THE PEOPLE'S CREATIVE TOOLKIT

1   TOOLS NOT RULES

Your story has to be told, and a lot of people have to listen. But how do you tell your story to get them to listen? And who is "them," anyway? These are questions we have to address with every important story, every labor campaign, every grassroots effort to change the way we work and live for the better. And the solutions are different every time. However, the creative and strategic tools offered here can help take those solutions from conversation to reality.

The creative power of arts and culture is a catalyst for action, and can ignite and sustain strategic activism over time. For nearly a decade, **Arts & Democracy Project** has been building the capacity of people fighting for justice to harness this power for their organizing and advocacy work. Arts & Democracy's ongoing collaboration with **Service Employees International Union** (SEIU) taps into the creative talents of SEIU members to build engagement and leadership, and integrates arts and cultural organizing into SEIU campaigns to great success.

SEIU Local 26 is one case of such success. As Minnesota's Property Services Union, SEIU Local 26 unites more than 5,000 janitors, security officers, and window cleaners in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. In 2011, organizers looked within their membership for people to help design and produce graphics for public demonstrations and upcoming campaigns. They built a relationship with **Rogue Citizen** (R/C), a small artist collective based in Minneapolis consisting of current and former Local 26 members. In 2012-13, R/C created a slogan, logo and original artwork for "Unlock Our Future," a campaign to support new Local 26 contract negotiations, advocate for **Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en Lucha** (CTUL), and provide foundation for a series of strikes by custodial workers. Importantly, "Unlock" also connected struggle in labor with the shared struggle for economic justice, safe communities, and environmental well-being.

Through a trial-and-error process, tense meetings and long hours, a diverse coalition of labor & community groups, visual artists, performers, and activists were able to employ a strong, consistent message and look that resonated widely in the metro area, online, in press, and on the streets. Banners, signs, posters, stickers, clothing, video segments, and online content all reinforced the message through one simple image and direct slogan. "Unlock Our Future" was not only a challenge to employers and policy makers, but a rallying cry for workers to take meaningful action on behalf of our families and communities.

The tools outlined in this toolkit are exactly that: tools that everyone can learn from, modify and use to unleash your imagination, amplify your narrative and help win your campaign. These are just a few lessons learned from one journey toward collective and community empowerment. You may never have handled a paintbrush before, nor written a phrase that's been published. But together, there are enough hands and voices to create the solutions we need to tell our stories to the world.

2   STRATEGY

The goals of your campaign might be evident to you and yours: fighting for higher wages, lobbying for policy change, transforming an entire system! But even with a shared understanding within your organizing circle, for you to achieve the change you want, the folks in power and the greater community need to understand the urgency of your story. They need to feel and comprehend the message as quickly as possible, whether it's on a hundred signs, a few seconds on the evening news, or on a social media feed.

So, the first thing you need to do is craft your message. Answer these questions when crafting your message:

- Who is your intended audience? Hint: "everyone" is not an answer, even though it might be the goal. Instead, think about: who are the specific individuals or groups of people you most need to reach and persuade to achieve your goal?

  For example: Perhaps your ultimate target, the person with the decision making power over the change you're looking for, is the CEO of a major retailer. If your strategy is to activate the customers of that retailer to boycott, then those consumers are your message audience. Perhaps your ultimate target is an elected policymaker. If your strategy is to organize that policymaker's constituency to pressure the policymaker, then those constituency members are your audience. **The Center for Story-Based Strategy's Influence Map** can help flesh out audience considerations:
  http://www.storybasedstrategy.org/uploads/4/5/4/4/45442925/4-css_influencemap.pdf

- Does the narrative you're crafting resonate with the base you are trying to rally? Is the community or labor base you are rallying fairly represented in the storytelling and images (including photos) being developed? Are the folks most impacted by an issue able to speak for themselves, as experts on their own lives?

- How does your message advocate for positive change (protagonist) and defend against oppression, fighting injustice (antagonist)? How will that be apparent in the language and images you use?

As the direction for your message starts taking shape, make sure you "do no harm." Consider:

● What parts of your proposed message could be manipulated or satirized by the opposing voice(s)?

● How might opposing voices exploit unintended connotations of an image?

● Is there any part of your message that might be throwing other allied communities under the bus? If it does, change it!

