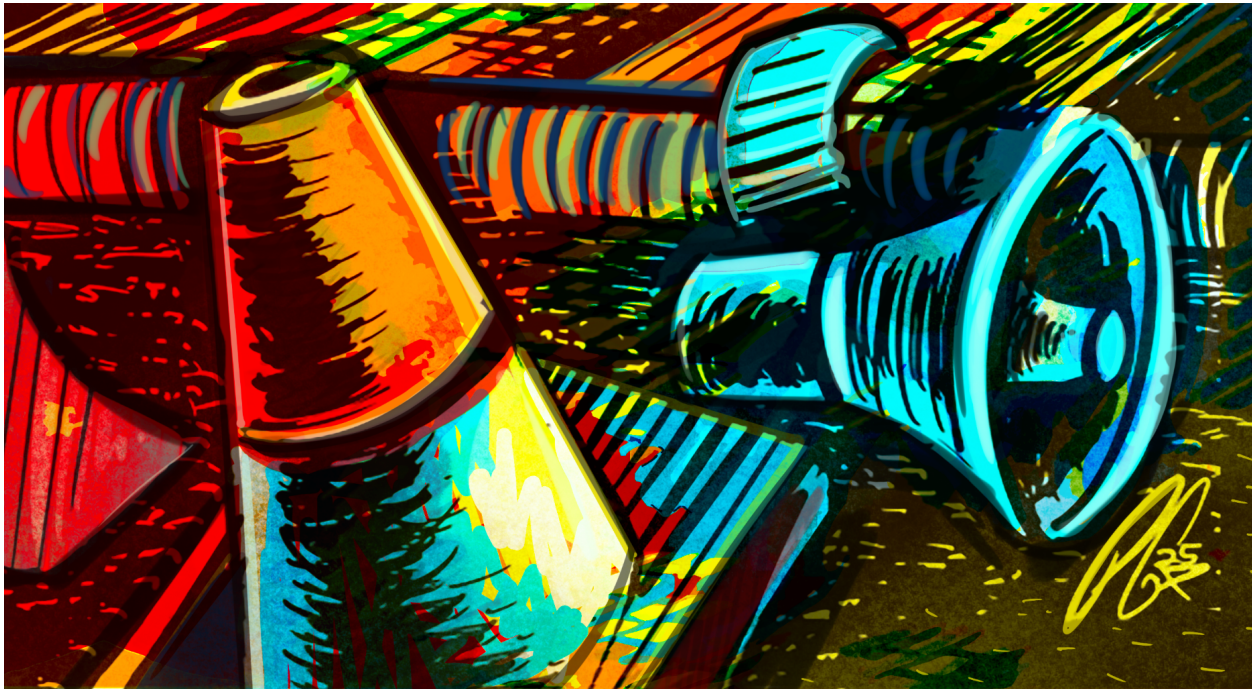


Streetwise & Steady

A Workbook for Action Peacekeepers or Event Marshals



By Daniel Hunter and Eileen Flanagan

Illustrated by Paul Garner

INTRODUCTION

We are living through a moment of democratic backsliding — an erosion of norms, institutions, and freedoms that some felt unshakable. Authoritarianism isn't new to this country. It has roots in slavery and Jim Crow, Japanese internment camps, the colonial project that tried to exterminate all Native peoples, and legacies of brutality and repression that have etched our history.

Democracy has always been waged. In this environment, public protest becomes both more necessary and more risky. Those in power may deploy tactics from the authoritarian playbook — stoking fear, marginalizing dissent, and justifying repression. History shows that when movements stay grounded in nonviolence, discipline, and solidarity, they can expose these tactics for what they are: desperate attempts to cling to control.

That's where peacekeepers come in. Peacekeepers, or marshalls, are the quiet stewards of safety and coordination in the streets. They help keep our movements organized, our people protected, and our message clear. They are not bosses, not enforcers, but facilitators — trying to ensure that our protests remain spaces of courage, care, and collective power.

This guidebook offers practical tools and principles for peacekeepers, rooted in the belief that nonviolent discipline is not just a tactic — it's a strategy for resilience. By projecting calm, modeling solidarity, and preparing for the unexpected, peacekeepers help movements withstand pressure without fracturing. If fear is the goal, then solidarity is the antidote.

When dictators want to crack down on people speaking out, they hope for chaos. They want to make *us* look dangerous. They win when the story is about broken windows instead of broken systems.

Peacekeeping is a serious skill — and best when coupled with training, a larger safety team with knowledge about the local conditions, and a well-designed action. This workbook isn't a substitute for in-person training, but a tool to deepen our skills.

So whether you're new to peacekeeping or a seasoned marshal, this handbook offers bite-sized lessons, field-tested stories, and interactive pages to help you reflect and grow.

When we stay grounded in purpose and connected, we can hold the line with calm and courage. May this guide serve not just as a tool, but as a companion in the long, steady work of keeping our movements safer and stronger.

Let's get ready.

DEDICATION

This manual is rooted in the lived wisdom of those who practice courage every day — those who de-escalate harm, hold ground with love, and make room for justice to take root.

We honor all the hard-earned lessons from folks who willingly stepped into the fray to those who the fray stepped on them. Thanks to all the written materials, stories, and swapped tips given to the movement — thank you.

by Daniel Hunter and Eileen Flanagan, Choose Democracy 2025

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CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS A PEACEKEEPER?

