

# Community Organizing Basics



Made By the Neighborhood Anarchist Collective  
in so-called Eugene Oregon.

[NeighborhoodAnarchists.org](http://NeighborhoodAnarchists.org)

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Activists, Organizers, and Leaders  
Community Organizing Principles  
Conversations with new or existing volunteers  
Convening meetings / teams

By the Neighborhood Anarchist Collective  
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This guide is part of a community organizing resource series:

- Organizing Basics
- Facilitation
- Convening Meetings / Teams
- How to Start a Successful Group
- Security Culture

Check them out at: [neighborhoodanarchists.org/organizing](http://neighborhoodanarchists.org/organizing)

1. Conveners don't need to facilitate meetings themselves but ensure there is a facilitator or ask who wants to facilitate at the beginning of the meeting.
2. It can often work well for the convener to facilitate the first couple meetings of a new team/group.
6. Ensure there are notes
  1. Similarly, a convener doesn't need to take notes, but ensures that someone is taking notes.
  2. A convener also ensures that the next steps and notes are sent out after the meeting.
7. Check in with people about tasks
  1. Depending on what the team wants, a convener can also send out reminders about tasks between meetings.

This may seem like a lot but remember that convening really is just scheduling meetings and telling people when/where it is. These details about how to do that are intended to help you along.

*Any questions? Additional ideas to include in this guide? Things that could be simpler? Other feedback? Please send them to: [guides@neighborhoodanarchists.org](mailto:guides@neighborhoodanarchists.org)*

2. When drafting the agenda it can be useful to lead with a short purpose statement so people understand the main goals of the meeting.
3. Basic outline:
  1. Check-ins
  2. Review agenda
  3. Review previous tasks
  4. [Agenda items]
  5. Review time of next meeting
  6. Debrief how the meeting went / appreciate each other
4. Invite people to add items to the agenda
3. Announcing meetings
  1. Once the meeting is scheduled, announce it in the appropriate communication system (email, etc)
  2. Include a draft agenda if possible and invite people to add agenda items
4. Meeting reminders
  1. Send a meeting reminder a couple days before the meeting and the day of the meeting
  2. 80% of organizing is reminders
  3. Include all the important information: Date, Time, Location, Agenda
  4. Make note if anything is different than normal (different location, different time, etc)
  5. Invite those who can't attend the meeting to send ideas/feedback via email or comments on the agenda document
5. Ensure there's a facilitator (See Facilitation Guide)

This guide aims to empower people to become effective organizers in their communities. Organizers bring people together and make it easier for people to take action and succeed. Organizers help people see how they can work together and make an impact. This happens at a group level (convening, facilitating, etc) and by supporting individuals to take on responsibilities and be more comfortable taking action for what they believe in. This guide provides information about over some of the basics of organizing: the fundamental principles and the specifics of the most common skills.

## **The Difference Between Activists, Organizers, and Leaders**

Though the terms “Activists”, “Organizers”, and “Leaders” are often used interchangeably there are important differences between each role. We define them as follows:

**Activists** are empowered to take action for things they believe in. They mostly do things themselves.

**Organizers** empower others to take action for things they believe in. They support groups of people to do things together.

**Leaders** present a vision and invite people to work together to create the vision. (No extra power, just an idea of where to go.)

A person could act in one or all of these roles at different times.

## Organizing Principles

An organizer makes it easier for other people to take action and succeed. The ultimate goal of an organizer is to empower other people to be organizers themselves. These are some fundamental principles that point how to do that:

- **Anyone can be an organizer** - No one is born an organizer. It's a set of skills that anyone can learn.
- **Organizers create clarity and certainty** - Make things as clear and specific as possible. Confusion and uncertainty lead to inaction and disengagement. People don't want to waste their energy.
- **Distribute work**
  - **Distribute work as evenly as you can** - Don't let a few people do everything (this means you). Empower others to contribute as much as possible!
  - **Roles not tasks** - Try to distribute entire roles/realms not just individual tasks. Gives

**Sometimes you need to decide** - Sometimes you won't hear from everyone or be able to reach a digital consensus quickly on when/where to meet. If time is running out, make the best decision you can based on the input you've received.