An example of a progressive message being co-opted is the supposedly environmental message of "Energy Independence." This message was crafted by large environmental organizations during the tail end of the George W. Bush years, who thought that this message would make acting on climate change more appealing to conservative voters and legislators. Turns out this message was very appealing to this group, but not at all for the reasons that green groups intended. Instead, the message reinforced military occupation in the Middle East (as well as Islamophobia), drilling for oil in Alaska, and increasing harmful natural gas extraction, called "fracking," across the country.

Your message can be presented in different tiers:

1. A main slogan, or motto, that sums up the spirit and direction of your campaign. This slogan does NOT need to include your entire message--and probably shouldn't! But your key message should definitely inform what your slogan should be. This messaging tier can be accompanied by a logo, and be reflected in social media pics, stickers, patches, signs, banners, and other materials. Popular examples include "¡Sí se puede!", "We Are the 99%," "Black Lives Matter," and "Unlock Our Future."

2. Slogan accompanied by a brief, two or three line summary of what you are advocating for, or fighting against. This summary can include all parts of your key message--what you are fighting for and what you're fighting against. This tier of messaging can be reflected in posters, fliers, and voices at a public assembly.

For example, this brief statement in an "Unlock Our Future" blog post echoing the phrases in the poster: http://www.seiu26.org/2012/12/06/unlock-our-future/

Or this "Unlock Our Future" social media image:

"We need to build good jobs in MN. We just want to support our families."

Minnesota Janitors & Security Officers have voted to authorize a strike. **Stand with us to unlock our future.**

3. Slogan and a complete explanation of your position, your goals and grievances, individual and group stories, citations and contact information. This tier is an expanded version of your key message, most likely reflected in press releases, editorials, open letters to elected and corporate officials, distributed pamphlets, mailings, and web posts.

For example, this "Unlock Our Future" blog post by **Minnesotans for a Fair Economy**, an SEIU Local 26 partner: http://www.mnfaireconomy.org/2013/02/unlock-minnesotas-future-february-week-of-action/

Or this 3-minute video showing excerpts of an "Unlock Our Future" press conference: https://youtu.be/goMp3lHzhfY

Keep these points in mind during initiatives to create related songs and music, video work, and live performance! This process forms the foundation for your communications, so take the time that you need to do it well.

Use all the resources at your disposal to build consensus in a group, craft language and select imagery, from Internet & library guides to contacts in your extended labor/activist network. Check out the resources listed in Section 7 at the end of this toolkit.

This worksheet created by **Center for Media Justice** is an especially good resource for crafting a message and strategy:

http://centerformediajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CMJ_Branding_and_Slogan_Worksheet-DRAFT.pdf

3   DESIGN

Visuals can seem very simple in the end, but the considerations going into visuals can be complex in the beginning. A typical street sign, for instance, seems basic and boring; but it has been carefully designed so that we notice the message right away, even at a distance from a moving vehicle. Just like that street sign, we need to communicate our key message very quickly.

So the main rules we'll emphasize here when designing imagery & text are: BOLD, SIMPLE, and EASY.

1. BOLD is another way of describing contrast, or the balance of dark space to light space.

Contrast is crucial in comprehending a statement or image from a distance. Does the design read easily when shrunken very small? Enlarged? High contrast images and lettering are often created by avoiding small, complex details and using only the most important shapes.

When selecting a font or creating hand-made lettering, this often means avoiding serif letters; that is, letters with tails, flourishes, and anything growing off the main form.

Flourish *tails* **serif**

Sans serif letters -- in widely accessible fonts like Helvetica, Arial, and Verdana -- are more direct, use space more efficiently, and are better for tracing, drawing and painting.

