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# NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION

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HANDOUT

**DIRECT ACTION:** The strategic use of immediately effective acts to achieve a social or political end and challenge an unjust power dynamic.

**CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE:** Refusal to obey civil laws in an effort to change an unjust governmental policy or legislation.

**THE RUCKUS SOCIETY** promotes the use of direct action that is:

- creative
- strategic
- nonviolent
- directed at a clear decision-making target
- builds people's power

**EFFECTIVE NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION CAN:**

- Directly stop a social, environmental, or political injustice
- Assert or defend a positive right despite the consequences
- Show willful refusal to cooperate with or participate in an injustice.
- Sound the alarm: alerts folks to an issue, problem, or idea
- Create a community based solution
- Amplify people's voices, build people power

**TYPES OF DIRECT ACTION:**

- Protest: registering your dissent
  - *Examples*: rallies, marches, teach-ins, postcards, street theatre, billboard liberation, banner hangs
- Non-cooperation: withdrawing something from the system that makes it difficult to function
  - *Examples*: consumer boycotts, labor strike, general strike, student walk-outs, draft resisters, war tax resistance, fasting
- Intervention: directly intervening in the functioning of the system
  - *Examples*: blockading roads or buildings, disrupting meetings or "business as usual", bird-dogging, jail solidarity, tree-sits, critical mass, plowshares
- Creative Solution: developing alternative, community-based systems
  - *Examples*: community gardens, food not bombs, freedom schools, clinic defense, off-grid housing, worker cooperatives, peer counseling, community policing

## **ACTION OPPORTUNITIES:**

Every system of injustice has distinct points that provide action opportunities-- times when communities can make clear demands for change, stop the system, or create their own solutions.

Each of the four types of direct action (protest, non-cooperation, intervention, or creative solution) can be used at any of the six points listed below.

- Point of production: when harmful items are created
- Point of destruction: when resources are extracted, pollution is released, or natural resources are destroyed
- Point of consumption: where products reach the consumer
- Point of decision: where plans for the future are determined;
- Point of assumption: where social norms are developed and upheld;
- Point of potential: when cultural or historic moments become action opportunities.

When planning an action for any given opportunity, think about the “**action logic**”: does the type of action you’re choosing fit the opportunity? Consider who is involved in doing the particular action, the history of the struggle, timing, logistics, and the overall story you’re trying to tell by doing the action.

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SOURCE:

*Hannah Strange (The  
Ruckus Society)*

[www.ruckus.org](http://www.ruckus.org)

*Action Opportunities from  
SmartMeme’s “Points of  
Intervention” worksheet.*

[www.smartmeme.org](http://www.smartmeme.org)

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# CHECKLIST FOR STRATEGIC ACTION PLANNING

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HANDOUT

1. **Clarify the Strategy:** What do you want to call attention to with this action? How does this support your campaign goals?
2. **Know the History:** What has your group (or other groups) done before to address the issue? How can you build on the history to escalate your tactics?
3. **Identify the Opportunity:** Why now? What is the Action Opportunity? Is there a new development on your issue or change in the political climate that you can take advantage of?
4. **Find Allies:** Who are your existing allies in this work? Who should be involved? Who is also impacted by this issue?
5. **Pick a Target:** Who is the decision-maker? Who can help you pressure that decision-maker?
6. **Develop Action Demands:** What do you want from your target? What would a "win" look like? Make sure these are realistic, measurable, strategic, and accountable to the impacted community.
7. **Assess Your Resources:** What skills does your group have? How many people will participate? How much money and supplies do you have access to?
8. **Choose a Tactic:** Make sure it will move you towards achieving your campaign goal and action demands. What exactly will people do? Why will it put pressure on your target? Why is it perfect for this moment?
9. **Determine Your Audience:** Who specifically do you want to mobilize with your action? Is it the public? Consumers? Shareholders? Government Officials?
10. **Decide the Tone:** What will the action feel like? Will the action be jubilant, angry, solemn, or calm? How will the tone impact the target and audience? Do you want to invite or repel them? How will the tone impact your group?
11. **Focus your Message & Media Strategy:** How do you make complicated issues understandable? Keep it short and simple. The

- message should reflect the tone & clearly communicate your demands. Develop media strategy: how will the action be covered, and by who?
12. **Create Visuals and Audio:** What will your action look and sound like? What imagery do you need to create? How will you amplify your voices and sound? How will the visuals and audio support your tone and convey your demands?
  13. **Choose the Location:** Where will this action take place? What does that location look and feel like? Is it a community-based location or is it the decision-maker's territory? Are people familiar with the location?
  14. **Scout the Location:** How will your action logistically take place at the location? How will people get there? What goes on there in the course of a day? Is there security on site?
  15. **Make an Action Plan:** Think through the action from start to finish. Assign action roles, make a time schedule, list supplies and equipment needed, finalize logistics. Make backup plans just in case!
  16. **Practice the Action:** Over and over. Then practice some more.
  17. **Perform the Action:** Be flexible, stay true to your action goals and demands, and be safe- eliminate unnecessary risk.
  18. **Celebrate!** Acknowledge your successes, even if your action demands were not met. Recognize new leadership, and congratulate new members.
  19. **Debrief the Action:** What were the action highlights? Where was there room for improvement?
  20. **Follow up:** Reach out to participants & members- keep them updated. Make calls to media- get the story out. Provide jail support if necessary, and keep track of ongoing legal issues.

