such as collectives, cooperatives, or collaborative projects. Download a PDF of the

toolkit at: [contemplativemind.org/files/Toolkit021618web.pdf](https://contemplativemind.org/files/Toolkit021618web.pdf)

34. The Strozzi Institute facilitates embodied leadership training and team-building that engage “the entire psychobiology of a person to learn and embody new skills, behavior, and context.” As explained on their website, “we’ve created a pragmatic on-the-ground version of mindfulness and embodiment that your team can use in high-pressure business situations to stay grounded in the values of your organization...” Their website includes a range of online offerings that may be relevant to collective, cooperative, and collaborative work that can be found at: <https://strozziinstitute.com/online-offerings/>

35. *The Manifesto for Tender Collaborative Work*, co-authored by Shan Wallace, Jenna Porter, and Iris Lee and edited by Kimi Hanauer, offers a set of values and a conversation around how to build space for tenderness within collaborative work. It was published by Press Press 2017. Download a PDF at: <https://presspress.info/content/4-document/2-manifesto-for-tender-collaborative-work/a-tender-talk.pdf>

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## Commune Diverge Shift Connect: A Press Press Handbook

*Commune Diverge Shift Connect: A Press Press Handbook* is a collaboration between the Institute for Expanded Research and Press Press. The project develops, collects, and shares emergent models and methodologies for collective work that aid in the efforts of cultural organizers. This reflection also marks a year of transition for Press Press, as the team initiates a nomadic presence in Los Angeles, expanding their national reach. Through this work, Press Press ultimately aims to provoke the question: What are the conditions necessary for cultivating and sustaining ethical and compassionate frameworks for being with and cooperating with others in the world? This publication is one component of a broader project that will be released in 2020.

## Press Press

Press Press is an interdisciplinary publishing initiative that aims to shift and deepen the understanding of voices, identities, and narratives that have been suppressed or misrepresented by the mainstream. Through an understanding of publishing as the action of gathering a public, Press Press builds cooperative and collaborative networks of relationships using publishing practices centered in self-representation and conversation. Often focusing on the intersection of immigration, race, and power in the United States, Press Press's streams of work have included public cultural programs and exhibitions, youth publishing workshops in immigrant- and refugee-only spaces, and the ongoing production of publications. Press Press operates out of a storefront studio and library in Baltimore, Maryland and a production space in Los Angeles, California. Learn more at [presspress.info](http://presspress.info).

## Institute for Expanded Research

The Institute for Expanded Research (IER) activates sites and leverages resources to produce and present projects in collaboration with artists. Nebulous and flexible, IER is a constellation of practices and projects taking many forms. As an artist project and research initiative, IER builds

partnerships to support artist-led inquiry and explore the potential for dialogue and collaboration across sectors. IER invites artists, researchers, and other practitioners to share ideas, strategies, skills, and creative work with the ultimate aim of exploring the role artists play in society by giving proximity to their thinking and working processes. IER was founded by Lu Zhang, a multi-disciplinary artist who works in installation, sculpture, drawing, and text – often in response to a chosen site. Learn more at [expandedresearch.org](http://expandedresearch.org).

The contents of this toolkit are based on two workshops which gathered Baltimore-based people who are involved in cooperative, collective, or collaborative cultural work, including: Allie Linn, Amy Reid, Bonnie Jones, C Kim (E'NB), E Cadoux, Tanya Garcia, Georgia McCandlish, Adriana Monsalve, Haniel Wides, Jacob Marley, Joseph Lee, Khadija Nia Adell, Lu Zhang, Markele Cullins, N'Deye Diakhate, Priya Bhayana, and Rose Buttress. The workshops were facilitated by Valentina Cabezas, Kimi Hanauer, Bomin Jeon, and Bilphena Yahwon.

This toolkit was initiated and composed by Kimi Hanauer using notes, transcriptions, and audio recordings from the workshops and additional research. This toolkit was edited by Lu Zhang and copyedited by Rebekah Kirkman. The digital publication was designed and coded by Eleni Agapis and can be found at: [toolkit.press](http://toolkit.press).

In the Prep Work section, an illustration appears that references a quote from the book *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Maree Brown, “Move at the speed of trust.” In the Growth Work section, two illustrations appear that feature quotes from Press Press's workshop Shared Agreements drafted by Bilphena Yahwon that say, “We speak and listen from the heart.” and “We will hold empathy and compassion in our actions and words.”

Thank you to Andrea Fraser, Candice Lin, and Gabrielle Civil for editorial advice. Thank you to Alea Adigweme for proofreading. Thank you to Paul Espinosa from the George Peabody Library for hosting Press Press and the Institute for Expanded Research for programming and research as part of the ongoing project.

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