The Dark Noise Collective

PENS UP | How Writers Can Join the Fight Against Police Violence

The purpose of this document is to connect writers to local, grassroots organizations that are engaged in active campaigns to fight police violence and increase police accountability. As writers, we are constantly cultivating our ability to read the world, move hearts, and imagine new futures. Yet our work is too often divorced from the organizations that are creating real, systemic change by mobilizing people power in our communities.

This document includes 1) concrete ideas for writers to contribute to local, grassroots movements, 2) tips for engaging in this work responsibly, and 3) a list of local movement organizations fighting police violence across the country.

This resource emerged from conversations among the Dark Noise Collective following the murders of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile by police in July 2016. We asked how we could leverage our position as a group of young artists of color to strengthen the fight to create a world in which our communities can live free of fear and state violence. We drew on our experiences participating in local movement work in Providence, Chicago, and the Twin Cities, as well as speaking with friends and comrades with years of experience organizing in their communities. We hope for this to be a living document that can grow into an even better resource with your input.

See also our Call for Necessary Craft and Practice and our Writing Prompts for Police Brutality and Displays of Global Terrorism (forthcoming).

Suggestions for edits and additions are welcome, especially for the list of organizations. Please follow the guidelines below when adding new organizations. Email darknoisecollective@gmail.com with questions.

1. Ways for Writers to Contribute to Local Movements:

- **Write a love letter to organizers thanking and encouraging them.** Organizing is difficult, draining work, and signs of love and appreciation are crucial to help organizers stay motivated to keep grinding.
- **Leverage your position as an artist to help fundraise.** Organize a benefit reading. When the organization is doing a donation drive, pull in your network of artists. If they're having a raffle or auction, donate your books. If you're more closely involved, offer to help write the fund appeal letter.
- **Write a poem that addresses the issue.** You can offer to contribute your words at an organizing meeting, community gathering, fundraising event, political rally, press conference, etc. In any case, don't *just* send the poem to journals or post it on social media --

engage with the people who are doing the on-the-ground work. The best poems for these purposes are those that are:
    - on topic and loyal to the organization's analysis/framework
    - accessible to people who aren't used to listening to poetry
    - emotionally genuine (without getting corny, of course)
    - at least a little bit hopeful
    - relatively short
- **Connect organizers to someone else's poem.** Maybe you don't have a poem that fits these guidelines, but you probably know one that does. Consider starting with this list.
- **Work with community members to craft public statements.** Many political actions include testimony by directly-affected community members -- ordinary people whose lived experiences make them experts on the topic but who may be new to public speaking. Offer to help speakers craft their testimonies or practice delivering them.
- **Write press releases, editorials, fund appeal letters, website copy, etc.** Once you've built a relationship with the organization, you can learn how to leverage your skills for some of the heavier-lifting writing work. This may be a different kind of writing than you're used to, but it's a good skill to develop. Remember that it's not a spotlight on you; it's about clearly communicating the movement's message.
- **Lead a community writing workshop.** Offer to lead a free writing workshop for an organization's membership base. Take an active role in promoting the workshop among the base. Prioritize making the workshop a safe, easy, and empowering experience, especially for first-time writers.
- **Write chants.** We use the same chants over and over at our marches. Come up with a chant or song that's easy to follow along and fun to yell. Always make sure to run it by an organizer first.
- **Do whatever they need you to do.** As a writer, you have a specific skillset that can be useful -- BUT community organizations also need volunteers to do all the things that make them run: cleaning the office, doing child care, giving rides, licking envelopes, donating food, stacking chairs, etc. etc. etc. This is also the best way to build relationships. **Really, you shouldn't be speaking on behalf of a community organization if you've never helped them take out the trash.**

2. Doing this Work Responsibly (and Well)

- **Always consider what the movement needs from you.** It can take a lot of work for an organization to pull in a new person. Be patient and humble.
- **Always communicate with the organizers to make sure your messaging is in line with theirs.** For example, if they're saying "abolish", don't say "reform;" if they're saying "Black," don't say "people of color," and so on. If you're unsure, ask. If you're consistently unsure, it may mean you need to spend more time listening and learning.
- **Recognize your own subject position**, especially the privileges you carry into the space, whether they stem from your race, education, class, gender, etc. Be wary of co-opting

language or struggles that do not belong to you, and center the leadership of those most directly affected. Remember also that some spaces are not open to everyone.

