

Why Protest?

Advocacy has many lanes—donating and fundraising, voting, writing and talking about an issue, researching, reporting, and protesting. You cannot occupy every lane, and the lanes we occupy may change over time. But know this, each and every lane is as important as the next to move your issue forward.

The time may come when you want to organize people to protest around your issue. Protest is an important and effective tool to both bring increased attention to your issue and to give others an advocacy lane. Protest also has the benefit of adding individuals and resources to the other advocacy lanes around your issue.

The Article 20 Network recognizes that the exercise of your freedom of peaceful assembly is more than a human right fundamental to participatory democracy; it's an impactful advocacy lane. But what if you've never organized a protest before?

This guide provides the basics of organizing your first protest and other useful tips. Following are ten suggested steps to organizing an effective protest and some suggestions for taking it to the next level. There are plenty of opinions about how to host a successful and inclusive



protest so feel free to read critically and adapt these ideas freely to suit your goals.

Ten Steps to Organizing Your First Protest

1 BUILD A TEAM YOU TRUST. As you begin to organize your protest, the more like-minded friends and community members you have at your side, the better! Reach out and ask if they want to help you organize. If your protest issue does not directly impact you, be sure that you are intentionally building relationships with those in your community who are, centering their voices and experiences, and listening to their guidance. It is best if you can co-create your team and action together. Lastly, seek out local or regional organizations who work on your

issue and invite them to organize with you. (You may also learn a thing or two from them!)

2 IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS. Ask yourselves what you are trying to achieve through this advocacy lane. Are you trying to build awareness? Do you aim to build a larger coalition to continue work on your issue? Are you trying to be seen and heard by an elected official or influential figure? Be clear with yourself and others about the objectives behind your actions. This will help you develop the best strategy, and later reflect on elements that can be improved.

3 DEFINE YOUR STRATEGY. With your goals in mind, try to imagine the most effective protest to achieve those goals and focus on making that protest happen. Ask yourselves: when and where will you hold the protest and why? What type of protest is required to achieve your goal? The most common modes of protest are marches and rallies. But protests can take many forms: sit-ins, walk-outs, vigils, and more sophisticated efforts like encampments and choreographed or theatrical expressions.

4 CHECK WHETHER YOU NEED TO CONTACT THE AUTHORITIES. Learn what local authorities require for public demonstrations in your community. You can often find specific permit requirements and guidelines on your local government's website or by calling your town hall. Do you need a permit and what are its requirements? Are there restrictions such as amplified sound restrictions or fines for littering? When talking to the authorities, don't shy from being clear about your needs, for example, to clear a road of traffic or provide a portable toilet.

You be the judge if you should adhere to the terms of the local requirements; violating those terms could invite confrontation, which your invitees may not be interested in or prepared for at all. Make it clear to the authorities, and your supporters, that safety is a priority. Ask the authorities to maintain contact with your group during the protest, and tell them how to do so.

5 GET THE WORD OUT. Assuming your objective is to have the largest turnout possible, you will reach more people by diversifying your outreach. You may want a versatile graphic to draw people's eyes to your invitations. Get the word out through every social media channel that will reach your intended audience. (One of the benefits of working with an established group is they can broaden your social media reach.) Put up posters where people can see them like public bulletin boards and lamp posts. Ask shops if you can put posters up in their windows. But nothing beats face-to-face outreach. Time permitting, visiting neighbors and personally inviting them with fliers in hand is a highly effective way of growing a protest.

6 HAVE A PLAN FOR BEING VISIBLE. Invite local television stations, newspapers, radio stations, and bloggers to your protest. Tell them what's special about your protest and give them the most precise information about the protest you can. Encourage your invitees to post videos and photos to social media and give them a hashtag.

"Attention is oxygen for movements. Without it, they cannot catch fire."

Zeynep Tufekci, Author, Twitter and Tear Gas

7 BUILD COMMUNITY. Every stage of protest planning is an opportunity to build solidarity and community. Keep an intentional lens on inclusion and intersection. Invite a wider circle of friends over for planning meetings. Sign-making parties are a great way to build relationships in advance of your protest.

8 PLAN TO KEEP IT PEACEFUL. You don't want your invitees or spoilers to ruin your plans by damaging property or starting fights. Designate peace marshals within your team. A peace marshal's job is to keep an eye out for anyone who is creating risks for your protests such as provoking police, vandalizing, etc. If tension rises, your peace marshals will step in and de-escalate. You may also want to invite your local Lawyers Guild or other independent observers if you are concerned about keeping the peace or the police response.



"In the South, we knew our adversary would stop at nothing to silence our activism. We knew we could never match his readiness to annihilate our resistance. So we ceded him that ground and challenged him instead to defend himself against the work of loving peace."

*John Lewis
Civil rights activist, statesman*

[BIRMINGHAM NEWS]

9 BE READY AND HAVE A CONTINGENCY PLAN. If your local police tend toward clearing protests quickly or even violence, you will want to share tips about self-protection against, for example, tear gas or pepper spray. If you are expecting extreme hot or cold weather, provide suggestions for staying safe. During the protest, everyone's safety should be your number one priority. Ask folks how they're feeling.

