

How to organize a

LOCAL EMERGENCY ACTION & RESPONSE NETWORK

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca
Delaware

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INTRO How can we build power in our communities? How can we protect our neighbors and loved ones against hate, discrimination, and oppression? What will be left if the massive protests subside? This quick guide will help you begin to answer these questions, drawing on examples of a successful model I started in the Philadelphia suburbs. We are now initiating similar groups in Delaware.



This model is focused on creating a collection of “ordinary people” who can respond to bias-motivated incidents in their community (or policies more broadly). The goal is also to proactively *prevent* bias and discrimination by building across race, religion, sexuality, and other identifiers. Please send me any questions, comments, or **requests for help starting your network** at rcotto@ywcade.org.

This is a project of **building people-power**, no matter which major political party is in office. We have the power to create great change when our community is organized. Some of that change can be made *on our own*, and some of it will be through pressure on government and businesses.

CRUCIAL PRINCIPLES FOR ORGANIZING

Reforms and Long-term Structural Transformation – Ideally, organizing focuses on things you can *actually win* through individual campaigns (many concerted actions towards one winnable goal), but *also* envisions broader structural change as a longer-term vision. For example, organizers in the Civil Rights Movement worked on campaigns to desegregate specific *businesses*, but had a longer term vision of *legal equality between all races*.

Unity in Action / United Front – A group like this will bring together like-minded people, but not everyone will have the same world view. This is not necessarily the place for a totally unified, shared political platform, but instead working together based on some basic common goals: “we will defend any member of our community from discrimination or hate; we will come together to help rebuild and repair after any damage done; regardless of who is attacked, we will all respond as though it was ‘my family’ being attacked,” etc. This is truly based on solidarity.

Solidarity – An injury to one of us is an injury to all.

Solidarity

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“If you have come here to help me then you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together.”- Australian Aboriginal quote

Structure and democratic Participation – To be most effective in meetings, at actions, and in campaigns, structure is necessary. To make sure everyone is on board and accountable, everyone should have a voice/vote. No one needs to be an “expert” to initiate something like this. We all learn important political lessons by and through organizing. We will make mistakes, and that is how we learn. After the first meeting, it is important to spread the work among as many people as possible.

Balance – of *action* and *planning*, of being on the streets and building the necessary infrastructure and leadership to keep the movement going when spontaneous actions have subsided.

STEP 1: THE CONCEPT, A SPACE, & A DATE

The first step in creating an emergency response network is to come up with an idea of your “mission” that is simple, and advertise with that. Here is an example:

We want to fight back by being an action-oriented response network of people who support those who have been harmed by acts of hate in [*your location*]. We will build bridges between our communities, and we will respond to any acts of hate or bias with compassion and support.

And another:

A network to proactively show love and support to area religious/racial/ethnic/sexual minorities who may feel marginalized, and to respond to any acts of violence or vandalism with protests and resources to help rebuild and repair any damage done, on an ongoing basis; To hold meetings to share resources and build connections between groups.

It may be just you, or a handful of friends calling the first meeting. Nothing has to be perfect (it won't be). Just get something together that's “good enough” as a working concept, then you will discuss it and hone it with your group at the first meeting.

Find a free or cheap space at least 1-2 weeks in advance. Libraries, unions, faith institutions are good possibilities. We had a huge turnout of about 50 to our first meeting (we don't often see crowds that big in the unorganized suburbs), so make sure you have a decent space. Schedule it on a weekend or evening. Make it kid-friendly with coloring books, paper, and markers/crayons.



STEP 2: ADVERTISING & PUBLICITY PARTNERS

Advertise: Use print fliers, social media, email, and word of mouth to get people in the door of the first meeting! Put the working mission statement/concept on a flier with *who, what, when, where, why, how*. If you want, insert a nice *picture* on the flier that portrays what you're trying to do. It doesn't have to be pretty though. You can save the doc as a pdf to send via email, or as a photo in jpg or png to post to social media. **Print it and hang it in local coffee shops, libraries, on telephone poles, etc.** Don't *just* rely on digital. But also post the flier to Twitter or Facebook, etc., among your own network, or create a special Facebook event with all the same info, and/or create a facebook page

for your group (you can always go back in later and change the name/description if people want to after your meeting). See example of facebook.com/LEARNetwork. Post the flier to other facebook pages or social media accounts that represent the kind of people you'd like to come to the first meeting.

