

COVID-19 Student Organizing Toolkit

a step-by-step guide on how to hold your university accountable to support student and surrounding community needs in the midst of a global pandemic

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HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

We are in unprecedented times that require us to think, organize and act in unprecedented ways. We hope that this toolkit can guide you in using this moment to dream bigger and demand better for students, youth and communities in order to create lasting change. Another world is possible, and we know it's coming.

Please use the above [Table of Contents](#) to access the specific information and resources. *You do not need to go through this entire document from top to bottom*, and we encourage you to go through and use what you want and need. Each page has a link at the bottom right-hand corner (“Back to Top”) that allows you to return to the Table of Contents. Feel free to view the [Glossary](#) at the end of this document for any of the bolded terms you’d like clarity on.

Much of this information is sourced from student organizers who have already begun this work (see current [COVID-19 STUDENT ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS](#)), previous campaign efforts, organizing tools and practices (see [ADDITIONAL RESOURCES](#)), and experience. We want to credit, honor and uplift all the love and labor – both historical and present – that goes into organizing in our communities.

If you have any questions, concerns, want to provide feedback, or wish to have additional one-on-one support running a campaign around these issues at your school, please [submit this Google form](#) to let us know.

With love and in solidarity,

Caitlyn, Shreya, Victoria, and Anu
Illustrations by Rachel



“A revolution that is based on the people exercising creativity in the midst of devastation is one of the great historical contributions of humankind.”

— Grace Lee Boggs

WHY WE ORGANIZE

What is organizing?

organizing is the process of communities taking collective action to envision the world they need and want, disrupt existing systems of power, and demand lasting change.

To organize, you and your community first need to be able to imagine a future founded on **people power** and free from **oppression**, and *believe that this future is possible*. This **vision** provides a direct path for you to determine what changes need to happen in your community and in society in order to get there.

Think about what your school could look like if it were fully supporting the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual well-being of its constituents – students, teachers, workers, and surrounding community.

How would your school be set up? What decisions would your school make? What would those decisions be for, and who would have the power to enact them? Where is your school currently concentrating its wealth and resources – and, in your vision, where should they be instead?

Right now, our **institutions** are designed for people already in power to make decisions about student lives and bodies. Student-led organizing allows students to mobilize, understand what other students and communities need, and act on a collective **grassroots** power to hold schools accountable to those needs.

THE (3) OUTCOMES OF ORGANIZING:

Through organizing, community members:

