

Synthesis Report

PEOPLES MOVEMENT ASSEMBLIES - 2010

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This report reflects the commitment to document the lessons of the Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) process that was organized before, during, and after the second US Social Forum in June 2010 in Detroit.

The report synthesizes 28 interviews representing over 30 different PMAs. James Braggs, Project South staff member, interviewed PMA facilitators and organizers from a cross-section of the 54 assemblies that took place in June. Acknowledging the limitations inherent in an interview process, this synthesis seeks to offer a general understanding of the innovations, challenges, and recommendations so that organizers and facilitators can evolve and strengthen our practices.

This report includes sections on Facilitation Strategies, Organizing Efforts, the Synthesis Assembly & National Assembly at the USSF, and the Outcomes after Detroit.

Facilitation- Strategies/ Flow/ Activities:

Facilitation:

- PMAs represented an ongoing and extensive facilitated effort that occurred months prior to the event itself, spanning a 3-9 month period,
- Each PMA represented numerous meetings, typically shared by a co-chair arrangement,
- A shared clarity of purpose resulted in effectively facilitated PMAs, clear and focused facilitation from the onset resulted in clear and focused facilitation during the PMA itself,
- Trust among and between participants on PMA organizing committees played a critical role in the development, implementation, and altering of facilitation strategies in the midst of changes,
- The facilitators of meetings were typically co-chaired by initiators of PMAs who also played key roles in the initial proposal, invitation, and visioning of the PMA as well as the day-to-day follow-up and communication between groups,
- Facilitation strategies were collectively developed and implemented by facilitation teams ranging from 2-3 lead facilitators,
- The facilitation teams that led the PMAs emerged from within the collaborating organizational teams and were accountable to PMA Working Group- in other cases the team doubled as the facilitation team.

Strategies:

“[Our] PMA was a co-creative collectively-held PMA, we wanted the space to be different from a workshop, to not be a space where we were the folks that held the knowledge or truth but were co-holding the space, the space was a shared PMA, it felt shared, there was room to explore ideas, learn, dialogue and build relationships with folks that didn’t know each other” (WHO? Cara Page?)

- ❖ Facilitation Strategies pivoted around one or more of the following efforts:

- *“Let’s have a place to gather, a place to map conditions, let’s look regionally, lets look nationally, let’s look at a particular historical context of what health looks like right now,”* Cara Page, *Lead Organizer with Health and Healing Justice PMA.*
 - **Represented an effort to collectively identify:**
 - what has been/ is being and could be done that would excite a broader base to committed action,
 - who else is in motion within our field of struggle,
 - what other people/communities/organizations are thinking about the struggle that can add to a collective and current understanding of things,
 - how folks are orientating themselves to the fight- which direction(s) folks are coming from and how those directions can be coordinated into a shared fight,

- *“It [the PMA] affirmed the direction we were going and it tightened it, it impacted the way we planned following the forum . . . it affirmed goals and commitments and refined them as well. [It] allowed us to get much more buy-in from the communities that we care about...”* (Karlos Schmieder, *Media Justice PMA*)
 - **Represented an effort to affirm and strengthen** an already articulated political position and plan of action.

- *“Healthcare Organizations participated in the PMA because they wanted to be a part of a much broader movement . . .and make the connections to with folks on different fronts of struggle”* (Rita Valenti, *What the Health Happened? PMA*)
 - **Represented an effort to connect** with a larger movement (regional, national and international) within particular fronts of struggle and or initiating an active dialogue with movement sectors outside their own.

- *“Through the process we sharpened what we were really talking about... it went from being solely being focused about communication and narrative strategies to also being much more about a bigger analysis of media justice that includes not only the media justice part but the policy change that supports the narrative change we want to see, ”*(Karlos Schmieder, *Media Justice PMA*)
 - **Represented an effort to clarify** analysis, strategies and political positions and programs.

- *“For us it was the linking, the broadening of the tent, the uniting of farm worker and the worker, urban and rural. We saw the USSF as an opportunity to do this and we saw the PMA as one step on the that road,”* (Steve Bartlett, *Food Sovereignty PMA*)
 - **Represented an effort to build** and maintain momentum along a trajectory of gatherings/events/actions already organized.

