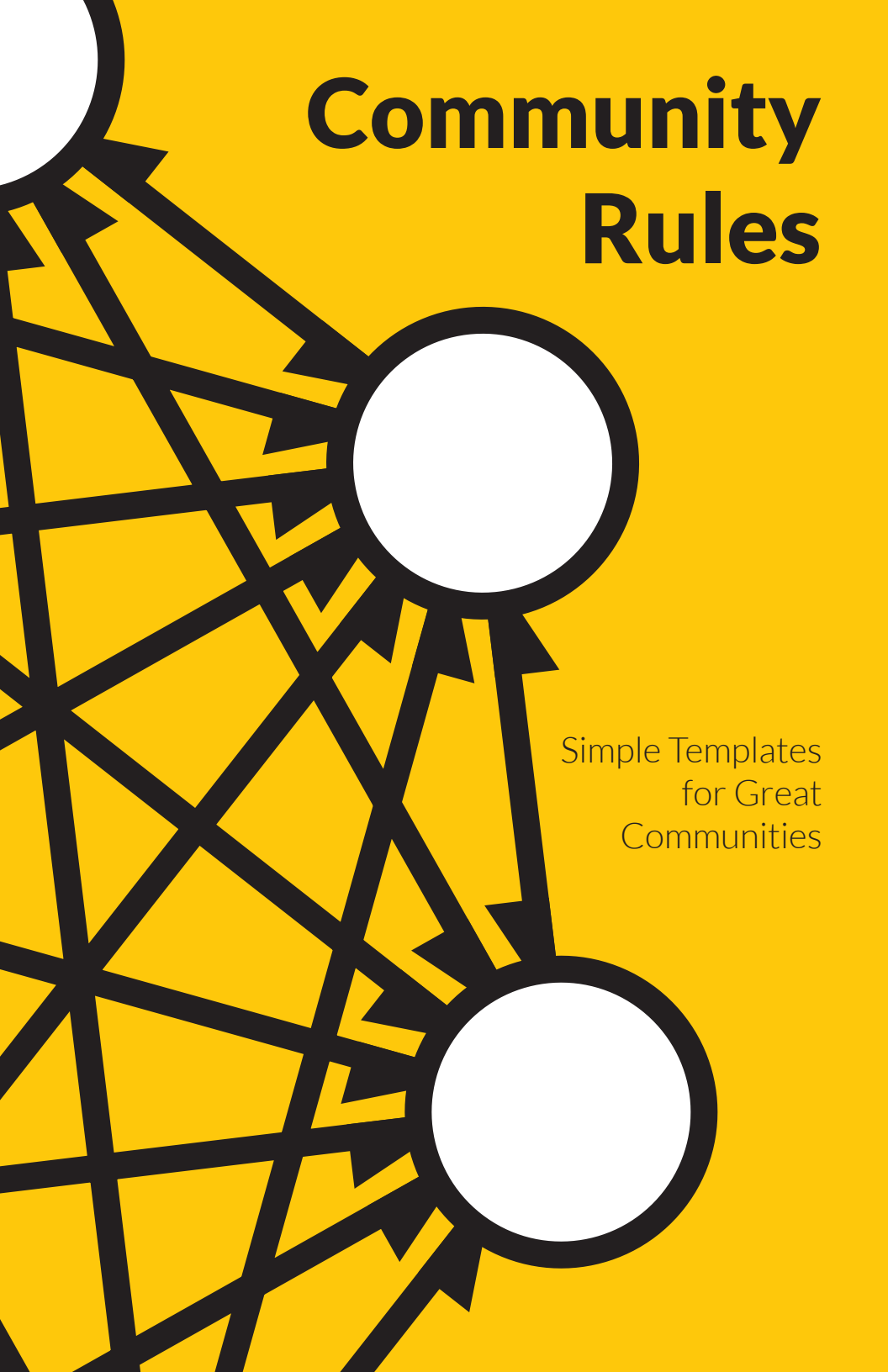
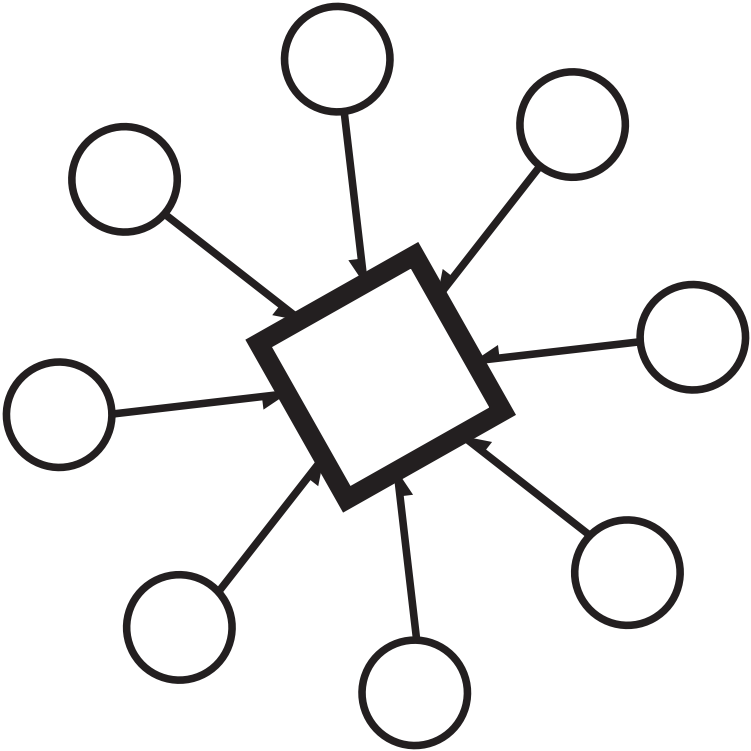
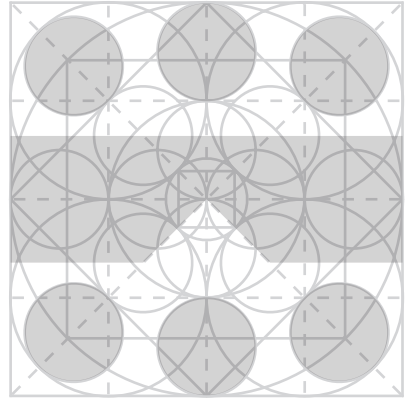
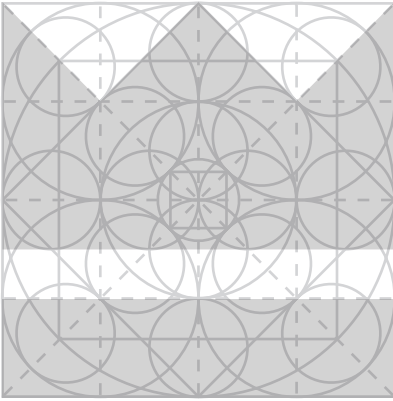


Community Rules

Simple Templates
for Great
Communities





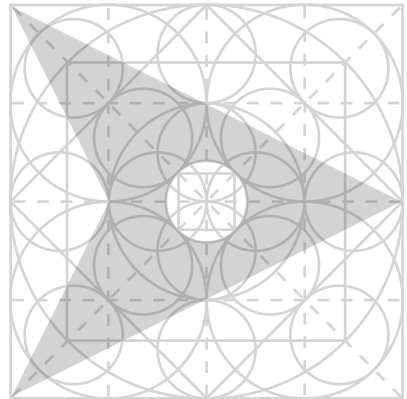
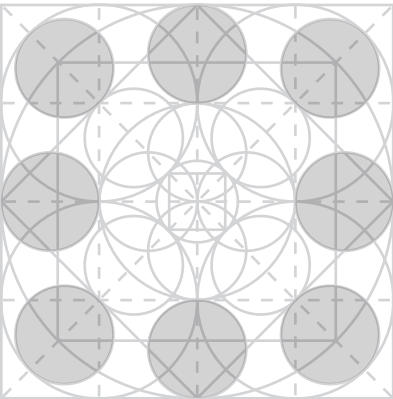


A project of the Media Enterprise Design Lab at the University of Colorado Boulder

Created by Cassandra Dana, Drew Hornbein, Vincent Russell, Nathan Schneider

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Published summer 2021



Invitation

Creating communities has never been easier. Online social networks enable groups to form among people who might never otherwise meet—across borders, even within neighborhoods, and around common causes that might otherwise remain isolated and underground. Getting involved in a community can be as easy as pressing “join.” But the technology can make community appear easier than it really is. Groups form, grow, and begin to thrive before they can consider how they will share power and deal with the conflicts that inevitably arise. Because many corporate social media platforms benefit from bottomless argument and conflict—it feeds more data about us to advertisers, after all—they are not designed to support problem solving and good governance.

Community Rules is a simple tool to help make great communities even better and healthier. It includes nine templates for organizational structures that communities can choose from, combine, or react against. The templates here are not meant to represent a complete set of possible arrangements. They are a provisional set to help spur much broader explorations, and to invite critique. Each of the templates includes example practitioners to illustrate how groups use that organizational structure. These templates are also available through a Web app we have created at CommunityRule.info, where you can customize them according to the needs of your group.

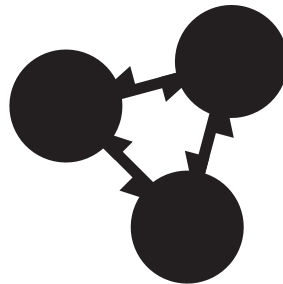
Why rules?

The feminist scholar and activist Jo Freeman wrote a famous essay in the early 1970s about a pattern she saw forming among fellow activists at the time: “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.” She warned that in groups that purport to be leaderless and non-hierarchical, leaders and hierarchies emerge anyway, usually among socially privileged participants. These shadow structures can be nearly impossible to remove. Freeman encouraged fellow activists to adopt simple, explicit forms of “democratic structuring.” Bring the power structure into the light of day, so participants know how to use and challenge it.

Tyrannies of structurelessness seem to recur online with particular frequency. This is aided and abetted by the “implicit feudalism” of social-media software; our technology assumes that there should be admins or mods with nearly absolute power, that the best ways of dealing with conflict are through censorship or exile. Despite the democratizing potential of the Internet, online communities can turn

into cults of personality or stifling polarization, rather than empowering democracies. For groups that want to avoid this, *Community Rules* offers some options for where to begin.