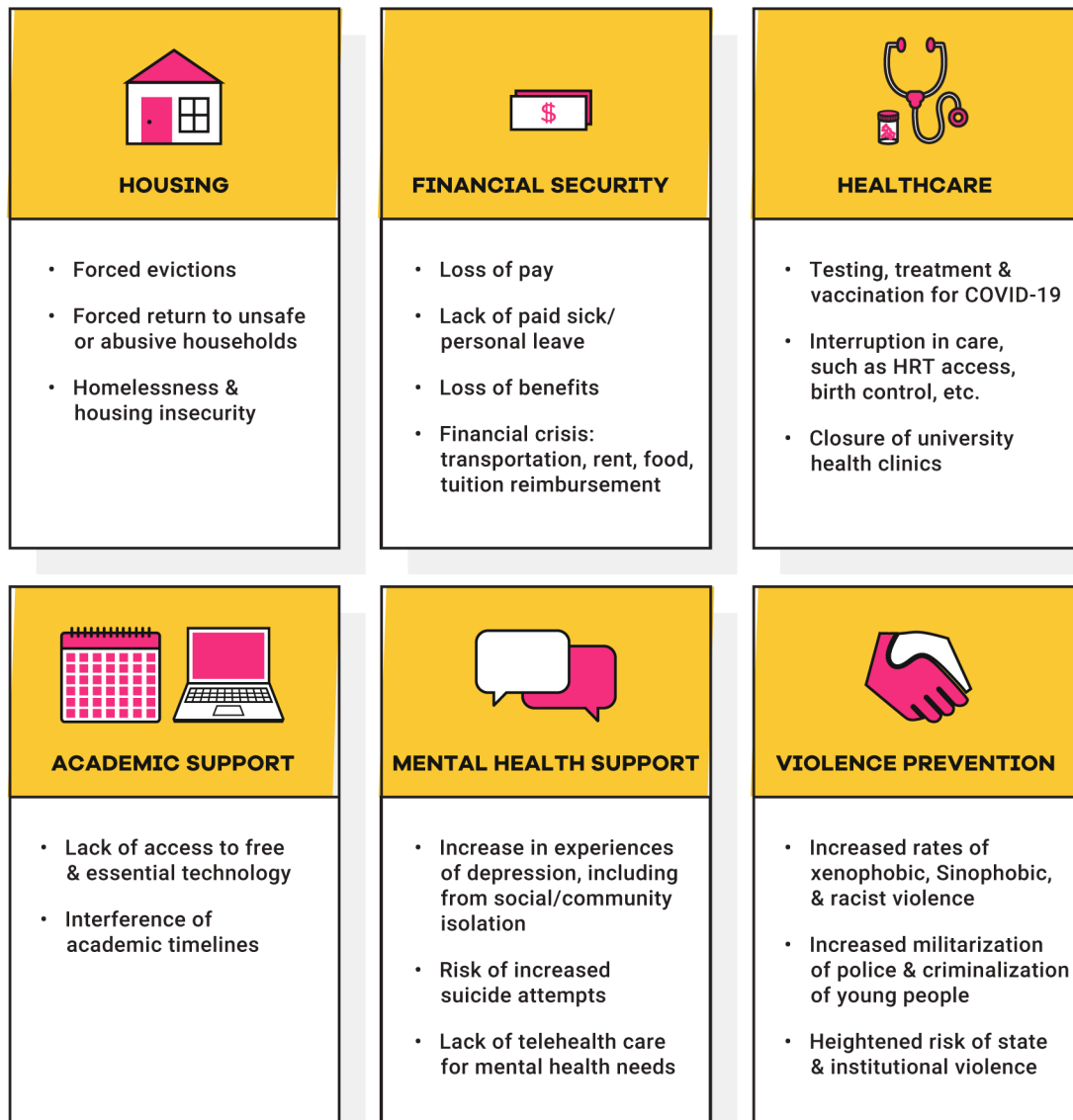
- 1 **Win concrete improvements in people's lives**
- 2 **Make people aware of their own power through community building and campaign victories**
- 3 **Restore wealth, resources and decision-making power directly to the people**

How are students impacted by the COVID-19 crisis?

The COVID-19 crisis is due to structural negligence to meet basic needs for our people. This includes schools and universities failing to support students at a time when students are most vulnerable.

Understanding how students are affected by this crisis allows us to identify key **issue areas** below and, as a result, what decisions the schools should be making or shifting to address those issues. You can use issue areas to run issue-based campaigns at your school, or consolidate it into one campaign like many student organizers have already done (see [COVID-19 STUDENT ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS](#)).

HOW ARE STUDENTS IMPACTED BY THE COVID-19 CRISIS?



[View and Download Issue Areas \(image\)](#)

[View and Download Issue Areas \(text\)](#)

Students can determine for themselves what decisions or decision changes implemented by the university will address these issues. The solutions created by students and communities affected by this crisis can be later written into **demands** (see below under [Strategy, Tactics and Demands](#)).

What about student-to-student mutual aid and support networks?

We have seen a beautiful outpouring of mutual aid efforts, from local neighborhoods and communities to campuses. **Mutual aid** originates from a community's desire to create their own support networks in response to the failure of government or state-based agencies to act during moments of crisis. Currently, we are learning that we cannot simply rely on institutions to provide for us. Mutual aid gives us the opportunity to learn how to participate in **self-governance** and create local systems of support.

Mutual aid is one way of resource-sharing and providing direct aid. However, mutual aid must coincide with grassroots organizing efforts.

Why should we organize?

What makes grassroots organizing effective is that it confronts what created the problem in the first place.

Grassroots organizing encourages students to look at deep-rooted problems under the surface that have existed long before COVID-19, determine steps to make lasting change, and fight to make those changes possible.

i don't pay attention to the

world ending.

