

Note: original notes document was on proton, but a few people had issues opening it. So here is a PDF, and all of the links should work.

WHAT CAN ARTISTS DO? Resource Document

On January 13, 2026, we facilitated a virtual workshop for musicians, poets, and other artists to explore how we can meaningfully support movement work in this historical moment (with a special focus on community defense + Minneapolis). This document shares notes from that meeting, as well as additional resources.

Meeting Slides and Overall Focus

[Here are the slides from the workshop](#), and here is a brief summary:

OUR FOCUS: (1) What artists can do—not just with our art, but with the spaces and audiences we have access to, the skills that we can use both inside and outside of an arts practice—What are we uniquely positioned to offer the movement? And (2) What are some concrete, specific ways that artists can meaningfully support organizing, especially in 2026, in Minneapolis but also beyond?

- Facilitation Team: [Kyle](#) and [UyenThi](#) - Minneapolis writers and activists.
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Calls to Action for Everyone, Not Just Artists

Before we got to the artist-specific material, we addressed how artists are community members before we are artists, and the call to action for community members in general looks like this:

Attend an "upstander" training, legal observer training, and/or "know your rights" training. A few MN-specific groups that sometimes offer these (though keep in mind that at this exact moment, there may or may not be capacity)

- [MONARCA](#)
- [MN Immigrant Rights Action Committee \(MIRAC\)](#)
- [The Immigrant Defense Network](#)
- [Immigrant Law Center of MN](#)

Connect to a local rapid response network. Every neighborhood, and a growing number of suburbs, have them. Talk to neighbors who might already be connected, and/or check out the [Defend612](#) network finder tool (if in MPLS). Some of those networks have patrols you can join, or neighborhood-specific calls to action. Doing that work, just being outside with [whistles](#) and phone cameras to form crowds and make

noise to make sure the agents know they're being watched, to document when someone is taken so any relevant info can be used in legal proceedings, etc.

Support each other. Plug into local mutual aid networks (often neighborhood-specific or even based out of particular schools, churches, etc.) to share resources with impacted families, support immigrant-owned businesses, raise money for legal defense, buy groceries for your neighbors, offer rides, all the day-to-day human stuff. We don't all have to be frontline rapid responders; there are many ways to show up.

- We also showed a slide with a bunch of upcoming events; many of them are local, and may have passed by the time you read this, but just as EXAMPLES of ways to plug in: Unidos virtual [event](#), VisionChangeWin safety team [training](#), MONARCA upstander [trainings](#), National ICE Watch [training](#), street medic [training](#), Queers Against Fascism [event](#), The Brave of Us [Tour](#) (and a million other things!)

While artists do have specific things we can offer, and it is worth exploring those things, it is also true that sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is just show up in the same ways everyone else is.

The two zines below both collect other links and resources related to "finding your political home," whether you're wearing your artist hat or not. These are what I share with people who want to get involved, but aren't sure where to start:

[Of What Future Are These The Wild, Early Days? \(Resources for Emerging Movement-Builders\)](#) - a zine of potentially useful "first steps" into the work: recommended reading, helpful frameworks, etc.

[Something to Share with Friends and Neighbors Asking "What Do We DO?"](#) - another zine covering some of the same ground as the previous one, but meant to be a bit shorter and more shareable.

- Also, MN-specific resource: [Mad? Sad? Motivated? 60+ MN Orgs Working to Make the Next 4 Years \(and Then Some\) Suck Less. \(via Racket\)](#)
- Also, a more general resource: [What to Do if ICE Invades Your Neighborhood \(via Wired\)](#)

The Focus of Our Workshop: The Power of Artists Beyond "The Power of Art"

We explored **five big-picture categories** related to how artists can contribute *beyond* our art.

A brief note RE: Examples. We talked about this at the event, but it's worth mentioning here: any list or pool of examples is going to be incomplete. The examples listed for each point are not even close to exhaustive; they are just a few guiding stars, pointing in

*the direction of galaxies of others. We leaned toward (1) **local** and (2) **recent** examples to illustrate these larger points. But even within that, there are a ton of incredible artists and organizations doing great work here (and beyond). We hope our tiny handful of examples here can open doors to many others.*

Fundraising and Resource-Sharing

- Artists can use our access to audiences and venues, as well as our skills at promotion and event planning, to organize events or projects that help move resources/money to where they can be useful: supporting immigrant-led organizations, contributing to mutual aid efforts, and beyond.

