



# HANDBOOK

Organizing Principle #2:

The General Defense Committee has one primary purpose — revolutionary anti-capitalism. This primary purpose should guide and inform all of our actions.

**November 2024**



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# Introduction

The General Defense Committee was founded in March of 2019 in Ypsilanti Michigan. Wanting an organization that was revolutionary in outlook and based in our neighborhoods, we drew our inspiration from the Twin Cities General Defense Committee. They had been successful in building a mass-based militant organization to primarily defend their communities from police violence. We also looked to the past, at groups like Anti-Racist Action (ARA) - a multi-tendency network that was based on direct action and a core set of principles. While the GDC originated from the Industrial Workers of the World, our GDC has always been independent of the IWW.



The GDC was founded in many ways as a response to the rise of the radical right and Trumpism, along with the utter bankruptcy and exhaustion of the established “opposition”. Around us we saw communities barely holding on and under siege. The hollowing out of social services, the complete failure of the two-party system to meet the most basic needs of the populace, and police agencies acting like occupying armies.

Soon after our founding, the covid pandemic began, followed by the George Floyd Uprising. With covid, the government and NGOs were totally incapable of meeting the needs of the people. We found ourselves deeply engaged in survival and mutual aid programs in our neighborhoods. Like many, we made masks, put together sanitation kits and emergency food packs, connected with those who most needed them, and organized their distribution.

Some of us had previously come to this work through organizing against police repression and racist violence. Even with this, the speed and intensity of storming of the 3rd precinct and the ensuing BLM rebellion took many of us by surprise. New lessons were learned, old ways that no longer worked needed to be discarded. The uprising taught us an important lesson: the masses can move much faster and more determined than those that are already organized.

# What is the General Defense Committee?

This is our statement of purpose, the “why” we organize. It is a living document and is meant to change as our work and the conditions we find ourselves in change. We ask that folks are in general agreement with this document to be members of The General Defense Committee.

**The capitalist class of bosses, financiers, landlords, and their cops wage relentless and violent class war upon the working class. The goal of the Defense Committees is to defend and support all working class and Oppressed Peoples, divided and under attack by those who wage class war against us. We therefore promote, through organization, action, and outreach, a mass, non-sectarian defense in order to build a self-organized working class that treats differences as strengths and opportunities to live in solidarity. Community Self Defense means we intend to build our revolutionary community by defending it and the earth on which we live from those who would see it destroyed.**

**Our power as a class will never come from our possession of wealth, but from our ability to organize the class to defend ourselves. We must secure defense against legal attacks, but do not imagine that legal and financial defense alone are sufficient. Any revolutionary organization that does not expect repression from the master class and organize to meet it has failed to learn from history.**

**We organize to defend members of the class against the different forms of oppression that structure our society. Our membership expects the Defense Committees to be an arena of mutual education through mutual struggle. Exploiters rely upon the fractured unity of the working class and Oppressed. By standing in solidarity across the diverse oppressions of the class, we intend to embody the notion that an injury to one really is an injury to all, and to openly use our defense to build the resilience, strength, and fighting spirit of the working class and oppressed.**

**Because the class war is not limited to the workplace or any other single arena, our defense of the class must be comprehensive. We recognize imperialism, colonialism, and settlerism as integral parts of capitalist domination. White Supremacy and oppression around race, gender, and sexuality are the pillars on which the owning class maintains power. They degrade the solidarity we must have for one another. Their domination is helped by violence within the working class, and reinforced by structures of violence organized by the state. We are against all of these oppressions. By organizing against the diverse oppressions of the working class, and centering our revolutionary and anti-capitalist principles in a disciplined way, we intend to directly overcome those divisions. We cannot struggle against racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy without struggling against capitalism. We cannot struggle against capitalism without struggling against racism, patriarchy, colonialism and white supremacy. Through this struggle we advance the goal of an anti-capitalist revolution by building solidarity and strength with all those exploited and oppressed by capitalism and imperialism.**

**The Oppressed do not determine the grounds of our liberation; those grounds are chosen for us by our oppressors, whose warfare upon our class and communities results in exclusion, harm, and death. We intend to meet our oppressors on whatever grounds we must, in order to complete the revolution**

**against capitalism; because capitalism demands our exploitation throughout the world and accelerates our entire world's ecological destruction.**

**We reject sterile bureaucratic or legalistic restrictions on the revolutionary demands with which our organization and our world is faced, recognizing that our history includes failed attempts to pretend allegiance to the state and capitalism. We make no pretense. We will defend and support each other.**

**The Defense Committees demand hope and bravery of our membership, We act amongst ourselves and the community with principle and commitment. We are our own liberators!**

## **Organizing Principles**

The General Defense Committee's Organizing Principles are the heart of the group. It is the "how" we organize. Without them, we would be rudderless and more susceptible to some of the all too familiar collective and individual shortcomings found in organizing. They are the ties that bind us. They help guide us in our work.