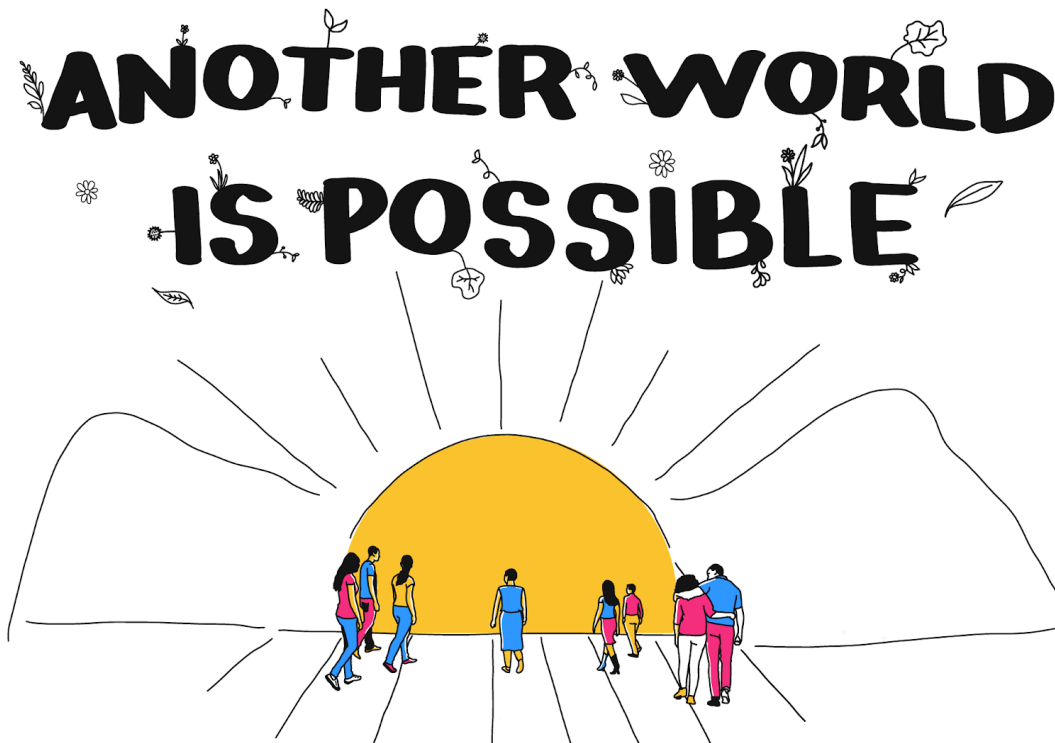
it has ended for me

many times

and began again in the morning.



—nayyirah waheed



WHAT DOES THIS MOMENT MEAN FOR OUR MOVEMENT?

- 1** More than ever, we know that current political structures and institutions are not serving the people. We need a bold vision for the world we want to create, and identify new changes we can demand from these institutions to get there.
- 2** Virtual/online movement building on a local, national and global scale enables us to take advantage of digital organizing and use unique, out-of-the-box tactics that institutions may not be prepared for.
- 3** The investment in mutual aid and community care networks is a result of deep community organizing and resilience, showing us how quickly people can be mobilized in moments of crisis.
- 4** This is the time to further politicize and expand our base. We are seeing and experiencing first-hand an unprecedented time where people are demanding a structural shift in national priorities.
- 5** Things will likely not return to “normal” after the COVID-19 crisis ends. However, organizers have the opportunity to lead our communities in creating a new “normal” post-pandemic, in which the needs of all communities are served and uplifted.
- 6** This moment is asking us to interrogate the following: Where does wealth, resources and the power to make decisions currently exist in our society? And where do we want it to be after this crisis?

ACT NOW: STEPS TO GET STARTED

STEPS TO GET STARTED

STEP 1

Build Your Base. Identify and coordinate with existing student groups on campus that might already be responding to the COVID-19 crisis and needs of students. If you are leading the effort, send outreach emails to peers or allied student/community groups to support your organizing. Host virtual meetings with organizational leaders and members to start planning!

Tip: graduate student groups, worker unions, student government, and alumni associations at your school are good places to start outreach

STEP 2

Collect Testimonials. As you build your base, ask students what experiences and struggles they're going through as a result of COVID-19. Create a Google Form for students to submit testimonials. Mapping out these experiences can help you identify issue areas in order to compile a list of demands. Share testimonials (get permission first!) on social media like Twitter or Instagram or a blog.

Tip: tag your school account and primary targets (see below) on each testimonial you share; if your school has a hashtag, use that as well

STEP 3

Identify Your Target. Who can approve of student demands? This could be your President/Chancellor, Vice President or Provost, Board of Trustees/Regents, etc. Your target is the person you will push to have your demands be met. Targets will typically give you the run-around, stating that your demands must be directed elsewhere. Know that the President/Vice President or the Board of Trustees have the power to issue directives down the chain of command.

