

Strengthening Our Chapter's Capacity by Hiring Staff

Authors: Aram F and Philip L

Co-signers: Alexey K, Amy W, Christa E, Connor R, E. Bailey M, Emma F, Fernando MC, Justin R, Luke C, Many J, Maria A, Meg S

Revised for September 2022 GMM submission
Incorporating two friendly amendments from Michael B.

RATIONALE

A) DSA grew rapidly under Trump, but since the Democrats took power, the Left has struggled. Social movements have ebbed, and participation in DSA chapters has declined. At the same time, there are exciting signs in labor. There is also potential for mass protests for reproductive rights and other issues.

Seattle DSA has built up a membership of 1,500 people, a core of active members involved in a wide variety of campaigns and projects, and a broader public profile. However, we also have weaknesses that have made it difficult to fully utilize our strengths. Some key weaknesses include: a) only a minority of our members being actively engaged in the chapter and our campaigns, b) some disorganization in our internal organizational functioning, and c) limited public-facing media to project our socialist politics and have an impact on local political debates.

In this complicated situation it's important to find ways to increase our organizational capacity and infrastructure to strengthen our campaigns and make it easier for more of our members to get involved. One way to do this is to use over \$50,000 in accumulated financial reserves of Seattle DSA and members' willingness (including less active members) to financially support DSA to hire a team of local staff organizers. This can be a valuable tool to help the chapter be better organized so that it is easier for members to get plugged in and build our public campaigns.

B) *The Stranger's* recent endorsement of pro-war corporate Democrat Adam Smith over socialist Stephanie Gallardo highlights the urgent need for an independent socialist voice for the working class in the Seattle area. Thanks to its healthy finances and large membership, Seattle DSA is well positioned at this time to create such a publication or similar media projects.

In fact a 2020 working group explored the idea of a public facing Seattle DSA publication. While in the end it was agreed there was not a basis to proceed at that time, they drafted [a vision for the publication](#) that reflected discussions within the working group and with the Local Council (LC) at that time. Note that the 2020 document is for reference, and is not binding to the current resolution.

C) DSA's 2021 national convention passed a [resolution](#) for the national organization to match funds for chapters hiring staff and renting office space. The resolution stated that "far from

substituting for membership involvement and leadership, hiring a staffer can free up DSA members and our elected bodies to focus on outwards-facing organizing and it can help build the internal structures to scale up these power-building efforts.”

D) The socialist movement needs to be rooted in the multi-racial working class. It is a priority for our chapter to build in South King County which has a concentration of workers of color. South King County is also the core of [the district](#) where Seattle DSA member and outspoken socialist [Stephanie Gallardo](#) ran for Congress — one of our chapter’s three priority campaigns.

E) The Stephanie Gallardo campaign, House Our Neighbors campaign, and Raise the Wage Tukwila all have shown in practice the importance of having paid staff to be able to most effectively build volunteer powered grassroots campaigns. The same applies to Seattle DSA. With a membership of 1,500 we believe the time has come for Seattle DSA to take this step.

F) Staff will not be a panacea or a magic solution to all our chapters' problems. Staff must be utilized to facilitate the increased participation of members. At this time we believe that local staff would be most beneficial for the following three priorities:

1. Strengthening the chapter’s communications capacity. This is a resource-efficient way to inform our members and the public about our campaigns, make the case for socialist politics on local issues in contrast to the dominant liberalism on the Left, and politically inspire members and the public to get active with our campaigns.
2. Internal organizing to help activate more members into our campaigns and strengthen our internal structures (with an initial focus on building DSA out of the Gallardo campaign in South King County).
3. Assisting the LC with administrative and organizational tasks of leading the chapter, which can help the chapter address some of its disorganization.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1) The LC will establish a Media Committee tasked with developing a plan to create public facing media with an emphasis on Seattle area politics from a socialist perspective, especially exploring the option of an on-line publication. The Media Committee will bring its recommendations to the LC, who will then bring a more detailed proposal to the chapter for discussion and a vote. Key aspects of Seattle DSA media will be:

- Appealing to a wider audience of Seattle area progressive and working-class people
- Being professionally produced on a regular schedule with news, reports on labor and other social struggles, and op-eds
- Being overseen by an Editorial Board which is representative of Seattle DSA’s diverse big tent

