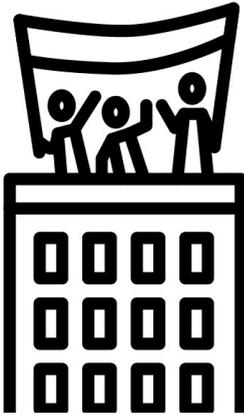


Seeds for Change guide



Action planning

A guide to planning effective direct action

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Introduction

Direct action is a powerful political tool. It involves using your own activities to meet your goals, rather than trying to achieve change via lobbying or voting.

See our *What is Direct Action* guide for recent examples of direct action, from people in Glasgow stopping an immigration raid; to Manchester students using a rent strike and highly publicised occupation of university buildings to win rent reductions in the first year of the covid pandemic; to Palestine Action's sustained direct action campaign that led to the closure of the Elbit Ferranti arms factory in Oldham.

This guide covers the key things you need to consider in order to plan an effective action: your strategy, how you will take care of yourselves as a group, practicalities like logistics and roles, and legal considerations.

Top Tips



Have a clear aim. Know what you are trying to achieve and plan your action based on that. For example, if your aim is to damage the reputation of your target, you might use different tactics from if you are trying to cause economic damage.

Find a pinch point where you can have most impact. For example, if you are organising a strike is there a single department that could shut down a whole factory if they downed tools? If you are blockading a building is there one entrance all the traffic passes through?

Think through your plan to make sure the action is safe, effective and a good experience for everyone involved.

Action aims

Direct action is most effective when you have a clear aim. If your action is part of a bigger campaign, it's important to think strategically about how the outcome of this action will move you closer to your overall campaign goals. This will help you decide who to target, what tactics to use, and what message you need to put across in the action.

Target

Think about the people or organisations who hold the power in the relation to your aims – these are the potential targets for your action.

Sometimes there is a sole target that it makes sense to take action against, for example, picketing outside a local business withholding pay from their workers.

In a bigger campaign, it can often be more effective to focus on a **secondary target** – a person or organisation that supports and enables the main power holder. For example, in a campaign to stop deportations, you might target a particular airline that operates deportation flights. Secondary targets are often less committed to the issue and can be easier to influence, but they are important props for the main power holder, so winning against a secondary target can have a big impact towards your goals.

Types of pressure

To work out how to best influence your target, consider what stake they have in the issue. Are they involved because of their ideology, do they stand to gain financially or are they simply going along with it because it's convenient? Here are some different forms of pressure you might use:

Economic pressure: making it more expensive for the target to act against your campaign goals – effective if they are financially insecure

Delay: slowing down progress on the project you are opposing – effective if it is time sensitive or makes the project more costly

PR offensive: exposing the target to bad press or damaging their reputation – effective if they are sensitive to public image

Direct pressure on decision-makers: effective if they are sympathetic to your cause, or if you inconvenience them enough that it is easier for them to support your goals than oppose them.

Tactics

Tactics are the specific activities you will do to put pressure on your target. Examples could include occupying a building, picketing outside an office, blocking vehicles, jamming a company's phone lines with calls, breaking machinery, disrupting an event, or organising a public banner drop, flash mob or street party.

Consider what tactic will create the most effective kind of pressure against your target, as well as what will work best for the people in your group. What will make your action a fun or empowering experience? Particularly if it is part of a bigger campaign, think about how you could use different tactics in the long run – escalating pressure over time, and maintaining energy in your group.

Action message

What do you want people to understand about the issue from your action? Come back to your aim, and think about how you will put this across. The target and tactics you have chosen should make sense as part of your message. Your message should make clear the thing you want to change, or the decision you want the power holder to make.

Media coverage and public scrutiny can intensify the pressure on your target and increase the chances they will give in. Your action is also a chance to draw in more support for your campaign. See p.9 for more tips on messaging and media.

Your group

Groups that take action together sometimes call themselves an affinity group. See our *Affinity Groups* guide for more information.

Direct action can have big impacts on the people involved. If you have strong personal relationships, you're more likely to trust each other and have each others' back in high stakes situations. It can help to spend social time together before and after the action. In addition, think about the following areas:

Your capacity

- What skills and resources do you have within the group?
- How much time and energy can you put into planning, carrying out and debriefing the action?
- Have you got enough people to make it happen?