What this can look like in practice: Benefit shows, raffle drives, fundraiser zines, donating a portion of book/album/artwork sales, "passing the hat" at parties, etc. *Specific examples:*

[MN8's online shop](#) using cool visual art to raise money for deportation defense (some of the best anti-ICE merch you'll find!)

[Springboard for the Arts' Artists Respond: Safety in Neighbors](#) support/stipend program.

[The post-event handout from our "You Never Zine Alone" online fundraiser event](#) - features some background on zines, some writing prompts, and more.

MONARCA fundraiser + poetry reading: Tuesday, January 20 at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis (2nd floor Open Book) at 6pm.

Amplification and Education

- Artists can use our platforms (via social media, email lists, and real-life networks of relationships) to signal-boost calls to action from organizers. We don't have to be experts or authorities; we can amplify those whose voices are most vital right now.

What this can look like in practice: Be a bullhorn: Identify trusted organizations in your community (as opposed to just random influencers or media personalities) and share their calls-to-action via reposts, links in your newsletters, word-of-mouth, and beyond. *Specific examples:*

We briefly looked at the graphic from this resource: [Beyond Hot Takes: How Can Social Media Meaningfully Support Movement Work?](#)

[Saber Ante La Migra](#) - Francisco Herrera (via COPAL MN)
[oh no! i accidentally collaborated with ICE](#) graphic via Landon Sheely

[For Artists and Musicians Who Want to Speak Out About Palestine But Aren't Sure How](#) (via Racket)

Using Artist Space as Activist Space

- Going beyond social media and digital communication: As artists, we can go “out there” to join the work, AND we can bring the work to where we already are. We can also find ways to use artist skills as activist skills: event planning, promotion, sound systems, flyer design, etc.

What this can look like in practice: Emailing a local org to offer some specific skill you have (event hosting, sound system tech, poster design, etc.), or letting local organizers table at your merch table at a concert, or giving up 2 minutes of time at an event for an activist to talk about an upcoming action, and beyond. *Specific examples:*

This point has fewer examples because a ton of this work happens in more informal, behind-the-scenes ways - artists just getting connected to movement efforts and plugging in where and how we can.

[Five Activist Resources Artists Can Share at Our Merch Tables](#) - this has a MN focus, but could be easily adaptable to other communities.

- **It took us five minutes to make this "ICE out of MPLS" half-sheet handout.** If you're local, print a few out and have them at your events (or design an even better one!)

We shouted out [Black Garnet Books](#) having a (now-passed) poster-making event.

We also briefly shouted out local arts orgs who also do vital community/movement work too: [TruArtSpeaks](#), [Juxtaposition Arts](#), [Indigenous Roots](#), [Public Functionary](#), [Twin Cities United Performers](#), [Spill Paint Not Oil](#) - the list could go on: the Twin Cities are full of organizations, businesses, initiatives, and collectives that organically integrate arts, culture, and movement. I mentioned having resources and activist materials on our merch tables, and my mobilize zine library as one example - there's a photo of it [on this page](#), alongside all of my zines.

Intentional + Strategic Narrative-Shifting

- If *narrative* refers to the stories and frameworks underneath our values, politics, and actions, how can we contribute to efforts to tell better stories? “Narrative interventions” can be individual pieces of art, but they can also be *projects*: themed events, anthologies, concept albums, poster campaigns, zine series, etc.

What this can look like in practice: As artists, we sometimes do narrative work just in the normal course of what we do: storytelling and culture-shaping. But there may be opportunities to strategize, to take time to really notice what “stories” are in the air around us, and how we might either uplift or disrupt them. *Specific examples and resources:*

We discussed a quote from Hala Alyan's [What a Palestinian-American Wants You To Know About Dehumanization](#)
 We discussed the "soil is more important than the seeds" quote from Ricardo Levins Morales' [Tending the Soil](#) series
 Whistles: Kits, Zines, and as a Tactic: [MSP whistle hub](#) + original via [Pilsen Arts & Community House in Chicago](#)
[MPD150's "Enough Is Enough" Abolitionist Report](#) - main website down right now, but free copies available at Moon Palace Books, Boneshaker Books, and RLM Arts.
[Justseeds' Free/Shareable Art Folder](#)
[Green Card Voices](#)
[The Butterfly Lab for Immigrant Narrative Strategy](#)
[Greater Than Fear campaign](#)