But rules should not be an end in themselves. The health of any community depends above all on the culture and relationships it cultivates. Rules can serve as a foundation, which keep a house from sliding into the mud, but the house itself is made of other things. Rules inevitably constrain our actions and our possibilities. They are important to have for when they’re needed, but they do not produce great communities all on their own.



Points of inspiration

The templates presented herein have long histories, only some of which are well-understood today. The name of the CommunityRule app comes from what archaeologists call a two thousand-year-old document found in Israel-Palestine, describing the rules of a utopian community. The use of “rule” as the name of a community’s constitution comes from the Latin *regula*, such as the sixth-century Rule of St. Benedict, a guidebook for monasteries still in use today. Council structures, such as in the Circles template, can be found in Indigenous communities the world over. Random selection of decision-makers, which you will find in the Jury template in this booklet, was used in ancient Athens for many kinds of government service. The Benevolent Dictator structure is widespread, from tribal chiefs to business owners, but the term comes to us through the culture of open-source software.

These templates have emerged through non-scientific experience, online and off. They were road-tested through collaborations in the summer of 2020 with mutual aid groups that

arose during the Covid-19 pandemic. One of those groups, the Rocky Mountain Mutual Aid Network, has been an ongoing partner.

Any attempt to draw from such diverse sources runs the risk of appropriation—of taking communities’ cultural heritage without permission or due respect. This is what happened, for instance, when the “framers” of the US Constitution drew selective inspiration from Haudenosaunee peoples (or Iroquois Confederacy), to create a government that would rob Native land and devastate Native people. As you develop rules for your communities, please be aware of the cultural contexts you might draw from for inspiration. To build a shared future of societies that are accountable and participatory, the world needs shared repositories of rules that enable communities to adopt, modify, and share improvements on rules from other communities. But this should happen as much as possible in a spirit of attribution and respect.

How to use this book

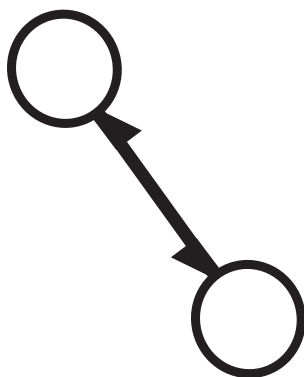
You can use this book in many ways. Reading it from start to finish is probably not the best one. Skip around and explore the templates and their practitioners. If your community resonates strongly with one, open the book to it and attach it to the wall where you meet. You can use the blank patterns at the front and back of this book to create your own rule icons. You can also download printable, poster-sized versions at CommunityRule.info/book.

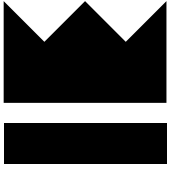
Which template is the right starting point for your community? Flip through them, and look for words that resonate. Where you find words you like, try on the template: Read through it, imagining what it would look like if your community adopted it. Does it fit? Try another template, perhaps one that doesn't resonate at all initially. How does that one fit? One template might describe roughly where your community is now, while another might point toward where you want it to become—be sure to recognize the difference.

If you want to customize a template for the specific needs of your group, scan the QR code on that template or visit the associated CommunityRule.info Web address. There, you can click “customize” and adapt the template however you like using the platform's

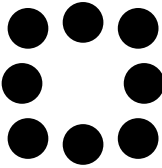
graphical interface. When it is ready, you can publish your rule to the platform's public library, or export it privately for you and your fellow community members.

May the pages to come help strengthen your community and prepare it for the challenges ahead. May they also lead you into invention, creativity, and communion with the many, many ways people throughout history have come together for their common good.

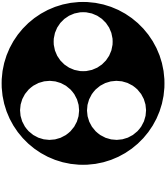




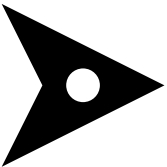
**Benevolent
dictator**



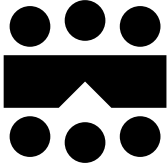
Consensus



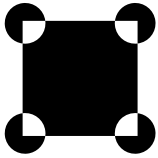
Circles



Do-ocracy



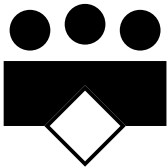
Elected board



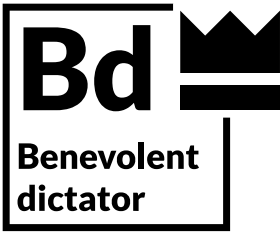
Jury



Petition



**Self-appointed
board**



The benevolent dictator holds ultimate decision-making power, until the group is ready for a more inclusive structure.

Values

- Servant leadership
- Singular vision
- Voluntarism

Membership

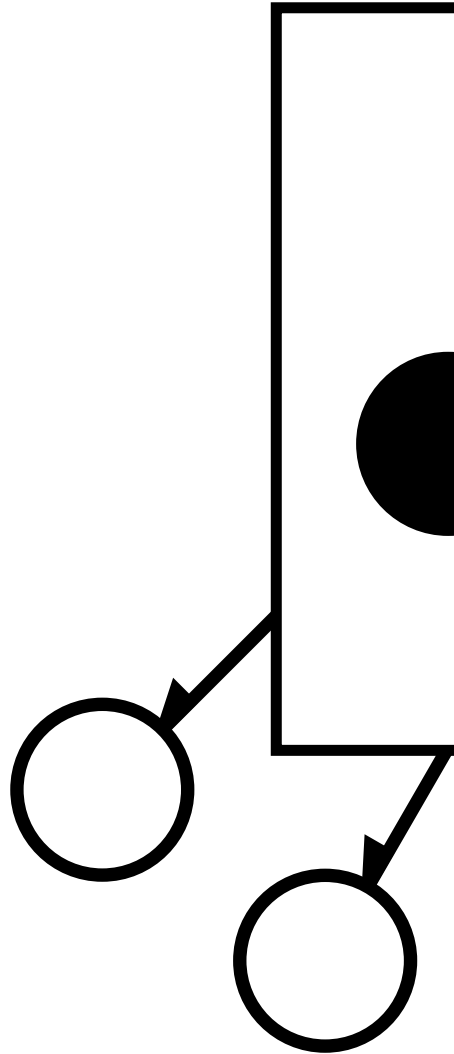
Participation is open to anyone who wants to join, but the benevolent dictator can remove participants at will.

Structure

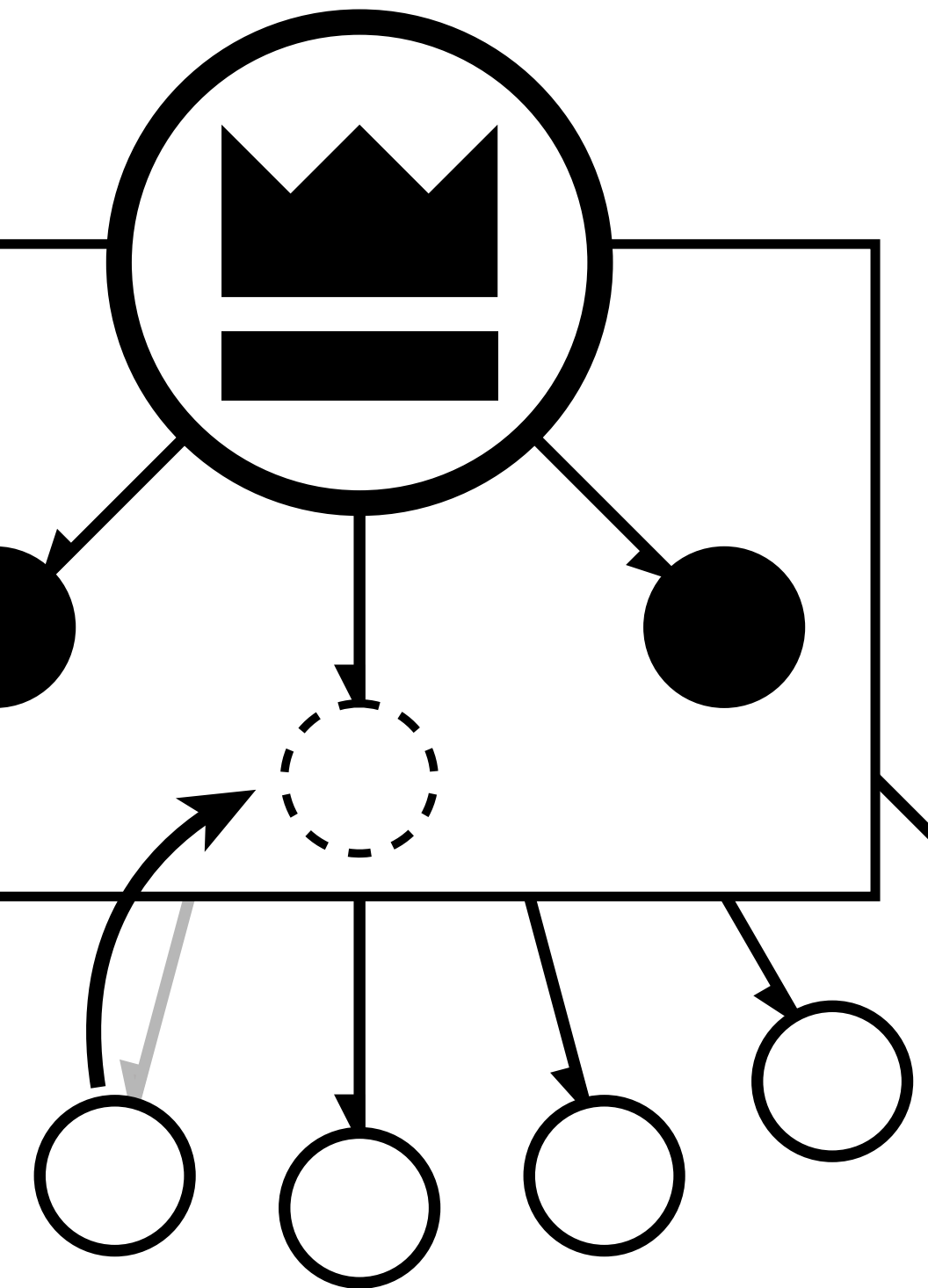
The benevolent dictator has authority and can change the group's governance as necessary. The benevolent dictator can invite participants to help with managing the group. When the group is sufficiently mature, the benevolent dictator will establish a more inclusive structure.

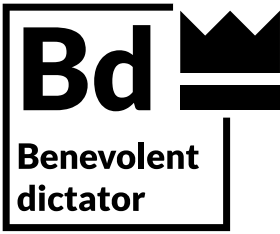
Process

The benevolent dictator is responsible for implementing—or delegating implementation of—policies and other decisions. If participants are not happy with the benevolent dictator's leadership, they may voice their concerns or leave the group.



