



# THE DEMOCRACY COLLECTIVE 2023-2024 COHORT

A REVIEW OF THE INAUGURAL SESSION  
AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR 2024-2025

CLEVELAND  

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**VOTES**  
EDUCATE CONNECT EMPOWER





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# The DemCo Crew



01. Kirby Broadnax | DemCo Facilitator

02. Yugan Sakthi | 2023-2024 Democracy Fellow

03. Erika Anthony | Executive Director

04. Angelique Gates | Senior Strategist



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# Introduction and Purpose

**The Democracy Collective** (or as we at Cleveland VOTES call it, 'DemCo') is an incubator for community-led, community-driven leaders. We aim to invest in the cultivation of leaders and innovative ideas to realize a more equitable democracy and stronger social fabric. This inaugural incubator, launched in 2023, is a 9-month cohort bringing local community members into a training and action program that advances equitable civic engagement in their lives, their communities, their organizations and schools, and in Cleveland as a whole.

This immersive experience creates a co-learning experience that will serve as an incubator to cultivate, harness, and strengthen the collective knowledge and power of our community members. Throughout the program, participants surface shared issues of concern, gain a greater understanding of the landscape of power in Cleveland, identify levers for change, and develop and advance projects to address their priorities.

Building a culture where **equitable civic engagement** is made a reality is a serious challenge. It requires overcoming decades of structural impediments, intentional barriers, systemic inequities, and a disempowering mindset that has left the marginalized residents of our community hopeless and discouraged by the lack of progress on these issues. Creating the future we all deserve requires both people + opportunities, time + investment, and drive + commitment. It will also take an understanding that breaking generational problems—and rebuilding them—takes time and continued commitment.





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# ++ Vision & ++ Mission

Ask any Clevelander and they will tell you that civic engagement—from voting to community voice to civics education in our schools and more—has experienced decades of underinvestment and lack of institutional commitment. You can read more about this in our [2021 study](#) in partnership with Policy Matters Ohio and HIT Strategies.

**DON'T GET US WRONG**—there are innumerable dedicated Clevelanders working to keep our community engaged with the issues that matter most to them. We are fortunate to work with many of them! However, because apathy and hostility from local government (as noted in the above-referenced study) has been going on for so long, one inspiring candidate or one great teacher who registers students to vote or one committed parent who takes their kids to city council meetings isn't going to be enough to fix what is now a systemic issue. And even after the success of our work over the past several years, we recognize that we cannot fix local democracy alone.

In response to the past and current civic climate in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, we launched The Democracy Collective in September 2023 to expand our capacity and commitment to equitable civic engagement in our cities, academic + educational structures, community organizations + neighborhood-based collectives, and institutions + businesses. This work impacts all of us, so we're going to need everyone's help to get the job done.

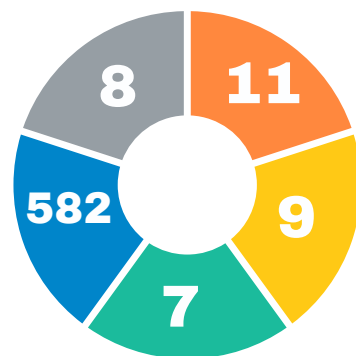
# Community Impact Meter

**Kirby E. Broadnax**

Greetings! What a time to be alive. We are swirling a multitude of joys & crises. There are seemingly endless challenges and opportunities – at all levels of our lives. In the midst of this duality, Clevelanders continue to show up for one another and for the issues that matter most to them. Cleveland VOTES was fortunate to welcome nine of these community leaders into our first Democracy Collective (DemCo) cohort and grow something new together.

There is so much to be proud of as I reflect on our DemCo journey thus far. For nine months, we met every other Saturday to learn, dream, share our visions for a city that uplifts all of us, and put our ideas into deliberate practice. We got to know one another through conversation prompts and over shared meals. We laughed, cried, got angry, and made plans together. We talked about how to better care for ourselves in this work.

**In our sessions, we mused over eight social change approaches, heard from 11 speakers and seasoned change-makers, learned from 582 slides, supported seven activation projects, and celebrated all nine cohort members finishing the program!**





My honor to serve as the facilitator of DemCo is twofold. I appreciate the expansive way the program engages the idea of equitable civic engagement. Cleveland VOTES and DemCo recognize that there are a variety of ways that we can connect with, support, and work towards the transformation of our communities that go beyond voting in elections. While electoral politics have a big impact, we also know that many groups have been (*and still are*) systematically excluded from meaningful participation and representation in that space.

We recognize that much of the change supporting our overall well-being has been achieved through community members consistently and strategically coming together and demanding better. The Democracy Collective stems from that lineage of community transformation – by and for the people.

**“The Democracy Collective stems from that lineage of community transformation – by and for the people.”**





Additionally, I remain enlivened by the intentionality of Cleveland VOTES to seek out those who are following their call to lead in the city without any ask of pomp and circumstance. Indeed in some cases, these individuals may not even think of themselves leaders. DemCo strives to support committed people like these in cultivating the skills, strategies, relationships, and growing confidence to step more powerfully into their community work.

The nine cohort members we welcomed into our first year of DemCo embody this spirit. Each of the participants arrived at the program with experience to share and ideas to grow. They are leaders in their respective spaces and beyond and are passionate about ensuring that Cleveland is an equitable, connected, informed, and accessible place to live. They understand the needs of their communities and importance of connecting with others to advocate and organize in more sustainable ways.

