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Facilitating Participation Beyond NYC: A Short Guide to Regional Organizing

As the movement in NYC continues to transform and reinvent itself, we should focus on reaching out to new people and including them in the conceptual and practical organization of our actions, experiments, and protests. New friends and comrades can renew the movement's creativity and energy while ensuring inclusivity and horizontality. At the local level (i.e. within NYC), a lot of outreach is already taking place. The aim of this note, then, is to facilitate participation beyond NYC by considering ways of engaging in regional organizing.

As a student at Princeton University and a member of activist groups and communities in both NYC and Princeton, NJ, I worked with Occupy Princeton to bring a contingent of Princeton students, educators, and community members to the May 1st Free University. Below are some of the questions that came up in preparing for our trip along with descriptions of how we attempted to answer them.

How can I get involved in organizing the Free University if I can't go to NYC for a meeting?

Since oftentimes Princeton folks could not physically be at a planning meeting, we found ways to be there virtually. Skyping into a meeting was

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the best way to actively participate with those in NYC. Joining the Free University listserv was also a good idea insofar as it allowed us to keep up with the meeting minutes and participate in the online discussions.

What can I do locally to prepare for the Free University?

For Occupy Princeton, participating in the Free University meant more than just attending the events on May 1st. We wanted to build up to the Free U by organizing in Princeton. We tabled for the event and put up posters and banners around campus, calling on students and professors to participate in the education strike. We also sent out letters to professors encouraging them to bring their class to the Free University. On the evening before May 1st, we held a pre-game potluck in order to discuss the history of May Day, the ideas behind the Free University, and why we were participating in the education strike. The potluck also served a practical purpose, as it allowed us to get a final head-count of who would be traveling to NYC and who would be striking in solidarity in Princeton.

How do I get there if I can't afford the cost of transportation?

This question did not come up for the May 1st Free University, likely because Princeton folks only had to travel to NYC once; however, it did

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come up recently when organizing for the weeklong activities surrounding the one-year anniversary of OWS and the five-day Free University. Many of us will be traveling to NYC multiple times that week, and the train ticket from Princeton to NYC is expensive. Some ideas we came up with to defray the cost of transportation included car-pooling, collecting donations, and staying with friends in the city rather than commuting each day. More ideas can be found here, including an Amtrak discount code and resources for arranging your own housing in the city: <http://s17nyc.org/support/join-us-in-nyc/>

How can I participate at the Free University?

Along with attending the classes and workshops at the Free University, Occupy Princeton members registered to teach classes and volunteered to help with preparing food and orienting participants at the entryways of Madison Square Park. Volunteer organizers and educators are what make the Free University possible, so this is an important way that non-New Yorkers can contribute to the collective educational experiment.