- 1. Our common welfare should come first; our success depends upon our unity. The Defense Committees are open to all revolutionary anti-capitalists of good faith, regardless of affiliation or lack of affiliation with any particular anti-capitalist ideologies or organizations. Diversity of traditions and tactics is our strength.**
- 2. The Defense Committees have one primary purpose — revolutionary anti-capitalism. This primary purpose should guide and inform all of our actions.**
- 3. The Defense Committees organize in service of revolutionary anti-capitalism. Though we may participate in coalition with others of various principles and beliefs, we do not involve ourselves with the elections, institutions or organizations of the owning class, so as not to divert us from our primary purpose.**
- 4. The Defense Committees are self-supporting; it is up to us and our membership to build and finance our organization.**
- 5. The Defense Committees are nonprofessional; we are not separate and apart from the people.**
- 6. In our propaganda, in the discussion of our tactical and political differences, and in all other activities, the larger faith of true comradeship should prevail between us.**

*"We need to be more patient, more kindly, more tolerant, more sympathetic, helpful, and encouraging to one another, and less suspicious, less envious, and less contentious, if we are to educate and impress the people by our example and by the results of our teachings upon ourselves, win them to our movement, and realize our dream of universal freedom and social righteousness." -Eugene Debs*

# WE ARE ANTI-CAPITALISTS. WE ARE REVOLUTIONARIES. WE ARE COMRADES.

## Capitalism is the Root

*"I've never read Marx's Capital, but I've got the marks of capital all over my body."*  
- Big Bill Haywood



Graphic by Janet Stein.

Societies are formed and interact around how they produce and exchange. There are those who own and those who work. Under capitalism, capital accumulation (profit) rules. Derived from the extraction of “surplus value” by the owning class, the worker has no choice by force of starvation, but to sell their labor. This is an unequal and antagonistic relationship.

Capitalism is not merely the “economic system” of production and exchange that takes place in a store or worksite. It is the whole of society - a system of social production. It is the laws, governments, and police it

produces to enforce its rules. It is the art, philosophy, and religion that give capitalism the moral, intellectual, and cultural legitimacy to reign. It is the educational and medical systems necessary to reproduce a compliant generation of workers. We recognize that systems of oppression have predated our present economic system. We also know that more than any other system, capitalism demands the continual “otherization” of whole groups to enforce onto Peoples and nature their roles necessary for profit-taking.

We cannot struggle against racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy without struggling against capitalism. We cannot struggle against capitalism without struggling against racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy.

Capitalism is a system that requires infinite expansion on a planet with finite resources. It is the root cause of inequality, wars, repression, alienation, exploitation, and degradation that is so readily apparent for all to see. A future of life and capitalism are not compatible. There is another way to live, another way to organize society based on the needs of people and the planet.

## Revolution: a sudden, radical, complete change

*“You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”* - Angela Davis

What does it mean to be a revolutionary? What is a revolution? It is hard to know unless we are in it. Nevertheless, these are important questions to ask.

Revolutions are the creation of new living institutions, new groupings, new social relationships; it is the destruction of privileges and the monopolies of the old classes and bases of power. Revolutions are life and death struggles between the past and the future.

We are revolutionaries because we believe that only revolution can solve the fundamental crisis in which we find ourselves today; capitalism is not compatible with living. We recognize that today, many communities and cultures around the world are defending their land and way of life from imperialism and capitalism. We need to be in solidarity with them. They can teach us ways other than systems based on exploitation. We also draw from the historical accomplishments, experiments, and struggles waged by the many traditions within our movement and around the world. Much can be learned from what has worked and what has fallen short. We are generous to



those who have tried, knowing their struggles were difficult and many sacrificed everything to bring forth a better world. We revolutionaries are part of a continuous historic process that is still playing out. All these struggles need to be seen in this light. They are still happening because the lessons learned are still informing us and our actions.