Even More Resources for Narrative-Shapers:

- [A zine of narrative-oriented writing prompts](#)
- [A handout with even more prompts](#) from a "narrative interventions" workshop I facilitated earlier this month.
- [REFRAME](#) + "narrative predictions" resource

Morale-Boosting, Energy, and “People Doing Stuff Together”

- *Hope is the oxygen of rebellion* - Ricardo Levins Morales (from [this book](#)). Here, we're talking about artist's role in helping people (including ourselves) resist isolation, alienation and overwhelm. Some of this through the art itself: creating and sharing work with "anthemic" energy, that inspires and mobilizes. And some of this is through just convening space where people can be with one another (whether in-person or virtual).

What this can look like in practice: A weekly jam, zine club at the library, monthly open mic, D&D group, drop-in improv classes, people knitting together at a coffeeshop, a virtual writing circle - all of these spaces, whether they are explicitly political or not, are spaces in which we can connect to community, and we need that right now. *Specific examples:*

We mentioned the "one million experiments" frame: the idea that there isn't going to be one perfect answer, but instead lots of people doing lots of stuff. [More on that here.](#)

[Kalpulli Yaocenoxtli](#), [Brass Solidarity](#), [Good Trouble](#) singers, and others using music and dance in support of movement.

Briefly mentioned [Better Things](#), [ReVerb](#), [BuckSlam](#), and other local open mic spaces

Local visual art! These really could have fit in any of the five categories.

- [We Love Our Immigrant Neighbors + We Love Our Somali Neighbors prints](#) (by Sean Lim, via Benchpressed)
- [ICE out of MNI MAKÓČE](#) design by Marlena Myles

- [ICE out of MPLS](#) - design by @wzzwnshp + @mike2600; Printed by @benbrlsq + @adambrlsq
- [ICE is brittle](#) design by SEE MORE PERSPECTIVE
- Ricardo Levins Morales' [buttons](#) and [more](#)
- [Defend 612's community defense art](#)

Guiding Stars: Quotes Referenced in the Workshop (often longer in the actual discussion; these are just snippets to aid in identification)

- **Audre Lorde** - *Change did not begin with you, and it will not end with you, but what you do with your life is an absolutely vital piece of that chain.* ([source](#))
- **Paul Robeson** - *There are no impartial observers.... The battlefield is everywhere. There is no sheltered rear.* ([source](#))
- **adrienne maree brown** - *No one is special, and everyone is needed.* ([source](#))
- **Toni Cade Bambara** - *As a culture worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to make revolution irresistible.* ([source](#) - or [listen!](#))
- **Hala Alyan** - *A story isn't enough, and one cannot triumph in any social justice struggle without examining the stories that have been turned into gospel.* ([source](#))
- **Ricardo Levins Morales** - *The soil is more important than the seeds.* ([source](#))
- **Sonia Sanchez** - *All poets, all writers are political. They either maintain the status quo, or they say, 'Something's wrong, let's change it for the better.'* ([source](#))
- **Danez Smith** - *there is no poem greater than feeding someone / there is no poem wiser than kindness / there is no poem more important than being good to children...* ([poem](#) + [full book](#))
- **Akwaeke Emezi** - *Storytelling is important, sure, but it is people organizing and building radical communities that will bring liberation and a better world our way. Instead of trying to save this world, consider burning it to the ground and creating something else. Stories can help with that.* ([source](#))

COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE DOCUMENTS (PADLETS)

Because the event had so many registrants, we opted not to do a traditional discussion, and instead had participants add to a few different "padlets," online bulletin boards that anyone can post to, with no need to sign up for an account:

- [What is a piece of art \(song, poem, book, anything\) that is giving you inspiration, or fire, or hope this week?](#)
- [A "lightning round" question: Add ONE song to our playlist that a DJ will play before the next action. BONUS POINTS if it's from the last five years.](#)
- [What is a cool, artist-driven project or effort you'd want people to know about?](#)

- Looking to the future: What doesn't exist yet, but could?
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A Few Pull-Quotes

