

Forming An Antifa Group

2017

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Introduction

Anti-fascist groups, often called “antifa,” are popping up all around the United States, and a number of people have asked us for advice on forming a group. Because antifa work is different from other forms of radical organizing, and because the antifa groups themselves are changing, we have written down some of our suggestions, based on years of experience. However, this article has been written in a very fluid political situation, and some of these specifics may or may not be relevant in the coming months and years.

This essay covers a number of points, including: the advantages, disadvantages, and obligations of working under the antifascist banner; questions involving anonymity and visibility, both in person and online; self-defense and firearms; working with problematic people and dealing with infiltrators; state repression; and actions to take as antifascists.

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This essay covers a number of points, including: the advantages, disadvantages, and obligations of working under the anti-fascist banner; questions involving anonymity and visibility, both in person and online; self-defense and firearms; working with problematic people and dealing with infiltrators; state repression; and actions to take as anti-fascists.

1) Why “Antifa”?

The first question is: Why are you forming an “antifa” group? The label has advantages and disadvantages, and you should consider this before adopting it. The antifa name gets you a certain level of brand recognition and built-in credibility, but it also includes certain obligations and distinct disadvantages.

If the purpose of your group is to do public organizing where your members are clearly identifiable—organizing anti-Trump rallies or supporting refugees and immigrants—using the antifa label and the traditional antifa symbols will likely lead to blowback that could be avoided by naming your organization differently. “Las Cruces United Against Racism” will not draw the attention that calling yourself “La Cruces Antifa,” and using traditional antifa symbolism, will.

2) Disadvantages

The primary disadvantage is that fascists will try to identify members of your group and cause you physical harm. Staying as anonymous as possible is the easiest way to minimize this. Members’ pictures may appear on white power websites with any personal information they can find, and many anti-fascists have been injured, even killed, doing this work. If you are exposed, you

will also be remembered by fascists for several years. (Keep in mind that anti-fascists who are not white men have been targeted more heavily by fascists: women garner greater online harassment, and people of color have been singled out in fights.)

3) Obligations

If you form a local antifa group, you will be expected to do a few things:

1. Track white nationalist, Far Right, and fascist activity Your group will be expected to document fascist groups and organizing in your area. This means gathering information on who is doing what, and knowing the makeup and key players of the various groups that are active. Once information is verified, antifa groups periodically release this information in a publicly available format. It is also crucial to alert any intended targets about specific threats you find while doing research.
2. Oppose public Far Right organizing. If the Klan or the National Socialist Movement hold a public rally, if Alt Right speakers come to town, or if the Daily Stormer holds a meet up, you will be expected to organize a counter-demonstration. If they hold poster or sticker campaigns, you should not only take down their materials but also put up your own; public outreach campaigns should likewise be countered.
3. Support other anti-fascists who are targeted by fascists or arrested for antifa-related activities. This could include supporting regional groups, or organizing benefits and fundraisers for prisoners and injured comrades.
4. Build a culture of non-cooperation with law enforcement. If you have any intention of working with the police, FBI, or other agencies; or if you publicly condemn anti-fascists who break the law: don't call yourself an anti-fascist. The cops will be Trump supporters; do not collaborate with them.

4) Visibility

Both the authorities and fascists will be interested in your group's membership, so you should consider the question of public visibility carefully before you start. We strongly recommend against antifa groups being organized using the open, public model of most contemporary activism because of the risk of infiltration. If an emergency situation—such as responding to fascist public event—calls for public meetings and a traditional mass organizing activist model, this should be kept separate from the long-term group structure.

In fact, we recommend that you stay anonymous both while forming and until your first action. Anonymity is your best defense, and you should keep it intact as long as you can. Develop your group, get on the same page, and decide what you want to focus on. Also, note that once groups are formed, it's very difficult to change the type of person who is in the group. Whether this is about gender, age, race, or counterculture—it will be hard to alter later on.

Use a “closed collective” model: this is a membership-based policy with no open meetings. Don't allow new people to walk in off the street. Instead, develop a process for researching and vetting people who want to be involved.

One extreme option is to function as a group but not give yourself a name, and not tell fellow activists what you are doing. Once you have a name, fascists will try to figure out “who is in the group.” Not having a public face makes your actions even more anonymous. If people are being targeted, for example after a conflict with fascists, a publicly known group will draw attention first. If there is no public presence, or no formalized organization with a name, this will complicate the process of identification and retaliation.