If you lack these things, you may need to make a plan for how you will bring more people into the group, learn skills from each other, or get hold of the practical resources you need. Where possible, try reaching out directly to people outside the group who might be able to lend resources or offer a particular skill.

Personal boundaries

Different people have different needs and boundaries around how they can participate in an action. The consequences of being arrested, for example, might affect one person much more than another. People can also have different fears and reactions around intense experiences like blocking something with your body, being in a close crowd, dealing with a confrontation, or being kettled or arrested by police.

Getting to know these things about each other within your group helps

you plan an action that takes everyone's needs into account. This could include thinking of different roles that work for different people, or making a plan for what the group will do if a particular situation arises. You often need to make quick decisions in unpredictable circumstances, so discussing potential situations beforehand helps make sure people consent to the course of action.

If people feel committed, prepared and confident in the action plan it is more likely to be successful, keep people safe, and be an empowering experience.

Organising welfare support during the action

Plan in advance how you will look after each other during the action.

Systems groups use include:

Buddies: people commit to looking out for each other in groups of 2 to 3. Buddy pairs (or trios) commit to sticking together for the whole action. They talk in advance about their needs and concerns, and how they can support each other.

Welfare role: 1 to 2 people take responsibility for welfare during the action. This is particularly relevant if some people are 'locked on' (attached to equipment and unable to move). Welfare tasks could include helping them eat, drink and even go to the toilet if the people locked on can't use their hands. They can also check on people's emotional well-being.

Logistics

The more practical planning you can do for the action, the more likely you'll pull it off successfully. Below are some tips for areas to think about.

Recce

A 'recce' is when you scout out your action site beforehand. This is an opportunity to gather as much information as possible that could help you plan and carry out the action – for example, the entrances, site security, or people working at particular times. If possible you can take photos or draw maps.

Timing

When will your action have the most impact? For example, if you were planning to blockade a coal mine, you'd want to time your action to when the most vehicles were coming in and out. If you were aiming to cause reputational damage you'd want to time your action for when it would have most publicity impact – for example, a campaign against a university investing in fossil fuels could hold an action during an open day. Or you might time an action to coincide with an event that could maximise media coverage, like a new law being passed.

Equipment

Think through any equipment you will need for the mechanics of the action, for example tools, lock-ons, or materials for blockading. How will you transport them or get them into position? In addition, think about what items you need to keep people comfortable during the action – eg. pillows, plenty of food and water. Equipment also includes props or banners you will use to get your message across.

Messaging

How will you make your message clear in the visuals of your action? Think about what will come across in a single photo shared on social media, or a 10 second news clip. If you want mainstream media coverage, invite journalists and send press releases. How will you engage with passers-by or people affected by the action? For example, you could hand out a leaflet explaining the issue and your aims.

What ifs

Think through some possible scenarios if things don't go to plan. What if the van carrying your equipment gets stuck in traffic? What if the building security is different on the day to what you expect? What if only 10 people show up, or 100? Discuss together what you will do.

Action roles

Transport

You may need drivers to get people or equipment to the action site. Drivers will need to avoid arrest, if they are driving people home.

Media spokesperson

This person communicates with the media to get the message of the action across clearly. This can include maximising opportunities with sympathetic media, or dealing with unsympathetic press if they show up. The spokesperson can practice what they will say beforehand – for example, conveying three key messages about the action. See our guide *Using mainstream media* for tips.

Other 'background' media roles could be to prepare a press release or contact reporters to get the desired media on-site.

Police liaison

Nominating someone to communicate with the police can help to de-escalate conflict, keep the police at a distance from the action

participants, and give a clear united message about any decisions or demands made by the group. A good choice for this role would be someone who is confident they can communicate calmly, and not tell the police more information than the group has agreed. They should make clear to the police early on that they are not the group's decision maker.

Legal observer

A legal observer (LO) is responsible for recording legal aspects of the action to help hold the police to account. LOs take detailed notes of interactions with police, including warnings and arrests, use of controversial police tactics, police badge numbers, what took place and exactly when. They may collect witness statements to help protestors later on. They often wear a hi-vis vest to make them easily visible so people can call them for help.