STEP 4

Create an Online Petition Letter. Draft a letter to your target and Have individual students, professors, workers, and alumni sign, and also encourage student groups to sign-on. Once you've gathered signatures, send the letter to your target highlighting the urgency of this crisis and include a clear list of demands.

Tip: get a Student Government or Student Council Resolution passed for your demands; see if a faculty association or alumni association would be willing to issue their own letter in support

STEP 5

Use Social Media to Mobilize Students. This is where creative tactics come into play — you want to get as much attention as possible from key players like allies and targets, including other students, administrators, news outlets, donors and even other schools.

Tip: plan a creative social media action, get featured on local or school media, write an op-ed, create a video compilation of all of your organizers reading a portion of the letter aloud and cut the clips together

STEP 6

Organize a Mass Virtual Petition Delivery. You can do this by hosting a virtual event where, during a set time one day, each person attending the event sends the same copy-pasted email (or petition) to your target. You can also host a "call-in" virtual event where you get folks to call your target en masse. Be sure to have a sample message prepared.

Tip: continue engaging in social media and consider tools that allow mass amounts of people to send out the same tweets, tagging your school and target(s) during mass actions, flood phone lines and fill voicemails with the aforementioned stories of students' needs

*“When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed.
But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.”*

— Audre Lorde

Strategy, Demands, Tactics

EXERCISE 2. CAMPUS STRATEGY CHART

TARGETS	Primary:	Secondary:	
TIMELINE			
	Short-Term Goals:	Intermediate-Term Goals:	Long-Term Goals:
TACTICS	Basebuilding:	Educational:	Power:

ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS	Resources We Have:	How We Want to Build:	Internal Problems:
ALLIES, OPPONENTS, & CONSTITUENTS	Constituents:	Allies:	Opponents:

**Know Your IX
Strategy Planning Chart**

[View and Download the Strategy Planning Chart \(PDF\)](#)

Primary Target: university president and provost, Board of Trustees/Regents

Allies: other students within the university, campus and community organizations, faculty and grad student associations, worker unions, women/multicultural/LGBTQ campus or community centers, university student government, alumni associations

Opponents: university administration, Board of Trustees/Regents

A **list of demands** includes **tangible actions** that address **community issues** to make **immediate and lasting change**.



A good demand should be specific and measurable. In a petition letter to your primary target, a list of demands often includes a deadline for when these demands should be met and who all should be included in the implementation process.

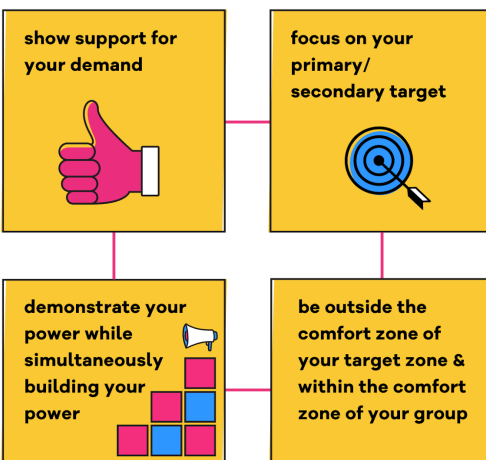
While strategy is your overall plan, **tactics** are actions you take to implement your plan — in a campaign, you use tactics to pressure a target to meet your demands. However, tactics are not endless action after action; they should coincide with your strategy outlining how you will escalate if your demands are not met right away.

For example, your first tactic could be sending a formal petition to your administration as an initial ask for your demands. It is rare that they say yes, and sometimes, even respond. As your deadline approaches depending on the response you receive from your school (or the lack thereof), you can escalate your tactics in intensity.



A **strategy** can be defined as the **method of building people power** to make the changes we need now to get to the world we want.

TACTICS SHOULD:



Typically, the most intense tactics are in-person (such as protests, sit-ins, and rallies), so this moment requires each campaign to come up with creative tactics that make sense for their campaign progression while maintaining the health and safety of those in their community.

Tactics are about more than raising awareness — they should disrupt “daily business / business as usual” and shift the public consciousness towards a vision of liberation.