CLEAN **BOLD** sans serif

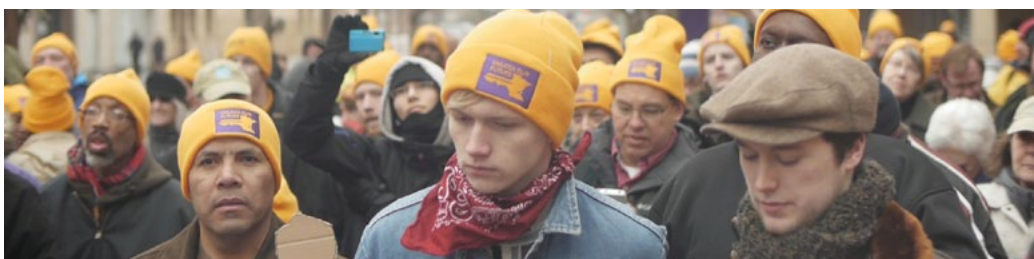**2. SIMPLE is about color and space.**

First, it is in your best interest to begin by creating your logo in black and white only, whether it includes text or not. Black and white is the most universal way to translate your logo into various forms and media, whether photocopied or painted, chalked or posted online. Don't worry about color until after the logo is designed.

Second, make sure that you design your logo so that it could easily fit within an invisible circle or square, so there aren't elements growing too far in any one direction. And yes, we mean square, not rectangle! Designing for a square or circle means the graphic will be much more applicable to nearly all online media, and will fit better in all kinds of printing scenarios.

Third, when you choose the colors for your graphic, you are also choosing, by extension, the colors of the visuals for the entire campaign. Simple also means consistent, and consistent means impactful.

A big challenge when a lot of people are involved in making and posting materials is to stay within the chosen color scheme. Keeping it simple from the beginning will help folks stay with the look throughout, reinforcing your impact and recognition value. Choose one or two colors to start with. The "Unlock Our Future" campaign had great success with a yellow and purple color scheme, with scores of SEIU Local 26 members and community partners turning out to events wearing branded hats. As mentioned in the Local 26 video included at **peoplestoolkit.com**, those hats became such an iconic symbol of the fight for economic justice that, to this day, corporations believe actions are brewing when they see groups of people wearing those hats.

As with language, there are different connotations for colors. For instance:

● Yellow may seem passive on its own, but when used with black it can be powerful, as with "caution" signage.

● Red, white & blue scheme has its own national, patriotic overtones in the U.S. This can be reinforced in your campaign, or subverted to make a political point.

● Red on its own can draw strong reactions, used to warn us of danger or sparking confrontation.

3. EASY is a little misleading. Maybe the most important aspect of your graphic is that it needs to easily transfer to different mediums.

For example: is your logo clear not only when used in a black-on-white format, but also used white-on-black?

Your logo should be available in a digital format that can be universally recognized for web uploads, printing, and more: saving or "exporting" as JPEG (high-quality) files are best, at 300dpi (dpi = dots per inch), which is standard resolution for printing. If your logo was created on a computer, this should be a cinch; if it's a hard copy graphic, use a scanner or high-quality digital camera to make a digital image.

You can do more if you have access to or some background in design software, or access to someone who does. Always remember that creative, talented people are working right alongside you—you may be surprised at the skill available in your own group.

Video tutorials: http://tv.adobe.com/videos/create-logo/

Adobe Illustrator tutorial: https://helpx.adobe.com/illustrator/how-to/design-logo.html

Adobe Photoshop tutorials: http://designscrazed.org/photoshop-logo-design-tutorials/

Other artwork, if needed, can come from a variety of sources. Again, give the creative people in your group, social circles, and extended network a chance to shine, not to mention other resources like professional and student artists who are occasionally eager to work for a good cause with a limited (or nonexistent) budget. Public libraries and Internet sources also have a wealth of images to borrow, copy or draw inspiration from.
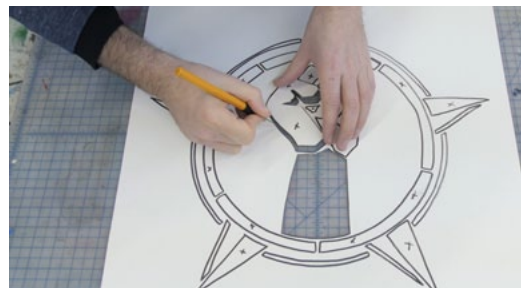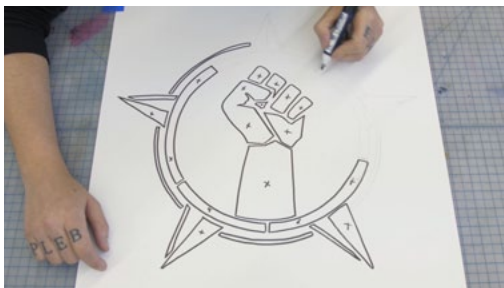
Please note copyrights: you could get in trouble if photos and illustrations are used outright with no permission. Use **search.creativecommons.org** to find image sources that you can modify, adapt, or build upon. If you are a labor or community group or other type of nonprofit entity, make sure to uncheck the "use for commercial purposes" box—you will get many more results from folks who are happy to share their work.