**“I am grateful to our cohort for starting this journey with us”**

The Democracy Collective program has been a meta-exercise for Cleveland VOTES: we are (still) incubating our idea of a leadership development program while inviting our DemCo participants to incubate their own projects within that space. We learned a lot over the course of our first year. Though we began the program having planned extensively, there were moments when we were building the plane while flying it! I am grateful to our cohort for starting this journey with us, for their patience, and for their feedback which is helping shape our second year of The Democracy Collective.







We discovered that too many carbs for breakfast make for a sleepy afternoon! We also learned the importance of being adaptive and flexible regarding the interests and needs of the cohort. Our curriculum partner Liberation in a Generation helped us to build out the modules, as well as make continual adjustments to ensure that the content was relevant to the participants.

The participants helped us to understand that we hadn't built enough time for them to connect with one another. We adjusted our sessions to include more time for deeper discussions and relationship building— a critical aspect of the DemCo program. I am happy to report that our CV team AND the cohort have emerged from this first year with new understandings and feel encouraged to continue our collective work.

Our participants embodied the best of what Cleveland is and can be: grounded yet undeterred by the harsh realities of the endeavors ahead and ultimately driven by a desire to see our mutual liberation.

We look forward to welcoming another cohort of committed participants into year two of The Democracy Collective, and together we will continue building the future that we know must arrive.

Looking forward,

*Kirby E. Broadnax*





# DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE



## March 2022 DemCo is “born”

While CV was in the process of crafting their strategic plan, the idea for The Democracy Collective was conceived.

## August 2022

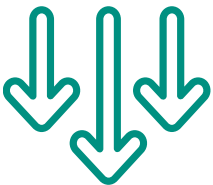
Finalized the structure of the 2023 program

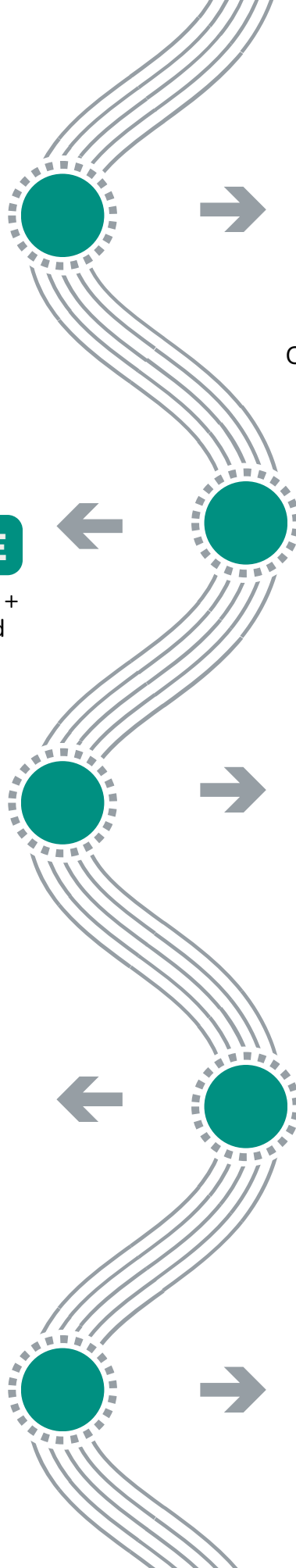
## SEPTEMBER & NOVEMBER 2022

Identified Liberation in a Generation as CV’s curriculum partner and had our first meeting in September!

## APRIL 2023

Finished planning and drafted an overview of DemCo + Opened the application for a facilitator





**JUNE 2023  
KIRBY JOINS!**

Hired Kirby Broadnax to be the DemCo facilitator. The Democracy Collective is announced at our State of our Democracy event & DemCo info sessions begin

**AUGUST 2023  
DEMCO FINDS A HOME**

MAGNET location secured sessions + Budget and curriculum are finalized while interviews for participants are underway. By the end of August, accepted applicants are selected

**SEPTEMBER 2023  
OUR COHORT!**

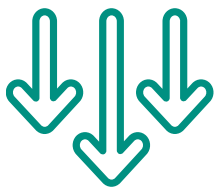
Cohort Participants Publicly Announced. This month: Session #1: Getting started & Session #2: Overall theme of the day: grounding in history with a brief history of Cleveland panel

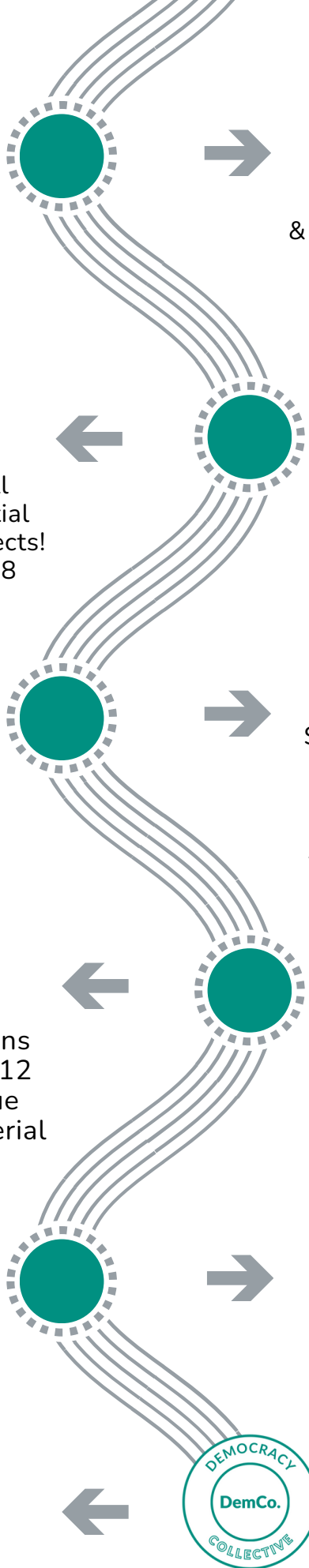
**OCTOBER 2023**

Participants attend Sessions #3 & #4, have their first DemCo Deep Dive, + begin individual coaching sessions

