

## **AFFINITY GROUPS**

Affinity groups are self-sufficient support systems of about 5 to 15 people. A number of affinity groups may work together toward a common goal in a large action, or one affinity group might conceive of and carry out an action on its own. Sometimes, affinity groups remain together over a long period of time, existing as political support and/or study groups, and only occasionally participating in actions. Affinity groups are composed of people who have been brought together at a nonviolence training or have existing ties such as friendship, living in the same area, or working together.

Affinity groups form the basic decision-making bodies of mass actions. They are usually considered "autonomous," independently entitled to develop any form of participation they choose, as long as they remain within the nonviolence guidelines. Groups of affinity groups working together are sometimes called "clusters." A large action can have several large "clusters" all working together. In large actions, affinity groups usually send "spokespersons" to a "spokescouncil" meeting, to communicate and coordinate the different groups' decisions and then bring the coordinated information or proposal back to their respective groups for their final discussion and approval.

Affinity groups also serve as a source of support for the members and reinforce a sense of solidarity. They provide a solution to the isolation or separation that can come to individuals acting alone. By including all participants in a circle of familiarity and acquaintance, the affinity group structure reduces the possibility of infiltration by outside agents or provocateurs. If a new person asks to join an affinity group, s/he should find out what the group believes in and what they plan to do, and decide if s/he can share in it.

### **Roles Within the Affinity Group**

Take turns so that everyone gets a chance to try different roles.

- At meetings: facilitator(s), timekeeper, recorder, vibes-watcher.
- During an action: those risking arrest, support persons (and during a mass action, affinity group spokespersons).

### **Affinity Group Support**

The role of support in a civil disobedience action is crucial. Support people accept the responsibility of being contacts to the outside once a member of the affinity group is arrested. During and after a mass action support members need to stay in touch with support people from other affinity groups, for information sharing and emotional support.

#### **Support Before an Action:**

- Know the people in your affinity group by name and description.
- Know where people who are arrested are likely to be taken.
- Make a confidential list with the following information:
  - Name of arrestee,
  - Name, if any, used for arrest.
- Know whether or not each individual wants bail, and when.
- Know whom arrestee would like contacted and under what circumstances.
- Know medical or other special needs.
- Know whether the individual plans to cooperate and in what ways.
- Know whether the person wants a lawyer.
- Know whether the person is a minor.

#### **Additional Support Before a Mass Action:**

- Know who the support coordinators are.
- Know the phone number of the action office.
- Be sure group fills out group check-in sheet or other paperwork for the action office.
- Be sure your name, phone number, where you can be reached, and how long you will be
- available to do support work are written on your affinity group's list.

### **Support During an Action:**

- Know boundaries of arrest and non-arrest areas.
- Give emergency info about yourself to another support person.
- Bring lots of food and water for your affinity group.
- Bring a big first aid kit.
- Bring paper and pens and, if possible, a camera or video camera.
- Hold money, keys and other things for those getting arrested.
- Keep in touch with arrestees as long as possible, noting any changes in arrest strategies, etc.
- Once arrests begin, write down each individual's name, and the time and nature of the arrest (get name and badge number of officer); note whether there was any police misconduct (brutality, inappropriate words).
- At least one support person should stay at place of arrest until all members of your group are arrested, and at least one should go to where those arrested are being taken.

### **Support After Arrests:**

- Call whomever needs to be informed about each person arrested.
- Go to any court appearances of those arrested.
- Help gather information needed by those in jail.
- In large actions, let office and/or coordinators know when you have to leave town and make sure to leave them all relevant information.
- If activists are in jail, make sure to have someone near a phone at all times, so that all calls from jail can be received.
- Contact office to tell them about people in jail (who, how many, in which cellblock/dorm/pod, what needs).
- Visit your group members in jail, and pass on any messages.
- Take care of kids, pets, cars, plants, etc., for those in jail.
- Write letters to the people in jail; organize support vigil in front of the jail.
- Be there to pick activists up when they are released from jail.
- Support other support people -- working together will ease the load.

### **Support at the Courthouse:**

Be present during court appearances, and try to keep track of the following information for each person your affinity group. During a mass action, call this information into the office.

- Name of defendant; Jane/John Doe number, if no name.
- Charge(s).
- Plea: Demurrer, Not Guilty, Guilty, No Contest, "Creative Plea."
- If guilty or no contest, sentence imposed.
- If demurrer or not guilty:
- Amount of bail, if applicable.

- Whether bail is paid or not.
- Date, time and place of next court appearance.
- Name of judge or magistrate.
- Name of defense lawyer.
- Name of prosecutor.
- Any other information which seems relevant.