

— how to start a
**SUCCESSFUL
GROUP**



Made by the Neighborhood Anarchist Collective
occupied Kalapuya Ilihi land in so-called Eugene, Oregon

NEIGHBORHOODANARCHISTS.ORG

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by the Neighborhood Anarchist Collective

This guide is part of a community organizing resource series:

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

Check them out at: neighborhoodanarchists.org/organizing

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Conclusion

That’s it! The group is launched! Now it’s just a matter of doing what you set out to do.

Continue to adjust the structure to best fit the needs of the group. What you write at the beginning will be a good start but once real people start engaging with the group you’ll quickly see what works and what doesn’t. Ask for feedback, be flexible, and experiment with different ways of doing things.

Remember to always come back to the mission and purpose. We spent time on those early on so there is a strong foundation to come back to when making difficult decisions.

Enjoy!

If you have any questions about starting a group, or you want to share the accomplishments of a group started with help from this zine please contact us at guides@neighborhoodanarchists.org ! We’d love to hear from you!

Promote it as widely as you are comfortable. 20-30 people in attendance would be great. So that could be just friend connections, public flyers, etc.

Think about the goals of the kickoff. What do you want attendees to come away with?

Important aspects of the kickoff:

- Have as many different founders as possible present/facilitate different sections. It's a group effort.
- Thank people for coming and explain why you've started the group.
- Have people introduce themselves and share why they're interested in the group.
- Briefly explain the mission, purpose, and structure of the group.
- Have some time for brainstorming from everyone so that it's not just a one way presentation. Could be brainstorming first projects, or ideas for how to do something, or just general visioning for the group.
- Present clear next steps and easy ways for interested people to plug in and get involved.

Example Kickoff Agenda:

neighborhoodanarchists.org/group-examples

This guide is based on the experiences starting the Neighborhood Anarchist Collective in so-called Eugene, Oregon. neighborhoodanarchists.org

Intro

Starting a new group can be intimidating. But it is often the best thing to do if there are no groups that resonate with you nearby. It is a significant amount of work, but very rewarding.

It is a huge help if you can work with a few people on these steps. But this guide also works for an individual starting a group on their own.

Step 1 - Write a Vision

Imagine what the group might ideally look like after it's established and been around for a year. Write down a vision of what it is like. What do you love about it? What is the group working on? What attracts people to the group? What is the feeling people get when they're engaged in the group?

Really paint a picture with as much detail as you can. Focus on what it feels like more than the specific actions. Write it in the present tense so readers can experience it as something that is possible.

Spend a decent amount of time on the vision. Get feedback on it and revise it until it is super clear. This is the invitation you will send to others.

Example Vision: neighborhoodanarchists.org/group-examples
(Feel free to copy anything from this if you'd like. But it's best if you rewrite it in a way that it resonates for you.)

Step 2 - Invite people

Once the vision is complete, send it out to people and invite them to contact you if they're interested in creating a group that's similar to the vision. Also send it to people you know wouldn't be a good fit and ask them to send it to people they know who might be interested. This will help you find new people you don't know or maybe didn't think of.

If you don't know anyone in the area who might be interested it can be helpful to join similar groups so you can connect with people who might resonate with the vision (or might know people). You could start joining groups and meeting people while still writing the vision.

If all else fails make flyers with a simplified version of the vision and a link to the full vision and post them around town. Make a new email address for people to contact you so you don't post your personal email address publicly.

Examples mission and principles:

neighborhoodanarchists.org/principles

Example structure (with conflict resolution):

neighborhoodanarchists.org/structure

Example safer space and meeting norms:

neighborhoodanarchists.org/norms

Example security culture:

neighborhoodanarchists.org/nac-security-culture

(You're welcome to use anything in any document. However it's always best to reword it to align with what you're doing)

Step 5 - Public Kickoff

Once the group structure is complete it's time to publicly launch the group!