	<h2 data-bbox="548 226 1263 273">SAMPLE LIST OF DEMANDS</h2> <p data-bbox="927 281 1263 306"><i>(adapted from existing ones below)</i></p>
1	Immediate moratorium on all student evictions
2	Commit to free COVID-19 testing/treatment/vaccination
3	Open free, virtual mental health counseling services
4	Reimburse all costs associated with tuition (particularly for labs, arts students, gym and facility fees), housing, meal plan, parking passes, mandatory distance learning technology such as laptops if needed, and travel due to evictions
5	Students who cannot return home (for any reason) are provided with alternative living arrangements or permitted to continue living on campus
6	Extend assignment, exam, and project deadlines; ability to withdraw from classes without penalty or marks on transcripts; expansion of Pass/Fail options; waiving of missed graduation requirements for those in their senior year as a result of this academic disruption
7	Emergency fund of \$____ to each student experiencing loss, housing and food insecurity, and difficult family situations
8	Emergency fund of \$____, continuation of benefits, and payment of expected wages through the end of the semester to each (part-time and full-time) worker experiencing loss, housing and food insecurity, and difficult family situations
9	Donation of remaining dining hall food and other resources to neighboring community organizations providing direct service at this time
10	Suspension of any civil or criminal penalties issued by University Police Departments for homeless individuals residing outside on campus grounds

[View and Download the Sample List of Demands \(image\)](#)

[View and Download List of Demands \(text\)](#)

<p>Sample Tactics <i>(click to view examples)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter to the President • Petition Letter • List of Demands • Student Testimonials <i>(submission form)</i> • Housing Survey • Coalitional Solidarity Statements • Local News and Media • Social Media Actions (1, 2) • Student Government or Student Council Resolutions 	<p>Draft Templates <i>(click to download and edit)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach Email • Petition Letter/Letter to Administration • Contacting your Landlord • Media Advisory/Press Release
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Digital Organizing Best Practices & Tips and Tricks

While social distancing doesn't allow for physical convening, there are still a variety of ways to build your movement and your base. This crisis is the first time in our lifetimes that everyone is impacted by the same thing, which allows for a unique kind of empathy-building and ability to shift the “movable middle.” Many people are feeling a deep sense of helplessness right now, and tapping them into something tangible they can do in the midst of this chaos will allow them to feel a sense of control and a sense of contribution to the community. Using [Google Forms to compile stories of student experiences and concerns](#) and sharing [these on a website](#), as mentioned before, is a valuable tactic.

Peer-to-peer conversations become even more important in a time of information overload. By reaching out individually to friends and community members, you will yield a much higher response than you may see from standard social media posts in this moment.

Create a [Slack](#) channel to facilitate communication within your community. Don't think just in terms of results when building these relationships – think about community care, finding joy and celebration even in a time of grief and loss, and deep connection. Model vulnerability and self/community-care for your team, and create space for people to check-in and receive support. Consider hosting digital community building events like the following: Netflix Watch Parties, organizing community skill-shares, virtual reading groups, teach-ins and study groups, so on and so forth. Get creative!

Picking a single day for your base to mass-call into target offices is wildly impactful. Using [Click to Tweet](#) and organizing a specific time for your base to tweet-storm targets makes your demands and requests for response publicly available. Creating videos of students sharing their experiences demanding the university respond, anything criticizing them in public can attract press coverage and threaten the image of the university, often invoking a quicker response from administration.

The best kind of actions should always seek to agitate your targets; it is not our job as organizers to come out the other side as friends of the administration.

Social Media 101

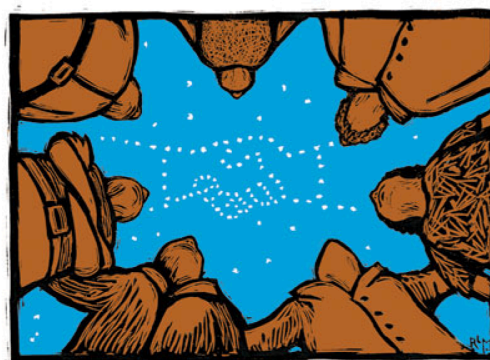
- **Consistency is key.** Be sure to have regularly scheduled daily posts (you can utilize platforms like [Hootsuite](#) or [TweetDeck](#)). Ensure these posts are relevant to/conscious of the ever-changing circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis. Social media isn't just promoting your campaign; it is in and of itself digital activism.
- When it comes to social media posts, you have 3-5 words to convince someone to read. **Grab attention with bold words and questions.**
- **Less is more.** If you are new to this, it is more important you focus on your community and messaging first and “branding” second. Creating fancy graphics will go much further if the words behind them have established meaning. Make posts that are in alignment with your values and aid in the process of building community (digital gathering opportunities, mutual aid, guides to coping/healing through this crisis etc).
- **Instagram** is an incredible tool for connecting with other young folk.
 - Utilizing live allows for interactive chats and a sense of convening community.
 - IG stories allow for “in the moment” content and can be less polished than posts, and allows you to build an authentic and personable voice for your campaign.
 - Feed posts should be curated with captions and have specific messaging.
 - Add locations to IG posts for location-specific reach and utilize university hashtags to reach the student population.