STEP 3: THE FIRST MEETING

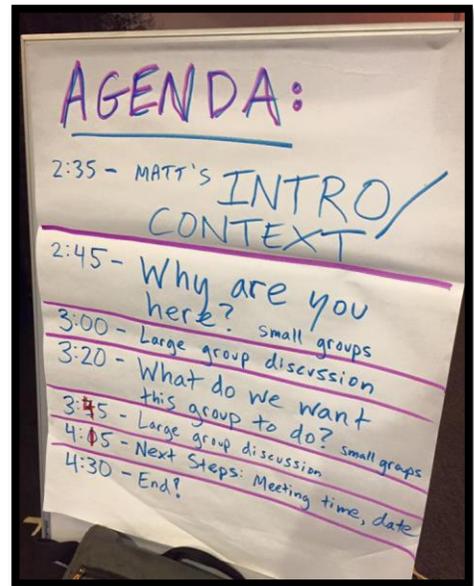
- No matter who comes, **work with who you have. You can grow from there.**¹
- Pass around a **signup sheet** with name, contact info, and a place for people to make notes.
- Create **an agenda**, a list of what will be discussed at the meeting. Here's a suggestion for your first agenda:



- (1) **Introduction:** Explain who the organizers of the meeting are, why you called it. Explain the agenda, then move on.
(Someone will always want to go around and have everyone introduce themselves—don't do this if it's a huge group! It will take up all your time, there's time for intros later.)

- (2) **Why are you here? What do you hope to get from this meeting?**

- Small group discussion for 10-15 minutes:**
Instruct the meeting to break into small groups of 5-10 people to discuss this question. (If there's under 15-20 people at the entire meeting then you could just discuss as a whole.)
- Report back from small groups, then wider group discussion.**
 - Have each group give a summary of what was said in their small group, then allow some time for more big group discussion. Here the facilitator or a note taker may want to write key words and phrases on the board at the front of the room for all to see.



- (3) **What types of actions could an emergency action network do to support those fearful right now?**² **What type of skills/resources do you have to contribute to this effort?**

- Small group discussion for 10-15 minutes.
- Report back from small groups, then wider group discussion.

- (4) **When will we meet next? & Pass the hat** for donations for the space if necessary.

- Plan to **arrive early** to set up. Get help from a couple friends.
- **Set chairs up** however you want (people will probably change them anyway!).

¹ For example, our first meetings were mostly white, Christian & Jewish people. In one sense we were disappointed we didn't have a totally diverse multi-racial/multi-cultural group, but at the same time we were happy that white people were showing up to defend our brothers and sisters under attack, and we know that building an inclusive group takes work and time to build relationships.

² See some ideas on p5 under Actions Subgroup.

- **Put a flier on the door** of your meeting space so people know it's the right place.
- Have **extra pads of paper and pens** available for people.
- Bring a **large note pad or white board** and easel: The facilitator or an assistant can write down things that people say in the meeting on a large board or paper. (This can help if you want to send out notes later. Or have an official “note taker” friend.)
- **Rules for Meeting:** When running the meeting, consider using some version of these rules:³
 - **FACILITATOR:** One person (you) runs the meeting and has the power to call on people, cut people off, move on to the next topic, or add a new topic— all in the interest of getting done as much as possible in a limited time period. It can be very chaotic if the person running the meeting doesn't take charge.
 - **RAISE HANDS & CUT PEOPLE OFF:** Ask people to raise their hands and you'll call on them. It's ok to cut off people if they are running on (“In the interest of time and hearing from as many people as possible I'd like to see if anyone else has anything to say...”).
 - **FOLLOW THE AGENDA:** Keep people on track. If someone brings something up that will be discussed later, tell them to hold that thought until you hit that agenda item.
 - **VOTING:** This is a democracy! You want people to become productive members of this group, and you want them to *own* any outcome of the meeting. Make sure big proposals are clear, brought in front of the group and discussed, then voted on.
 - Discussion and voting is a way to move through disagreements, understand where everyone is coming from, and get things accomplished even when not everyone has the same point of view. As a suggestion, a simple *majority* (over 50% of the room) is often the easiest and the best form of voting in organizing. (This is opposed to *consensus*, where everyone must agree, or supermajority like 70%, which often means a minority of people can prevent the group from doing something). When people have discussed thoroughly, say “Let's vote—all in favor of this idea raise your hand. Anyone opposed raise your hand.” Then it's clear.
 - *Skip introductions* if it's a large group (it will take up half the meeting).



WHAT TO GET DONE

You will not get everything done in one or two meetings. This is not an overnight process but a long, long journey. Not everyone will be on board. Some people will drop in and out. Therefore, establishing a simple foundation at the first meeting is the first goal. Come out of the first meeting with an agreement on a working mission, some actions ideas, a way to stay in touch in between meetings (even if it's just a mass email Ccing everyone), and a date for a second meeting. People will feel good just getting together, expressing themselves, and getting a few concrete things accomplished.