## From Allies to Comrades

*“For too long, the individualist rhetoric of “self-care” has crowded out our sense of working collectively for shared goals. Comradeship is about our responsibility to each other — a responsibility that makes us better and stronger than we could ever be alone.” - Jodi Dean*



There is an epidemic of alienation, depression, anxiety, suicide, and addiction in modern capitalist societies. These are human reactions to an inhuman world. No one is left unaffected. We live in perpetual uncertainty, and we are faced with existential threats on a near daily basis. Social media and modern culture only isolate us more.

Moving us from hyperindividualism, defeatism, and at times, self-indulgence is a modern task. Building and maintaining real relationships is essential for us to break out of the anguish we find ourselves in and start to construct the world we want to see. Social problems need social solutions. We find safety and empowerment in our comrades, those who are there for us. Our struggles are connected. Those engaged in a common struggle, all moving in the same direction.



We place great importance on our comradeship in GDC. We come from all revolutionary currents, or no current at all, and just want to defend our neighborhoods. These differences are what make us dynamic and allow us to work collectively. As comrades, though we may have differences, we know that we are on the same side of a political struggle. There is a feeling and expectation of solidarity and accountability toward one another. We know this kind of solidarity is essential if we are to build the revolutionary movement necessary for the task at hand. We distinguish “ally” from comrade. Allyship is not in conflict with the state or capitalism but instead personalizes society’s problems. Being a comrade must be an intentional and aspirational process in order to repair the broken relationships we have under capitalism.

## Organizing

### Introduction

Much of what we will discuss in this section is a process rather than a hard set of facts. How we have decided to organize is not some sort of magic or an immortal science, rather, it is the use of tools we have in this time and place and how they best fit our needs to carry out our political work.

Like all tools, if they no longer work for the tasks at hand, we will put them down and pick up new ones. All of what we are about to discuss relies on a culture of principles, comradeship, and accountability. This is why we find ourselves coming back to our principles before each meeting and throughout our work.

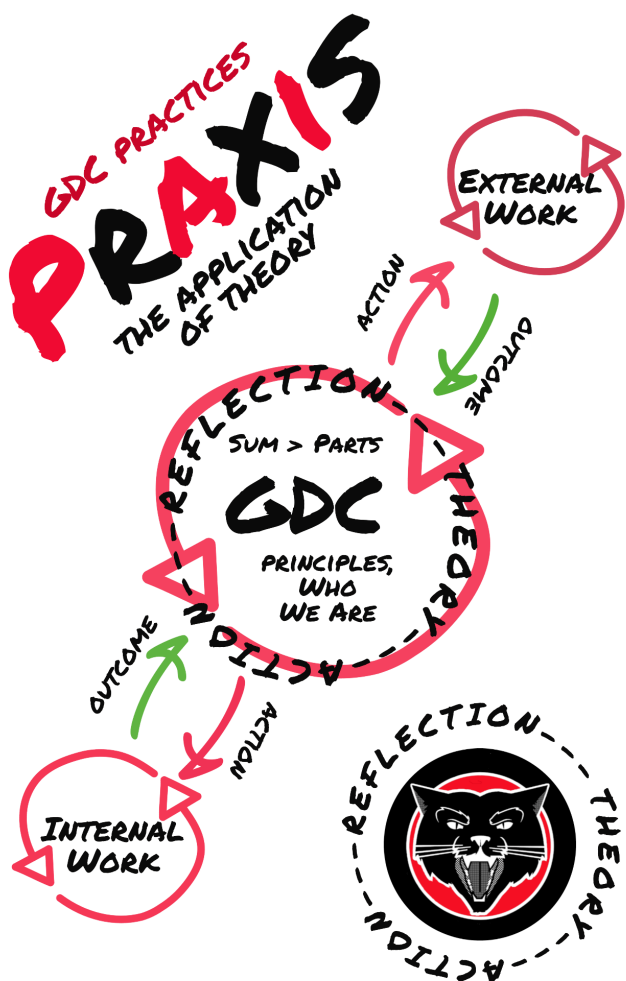
### Community Self-Defense Model of Organizing



The GDC uses a community self-defense model of organizing. This means we organize at the point of conflict between capitalists and those they exploit. That point of conflict is decided by the capitalists, whether it's at the place we work, where we reside, or any other area of contact (racist police, courts, corporations, gentrification, landlords, bosses, etc.). Community self-defense is rooted in the people, not weapons or laws,

but in the organized multiracial, multinational working class, of all genders and sexualities, organized to fight off attacks and defend the gains won through struggle. We believe that it is up to the working class themselves to resist exploitation and oppression. GDC engages in activity that directly helps overcome social divisions, and encourages resilience, solidarity, fighting spirit, organization, and self-determination among the working class. This is community self-defense.