**NOVEMBER 2023**

Participants attend Session #5: Organizing 101 + pitch their Activation Projects





## DECEMBER 2023

Participants attend Session #6 & Session #7. **Curriculum Highlight:** Story of Self. To learn more see page \_\_\_\_

## January 2024

New year, same cohort! All participants submit their initial proposals for Activation Projects! They also attend Session #8 & Session #9

## February 2024

STAFF take part in a DemCo Mini Retreat to re-evaluate + adjust and plan for the second half of the cohort. All participants Activation Projects are approved. and they attend Sessions #11 and #12

## MARCH 2024

Participants attend Sessions (Community of Practice) #12 & #13, which had a unique self-care focus for the material and the cohort loved it!

## APRIL 2024

Participants attend Sessions (Community of Practice) #14 & #15

## MAY 2024 GRADUATION!





# Program Overview

## 2023-2024

Through the Democracy Collective, Cleveland VOTES aims to expand and build the capacity for and commitment to equitable civic engagement in Cleveland's academic + educational structures, community organizations, neighborhood-based collectives, institutions, and businesses.

To build this capacity, nine Cleveland change-makers were accepted into the inaugural DemCo cohort.

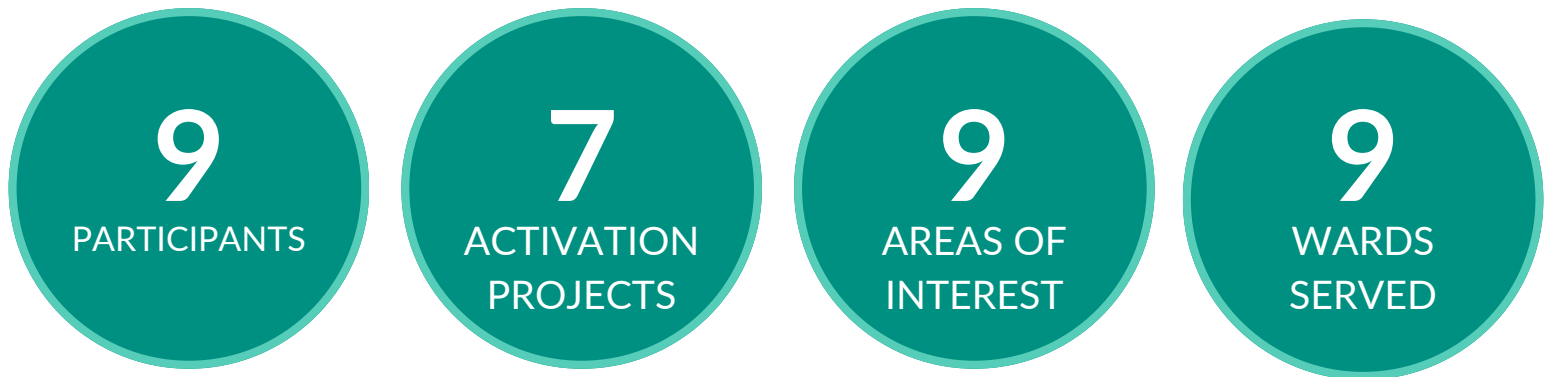
This cohort met on a semimonthly basis from September 2023 to May 2024. These meetings included curriculum sessions to teach participants the necessary tools to implement their Activation Projects and, later, community of practice sessions to help participants develop and advance their Activation Projects. Additionally, participants were required to complete homework assignments, attend one-on-one coaching sessions with the facilitator, and, ultimately, create an Activation Project that demonstrates their learnings over the course. This resulted in participants engaging in the program and materials for around 10-15 hours per month.

**10-15 hours/month**





# Program Overview



The 2023-2024 cohort was run by Kirby Broadnax, Facilitator, and Yugan Sakthi, Democracy Fellow. For the 2024-2025 cohort, Broadnax will continue to serve as facilitator and will be supported by our new Democracy Fellow, Moses Ngong!

The curriculum was developed in partnership with [Liberation in a Generation](#). Since 2018, this national movement has been supporting organizations building the power of people of color to transform economic power structures. Liberation in a Generation unites advocates, community organizers, economists, and emerging and proven leaders of color across the country to build a Liberation Economy, within one generation. Liberation in a Generation constructed the curriculum content and session framework alongside Cleveland VOTES team members.



# Program Overview



Kirby Broadnax

*It has been a joy to watch the participants connect with each other and grow as community builders over these past nine months. We've talked about our vision and purpose, we've learned from other seasoned democracy builders in Cleveland, analyzed power and discussed strategy, and we've also practiced taking good care of ourselves and one another. In short, we've covered a LOT! I am beyond proud to know each of these outstanding humans, and am grateful for their commitment to making this city one where ALL can thrive.*