ONGOING MEETINGS

People will be pulled in many directions—especially between being physically present at protest actions versus sitting in a room talking and planning. The point of networks like this is to have balance, and establish connections and structure enough to keep going even after massive protests subside. It is

³ This is loosely based on *Robert's Rules of Order*, which is an extensive rulebook that big democratic institutions use to run meetings.

important that people volunteer to do things, and work should be spread out among as many people as possible. Write who volunteers in the meeting notes, to hold people accountable.

Ongoing meetings can be run similarly to the first. Plan an agenda, facilitator, note-taker, and meeting space beforehand. Continue advertising as you see fit. New people will come to meetings and bring up issues already discussed (for example, wanting to change the mission). When possible give a brief summary of how the group handled that issue and already decided the question, then move on to business at hand. Don't let it derail the work already done. If there is a majority of people who want to revisit the topic and make a different decision, then in that case you can open the question up again.

STRUCTURE OF THE GROUP

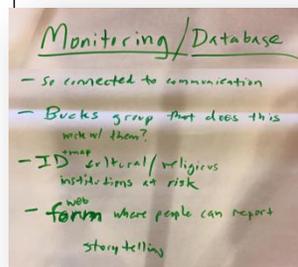
Your network may decide to break down into sub-groups, where people can choose to focus on specific topics. In these smaller groups, and outside of the main meeting, people can brainstorm and plan specific logistics, then bring back a proposal/idea to the entire network for approval in larger meetings. Here's an example of how our first local group broke down into the following subgroups:

ACTIONS subgroup –

Plan protests or vigils against any vandalism or violence (include confirming them as true incidents, also only showing up only if victim *wants us there*); Multi-cultural potluck to bring together people of multiple faiths, races, identities to share their food and cultures, have 10 minutes to discuss each, also have 10-min breaks with trainings on how to interrupt/de-escalate attacks; Work up to a *Stand Against Racism* event focused on speaking out against Islamophobia. (standagainstracism.org)

MONITORING / DATABASE subgroup

– Mapping some of the cultural and religious institutions that may be at risk in the area, will help to determine network's geographic reach; Mapping resources and existing groups that may be useful to our network; Create a venue/forum for people to tell their story of being targeted, if they want to, Collect stories.



COMMUNICATIONS subgroup –

Branding / logo / signs / cards; Marketing, press releases (when ready); **a priority will be reaching out to groups that may be at risk. This will require face-to-face meetings, making clear "I come in peace, in solidarity. We want to see how our group could build a relationship with your [mosque, etc.] and support you in this time."** Set up groups.google.com for internal email list organizing, Make public email announcement list; Facebook page; business card.

EDUCATION subgroup –

internal for members of the network and *external* to wider community; Workshops & Trainings on Non-violent protest, Interrupting and De-escalating attacks, using Technology, Political education; Tapping into talent and skills of all members of the network, and their other organizational affiliations; Film showings; Small listening/therapeutic sessions for people who are scared/victimized, utilizing social workers in group.



SOMETHING NEW, NOT DOUBLING EFFORTS

Look around to see if someone else is already doing this. You may find that many people have talked about starting such a group and would support one, but nobody has taken the lead to do it. Other groups are popping up like "Indivisible," "Showing Up for Racial Justice," Women's March groups, or study groups. These or other community groups may be good partners and overlap on some advocacy/education, but are not necessarily replacements for a grassroots response network like this.



As you’re deciding the kind of activities your network will do, it’s important not to recreate the wheel. If there are existing groups already focused on collecting data on local acts of discrimination, just partner with or use them. Find out the unique space you can organize within, and partner with existing groups to make all your work stronger. For example, one of our local groups decided to use an

existing “lawn sign campaign” that was very popular locally, “Hate Has No Home Here,” instead of making our own. We helped build and distribute their sign campaign and orders, and through that we are able to gain publicity for our organizing network. We are also finding the houses that proudly display these signs as a way to identify potential new organizers to join our group—so we will drop fliers for our meeting into their mailboxes, and use that to grow our network.



There are a variety of ways to build an emergency response network. Use these suggestions as you see fit to get you moving. The important thing is to start organizing!

SUPPORT FROM YWCA DELAWARE



YWCA Delaware is committed to helping networks like this launch in communities across Delaware and across the U.S. I am available to consult with you and help you brainstorm ideas for moving forward through this process. Please contact me if you would like virtual assistance setting up your own network.

In solidarity,

Matt Pillischer

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If you found this guide useful, please consider making a donation to the **Racial Justice Program** of YWCA Delaware at: www.ywcade.org/SupportOurPrograms