

Proposal to Create a Formal Membership & Leadership Structure for SURJ NYC

“I don’t want to be part of a club. I want to be part of a movement.” - [Mariame Kaba](#)

Background

Rationale and Goals

The Accountability group has been meeting for 4-5 years with a mandate to figure out how we can be accountable: to each other, ourselves, WGs, National, people of color, our politik. Through this process, we determined that structures are needed to help us be more accountable. We propose that Showing Up for Racial Justice NYC (SURJ NYC) adopt a formal and radically accessible membership structure. Creating this structure will allow us to share clear expectations for anyone who wants to make SURJ NYC their organizing home, supporting new members to understand their role in our movement work, as well as the ways SURJ NYC supports its members in their anti-racist work and beyond.

As part of the design of this membership structure, we believe we will be able to clarify important expectations for SURJ NYC members, like integrating a practice of moving money into everything we do, participating in calling in our networks, and taking impactful actions to change material conditions.

We will also be able to somewhat simplify the chapter-wide decision-making process by inviting members to participate in that process outside of chapter meetings, and devoting chapter meetings to work that is necessary and relevant to both a wider base and to newcomers.

By welcoming folks to make a deeper and more sustained commitment to SURJ NYC, and offering an opportunity to formally become a member of our community, we believe that we can lay the groundwork for making deeper kinds of commitments to each other.

Currently, while the CC serves important functions like financial compliance and some emergency decision-making, it explicitly does not “manage strategic planning,” choose partners, or shape a collective vision. By bringing everyone in Leadership formally into an accountable decision-making body, we hope to close a gap in strategic and collective decision-making. This will help members understand who makes decisions, how and why, and clarify the commitments and expectations of chapter leaders so that members understand what they’re opting into when they join Leadership.

Key Terms

Consensus-building Decision-making Process: The process SURJ NYC uses to make decisions about major things like new areas of work or changes to our structure. [Read more here.](#)

Connection with Racial Justice and SURJ NYC's work

SURJ NYC's purpose is to organize moveable white folks into work that meaningfully shifts power and perspective to dismantling white supremacy. You can find more detail about SURJ values [here](#).

- We organize out of mutual interest - we are not here to “help” Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color but to work towards liberation for all of us. Membership gives us a structure to care for one another in ways that model the world we want to create.
- Accountability to the groups and campaigns we organize with - when we know what our capacity is, we can better support our partners by accurately naming what we can and cannot do and showing up accordingly. Without proper knowledge of our capacity as a chapter, we may be underserving our relationships or overpromising our capabilities.
- Growing is good - by giving a clear model of what it means to be a member, we can more easily retain folks who have expressed interest in our work but would not necessarily be sure how to participate under our current structures. Establishing practices around staying in contact with new folks also keeps us accountable to their experiences as we answer questions and work to support them as SURJ members and in their lives.
- Center class - By committing to supporting one another as people beyond the meetings we attend and caring about people's survival first, we recognize that we all have different class experiences, taking care of each other in a way that allows us all to participate in this work.
- Take Risks, Make Mistakes, Learn and Make Amends, and Keep Going - when we have a supportive structure behind us that is also able to hold us accountable, we are better prepared to take risks and to make amends when those risks don't work as intended.
- There is enough for all - By supporting one another and our wider movement through both moving money and showing up for one another, we model that there is enough for all of us to have our basic needs met and learn to let go of a scarcity mindset.

Proposal Details

Scope

We propose that SURJ NYC create a structure to support formal chapter membership. In this structure, any person (member or non-member) will be welcome to attend any SURJ NYC meeting, except for the consensus-building decision-making process. Only members will

participate in the consensus-building decision-making process. Non-members will be welcome to join campaigns, and participate in political education and skill-building events.

We also propose that more fine-grain decisions be made by a group of members called the Leadership Crew (LC)—members who have been active for at least 6 months and commit to stewarding SURJ NYC, holding down necessary admin, and shaping the collective vision and strategy of our chapter. The LC will replace the Coordinating Committee (CC), and take on additional functions. LC meetings will also replace the Work Updates, currently submitted by working groups and other functions of the chapter (e.g., Comms, Orientation, Calling In) each month to keep the chapter as a whole informed of what they are doing. Leaders will collectively make decisions about our vision and the moment-to-moment strategy of the chapter.

Non-members

Non-members are welcome to join any actions, meetings, or events and receive our eblast and working group-specific communications. These folks do not participate in the consensus-building decision-making process.

Members

For those interested in becoming a SURJ NYC member and being able to participate in setting the direction and structure of the chapter, we will ask for several things:

1. To make a donation of as little as one dollar per year to help collectively fund our work and the work of the organizations and campaigns we organize with,
2. To make a set of commitments for their anti-racist practice, including:
 - a. Move money: Make at least one generous-for-them donation to POC-led organizing each year.
 - b. Move self: Engage in study and self-reflection to deepen their understanding of how white supremacy operates and how to dismantle it.
 - c. Move community: Participate in calling in the white people in their networks.
 - d. Move power: Take concrete action designed to effect change to the material reality of white supremacy in NYC. (Go to a rally, call their representative, etc.)
 - e. Move into relationship: Build relationships with other people in SURJ NYC. Seek out people to learn from, process with, and give and take feedback with.
3. To participate in the consensus-building decision-making process that helps us set the direction and structure of SURJ NYC.