A peacekeeper (sometimes called a “marshal” or “action ambassador”) helps keep people safe and makes sure the action goes smoothly. You don’t need any special superpowers — chances are, you already have many skills you need from everyday life.

Think about times you’ve helped calm down a friend who was upset or stopped a fight between classmates. Or when you noticed that someone on the bus wasn’t feeling well and helped them get the help they needed. These are the same skills peacekeepers use.

Peacekeepers help move the crowd, answer questions, cool down heated moments, and connect people with first aid or other resources (rides? restrooms?). Your calm and confidence help create a safe, organized space for everyone involved.

Peacekeepers are often part of a larger safety team, which may include a Police Liaison, Media spokespeople, MC, and an Action Coordinator. The Peacekeeper role isn’t about enforcing rules. It’s about creating the right conditions so the action can achieve its goals.

ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES FOR THE PREPARED PEACEKEEPER

- ☐ Fully charged cell phone (lock down your phone if you have secure action info)
- ☐ Contacts for Police Liaison, Legal Observers, and other key action roles
- ☐ Schedule of events
- ☐ Map with march route, noting problem locations and first aid
- ☐ Identifiable vest or armband, if team is using these
- ☐ Water, snacks, sunscreen
- ☐ First aid supplies if your action won’t have medics
- ☐ Your ID, just in case of trouble with police

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Before the Action

- **Get Trained:** Use this guide and attend peacekeeper trainings (see list at end).
- **Meet Your Team:** Align on responsibilities and plans. If numbers allow, plan to go in pairs. Assess yourself and your team (*can we control our tempers? can we follow directions? do we know the action plan? can we stay the whole time?*).
- **Prepare Supplies:** Pack the above list. Ask if you’ll be given a vest or armband.
- **Get Oriented:** Learn the action plan, route, roles, and communication channels.
- **Ground Yourself:** Show up hydrated, rested, and emotionally ready. Take a moment to calm your mind and body before you begin.

During the Action

- **Be a team player.** Take direction from the organizers or team leads.
- **Partner up, whenever possible.** Best to move through the crowd in pairs.
- **Be Present and Observant:** Stay alert to what’s happening around you. Scan for signs of confusion, frustration, or conflict before they escalate.

- **Communicate Clearly and Calmly:** Use a steady voice and simple words. Repeat important information so everyone understands.
- **Move with Purpose:** Whether you're directing crowd flow or stepping into a tense moment, move with confidence and intention.
- **Use Your Body Language:** Open posture, eye contact, and calm gestures can reduce tension and build trust.
- **De-escalate Conflicts:** Encourage dialogue, separate conflicting parties, or use humor or distraction to ease pressure.
- **Know Your Limits:** Ask for backup or help when things get beyond your capacity or when you're not the best person to solve a particular problem.
- **Stay Flexible:** Plans change. Be ready to adapt and respond to new challenges.
- **Look out for Vulnerable Participants:** Whether due to age, disability, health, or emotional stress, some people may need extra support.
- **Take Care of Yourself:** Drink water, breathe deeply, and check in with your team.
- **Be available the whole time.** This is a full-time role. Prepare to stay to the bitter end of the event. Don't take other tasks like handing out leaflets.

After the Action

- **Debrief with team:** Share what went well or was hard, and lessons for next time.
- **Support each other:** Hold space to talk through stress, fear, or adrenaline crashes.
- **Report key info:** Let organizers know about incidents or follow-up concerns.
- **Rest and recover:** Hydrate, stretch, eat, and take care of your nervous system.
- **Reflect and learn:** Journal or think through what you learned and how you want to grow in this role.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

A rally was punctuated by shouts from an antagonistic, drunk man. For a while the crowd ignored him, but he became more and more animated. A peacekeeper made a decision and very publicly walked towards the man. He was trying to send a signal "it's handled."

Once there, he lowered his voice so it was hard for the man to hear. The drunk man quieted enough to lean in, and they exchanged a long and tedious conversation. The drunk man ranted and raved for half an hour while the peacekeeper nodded his head, asked questions, and listened the best he could. No insight or meeting of the minds was reached — but the overall action continued without interruption.



A rally planned for an afternoon was stretched to the limits by a 96° summer heat wave. The organizers had planned several hours of speakers. Peacekeepers, having distributed water to the crowd, saw that the energy was waning — extreme fatigue was descending fast. Unusually for a peacekeeper role, they approached the organizers and said, "You gotta end this early." The organizers realized they needed to adjust plans and did. The action ended before the energy was drained or anyone fainted!

PRACTICE PAGE: PROJECTING CONFIDENCE

Part of a peacekeeper's role is projecting confidence. One way is to remember you have skills already in your life experience.

Circle things you've done and think about how they help you be a peacekeeper.



Calmed an angry kid



Stepped between
arguing friends



Told someone where
a bathroom is



Walked someone
home who felt unsafe



Put a bandaid on
someone



Stayed calm while
someone yelled



Flagged a problematic
behavior



Gave directions



Reminded a group of
a shared goal



Spotted tension and
helped shift the mood



Talked someone out
of a rash decision



Calmed yourself
down

Peacekeepers tend to people, care when people are angry, scan crowds, give instructions, and — yes — give bandaids.

