

The Activist Compass



Intro

The Activist Compass is a methodology developed by Milica Crkvenjakov to fill a dual purpose when working with activists:

1. **Put the learning and activities into context.** If you have many activities you want to do during a certain period, not having a common theme between them makes it harder for people to understand the purpose of the activities and retain the knowledge.
2. Help activists form a **clear sense of their motivations** and competencies within their activist work.

The Activist Compass was first created and introduced during the Activate Youth¹ Erasmus+ project, on the second Study Visit in Črmošnjice, Slovenia, hosted by the institute Moja Mavrica.

Author's note:

While the compass was developed to be a tool for activists, it can be adapted to other situations as well, with the same or different compass points. Please feel free to use and adapt the methodology for your needs in youth work and wider.

¹ Activate Youth is a long-term Erasmus+ KA2 – “Cooperation partnerships in youth” project between Olde Vechte Foundation (NL), Active Rainbow (LA), Global Cassero (IT), Roes Cooperativa (GR), Zavod Moja Mavrica (SL) and Rõuge Noortekeskus (EE)

The methodology:

The Activist Compass is meant to be a methodology that is used to unify a wide array of activities, but it also has activities of its own for opening and closing.

NOTE: This methodology is developed to be used over the course of 5 days, and that is how it will be described. Feel free to adapt it to your own time frame, whether that's covering it in fewer days or stretched out over a longer period.

Opening activity:

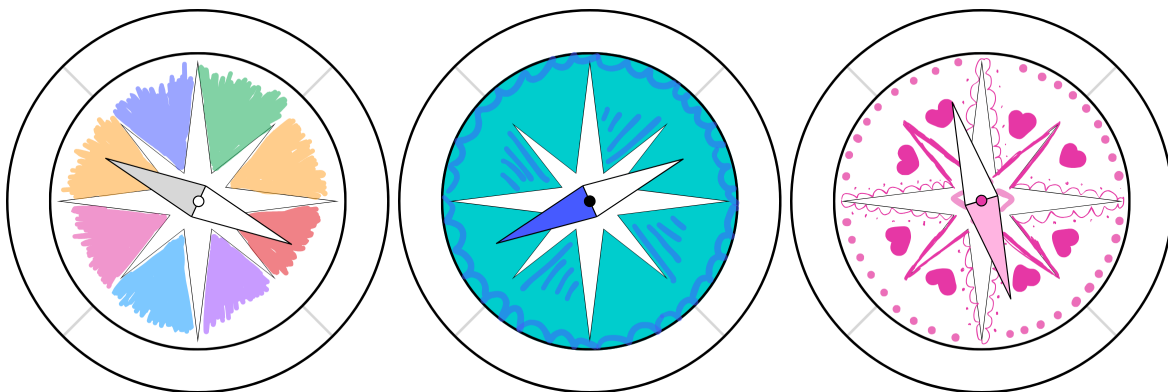
In the opening activity, we introduce the participants to The Compass. Each participant gets their own compass (a printable version can be found on the last page of this document), and we explain that each day we will be opening one of the compass points.

Participants are given creative materials and are instructed to decorate their compass however they wish, making sure to leave the outermost part of the compass empty, since that is where we will be writing the directions. The compass needle is attached by poking a hole through the centers of each piece and attaching them with a bit of rolled-up paper.

(NOTE: There can be additional context added to this. If you are working with younger people or children, you can deepen the context by saying you are explorers lost in the sea of activism, and you have to find your way by making a compass, or a similar story.)

Suggested time: 30 minutes

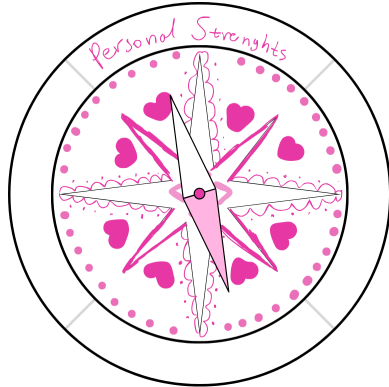
After the opening activity, you can have some reflections or activities with the participants to look at activism as a whole and their role in it.



Example of decorated compasses after the opening activity.

1. Personal Strengths

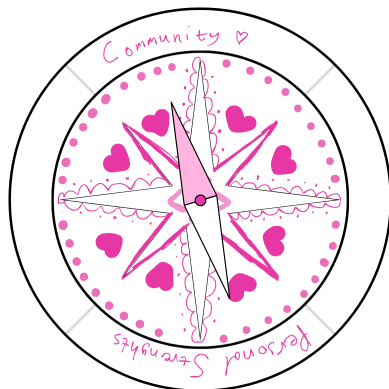
We start by telling the participants that the first direction is Personal Strengths, and they write this in one of the directions of the compass, or fill that space with illustrations inspired by it.



This is followed up by activities that allow the participants to reflect on their personal strengths, knowledge, and experiences.

2. Community

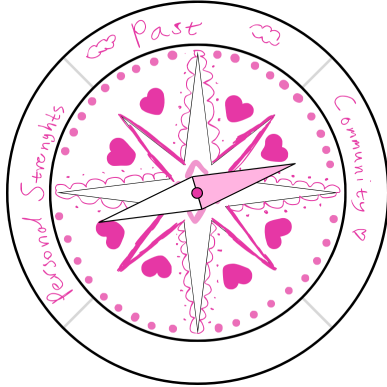
On the second day, we reveal the next direction, which is written opposite of the personal strengths - community. The participants fill in that part of their compass. We talk about how we can rely on our community in activism.



