



NONVIOLENCE TRAINING

NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION PREPARATION AGENDA

This training agenda is to prepare people who are considering engaging in nonviolent direct action. It is also helpful for people who want to participate in nonviolent actions but not risk arrest.

The Agenda includes:

- ✓ Exploring what is meant by *nonviolent direct action (NVDA)*
- ✓ An overview of the scenarios and the action structure
- ✓ Understanding your rights and the potential consequences of nonviolent direct action, including the arrest process.

While this agenda can be done in as little as 4 hours, it is written in the hopes people will commit to the longer option of 5 hours or more. Even though people often request short trainings, it is extremely difficult to prepare for nonviolent direct action in less than 4 hour, and that assumes participants will get some of the information they need before or after the training. **To practice nonviolence in an action it is wise to *practice nonviolence in a training.***

Assumptions of this Agenda

This agenda assumes the participants are familiar with the issues being addressed by action. The trainers need to work with the organizers to determine if more time should be spent on developing the scenario, understanding the action structure and group process as well as the legal situation. If people are unfamiliar with the action structure and decision-making process or the legal system, it takes time to understand it and consider options.

There are many misunderstandings about nonviolent action. Nonviolence is a strategy for survival. But wanting an action to be nonviolent isn't enough. A nonviolent action does not mean a passive action. Nor is it just being "peaceful" as the authorities warn us to be. A nonviolent action can be an angry action, because we are angry at injustice.

The purpose of actions are to call out the system, not engage in dehumanization of the police or others. We need to be prepared to de-escalate situations when needed. What kind of disturbances might arise because of the actions of our opponents, the police, provocateurs or even those acting with us?

Everyone participating in the action should have an understanding of how to maintain nonviolence during the action. Structures and strategies should be in place to deal with violence should it occur. This might include affinity groups (see *Action Structure* section) and legal observers (see *Legal Process* section).

This agenda does not have a separate section on oppression. Trainers should raise awareness throughout the training of how oppressive behavior – on the part of the police and activists – exists and can be dealt with. Brainstorm what oppression looks like in groups and demonstrations (prompt people to think of what they witnessed or felt oppression). Opportunities for this start in the group introductions when people choose how they identify themselves. Include possible incidents in hassle lines and role plays so people can learn how to interrupt where oppressive and unjust behavior. Make sure there is an awareness of how differently vulnerable communities are treated while learning tools for protecting ourselves and others. A list of questions to consider on "Dealing with violence from outside the campaign/group" and "Organizational structure" can be found at the end of this article on *Gender and Nonviolence* (<http://www.wri-irg.org/node/23269>).

Resources

Most of the links to materials and exercises are from War Resisters' International's **Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns** (2014) available online [here](#) and in paperback for sale from [WRL's store](#). [Empowering Nonviolence](#) includes all of the Handbook sections along with other resources. War Resisters' International also has online versions of the 2009 edition in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) organized by chapter.

War Resisters League's **Handbook for Nonviolent Action** (1989), a 34 page booklet first printed in 1989, can be purchased on [our store](#), and can be found at the Digital Library of Nonviolent Resistance at the Rutgers International Institute for Peace (<http://nonviolence.rutgers.edu/document/IIP0099F02>).

AGENDA for Facilitators [4 to 5+ hours]

Add breaks and energizers when needed.

Introduction [5 minutes]

Welcome, introduce trainers and goal of training. Ask if there are any police in attendance, would they please identify themselves. Be clear to the group that we are nonviolent and have nothing to hide, but do not welcome informants or provocateurs.

Agenda Review and Group Process Agreements [10 minutes]

Review agenda items and times.

Creation of group process agreements by the group (i.e. step up/ step back; listen; be succinct when speaking). The facilitator may want to ask for a show of hands to get a sense of the group: who is attending a training for the first time, who has participated in a large demonstration, who has participated in nonviolent actions, etc. Make it clear in asking that there is no hierarchy, we are all in this together.

Group Introductions [15 minutes]

Facilitator asks people to: *Pair with someone you don't know, answering "Why am I here/what I hope to learn at this training/what do I want to prepare for?" This is a listening exercise, take turns telling about yourself and listening, don't engage in a conversation.* Tell them to listen to each other for 2 minutes, then switch (facilitator should keep time).

If there are under 20 participants, go around so the facilitators can hear what they hope to learn (option, have people introduce what their partner said.) If it is a large group, have five pairs/10 people introduce themselves or their partner in 30 seconds.

If this is a training for people who already know each other you might want to have them ask other questions such as “what are you most excited about/most fear in doing this action?”