You already have skills for being a peacekeeper! You can do this!

CHAPTER 2: BEING IN THE RIGHT LOCATION

One of the most important jobs of a peacekeeper is being in the right place at the right time. Your position can make the difference between a peaceful, smooth action and chaos breaking out. Typically, a lead peacekeeper will position teams across the action. You will still need to be aware of trouble spots as the crowd moves.

Your goal is to be where you can see clearly, act quickly, and help keep the group safe and organized. That may mean standing at a busy intersection to block traffic. Another time, it could mean moving through the crowd, scanning for problems, or helping vulnerable people.

Areas that are most likely in need of peacekeeping:

- At the front of the protesters
- At the stage, where people may try to rush the stage
- Wherever counter-protesters are
- At the back of the protesters (especially where stragglers might arrive late)
- Any bottlenecks — places where the crowd has to squeeze through
- At the intersections, especially if cars/crowds have to stop to let protesters pass.

If you're where you're needed most, it will help you:

- **Read the Crowd:** Notice shifts in mood or energy (e.g., excitement turning to agitation); spot conflicts early (e.g., verbal arguments, pushing, individuals trying to escalate tensions).
- **Monitor Surroundings:** Keep an eye on police presence and movement; watch for counter-protesters or other external threats; know where your exits, medical stations, and regrouping points are.
- **Stay in Communication and Track Your Team:** Share updates quickly with fellow peacekeepers; relay important changes (e.g., a shift in protest route or police behavior).
- **Anticipate Issues:** If the crowd starts moving fast, consider where bottlenecks will form. If police change formation, watch to assess if they are preparing to kettle (corral or trap) the crowd, and share that intel with your team.

TIPS FOR BEING IN THE RIGHT LOCATION

- Move with the crowd but try to keep a vantage point so you can see and be seen. For example, at a march:
 - **Front Peacekeepers** stay a little ahead of a march, leading at a pace that allows the march to stay together. They look for obstructions and facilitate the planned action.
 - **Peacekeepers in the crowd** keep to the edges and perimeters. Block traffic at intersections, if needed. Look for scuffles or counter-protesters.
 - **Back Peacekeepers** bring up the rear, contacting the front to slow down if needed. They integrate stragglers into the march, make sure no one is left

behind, and keep an eye on counter-protesters or police approaching from the rear.

- Stay alert for blocked exits, narrow passages, or areas where people might get separated.
- Keep alert. Keep scanning the crowd, cars, passengers. In long actions, some peacekeepers suffer from boredom and found it helpful to vary postures and the way they walk. Stretch. Try walking on tiptoes for a little while.
- Communicate your location regularly with other peacekeepers or team leads.
- Keep pace with the crowd. Be ready to adjust as the crowd grows or shifts direction.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Near the end of a long march, a group of activists from a subgroup announced, "The march is now heading this way!" They attempted to lead several hundred people in a different direction, towards a police barricade. Not knowing better, most people initially followed. Peacekeepers were positioned nearby and quickly intervened: "No, no, the march continues this way" — they moved ahead of the march and calmly but confidently redirected the marchers. The march was not hijacked.



During a civil disobedience action, a person with a portable sound system suddenly began shouting at one of the speakers. A few people shouted at them to "shut up."

A peacekeeper assigned to the speaker's area went over. Quickly, they saw that the disruptor had history with that particular speaker and decided it wasn't worth trying to shut them down. "Everyone has a right to their voice," they told the watching crowd. Most of the crowd turned back to the speaker. The shouting person kept at it. After a while, the peacekeeper calmly engaged them in a conversation, "How long do you plan on yelling?" and "What's the message you want to convey?" The peacekeeper listened and, after feeling sufficiently heard, the shouter took their loud system and left the rally.



Struggling with the front of the march setting too fast a pace, one group asked for volunteers with disabilities to lead the march. This went really well for pace-setting and received a lot of appreciation from many sides.