Customize at
CommunityRule.info/create/?r=benevolent_dictator





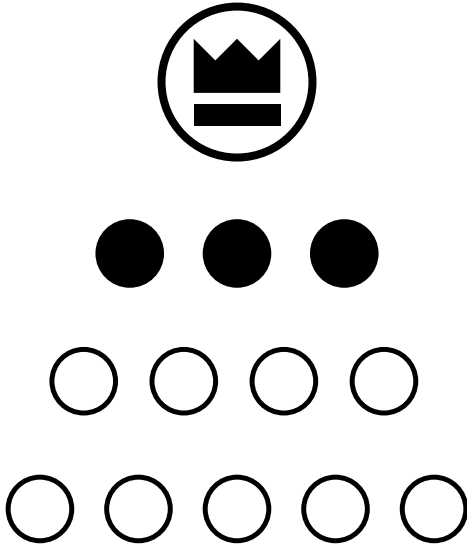
Practitioners

Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation

Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation is a decentralized organization with multiple chapters in various cities that organize to build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities. Although it is not the sole organization in the Black Lives Matter movement, it is one of the most prominent and serves as the fundraising body, grantmaking entity, and action-oriented think tank of the movement.

Governance

Originally founded in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, as of 2020, the organization is led solely by Cullors, who is the only board member and executive director.



Learn More

BlackLivesMatter.com/about

Python

Python is a popular, open-source programming language that emphasizes code readability to aid programmers in writing clear, logical code.

Governance

Guido van Rossum created Python, and served as the benevolent dictator before stepping down from the position in 2018. Upon van Rossum's resignation, the Python Software Foundation adopted an elected board model of governance. The new model employs a five-person steering committee elected by core developers that determines standardized practices for the programming language.

Learn More

[LWN.net/Articles/775105](https://lwn.net/Articles/775105)

Contributor Covenant

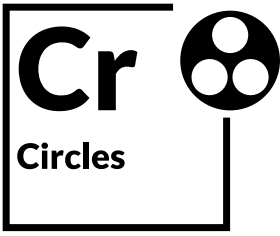
Coraline Ada Ehmke developed Contributor Covenant in 2014 as a code of conduct for open-source software projects at a time when there was widespread resistance to such agreements. Within several years, many of the most prominent software projects had adopted it, including Linux, Node.js, and thousands more.

Governance

In 2020, Ehmke used an early version of CommunityRule to create a GOVERNANCE.md file in the Contributor Covenant's GitHub repository, naming her "benevolent dictator for life." But the following year, she migrated Contributor Covenant to the Organization for Ethical Source, a democratically member-governed organization that she co-founded.

Learn more

Contributor-Covenant.org



Units called circles have the ability to decide and act on matters in their domains, which their members agree on through a council.

Values

- Decentralization
- Delegation
- Trust

Membership

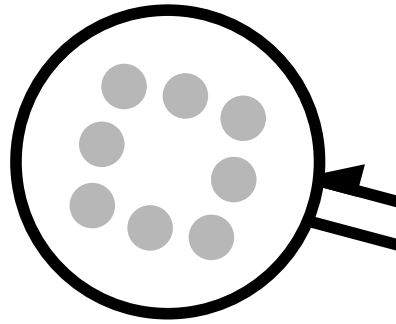
To join, a person must be welcomed into a particular circle according to its policies.

Structure

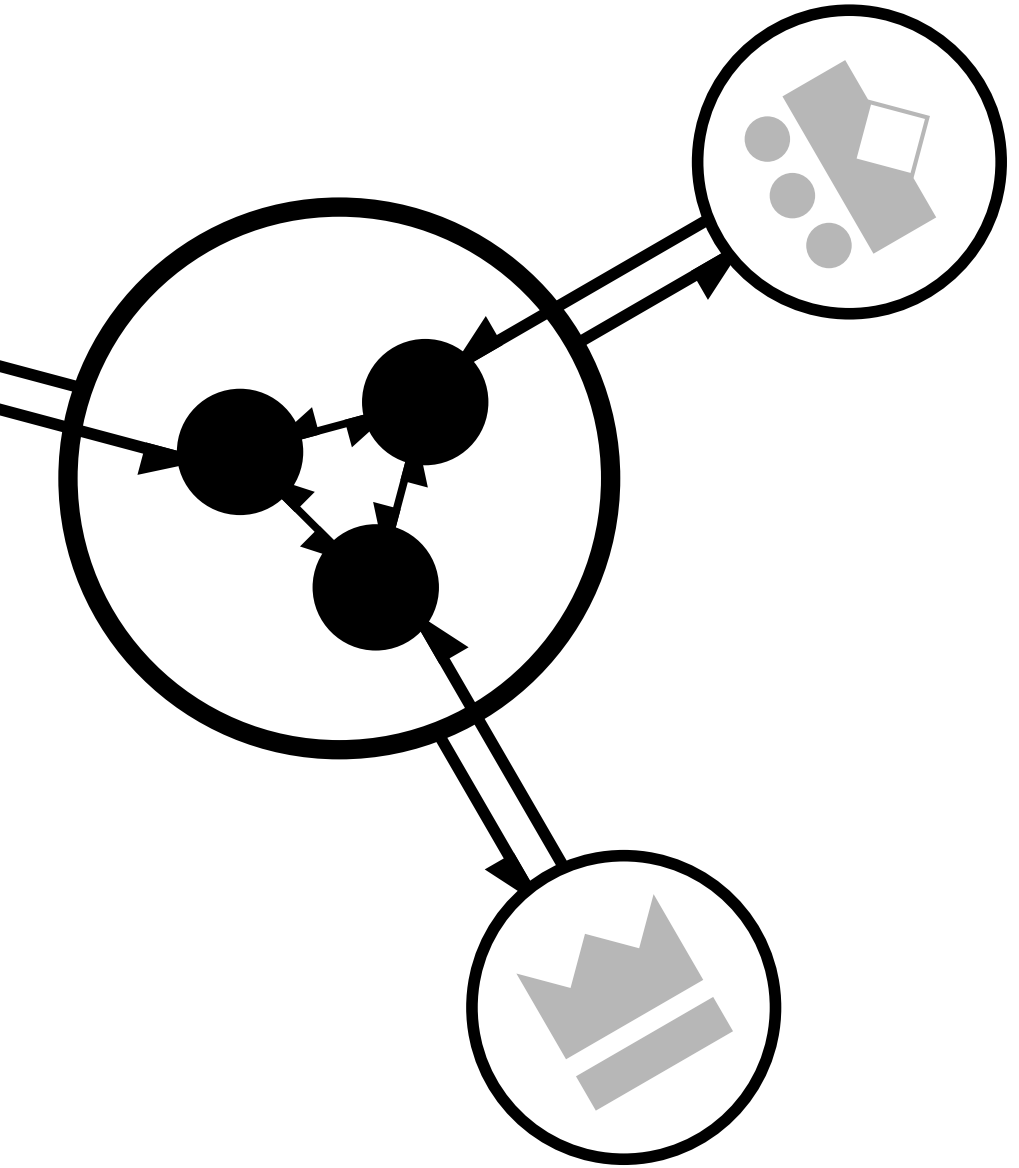
Representatives of circles regularly meet in a council to coordinate efforts and determine the domains of each circle, as well as to add or remove circles from the council. A circle can create roles for its members and assign authority over specified sub-domains.

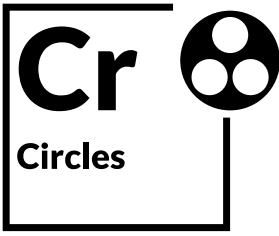
Process

Circles and the council use consent to make decisions. Consent means that nobody presents a serious objection to a proposal.



Customize at
CommunityRule.info/create/?r=circles





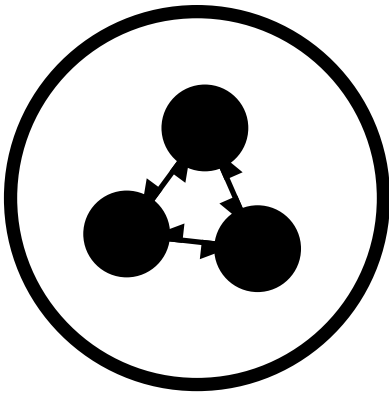
Practitioners

Sustainable Economies Law Center

Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC) supports community resilience and economic empowerment through essential legal tools. They provide education, research, advice, and advocacy that promote sustainable communities.

Governance

SELC operates with a system of distributed decision-making. Semi-autonomous circles of staff and volunteers are responsible for SELC programs. These program circles are situated within larger circles of accountability.



Learn More

TheSELC.org

Meerkat Media

Meerkat Media is a cooperatively owned production company and artist collective based in New York. The organization consists of independent artists who share resources, provide mutual aid, and collaborate for the purposes of artistic development.

Governance

Artists associated with the Meerkat Media Collective receive a monthly stipend to pursue independent or collaborative projects. Commissioned projects are democratically run through the Meerkat Media Workers Cooperative.

Learn More

MeerkatMedia.org

Resist

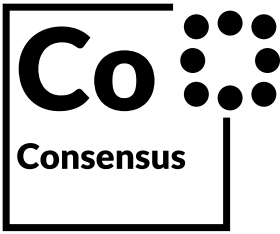
Based in Boston, Resist redistributes resources to support communities and movements working for justice and liberation. Through radical philanthropy, Resist provides critical early funding to those on the forefront of change.

Governance

Resist is comprised of a board of directors, a staff collective, and three decision-making bodies. Each decision-making body has specific functions and authorities as dictated by the board of directors. Overlap and collaboration between the decision-making bodies ensures cohesion within the organization.

Learn More

Resist.org



Decisions that affect the group collectively should involve participation of all participants.