- **Build relationships.** Any work you do is best if you are committed to building a long-term relationship with the organization. Avoid the spit and bounce.
- **This is a marathon, not a sprint.** Remember: organizing is long, slow, tedious, stressful, mostly-unromantic, crucial, powerful, beautiful work.

3. Organizations Doing the Good Work

READ THESE GUIDELINES FIRST:

Please add to this list ONLY organizations and groups that:

- Are grassroots movement organizations that mobilize a membership base to effect systemic change and build people power. List political arts organizations ONLY if they are working closely and directly with an org that fits this description. Do not list legal /advocacy organizations, community centers, social service providers, research centers, trainings, or foundations.
- Have *fighting police violence and/or increasing police accountability* as an explicit, major focus of their organizing (while understanding that all oppressions and movements are linked).
- Center the experiences and leadership of directly affected people, especially people who are Black, Indigenous, POC, working-class, women, queer/trans, living with disabilities, and/or immigrants.
- Are NOT funded or run by police or other government agencies.

If you question or oppose the inclusion of any organization on this list, you can email darknoisecollective@gmail.com to open a discussion about its removal.

ARIZONA

- Puente

CALIFORNIA

- Northern:
  - Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
  - Black Organizing Project
  - Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice
  - Anti Police Terror Project
  - AORTA--Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance
  - Community Democracy Project
  - Transgender Gender Variant Intersex Justice Project

- Southern:
    - Los Angeles Community Action Network
    - Stop LAPD Spying Coalition
    - Youth Justice Coalition
    - Dignity and Power Now
    - 18 Million Rising
    - Todo Poder Al Pueblo

ILLINOIS

- Assata's Daughters
- Let Us Breathe Collective
- We Charge Genocide
- Chicago Torture Justice Memorials
- Organized Communities Against Deportation
- Project NIA

LOUISIANA

- breakOUT
- New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice
- Safe Streets / Strong Communities

MASSACHUSETTS

- National Organization for Women - MA (MassNOW)
- Socializing for Justice - Boston (SoJust)
- Community Change, Inc.

MINNESOTA

- Communities United Against Police Brutality
- Neighborhoods Organizing for Change
- The Third Place

MISSOURI

- Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression
- Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment (MORE)
- The Organization for Black Struggle
- Hands Up United
- Solidarity Economy

NEW YORK

- CAAAV
- Brooklyn Movement Center
- Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM)
- FIERCE

- Justice Committee
- Picture the Homeless
- Streetwise and Safe (SAS)
- Audre Lorde Project's Safe OUTside the System Collective

NORTH CAROLINA
- Southerners on New Ground (SONG)

OHIO
- Ohio Student Association

PENNSYLVANIA
- Juntos

RHODE ISLAND
- Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE)
- Jobs with Justice RI
- Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)

TEXAS
- Mothers Against Police Brutality

UTAH
- Utah Against Police Brutality

WASHINGTON
- Seattle Young People's Project
- Washington Incarceration Stops Here and No New Youth Jail
- Northwest Detention Center Resistance
- EPIC (End The Prison Industrial Complex)
- Youth Undoing Institutional Racism

NATIONAL/REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS WITH LOCAL CHAPTERS:
- Black Lives Matter (many)
- Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (Atlanta, Jackson, Ft. Worth-Dallas, Jackson, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, Washington DC)
- PICO Network's Live Free Campaign (Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, California, New York)
- Southerners on New Ground (SONG)
- Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100)

Organizations that don't fit the above criteria (but are still good to know about):

Arts organizations with an active focus on police violence:

- Design Studio for Social Intervention (ds4si) (Boston)
- Behind the Blue Line: Stories of Police Brutality (Minnesota)

Legal aid funds for folks arrested while protesting:

- Baton Rouge Legal Defense Fund
- Chicago Community Bond Fund

White ally organizations:

- White Noise Collective
- Catalyst Project
- Showing up for Racial Justice
- Coalition of Anti-Racist Whites
- SURJ-Showing Up for Racial Justice

Trans Women of Color Collective