

17 Ways You Can Work For Social Justice

by Nina Flores

Be present, question assumptions, and be loud! Social transformation starts with everyday people working for change.

If you're feeling inspired by the Supreme Court's historic same-sex marriage decision, then do your part to help build and sustain forward momentum toward justice for all. Legalizing same-sex marriage is a huge victory, but it is not the finish line of justice. Inequality takes many forms, and people are still waiting on their ability to live freely, safely, or, just to live.

1. Organize

Support community and issue-based organizations. Be part of front-end planning processes and not just the end-game celebrations. Help develop short-term and long-term strategies. Talk with activists and advocates to broaden and share understandings of equality and justice.

2. Show solidarity

Justice for all can't happen without building solidarity across issues, communities, and movements. For instance, justice for all means being in solidarity with undocumented trans women of color, the ongoing struggles of indigenous communities, and the actions and demands of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

3. Hone your allyship

We can all be stronger allies, more conscientious of the language we use, our privileges, how deeply we listen, the ways we offer our support, and our willingness to be vigilant and visible.

4. See the connections

Movements don't exist in a vacuum—examine how the struggles for racial, gender, economic, environmental and social justice intersect. Who is excluded when we ignore these intersections?

5. Take risks

For some the risk of speaking out or taking action presents serious safety concerns. However, if all that's at stake is mild discomfort, then what do you have to lose?

What stops you from speaking up, speaking back, or showing up?

6. Look closer at language

How are social issues and conceptions of justice constructed through language? What can you do to reframe how you talk about equality and what it means to seek justice? Be specific in your language. Are you critiquing systems that perpetuate anti-blackness? Then say anti-blackness. Are you applauding acts of resistance? Then be explicit in describing why the act was necessary.

7. Deepen your critiques

Take time to push beyond surface critiques. Look for unquestioned assumptions. Identify and resist dominant narratives. Take in some inspiration from bell hooks, Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Eduardo Galeano, the Combahee River Collective, Gloria Anzaldua, Paolo Freire, and more. Up your critical analysis game .

8. Get to know your communities

We are often part of multiple communities simultaneously. Think about your neighborhood, your city, your campus, or identity-based communities. Do you know one more than the other? What inequalities do you see? Keep exploring, dig deeper.

9. Asset mapping for action

Work with community members to map out community assets—meeting spaces, people, support groups, printing shops, independent businesses, local organizations, media, churches, social services, etc. Is your community working together? Around what issues? Who drives decision-making and who is left out of these decisions? Document progress, celebrate success, and evaluate strategies.

10. Presence matters I

Attend events, rallies, protests, vigils, workshops, book fairs, lectures, teach-ins and seminars. Make it a priority to show up when folks have taken the time and effort to organize events.

11. Presence matters II

Public space is no longer just in person—build your on-line action community, too. Use your social media platforms to pose questions or to critique the limited ways in which media frames equality and justice. Just because a follower doesn't engage doesn't mean they aren't reading. Challenge yourself to complete a cycle of #100DaysOfJustice—Day One: A Call to Action for Justice for All.

12. Run for office

Movement doesn't only happen on the ground. Election season is coming and we need more elected officials who are willing to take action on issues affecting equality such as gerrymandering, voter-identification laws, paid leave, employment discrimination and fair housing. Thinking about running? Check out Emily's List, Ready to Run, and the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund.

13. Pay attention to policy

Did you know the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013? The 2016 election will be the first presidential election in 50 years without full Voting Rights Act protections for voters. Visit the the Brennan Center for Justice to learn about voting rights and how many State legislators are making it more difficult to vote.

14. Share your story

Add your experiences, your voice to the public discourse. Is your story an example of everyday inequality that mainstream media ignores? Ready to provide a counter narrative? Start blogging or take a seminar with The OpEd Project.

15. Share your skills

Are you a copy editor? Are you a graphic designer? Are you bilingual? Are you familiar with web design? Share your skills with the community groups and organizations that help grow local and national movements.

16. Use your talents

Are you an artist, musician, writer, or photographer? How can you use your creativity and talents to inspire your community, build awareness, or help fuel movements? How can your work show new or critical versions of justice?

17. Stay loud. Every single day

Stay loud for the generations who came before you, and those who will come after. Stay loud and drown out the silence of indifference. Stay loud until we have justice for all, and then get louder.