## Praxis



The GDC uses praxis as our method of interaction with our work and organizing. We draw inspiration from Paulo Freire and his work found in Pedagogy of the Oppressed:

*"Social reality is the product of human action, it is not transformed by chance, destiny, fate or god. So, if people produce social reality, then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for humanity, a task made real and possible by the fact that world and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction."*

This interaction can most easily be described as **Theory - Action - Reflection**

In this way, we use our collective meetings for a time of reflection and theory. We bring back to them what we have learned through our actions. This action can be found in organizing, events, demonstrations, or work. We are a group and the reason we come together as a group is because it makes us stronger than our constituent parts. In this sense, what we do and say in our political work is an extension of GDC and who we are.

## Theory – a Method to the Madness

Many of us first come to revolutionary politics through our anger at the injustice we experience. After a while, we might find that anger is not sustainable. Anger is not enough. Theory helps bring clarity to the chaos we see and feel. It is a method for understanding the conditions in which we find ourselves. Having theory gives us the confidence to engage in our communities. It also helps us understand the lessons that have been learned previously. Educating ourselves is the responsibility of both



the individual and the group. It is the foundation on which we interpret the world. Our theories and books we read can feel big and overwhelming at times. That is ok, we are often discussing big and overwhelming subjects. Be patient. We urge comrades to create informal study groups together. We support each other and lift each other up. We meet comrades where they are.

## Reflection– to Disagree is Comradely

Having an honest dialogue about our work and our actions is important for our personal growth and for the success of our projects. Reflection is where we come together to collectively interpret our work. Understanding how to constructively reflect, appraise, and criticize builds stronger bonds, maintains egalitarianism, and keeps individual egos at bay.

# Action – Washing Dishes a Revolutionary Act?

*"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point, however, is to change it."*

- Marx

It is not enough for us to gain knowledge of our social reality. We must act together upon this reality so as to transform it. This can look like many things. The work we do cannot be seen in isolation as just a mere individual act but as a collection of interwoven actions that move us towards the goal of human liberation. When it is understood through this lens, in combination with our theory and reflection, even washing dishes can be a revolutionary act.



## Social Investigation

*"To investigate a problem is to solve it."* -Mao

We are all, in many ways, both students and teachers. Both roles are in constant dialogue with each other. People are already experts in their own lives and need to be treated as such. Social investigation is the process of immersing ourselves in the community in which we work. We need to have an authenticity necessary to do the organizing we have set out to do. To be trusted. To act on principle.

Many of us come to organizing through our lived experience, already having "legitimacy". Others earn it through patient work with communities that are new to them. You might have heard the phrase "No investigation, no right to speak".

Investigation looks like different things at different times. What is important is that we engage and test our ideas. Thoughts without action are just opinions. Our emphasis is on doing the work as much as reading about the work others have done. Social investigation happens not only out in the community but inside the organization as well. Our legitimacy to organize on matters comes from our work around those matters.

## It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint

Our work, by its nature, can be taxing. There can be long stretches with seemingly little payoff. It is important both for you, and the group, to pace yourself. Many of us first come to organizing, going to everything, involving ourselves in everything only to exhaust ourselves and burn out in a few months. This work is a marathon, not a sprint. We urge comrades to only commit to things we can reasonably do. We want to play to our strengths. Many of us have talents we can bring to bear. Some of us are extroverts and great communicators, while others are introverts and wonderful

administrators. Find a place that fits. Whether that looks like one or two meetings a month or being a daily organizer, there is a place for everyone. Take planned breaks from organizing and let our comrades know if we need help. Find joy in what we do and have comrades we can talk honestly with.