2) Seattle DSA will hire 1 part-time organizer who focuses on strengthening our communications capacity. Examples of this include:

- Doing media work and press releases
- Strengthening our social media presence

- More regular production of articles, news reports, and opinion pieces for our existing website
- Helping with our weekly email blasts to our members and supporters
- Coordinating the Media Committee tasked with planning, and potentially launching in 2023, a Seattle DSA public facing media project
- The staffer will also assist the LC in running the chapter in a more organized fashion. For example:
 - Responding to emails sent to the chapter
 - Action Network Data Entry (or preferably recruiting members who will do it)
 - Better maintenance of chapter records like past resolutions and votes

3) Seattle DSA will hire a second part-timer as a “chapter organizer” who will:

- Initially, lead up efforts to build DSA in the aftermath of the Gallardo campaign. Examples of this include:
 - Lead a drive to recruit new members to DSA from among the people on the Stephanie Gallardo volunteer & donor lists, with the aim of establishing one or more SDSA branches in South King County, and strengthen the Eastside branch.
 - Follow up with allied organizations and campaigns identified during the Stephanie Gallardo campaign to build a long term relationship with DSA.
- Activate more of our members in the chapter’s priority campaigns, and assist with strengthening our membership engagement capacity and internal structures.
- Assist the LC in running the chapter (see examples under point #2)

4) The LC will be responsible for drafting more detailed job descriptions and work plans which will be reported to the chapter. The exact role of staff may change according to democratic decisions of the chapter based on the needs of Seattle DSA.

5) These hiring decisions are for an initial trial period until the 2023 chapter convention. In preparation for the convention the LC will assess the impact of having staff and their progress towards specific goals, the financial viability of keeping staff, and make a recommendation about whether to continue with staff, followed by a discussion and vote at the 2023 chapter Convention.

6) A core principle of Seattle DSA is being a democratic and member-run organization. Any staff hired by Seattle DSA will work under the direction of the LC. The role of staff is to assist the LC and membership, rather than substituting for them. History shows the danger of socialist and labor organizations becoming staff-run and undemocratic. We commit to regularly reviewing this dynamic at chapter conventions and other spaces as needed.

7) Hiring process:

- The LC will put out a call for applications with job descriptions, including specific and measurable goals for the staff’s work
- The LC will establish a Hiring Committee to conduct interviews and make recommendations to the LC for hiring Seattle DSA staff

- Preference will be given to applicants who have experience organizing in DSA and socialist movements, as well as other social movements. Given DSA's current demographics, applicants who are not cis white men will be especially encouraged to apply
- The LC will take final decisions on personnel, wages, and benefits of Seattle DSA staff, and report back to the chapter

8) Finances:

- Wages, benefits, and expenses will be approximately \$3,000/month for each part-time organizer. DSA staff will be paid approximately \$25/hour for approximately 25 hours/week, plus a monthly health insurance stipend.
- The LC and chapter Treasurer will establish a finance team to increase our income through a local membership monthly dues drive which will contribute to general chapter income, as well as a dedicated fund for members who want to specifically support the two part-time positions. Our initial goal is to increase our local income by \$3,500/month by November 30 between these two funds. If we hit this goal, we could consider setting a new higher goal at that time or at the time of the 2023 Chapter Convention.

9) A local office is an important way to strengthen our chapter's capacity, especially as a place for storing supplies, staff and volunteers to work together, and for small in-person meetings of DSA members and campaigns we support. In 2022 or early 2023 the LC will set up an Office Committee to coordinate an effort in the chapter to find possible office space, develop a budget, and fundraise to help pay for it. The LC will apply for [matching funds](#) from national DSA for a local office, though we cannot rely on getting this.

The following amendments have been accepted as friendly and are now part of the resolution:

Any staff member(s) hired by the chapter will be employee(s) of the Chapter, and covered by unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, Social Security. All wages paid will be reported on appropriate tax and other government forms, and fees will be paid for the programs listed above.

No one employed by the Chapter will be an "at will" employee. There will be a process, to be determined by the LC and any employees together with regard to performance reviews, warnings, terminations etc. If such an agreement is not possible, then the method of resolution will be the same as currently used by the CWA and another DSA chapter.