

SAMPLE APPLICATION

Activist in Residence (AIR) Program Application

Donald Quixote

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Elf Labor Meeting

Project Title

AIR Project Proposal

Submit a proposal of no more than 3 pages in which you describe the project you would like to carry out. At a minimum, address the following topics:

- A. Need for the project: What is the situation that creates the need for your project? What social justice issue(s) will be addressed?
- B. Connection to past work of the Quixote Center: In what way does your project connect to historical work of the Quixote Center? If it does not connect directly, how does it connect to social justice organizing more generally.
- C. Methods and strategies: What will you do? Where will you do it? Who will be involved? Who will be affected?
- D. Goal or desired outcome: What will be different because of your work? How will you be able to measure the success of your project?

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Need for the Project

For too long, the working conditions of the elves at the North Pole have been ignored. While their supervisor, Santa Claus, is known the world around, they are anonymous cogs in the production machine of Christmas giving. Representatives of big business will point out the high prestige of the elf profession but they often overlook or omit important details of how compensation is handled at the North Pole.

First of all, while some see the opportunity accorded to elves to participate in the labor market in this unique way as an advantage, the fact of the matter is that they are practically obligated to do so. In no other profession is being an elf seen as anything other than a deficit. Moreover, non-elf applicants are not even seriously considered, although it would be hard to know this since the geographical remoteness of the North Pole makes it an inhospitable location for most applicants. While uniforms are provided at no cost, the monotony of the color scheme is maddening for some and serves no useful purpose other than to reinforce the stratification of the North Pole labor force. The cafeteria offers unlimited candy canes, hot chocolate, and marshmallows, but a steady diet of these foods has an unspeakably high glycemic index and fails to deliver even a modicum of the recommended daily intake of vitamins and minerals.

Moreover, while we all consider elf labor during December, the fact is that elves must work crushing 16-hour days all year long in order to meet their production quotas. There is no overtime pay nor any compensation beyond that necessary to pay for their basic needs, which include lodging, (inadequate) food, and the weekly cleaning price for the aforementioned uniforms. Because of the free market approach at the North Pole, which lies in international waters, organized labor has been unable to make any inroads. Elves have no retirement plan, employer-sponsored healthcare plan, or even time off.

Methods and Strategy

Because this problem is so large, I know I will only be able to take on a small part of the issue during the residency period. I propose to organize a meeting of elf leaders in early August 2019. I have been laying the groundwork for this meeting for some time. I made some connections within the elf community through social networking and several independent elf leaders have

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already approached me about this plan. I realize the risks to the elves involved are substantial, so I plan to keep the planning confidential and not to have any publicity until after the event is carried out.

In addition to working directly with the elf leaders, I plan to reach out to organizers from the Global Federation of Fantastic Workers Union. They have been done substantial research into the labor conditions of elves and have a demonstrated history of organizing with communities in campaigns including the Troll Mining Collective and Dragon Welders United.

The day to day work will involve outreach to the affected community of elves, meeting planning, and a great deal of logistical detail. I have carried out small meetings, including convening a weekend-long gathering of statewide leaders for *Magic: The Gathering*. But the logistics of organizing a meeting in the icy waters of the North Pole will require institutional support and mentoring. Specifically, I will need help with a conjuring spell to teleport the elves to a secret location (perhaps within the protection of a ring of mushrooms) as well as money to purchase modest refreshments of pizza, salad, bagels, cream cheese, and the like. Because of space limitations and also to allow for greater participation, the number of elves present will be restricted to 20 applicants. The purpose of the meeting will be to air grievances and to develop a “hit list” of labor conditions that can be improved in the short term and longer term, in order to guide the efforts of the international solidarity community.

Desired Outcome and Reporting

While elves already of course have voices and autonomy, the isolation and non-existent media market in the North Pole have meant that most citizens of the planet’s nations are unaware of their plight. The purpose of this meeting is to offer a safe forum for elf leaders to raise up their concerns with the goal of laying out some initial reform proposals to change their labor conditions. The success of this plan will be measured based on three criteria: 1) The meeting will take place on or before August 31, 2019; 2) At least 12 elf leaders will be present; 3) A working document of grievances and means of redress will be elaborated. The final report from this project will be provided to the Quixote Center by October 31, 2019 and will include the number and basic demographic information about attendees as well as the working document itself.

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Connection to the Work of the Quixote Center

While the Quixote Center has not, to the best of my knowledge, ever offered a program specifically focused on labor organizing, the themes of this work connect deeply to past work at the Center and to social justice organizing more generally. The desire to be present and to have my work guided by those in the vulnerable population of elves is consistent with work that has been done in earlier initiatives at the Center. My approach of convening a meeting is also consistent with techniques that have been used in a number of earlier campaigns and works to center the voices of those most affected by the labor conditions in the “Elves Workshop.” Because elven voices have been ignored and silenced for centuries, just listening and letting them set the agenda addresses questions of systemic injustice.