Consider using a cell model whenever possible, in which one member meets with others when required. For example, you might need a public face to talk to other groups, club owners to convince them to cancel Nazi bands, to meet people to receive information they don't want to share online, or to table at events. To limit exposure, make sure one person is designated as the semi-public face, even if they never admit they are a group member. This limits how many people can be exposed.

5) Online Presence

As part of staying anonymous, you should carefully manage your online presence. We recommend only using Twitter; it limits the amount of personal information you expose and makes tracking your connections more difficult. Facebook presents numerous, major risks for the security of your members and supporters. A recent doxxing of “antifa” was the result of information bigots culled from people who had interacted with an antifa facebook page. The targets were not even antifa, just sympathizers, but they were identified via facebook.

Websites imply that your group is more legitimate, and should be used especially if you want to doxx local fascists or put up group statements. Again, if you don't have a group name, you may choose not to have any online presence.

Individual members, when possible, should get off social media, especially facebook, altogether. Where they don't, they should maintain strictly separate personal and political accounts.

6) Self-Defense

Antifa groups engage in self-defense work. While most antifa work does not involve direct confrontation, and the amount of confrontation varies from group to group, sometimes it is necessary. Your group members and the supporters around you should be prepared.

We recommend regular martial arts training for anti-fascists, as well as for the larger radical community. It's a good place to meet people who are serious about this.

Find out what the laws are in your city and state about a variety of self-defense weapons and make sure to practice with, and carry, everything that is legal— whether that is pepper spray, retractable clubs, or other devices. In some cases, what is legal to carry for self-defense is considered assault with a weapon if used in an offensive capacity. Laws vary community by community and ideally a lawyer should be consulted regarding this.

7) Guns

A word about guns. Ask yourself: Can another weapon suffice instead of a gun? If you do choose to own guns, engage in regular practice. A gun can give you a false sense of security and

if you're not in practice, you're more likely to be injured than if you don't have one. Keep in mind that gun shops and range owners themselves are often connected to right-wing political groups.

If you choose to engage in firearms training, make sure everyone understands basic gun safety—as well as local laws—when it comes to owning, transporting, and potentially using firearms.

Above all, don't front with images of guns unless you own and are ready to use them. Which is better: to pretend that you have guns and then have one pulled on you when you are unarmed, or for fascists to try to roll on you without realizing you are armed?

However, if right-wingers have been threatening people in your area with guns, or have already shot people, we recommend you arming yourselves immediately and getting concealed carry permits, where possible. For more information, see “Know Your (Gun) Rights! A Primer for Radicals” at itsgoingdown.org/know-gun-rights-primer-radicals.

8) Manipulators, Big Mouths, Loose Cannons, and Provocateurs

A diversity of people are joining the anti-fascist movement today which both strengthens it and broadens its base. However, people may float into your circles who put your core goals and membership at risk, and so here are some warnings:

1. Some people use the antifa name as a way to promote their specific political views, especially members of some ideologically driven left-wing groups. If someone is more interested in recruiting people to their own group than doing anti-fascist work, get rid of them. Same with someone who seem to be interested in being publicly identified as antifa so they can gain public acclaim. Real antifa strive to remain anonymous—that's what the masks are for!
2. Insist on mutual respect. Some people will be more interested in identity politics than others, and some people will be new to all of these discussions. This diversity is a healthy development, but establish a minimum level of respect that must be observed for all group members. Disputes over patriarchal behavior tore antifa groups apart in the 1990s. Work to create a culture of mutual respect and support that can also help bring in new people.
3. Avoid those who insist you must “follow their leadership” because of their identity, or who lay out a preset plan based on experiences from a decade or more ago. The Far Right threatens a broad range of identities. Also, this is a new situation, and nobody knows what the correct course of action is.
4. Be wary of people who just want to fight. Physically confronting and defending against fascists is a necessary part of anti-fascist work, but is not the only or even necessarily the most important part. Macho posturing and an overemphasis on picking fights and physical combat can be reckless, un-strategic, and unnecessarily dangerous for your group.
5. Drop people who have loose lips and openly talk about illegal actions around people they don't know, or who pressure newer and younger people to engage in illegal activities. Antifa work is intense and potentially dangerous: We face threats from both the state and the

fascists. If someone in your group likes to brag and talk about various illegal actions they have done or plan to do, especially when they are in public settings (including meetings or people who aren't in the core group), quickly remove them.