In the large group, give an opportunity for each person to give their name, where they are from (group or place) and their preferred gender pronoun (PGP). PGP Resource: <https://www.hrc.org/resources/why-we-ask-each-other-our-pronouns>

Scenario Overview [20 minutes]

The structure and planned scenario and back up plans needs to be clear to the participants. Is the message and goal of the action clear? Let them know that details on structure and legal issues have their own agenda items.

If the groups needs to spend time deciding which action they wish to engage in to meet their goals, that will take additional time. The cross-spectrum exercise (see link below), and the matrix (see below) are helpful processes for developing a scenario.

Nonviolence Guidelines [10 minutes]

Some actions have nonviolence guidelines or agreements. These are not a definition of nonviolence but an agreement made by those participating in an action for tactical and safety reasons. If there are Nonviolence Guidelines, have everyone read them together, followed by questions and comments. Ask if everyone can agree. History and examples of nonviolence guidelines are at end of “Maintaining nonviolence during an action” <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/23294>.

Hassle Lines/Parallel Lines [30 - 40 minutes]

See <http://wri-irg.org/node/23341> for a description and examples of roles in this exercise. Hassle lines begin to prepare people for situations that might arise. Role play at least 2 situations, escalating the “hassle”, to give people practice in de-escalating a possible conflict and identify de-escalation techniques.

Tools for grounding, protecting and blockading [5 - 10 minutes *for each*]

Practice a variety of physical tools that can help you protect yourself and others in your group, and de-escalate a situation. <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/23378> (time depends on number of tools practiced)

Deconstruct Martin Luther King, Jr quote from “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” [15 - 20 minutes]

Write this quote on a wall chart: **“Nonviolent direct action seeks to create a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to so dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”** Ask the group to identify the crisis, the creative tension, the community, and how they can dramatize the issue they are addressing. For more details on using this quote: <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/23353>

Cross spectrum [20 – 30 minutes]

<http://wri-irg.org/node/23374> A short version of this exercise should give an opportunity for participants to determine what is effective nonviolent action. This can also be used to develop a nonviolent action scenario, which may need a full 30 minutes or more.

Action Structure [30 – 45 minutes]

Affinity groups and quick decision-making The content of this section depends on the action structure, if there are affinity groups and what the decision-making process is. You will need more time if this is new information for the participants. It is best to have handouts. Practice is important. For example, a quick-decision role play: In affinity groups discuss what you would do when the police told you you can't go any further, or if you do not disburse you will be arrested. This scenario helps groups think about having a Plan B for possible scenarios.

- Affinity groups: http://soaw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=644#6
- Techniques for consensus decision-making in large groups: https://www.warresisters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/wrl_consensus_decisions.compressed.pdf

Legal Process [45 - 60 minutes]

The content and length of this section depends on several things: is there a separate legal briefing, what is the risk factor of the action, is there a call for bail solidarity? The content and length of this section depends on several things.

Does the group understand their rights? Share these resources, discuss what is most pertinent to the group: ACLU's Know Your Rights (aclu.org/know-your-rights), *Know Your Rights: A Guide for Protesters* (nlgnyc.org/know-your-rights/), *Know Your Rights* (nlgnyc.org/know-your-rights), *If An Agent Knocks: Toolkit for the Movement* (ccrjustice.org/if-agent-knocks-resource).

Is there a legal briefing? Make sure people understand the legal system, go through the Legal System Flowchart (warresisters.org/sites/default/files/wrl_legal_chart.pdf) making sure people understand their options. This is a good time for people to share short stories of options they have taken. If there is not a separate legal briefing for the action, a description of the possible charges and consequences is needed. ACLU's

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Protester's Rights can be found at: <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights>.

Situations described in there can be used to create role plays. Let people know if there are Legal Observers. The National Lawyers Guild provides Legal Observer training, find their chapters and lawyers at www.nlg.org. If there is time, role play the arrest process and processing.

Scenario Role Plays [30 - 45 minutes]

Make sure there is time to give people an opportunity to practice several possible situations they may face such as dealing with a police blockade or attack on the demonstrators, a provocateur encouraging people to rush a police line, dealing with counter-demonstrators or people in your affinity group who are not committed to maintaining nonviolence during the action. <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/23372>

Carry it on [10 minutes]

In pairs, ask each person to share what they most want to be mindful of during the direct action, what will ground them if they feel overwhelmed by the emotions of the day. If there is more time, people can do this in their affinity groups, if less time, encourage them to do it later in affinity groups, although it may stick with them more if they make the commitment at the training.

Evaluation & Next Steps [10 minutes]

What went well? What could have been better?

Close out: Are we clear about next steps (meeting schedule, affinity group development, signs and props we need to bring, travel plans, plans to discuss legal options, etc.)?