Values

- Creativity
- Empathy
- Solidarity

Membership

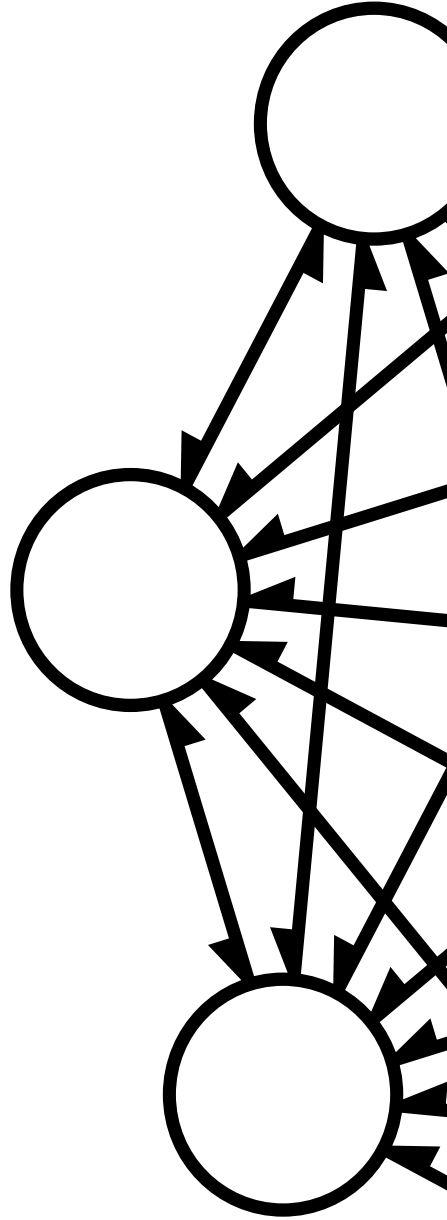
New participants may join as long as no others object. Participants may be removed if a proposal to do so passes the consensus process.

Structure

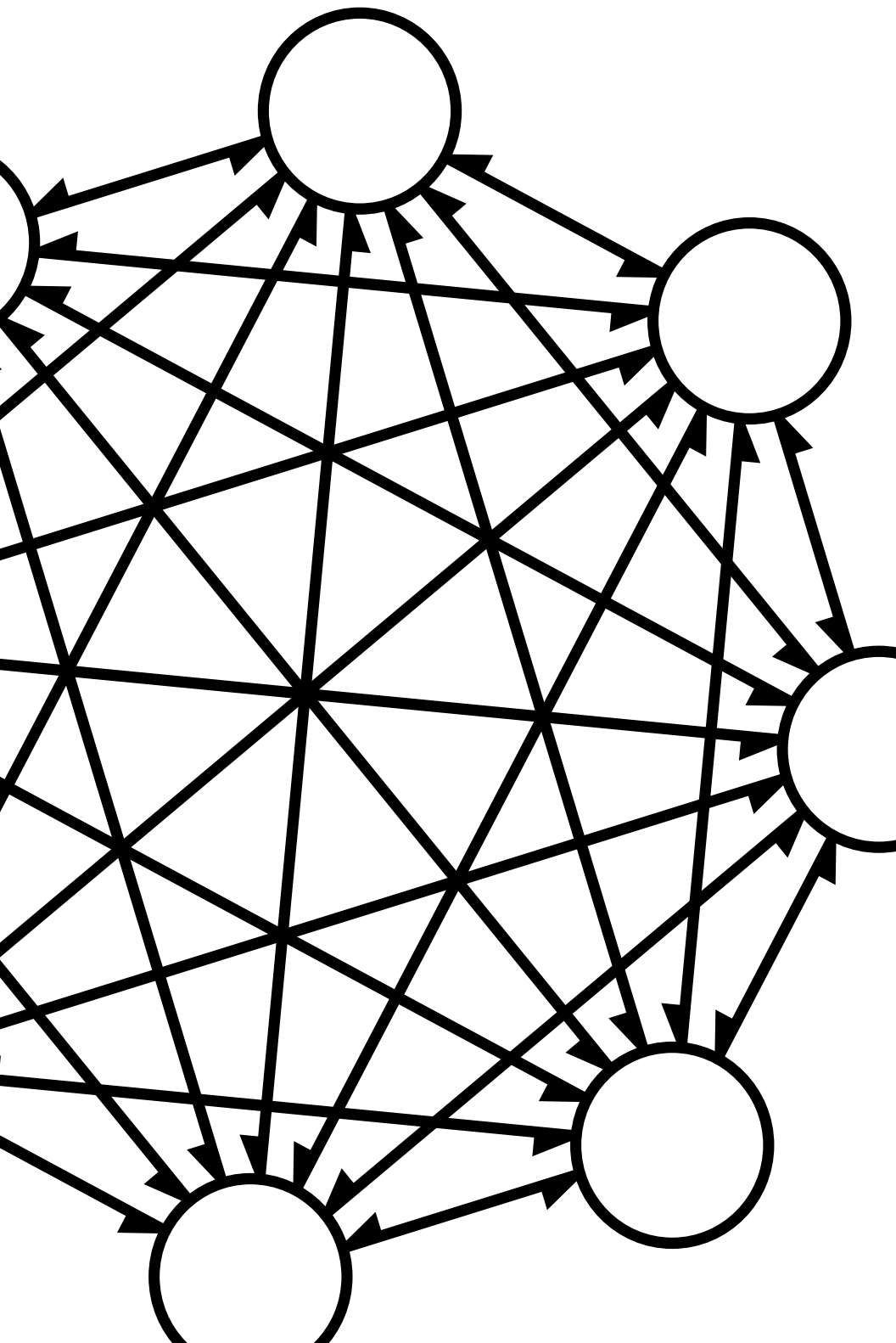
People who make proposals that the group agrees on is responsible for its implementation, delegating as necessary and as participants are willing to help.

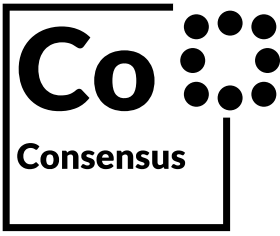
Process

Any participant may make a proposal at any group meeting to which all participants are invited. The proposal should be discussed and modified through open conversation in order to address all concerns. A decision is made only if there are no serious objections remaining.



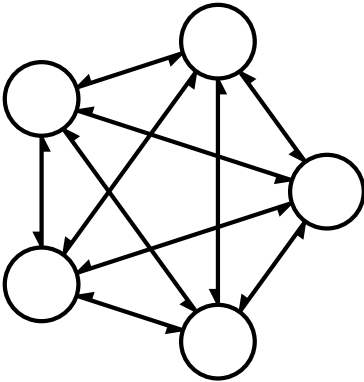
Customize at
CommunityRule.info/create/?r=consensus





Practitioners

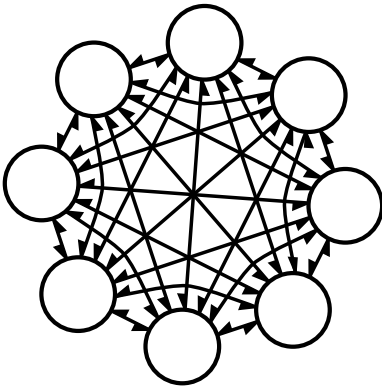
Caribbean pirates



During the Golden Age of Piracy (circa 1650–1730), many Caribbean pirate crews of European descent operated as limited democracies. Pirate communities were some of the first settler-colonizer groups to institute a system of checks and balances for governance in the Caribbean and North America.

Governance

While pirate captains frequently possessed decision-making power during an expedition, they were appointed and deposed with a mandate from the crew. Articles of agreement among a crew typically required unanimous consent.



Learn More

RhizomeNetwork.files.
[wordpress.com/2010/12/
history_of_consensus_jan2012_v2.pdf](https://wordpress.com/2010/12/history_of_consensus_jan2012_v2.pdf)

Indaba

Pronounced IN-DAR-BA, Indaba is a form of community gathering developed among the Zulu and Xhosa peoples in southern Africa. It has been adopted in international deliberations such as the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

Governance

In an Indaba process, participants avoid lengthy debate by stating at the outset what outcomes they cannot accept, and then suggesting proposals for common ground. The process encourages listening, relationship-building, and mutual respect.

Learn more

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indaba

CECOSESOLA

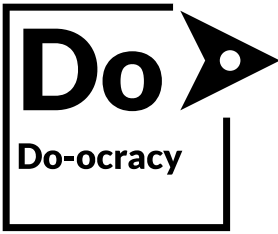
Founded in 1967 CECOSOLA is one of Venezuela's oldest and most widely recognized worker cooperatives. The organization currently serves as a non-hierarchical, participatory network for associated grassroots cooperatives and community groups.

Governance

CECOSESOLA is a consensus-based cooperative based on mutual trust and respect. Everyday decisions can be made by individuals or subgroups, but must adhere to a common criteria that is established and revised through member consensus.

Learn More

Boell.de/en/2016/01/21/venezuela-we-are-one-big-conversation



Those who take initiative to do something in the group can decide how they do it.

Values

- Bias for action
- Consultation
- Decentralization

Membership

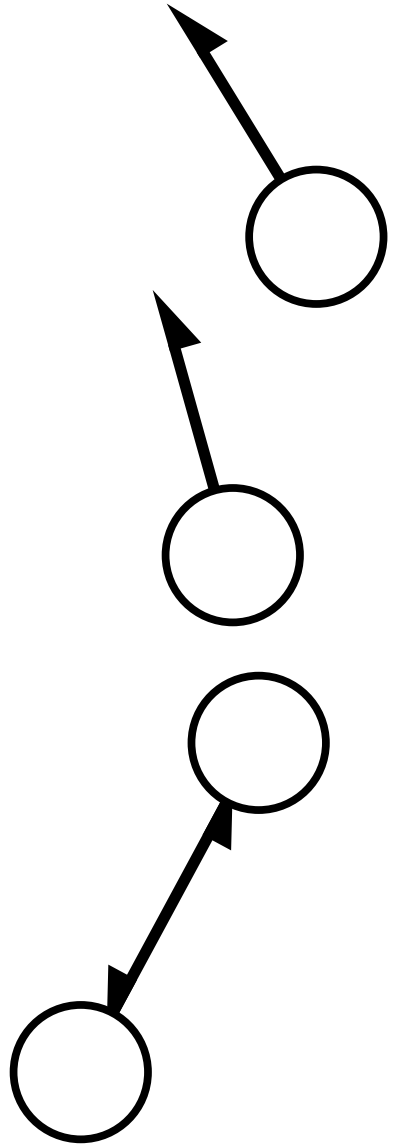
New participants may join as long as no others object. Participants may be removed if a proposal to do so passes the consensus process.