Be particularly vigilant against anyone who attempts to pressure young or new members to carry out actions that might put them in unnecessary danger. This is a classic provocateur move with the potential to bring a group down.

Make good group dynamics and security culture part of your chapter's inner dynamics and when people make mistakes, remind them in a good way that they have done so. For those that can't get with the program, show them the door.

9) Infiltrators

Over the years, we have dealt with a variety of infiltrators. Sometimes they are random contacts. Sometimes they are fencesitters in the punk rock and skinhead scenes who are known to people in both fascist and anti-fascist circles. On one occasion, a black man tried to get involved with antifa groups, but ended up being affiliated with a neo-Nazi party and was feeding them information. Alt Right supporters in particular can be from the same social demographic as many left-wing activists, and have infiltrated several meetings and demonstrations, including January 2017 planning meetings in DC before the protests at the inauguration. You will have to screen out and deal with them.

If people contact you and ask to meet, ask yourself: Do you need to meet with them? Vet them first. Consider asking them to show ID or reveal other personal information before any in-person meetings.

10) State Repression

The state sees anti-fascists as an enemy. Activists will be monitored and the state will not hesitate to jail people. Until now, U.S. antifa have been spared the harsh repression that the animal rights and radical environmental direct action groups received, which included terrorism charges, long sentences, and harsh prison conditions. However, because Trump is allied with the Alt Right, this has the possibility of changing soon, and antifa may face increased targeting on a federal level.

In the past, police tended to show up in large groups at public demonstrations to prevent clashes between antifa and racists. This may no longer be the case (as happened in Anaheim in February 2016), or police may start openly taking the sides of racists in public conflicts. This happened in Seattle in January 2017 when an Alt Right supporter shot an activist at a demonstration; police refused to arrest the shooter.

Prepare legal support ahead of time; make sure you know a lawyer who is willing to represent anyone who is arrested. A trial lawyer, if necessary can be found later. Get used to doing political prisoner support. Many anti-fascists are in prison around the world, and they would like our support now. Remember: It maybe your turn later. Contribute to the International Anti-Fascist Defense Fund (intlantifadefence.word-press.com), and apply to it if members need financial help with legal, medical, or other expenses.

11) Political Orientation

The anti-fascist movement has come from multiple theoretical currents; it is based on an agreement on tactics, not ideological uniformity. In the U.S., most activists are anarchist, although a few are Maoist or anti-state Marxists, (in other countries, the movement is predominately Marxist.) There is a general agreement to live and let live regarding political disagreements that would be divisive in other activist circles.

Other than tracking and countering fascists and white supremacists, it's your choice what your group wants to focus on. Some antifa groups pay a varying level of attention to other radical right-wing forces, such as the anti-immigrant movement, the Patriot and militia movement, Islamophobes, Mens Rights Activists, homophobic organizers, etc. Regarding what radical movements you actively support, it's also your choice who you want to make your ties to. Today, this is commonly to Black Lives Matter and other activism against police oppression of the Black community, immigrant and refugee movements, work with prisoners, and Rojava solidarity work.

Working with other groups can be challenging. It is not uncommon for liberal activists to immediately smear anti-fascists as violent thugs who delegitimize their movement, and others will be willing to inform the authorities if they suspect illegal actions are being taken. However, a few will be sympathetic—and we have run into a number of people who privately have told us they were antifa in the past and understand the need for this approach.

However, in general we have found that, unless there is an existing relationship with a more mainstream organization, they will almost always reject collaboration if you approach them as an antifa group. It's best to build relationships prior to any request for working together, or if this can't be done, to approach them under a different name ("Las Cruces United Against Racism"). In general relationships with Black Lives Matter and immigrants rights groups have been positive. However, be sure that any conflicts with fascists are done in a way that does not draw police repression onto these demonstration activists: keep a separation in time and space.

On the national level, your group can affiliate with the Torch Network if you are in agreement with their points of unity: torchantifa.org

12) Take Action!

Now that you have a group, what do you do?

