

Affinity Groups – What they can do during a demo

from the “direct action handbook” section of <http://www.nornc.org/>

An affinity group is a small group of 5 to 20 people who work together autonomously together on direct action or other projects. You can form an affinity group with your friends, people from your community, workplace, or organization.

Affinity groups challenge top-down decision-making and organizing, and empower those involved to take creative direct action. Affinity groups allow people to "be" the action they want to see by giving complete freedom and decision-making power to the affinity group. Affinity groups by nature are decentralized and non-hierarchical, two important principles of anarchist organizing and action.

The affinity group model was first used by anarchists in Spain in the late 19th and early 20th century, and was re-introduced to radical direct action by anti-nuclear activists during the 1970s, who used decentralized non-violent direct action to blockade roads, occupy spaces and disrupt "business as usual" for the nuclear and war makers of the US. Affinity groups have a long and interesting past, owing much to the anarchists and workers of Spain and the anarchists and radicals today who use affinity groups, non-hierarchical structures, and consensus decision making in direct action and organizing

Affinity Group Roles

There are many roles that one could possibly fill. These roles include:

- Medical - An affinity group may want to have someone who is a trained street medic who can deal with any medical or health issues during the action.
- Legal observer- If there are not already legal observers for an action, it may be important to have people not involved in the action taking notes on police conduct and possible violations of activists rights.
- Media - If you are doing an action which plans to draw media, a person in the affinity group could be empowered to talk to the media and act as a spokesperson.
- Action Elf/Vibes-watcher - This is someone who would help out with the general wellness of the group: water, massages, and encouragement through starting a song or cheer. This is not a role is necessary, but may be particularly helpful in day long actions where people might get tired or irritable as the day wears on.
- Traffic - If it is a moving affinity group, it may be necessary to have people who are empowered to stop cars at intersections and in general watch out for the safety of people on the streets from cars and other vehicles.
- Arrestable members - This depends on what kind of direct action you are doing. Some actions may require a certain number of people willing to get arrested, or some parts of an action may need a minimum number of arrest-ables. Either way, it is important to know who is doing the action and plans on getting arrested.
- Jail Support - Again, this is only if you have an affinity group who has people getting arrested. This person has all the arrestees contact information and will go to the jail, talk to and work with lawyers, keep track of who got arrested etc.

How To Start An Affinity Group

An affinity group could be a relationship among people that lasts for years among a group of friends and activists, or it could be a week long relationship based around a single action. Either way, it is important to join an affinity group that is best suited to you and your interests.

If you are forming an affinity group in your city or town, find friends or fellow activists who have similar issue interests, and thus would want to go to similar actions. Also, look for people who would be willing to use similar tactics - if you want to do relatively high risk lockdowns, someone who does not want to be in that situation may not want to be in the affinity group. That person could do media or medic work, but it may not be best if they are completely uncomfortable around certain tactics of direct action.

If you are looking to join an affinity group at a mass action, first find out what affinity groups open to new members and which ones are closed. For many people, affinity groups are based on trusting relationships based around years of friendship and work, thus they might not want people they don't know in their affinity group. Once you find which affinity groups are open, look for ones that have an issue interest or action tactic that you are drawn to, like a Free Tibet affinity group or a blockade affinity group.

What Can An Affinity Group Do?

Anything!!! They can be used for mass or smaller scale actions. Affinity groups can be used to drop a banner, blockade a road, provide back-up for other affinity groups, do street theater, dismantle a bulldozer, block traffic riding bikes, organize a tree sit, change the message on a massive billboard, play music in a radical marching band or sing in a revolutionary choir, etc... There can even be affinity groups who take on certain tasks in an action. For instance, there could be a roving affinity group made up of street medics, or an affinity group who brings food and water to people on the streets.

What makes affinity groups so effective for actions is that they can remain creative and independent and plan out their own action without an organization or person dictating to them what can and can't be done. Thus, there are an endless amount of possibilities for what affinity groups can do. Be creative and remember: direct action gets the goods!

Direct Action Roles for Affinity Groups

BEFORE ACTION

Coordinator, Campaigner or Organizer
Fundraisers
Research
Scouting the site or route
Outreach and organizing
Logistics and support
Meeting facilitator
Prop, sign and banner making, Painters, Graphic artists, etc.
Media outreach: Send out media advisory and media release
Media kits
Writers

DURING ACTION

People risking arrest (committing civil disobedience) Direct Support People
Police Liaison
Peacekeepers/monitors:
Deployment Team/ Diversion
Media spokesperson
Media outreach
Communication team
Demonstrators/Sign-holders/Chanters/Singers/ Hand out literature etc.
Videographer
Still photographer
Medic/EMT/Medical Team
Legal Observer(s)
Jail Support Contact person

AFTER ACTION

Legal Support Lawyer
Documentarian/Historian/Archivist
Fundraisers
Public speakers
Letter writers to decision-makers and newspaper editorial boards