Our note-taker recorded a few key moments from facilitator Kyle - sharing them here to get a feel for what the event was about, and/or for use in sharing this document with your community:

- *Together, these guiding stars point us in a direction: How there is no neutral. How going about business-as-usual and pretending like nothing is happening directly benefits the fascists. How everyone has a role to play in this moment. And how that is a collective challenge, not just an individual one.*
 - *The feds think they can bully Minneapolis into submission. That if they just shout loud enough and hurt enough of us, we'll all just throw our hands up and abandon our neighbors. And that is never going to happen. Minneapolis is not afraid. But courage, I think, needs fuel. And who better than artists to continually supply that fuel? With our actions and with our art... I haven't been to church in a long time, but one thing I know is that when you sing loudly, it creates space for the people around you to be a little bit louder too.*
 - *Artists may have some unique things to offer, but we aren't special. The call to action for everyone is still the call to action for us. Artists are people. And sometimes, the best thing we can do is actually take our artist hats off and just show up and take action in the same ways that everyone else is.*
 - *There is no universal answer to the question 'what should artists be doing right now' because our identities matter. The communities to which we are accountable matter. Our histories and our relationships to this historical moment are all going to be different, and that will impact what we are called to do.*
 - *You don't have to have a big audience to be an effective bullhorn for movement narratives, to signal-boost the calls-to-action from the people doing the work. 'Reach' and 'impact' are not the same thing.*
 - *I think some artists are more concerned about being called performative or preachy than they are about this fascist crisis. Obviously, we want to avoid 'talking about it without being about it,' but talking about is actually a good thing.*
 - *We're using the word 'energy' here rather than 'joy.' I think joy is vital and it's absolutely part of this conversation—but 'energy,' to me, is broader: it includes fury, spite, and grief, and we need all those as much as we need joy.*
 - *Artists have more to offer than our art.*
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ADDITIONAL LINKS AND RESOURCES

Just a few more resources that we didn't talk about in the workshop, but that people working at the intersections of art and activism might be interested in. As always, the caveat that this is not

every good link or resource out there. It's not an exhaustive bibliography or the syllabus to a college class. It's just a few links that I (Kyle) have found to be useful in my work. I hope they can be useful to you.

Additional reading + food-for-thought:

- [Poetry Playlist: A Few Poems Exploring Immigration, Movement, and a Future Without Borders](#)
- [Danez Smith - An Elegy for My Neighbor](#), Renee Nicole Good
- [Palestinian Poets on the Role of Literature in Fighting Genocide](#)
- [Monica Trinidad: How to make art for social change](#)
- [Octavia E. Butler: A Few Rules For Predicting The Future](#)
- [Carmen Maria Machado on Making Heart in History](#) (part of Writing CoLab's 100 Days of Creative Resistance - also worth checking out)
- [Renee Macklin Good's wife says she nurtured kindness](#)
- [Poet Bao Phi writing about Minneapolis right now](#) (bad headline, great writing; Bao is the best)
- A few good newsletters to possibly subscribe to: [Kelly Hayes](#), [Mariame Kaba](#), [Margaret Killjoy](#), [Deepa Iyer](#)

For writers: prompts, classes and workshops

- [Kyle's virtual, asynchronous class: *Meeting the Moment: Political Poetry and the Anthem Impulse*](#) (seven videos + a workbook full of prompts and resources)
- [Let Every Word Be A Wrench In Their Machine: Writing Prompts](#)
- [A handout to practice creating engaging "hooks,"](#) a tactic relevant to both writers and comms people/political communicators
- [When the Smoke Comes](#) writing workshop: Oakland-focused but a good example of the kind of work creative writers can do right now
- Button Poetry's [slate](#) of online writing workshops (a lot of options here, but also a specific highlight: the Feb 7 "Button Up" workshop: *SALT, WARMTH, AND FORCE: POETRY AGAINST ICE*, facilitated by KTM (more info [here](#))).
- [A guide to starting your own writing circle and/or creative accountability group!](#)
- LOTS more related to this in the [padlet discussion](#)

**A million other things, but I hope something here can be helpful.
Thanks for tuning in.**

Find Kyle's work via his [website](#) or free [newsletter here](#). Find UyenThi's work [here](#).