Structure

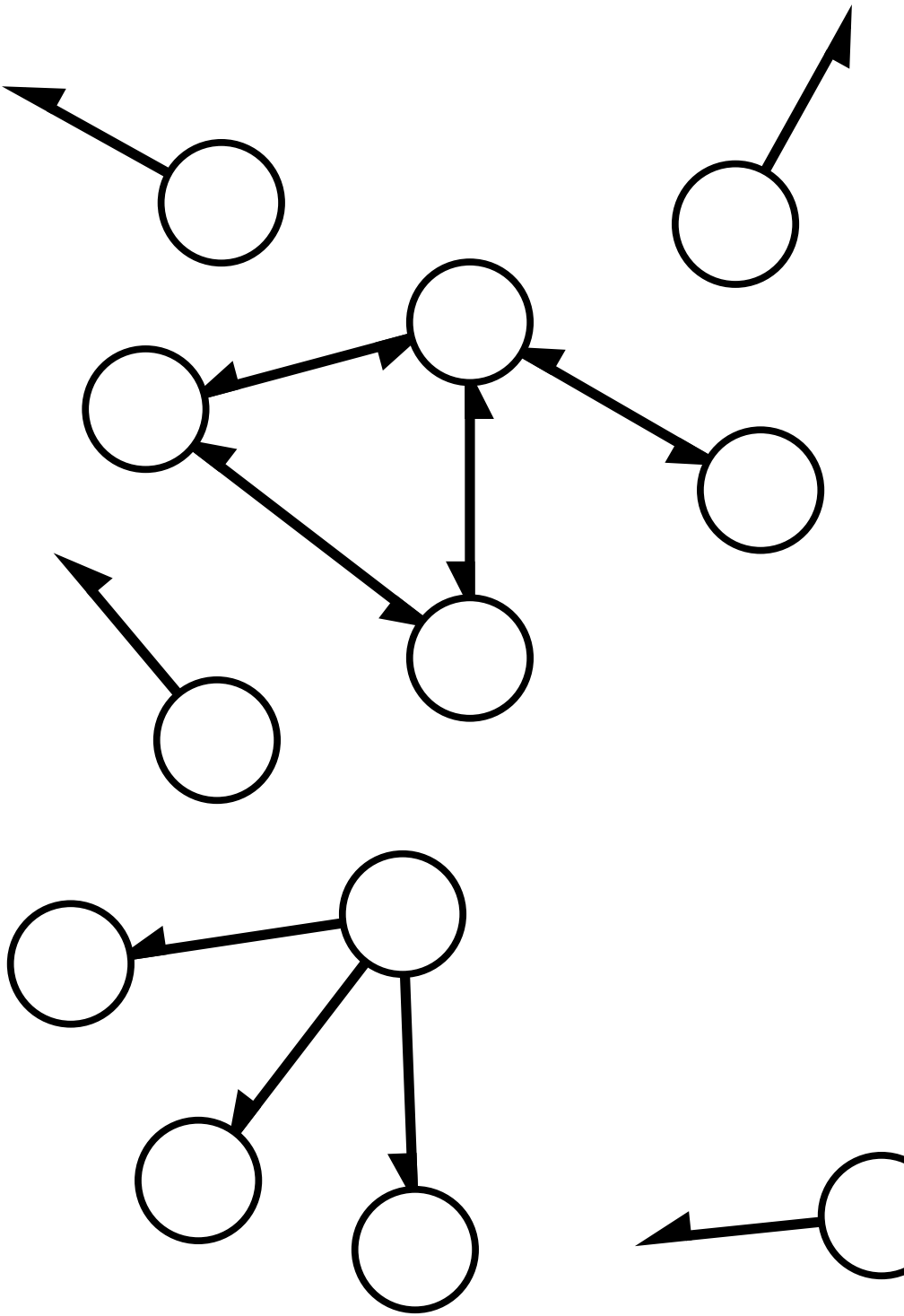
People who make proposals that the group agrees on is responsible for its implementation, delegating as necessary and as participants are willing to help.

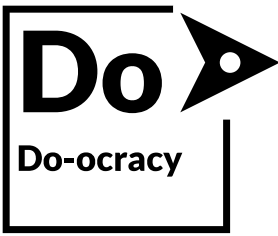
Process

Any participant may make a proposal at any group meeting to which all participants are invited. The proposal should be discussed and modified through open conversation in order to address all concerns. A decision is made only if there are no serious objections remaining.



Customize at
CommunityRule.info/create/?r=do-ocracy





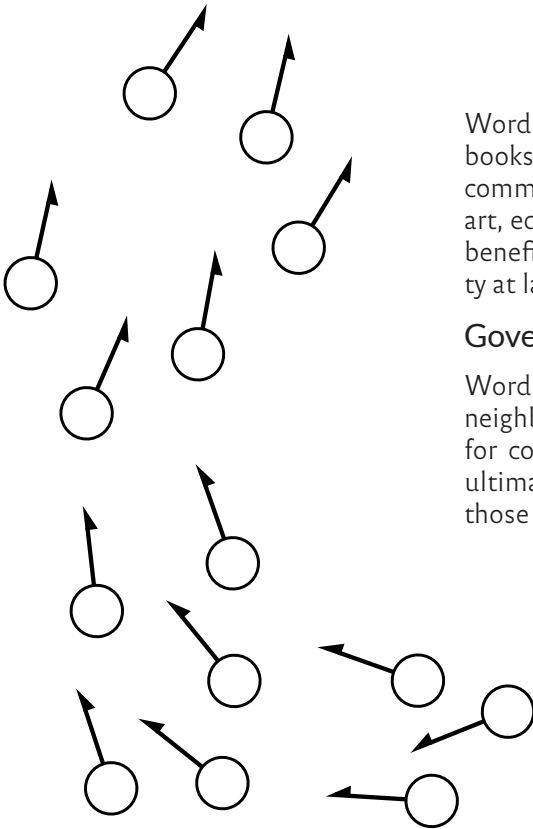
Practitioners

Word Up Community Bookshop

Word Up is a multi-lingual community bookshop in New York. Members are committed to cultivating a space for art, education, and empowerment that benefits individuals and the community at large.

Governance

Word Up is a collective run by over 60 neighborhood residents. They strive for consensus in decision making but ultimately provide weighted power to those able to execute the work.



Learn More

WordUpBooks.wordpress.com

Edgeryders

Edgeryders is a think tank and online social network working to create widely beneficial and self-sustaining projects. This means projects are able to generate enough value to compensate those working on them.

Governance

Any member with the interest and resources to pursue a project may do so without permission. Members check in on each other's projects to ensure they are legal and do not pose a threat to Edgeryders' infrastructure.

Learn More

[Edgeryders.eu/t/principles-for-collaboration-and-operations-in-edgeryders/8729](https://edgeryders.eu/t/principles-for-collaboration-and-operations-in-edgeryders/8729)

Social.coop

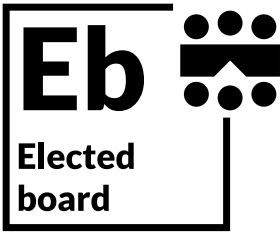
As an alternative to corporate-owned social media networks, Social.coop, part of the "fediverse" social network, pioneers an open approach to co-owning and co-operating our online platforms. Governance takes place through the decision-making platform Loomio.

Governance

Tasks are done through voluntary committees, although some roles come with small stipends. Any member may make a proposal for a policy, which can be passed through a vote of the membership. All financial transactions are public.

Learn more

[Social.coop/about](https://social.coop/about)



An elected board determines policies and organizes their implementation.

Values

- Delegation
- Representation
- Servant leadership

Membership

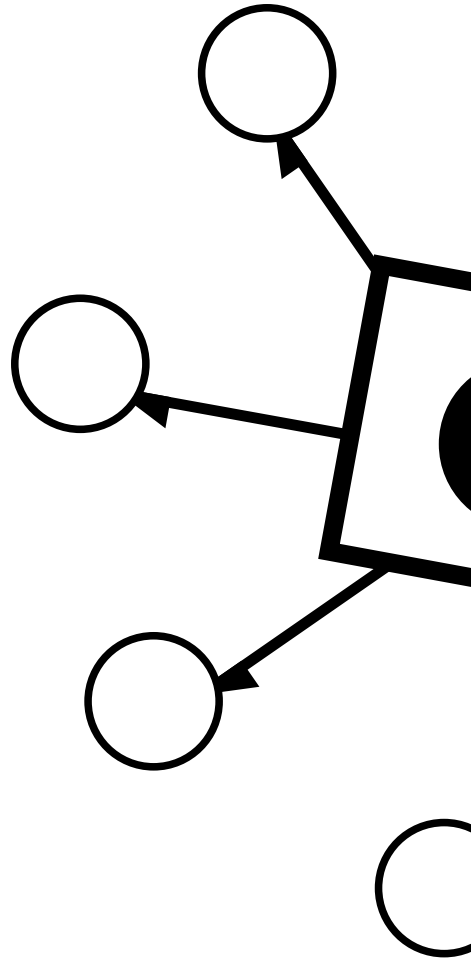
The board sets policies for membership and removal.