PRACTICE PAGE: OBSERVING

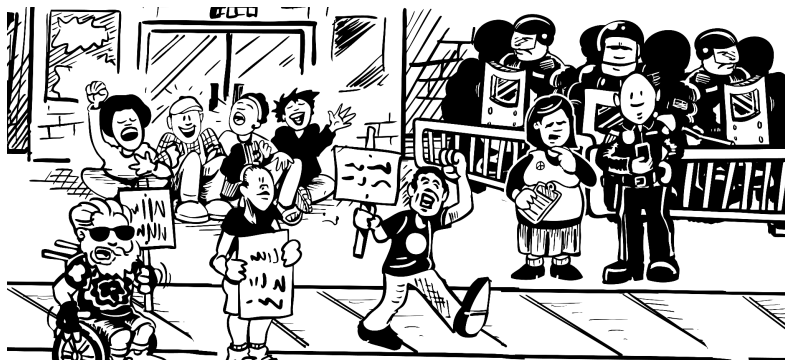
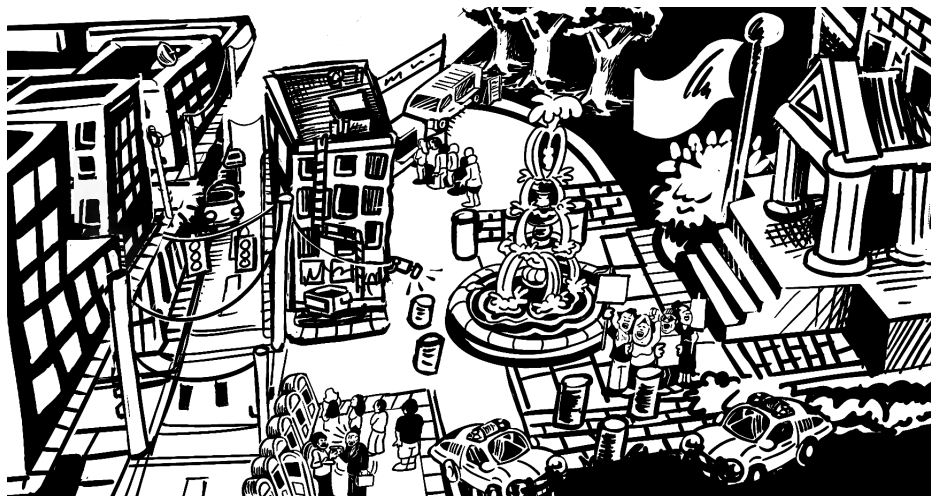
Peacekeepers stay aware of what's happening around them. That means noticing where tension might rise — and being in the right place before things go sideways.

Look at the maps below. You only have 3 marshals to place at each one. *Where would you put them? Why?*



Map 1: A march to the park's stage

Map 2: A rally by the fountain at city hall



Map 3: A civil disobedience blockade

Why did you choose those locations? What might you notice that a map can't show?

CHAPTER 3: DE-ESCALATING BASICS

De-escalation is one of the most important skills a peacekeeper can have. You can't control other people, but managing your own breath, voice, and tension can influence them. Your calmness helps others feel safe.

Whether it's calming down a protester or handling hecklers and angry onlookers, your ability to reduce tension can stop problems before they escalate.

One experienced peacekeeper says: *you can stop most crowds from doing dumb things if they are fed, watered, and they know the plan*. She tells a story of "stopping a riot" when the single stall port-o-potty was overflowing and people were outside getting explosively frustrated. She persuaded a local restaurant to open their restrooms. Crisis managed.

Not all conflict needs intervention. You might wait and watch if a disagreement seems constructive, healthy (even if loud), or the situation is unfolding with wise voices.

You often want to intervene if the conflict seems destructive, people are asking for help, nobody else is helping, or physical posture suggests that physical harm may be imminent.

When choosing what to do, be aware of how you may appear to others. While any kind of person can be an effective peacekeeper, our age, race, gender, size, and the way we dress can all influence how we are perceived (e.g., a very tall man may choose to stand a little further back from someone who already seems to be afraid).

If something doesn't work, try something else. Remember your A,B,Cs:

- A — Assess** what is happening.
- B — Breathe** to keep yourself calm.
- C — Choose** if you will get involved and how.
- D — De-escalate** using the tips below.

TIPS FOR DE-ESCALATING: THE SIX DS

- **Delay:** Wait it out, if that is a safe option.
- **Direct Intervention:**
 - Use open and non-threatening body language — e.g., hands visible
 - Keep your voice even, not angry or loud.
 - Use active listening. Nod to show that you hear their concerns.
 - Do not touch angry people, or police.
 - Stay respectful in words and tone, even if others are hostile.
- **Distract:**
 - Use humor or start a song.
 - Ask a question like, "Where'd you get that great t-shirt?"
- **Distance:**
 - Use your body to create space between individuals or groups.
 - Invite an upset person to move to a quieter area to talk or take a break.
 - Link arms with others to form a protective circle/wall.

- **Delegate:**
 - Recruit allies to keep the crowd moving while you de-escalate.
 - If needed, bring others who may have more credibility into the conversation to help calm things down.
 - If someone is too angry or violent and you've run out of options, get someone to call for more help.
- **Document:**
 - Record or have someone record tense interactions. Assess if helpful as it may calm a person down — or make them angrier. (Use Instagram, FacebookLive, or any app that uploads immediately to the cloud.)

HANDLING COUNTER-PROTESTERS/HECKLERS

Your goal is not to convince or persuade. Your goal is to have a successful event and make sure their harassment doesn't become the story. Successful peacekeepers have done this by listening for a long time, joking with them, singing songs over them, even agreeing with them in order to allow things to go more smoothly.

While one peacekeeper focuses on the counter-protesters, another can signal to the crowd that they should not take the bait and keep moving on. You don't want this to be like a car crash, where people slow down to stare, which feeds the conflict energy.

HANDLING PROTESTERS, INFILTRATORS, AND AGENT PROVOCATEURS

Escalation can come from our people. Upset or distraught protesters may need you to escort them to the perimeter for some space. Help people take a breath and remind them of our common goals, even if we don't agree on every chant or sign.

Protesters can unwittingly stir up trouble by spreading and escalating rumors — perhaps about counter-protesters or police. This can agitate the crowd even more than their actual presence. Sometimes infiltrators will intentionally spread rumors in crowds to spur chaos. So when you hear a rumor, calmly tell people that you will look into it. Check in with your team to get verification. Do not spread rumors without verification.