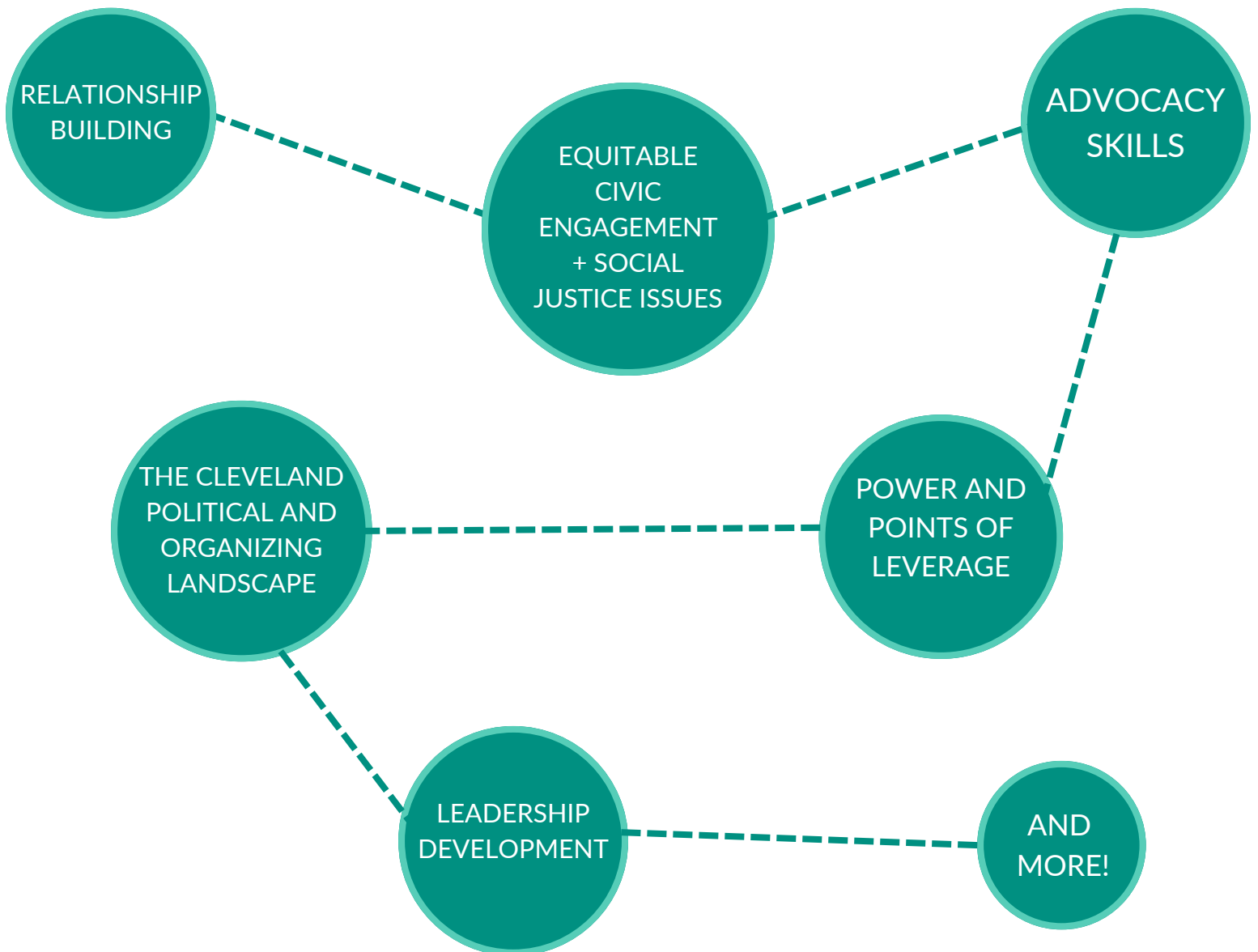
Yugan Sakthi

*I love the familiarity, togetherness, and vulnerability that everyone has cultivated together within the space. In the midst of everyone's busy lives, it's not easy to dedicate Saturday mornings to [the Democracy Collective]. But gathering around a shared love for making Cleveland a more equitable city makes each session a treat to participate in. While we planned out many components of this inaugural cohort, there were also many surprises. I'm excited to bring in year two of the program and all the energy that it will bring!*



**11 CURRICULUM  
SESSIONS OVER  
SIX MONTHS!**

The Democracy Collective includes 11 curriculum sessions over six months that provide participants with the necessary tools to implement their Activation Project, a civic and voter engagement-oriented project to engage community members. Throughout the lessons, participants learn about:







- + + Sections of the curriculum are tailored to the interests of the Democracy cohort, providing participants with the space to explore various topics in equitable civic engagement and social justice.

+ +

“ I feel like [the curriculum] honored everyone and their experiences, more or less, regardless of their path.  
~ Inaugural Cohort Member ~

”

At the end of the six months of learning, participants implement an Activation Project focused on an issue/area of interest. They work on this project for the remaining three months of the cohort, with ongoing Community of Practice sessions and check-ins with the facilitator.

## MOST USEFUL CONTENT FOR IMPLEMENTING ACTIVATION PROJECTS

Session	Content
Session 2	History of Cleveland & connecting personal history with civic engagement
Session 4	The concept over power & power grids
Session 6	Elements of day-to-day organizing & self-care practices
Session 7	Power mapping & self-care practices
Session 9	Power mapping & co-governance





## Session 1: Launch

Facilitators and participants start by reviewing the purpose of the Democracy Collective: firstly, to expand and build participants' capacity for and commitment to equitable civic engagement and, secondly, strengthen individual and collective power to effect change in communities. This is done through the development of advocacy and leadership skills with the goal of creating a strong foundation for long-term work.

Members of the cohort are provided with an overview of the curriculum, with the intention of informing them that leadership is grounded in the five elements present in the curriculum—**relationships, knowledge, skills, reflection, and a grounded approach.**



**RELATIONSHIPS,  
KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS,  
REFLECTION, & A GROUNDED  
APPROACH**

## Session 2: Shoulders We Stand On

This session focused heavily on history and community building, two topics participants found vital when completing their Activation Projects. Regarding history, this session focuses on how present work is shaped by the past and why one must reflect on their personal, ancestral, and community history.