- ❖ The PMA Organizing Kit, Facilitators’ Guide, weekly conference calls, and PMA orientation sessions (that occurred over three days during the USSF) played a significant role in informing the dominant trends around which PMA facilitation strategies emerged,

- ❖ Popular education dominated facilitative approaches and agendas: there was a wide range of cultural and multi-media medians utilized like song, poetry, dance, drama, web-based technologies and a wide range of interactive dialogic activities,

Flow:

- **Welcome, overview of the order of events, and brief explanation of a PMA** was provided by one of or both of the co-facilitators,
- A wide range of **cultural activities were used to convene the PMA**, from ritual practices, spoken word, song, dance and drama,
- **Speakers were invited to speak** on the topic/issue/themes and personal experiences in a variety of formats (panel, fishbowl, solo/lineup),
- Either a **direct engagement with the themes raised** by speakers were facilitated, i.e. forum style and or fish bowl, or **breakout groups were initiated** to facilitate small group discussions on questions and or themes presented,
- Brief **small group report backs** to larger group were a common next step after breakout groups,
- **Synthesis of small group discussions** into either a resolution, affirmed set of commitments or agreed next steps typically followed report backs along a spectrum of facilitative methods,
- Typically the synthesis of small group statements/report backs spilled into **resolution working groups** that continued the work of drafting the statements after the PMA event, or working groups that took on the responsibility of follow up work after the PMA.

Activities:

A wide range of interactive activities were used to introduce, frame, icebreak, and facilitate interactions among the participants. Some of those activities included:

- ❖ **Geographic maps** were used to prompt participants to locate themselves on the map to actively demonstrate “who was in the room,” (Anti-Prison PMA)
- ❖ **Small group discussions** were a common facilitated portion of most PMAs,
- ❖ **“Fish bowl”** activities was used in several PMAs to initiate and facilitate a dialogue between participants and speakers (EcoJustice PMA, Education Transformation PMA),
- ❖ An **interactive web-based software** was used to facilitate and democratize the crafting of resolution statements (Techie Congress),
- ❖ **Physical stretching, breathing, and various physical exercises** were used to support participation, emphasis body awareness and reinvigorate the energy of participants (UpSouth DownSouth PMA and Health & Healing Justice PMA),
- ❖ **Timelines were collectively created** to situate the personal experiences of folks within a larger historical context (Health and Healing Justice PMA)

Reflections on the Success and Efficacy of Facilitation Strategies Used.

- The **facilitation guide** aided in the development of facilitation strategies,
- It was widely noted that **cultural activities** used to open and convene spaces helped set a positive tone and distinguish the PMA as a different kind of space distinct from a workshop or plenary,
- The use of **speakers** was common, and generally noted as useful in the framing of the purpose and thematic focus however it was also noted that too much time was consumed in this area not leaving enough room for the group to engage in small group dialogue, and or the crafting of a resolution,
- **Small group discussions** were widely used and their report back to the larger group a common activity used across PMAs,
- **Observing** and participating in other PMAs significantly informed facilitation strategies,
- **Surveying** the roster of PMAs informed facilitation strategies and in several cases PMAs were either combined and or altered based on a perceived overlap of thematic focuses,

- **Clarity of purpose** within the PMA organizing bodies was a primary factor informing it's perceived success and efficacy and continuity in work after Detroit,

Reflections on Unforeseen Accomplishments

- The **energy and excitement** of participants exceeded the expectations of organizers,
- Inspiring moments of **affirmation and resonance** were commonly shared throughout assembly process between participants, speakers, organizers, and the articulated statements of possibility and action articulated during the PMA,
- Deeper **organizational relationships** emerged and expanded,
- **New insights and/or political frames** were articulated that expanded the breath of current frames,
- Represented an **unprecedented convergence of movement forces** within a particular front of struggle, into a common room around a common set of questions (Anti-War, Healing Justice, Joint Racial Justice PMA)
- Represented an **entry point** for the introduction and development of new leadership,
- Despite the difficulties associated with process, folks **stuck it through to the end** and affirmed their commitment to working together,
- Organizers located counterparts and **formed friendships** with organizers in other parts of the city, region and country they consider to be lasting relationships.

Challenges Associated with Facilitating PMAs:

“Seeing people’s patience with the space even though they didn’t like the campaign ideas or the direction of the PMA was powerful” (Caitlin Breedlove, Queer&Trans PMA)

- Resolutions: facilitating a discussion that led to the **collective development of a resolution** was a significant challenge,
 - Negotiating the development of a shared action or resolution against the **capacity of the anchor organization,**
 - Managing the tension between a broad **inclusive statement** of action and/or solidarity **vs. the need for a focused strategic action plan** with specific targets, identified outcomes,
 - **“Attempted to do too much”** was a common challenge folks noted- packed the agenda and or process too tight and as a result had to make adjustments to account for time and or group dynamics,
 - **Flexibility-** being able to shift method and direction in response to the energy and desire of the participants,
 - **Negotiating a wide range of diversity,** levels of understanding, involvement and commitment alongside the focused agendas of more organized forces like official advocacy and grassroots organizations,
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The Organizing -Before/During/After

Before

How were PMAs organized?