Structure

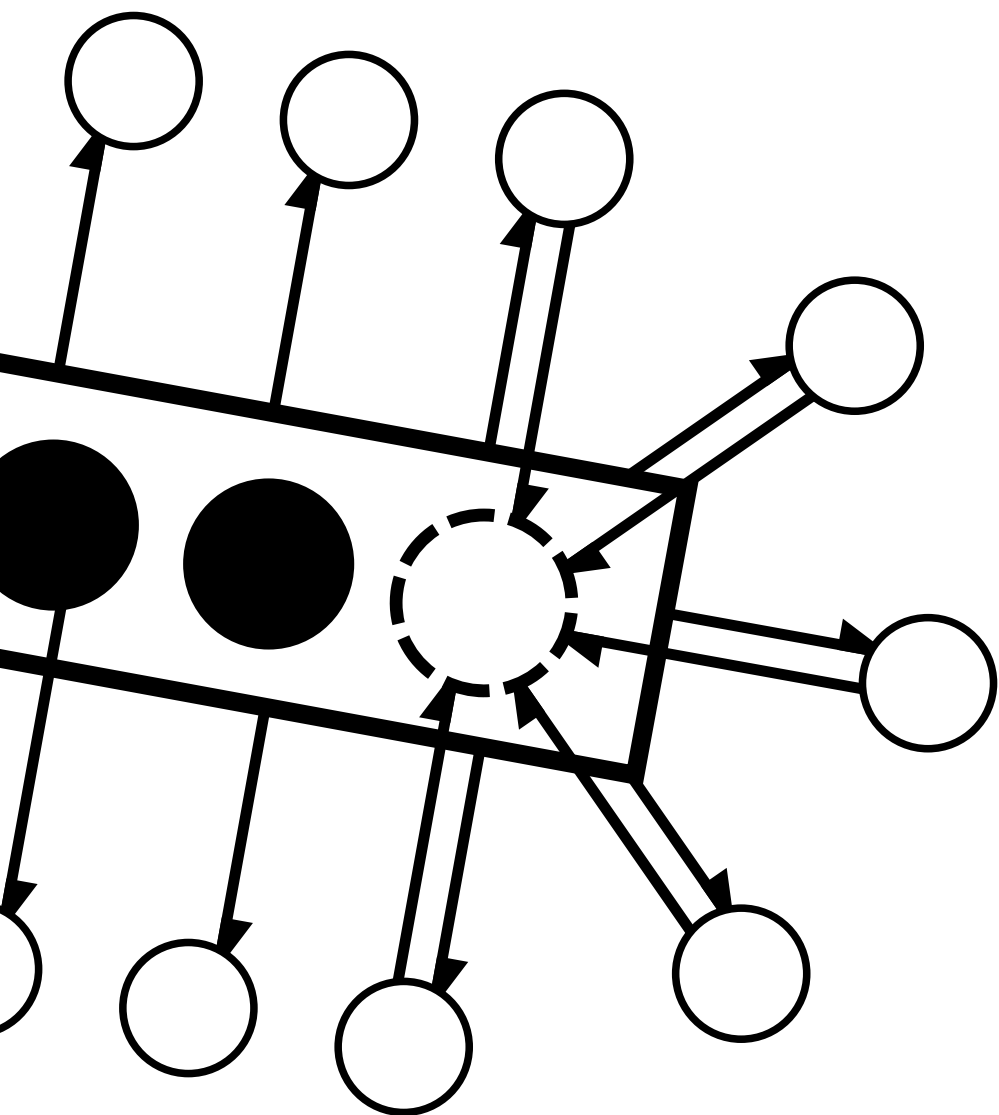
A board is responsible for making decisions and implementing them, including by delegating necessary work to others.

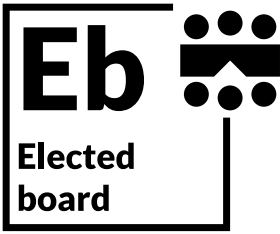
Process

Any community participant can be a nominee for board positions. In regularly scheduled elections, the nominees with the largest number of votes become board members. The board makes decisions by majority vote.



Customize at
CommunityRule.info/create/?r=elected_board





Practitioners

Participatory Budgeting Greensboro Commission

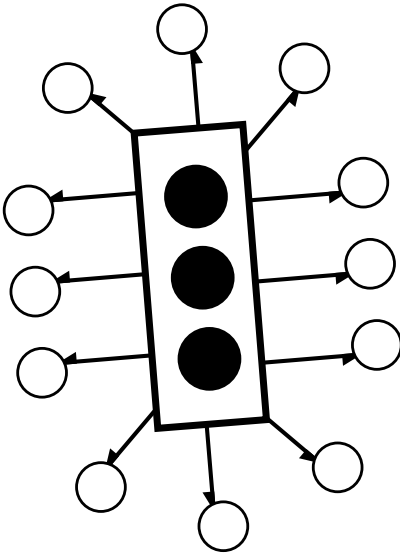
Participatory Budgeting (PB) Greensboro is a democratic process whereby residents of Greensboro, North Carolina, decide how to spend \$500,000 of city funds. Each PB cycle lasts 2 years. During that time, residents submit ideas, and PB volunteers vet those submissions and turn them into project proposals. Residents then vote on which projects to fund.

Governance

The Greensboro PB Commission is comprised of eleven volunteer community members, including two people from each of Greensboro's five city council districts and one at-large member. The commissioners are appointed by city council members to recommend PB projects, funding, and program guidelines. The commission approves decisions through a majority vote of commissioners.

Learn More

[Greensboro-nc.gov/
departments/budget-evaluation/
participatory-budgeting](https://www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/budget-evaluation/participatory-budgeting)



Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society

Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society is a cooperatively managed financial institution that strives to provide economic stability for sex workers in West Bengal, India. The organization is managed by and exclusively serves sex workers.

Governance

Usha is governed by a nine-person board of directors. Directors are elected through a two phase system. Members nominate and elect forty five representatives. These representatives then elect individuals to serve on the board of directors.

Learn More

UshaCoop.com

SEWA Cooperative Federation

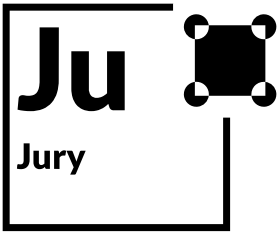
Descended from the Self-Employed Women's Association, founded in the state of Gujarat in 1971, the SEWA Cooperative Federation supports women-led businesses. It represents several hundred thousand women workers in over one hundred cooperatives, supporting member businesses' collective power and local autonomy.

Governance

The federation's members, which are themselves cooperatives governed by their worker-members, elect a board of nine to fifteen members. This board governs the federation and elects its president.

Learn more

SewaFederation.org/about-us



Proposals are shaped and decided on by randomly selected juries.

Values

- Equality
- Participation
- Study

Membership

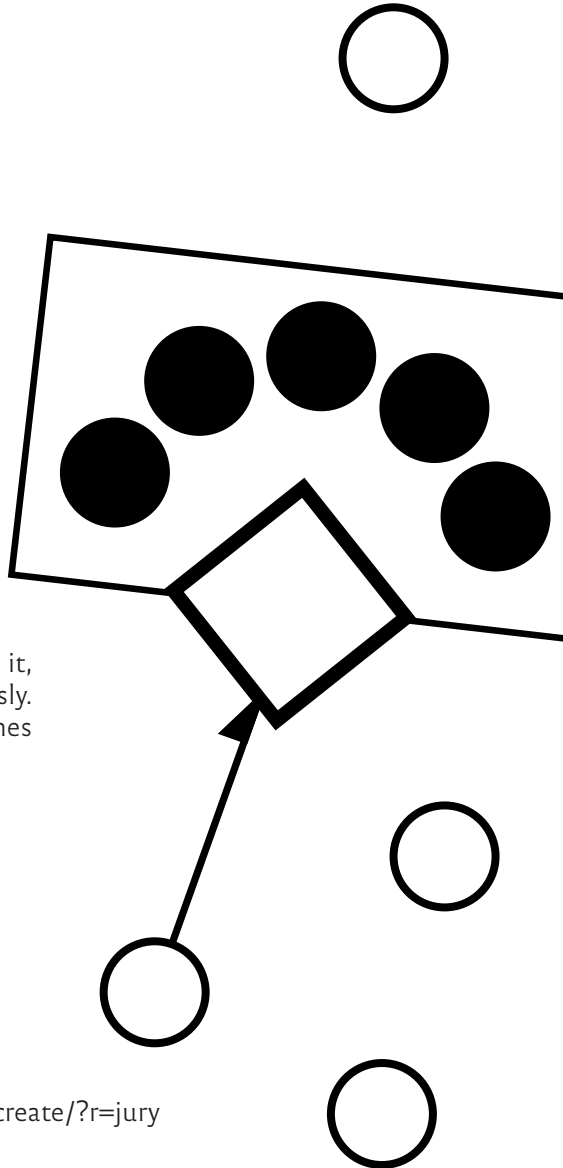
Juries set policies for membership and removal.

Structure

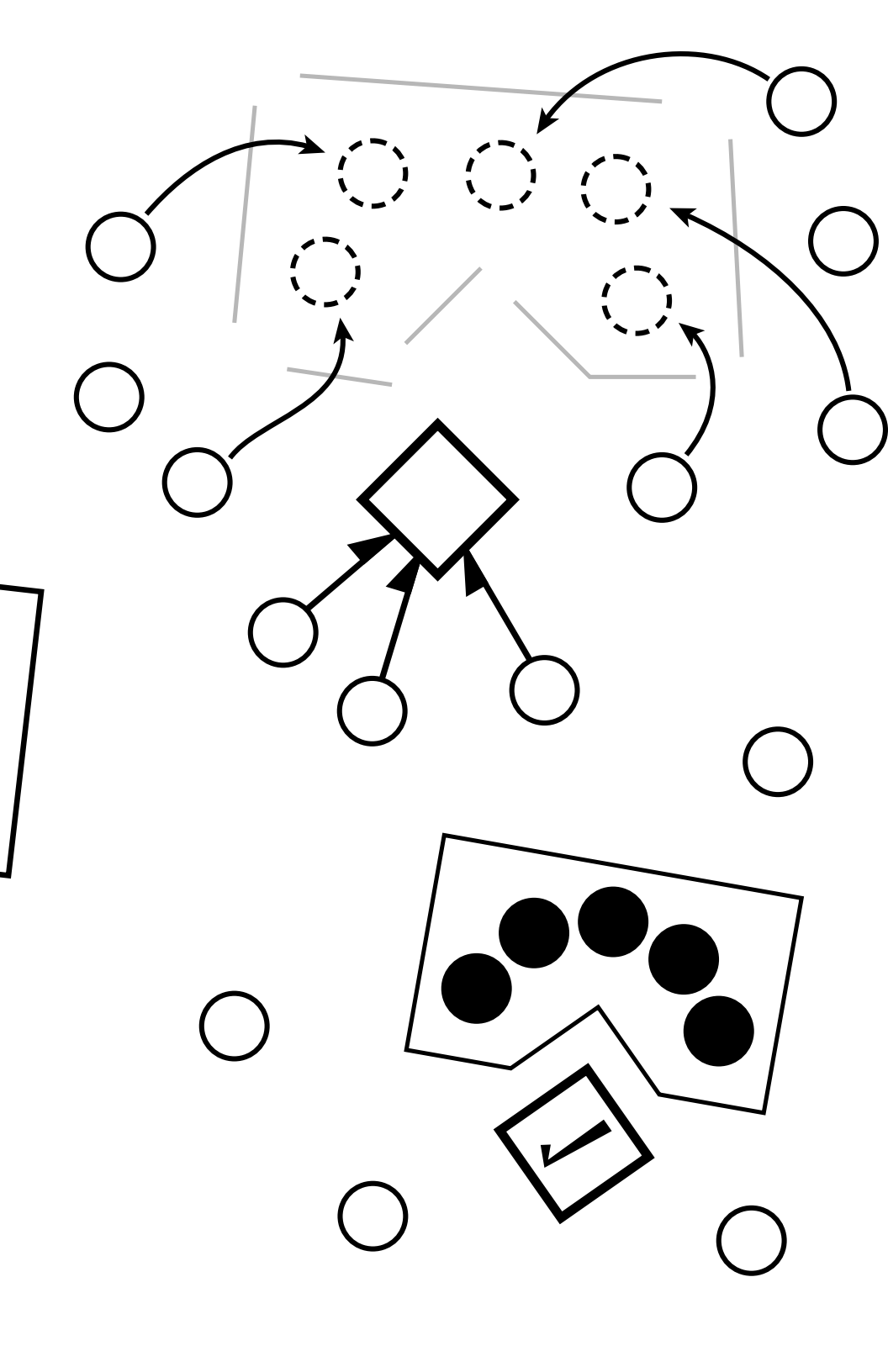
Temporary juries form by a random selection.