LOs stay 'uninvolved' in the action and should not hold banners, join in chanting etc. They are there in an observing role, but they have no special legal status and are not immune from arrest.

Netpol guide for legal observers: netpol.wordpress.com/monitoring/legal-observers/how-to-be-a-legal-observer/

Green and Black Cross training: greenandblackcross.org/events/

Police station support

If it is likely people will be arrested, it's useful to have someone keeping track of where people have been taken, and meeting people at the police station when they are released. The person in this role should stay at a distance from the action and have a phone to contact police stations, legal observers, or solicitors. They will need a form of transport to reach any police stations in the area. They may also ask people in the group for any relevant information beforehand, eg. if they want someone to be contacted if they are arrested.

First aider / street medic

It can be useful to have at least one person who knows basic first aid. For a large mobilisation, street medics should also know how to deal with the effects of CS gas (tear gas) which police sometimes attack protestors with.

Security

If your action relies on secrecy before, during or after it happens, think through how you will stop information leaking to the police.

This could include using secure channels to plan and communicate about the action, such as meeting in person without your phones, and using messaging platforms with a high level of security. A good rule is to use a platform that is both open source **and** end-to-end encrypted, such as Signal. Even these messages can still be accessed on your phone if it is taken by police, so ensure they are deleted before the action, or don't bring your phone.

Make agreements as a group about how you will avoid disclosing unnecessary information, for example by using fake names, covering your faces, not engaging in conversations with police, and doing no comment interviews if arrested. Particularly consider people's security in relation to livestreaming or taking photos.

If you hope to do something which remains secret afterwards, you may need to devote a lot more time and research to making a security plan.

Legal

Some actions may lead to arrest and criminal convictions. Research what legal consequences people have faced for actions similar to yours. This is no guarantee of the risks, but will give you a guideline. Sometimes this can help you avoid arrests and prosecution, for example by making an agreement to move voluntarily when given a final warning by the police.

If you are arrested, you will be taken to a police station and may be interviewed. You will then be released, and they may charge you with an offence. If so your case will go to court, and you will have a chance to seek legal support. You may have a series of court dates over several months.

Our *Impact of convictions* guide explains how criminal convictions work, and covers how they can affect areas of your life such as employment, housing, immigration status and more.

Green and Black Cross have lots of useful guides to your rights at protests greenandblackcross.org/action/know-your-rights/

Their 5 key messages are:

- **No comment** when asked any questions by police
- **No personal details** – you do not legally have to give your name or address at any stage in an arrest process
- **Under what power?** - If police ask you to do something, ask them what legal power they are using and on what grounds
- **No caution** – Cautions are an admission of guilt. Police use them to avoid going to court, so don't accept them
- **No duty solicitor** – The duty solicitor is the default solicitor who is present at the police station. They often give bad advice to protestors. Use a solicitor with protest experience

Netpol operates a list of trusted protest solicitors: netpol.org/solicitors/

After the action

Debrief

Make time after the action to get together and discuss what happened. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. It's helpful to talk about how the action felt, particularly if people experienced confrontation or police repression. A debrief can also flag up any further support people need to deal with the after-effects of the action.

Ongoing support

Court support

If someone is arrested and charged, they may be continuing to deal with the legal consequences some time after the action. Some ways the group can support them through this process are:

- helping them get legal support, or prepare their case if necessary
- attending their court dates with them, or checking in afterwards
- collectively raising money for any fines they get

Emotional support

The experiences people have while taking direct action can have an impact on their emotional well-being. It's important to support one another through this, particularly because people often can't talk to others in their life about it.

You can support people by:

- proactively checking in afterwards, particularly if someone hadn't anticipated being arrested, or they experienced violence

- If you had a buddy system or welfare role on the action, continuing to give support through these methods
- getting together socially if appropriate

If someone in the group has experienced trauma during an action, external help may be available. Counselling for Social Change provide counselling for activists: counsellingforsocialchange.org.uk/

There are also resources available at Activist Trauma Support: activist-trauma.net/

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Direct action can be a powerful political tool. This guide covers the key things to consider in order to plan and carry out an effective action: your strategy, how you will take care of yourselves as a group, practicalities like logistics and roles, and legal considerations.

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