- Anchor organization(s) **sent out invitations** to organizations and individuals seeking sponsorship and collaboration in the organizing of a PMA,
- **PMA organizing bodies** were formed to facilitate the planning and organizing of PMAs,
- PMA organizing bodies **formed between 3-9 months prior** to the USSF and **met on a consistent** Monthly and bi-monthly **basis** leading up to the USSF,
- **Anchor organizations** played lead roles in the day to day planning, logistical follow- through work and material development,
- **Conference calls** were a common method of meeting and planning,
- Organizers **surveyed the roster of PMAs registered** to identify opportunities for connection, addition, collaboration, consolidation and thematic focus,
- **Organizational sponsorships** were actively pursued, over 200 organizations co-sponsored PMAs during the USSF, several PMA number between 4 and 50 organizational co-sponsorships,
- **Organizers participated in** PMA Working Group(the national coordinating body) conference calls, utilized PMA Toolkits and the PMA Facilitator's Guide, attended the PMA orientation sessions held during the USSF and participated in and observed PMAs prior to holding their own,

Some Examples of Organizing Efforts Prior to the Detroit National PMA process

- **Surveys** were used to identify topics of interest,
- **One-one interviews** were conducted and compiled, weeks prior, into a report that was then presented to the larger assembly (Queer&Trans PMA),
- **Virtual Assemblies** were held online using chat spaces- in which questions were posed and responses documented and then used to inform and frame thematic focus of the PMA (Techie Congress),
- Organizations were asked to **draft resolutions prior to the PMA** around a stated question or issue and prompted to prepare for deliberation and synthesis during the PMA (Portland PMA),
- **Delegations were sent to Detroit**, prior to USSF, in order to connect with local organizers and to identify local movements in motion within that front of struggle that would be interested in participating in the organizing of the PMA (Food Sovereignty PMA)

Who participated in the organizing process?

- The organizing process was anchored by grassroots social justice and advocacy organizations that provided **staff organizers**, resources, institutional commitment, and consistent support to the process and systematic follow-up afterwards,
- **Community organizers** not associated with a particular organization actively participated throughout the process,
- **Over 200 organizations** co-sponsored PMAs during the Detroit PMA process,
- PMA organizing bodies **ranged in size from 5-20 participants** representing an average of 4 or more organizations,

- In some cases the PMA organizing body was a **subcommittee of a larger emergent national project** utilizing the PMA process as one component in a strategy of projects used to determine how they would “show-up, represent and organize” around the USSF.

Was the organizing process collaborative?

- Every assembly interviewed **represented the expression of a collaborative project**,
- The **intensity of collaboration** and shared leadership **depended** largely on history of previous work between organizations and individuals (**trust**), a shared understanding of the strategic utility of the PMA process as it related to future work and movement building (**clarity of purpose**) and the **facilitative leadership** of the anchoring organization which represented a clear and focused facilitation attuned to difference as a resource rather than a challenge,
- Deep collaborative relationships did not necessarily lead to a “successful” PMA but the **organizing of PMAs did clarify** relationships, roles, questions, resonate themes to organize around, political possibilities for future work and advanced the continuance of work and communication between organizations beyond the USSF,
- Already formed alliances and emergent coalitions identified the PMA space as a critical site for the continued cultivation of relationships within the alliance and coalition, in these cases it was noted that **preexisting relationships and systems of communication were tightened, focused and invigorated**,
- In some cases **official alliances and coalitions** were formed and in other cases **unofficial formations** took root around a spectrum of linkages and systems of communication, i.e. list-serves, conferences calls, agreements around a second face to face gathering etc.,
- **Facilitation was shared**, and thus sharing facilitation and collectively developing a facilitation strategy represented a collaborative process,
- In cases where facilitation was unilaterally developed the **PMA itself represented an invitation** to imagining and developing a shared project,

Roles played throughout PMA process?

Roles were commonly filled by the same person, i.e. cultural workers were lead organizers were lead facilitators who also co-chaired the organizing bodies and represented at the Synthesis Assembly.

