



FAN ACTIVISM 101

FANDOM is a human instinct. For as long as people have been telling stories, we've been driven to share those stories with one another: through retelling, reimagining, and remixing. Fandom happens when media is consumed in community. You're probably picturing a convention floor, cosplayers, and release parties, but if we travel back in time we'll find oral stories passed down generation to generation: pub-goers demanding a favorite tale from the traveling bard, family stories that get more fantastical with each retelling, the fish bigger and bigger as the years go on. **When we love something, our instinct is to share it.**

As our world became more globally connected, fans with ideas considered "fringe" began to be able to connect – the popularity of imagining Captain Kirk and Spock in a romantic relationship (shipping, and in the case of a same-gender relationship, slash shipping) during Star Trek's original run is often cited as a beginning of modern fandom culture. Using systems of forwarding addresses and hand-assembled magazines, Kirk/Spock shippers – primarily women – distributed original stories, art, and analysis of the show through the mail.

Kirk/Spock fandom stands out not just because of the ingenuity involved or the fact that it remains a popular ship to this day, but because it represents a shift in core fandom culture: imagining Kirk and Spock together wasn't just retelling the story of Star Trek, **it was retelling it in a way that imagined how that world – how our world – could be.**



FAN ACTIVISM is the practice of organizing fans of pop culture for social change. It's a diverse community of practitioners with varying interests, fandoms, and approaches to the work, but a common vision unites the fan activism community: to make the world a more loving, equitable place for all.

In our favorite stories there's always a moment when it becomes clear that every person and every tool is needed if the fight is going to be won. As organizers across the globe work to push back a growing rise of fascism, division, and greed, we know fan activism has unique opportunities to build momentum in that work.

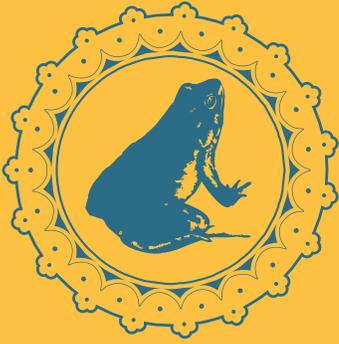
As they say in another iconic space opera, Star Wars: this is a rebellion, right? Let's rebel.

BUT... HOW?

There are five important things about fan activism to keep in mind from the outset...

1. A major pillar of fan activism is **capturing public imagination** and redirecting it towards social good, but that only works if the public is currently imagining it. So the time for a *Hunger Games* campaign was 2012, not now, however much you personally may still love Katniss.
2. Even still, popularity does not a good campaign make. **You need a**





strong connection to your source material -- talking about chocolate sourcing works for *Harry Potter*, but not for *Game of Thrones*. (How to ruin a narrative in 8 seasons, maybe.)

3. Speaking of disappointing creators, listen: at the end of the day we know that most of our favorite media is ultimately produced by corporate capitalist conglomerates with their own agendas. We may not always agree with the direction a piece takes, or how it gets made. **Our relationship status is often complicated.**

4. But stories like *Star Wars*, and *Marvel*, and *Star Trek* -- they have been **remixed, reimagined, and retold** so many times by now that they've become something beyond the original creators. These are the King Arthur stories of our time.
5. Fan activism is **grassroots organizing** -- you don't start a fan activism campaign trying to get Warner Brothers or Disney on board, you start by embracing the community of people that make the fandom what it is.

With those pillars in mind, how does fan activism actually happen?

Step 1: Find the fans! We don't exactly make it challenging. In order to work in partnership with fandom, and with respect, take the time to visit their spaces. Go to a convention, read some fanfiction, study up on the think pieces and reaction videos.

Step 2: Find your place in the story! Once you've learned about the fandom, you need to find where you are in this story. What about the current situation is connected with the story you're drawing from?

Step 3: Why should fans care? Once you have that connection, you remind fans why this is so important. Why did this part of the story make such an impact in the first place?

Step 4: Give them a battle plan! You have your story experts on board, and you are the organizing experts in the issue you're currently working on. Give the fans the battle plans! In this story you're the ringer here to give the heroes the insider info they need, together you're the disparate groups teaming up for the end battle.



BEST PRACTICES

Through intensive research-in-practice with our Fan Organizer Coalition, we've identified four established best practices in the

field. Across these many different strategies of fan organizing, there are a shared set of values and behaviors that fan organizers agree are central to the work. For fan organizers whose work is primarily oriented around creating pluralist communities within their fandom(s), these values are modeled by organizers and expected to be upheld by community members.

INTENTIONALITY	ACCOUNTABILITY	IMAGINATION	COMMUNITY CARE
Establish Community Agreements	Build Genuine Relationships	Remixing	Prioritize Accessibility
Take Action with Intention	Apologize Authentically	Claiming the Narrative	Activist Care
Create Thoughtfully	Problematic Faves	Embracing Playfulness	Open Access

If you're a movement organizer or just someone interested in learning more about how fan activism can be a tool in reaching your goals for social change, we'd love to hear from you! Fan organizers frequently collaborate with other movement organizers – you bring your expertise, we'll bring ours! If you're not sure who to reach out to first, Fandom Forward is happy to help get you to the right place: reach out to info@fandomforward.org.

Fandom Forward is an international 501c3 nonprofit that turns fans into heroes. We're harnessing the power of pop culture to make activism more accessible for everyone. Learn more about Fandom Forward: fandomforward.org