This is followed up by activities that allow the participants to explore community care, organizing, community building, teamwork, and similar concepts.

3. The Past

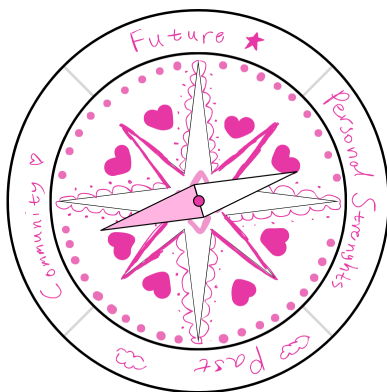
On the third day, we reveal the next direction, which is the past (written in any of the remaining spots on the compass). The participants fill in that part of the compass.



On this day, we focus on activities that allow us to reflect on the past (either our personal or collective past), the people and events that came before us, and focus on honoring and channeling them by what we do today. We also focus on how we remember the past and how we record it, how we keep archives, stories, and art, and how we must record what we do today because it will be the past at some point. This is a good day to focus on storytelling.

4. The Future

On the fourth day, we reveal the final direction of the compass - the Future. The participants fill in that part of the compass.



The activities of the day are focused on our drive, motivation and wishes for the future. We focus on imagining the world we want to build, we allow ourselves to really dream of the future we want, for ourselves and the world, and then the steps that are needed to get to that future.

Closing activities:

It is important to use the compasses that the participants created for a closing activity. Omitting this would give the participants the feeling that the compass itself is useless and will lessen the impact of the overall methodology.

There are several closing activities here that can be done on the fifth day, you may choose to do all of them, some of them, or make up new ones of your own, it is only important that some of them include the compasses that the participants made.

It is important that the activities don't put an accent on some of the directions as a "correct" choice, but show all of them as good variations and different ways to get to the desired ending.

Activity 1: Prompts

Stand in a wide area, and have everyone spread out. They can be facing different directions. Each participant holds in their hands their compass, with any direction pointing front. Explain to them that when prompted, they should move in the direction of any of the compass points, depending on what they would rely on in that situation. Play some soft music and start reading some prompts. These prompts should be specific situations, and they can/should be tailored to the group.

Example:

"It's late at night, and you can't sleep. You're nervous about the news that there will be issues at pride tomorrow." - The participants who would rely on their community slowly walk/step/dance in the direction which their compass shows as "community".

Don't take big breaks between the prompts, keep them going, and what you will get is a sort of dance, with all of the participants moving in all directions around each other.

Alternatively: Make the entire area a giant compass, and have the participants move together according to that, not their personal compasses.

Activity 2: Interactive story

You will need 4 additional co-facilitators/volunteers, each standing in one corner, clearly representing the different points.

You start reading a story, which is interactive. After every paragraph, there is a decision to be made, and it must be guided by one of the four directions of the compass. The participants each choose a direction and go to that facilitator, who reads them how the story would continue if the protagonist chose that direction. Each "branch" of the story ends up back at the same point, and they all reconvene in the middle where you continue the main storyline until the next branching, and everything repeats.

Activity 3: Improv

Ask the group to divide themselves into 4 smaller groups (not necessarily the same size), according to the direction they feel most attracted to personally. Introduce to them different methods of improv theatre (for example: “Change!”, “Time travel”, “One-word-at-a-time” and “Luckily/Unfortunately”²). Write the names of the games on pieces of paper.

Every round, each group picks a paper that determines the improv game they must use. Then you act as a *insert relevant character* seeking advice. Each group, one by one, must give you advice through the method of the improv game they picked and the perspective of the direction they chose at the start.

Activity 4: Storytelling

The setup is the same as for the first “Prompts” activity, but instead of reading individual prompts, you read out a story that is relevant to the group. While you are reading, the participants need to listen carefully and recognize when the protagonist (it is best if the story is written in the second person) is relying on one of the 4 directions, and when they do, they start moving in that direction. You can have multiple stories.

² 1. “Change!” - The group starts acting out a scene. The facilitator, every now and then, shouts “Change!” and when they do, the participants must change the last part they did/said to something else. Ex. If the participant last said “But I love her”, they must change it to “But I hate her”, “But I don’t know her” or anything else that is different from the original sentence.

2. “Time Travel” - The group starts acting out a scene. The facilitator, every now and then, shouts “Freeze” and then gives a point in time, ex. “Five years into the future”, “20 seconds ago”, and similar. The group continues the scene in that new timepoint.

3. “One word at a time” - The participants must speak by saying only one word at a time, and the next person in the group says the next word, and the next and so forth.

4. “Luckily/Unfortunately” - The first person says a sentence beginning with the word “Luckily,”, the next person continues the story, but must begin the sentence with “Unfortunately”, the third person again starts the next sentence with “Luckily” and it repeats until the end of the story.

A few closing words

Dear reader,

I created The Activist Compass as a tool to assist youth workers and facilitators bring context to the activities they do, and I would love it if it was used to spread good elsewhere. This is only the first version of the method, and if you have any questions, feedback, ideas, or simply want to share your experience of using the methodology, I would love to hear from you, and you can write to me at milica@kolektivmana.com.

Best,
Milica
(she/they)