COVID-19 STUDENT ORGANIZING CAMPAIGNS

Campus Organizing

Special shoutout to student organizers across the country who have already begun this work. Support their efforts by joining in if your school is listed below, or launching your own campaign!

- [Emory University](#)
 - [Google Form to submit graduate student concerns](#)
- [Harvard Petition \(letter to admin\)](#)
- [USCB4COLA](#)
 - [Petition Letter](#)
- [UPenn Petition](#)
- [UChicago United Demands](#)
- [Indiana Grad](#)
 - [Letter to Admin](#)
 - [Testimonials](#)
- [Duke Grad Union](#)
- [NYU COVID Coalition](#)
- [Georgetown Grad Union](#)
- [University of North Texas](#)
 - [#DentonRentFreeze](#)
 - [Housing Survey](#) (sample)
 - [Rent Freeze Week of Action](#)
 - [Contact your Landlord email draft/phone call](#) (draft)
- [Students Organize their Own Mutual Aid Networks](#)



Solidarity In Stars
Ricardo Levins Morales Art Studio

Organizing Victories!

- [Emory University](#)

SELF-CARE AND COMMUNITY CARE

It is important for students to also prioritize their own mental health and needs during this crisis. Be sure to intentionally practice self care, in whatever way that may look like for you. We recognize that self-care cannot exist without community care, particularly in a time of social distancing, so we've added some resources on pod-mapping and mutual aid below.

"It is our duty to fight for our freedom.

It is our duty to win.

We must love each other and support each other.

We have nothing to lose but our chains."

— Assata Shakur

Mental Health

- [Mental health and coping during COVID-19](#) (CDC) - for you, your parents and responders
- [Taking Care of Your Mental Health in the Face of Uncertainty](#) (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention)
- [Managing COVID-19 Anxiety](#) by @blessingmanifesting on Instagram
- [Undoing Ableist Capitalist Assumptions](#) by the comrade closet
- [Podcast: Healing Justice Coronavirus Wisdom from a Social Justice Lens](#)
- [SUPPORTING YOURSELF THROUGH THE COVID-19 FRENZY](#) by Leata Mae
- [MindRight](#) is a free text therapy resource for teens ages 13-24
- [Tea Time with Sandra Kim](#)
- [Coloring Pages](#)

MANAGING CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19) ANXIETY

♥ For You

- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage
- Connect through calls/text/internet
- Add extra time for daily stress relief
- Practice self-care
- Focus on your mental health

For Kids

- Reassure them that they're safe
- Let them talk about their worries
- Share your own coping skills
- Limit their news exposure
- Create a routine & structure

For Quarantine/Isolation

- Keep in contact with your loved ones via social media, texts, and phone calls
- Create a daily self-care routine
- Keep yourself busy: games, books, movies
- Focus on new relaxation techniques

@BlessingManifesting

Holistic Health

- [Third Root Community Health Center on how to holistically support your body through COVID-19](#) (Brooklyn, NY)
- [How to support your body's innate ability to protect & heal](#), including herbs to take to support immune system (recommended from Third Root)
- [DIY Hand Sanitizer](#) from @aguadejade
 - Another recipe [from WHO](#)
 - [The Verge - Hand Sanitizer Recipe](#)
- [Why and how to moisturize your hands too](#), including DIY Hand oil recipe from @hoodherbalism
- [SUPPORTING YOURSELF THROUGH THE COVID-19 FRENZY](#) by Leata Mae