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*SOURCE:*

*Compiled from lists by JC Callender and Sharon Lungo, The Ruckus Society [www.ruckus.org](http://www.ruckus.org), and Kathy NiKeefe, Students for a Free Tibet*

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### BEFORE ACTION

- **Action Coordinator:** a member, campaigner or organizer who makes sure the big picture of the action happens!
- **Fundraisers:** hold events or get donations to cover action expenses.
- **Researchers:** to learn about the target and gather facts for the campaign.
- **Scout:** find out logistical information about the location and how the action could take place there.
- **Outreach:** make sure members and allies know about the action.
- **Logistics and support:** gather supplies and materials for the action. Take care of permits, paperwork, and other action prep tasks.
- **Meeting Facilitator:** make sure the planning process is inclusive.
- **Artists, Painters, Sewers:** make props, signs, banners, political theatre, etc.
- **Media Outreach:** Send out media advisory and press release.
- **Media Kits:** write, gather and photocopy contents.
- **Writers:** write materials, flyers, media kit contents, chants, web site, etc.

### DURING ACTION

- **Action Team:** the core participants in the action. Often intending to risk arrest or commit civil disobedience.
- **Direct Support People:** provide direct emotional or logistical support to those risking arrest. Often more at risk of being arrested with the person they are providing support to.
- **General Support People:** people not directly supporting the action team who provide logistical support like food, water, etc.
- **Police Liaison:** maintains communication or negotiates between police and demonstrators. Not necessarily a decision maker for the action.
- **Peacekeepers/monitors:** another "layer" of support for the demonstration, specializing in nonviolent de-escalation techniques.
- **Diversion Team:** can be used to draw attention away from the action team as they deploy.
- **Media Spokesperson:** a member of the organization or community who communicates the main goals and demands of the action to the

media. It's good to train these people and provide soundbytes so they stay on message.

- **Media Outreach:** Invites the media to the event, greets them and introduces them to the Spokespeople.
- **Communication Team:** (also called tactical team) uses radios or other forms of communication to relay information between action team, coordinator, media outreach etc.
- **Demonstrators/Participants:** people to hold signs, chant, hand out literature, sing, etc. to convey the action goals and demands. Provide fun and morale.
- **Independent Media:** members of your group who records the event on video and photo, writes articles or website updates.
- **Medical Team:** street medics or EMT's who are there to support the action team and participants.
- **Legal Observers:** a group of people who observe and record what happens during the action, especially interactions between action team/participants and law enforcement. This information could be useful in legal cases. These observers should be trained.
- **Legal Support:** someone off-site on the other end of a phone who is tracking arrests and providing support to folks in jail. Action team and participants should all know this phone number!
- **Off-site Support:** someone who provides logistical support in the form of childcare, pet sitting, etc

### **AFTER ACTION**

- **Legal Support:** follows up with any arrest situations and ongoing legal cases resulting from the action.
- **Documentarian/ Historian/Archivist:** compiles all independent media generated at the action.
- **Fundraisers:** make sure any remaining costs are covered.
- **Public speakers:** share the success of your action with allies, members, and the general public.
- **Media Follow-up:** make sure the story of your action is getting coverage. Provide photos, articles, video, interviews, or write letters to the editor.

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*SOURCE:  
Adapted from RANT  
Collective,  
[www.rantcollective.net](http://www.rantcollective.net)*

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# DIRECT ACTION PLANNING WORKSHOP EVALUATION FORM

**HANDOUT**

***Date & Location of Training:***

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***Name of Trainer(s):***

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***Please rate the following statements:***

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
<b>As a result of this training by The Ruckus Society:</b>				
I can define direct action & I understand the four different types of direct action				
My skills in direct action planning has increased				
I understand the concepts of action opportunities and action logic				
I feel more interested in taking part in nonviolent direct action				
I feel that nonviolent direct action can help my group/community win our campaign/struggle.				

***Circle Yes or No:***

Have you been part of Nonviolent Direct Action in the past? **Yes / No**

Were the trainers knowledgeable about the topic? **Yes / No**

*Comments:*

Were the trainers skilled at conveying their knowledge/information? **Yes / No**

*Comments:*

***(PLEASE TURN OVER)***

**Please answer the following questions briefly:**

Highlight of the training:

Would you add anything to the training?

General Comments:

**NAME (OPTIONAL)**

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**Please add me to The Ruckus Society e-mail list for updates about future trainings and actions!**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_