Agent provocateurs are people who intentionally join crowds to stir up trouble. Sometimes they try to encourage violence or property destruction to undermine the action's goals. You can surround them with peacekeepers, ask the crowd to help isolate them, or divert attention (start a song, perform silly skits, create alternative theater to draw attention away from a troublemaker). Alert the team to keep a close eye on that troublemaker.

The behavior of an agent provocateur and a fed up protester may be the same. You are not there to judge or determine their motives — merely to uphold the action's goals. Actions are democratic spaces — so if everyone has come being told there is no property destruction, then your job is to uphold that principle for the duration of that action. ("We're not doing that today. By attending, we've agreed to that for today.")

As a de-escalator, you will use many tools — your voice, your body language, your ability to listen — all combined to help turn down the heat.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Protesters at an inauguration faced tension at Secret Service entrances, where a mix of protesters and President-supporters created a charged atmosphere. One entrance — where things moved the slowest — was an especially tense bottleneck. People began arguing, and there were minor physical altercations.

A peacekeeper tried loudly saying, "This is a new experience for us to talk across these lines of difference. It's okay to disagree." This calmed things for a few minutes.

But as the line still didn't move, a few minutes later arguments again flared with minor pushing. The peacekeeper saw the potential for serious violence. Looking around, he saw a small group singing and invited them over to the checkpoint. Tentatively at first, they took the bullhorn and sang. Their song was against sweatshops, but gentle in melody and tender in words. Calm permeated the crowd, and the action was a success.



The night before a protest, a well-known activist was jumped and punched in the face by thugs from the other side. Determined not to be scared in his neighborhood, the activist joined the protest the next day determined to not let violence rule the day. A team of peacekeepers — this time without vests — stayed close to avoid any altercation. As expected, the thugs arrived. There was yelling — but only physical posturing. Other peacekeepers did not run but slowly walked towards the scene. One peacekeeper kept other protesters at bay — to keep this from becoming the focal point of the action. After a few minutes of yelling, the thugs got into the activist's face. At that point, peacekeepers calmly told the activist, "We made our point." Together, they all walked back into the crowd while one peacekeeper stayed to let the thugs know, "It's over." Nothing happened that day.

PRACTICE PAGE: EMPATHIZE WITH OTHERS

When things get tense, your first step can set the tone for everything that follows.

Draw a line from each situation (on the left) to one or more first moves (on the right).

Some interventions work for multiple situations — and add your own interventions, too!



A protester
yelling at
another
protester

Ask in a
friendly way:
"What's up?"



A by-stander
pacing
nervously

Link arms with
other
peacekeepers
and surround



Two friends
arguing
loudly,
distracting
others

Calmly
approach, "I'm
here to listen"



A single
heckler
shouts loudly

Give space
but keep
watching



Counter-
protesters
push and
shove into
your crowd

Shift mood
with a song or
chant



CHAPTER 4: DEALING WITH LARGE CROWDS

Large crowds have their own energy and momentum. When you're a peacekeeper, you help shape that energy so the crowd stays safe, focused, and moving smoothly.

People in a big group may feel anonymous, which sometimes leads to risky or unpredictable behavior. Panic in large crowds typically grows from frustration:

- An immediate, severe threat (someone is getting hurt)
- Limited escape routes — or a rumor that they are limited
- Too much uncertainty and not enough information ("How long is this march?" or "Where are we going?" or "Why are the police showing up?")

Try to address frustrations quickly. Early interventions may be simple: "We see the police. Our police liaison is on it. Meanwhile, we continue walking." Your clarity can reduce the chance of panic or violence. That helps keep the group's message clear and focused.

Think ahead about where the action is taking place. Understand the approaches, entrances, flow patterns within, seating, restroom location & capacity, stage security requirements. When possible, avoid having the crowd move through stairways, doorways, or tight streets where people may feel trapped. If that does happen, encourage calm ("Let's take it slow here. We're narrowing up — give folks space."). Offer alternative routes, look out for people getting hurt, and project confidence: "We're in a tight spot — we'll get through together. Just go one at a time."

If caught in a rush: Raise your arms to chest-height and lock your wrists together, elbows out. This will create a space in front of your body and help prevent suffocation. In a heavy surge, let your body be carried by the tide, and don't panic. Use your voice to calm others and call on them not to push.

If you can't be heard: Call out "mic check, mic check" and those nearby who know this term from the Occupy Movement will shout it back to you. Then share your message in a few words — "Walk, don't run" — and people will say it back in unison, spreading the word.

TIPS FOR MANAGING LARGE CROWDS

- Use clear, loud, and simple communication. Repeat important messages. ("We are heading this way!" or "Ignore the counter-protesters. Keep moving!")
- Use hand signals to indicate turns, especially when noise levels are high.
- Coordinate with peacekeepers at the front, middle, and rear to keep the whole group moving together.
- With nothing in front of them, the front part of a march always moves too fast for the back end of the march — creating empty space and spreading out the crowd. Keep encouraging the front to slow down.
- Keep an eye out for people who seem lost, overwhelmed, or struggling physically.
- Ask nearby individuals to help (e.g., "Can you help me direct the crowd this way?").
- Keep calm and confident — your energy influences the crowd's mood.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

After unexpectedly hearing that police were arresting people, the crowd surged. People began running — very dangerous with a large crowd. Some protesters were knocked aside by each other and trampled. One peacekeeper looked around and locked eyes with someone who seemed to be staying calm. Without words, they linked arms and projected their voices into the crowd: “Keep calm. It’s okay.” Others began linking arms and slowed the surge. The police weren’t arresting people — but the rumors had nearly caused a stampede.