In order to educate participants on Cleveland's rich history of organizing and social justice, a panel is convened composed of Leah Hudnall, Greg Moore, and Mordecai Cargill—all of which are leaders and organizers in their communities.

Then, participants were encouraged to ground their work in their lineage by discussing their ancestral history genealogically and through previous spirits + ideas. Finally, participants built important community norms such as active listening and equitable civic engagement.





### ++ Session 3: Approaches to Social Change

- ++ Participants completed an exercise to review the different aspects of power.
- ++ the focuses were on power within and power with. The former is the power one gets from their internal strength that is informed by their histories, cultures, and communities. The latter is the collective power that manifests in building and sharing power with others.

Participants learned about the sources of social change that allow one to enact a difference in the community, such as service delivery, education, networking, advocacy, mobilizing, electoral politics, narrative change, and organizing. They were encouraged to focus on organizing as that is the source that, ultimately, shifts levers of power.

### Session 4: Power

Participants discussed the idea of purpose, first, in the abstract and, then, in tangible applications—through history, community, vision, etc. Then, panelists informed participants about how power operates within Cleveland community development.

After learning how power operates in Cleveland, participants were given the tool of power grids to take inventory of the people in their communities they believed would support or oppose their work.

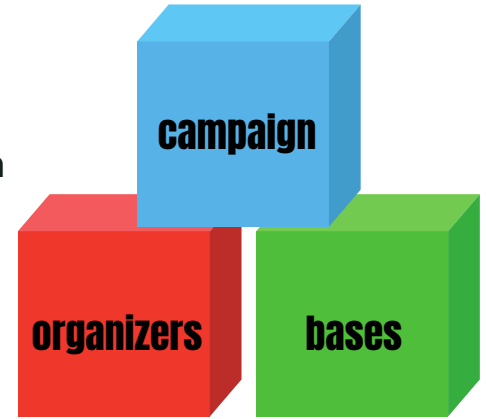
Type	Allies	Unknown	Opponents
Community Leaders			
Local Groups			
Nonprofit Institutions			
Faith-Based Institutions			
Small Local Businesses			
Elected Officials			
Government Agencies			
Big Businesses / Corporations			
Other ( <i>foundations, colleges, etc.</i> )			





## ++ Session 5: Organizing 101, Part 1

++ This session introduced the building blocks of organizing. Consisting of the  
++ organizers (the people strategizing and keeping things moving), the bases (the people organizers can build with to continue the fight), and the campaigns (the topic at the root of an issue that, when solved for, can make systemic change).



The session concluded with reminding participants that organizing is a long-term and emotional effort.

## Session 6: Organizing 101, Part 2

Organizing was explained using the range of general building blocks and what it looks like in day-to-day organizing. Organizing was consolidated down from the general building blocks to the aspects of day-to-day organizing.

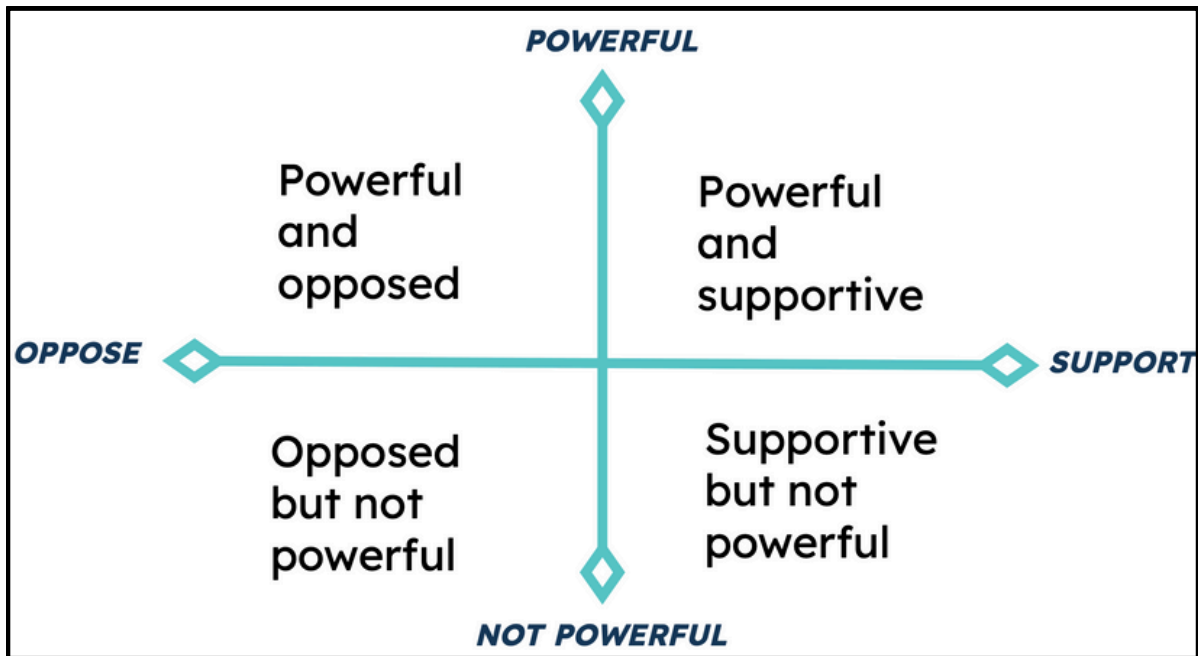


A portion of this session was dedicated to prioritizing and uplifting the need for self-care to avoid burnout. Participants were even given strategies to reset the vagus nerves, the main nerves of the human parasympathetic nervous system.