Beware that it can feel easier to stick with creating structure documents forever. They'll never be perfect. Plus, everything will change once you actually start using them with more people and seeing what works and what doesn't work. At a certain point you'll need to just call it good enough and choose a date for the kickoff.

This first meeting is important. It's the groups debut. It can be helpful to form a subgroup just to plan the kickoff (agenda, content, promotion, etc).

New people can join the group at this phase but make it clear to them that you're mostly working on writing documents, not doing much in the world yet.

Other documents to consider working on: Safer space norms, meeting norms, security culture, and/or conflict resolution process.

Structure: How decisions are made, who makes decisions about what, who meets when for what purpose, how things are internally organized, teams, projects, gatherings, assemblies, etc

Meeting norms: General practices for how you want meetings to go. Norms happen naturally/unconsciously in every group. By declaring them at the beginning you can help ensure they align with the mission and principles. It's also helpful for new people.

Safer space norms: General practices specifically to reduce oppression and support people to feel comfortable sharing and contributing.

Security Culture: A set of shared customs for a community whose members may be targeted that are designed to minimize risk, offset paranoia, and increase effectiveness and trust. Learn more at: neighborhoodanarchists.org/security-culture/

Conflict Resolution: Conflict is inevitable in any group. Developing a process for how to resolve it from the beginning will make conflict less disruptive.

Step 3 - Organize a first meeting

Once you've heard back from some people who are interested in the vision, it's time to start a first meeting. Ideally there'd be 5-10 people at this phase.

The purpose of this meeting is to see who is excited to do the work of developing the group with you.

Find a space, schedule a meeting when people can attend, create an agenda and send it out, and send out a meeting reminder. Learn more about convening: neighborhoodanarchists.org/convening

Main elements:

1. Welcome them and share why you're doing this.
2. Give time for everyone to introduce themselves and share why they're interested in this group.
3. Visioning brainstorm - Invite people to share ideas for what they're looking for in a group. Both what the group is like and what the group will do in the world.
4. Gauge commitment - Explain that you're looking for people to do the work of creating the group: Writing a mission, principles, structure, etc. Ask who is interested in doing that and make it clear that it's totally fine if they're not interested in that aspect (they can always join later once the structure stuff is done). Hopefully 3-8 people agree to work on creating the group.
5. Plan next steps for the next meetings.

After this meeting never mention or reference the vision you wrote again. That was just the invitation. From here out you are

all the equal co-founders of the group. They are not implementing your vision, they're creating a group they want to see in the world. It's important that everyone feel connected to creating the group together.

Example First Agenda:

neighborhoodanarchists.org/group-examples

Step 4 - Develop group structure

Start meeting regularly (ideally weekly) with the co-founders. Remember you are all equals so you're not necessary guiding this process anymore at this point. You're working it out together and people may prefer different ways of doing things. These are some suggestions for you to propose.

Start by setting meeting norms for how you work together and develop plans for how you'll write the mission, principles, structure, norms, name, etc.

This basic process works well:

1. Invite people to individually think about or work on something for the next meeting (like a draft of mission statement.)
2. Then share the individual ideas and brainstorm more ideas at the meeting.

3. Form a subgroup (2-3 people) to take the ideas a make a first draft. (It's really hard and takes a long time to write something as a full group. It's much easier in a small group.)
4. Bring the draft to the full group for feedback.
5. Revise based on the feedback (either an individual or back to the subgroup for the next draft.)
6. Repeat steps 4-5 as needed (Or maybe jump back to an earlier step if it doesn't seem like you're reaching a satisfying final version.)

Finalize the mission and principles first then start on the structure, norms, name, etc. You want everything to stem from the mission and principles. Continually reference back to them. A solid mission and principles are the foundation of the group. It will help people self-select themselves into or out of the group so you're all on the same page, and they are things you can align with instead of personal preferences when making decisions (especially difficult decisions).

The goal of this phase is to write the structure documents, but it's also a time for this group of people to get to know each other and really work out what the group is going to be about. This will be the core of the group for a time and will hold the vision for new people.