- **Anchor organizations** initiated and facilitated the organizing of PMAs
- **Co-sponsoring organizations** offered endorsement, organizational supports, a range of financial supports, access to networks of potential interested participants and committed to participating in the PMA, not all co-sponsoring organizations organized PMAs,
- **PMA organizing bodies** were formed 3-9 months prior to the USSF to plan and organize PMAs,
- **Lead organizers** played a critical role in the facilitation, communication and coordination of PMAs,
- **Lead facilitators**, typically lead the PMA event from start to finish,
- **Small group facilitators**, typically supported the small group discussions,
- **Note takers**, took notes of the PMA and got those notes to the lead organizers,
- **Videographers**, video recorded the event,
- **Speakers**, provided historical, political and social contexts for PMA,
- **Cultural workers, artists, spiritual and cultural leaders** etc. helped convene and bless space, set and/or to reiterate the tone of the space and distinguish the PMA from the workshop/plenary/ and panel discussions,

- **Synthesis Assembly Representatives** participated in the Friday evening Assembly to produce the National Social Movement Agenda based on the experiences of the assemblies,
- **Resolution working groups** formed in several cases to finalize the writing of the resolutions after the PMA

Accomplishments as a result of the PMA

- **Strategic directions** were either identified, established, clarified and/or affirmed during the assembly, in most cases the PMAs appeared to clarify and affirm those directions (Media Justice, Techie Congress, Queer&Trans PMA)
- **Political alliances** were both strengthened and formed during the PMA process. Informal alliances also took shape as PMA organizing committees/collectives maintained relationships and pursued follow-up work (Detroit “right sizing” PMAs, Student Bill of Rights organizing, and the Anti-Imperialism Joint PMA),
- **New political frames emerged** that represented new analytical frameworks and social movement articulations (the two prominent examples that arose from the reflections was the Healing Justice and Food Sovereignty PMAs),
- **National actions** were launched advancing the work established during the PMA process,
- Cross sector organizing intensified as PMA organizers surveyed, shared, consolidated, connected and linked the resolutions and visions articulated within PMAs across other PMAs,

What wasn't accomplished and why?

- **Resolutions were not always generated** due to time constraints and the internal dynamics
- Resolutions were produced and crafted with **no clear plan of action or follow-up strategy**,
- Plans and or **calls to action were not developed**
- Plans and or **calls to action were developed but were too broad** to follow through on and/or mobilize around,
- Strategic **discussions were engaged at a temporal** level in an effort to accommodate the diversity of experiences convergent within the PMA leaving many organizers wanting for deeper discussions and collaborations,

What would you need in order to achieve your goals more effectively?

- **Supports provided prior to and during the USSF** ie. the PMA Headquarters, PMA Kit & Facilitators Guide, conference calls, PMA Orientation sessions, and documentation trainings (notetakers/videographers) were useful and helped clarify the understanding of the process,
 - **More opportunity, time and space to connect and dialogue** with the organizers of other PMAs prior to the mass gathering (in this case the USSF) would have further helped clarify purpose, focus and facilitation strategy of the PMAs,
 - **More support and preparation provided to organizers regarding the Synthesis process** could have further clarified and focused the way Synthesis representatives showed up to the Synthesis Assembly, represented the work of their PMAs and facilitated the production of resolutions during PMAs as well as it's relationship to their communities and organizations back home,
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Synthesis and National Assembly

The Synthesis Assembly took place on the fourth night of the Forum, Friday evening June 25, 2010. We asked that each PMA send one representative to participate in the Assembly. Over 60 people attended despite multiple conflicting events and general exhaustion from the week. After presenting a historic context, people were asked to summarize the Resolutions produced at the Assemblies into cards that were attached to a wall mural divided in three sections: Methodology, Challenges, and Action. In small groups represented by the thirteen tracks of the Forum, the participants crafted summary statements to reflect the general agreements and political directions of the assemblies they organized. The synthesis process challenged the notion of representation and asked folks to step outside of their organizational and ideological agendas for the purpose of setting new paradigms of action. We completed the process in three hours.

A Synthesis Commission made up of seven veteran movement activists observed the process and were facilitated to craft a statement that reflected the overall direction of the politics that the assemblies held and the practice that the assemblies innovated.

The Preamble written by the Synthesis Commission and the Summaries written by the groups were presented at the National Peoples Movement Assembly the following day.