Leaders

When members have been involved for at least six months and are holding down pieces of work, in a working group or otherwise, they are eligible to join the Leadership Crew (LC). The LC is a decision-making body with clear expectations for participation and clear responsibilities. Anyone who does work to support the functions of SURJ NYC, the projects taken on by the chapter, or any of the chapter's working groups is a member of the LC. Current members of the

LC will be tasked with highlighting opportunities to join and regularly making clear that this is the way we move together.

The LC will meet three times a month online and quarterly in person. These would replace the ad-hoc monthly meetings that began earlier this year as well as CC meetings. At every meeting there must be at least one member of every working group present, but it doesn't need to - and likely won't - be the same person every time. Whether in the full body or by smaller groups delegated to by the full group, the LC will do these things:

- Determine, articulate, and disseminate chapter-wide strategy and goals
- Review requests for support, sign-on, and cosponsorship
- Track chapter funds
- Develop and/or support proposals for the full chapter as appropriate
- Flag and coordinate support for collaboration between working groups

As part of the LC, leaders are responsible for:

- Attending at least one meeting per month
- Being engaged enough in their working group to be able to
 - Report on the work and current perspectives of their working group during meetings
 - Make decisions with the LC on behalf of their group in a way that allows the LC to make time-sensitive decisions together
- Keeping up to date on info shared/discussions in meetings they haven't attended, by hearing from folks who were there and/or reviewing notes

Timeline

- If the proposal is approved, the LC can begin meetings in September (3 times a month) and assess in December how the meeting and body structure is working.

Next Steps

- LC meetings will begin in September
- Nuts and Bolts:
 - LC to establish structure and systems to manage and track membership.
 - Make an announcement in the eblast about our new structure.
 - Add information about membership to the [website](#).
- Logistics for the LC to consider:
 - What is the best 'roles' structure within the LC?
 - How does the LC make decisions? Is it similar to what was done in the CC?
- Questions of accountability for the LC to consider:
 - How is the LC accountable to membership and vice versa?
 - How do we ensure that leaders and members are accountable to all folks and groups with which we organize, not just the ones they know?

Appendix: Structure and Capacity

The LC will be responsible for creating and implementing the structures necessary to support the membership model.

Proposed Structure	Rationale	Capacity Required
Meetings separate from chapter for decision-making	Separate meetings will help ensure that those making decisions about the chapter have a baseline knowledge of and commitment to SURJ NYC.	A pool of 6-10 people prepared to facilitate the process. Folks able to step up to schedule, promote, etc.
Email list and member tracking	<p>A chapter member email list will enable us to reach out to members to invite them to chapter-wide decision-making and member check-ins.</p> <p>In addition, it will be an easy way to count how many members we have.</p>	<p>New email list in Every Action, regularly updated, including only members.</p> <p>Anyone checking in with members skilled up to update contacts in EveryAction</p>
Treasury & fundraising	Helps members meet their commitment to move at least \$1 per year to SURJ NYC general funds (split between us and our partners).	Maintain the donation button on the website, current bank account, and treasury data.
Support for understanding commitments and making a plan to meet them	The IT commitments will be more meaningful if members have opportunities to discuss and understand them.	Member orientations focus on understanding the commitments and why each is important, along with ways to meet them.
Opportunities to meet commitments	By making it possible to meet all of members' commitments within SURJ NYC, we a) make it more likely that folks will meet their commitments and b) give members guidance on how to meaningfully engage with our work.	<p>Regular offerings of political education, calling-in workshops, actions from groups and campaigns we organize with, and social gatherings.</p> <p>Efforts made by legacy members to follow up personally with new members</p> <p>Regular, clear fundraising asks.</p>
Personal check-ins for every	Accountability for meeting	Broad-based leadership

member	<p>commitments</p> <p>By leading these conversations with a meaningful check-in about how a new member is doing, we will learn about opportunities to support them if they're having a hard time. Caring about people's survival first directly supports the leadership of poor and working class white people.</p> <p>Having a person to connect with 1:1 fosters a sense of belonging. It's the single most common reason many of us have stayed a part of SURJ.</p>	commitment to follow up with at least one new member a year.
LC administration	Ensure meetings are scheduled, reminders are sent, zoom is set up, and there are facilitators and notetakers scheduled.	A group of folks to coordinate administrative tasks
Make sure chapter members know which groups and campaigns we are in accountability with and what that means.	Since we are a values-driven and accountability-led org, facilitating internal education on the groups and campaigns we organize with will help each member to engage more deeply in the work of those we organize with.	Regular check-ins with working group / accountability liaisons in meetings; potential overview of partners done when new folks join the LC.
Annual big fun membership event	In-person and special events will help us to build relationships with one another and encourage celebrating our wins / steps forward in addition to having joy and connection as a part of SURJ NYC's culture.	A group of folks to plan, promote, and coordinate hosting a large meeting.