

FOR THE BIRDS
feminist collective + distro

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NEW MEMBER APPLICATION

Please note that For The Birds is inclusive of folks with a range of gender expression, though we are not currently open to male-identified community members in the interest of preserving a safer space.

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FOR THE BIRDS:

PROCESSING: For the Birds attempts to process internal and external group interactions on a weekly basis, as well as an extensive processing period after larger events, like The Big She-Bang. This is a crucial element of For the Birds as it allows for productive group discussion, direct communication, troubleshooting, and improvement. Processing is comprised of Check-ins, Check-outs, and a general commitment to discussing conflicts as they arise, guided by our processing questions (see “Check-Outs” section).

AT A FOR THE BIRDS MEETING:

CHECK-INS: At the beginning of every weekly meeting, each member checks in about anything she would like to share with the group, which usually includes her state of mind and current life-happenings, so that we are all better prepared to get down to Bird-ness for the rest of the meeting. Every Bird gets 2 minutes to check in, and we have a timekeeper to keep track, giving a hand signal at the one-minute and two-minute time intervals. In this time, no one responds to each other, as it is a sacred space for each Bird to be heard. Check-ins are meant to validate each Bird in her every day experience and allow her to feel the support of the Collective, promoting sustainable activism.

AGENDA ITEMS: Generally, we begin meetings by making a collective agenda that the facilitator uses to guide the meeting.

TASKS: We have two regular roles to be filled at every weekly meeting on a rotating basis:

- ▣ **FACILITATOR** - The facilitator assesses the agenda items and groups the items according to theme and then prioritizes them according to estimated time allotment (longest first).

➡ **NOTE-TAKER** - The note taker records who is in attendance at the meeting, the date, and the key points and details of the meeting. At the end of each set of meeting minutes, the note-taker should record the Task list, which is comprised of who has volunteered to take on each task that the collective has identified during the course of the meeting.

MEETING CLIMATE: Our meetings cover a lot of material, but are also full of laughter, bad bird puns, and support. We work on not using language and words that perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes of womyn. We are also committed to examining the race, ethnicity, class, gender presentation, and sexuality dynamics within our group and the larger climate in which we work. As we have all internalized negative patterns and attitudes, we see meetings as a time to practice communicating about differences within a safe and caring space so that we can all grow in our feminism.

We also attend to dynamics of who carries out which tasks and how often, having become aware that some of us must learn to step forward at times, while others must learn to step back. We try to make sure that work distribution is equitable and that everyone has a voice.

SAFE WORD: For the Birds employs a "safe word" to help us communicate in the moment about comments we find upsetting or triggering during a meeting. Often times, it's difficult to verbalize our responses to things and the safe word is a way to begin a dialogue. Safe word discussions can occur in the moment or can be tabled until the end of the meeting, during check-outs.

ALLY BIRDS: Ally Birds meets regularly to support women of color involved, directly or indirectly, with For The Birds. Comprised of the white members of For the Birds, we are committed to antiracism. Through readings and discussions, Ally Birds aims to examine and discuss our white privilege while also working to improve our collective and make it more comfortable and inclusive for women of all backgrounds.

CHECK-OUTS: At the end of every meeting, we do a go-around where every member discusses how she felt about the meeting. We like to keep these questions in mind while doing so:

FOR THE BIRDS' PROCESSING QUESTIONS*:

- Did anyone withdraw or feel isolated during the meeting?
- Is anyone arriving late or leaving early for reasons other than just being busy?
- How was the overall tone and atmosphere of the meeting?
- What did you learn?
- What worked well and why?

- What did not work, and how can we change it?
- What may have been overlooked or left out of the meeting?
- Did everyone adhere to the group's rules and principles during the meeting?

As mentioned above, this is also a time to discuss any conflicts that may have arisen and gotten tabled during the meeting.

* Note: We no longer use the processing questions to structure our check-outs at the end of meetings, but you can take a look at them to get an idea of the ground that we use check outs to cover. At this point we find it easier to be more open with each other without their formal structure.

MEETING TIME: We meet every Thursday at 8pm in Greenpoint, Brooklyn or Astoria, Queens and our meetings usually last around 2 hours.

INTER-MEETING COMMUNICATIONS: For the Birds communicates using a google group email list, and a shared gmail account. We use google documents to facilitate collective writing and access to meeting minutes, plans, and distro-tracking information. We also communicate by phone/text.