## Tasks of convening:

1. Scheduling / rescheduling meeting
  1. You can use scheduling tools like [whenisgood.net](http://whenisgood.net) or [doodle.com](http://doodle.com) to find times that work for a group of people (easier than a bunch of emails back and forth).
  2. Finding a regular day/time is ideal (like the 1st Wednesday of each month at 6pm). Using schedulers for every meeting can get tiring. Often the first meeting can be decided with a scheduler, then decide the regular time at that first meeting.
  3. A regular location is good so people know to always go to the same place.
  4. If a meeting needs to be rescheduled, it's best to figure that out as soon as possible. Last minute rescheduling is stressful and it's usually easier to cancel.
2. Draft Agenda
  1. Start a draft agenda as soon as possible on [cryptpad.fr](http://cryptpad.fr) or Google Docs.

Be sure to follow up afterward to thank them again, see how they're doing, and ask if they need any information or support.

## **Skill: Convening**

Organizers are often responsible for convening: making sure the team meetings happen and making it as easy as possible for people to attend the meeting and do the work of the team. This could be rotated to others as a way to distribute responsibilities.

*At its simplest convening is scheduling meetings and telling people when/where they are. The rest of this section is just details.*

## **Convening Principles**

**Clarity and Certainty** - The role of the convener is to create clarity and certainty:

Certainty that the meeting is going to happen (or not).  
Clarity about when/where the meeting is happening, what will be discussed, etc.

**Make questions simple** - Most convening happens digitally and providing too many options or asking too complicated questions digitally is very difficult. Open ended questions (like "When do we want to meet?") are harder to respond to. Keep questions about dates/times very clear and simple (This or that. Yes or no.) Save complicated questions for during the meeting.

people some autonomy and ability to make decisions. Much more empowering.

- **Set people up for success** - Make things specific, clear, enough instruction/background info, not too many options, etc. Make it easy for people to say 'Yes!'.
- **Passion not obligation** - Don't guilt/shame people into tasks. Follow passion and excitement. There are people that would love to do every task/role, we just need to find them.
- **Follow up** - We're all busy, and we sometimes need a reminder to actually follow through on our best intentions. Following up with people can feel like nagging but is true support.
- **Sometimes not everything needs to get done right away** - Be realistic about capacity. It's better to do less for longer rather than burn yourself or others out. Social change takes time and we're in it for the long haul.
- **Organizing is about relationships**
  - **An organizer is always building and maintaining relationships** - To organize with people, you need to know them: who they are, what they care about, what they are excited to do, etc. They also need to know you: That you are sincere, competent, and that you care about them.
  - **Meet people where they're at** - Some people are ready to jump in, some want to wait. People have different knowledge and skills. Listen to

them and respect where they're at. Encourage but don't push.

- **Check-in often** - Digital or in person check-ins are always helpful. Short or long, people appreciate feeling missed and being kept in the loop.
- **Reach out individually** - If you want people to respond to something or attend an event, contact them individually. Inviting a group is impersonal and isn't building the relationships.
- **Appreciation goes a long way** - People want to be seen and needed. As long as it's genuine, this almost can't be done too much.
- **Engage the heart** - Emotion more effectively motivates action than facts and figures.
- **Trust the people and they will become trustworthy** - People respond to trust. Others may do things differently than you and that's okay. *(Credit: adrienne maree brown in Emergent Strategy)*
- **People want you to succeed** - Everyone you're working with wants you to do well, because that means that they are also doing well. You're a team. You're on the same side. It's not a test or a competition.
- **Enjoy the work** - In a world full of drudgery and fear, we can bring playfulness and joy to social justice work. If we're miserable doing social justice then why would anyone else join us?

## **Skill: Conversations with New or Existing Volunteers or Group Members**

Conversations with new or existing volunteers or group members are vital to building relationships and distributing work. Some people find either easier than others. However anyone can have these conversations by following these steps:

### **TREAT**

**Think** - Think through what you want to talk with them about and prepare.

**Relationship** - Build a relationship. Ask them about their interests. Listen. Share about yourself.

**Explain** - Tell them about the role, organization, task, etc. that they could be involved in. Share the vision of what it would look like. What would they get to do? What impact would it have?

**Ask** - Ask them if they'd like to get involved with whatever the opportunity is. Don't leave it vague. Clarify any details or next steps.

**Thank** - Thank them (regardless of their answer) and acknowledge them for being courageous enough to talk with you. It shows how much they care.

This isn't a rigid order. Be flexible and jump between steps. Let the conversation flow naturally.