4 PRODUCTION

At this point you have a strong slogan and a powerful logo ready for your audience to see. These are a few ways to produce large-scale translations of that visual. Follow the tutorial videos at **peoplestoolkit.com.**

MAKING SIGNS: **The fastest and most cost-efficient way to make a lot of signs is to make stencils.**

- Allow time for some mistakes to be made, and always acquire more materials than you anticipate needing!
- Gather the materials that will end up being the signs: cardboard, white foamcore, perhaps recycled materials. Try to get similar sizes of sign materials.
- Plan what size the stenciled image should be to fit well on the signs.
- Obtain sheets of posterboard, clear acetate, or a similar sturdy but cuttable material to create your stencils in. Normal paper will not hold up for very long. Make sure the material is larger than the image you'll be cutting into it.
- Transferring imagery + text can be done a variety of ways.
  One is simply to draw it on the cutting surface by hand, using rulers if necessary, approximating as best you can. A more precise way is to print out the design to the desired size; if that is bigger than a normal office printer can do, go to the nearest print/copy center in your area.
- Print the design black & white on cheap, thin paper; use a light coat of spray adhesive or glue to stick it to the cutting surface.
- With a bright marker, trace the design by hand, drawing in "bridges" or connections that will be left after all the shapes are cut out, holding the design together without falling out.
- Cutting out the shapes you have established in the design can take time. Patience will be rewarded!
  The best knives to use are fresh, sharp utility blades, like OLFA or X-ACTO brands.
  A self-healing mat or wood panel should be underneath the cutting surface, to protect floors and tables and help keep your blades from dulling too quickly.

With a freshly cut stencil, use spray paint to transfer the design onto the sign surface.

• The quality of the spray paint will be reflected in the sign.
　　Higher-end (and more expensive) spray paint brands like Montana and Liquitex have
　　dense pigment and lower pressure cans.
• It is good to test the spray paint you have before using it.
• Once you are ready, place the stencil on the blank sign surface.
• Shake the spray paint can thoroughly to mix the pigment with propellant.
• Hold the can 8 to 12 inches away from the surface and spray a light coat over the cut stencil.
　　Make sure to keep it light. Spraying too close or for too long will result in dripping and bleeding
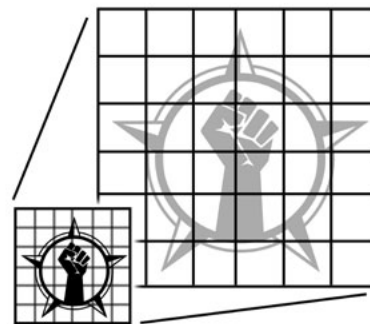　　of the design, not to mention a sign that will take longer to dry.

NOTE: Spray in well-ventilated areas ONLY. If possible, wear protective gloves and an organic filter mask, ie: 3M 6000 series, with replacement filters.

With any luck, one stencil can last dozens of sprays if not more, depending on the strength of the stencil material and type of paint. We recommend cutting multiple stencils of the same design.

MAKING A LARGE BANNER or mural can seem like a daunting task, but it doesn't have to be.

· Locate your working space—bigger than you think you need!
· Identify what you'll be making your banner out of. Various materials are suitable, although cloth (like a
      bedsheet) or canvas (from an art supply or fabric store) works well. Make sure your surface is
      factory-primed or otherwise ready to paint. String up a banner so it is flat against a wall. If the
      surface is not primed, apply a coat of acrylic gesso or interior acrylic-latex house paint and let dry.
· You can transfer your design to the larger surface in a few ways.

1. Old school overhead projector:
· Print or draw the design black/white onto a clear sheet of acetate, placed on the base of the projector.
· The light projects the image onto the surface. Adjust distance and focus until the image is at the desired size
      and location on the surface.
· Trace all the shapes with a pencil or marker, to be filled in with paint once complete.
· Acrylic or latex paint will dry in a reasonable amount of time and be resistant to weather.
      Various sized house painting brushes are fine.