## + + Session 7: Speaking with Power

+ + Not only does organizing include power grids (see page 17), it also includes power mapping. Power mapping is a tool to identify those who have the power to affect the change the organizer is seeking. Power mapping begins with selecting the primary target (someone who has the power to make the change the organizer is seeking) and the secondary target (someone who has the power to move the primary target). After selecting these targets, the primary and secondary targets + the individuals on the power grid are transposed onto a four-quadrant plot.



Next, participants drew inspiration from novelist Octavia Butler to learn about how to envision the change the participants hope to make in the future. Additionally, participants built upon the self-care practices highlighted in Session 6 by distinguishing the difference between urgency and importance.

## + + Session 8: New Beginnings

- + + Participants learned about what goes into planning an effective event. This
- + + included a clear goal, audience, and format in mind. They were reminded to
- + + consider relevant partnerships, estimate turnout, and complete pre-event logistics during the planning process.

On the day of the event, the organizer would complete any relevant day of planning, and, after the event, one should debrief, evaluate, and follow-up.

## Session 9: Building Power

Participants began by reviewing the power mapping content covered in Session 7.

Then, co-governance was introduced with examples of what co-governance looks like in Cleveland and in general. Co-governance is a practice that allows community and labor organizations to build authentic, power-sharing relationships with the government, and it establishes a body that allows non-elected officials to meaningfully influence government agencies and rule-making processes. Some examples look like people's assemblies, independent redistricting commissions, and participatory budgeting.





## **+ + Session 10: Strengthening Relationships**

- + +** Session 10 highlights different listening practices that foster meaningful
- + +** connections. These practices include active listening—listening to
- + +** understand, not to respond—and wise counsel—showing up in a space with the intention of responding with advice.

The Facilitator and Democracy Fellow walked participants through the Democracy Collective Google Drive documents. This allowed participants to learn more about the budget worksheet, calendar usage, and SMARTIE goals. These helped participants know what success looks like, track their progress, and stay accountable to the community.

## **Session 11: Creating Strong Foundations**

Each participant gave the cohort a brief presentation to practice leading and sharing their wisdom with others.

Then, participants completed the Packing Our Medicine

Bags activity where they named the grounding practices they planned to carry with them outside of the Democracy Collective space and identified realistic situations where these practices could be implemented. Participants concluded their final Democracy Collective Curriculum Session with a gallery walk reflection on the program.

<b>STRATEGIC</b>	Reflects an important dimension of what your organization seeks to accomplish (programmatic or capacity-building priorities).
<b>MEASURABLE</b>	Includes standards by which reasonable people can agree on whether the goal has been met (by numbers or defined qualities).
<b>AMBITIOUS</b>	Challenging enough that achievement would mean significant progress—a “stretch” for the organization.
<b>REALISTIC</b>	Not so challenging as to indicate lack of thought about resources, capacity, or execution; possible to track and worth the time and energy to do so.
<b>TIME-BOUND</b>	Includes a clear deadline.
<b>INCLUSIVE</b>	Brings traditionally marginalized people—particularly those most impacted—into processes, activities, and decision/policy-making in a way that shares power.
<b>EQUITABLE</b>	Seeks to address systemic injustice, inequity, or oppression.





## Session 1: Launch

The first meeting started off by reviewing the purpose of DemCo: **to expand participants capacity for and commitment to equitable civic engagement and strengthen their power to effect change in communities.** This is done through the development of advocacy and leadership skills with the goal of creating a strong foundation for long-term work and informing them that leadership is grounded in the five elements present in the curriculum—**relationships, knowledge, skills, reflection, and a grounded approach.**



**RELATIONSHIPS,  
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## Session 2: Shoulders We Stand On

This session focused heavily on history and community building, two topics participants found vital when completing their Activation Projects. Regarding history, this session focuses on how present work is shaped by the past and why one must reflect on their personal, ancestral, and community history.

## Session 3: Approaches to Social Change

The focuses of this session was were on two different aspects of power: **power within** (one gets from their internal strength that is informed by their histories, cultures, and communities) and **power with** (the collective power that manifests in building and sharing power with others).

Participants learned about the sources of social change that allow one to enact a difference in the community, such as organizing





# Activation Projects

The capstone of participants' learning in the Democracy Collective is the Activation Project. Cohort members can choose the form of their project so long as the project advances equitable civic engagement and voter engagement. Some examples of Activation Projects from the inaugural DemCo cohort include a youth training program, resource guide, a Latinx newspaper, and much more!



The purpose of these Activation Projects is for participants to take the skills learned in the curriculum sessions and apply them to a community issue that interests them while receiving support from the cohort, facilitator, and Cleveland VOTES team. We know that the ability to brainstorm, get feedback, and pivot (as needed) are important parts of project incubation, and we don't want our cohort to go it alone. The curriculum, developed in partnership with Liberation in a Generation, is crucial to imparting some of the skills, tools, and strategies the cohort members will use to implement their Activation Projects and strengthen their capacity for affecting change.



# ++ ++ ++ ++ **Activation Project**

Each Activation Project must be aligned with an activation category—service delivery, networking, electoral politics, narrative change, education, mobilizing, advocacy, and organizing—to help participants ground their project in a method of social change.


Additionally, Activation Projects must focus on a specific geographical area, population, and principle of [equitable civic engagement](#) as well as specify a mechanism for resident engagement, voter education, voter registration, and data collection + evaluation.