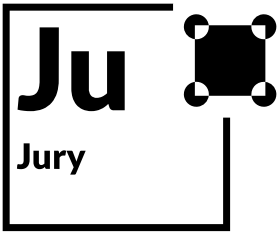
Process

All participants have the right to initiate proposals, sign them, and serve on juries. If a certain percentage of participants signs a proposal, a jury is formed to study it, revise it, and agree on it unanimously. A proposal agreed on by a jury becomes binding for the group.



Customize at
CommunityRule.info/create/?r=jury





Practitioners

Australian Citizens' Parliament

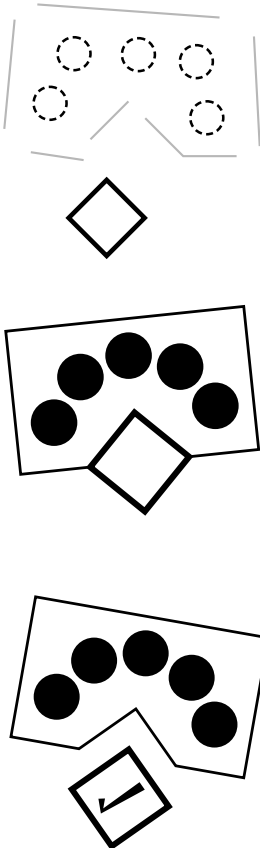
Australia's first Citizens' Parliament was held for three days in 2009 and consisted of ordinary citizens from across the country who gathered to deliberate about how to improve Australia's political system. Participants identified fundamental characteristics of a healthy democratic political system, and then generated thirteen recommendations that the national government could implement to improve democratic governance in Australia.

Governance

Nine thousand Australians were randomly selected and invited to participate in the Citizens' Parliament, with 30% expressing a desire to participate. From that pool of 30%, organizers randomly selected 150 people to join the parliament. All citizen parliamentarians had the ability to propose policies and the right to vote on all proposals, with majority voting determining whether the proposal would move forward.

Learn More

CitizensParliament.org.au



Ancient Athens

Ancient Athens is widely associated with democratic processes. Although it was not the only or the first ancient Greek city-state to employ democratic means of governance, robust record keeping has enabled the study and influence of Athenian democracy (circa 600-300 BCE).

Governance

Officials were selected at random from male citizens who had served in the military. Officials were randomly rotated and served a limited term to ensure the continuation of a citizen-led government.

Learn More

Marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1956/06/every-cook.htm

Forest of Dean District Citizen Jury

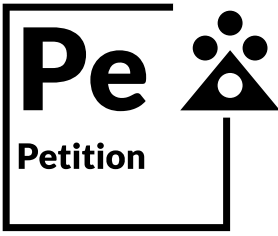
In 2018 two major hospitals in South West England were slated to close. The Gloucestershire Care Services National Health Trust sought to replace the two hospitals with one new, strategically placed, facility.

Governance

A group of eighteen residents were selected to form the jury responsible for determining the location of the new hospital. The jury considered demographics, potential population growth, and transportation before voting on a final location.

Learn More

CNDP.us/forest-of-dean-citizens-jury



All participants can propose and vote on proposals for the group.

Values

- Equality
- Initiative
- Majority rule

Membership

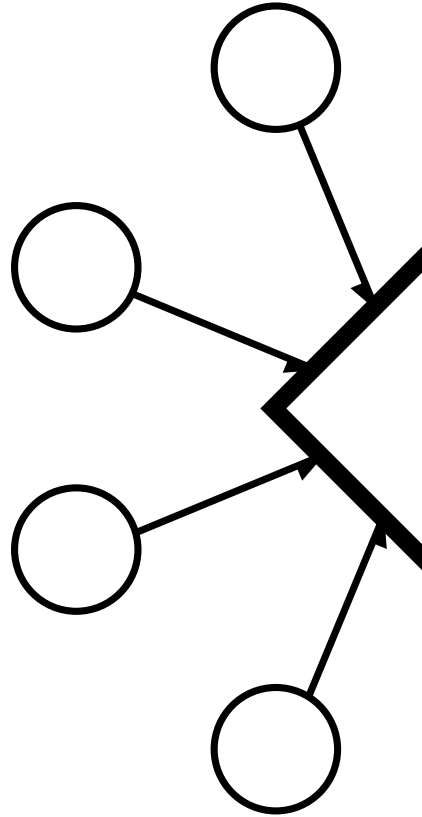
Petitions set policies for membership and removal.

Structure

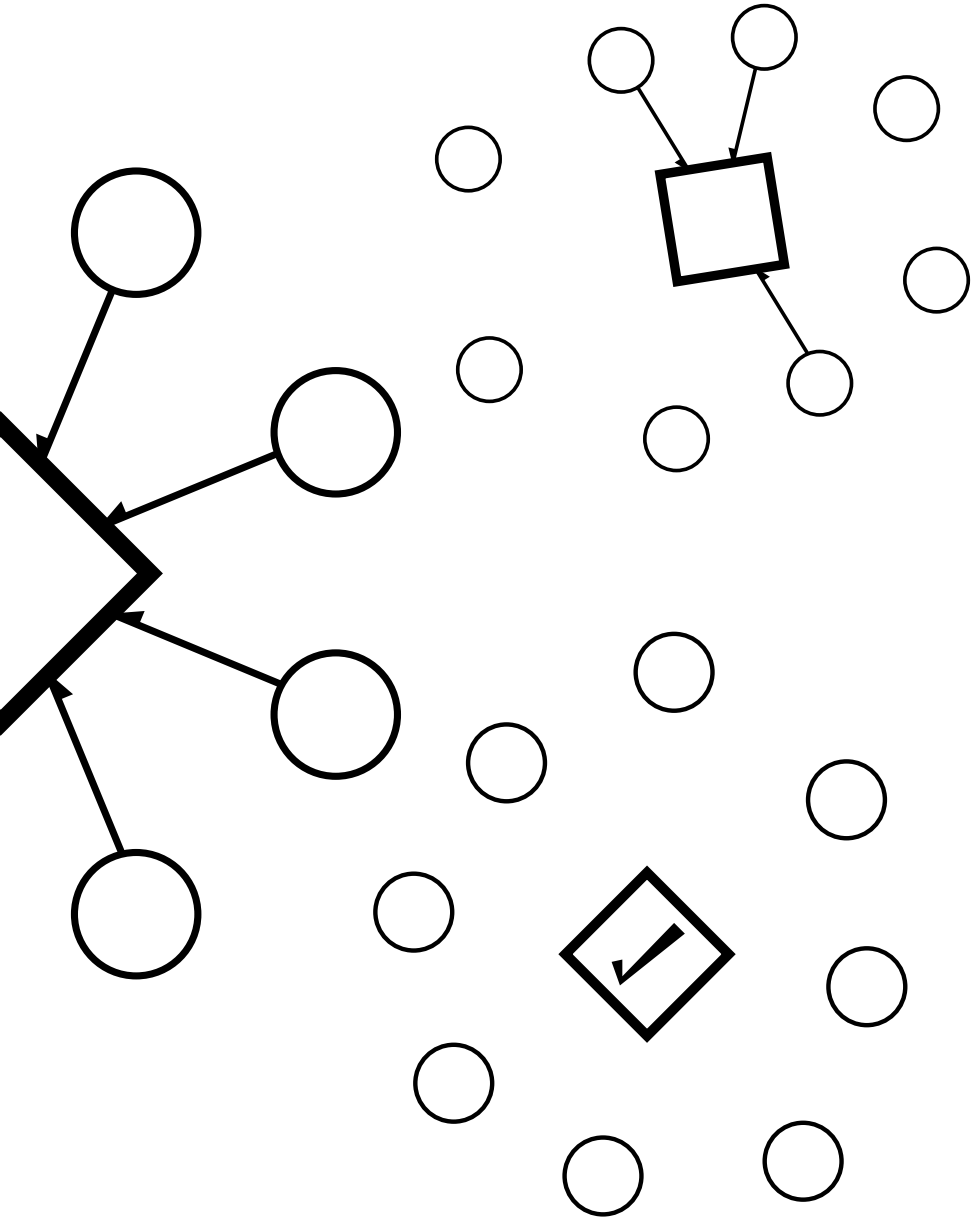
Any structures must be established by petition.

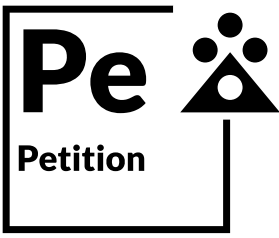
Process

All participants have the right to initiate proposals, sign them, and vote in resulting referendums. If a certain percentage of participants signs a proposal, it goes to a referendum. If a majority of participants vote for it within a certain period of time, it becomes binding for the group.



Customize at
CommunityRule.info/create/?r=petition





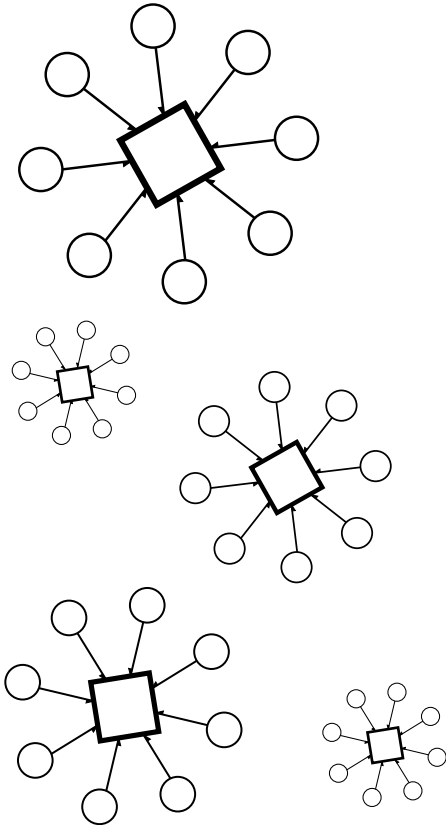
Practitioners

Decide Madrid

Decide Madrid is a citizen participation platform that enables residents to collectively draft and vote on legislation.