10 LEAVE NO TRACE. Leaving a mess is not a good look for your team or your cause. Make sure people know your expectations up front

Other Good Practices

» **KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM.** Your protest is likely to draw many new folks who want to get further involved in the cause. Use the protest to make sure they know what the next action is. Hand out flyers for your next general meeting or for another protest. If you don't have an immediate next step for them, get your clipboards out and collect email addresses with the promise of further action.

» **GET CREATIVE.** Find a time or location that helps bolster your message. For example, a marijuana



“Protest is, in its own way, storytelling. We use our bodies, our words, our art, and our sounds both to tell the truth about the pain that we endure and to demand the justice that we know is possible. It is meant to build and to force a response.”

DeRay Mckesson, Civil rights activist

[BALTIMORE SUN]

about discarding signs and literature. Set an example by picking up litter from your group. When you see someone littering, point them to the nearest garbage can.

You want to learn from your experiences so you do an even better job organizing your next protest. After your team has had some time to reflect (but not too long after your protest) get your organizing team together to discuss how the protest went. Review how you did with each of the ten steps. Document the conversation for the next time you plan a protest. And finally, be proud of what you have accomplished; you organized your first protest.

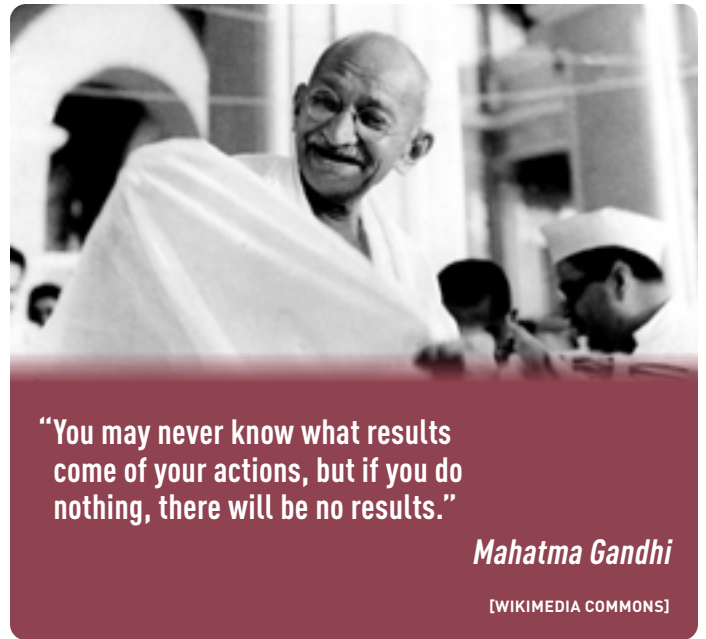
decriminalization march could be held at 4:20pm or a rally against police militarization could be held with armored vehicles behind the speakers. Be theatrical if you want; great photos spread faster and help get your message out. Puppets, themed costumes, or other artistic expressions help draw attention. Some organizations, like PETA, are known for their powerful protest theater, soaking themselves in fake animal blood. Even with a small attendance, their protests garner international attention.

» **GO DEEP ON YOUR STRATEGY.** You may be trying to influence a politician or other influential figure. If this figure has not responded to protest in the past, consider another approach. Everyone with power draws that power from someone else (donors, for example). You may want to consider protesting the origin of their power, for example, protesting a politician's top donor or a university president's allies on the board of directors.

» **DON'T BE AFRAID OF DISRUPTION.** While many Americans equate disruption with violence or beyond the scope of constitutionality, disrupting the daily rhythms of life—especially for corporate or government officials—is precisely what the founding fathers had in mind: colonial-era riots, the burning of effigies, and dumping crates of tea in the bay. Disruption gets people talking about your protest and draws more media attention. Disruptive protest is more likely to lead to arrests. Be sure all of your invitees know what they are signing up for and that you research best practices in

civil disobedience and disseminate that information to all participants.

- » **BE SPONTANEOUS.** If a protest is not pre-planned or expected by authorities, it can draw urgency to your cause and, as it grows, can give a feeling of momentum. Of course, to draw a crowd and the press to a spontaneous protest, more work will have to be done in a shorter amount of time. An inspirational (and effective) example of spontaneous protests were the large, widespread airport protests after President Trump announced his “muslim ban”. Many municipalities waive permit requirements if a protest forms in response to a recent or ongoing event but it’s worth checking with your local officials so you don’t put your invitees at risk of arrest.



Because many U.S. Laws and practices governing assemblies are inconsistent with international human rights standards, this document is for informational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice. This is an informational resource. If you are unsure of the regulations in your area, feel free to contact your local authorities for the most up to date information.

IF YOU BELIEVE YOUR HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE BEEN VIOLATED:

- Comply with the directions of authorities
- If you are arrested, remain calm and ask for an attorney
- Keep evidence to document your experience
- Contact the Article 20 Network at myrights@a20n.org or another civil rights organization for support.

THE ARTICLE 20 NETWORK defends and advances the human right to freedom of peaceful assembly worldwide.

Through education, advocacy, and research, the Article 20 Network encourages the proliferation of public demonstrations and fights back against obstacles and threats to our human right to peacefully assemble.

Learn more about peaceful assembly and our work at a20n.org.