A protest had ten times more people than expected. Peacekeepers were stretched thin — and so an experienced peacekeeper walked around the march and recruited some people they knew from previous actions. They rapidly deputized them and led a quick orientation to the game plan. Although few, they focused on key places: the front of the march, the end of the long march, and a few scattered through the long, snaking march.



At another march where the size was unexpectedly large, a peacekeeper taught the entire crowd three main hand signals: Crossed arms above the head: medic! Palm in the air (like hand raising): slow down. Waving arms back and forth above one’s head: emergency! This distributed responsibility to the group and worked!

PRACTICE PAGE: ENLISTING ALLIES

Peacekeeping is a team effort! When groups get tricky, finding and asking for help is key. People in the crowd can be seen as allies and recruited to help.

Scan each scene below. Circle one or two possible allies to ask for help.

Decide how you'd approach them — and what you'd ask them to do. (*Pro Tip: If they don't work out, you can always try someone else.*)

Scene 1 — Crowd at a Bottleneck



Scene 2 — March is going too fast



CHAPTER 5: DE-ESCALATING WITH SECURITY FORCES

Protests can be more tense when there are police, military, ICE, or hired security. Peacekeepers often act as a physical buffer between security forces and demonstrators, helping to reduce conflict and keep everyone safe. Here's who might arrive:

- **Police/sheriff:** Most common. Local or state agents tasked with enforcing laws and maintaining order, but frequently used to suppress dissent. Often identifiable.
- **Hired Security** (e.g., Securitas): Private personnel contracted to protect properties. They lack public accountability and are typically identifiable, poorly trained, and unfamiliar with details of First Amendment Rights.
- **ICE** (Immigration and Customs Enforcement): Federal agency focused on deportations. Extremely rare at protests. Increasingly without uniforms.
- **Military:** Enforces state power. Rarely in protests. Their presence is a high escalation, rather than routine crowd management. Typically identifiable. They are supposed to follow strict guidelines in dealing with civilians.

Each may be different in different parts of the country. For example, after decades of flagrantly violating protester rights, many city police have created specialized forces for protests ("civil affairs"). For them, protests and assertions of First Amendment Rights are routine. Other police with less experience of protests, facing the same situation, may grow rapidly hostile and even violently so. If you don't know, ask other local activists.

All these institutions are hierarchical. They want a representative of the group with equal rank. In protests, it's recommended to designate a police liaison who is assigned to establish a channel of communication with law enforcement. Peacekeepers can buy time by deflecting issues: "I need your commander to explain this to our police liaison." Or repeating commonly known information: "We've told everyone this rally ends at 4pm." When in any doubt, let the police liaison and action lead discuss details with security.

There are potential consequences for lying to these forces — but not for them to lie to you. In extreme cases, police have been known to "ping-pong" (giving conflicting orders to herd protesters into areas) or "netting" (dividing a protest in half to isolate and potentially arrest some) or "kettling" (containing a protest so it can no longer move forward or back, often before arrests or to halt further advancement).

With all this, it's important to recall your goal. You are there to support the peaceful action and protect participants. You are not there to confront or challenge security forces on their role. You may be friendly or neutral, kind or distant — but do not over share or be overly forthcoming. Don't identify group leaders (or others) without permission.

Generally, inform security forces of your intentions, rather than asking permission. Be open to their legitimate concerns, such as traffic flow or an approaching ambulance.

TIPS FOR DE-ESCALATING WITH POLICE

- Keep your voice calm and respectful, even if you disagree.
- Know your rights and the rights of protesters. Calmly remind police if necessary.
- Position yourself visibly between police and protesters to prevent confrontations.

- Communicate concerns clearly and calmly to your lead or police liaison.
- Be aware of police activity, such as moving closer to the crowd or bringing more vehicles to the area.
- Encourage protesters to remain peaceful and follow action guidelines.
- Avoid physical contact with police (all touch can be considered assault).
- Document any aggressive or unlawful police actions from a safe distance.

DEALING WITH POLICE HORSES AND BIKES

In some places, mounted police are used for crowd control. Horses can be intimidating, but they are also sensitive animals. Bikes are also used for police to move fast through crowds — and in more extreme situations as battering rams or moveable blockades.

- Tell people to not touch horses or bikes — they can be considered an extension of police's bodies and therefore touching can be deemed "assault on an officer."
- Create space — guide the crowd to make room. Don't let people cluster tightly.
- Stay calm and steady — avoid sudden movements or loud noises that spook horses.
- Although bikes may not look as scary as horses, police sometimes use them to shove people, so peacekeepers can remind the crowd to keep a safe distance.
- Watch for flanks and kettles. Police sometimes use bikes or horses to create sudden barriers. Look for ways to keep people from being boxed in. If this starts happening, warn the crowd early and help people find exits.
- Peacekeepers on bikes can move quickly to scope out options and track police movements. Be mindful of spill risk — bikes can fall or crash. Don't add to the danger by escalating tension.