Governance

The Madrid City Council encourages citizen involvement in governance through the use of Decide Madrid. Citizens work together to produce and ratify legislation that benefits the entire community



Learn More

Decide.madrid.es

Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative

The Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative is a community collaboration that seeks to foster systemic change, address structural racism, and reduce poverty in Rochester, New York.

Governance

Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative centers self-sufficiency and participatory budgeting. Anyone in the community can propose a project. The community votes on proposed projects to determine which are most beneficial and fundable.

Learn More
EndingPovertyNow.org

Citizen Petitions of South African Parliament

In South Africa, any citizen can submit a petition to Parliament as a form of public participation in law-making. Citizen-initiated petitions can be approved or denied by Parliament, offering opportunities for the direct involvement of citizens in crafting laws.

Governance

All citizen-initiated petitions must be sponsored by at least one member of Parliament (MP) to be considered in Parliament, and petitioners can approach any MP for sponsorship. The sponsoring MP formally presents the petition to Parliament, and the petition proceeds through the law-making process like any other bill.

Learn more
[Parliament.gov.za/
how-to-petition-parliament](http://Parliament.gov.za/how-to-petition-parliament)



A board that selects its own members determines policies and organizes their implementation.

Values

- Delegation
- Meritocracy
- Servant leadership

Membership

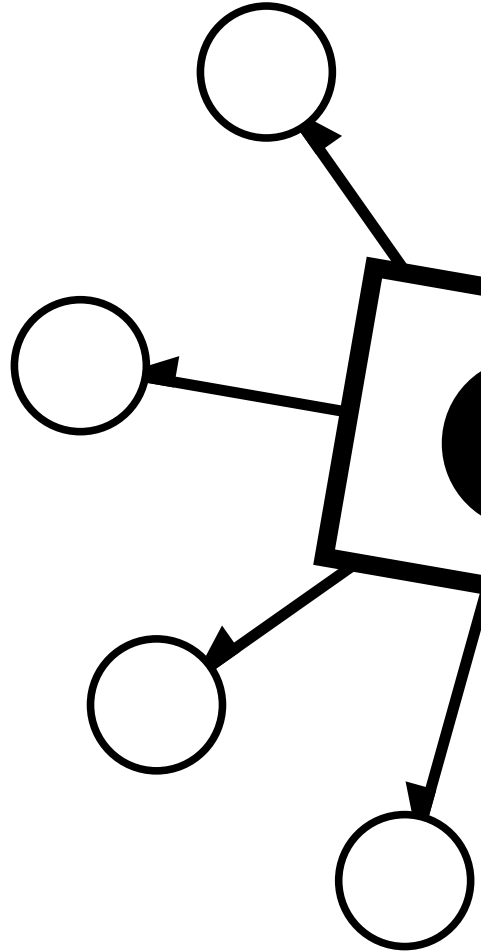
The board sets policies for membership and removal.

Structure

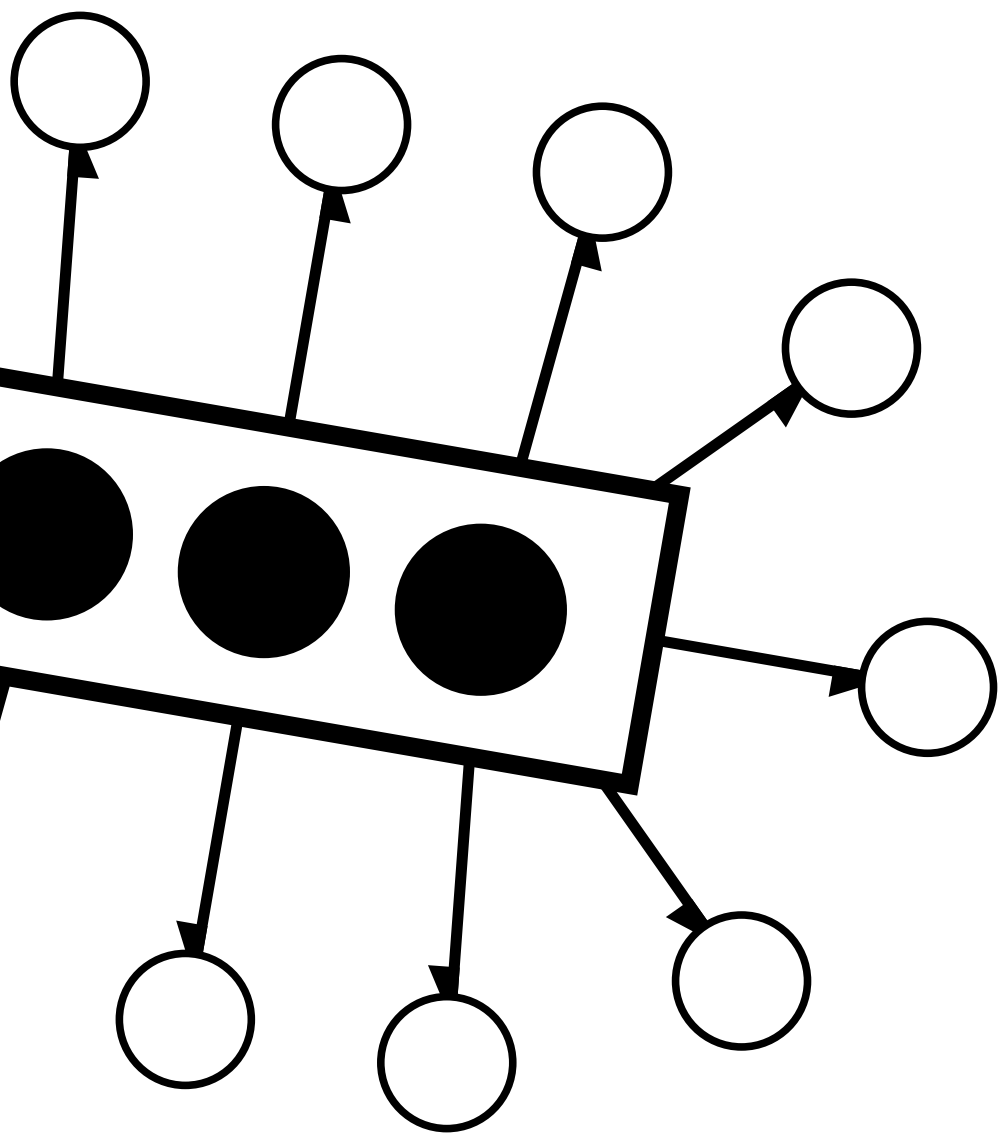
A board is responsible for making decisions and implementing them, including by delegating necessary work to others. The board elects its own members.

Process

The board makes decisions by majority vote.



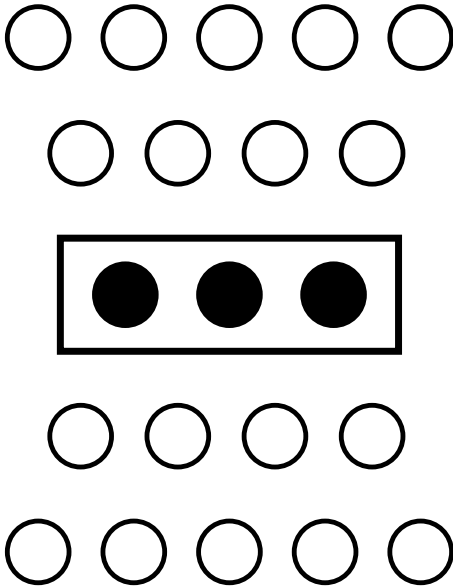
Customize at
CommunityRule.info/create/?r=self-appointed_board





Practitioners

People Powered



People Powered is a non-governmental organization that serves as a global hub for participatory democracy. It focuses on supporting leaders in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America by sharing resources, providing training, offering fundraising support, and creating networking opportunities for participatory democracy organizations and advocates.

Governance

Local, regional, and national organizations can apply to become an affiliated member with People Powered and benefit from that organization's resources. Membership applications are reviewed and approved by People Powered's staff. People Powered is governed by an eight-member board of directors, with existing board members collectively deciding when to appoint new board members and who those members will be.

Learn more

PeoplePoweredHub.org/about

The Elders

The Elders is an international nongovernmental organization of public figures, including senior politicians, peace activists, and human rights advocates, originally brought together by Nelson Mandela. The Elders work to develop solutions for seemingly insurmountable social problems, such as climate change, HIV/AIDS, and poverty.

Governance

Membership in The Elders is obtained through invitation from current members, with sitting members deciding when to appoint new members, and who those new members will be.

Learn more

TheElders.org/who-we-are

Facebook Oversight Board

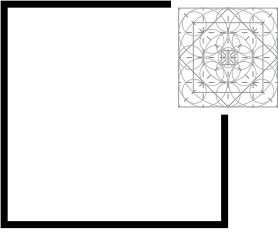
The Facebook Oversight Board is a body of twenty members that makes consequential content moderation decisions on the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram. It is the final arbiter of whether to allow or remove content that has been posted on those platforms, including account suspensions and bans.

Governance

The initial board members were chosen by Facebook in collaboration with consulting firms and executive search firms. Facebook interviewed nominees and selected four co-chairs for the board who then helped choose the remaining sixteen board members. Although anyone can be nominated to serve as a board member, Facebook and the board approve new board members.

Learn More

OversightBoard.com



Values

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- .
- .

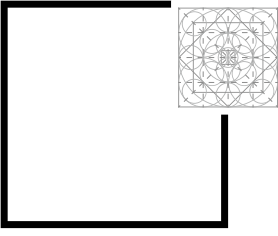
Membership

Structure

Process

Create your own at
CommunityRule.info/create





Values

- .
- .
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Membership

Structure

Process

Create your own at
CommunityRule.info/create



