

Organizing is a set of skills anyone can learn, and the more people who learn them, the stronger our communities become.

This guide aims to empower people to feel more confident organizing so they can bring people together and take collective action.



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

NeighborhoodAnarchists.org

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COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

the BASICS



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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6. Ensure there's a facilitator (See the NAC Facilitation Guide for more)
 1. Conveners don't need to facilitate meetings themselves. Conveners need to 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.
7. 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.
 3. It often works well for the notes to be in the same document as the agenda, so it's easy to find.
8. 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

3. Basic outline:
 1. Check ins
 2. Review agenda
 3. Review previous tasks
 4. [Agenda items]
 5. Review time of next meeting
 6. Process review / Appreciations
4. Put the agenda doc link in the Signal group description so it's easy for everyone to find.
5. (You do not always have to have a written agenda, but it is a good practice. Sometimes just having some a basic idea of what you'll be talking about is good enough.)
4. Announcing meetings
 1. Once the meeting is scheduled, announce it in the appropriate communication system (Signal, email, etc)
 2. Include a draft agenda if possible and invite people to add agenda items
5. 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

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 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. This gives 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.

2. If not everyone responds, you may have to send a reminder. If some people still haven't replied, you can try @ tagging people. And then choose the best time for the people that replied and ask if that works.
 3. Finding a regular day/time is ideal (like the 1st Wednesday of each month at 6pm). Going through the scheduling process 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.
 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. Meeting Location
 1. Will the meeting be in-person only, all online, or hybrid in-person and online? There are advantages and disadvantages to each in terms of accessibility, meeting flow, attendance, and tech/setup. Online or hybrid meetings make it easier for a lot of people to attend.
 2. Ask the team what would work best for them. If most people are going to be online, it's often better for the meeting flow to be all online instead of hybrid.
 3. For in-person meetings, having a regular location is good so people know to always go to the same place.
 3. Draft Agenda
 1. Start a draft agenda as soon as possible on cryptpad.fr or pad.riseup.net, then the group can add to it as you think of things.
 2. It can be useful to lead with a short purpose statement so people understand the main goals of the meeting.

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.

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. Signal polls or posting dates in the chat and asking people to thumbs up down is often the easiest if there are only a few options. If the date/time is really wide open, scheduling tools like when2meet.com or whenisgood.net can be helpful.

- **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.

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.