IF ICE SHOWS UP

As of writing, ICE does not commonly show up at protests. To support safety:

- Do not spread rumors, which may be intentionally spread to scare the crowd. Try to get real information that ICE presence is *confirmed*.
- If their presence is confirmed, calmly alert the crowd and your safety team.
- Remind people they have the right to remain silent. Anything someone tells an officer can later be used against them in immigration court.
- Record interactions, which is legal if you are not interfering.
- If your team is ready and willing to risk being arrested to protect people from detention or deportation, you can link arms around them and walk with them to a safe place. This may have significant legal consequences.

If a noncitizen is arrested during an action, contact a lawyer immediately. Tell the person arrested to not sign anything and not answer questions about their status without their lawyer. *Do not assume you should post bail.* In some locations, paying bond/bail can trigger a transfer to ICE. In other places, paying bond/bail quickly after arrest will avoid an ICE transfer. Connect with local immigrant organizers, attorneys, and public defenders. If you're able to, alert any local rapid response networks about ICE activity or collaboration.

IF THE MILITARY SHOWS UP

This situation would be uncharacteristic, but not impossible. President Trump used the military in DC and Portland in 2020. Trump ordered crackdowns on protests by federal troops, and unidentified federal forces scooped up protesters and threw them into vans. National outrage was dimmed by the narrative that protests in Portland were violent.

This is a further reminder of how petty violence is the spark the administration wants — and how we need a simple message: “We are not violent, Trump is.”

If the military is ever deployed at a protest, your job remains the same: keep calm and help the action. Encourage folks to record everything. The action coordinators will make judgement calls — like if it’s safer to cancel, or adapt the action. Your interactions with military personnel remain the same: be a buffer if possible, encourage protesters to avoid escalated interactions, do not touch them, and make sure a police liaison is talking to them so you can assess the level of danger around you.

For all these situations, further context-specific training will be helpful, when available.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

During a loosely organized march, police blocked a street unexpectedly, trapping protesters. When police started tear gassing the crowd, two experienced peacekeepers, who happened to be present, loudly and calmly said, “Walk, don’t run!” while pointing out the direction people could go to exit the area. They used their arms and own pace to model a calm departure. While people were stung by the teargas, they were not hurt by each other in a stampede, which could have easily happened without the peacekeepers’ calm intervention.



Hundreds of people watched as dozens of people committed civil disobedience. At first, the police held back. Then, peacekeepers noticed that police with bicycles were very slowly advancing and gradually creating a circle around the whole crowd. Peacekeepers calmly walked around the crowd pointing out the police movement and advising people that if they had not prepared to risk arrest, they could slowly move outside of the ring of police. Onlookers adjusted their positions, and only those intending to risk arrest were actually arrested.



In a rural town, a large (for that small town) protest was coming up. Untrue rumors persisted that the marchers were importing violent protesters from out of town. After a long discussion of considerations, the group decided to approach local elected officials, police, and fire departments. Protest organizers found out the officials were quite scared — and when they heard the protesters’ nonviolent intentions, their tension noticeably decreased. The action went off without police interference.

