

Proposal to host an instance of the Mobilizon platform

This proposal comes from organizers of the anti-colonial abolitionist zine distro Sabordage. One of the intentions of that project is to bring our politics into social spaces where there are new people coming through and potentially being exposed to those ideas for the first time. As part of that kind of outward-facing focus, we want to be able to orient people towards opportunities for connecting further with movement activities that are open to new people getting involved. We believe it is a huge strategic problem for all of us that such opportunities are often limited and hard to find.

Sabordage will table flyers for a few upcoming events when they are available, but these are usually only for larger mobilizations and less often for smaller events. There is the Résistance Montréal website, which does a good job of sharing posts that can be automatically collected from websites (via RSS), as well as any additional events that can manually be added by the administrators of the project. However, RSS and manually collecting events is still only covering a fraction of the relevant events that are actually happening in our context. The unfortunate reality, which is the focus of this proposal, is that our broader movement spaces still rely heavily on facebook for promotion and mobilization of our socially-oriented events.

At this point everyone is very aware of the problems with facebook, so we won't list them here. It is easy to name all of the obvious reasons to not use this platform, but it is much harder to find alternatives to meet the real needs of organizers. [Mobilizon](#) is a decentralized, open source software tool for organizing events and groups. It was specifically designed to meet the needs of socially-oriented activist groups and networks and provide a practical alternative to dependence on facebook.

Over the past years it is clear that facebook is in decline, especially among younger people. It is rapidly being replaced by more algorithmically-targetted and addictive capitalist platforms such as instagram or tiktok. However, these new platforms are less directly useful than facebook as tools of activist infrastructure, especially for publicly-oriented events. This leftover usefulness of facebook explains its continued presence in our context, despite being increasingly less relevant for reaching younger networks.

Development of Mobilizon only started in a serious way in 2019, so it is just in the past year or so that it has become stable and ready for more widespread use. With facebook continuing to decline in both social reach and legitimacy, and Mobilizon just becoming ready as a viable alternative, now is the time to strike!

By hosting an instance of the Mobilizon platform for use in our region, we provide a path forward for our networks to move away from more than a decade of heavy dependence on facebook for organizing events. This will start as a marginal impact at first, used in smaller contexts, and perhaps in [parallel to facebook](#) for bigger mobilizations. Gradually, it can become more known and useful in broader movement spaces. All of this would be laying the groundwork for moments of heightened social struggle when it will be crucially important to be able to more broadly rely on social organizing infrastructure that is not completely controlled by capital and the state.

One of the the authors of this proposal is also involved in Kolektiva, a global anarchist internet-infrastructure project that is currently running two services: a PeerTube instance for video hosting at [kolektiva.media](#) and a Mastodon instance for twitter-like social media at [kolektiva.social](#). Based on that experience, we can imagine there being three main categories of tasks involved with this kind of project:

- **Moderation:** One of the major advantages of Mobilizon is that it allows groups to create and manage their own events directly, without the bottleneck of manual aggregation and posting by administrators. However, this user autonomy inherently makes it more necessary for administrators to do work to moderate the content on the instance. This can include drafting and updating a terms of use / code of conduct / basis of

unity kind of documents, and then using them to inform decisions about which uses of the platform are not supported, and how to deal with politically contentious behaviours/disputes when they inevitably arise.

- **Promotion:** a social tool becomes more useful when more people are using it, and so we have to put work into explaining why and how to use Mobilizon instead of facebook, supporting groups to get setup to use it, and working our way towards a cultural shift in which using our own autonomous infrastructure for our events has become the obvious thing to do.
- **Tech:** Mobilizon is a very lightweight web application, written in the Elixir programming language, and also relying on NodeJS and PostgreSQL. The tech tasks involved are the usual responsibilities of sysadmin work: setup of a Linux server, installing and configuring the Mobilizon software, and then keeping on top of routine maintenance, upgrades, backups, expansions, security, etc.

Both the moderation and promotion tasks very clearly benefit from coordination among many volunteers from various different locations, networks, and groups that are using the service. This is one of the important ways in which it would be beneficial for the hosting of a Mobilizon instance to be the project of a broader regional revolutionary organization.

The tech task is more specialized, so there are fewer people with the skills to do it well, and it can unfortunately be very easy for it to either fall on a single individual or be neglected completely after the initial setup work is done. It is also a task with higher degrees of trust and accountability involved - since Mobilizon is not end-to-end encrypted, someone with backend access to the server can in theory get access to all of the private communications passing through the instance. These factors should be taken into account when figuring out the composition of a tech team. It should probably have at least two individuals at a time who are formally given access to the backend of the server and are responsible for maintenance (with a set of potential replacements available if necessary).

Effectively and ethically navigating the inherent power dynamics involved in the management of this kind of shared movement infrastructure is a clear example of how it is important for this revolutionary organization to be inherently anti-authoritarian. Both in terms of its formal principals and basis of unity, and as a priority informing the design of our forms of organization. I'm sure we can all think of examples of what can go wrong when what is supposed to be broader movement infrastructure has control inadvertently centralized around a certain group or individuals that do not share an anti-authoritarian approach.

Mobilizon itself is designed with this kind of decentralized, anti-authoritarian approach in mind. Every instance can be federated with any other instances so there is no one central server that everyone depends on using. In practice, this also means that if this project were successful in spreading the use of Mobilizon in our region, then smaller autonomous instances can be easily setup in specific locations or contexts while still participating in the growing online network. Federation is also possible with a whole open source world of software using the same standard communications protocol (ActivityPub). This includes instances of PeerTube and Mastodon, such as those run by Kolektiva. For a much more detailed exploration of this kind of federated software and how it could be relevant to revolutionary politics, see [Fedizine: an anarchist introduction to federated social media](#).