

# Nonviolent Direct Action Checklist

*“A good nonviolent action is like a great work of art.”*  
- Gene Stoltzfus

**ROLES** - Not every action requires all of the following roles to be filled, and sometimes a person can fill more than one role (although you should be wary of overloading an individual with too many responsibilities). The checklist below guarantees that you will not forget anything on route to a successful action.

**Tactical Leadership** - A small team of people (2-4) designated to make quick decisions if necessary during the course of an action. Tactical leaders should consult with Affinity Group (AG) spokespersons/liaisons whenever possible.

**Press Spokesperson** - Person(s) designated to interpret the group’s action to the press. (Even with spokespeople, all participants in the action should have sound bites ready - you never know when the media will put a microphone in front of you.)

**Press Hustler** - One or two folks who proactively approach press people, offer them press packets, and direct them to press spokespersons.

**Leafletters** - Persons who distribute leaflets to inform and educate the public about the group’s action. (Leafletting can be an art itself: an effective leafletter makes eye contact and a friendly positive comment with every leaflet. Practicing ways of handling indifference, hostility and open interest helps!)

**MC (Master of Ceremonies)** - Person(s) to welcome participants, introduce speakers and musical acts, make announcements and wrap things up at the end. (While racial, ethnic and gender diversity are important in all aspects of an action, they are particularly important as part of the “public face” of an event; consider co-MCs as a way to better represent the diversity in your group.)

**Song & Chant Leaders** - A couple of people prepared to lead the group in chants and/or songs.

**Speaker** - Person(s) knowledgeable about the issue who can articulate the group’s message and inspire and motivate participants. (The good speaker will not mind being asked to keep his or her comments to a very specific time frame!)

**Photographer** - Records the action on film or video; can be helpful with press follow-up.

**Timekeeper** - If you need to keep to a specific time schedule, a person to hold up a sign letting speakers know when their time is up. (One minute warnings are always appreciated.)

**Action participants** - Individuals planning to engage in civil disobedience or civil resistance. With large numbers, organizing into affinity groups of 10-20 people helps provide support and foster democratic decision-making. (Not everyone can risk arrest, of course, and having a large crowd of supportive non-arrestees is very empowering - both to those risking arrest and to those watching the action, who will no doubt be even more inspired to risk arrest the next time..)

**Support** - Person(s), usually working with specific affinity groups, who carry out specific support roles for anyone who is arrested. Support persons cannot and should not be risking arrest - they need to stay on the outside (or “minimum security” as Phil Berrigan put it) to play their roles.

**Police Liaison** - Person(s) designated to speak with police during the action; communicates police message to the tactical leadership, and, whenever possible, to the entire group. (Unless specifically designated to do so, this person does not negotiate with police or make decisions on behalf of the group..)

**Legal Observer** - Not a lawyer, necessarily, but individual(s) who watch for any violence or police brutality, to

serve as reporters and witnesses if needed. (Graduate students from local law schools often serve in this capacity.)

**Peacekeepers** - Person(s) who know the action scenario (including contingency plans and any pre-action rally) and can help direct people in the appropriate activities and/or directions (form picket line, stay on march route, etc.). Peacekeepers can wear something distinctive, such as arm bands or hats. Peacekeepers should be prepared to deal with confusing or disruptive situations: both provocateurs and mentally unstable people are real possibilities that should be considered, with responses prepared.

**Communications** - Persons who can act as scouts, staying ahead or behind a march to monitor police or counter demonstrator activity. Bikes and walkie-talkies/cell phones are typical equipment for a communications team.

**Medical Aid** - Person(s) with sufficient training to deal with any medical emergencies that may occur during the action. If significant police force is possible during the action, (use of pepper spray, etc.) specific medical preparations should be made to deal with the situation.

## **MATERIALS TO BRING**

*Signs & Banners -- Leaflets -- Song and chant sheets -- Press packets -- Sound System/ Bullhorns -- Props (make action-specific list)*

## **ACTION PREPARATION TIPS**

**Take nonviolence training** - No one should engage in nonviolent direct action without appropriate training. In preparing for an action, think through (and role play, whenever possible) how to respond to police, arrest, and possible violent confrontation.

**Retain legal counsel** - No one should engage in nonviolent civil disobedience without appropriate legal briefings and representation. (Usually one or a small group of lawyers serves this function for an entire group.)

**Reflect** - Take time to center oneself before the action, through thoughtful reflection, meditation, prayer, etc.

**Stay Calm** - Shouting, running and angry words escalate tension. Panic increases the possibility of injury.

**Be Determined** - We have a job to do - to offer nonviolent resistance to a war against Iraq - and much depends on our doing it well. Have contingency plans, be prepared to make quick decisions if obstacles are placed in your way by authorities or there is an outbreak of violence.

**Dress Appropriately** - Wear clothing that is protective and appropriate for the situation (will you be sitting on the ground? will it be cold out?). Avoid wearing clothing with hoods, as you can be dragged by them. Avoid open or loose shoes and jewelry. You may want to remove eyeglasses to keep them from getting broken. Don't carry sharp objects in your pockets, and in general carry no more on you than you absolutely need.

**Eat and Drink Appropriately before an action** - You want to strike a balance between properly hydrated and energetic (healthy food is better than junk food!) and the reality that, if up are participating in the action and risking arrest, you may not have access to a bathroom for some time. Bringing water is a good idea.

**Be Alert** - If the police seem to be hurting someone, urge them to stop. Recognize that people of color, poor people, LGBTs, people of limited mobility and immigrant groups are at a greater risk of police harassment, arrest and abuse, and that some people may wish or need to have safer places to express themselves. It is important for all of us to be advocates of each other.

*Adapted by Gordon Clark, Betsy Raasch-Gilman and Nadine Bloch for the Iraq Pledge of Resistance, January 2003. Original list developed by Kryss Chupp of Christian Peacemaker Teams from a variety of sources.*