2. Digital projector:
Similarly, a digital projector connected to a computer can project the image onto the surface.
There is more room with this method to fine-tune size and placement, as you're adjusting the projector's lens
and direction as well as how the design appears on the computer screen. As with the old school projector,
trace all the shapes with a pencil or marker, and fill those outlines in with paint once completed.

3. Grid the design.

   If light projection is not an option, a simple though time-consuming method is to use a grid.
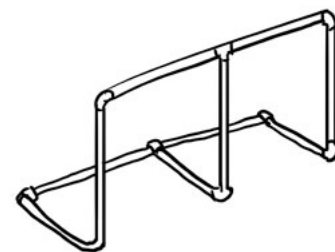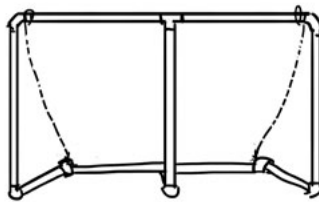
- First, on a paper copy of the design, use a ruler and pencil to draw a uniform grid over the image:
    perhaps lines at 1-inch intervals.
- On the painting surface, draw a corresponding grid on a much larger scale; perhaps lines at 12-inch intervals.
- Each square on the paper copy now correlates to a larger square on the painting surface.
    As best you can, draw the shapes in each square according to the design on the paper copy,
    until the entire design has been drawn out and is ready to paint.

After a banner has been painted, grommets can be hammered in at regular intervals along the edges to attach rope for hanging, or sticks can be attached to the sides if the banner is to be carried high over a crowd.

MAKING A FREE-STANDING FRAME with multiple purposes can be very useful for blocking part of a street or intersection, displaying the banner you've just produced, and providing a focal point for crowds and cameras alike.

1. Draw out a simple design that makes sense to you, and is easily assembled on the spot. The following illustrations provide an example; L-shaped sections of PVC pipe connected to form a upright structure, almost like a soccer goal.

2. Make a list of materials you will need. As mentioned previously, always acquire more than you think you will need! This scenario assumes there is a 5ft x 18ft banner with grommets prepared, and the goal is to block roughly two lanes of traffic:

- 15 PVC pipe sections, 6ft.
- 4 PVC pipe sections, 4ft.
- 20-30 5-way PVC connectors, several 2-way right-angle joints.
- 50ft nylon rope, and a package of plastic zip ties
- 4 weights, perhaps sandbags.

3. Create 4 right-angle elbows, each using a 6ft and a 4ft length connected by a 5-way connector, with a connector on the end of each length. Make sure that when assembled, these will fit inside a vehicle you might be using to transport to the target site. Identify which elbows will be on the outside of the structure.

4. Once unloaded at the site, connect all the elbows with the remaining 6ft lengths at all three points: top of the 6ft arm, elbow joint, and end of the 4ft, so that the resulting assembly stands 6ft high and 4ft deep, and about 18ft long. Lay weights on the lower section to keep it in place on the ground. One additional option is to secure lengths of nylon rope between the ends of each elbow, creating triangles that strengthen the assembled frame as it supports the banner.

5. Connect the banner to the structure with zip ties, or nylon rope as necessary, threaded through grommets installed in the corners and top side of the canvas, and around the PVC pipe frame.

In this scenario, it is important that all participants know what assembly is required ahead of time.
We recommend that this process be rehearsed a couple times before executing it in public, so it can go quickly when you need it to. There is no one way to design a free-standing structure like this, and you should experiment with different designs. As with other actions, local laws and police reaction differ from region to region.

5 APPLICATION

Promotion and documentation are two important aspects of the campaign once you have language and visuals in place, voices ready to be heard, and people in the street.

Promotion of your messages and events can take many forms:

- Press release, letters to the editor, mass emails, online posts, editorials, interviews with the press. Make the calls! **The Center for Media Justice** provides several great resources for working with the traditional media:

  > http://centerformediajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PitchingDosDonts.pdf
  > http://centerformediajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PitchRapWorksheet.pdf
  > http://centerformediajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/SpokespersonTipsHandout.pdf
  > http://centerformediajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PressReleaseTemplate.pdf

- Stickers and fliers, even targeted graffiti, adhered all over your city or target area. Remember, know the distinctions between public and private property. Be aware of the legal risks you may be taking!

