

DOES IT SPARK JOY?

Tackling digital
organising

What is digital organising?

There is a distinction, often attributed to trade union activist Jane McAlevey, between organising, mobilising, and advocacy.

One way to think about the distinction is:

- Organising - building and expanding a base of collective power.
- Mobilising - getting people to act, like attending protests, rallies, and actions.
- Advocacy - organisations acting bilaterally (lobbying politicians, going to court).

This is not to say that a particular one of these is supreme above the others - a good campaign will likely need some balance of all of these.

The important idea is that organising practices often build and develop collective power by bringing in new people and/or increasing participation within organisations. But what does this mean in digital terms?

Digital organising is the use of digital spaces and communication to build collective power.

When many places discuss digital organising, they actually mean putting on digital actions (tweeting at the same time, spamming a mailing list, etc). What we mean, and hopefully this document can help with, is how groups use digital spaces and comms to build their capacity and develop their power.

Digital Organising Problems

Why does digital organising matter? Because in a world that increasingly sees activists meet, communicate, and mobilise using digital spaces, poor digital organising can undermine the strength of groups. It can lead to:

- Miscommunication - The basics of things needing to be done are missed. Information is too dispersed to get to people.
- Fatigue and Dropoff - Constant notifications or lack of effort put into maintaining a space leads people to disengage.
- Security Concerns - Action information and others details are shared with those who oppose transformative change.

- Hierarchy - Digital spaces allow certain individuals to impose and take control of previously egalitarian ways of working.
- Exclusion - The introduction of a platform or use of one communication mode leads to certain people not being able to participate.
- De-rooting - A group previously rooted in an offline community is now mainly online and struggling to engage new people in their work.

These problems often come as a mixture, and can't ever be fully eradicated. However, it's important to think through how to reduce their possibility with good digital organising.

The Exercise

This exercise gives a series of prompt questions to work through as an individual, or ideally, in a group.

Either use the below space, a piece of paper, a notes app, or your own head, to think through some of the prompt questions.

Consider them in the context of a campaign or group that already exists, or one that you'd like to organise around.

Who holds the power?

Who currently has the power to change the issue? Who could be organised to force them to act, or replace them?

How do you reach them?

Once you know who you want to organise, how do they discuss and share information? What languages do they use? What apps? Is there a digital space all your group already share? Is it better to talk in-person or online?

What do you want them to do?

When you reach people, what do you ask them to do? Is it to attend something? In person or online? Is it to join your group? How do you support them to do this?

How do you build relationships?

You are reaching people and they are acting, how do you build relationships in your group? Do people have a space to talk together? Is it for general discussion or is that too much? Are there clear rules for engagement? Do people know them? Do all spaces have clear reasons for existing?

Who wants to stop you?

Who would want to stop your organising? How might they use digital spaces to do this? How do you keep spaces secure?

And repeat

These are just a series of questions to guide a discussion of digital spaces.

It might be that you realise you have too many digital channels, or that you need more offline spaces. Don't be afraid of that conclusion.

Remember to regularly reflect on this structure, to re-apply and consider as new campaigns, challenges and more occur.

About The Movement Hub

The Movement Hub was founded in 2018 from within Greenpeace and Civil Rights Defenders to bring together European activists working on social and climate justice

The Movement Hub empowers anyone fighting for positive change in the world – by providing a platform for learning and sharing stories, tools and techniques.

Visit themovementhub.org to learn more or email us at info@themovementhub.org