ACTIVITIES (WHAT WE DO):

▣ **Communications Coordinator (Bird on the Wire):** Every month a new member takes responsibility for mailing out distro items (only For the Birds original material) and checking the e-mail, Myspace, Facebook, and Twitter on a regular basis.

▣ **Planning Events:** Throughout the year, For the Birds strives to create spaces for feminist expression in the form music, art, readings, etc. Every August we hold our annual day long celebration known as The Big She-Bang (see below). We are also open to planning other events as the need may arise given our resources at the time. Events are planned collectively so that everyone can use their strengths. Each member must commit to an equal amount of tasks to keep participation balanced.

▣ **Workshops:** For the Birds has authored a workshop called "Queer Eye for the DIY" in which we present the notion that feminist practice should be in constant practice. In our workshop we examine how and why feminist activities in radical, queered communities seemingly disintegrated. Our dialogue will consist of the current state of feminism, the appeal of grass roots organizing, and the various alienating elements of both mainstream and alternative cultures. We also present tactics used by feminists in the past to interrupt oppression in our own strategies

and experiences aimed at further queering our community and the progress of feminism.

DISTRO:

➡ **Tabling:** We strive to table with our distro at least once a month. Birds that are available are expected to commit to bring, setting up, minding, and breaking down, and leaving with the distro at the end of the night.

➡ **Production and Upkeep:** The distro often needs to be inventoried and replenished. Zines need to be copied, folded, and stapled. For the Birds will reimburse all expenses used to make copies if you don't have access to free copies.

BLOGGING: Every week, a bird is scheduled to make a post on our blog on the website. Before posting on the website, the member must e-mail their content to the collective so that we know everyone is okay with it. The schedule can be found on our Google Calendar. If you would like to post during a week that is not your scheduled week, we think that's awesome, just follow the blog protocol by e-mail first.

COMPILATIONS: Every year at The Big She-Bang, For the Birds releases a compilation of music by women-identified artists and bands. These needs to be created, inventoried and restocked just like the rest of the distro. So far we have three For the Birds releases: FTB001 The Big She-Bang, FTB002 Gimme Cooties, FTB003 Best of the Nest. These are the only contents of our mail order.

THE BIG SHE-BANG: The Big She Bang is an all-day event of workshops, panel discussions, visual art, and music by and for women and women-identified artists & community members. The Big She-Bang strives to cultivate a space for women to share creative endeavors, exchange ideas, and provide support in a safe and open-minded environment. It is a multimedia event that serves as a platform for women artists and activists. This year's She-Bang festival will include workshops and panel discussions, live musical performances, an all-day art show and tabling by various feminist organizations from New York. The event is always all ages, and everyone is welcome.

After reading our guidelines and protocols, if you are still interested, please respond to our questions below so that we can get to know you a little better! If we think you are a good fit, we will invite you to attend 3 consecutive meetings so that you can get a feel for collective involvement and see our process in action. At the end of that trial period, we will all decide how we feel about you becoming a permanent Bird!

PLEASE SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE FOR THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Please respond to the following questions and e-mail your answers to forthebirdscollective@gmail.com

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Section I: Past Experience/Organizing

- What feminist/activist/artistic/political organizing have you been involved with in the past or are currently involved in?
 - A) Individual or collective work?
 - B) Small groups or large groups?
 - C) Have you worked with a consensus process before?
- How do you feel these experiences would contribute to For The Birds?

Section II: Your Feminisms

- What are some past experiences or personal qualities you bring with you that you feel would enrich and synergize with For the Birds?
- Tell us about a time in your life when you relied on feminism to help you cope, explain, or find meaning in a life situation. You don't have to share more than you are comfortable with, but we are interested in how the personal and political interact in your life.
- How would you describe YOUR feminism (whether through thought or action or both)?

Section III: Personal Politics

- What defines a "safe space" for you and what do you look for in positive/feminist friendly social spaces?
- Do you feel that certain words or phrases still used in the mainstream are not feminist and/or conducive to illuminating patriarchy? And if so, what?

Section IV: Flight Plan!

- What types of projects would you hope a feminist collective that you participate in would undertake? What groups might you think to collaborate with?
- What drew you to For the Birds (events we do, our distro, our mission statement, our web presence) and please elaborate on why you think you'd be a good fit based on this?

And last but not least, does our meeting time work for you? What is your availability?