## It Works if You Work it

The GDC is a collection of people all playing their part in organizing. There is a saying in this work, 20% of the people do 80% of the work, and 80% of the people do 20% of the work. This saying holds true for us as well. We recognize that there will always be an imbalance of work. The best way to mitigate this is through communication. This looks like responding to messages when requests or questions are asked to the group, joining/leaving threads when necessary and taking initiative when needed. Say what we can or cannot do, and do what we say. Build the trust necessary, hold ourselves accountable to our comrades. There is no judgment if we can only commit to a few things or need to pull away from work at times. Life comes at us and we often need to adjust what we can give and stay healthy. When we communicate this, we maintain our trust and the organization can make adjustments.

# Mass Work

Mass work refers to the kind of struggle that is focused on organizing working class people to fight directly against the everyday aspects of our exploitation and domination, and against social structures that hold back the potential for mass action of our class and all oppressed peoples. Mass work does the following:

1. Engages in a form of organizing work that breaks barriers and unites different kinds of working class people in struggle.
2. Brings us as working class people into an organization as active participants, not as passive members guided by professionals.
3. Engages in a practice of politics that treats us, the working class and oppressed, as instruments of our own liberation.
4. Builds the power of working class people in our everyday lives through our own organizations, not simply as a constituency relating to the larger political system.
5. Develops GDC members organizing abilities and transforms our work into a tribune of diverse working class concerns and fights.
6. Builds organizational infrastructure and culture through a real struggle against instances and systems of exploitation and domination.

*Adapted from "Mass Work" by DSA Friends of the Communist Caucus*



# Qualities of a Revolutionary Organizer

- ★ Effective organizers have done social investigation in the area we are organizing.
- ★ We have a theoretical understanding of the conditions we are operating in.
- ★ We treat people as experts in their own experience, intelligent problem-solvers, and leaders in their lives and communities.
- ★ We build trust among the people we are organizing with.
- ★ We are motivated by a sense of comradeship and duty.
- ★ We hold ourselves to our high principles, standards, and code of conduct, knowing how we act reflects on our politics and our work.
- ★ We are clear on the goal and how they can get there.
- ★ We bring people together. We move people to collective action. We do not try to solve problems alone.
- ★ We put the interests of the project first above our individual concerns.
- ★ We respect group decisions and work to follow them out.
- ★ We make it clear how people not yet organizing can get involved, become organizers themselves, and help build the revolutionary project.

## Structure

### Introduction

GDC is built for its size. As we grow, our framework will grow, too. We generally only want as much structure as needed for the work to be completed. Our structure is as horizontal as possible, with wide autonomy given for the day to day running of our projects. Official elected positions in GDC are based on one's responsibility and accountability, not on one's authority.

## **Becoming a Member**

The first step in becoming a prospective member is to fill out our application. We use a cohort process for people interested in organizing with GDC. We come together as a group to discuss how to build the relationships and the knowledge necessary to organize against the exploitation and oppression that capitalism produces. We generally have a minimum of four meetings for the cohort process.

The cohort process is a way to start building the bonds necessary to carry out our organizational work. We meet people where they are at politically and socially. We understand that for many people this is their first time engaging in a revolutionary group. Being accessible and having attainable goals for cohort members is a priority in the process.

Principle #1. Our common welfare should come first; our success depends upon our unity. The Defense Committees are open to all revolutionary anti-capitalists of good faith, regardless of affiliation or lack of affiliation with any particular anti-capitalist ideologies or organizations. Diversity of traditions and tactics is our strength.

## **Internal Organizing**

### **General Assembly Meetings**

Our organization-wide meetings are where we gather information from our work in the different committees, working groups, and action groups and reflect on those activities as a collective. These are usually held on a monthly basis.

### **Administration Committee**

The Admin Committee is a permanent structure that carries out internal work. It is open to dues paying members and has elected coordinators. Responsibilities include finances, membership list upkeep, supply inventory and storage.

### **Coordinating Committee**

The Coordinating Committee is a permanent structure that carries out internal work. It is open to dues-paying members and has elected coordinators. Responsibilities include onboarding and member retention, communication, coordination and strategy building.



## Political Education Committee

The Political Committee is a permanent structure that carries out internal work. It is open to dues-paying members and has elected coordinators. Responsibilities include theory nights, political education and internal development.

## Dues

Dues are the way that we are allowed to function as an organization. They are vital to our revolutionary and anti-capitalist work.

Minimum: \$5/month. Recommended: sliding scale of 2-4% of net income. Members unable to pay dues due to financial hardship are still considered members in good standing.

