

Big Protests Are Fine, But Here's a To-Do List for Lasting Change

By Sarah van Gelder posted Jan 18, 2017

After the inauguration and the Women's March on Washington, what comes next? To make real change, we'll need to build power where we live.



As the Trump regime rolls out, the need for building local power becomes startlingly clear. Many will march in the Women's March on Saturday, and that promises to be an important statement against normalizing the Trump administration. But after the big events are over, what next? National demonstrations are important, but to make real change, we'll need to build power where we live.

It's in our communities that we can resist hate and stand up for each other.

In communities we have the moral authority to insist on the changes we need and to build the sort of world we want. By building connections—even with people who vote differently—we can find common purpose that transcends polarized politics. On that basis, we can resist those who would force pipelines or deportations on us and reclaim our power as “we the people” of the United States.

So what does it actually mean to build power where you live?

As I traveled across the United States reporting for YES! and for the book, [The Revolution Where You Live: Stories from a 12,000 Mile Journey Through a New America](#), I found answers as diverse as the communities I visited.

The following, adapted from the book chapter, “101 Ways to Reclaim Local Power,” regroups these ideas under the categories of Reconnect, Resist, and Revitalize. Some are major projects; some are simple changes in habits. None is a quick fix, but as I discovered on my trip, this work, grounded in place, can release enormous energy and even joy.

1) Reconnect to your human and ecological community

- Learn about the original people whose land you live on, and acknowledge them.

- Convene get-togethers for people who don't normally interact: old and young, police and community, people of different races and places of origin.
- Learn about the links between soil health and human health.
- Learn where your water comes from, how it gets to homes, schools, and businesses, and how (and whether) it is safe.
- Walk outside. Pause to talk with people you encounter.
- Attend someone else's ceremony or celebration.
- Make space for everyone to speak for themselves, especially those often silenced or marginalized.
- Meet for coffee with someone who is feeling isolated.
- Get to know the people who are just arriving in your community, especially refugees and immigrants.
- Offer translation at community events.

2) Resist hate, exclusion, and policies that impoverish your community

- Learn about police practices in your community: Are people of color or immigrants more likely to be stopped, arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced? Does an inability to post bonds mean some are in jail for extended time periods awaiting trial?
- Avoid e-commerce and corporate chains. Grow local, shop local, share local.
- Learn the mechanics of voting and ballot access; resist efforts that exclude eligible voters.
- Pay attention to outside entities that are looking to exploit or privatize the commons, and sound the alarm.
- Find out who in your community is not free—buried in debt, in prison, being trafficked. Support their vision of liberation.
- Sponsor election debates; the people who are most marginalized should moderate and ask the most questions.
- Ask for help. (Don't be a martyr!) People often want to pitch in but aren't sure how. Create spaces for leadership to emerge.

3) Revitalize your community and reclaim power

- Encourage retiring business owners to sell their businesses to workers.
- Introduce talking circles to schools so that students have a safe way to resolve conflicts.
- Hold celebrations featuring the diverse foods, music, dance, and art from the cultures that make up your community.
- Clean and conserve water by creating wetlands and rain gardens.
- Start a licensed kitchen incubator so people can process and sell their favorite salsa or soup.
- Encourage your library to loan out tools, bicycles, and clothes for job interviews.
- Organize to establish community-owned electricity generation, such as solar or wind power.
- Learn and teach facilitation, mediation, and circle processes so people can work effectively together.
- Run for local office.
- Hold forums to set community priorities, and invite elected officials to respond to *your* agenda. Ask for commitments and report-backs.

Sarah van Gelder wrote this article for [YES! Magazine](#). Sarah is cofounder and editor at large of YES! Magazine. Her new book, "The Revolution Where You Live: Stories from a 12,000-Mile Journey Through a New

America,” is available now from YES! Read more about her road trip and book here and follow her on Twitter @sarahvangelder.