

# HOW GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS AND COALITIONS CAN SUPPORT IMMIGRANTS' RESISTANCE TO INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION

Society for Community Research & Action, Division 27 of the American Psychological Association

## BACKGROUND

Around the globe, many immigrants experience oppression from local, national, and transnational sources as they migrate and after they settle in their new communities. Oppression is organized and unrelenting, embedded across societies. Immigrants resist oppression by engaging in actions that undermine oppressive power structures. Resistance can be undertaken individually or collectively; targeted at individuals, groups, policies, structures, or systems; and active or passive, organized or unorganized, and overt or covert.

In this brief, we outline ways movements and coalitions may facilitate resistance to oppression.

## MOVEMENTS AND COALITIONS

Grassroots movements and coalitions involve people coming together around a particular issue and mobilizing to bring other people into the movement to effect change. They often join immigrants and allies, and can range from neighborhood-based coalitions to large transnational grassroots movements.

Grassroots movements and coalitions often challenge oppression by directly staging collective actions that seek to inform, influence, and/or demand that policymakers take action to dismantle oppression. They can also play a critical role in facilitating resistance by aiming to dismantle oppression inside their movements and coalitions. They can provide empowering brave spaces that attend to suffering caused by oppression. In this way, they can support members to develop courageous vision and foster a culture of growth. To do so, their members should have opportunities to take on meaningful roles, provide and receive support, develop skills, share leadership, and build community. Grassroots movements and coalitions can create and allocate resources to facilitate resistance. Grassroots movements and coalitions should use their unique power to act. Different grassroots movements and coalitions may take divergent approaches; there is no one way to support resistance.

## FRAMEWORKS

Our recommendations are grounded in the framework of **SOCIAL SETTINGS**<sup>1</sup> along with three frameworks:

**EMPOWERING SETTINGS**<sup>2</sup> have a culture of growth and community building; opportunities to take on meaningful, multiple roles; peer-based support; and shared leadership committed to development.

**HEALING JUSTICE**<sup>3</sup> focuses on systems of oppression and calls for structural solutions while attending to suffering, emphasizing a cycle where people build community, develop courageous vision, heal, and act.

**DECOLONIZATION**<sup>4</sup> involves decentering western ways of knowing to resurface ancestral truths and actions, drawing attention to intersectionality and allyship to resist colonialism.

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<sup>1</sup> See Seidman & Tseng, 2011; Tseng & Seidman, 2007, Tseng et al., 2002

<sup>2</sup> See Kieffer, 1984; Maton, 2008; Maton & Brodsky, 2011; Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Wilke & Speer, 2011; Zimmerman, 2000

<sup>3</sup> See Chavez-Diaz & Lee, 2015; Gemignani & Hernández-Albújar, 2019; Ginwright, 2015a, 2015b, 2018; Page, 2013

<sup>4</sup> See Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOGNIZE OPPRESSION:** Oppression is carried out individually, collectively, institutionally, and structurally. Oppression can be disguised as the status quo. Stay alert, listen, and look for oppression.

**LOOK FOR RESISTANCE:** Some resistance may be easier to see than others. Be alert to resistance already taking place in your movement or coalition and surrounding community to support it.

**LISTEN AND LEARN:** Look to those who are resisting both within and outside of the movement/coalition to identify how you might best facilitate resistance. Center the knowledge, experiences, skills, and hopes of those already engaged in resistance work to determine next steps for your grassroots movement/coalition.

**LOOK TO MODELS:** Look at movements and coalitions similar to your own to explore how they have facilitated resistance. United We Dream in the USA and the Asian Migrants' Coordinating Body in Hong Kong are examples of grassroots movements and coalitions that have supported resistance. Keep in mind that no movement or coalition is perfect and all are in constant development.

**PROVIDE RESOURCES.** Support resistance by providing resources that your community needs. Build on the existing assets and skills of those in your movement, particularly those experiencing oppression. Think about the unique resources you can offer. These may include legal aid, housing, or health care; education, information-sharing, or skills development; technical or fiscal support; and/or emotional and social support.

**HARNESS TECHNOLOGY:** Technology can facilitate communication, connection, coordination, and information dissemination. Yet, it can also bring to light acts of resistance not meant for the public eye, putting individuals experiencing oppression at risk. Technology is also unevenly distributed and accessed. Look to those experiencing oppression to consider how technology can support your resistance work.

**USE POWER WISELY:** Recognize and use the unique power and strengths your grassroots movement and/or coalition holds to work toward dismantling oppressive systems.

**MAKE SPACE:** Make sure all voices are heard and their existing knowledge, experiences, and skills are harnessed and equally valued. Decenter Western ways of knowing and challenge structures of white supremacy. Make space for those typically ignored. Those with more power should relinquish that power in their roles and step back. Build community to facilitate resistance.

**HONOR DIVERSE ROLES:** Provide opportunities for all members to take on meaningful and multiple roles, to share leadership, and to grow individually and together. Create ways for members' contributions to evolve over time. Honor and value the diverse roles members undertake, particularly those historically undervalued.

**ACT IN SOLIDARITY:** Those with more power and privilege must be allies, accomplices, and partners to those being oppressed, resisting any internal or external narrative that pushes them to be saviors and to see others through a passive victim lens. Change common individual oppression actions, such as privilege-splaining.

**LOOK IN THE MIRROR:** Reflect on your movement/coalition's structures, processes, and practices to examine ways you may be upholding systems of oppression. Actively work toward dismantling oppression in your movement and/or coalition. Make sure you are not reproducing the cycle of oppression.

**BE WILLING TO REFLECT AND CHANGE:** In your work, you will likely make mistakes. Be open to feedback from those whose resistance you seek to support. Continuously reflect on what you are doing and why. Be ready to own your actions and make changes accordingly. When your grassroots movement/coalition or someone in it is "called in" by those oppressed, view the intervention as an act of love, designed to help the movement/coalition or person do better, as you are viewed as having the capacity to grow.