## External Organizing

### Working Groups

Working groups are permanent organizing structures used to carry out external work. These groups carry out work over long periods of time and often in multiple areas. They currently include Housing, Abolition, and Anti-Imperialism.

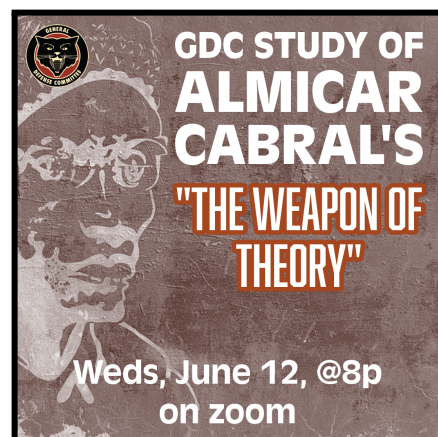
They are open to dues paying members and have elected coordinators. Collaborative work with other organizations around similar topics and issues is carried out by the Working Groups.

### Action Groups

Action Groups are temporary organizing structures used to carry out external work around short-term, specific events or actions. They are open to dues paying members and non-members, and have no elected coordinators.



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## Theory Nights and Study Groups

Theories are important to engage with comrades and friends in ways that look at the “big picture”. It allows us to discuss in depth issues that are important in building a revolutionary movement. It is also a way to build bonds with other organizing efforts by asking groups and individuals to discuss topics with us. We also encourage comrades to organize “informal” study groups. Reading texts together and then discussing them. This allows for a wide variety of tendencies, writers and ideas to find a place in GDC.

## Mass Meetings

Mass meetings or Open Houses are held quarterly or biannually to connect with our larger community and build relationships with different groups. Often, we will invite other organizations or movements to this meeting to describe their work and how we can collaborate together.

## GDC Signal Practices



Our primary day-to-day organizing tool is the encrypted messaging app Signal. As we gain members, it is important to build trust and allow for smooth communication. Please follow the below guidelines for adding new members and those interested in our work to our Signal threads.

These channels should be treated as official organizing tools; always remember there are many people on these lists. Please follow our principles on these threads. Not following our principles can lead to removal. Be considerate of your comrades' time and ability to connect with our work. Individual conversations and questions should happen off list if possible.

**NOTE: GDC is an above-ground organization; please refrain from discussing things in GDC communications channels which are illegal or may result in law enforcement scrutiny.**

Requests for responses should begin with **XX** then the request. When comrades see these **XX** it should be considered your responsibility to answer. 👍 is “yes”, 👎 is “no” and ? is “maybe or don’t know.”

## **Threads - open to all, members and non-members**

- **DISCUSS:** This thread exists to facilitate collaborative organizing between members, supporters, and comrades. All pertinent GDC information and collaboration will be posted here.
- **THEORY:** The purpose of this thread is to schedule theory night events, share theory that comrades think will aid in the development of others and conversation relevant to said content. All revolutionary ideas are welcome regardless of tradition.
- **ACTION GROUPS:** GDC will, at times, form temporary threads around specific causes and projects that are composed of members and occasionally non-members. **These threads are to facilitate work. Joining these threads implies a willingness to take direction and respond to questions and requests, to actively be involved directly with the work associated with the thread.**

## **Threads - for dues paying members only**

Non-members should not be added. Information discussed in these threads should not be shared with other groups or non-members.

- **INTERNAL:** This thread is our primary organizing thread directly related to our organizing efforts for dues paying members. Comrades are required to check daily and respond to requests and interact such as filling out straw polls, voting on proposals, helping organize events, etc. Decisions and events organized on this thread will be announced on DISCUSS Thread.
- **COMMITTEES:** These threads are to facilitate work carried out by GDC Committees. Joining these threads implies a willingness to take direction and respond to questions and requests, to actively be involved directly with the work associated with the committee.
- **WORKING GROUPS:** These threads are to facilitate work carried out by GDC Working Groups. Joining these threads implies a willingness to take direction and respond to questions and requests, to actively be involved directly with the work associated with the group.

## How to Write a Report-back

Written reports help us act collectively as a group by sharing information with each other. When we are at meetings or events representing the GDC, the information we acquire there is for the use of GDC and should be shared with the group. Reportbacks are preferably done within 24 hours and communicated via Signal.

- Date, time, place
- Description of event or meeting
- Names and number of people in attendance, and organizations
- Conclusions, notes, takeaways
- Next steps, action items