- Social media, with the right coordination, can be very effective. Plan with as many participants as possible how to post, share, re-tweet, and "like" prepared content on various platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, tumblr, and others.

  > **Picture the Homeless** has a wonderfully sassy social media guide for organizers:
  > http://picturethehomeless.org/Documents/Presentations/Social_Media_for_Social_Justice.pdf

- Word of mouth, shaking hands! Sometimes there is no substitute for boots on the ground, rallying friends and peers, and where you're able to, contacting workers and residents who are new to the struggle.

Make sure that these methods are embedded in your larger media strategy, so that each action coordinates with others to emphasize and reinforce your message.

The Center for Media Justice provides a sample media plan here:

> http://centerformediajustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/SampleMediaPlan.pdf

Documentation is crucial for every grassroots campaign.

Use mobile phones at all levels of quality to record audio and video and take photos. Don't assume a professional photographer or media outlet is going to catch all the important moments in a public action!

witness.org has a simple mobile phone tip sheet and video guide available for free download:

> http://library.witness.org/product/filming-with-a-mobile-phone/
> http://library.witness.org/product/part-2-video-advocacy-guide/

Line Break Media created a PowerPoint presentation with some tips:

> https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B61QZUaTUxXTOXRIdG9IR25rbzg/

If you have a higher quality camera or audio recorder, take the time to master your tools. The device will not do the work for you.

Don't be shy about documenting the processes of building consensus, developing imagery, creating materials, or preparing for an action. These moments can be important for internal review, or assembling later for a video recap for the public.

As with design, utilize free or inexpensive software at your disposal, and don't hesitate to approach skilled people in your extended network who have experience editing video, audio, and photography.

Ultimately, there is no one rule for how you use the photos, footage, and materials amassed during a campaign; only that you save everything! Those signs and banners might come in handy again. Back up files online (Google Drive, yousendit, etc), on colleagues' computers, with flash drives, on external hard drives, or on CD-Rs. Many smartphones automatically back up video and photo files to a remote server.

Regardless of where you are taking action, many police units will not appreciate you filming them in public. However, as long as you are not secretly recording, it is completely legal in all 50 states. Even so, consider free or inexpensive apps like bambuser to broadcast and store video live from your phone, as well as monthly-rate options via sites like livestream.com and ustream.tv, so your footage is preserved even if your phone is confiscated or damaged.

6   CONCLUSION

The work of public messaging, graphic design, and storytelling cannot happen in a vacuum, resting on the shoulders of a couple organizers. In unions, member involvement is essential for generating consensus and illustrating stories that have impact. For any group trying to create meaningful change in their communities, including many voices early in the process is vital for "telling the truths that stand up next to the lies told about us."*

*Quoted from renowned artist and activist Ricardo Morales.

7   FURTHER RESOURCES

Check out Arts & Democracy Project online for a wide variety of arts and cultural organizing resources:
        http://artsanddemocracy.org/

· For overall messaging and story strategy: **Center for Story-Based Strategy Tools** and **Publications**

· For a range of strategy guides, media worksheets, and case studies: **Center for Media Justice Resources**

· For an older (published in 2002) comprehensive guidebook on communications strategy, check out
        SPIN Works! Please note that the sections on how to work with media are very outdated since they
        do not reflect our current online and social media landscape. However, the sections on messaging,
        how to be a good spokesperson, and others are timeless.

· For online training videos in earned and social media:
        New Organizing Institute Online Organizing Toolbox

· For a selection of presentations and guides on organizing and media: Picture the Homeless, scroll down to
        "Presentations" and "Training/Organizing Guides".

· For a comprehensive set of resources on documenting actions/events/etc with video--including with
        tools at hand like smartphones: **Witness Resources**

· **The Global Action Project** provides a great start-to-finish curriculum, from message to video basics.
        It is a youth-centered curriculum that also happens to be clear and excellent for people of any age.
        You will need to register with a name and email: http://global-action.org/curriculum

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is presented by

Arts & Democracy Project
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Rogue Citizen
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