- **Establish an Online Presence**

If you are a public group, establish an online presence. Again, we recommend limiting this to a webpage and/or twitter. If you make a facebook group for an event, make sure you set the invite list to private: many people have been doxxed based on information from invites. For some more ideas on basic online security, see: itsgoingdown.org/time-beef-defense-against-far-right-doxxing

- **Start Monitoring**

Find out about your local Far Right groups and collect information about them, including organizations, names, pictures, addresses, and work places. These can include Alt Right activists, KKK, Nazi skinheads, neo-Nazi parties, suit-and-tie white nationalists, anti-Semites,

Islamophobes, anti-immigration activists, Patriot and militia groups, and others. The SPLC's Hate Map lists groups by state, although it will be incomplete. You can also look at established national groups such as Identity Evropa and the Traditionalist Worker Party and see if they have local chapters in your area. Also, reading reports by other anti-fascist groups may give insight into who is recruiting in your area.

- **Stickering and Wheatpasting**

If racist groups are stickering or flyering in neighborhoods, organize patrols to tear them down. Use a scraping tool, as there have been occasional instances of razors being placed behind the stickers. Create anti-fascist stickering, flyering, wheatpasting, and graffiti campaigns of your own.

- **Doxxing**

After doing your research, present information about racist organizing in your community. The information you release should present enough information to convince an average reader that the target is clearly a racist. Information should include, if possible: a picture, home address, phone number, social media profiles, and employment information.

Be sure to include organizational affiliations and screenshots showing concrete evidence of racist and fascist views. Follow up the doxx with a pressure campaign: call their work and try to get them fired, and inform their neighbors through flyering or door-to-door campaigns.

When you present your intel, you'll have showed your hand, however, and generally it's difficult to collect more after that. Also be aware that you will enrage your target by naming them: you might have been ignored as a public group for a year doing antifa stuff, but once you refer to a local racist by name, they will fixate on you.

Make sure your intel is correct. You will lose credibility and create unnecessary enemies if you list a home address or work place that the fascist is no longer associated with. The majority of research can be done online, but some things can only be verified in the real world.

- **Event Shutdowns**

Pressure venues to cancel racist or fascist events. Make sure you have your dossier on the subject prepared beforehand to present, as the first question will always be "How do you know they are a racist?" Approach venues with a friendly phone call, as often they are not informed about the politics of events at their space. However, if they don't cancel immediately, they will almost always need to be pressured. Collect phone numbers, emails, and social media contacts and call for a shutdown. (We have found it is helpful to make easily sharable graphics and short videos.) Threaten a boycott of the venue if the event goes on, and follow through on this. In Montreal, one racist concert was canceled after antifa physically blocked the entrance.

- **Self-Defense Trainings**

Set up an antifa gym or regular self-defense trainings. Some groups set up two parallel ones: one mixed gender, and one women/trans/gender non-conforming folks. In addition

to providing skills, trainings are good ways to increase confidence and meet new people. (An antifa gym network exists in Europe.)

- **Events: Benefits & Tabling**

If your group has a public presence, table at events with anti-fascist literature, stickers, buttons, patches, etc. This is particularly important in cultural scenes where fascists are recruiting, to help organize resistance to them, as well as to reach out to new participants and pressure fencesitters.

If you have a friendly political situation, throw benefits to raise funds.

Concerts are a favorite, but be creative! The anti-fascist movement is going to need a lot of money, and it's better to collect it before rather than after it's needed. Also get in the habit of having letter writing nights and doing other support work for anti-fascist and related political prisoners. Consider donating to the International Anti-Fascist Defense Fund, which collects funds for prisoners around the world.

- **Demonstrations**

If racists are having public rallies, organize mass demonstrations against them with allied groups who are willing to work with you. You can also join other demonstrations, such as Black Lives Matter or for immigrants and refugees, with antifa flags and banners—though be sure to be respectful of the organizers and not get in front of their message. Take photos with antifa banners, blur the faces, and put them on social media.

In general, antifa work should be a certain set of practices within the broader radical movement against white supremacy in particular, but hierarchy and oppression in general. Antifascism is not a stand-alone ideology; it is a piece of a whole, just as prisoner support is. Fascists, after all, don't just threaten people of color—they also are against Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ people, immigrants and refugees, feminists, leftists, etc. Make sure that antifascism is a part of the other movements in our society towards liberation.