Attending the Synthesis Assembly:

- The majority of participants interviewed participated in the synthesis assembly
- The selection of representatives was a relatively contention-free process,
 - Either most folks were **too tired or fatigued** to consider the Friday meeting an option, or
 - Had **social plans** that Friday afternoon (last night of USSF a lot of parties going on)
 - **Felt lead organizers would be the best representatives** and were thus happy to nominate them to attend Synthesis Assembly,
 - In some cases **there was an assumption** that lead organizers would attend the Synthesis Assembly,
- PMAs selected Synthesis Assembly representatives based on the **apparent leadership roles played** by lead organizers present during the PMA,
- **Lead organizers of PMAs were the primary participants** during the Synthesis Assembly,
- Due to the factors of time and social context those who attended the Synthesis Assembly **approached the process with a serious commitment to represent the work of their PMAs** and sincere curiosity about the process itself,

Reflections on the Synthesis Assembly:

- Process was “intensive, challenging and intriguing”
- Committed to revisiting and thinking through the process collectively in order to further develop it for future convergences,
- Needs a clearer a system of accountability particular to the process,
- Clarifying the role, relationship and connection between PMAs, Synthesis process and local organizing,
- Needs to establish mechanisms to maintain communication and connection across sectors,

- The same support and intentionality that was provided to support PMA organizers around organizing and facilitating PMAs should be provided to Synthesis Representatives in the future,
- More time, space and intentional deliberation is needed for synthesis process,
- The intensity of the facilitation strategy only allowed efforts to be focused around the material production of a shared statement vs. a focused deliberation over content,
- The process was frustrating on several fronts (time and space) but it represented an critical opportunity to connect with and across movements forces,

The National Peoples Movement Assembly:

The National Peoples Movement Assembly took place on the last day of the US Social Forum, June 26, 2010. One of the four major actions (that had been affirmed and planned through two PMAs in Detroit leading up to the Forum) happened at 9am. The Assembly started at 12pm. No other activities were planned simultaneously, and the Assembly was attended by over 3,000 people in COBO Hall.

A percussion band marched through the hall and opened the Assembly. The participants of the Children's Social Forum contributed a song. One facilitator/MC introduced the flow and discussed the success. A 7-minute video was played. People saw themselves in action, and they saw slices of the other PMAs happening throughout the week. Ruben Solis introduced the history and context of the assembly process and why our movements need a space to take positions and make action plans. The Synthesis Commission presented the Preamble, a page-long document they produced the night before at the Synthesis Assembly. Representatives from the Assemblies lined up and read the crafted summaries of thirteen fronts of struggle to wild cheers. We presented the consolidated days of action and introduced an affirmation process to join in solidarity or to take action on each of the days as they were announced. We closed the assembly with two speakers, a delegate from Senegal inviting the participants to the World Social Forum in Dakar, and an ambassador from Bolivia who spoke about the Cochabamba Accords. We congratulated the participants for their work and accomplishment.

Reflections on the National Assembly:

- Logistics (sound quality and space) were reoccurring themes,
 - Tone of NPMA didn't seem to fully reflect the intentionality of the assemblies themselves, felt more like a rally than a larger assembly, reimagining the large Assembly is critical to it's development so that it reflects it's true political meaning,
 - The connection between affirmations and national days of action was unclear,
 - Thinking through the national commitments to action and their affirmations during the NPMA were a unique expression of a active democratic process, the process of representing, synthesizing and affirming the commitments to action lost clarity and focus during the NPMA- the connection between assembly resolutions, movement synthesis and affirmation needs to be further aligned so that they more accurately reflect the tone, character and intentionality of the assemblies they represented-
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After Detroit

Challenges identified in relation to the future development of the PMA process:

- Follow-up resources and organizational capacity,
- Holding each other accountable to and tracking the implementation of national commitments to action,
- Staying connecting and becoming coordinated over time and distance,
- Identifying focal points within the summary statements to organize more targeted campaigns around,
- Tying National PMA process to local organizing processes,
- Clarifying the relationships between the Synthesis Assembly, PMAs, and local organizing,
- Lack of clarity surrounding decision making processes,

Opportunities identified in the future of the PMA process:

- Opportunities for greater collaboration, connection, and communication between and across sectors,
- Opportunity to refine and collectively develop a trans-sector movement building process,
- Opportunity to synergize and actions plans and movement strategies across the country,
- Opportunity to demonstrate an intersectional political practice alongside a grassroots democratizing process,

Recommendations about next steps for entire process:

- Follow-up communication and connection to other projects and actions under way,
- Develop and intensify popular education strategy,
- Clarify Synthesis Assembly process,
- Clarify PMA's relationship to the USSF