To ensure Activation Projects are targeted, participants specify goals, indicator(s) of success, reach, budget, and more for their project. Then, participants begin the implementation process for their Activation Project. This process includes a project plan, implementation, and a final presentation.

Read [the Democracy Collective Zine](#) to see Activation Projects from the 2023-2024 cohort.

“ Creating my project has created a platform by which I am able to engage other relevant stakeholders (grant making bodies, local organizations, etc.) in the development of future projects.  
- Inaugural Cohort Member ”





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“  
The planning of the activation project was a great skill builder. Yugan & Kirby really wanted you to stretch yourself to create your project, & each class taught you next steps. This was such a great way to get you going.  
- Inaugural Cohort Member  
”

These participant comments illuminate the tangible benefits of Activation Projects. Those benefits are:

- Collaborating with Cleveland change-makers and community members,
- Formalizing curriculum topics,
- Challenging and/or stretching how participants approach social change,
- Addressing systemic issues in Cleveland through equitable civic engagement,
- Challenging traditional norms of failure and success through providing the Space for participants to incubate, tweak, and recalibrate their Activation Project as needed,
- Effecting change beyond the Democracy Collective incubator

In just a few months since the conclusion of the 2023-2024 Democracy Collective, participants from the inaugural cohort have gone on to receive grants from our [Equitable Civic Engagement Fund \(ECEP\)](#), print and distribute copies of their newspaper and resource guide Activation Projects to the Cleveland community, and commit to continuing their projects in the coming months and years.

# Compensation Summary

A standout feature that sets the Democracy Collective (DemCo) apart from many other leadership training programs is its commitment to financial accessibility. The DemCo application has no application fee, and participants are compensated for their time and receive funding for their Activation Projects

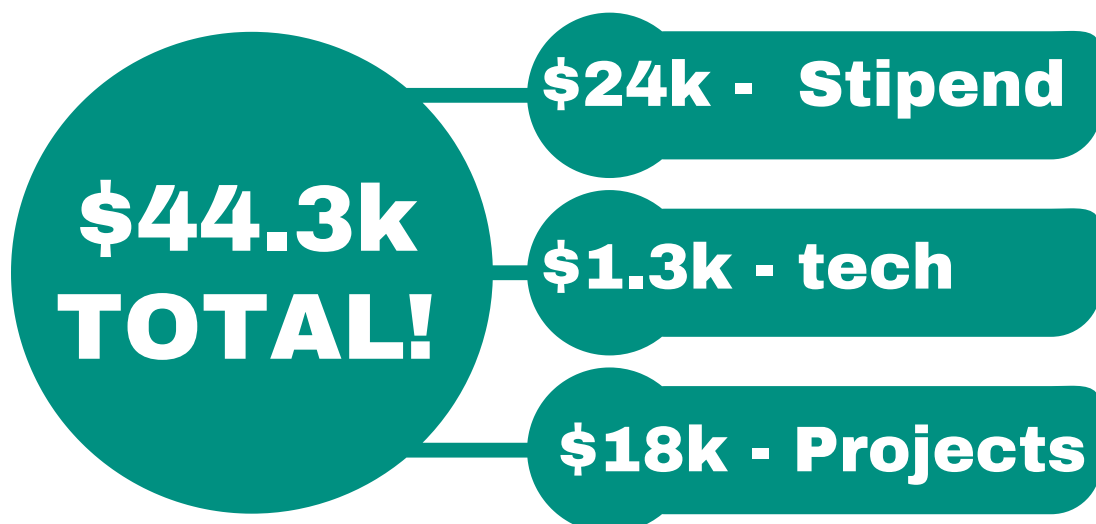
The cost of comparable programs in the area ranges from **\$2,250 to \$7,500**, often requiring application fees. These programs are typically sponsored by the participants' employers, which restricts accessibility to those with organizational affiliations or higher socio-economic status. In contrast, DemCo aims to be inclusive by directly compensating its participants.




## Individual & Technology Stipends

Each DemCo participant was eligible to receive a stipend for their time and funding for their Activation Project. The individual stipend compensates cohort members for approximately 10 to 15 hours spent in sessions per month over nine months and additional hours spent completing projects and assignments. Participants can earn up to **\$3,600 for full attendance**, receiving approximately **\$225 per session**. Stipends were distributed in two payments in December 2023 and May 2024. Out of the nine participants, eight completed our post-evaluation survey: **five strongly agreed the stipend was helpful, one agreed, and two were neutral**.

However, *not all participants received the full stipend due to several factors influencing compensation allocation*. The DemCo Team evaluated attendance, excused/unexcused absences, one-on-one coaching sessions, in-session engagement, communication, and completion of homework. These criteria determined the final amount of compensation. **By the end of the cohort, over \$24,000 was distributed among the nine participants.**





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Additionally, a **\$500 technology stipend** was available to ensure equitable access to devices and resources. Participants utilized over **\$1,300** (approved by Cleveland VOTES) to purchase necessary equipment such as laptop chargers, wireless microphones, tripods, webcam lights, portable hard drives, Microsoft Office Home and Studio, iPads, Adobe Photoshop + Lightroom, a used desktop computer with hardware upgrades, printers, and business internet. Post-evaluation feedback indicated that seven out of the eight participants that completed the survey strongly agreed the technology stipend was beneficial. **These items and services enabled participants to complete their Activation Projects and fully engage in the program.**

## **Activation Project Funding**

As explained in a previous section, all participants created **Activation Projects** that advance equitable civic engagement and voter engagement. Each member of the Democracy Collective received **\$2,000** to support the execution of their projects, totaling **\$18,000**. These projects ranged from youth training programs and resource guides to a local Latinx newspaper.