13) Security Culture & Internet Safety

Especially if you are new to the kinds of activism where police and others may be targeting you, be sure to familiarize yourself and your comrades with security culture protocols, and to implement online security measures, from the start. It's common for groups to be more open early on and closed in later; try to avoid this dynamic by starting out with your cards close to your chest, and keep playing them that way throughout the game.

It is best that individual members leave social media. This is a double-edged sword, but it will provide more protection if antifa avoid facebook and similar platforms.

Also keep in mind that some security measures are primarily aimed at keeping you anonymous from the fascists, but might not do much to shield you from the deeper resources of the state. The FBI has much greater surveillance resources than the local police, who in turn have more resources than your local white power crew.

Some applications that can help you with security include Signal (text and calls), KeePassX (password manager), TOR (internet browser), Pad.riseup.net (“real time collaboration of text documents”), Jitsi.org (web conferences), PGP (email & document encryption), Mailvelope (encryption for webmail), OwnCloud (alternative to dropbox and googledocs), and PowerBase (database solution). In addition, spend some time removing yourself from search directories.

An extended discussion of security culture and digital security is beyond the scope of this primer, but starting points have been included in the following reading list.

Further Readings

General Security Culture

“Security Culture: A Handbook for Activists” pdf.resistanc.org/sectirity.handbook.zine.pdf

“What is Security Culture?” crimethinc.com/2004/11/01/what-is-security-culture

“Security Culture for Activists” ruckus.org/downloads/RuckusSecurityCultureForActivists.pdf

Digital Security

“How to Trump-Proof Your Electronic Communications” slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2016/11/how_to_trump_proof_your_electronic_communications.html

“Digital Security Tips for Protesters” eff.org/deeplinks/2016/11/digital-security-tips-for-protesters

“Security in a Box: Digital security tools and tactics” securityinabox.org/en

“YOUR PHONE IS A COP: An OpSec/InfoSec Primer for the Dystopian Present”

itsgoingdown.org/phone-cop-opsecinfosec-primer-dystopian-present “YOUR PHONE IS A COP 2: Getting Arrested with Your Phone” itsgoingdown.org/phone-cop-2-getting-arrested-phone

“Time to Beef up Defense Against Far-Right Doxxing” itsgoingdown.org/time-beef-defense-against-far-right-doxxing

“Speak Up & Stay Safe(r): A Guide to Protecting Yourself From Online Harassment” online-safety.feministfrequency.com/en/-preventing-doxxing

“How to Remove Yourself From People Search Directories” techlicious.com/tip/remove-yourself-spokeo-intelius-peoplesmart-mylife

Antifascist News And Analysis

It’s Going Down itsgoingdown.org

Anti-Fascist News antifascistnews.net Three Way Fight therewayfght.com Iogsp iogsp.com

Idavox / One People’s Project idavox.com

Antifa Prisoners

“International Anti-Fascist Defence Fund” intlantifadefence.wordpress.com

“Global Antifa Prisoner List” nycantifa.wordpress.com/global-antifa-prisoner-list

Organizing Resources

Torch Network torchantifa.org

“Affinity Groups: Essential Building Block of Anarchist Organization”
crimethinc.com/2017/02/06/how-to-form-an-affinity-group-the-essential-building-block-of-anarchist-organization

“#TrumpTheRegime: Resources and Ongoing Resistance to Trump and the Far-Right”
itsgoingdown.org/trimptheregime-resoirces-ongoing-resistance-trimp-far-right

“Bloc Party: How to Join the Resistance Interview & Zine” *itsgoingdown.org/bloc-party-how-to-join-the-resistance-interview-zine* “How to set up an anti-fascist group” *antifascistnetwork.org/how-to-set-up-an-anti-fascist-group*

“Resources for anti-fascist action” *antifascistnetwork.org/2015/06/07/resources-for-anti-fascist-action/*

Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook (somewhat dated, but see chapters on anti-fascist action and infiltration) *archive.org/details/RecipesForDisasterAnAnarchistCookbook*

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



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Retrieved on 2020-09-08 from
<https://itsgoingdown.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/howtoantifa-revised.pdf>

An alternative version can be read here:

<https://itsgoingdown.org/forming-an-antifa-group-a-manual/>

theanarchistlibrary.org