Pod Mapping, Mutual Aid and Community Care

- [General Pod Mapping Worksheet](#)
- [General List of Mutual Aid Networks](#)
- [Pod Mapping for Mutual Aid](#)
- [Neighborhood Pods How-to](#)
- [Mutual Aid Resource Toolkit](#) (DC)
- [Template letter to neighbors](#)
- [COVID-19 Mutual Aid Instagram](#)
- [Big Door Brigade - Mutual Aid Toolbox](#) compiled by prison abolitionists
- [Community Care and Mutual Aid Signup TEMPLATE](#) - do not edit, make personal copy
- [Decolonizing Community Care in Response to COVID-19](#) (ndn collective)
- [The Green Institute's Together While Apart: Webinar Video, Q&A, and Resources](#) (including image pictured above)



A special message of gratitude for those who contributed to this document, including: leaders from the 2019-2020 Student Organizing Team (SOT) from around the country who organize across issues to effect positive change in their communities, led by Shreya Pokhrel and Victoria Guerrero. The Youth Organizing staff who support our amazing Youth Activist Network year-round as they build movements across issues. Anu Sharma and Caitlyn Caruso, co-coordinators of the SOT, who strung all of the magical notes in this document together to make a visionary melody. Rachel Margolis for helping to bring this document to life with her art – as well as assisting in the formatting of the toolkit. Joy Bullock and Geoff Corey, staff on the communications team who are the ones who made sure you were able to find this resource. Kinjo Kiema, our associate director of youth organizing, for providing guidance and resources as we compiled this document. and last but not least, endless gratitude to those who walked before us, those who guided us, and those who have shaped us.

GLOSSARY

Oppression is a system where a select few hoard power, wealth and resources at the expense of many; historically rooted cycles of domination and power of one group over another

Institutions are areas in our society (such as schools, prisons, hospitals, family, etc.) with laws, customs, and practices that can reproduce oppressive norms, behaviors or violence

Xenophobia is the fear against a group of people from another nation and/or different than your own, leading to targeted discrimination or racist violence

Sinophobia means anti-Chinese racism

Militarization is an institution's ability to use physical force and cause oppressive violence

People power is power that people feel in community and/or when they come together (in organizing campaigns, actions, mutual aid, etc.)

Grassroots means directed by people power and not by larger corporations

Organizing is the process of communities taking collective action to envision the world they need and want, disrupt existing systems of power, and demand lasting change

Vision is a community's collective image of a future free from oppression

Issue areas can be what communities need to achieve their vision

Demands are tangible actions that address community issues to make immediate and lasting change

Target is a person in a current position to approve of and implement demands

Tactics are actions communities take to pressure a target to meet their demands

Strategy can be the method of building people power to make the changes we need now to get to the world we want

Mutual aid is when groups of people mobilize to create local, community-led systems of support in response to the failure of government or other state-based agencies to act during a crisis

Self-governance is the ability for communities to come up with their own solutions to issues, make decisions for themselves, and support one another and surrounding communities without relying on outside agencies

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<p>Digital Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources for Online Facilitation • Digital Resilience in The Time of Coronavirus • Plan Now to Adapt to Coronavirus • Software for Staying Connected (Section 5 of the Organizing for Palestinian Rights in the Time of COVID-19 Toolkit) • Webinar: Online Facilitation 101 • Online Meeting/Gathering/Education/Event Resources • Digital Tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Which Tools? ◦ Worksheet ◦ Digital Security 	<p>Organizing Tools and Models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralized organizing in moments of crisis • Network Models (pros/cons) • Circles of Connection • Collective Infrastructure • Set Principles • Decision-making Chart <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Decision-making Worksheet • The Movement Cycle <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Worksheet
<p>Organizing Toolkits and Webinars</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demands from Grassroots Organizers Concerning COVID-19 • Training: Sunrise School • Tenant Organizing • Workplace Organizing Toolkit • Advocacy Resources • Webinar: Movement NetLab 	<p>General Organizing Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KYIX Campus Organizing Toolkit • Youth Activist Toolkit • Mutual Aid • Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing
<p>General COVID-19 Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Resources for Youth and Students • General Coronavirus Resource Kit • Uprooted & Rising COVID-19 Resource List for Students & Organizers • COVID-19 Mutual Aid and Advocacy Resource • So Coronavirus is Happening - What Now? Toolkit for Teens • Social Distancing Resources • COVID-19 Resources for Students • COVID-19 resources for US local groups (350.org teams) 	