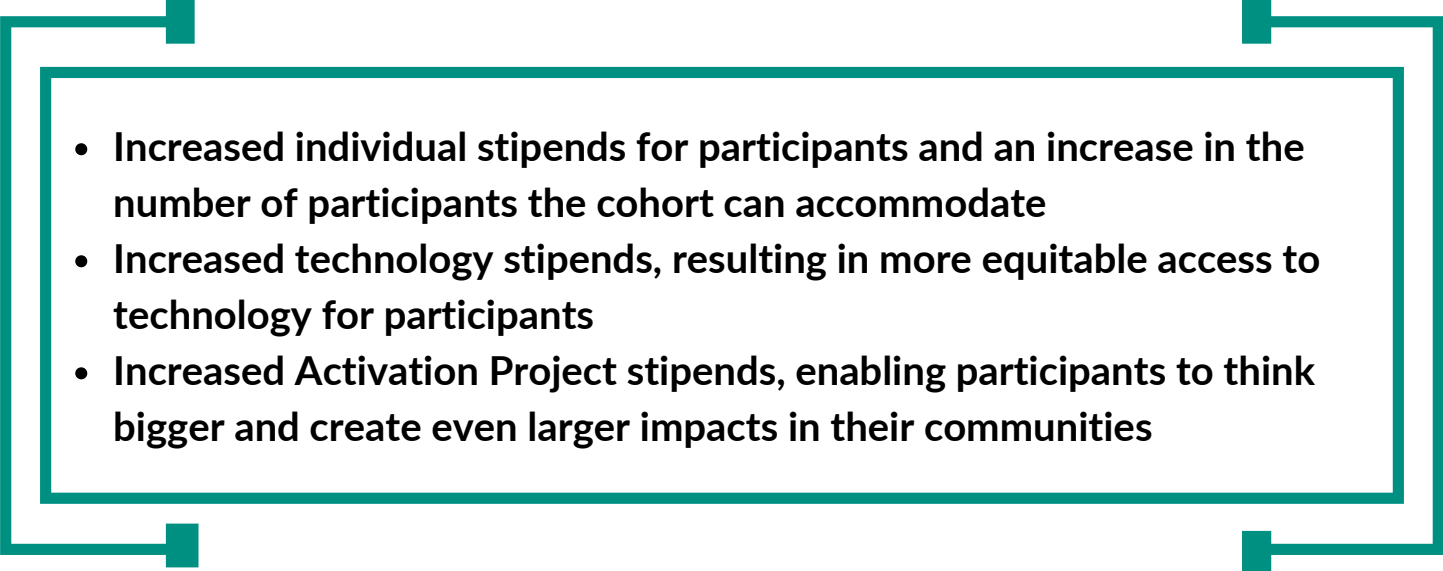
For example, one inaugural cohort participant used their Activation Project stipend to employ graphic artists and cover printing costs for a project using graphic novels and graphics to advocate for voter turnout, and political involvement, and instill pride in the political richness of Cleveland's Black population.

To bring "Intersection" (a project concerning judicial politics) to reality, another participant used their stipend for a print studio membership with instruction and orientation, photo development supplies, and other promotional materials.



# The Impact of Future Funding

The Democracy Collective Incubator is made possible through grants and donations from our partners. Special thanks to **The George Gund Foundation, The Cleveland Foundation, The Sisters of Charity Foundation, and Saint Luke's Foundation** for funding the inaugural cohort. We are extremely proud of what we have accomplished with the funding available to us for the inaugural cohort, but we are not stopping here—we want to grow DemCo! Increased local, state, and national funding would allow DemCo to blossom into a project with *even greater potential and reach*. Increased funding means:

- 
- Increased individual stipends for participants and an increase in the number of participants the cohort can accommodate
  - Increased technology stipends, resulting in more equitable access to technology for participants
  - Increased Activation Project stipends, enabling participants to think bigger and create even larger impacts in their communities

Furthermore, a larger budget allows us to be more **responsive to feedback** from participants. When asked what tools or resources they would have liked to see the facilitators provide, members of the cohort expressed a **desire for more guest speakers and opportunities for experiential learning**. They also requested **more sessions and longer days** to learn more and gain additional hard skills. However, these activities carry costs that we could only meet with increased funding.



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## Findings & Looking Forward

The inaugural Democracy Collective (DemCo) is a testament to the **power of community-driven leadership** and **equitable civic engagement**. Through this program, our team witnessed the potential of dedicated individuals who are committed to making Cleveland a more connected, informed, and accessible place. The nine passionate participants in our first cohort embraced the challenge of addressing systemic issues through community-driven activation projects and forged meaningful connections with one another.

Reflecting on the journey from the conception of DemCo to the graduation of the first cohort, it is clear that the commitment of both Cleveland VOTES and our participants has been unwavering. With LibGen, we crafted a curriculum that not only imparted knowledge but also fostered relationships, reflection, and a grounded approach to leadership. The dedication shown by our participants in completing their Activation Projects speaks volumes about their **potential to effect lasting change in their communities**.

As we look forward to the next cohort, we are energized by the lessons learned and the successes achieved. The Democracy Collective has proven that with the right support, resources, and commitment, community members can rise to become effective leaders and advocates for equitable civic engagement. We are grateful to our inaugural cohort for setting a high standard and helping to shape the future of this program. Thank you to everyone who has supported this journey, and we look forward to continuing this vital work in 2024.

