

# HOW WORKPLACES AND UNIONS CAN SUPPORT IMMIGRANTS' RESISTANCE TO INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION

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## 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 workplaces and unions may facilitate resistance to oppression.

## WORKPLACES AND UNIONS

Immigrants' labor is frequently exploited in workplaces. Unions, however, can support workers and collectively advocate for workers' rights. Many unions and some workplaces position themselves to support immigrants' resistance, often by uniting immigrants and non-immigrants to address harms within and beyond the workplace. Such workplaces range from small local shops to large international companies.

Workplaces and unions can play a critical role in facilitating resistance by aiming to dismantle oppression inside and outside their workplaces and unions. Workplaces and unions can provide empowering brave spaces that attend to suffering caused by oppression. They can support members to develop courageous vision and foster a culture of growth and allyship. To do so, their members should have opportunities to take on meaningful roles, provide and receive support, develop skills, share leadership, and build community. Workplaces and unions can create and allocate resources to facilitate resistance. They must attend to systems of oppression, and advocate for systemic and intersecting solutions. Workplaces and unions should use their unique power to act. Different workplaces and unions 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 workplace/union and surrounding community to support it.

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

**LOOK TO MODELS:** Look at workplaces and unions similar to your own to explore how they have facilitated resistance. The United Farm Workers Organizing Committee is an example of a union that has supported resistance. Keep in mind that no workplace 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 workplace, 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 workplace and/or union 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 workplace and/or union's structures, processes, and practices to examine ways your workplace may be upholding systems of oppression. Actively work toward dismantling oppression in your workplace and/or union. 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 your workplace/union seeks to support. Continuously reflect on what you are doing and why. Be ready to own your actions and make changes accordingly. When your workplace, union, or someone in it is "called in" by those oppressed, view the intervention as an act of love, designed to help the workplace, union, or person do better, as you are viewed as having the capacity to grow.