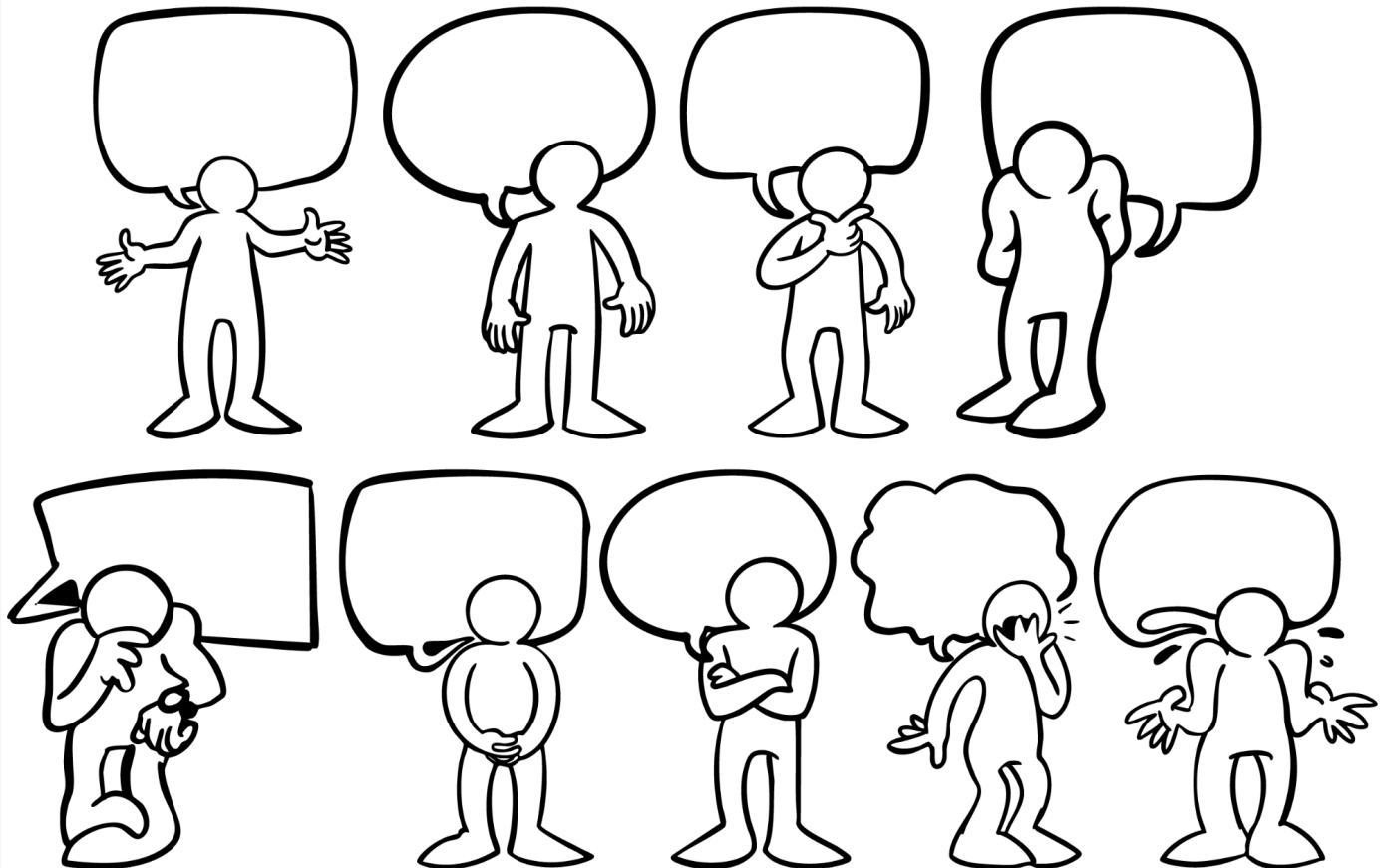
PRACTICE PAGE: HANDLE FEAR

It's common to have fear about interacting with security and police. It may help to have some prepared phrases to use and the body posture you'd like to have.

Consider these different postures you might have when talking with security forces. Try practicing some of the different postures in your body. Pick one of these postures that's most like what you'd like to do. Why did you pick that one?

After you select your posture, write in a phrase you might use with a security force who is asking you to do something not in line with your plans. Some examples:

- "I can't speak to that."
- "I'm not the person to talk to about that. Can you find our police liaison?"
- "We're just here to support the event running smoothly."
- "I'll pass that along to the team and let you know what they say."
- "We're allowed to do it. If something has changed, please tell our liaison."



Try saying that phrase (or trying some others) out loud — with your posture and slow breath. Notice how it feels.

CHAPTER 6: BEING SAFE AROUND CARS

Drivers may become angry if their route is blocked by a march or rally. Out of impatience, they may try to drive through the crowd, endangering marchers. If a blocked driver appears impatient, do not leave them unattended. Use your de-escalation skills. Calmly inform them of the length of the march and urge them to wait. Some peacekeepers can stand in the way with their arms outstretched while watching the drivers closely.

Some motorists may try to drive through crowds intentionally to cause harm or chaos. This is called vehicle ramming, and it is a serious threat, which can endanger lives and discourage people from attending future protests. While vehicle ramming remains rare, there has been an uptick in this form of violence. When possible, the best prevention is solid obstacles between angry drivers and protestors, like movable barricades or having our own vehicles leading and tailing a march.

Peacekeepers must be prepared to assess the threat posed by nearby vehicles, so they know how to respond. If you believe a driver may intend harm, your priority is to quickly get participants out of harm's way. Have another peacekeeper alert your team. This may be a moment to consider getting police support if that fits with your group's values.

To prevent problems, be especially careful when approaching a new intersection. Peacekeepers should wait until cars have stopped at a red light and then quickly step into the crosswalk holding hands or using bicycles to help fill the space. *Face the cars.* (Police may block traffic for marches, but peacekeepers should be between the police and protesters.)

The march should not get too spread out — empty space in a marching line invites cars to think they can sneak through. This is a risk. Keep the march together.

While one team is holding an intersection, another team may move ahead to the next intersection. The teams can "leapfrog" each other to keep the pace steady. To get ahead of the crowd, walk fast (or skip) but stay calm, so the crowd can see that nothing is wrong.

Once the march has gone by, wave kindly to the waiting cars (preferably waiting until there is a red light to protect you as you rejoin the march).

If you see a car that looks like it might not stop, yell for everyone to get out of the way.

TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO CARS

- Stay alert to vehicles approaching the crowd, especially at unusually slow or fast speeds or using unusual routes, like a sidewalk.
- Use clear, loud commands to alert people to move away from the vehicle's path.
- Guide the crowd quickly and calmly.
- Communicate the threat to peacekeeper leads and emergency services immediately.
- Afterward, assist in documenting the incident for legal and medical follow-up.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

A march paused at an intersection to point out the pollution caused by a nearby fossil fuel facility, unexpectedly blocking the path of fans leaving a hockey game. The hockey fans started yelling and honking, insulting the protesters. One car tried to inch past a peacekeeper on a bike, knocking him over.

While a few peacekeepers stood in front of the vehicles, a few others approached the open car windows, keeping a respectful distance. The peacekeepers expressed empathy for the frustrated fans and assured them that the intersection would be clear soon.

They mentioned in a friendly way that the speaker was just telling people about the pollution causing high asthma rates for our city's children. The hockey fans were still unhappy, but quieted down.

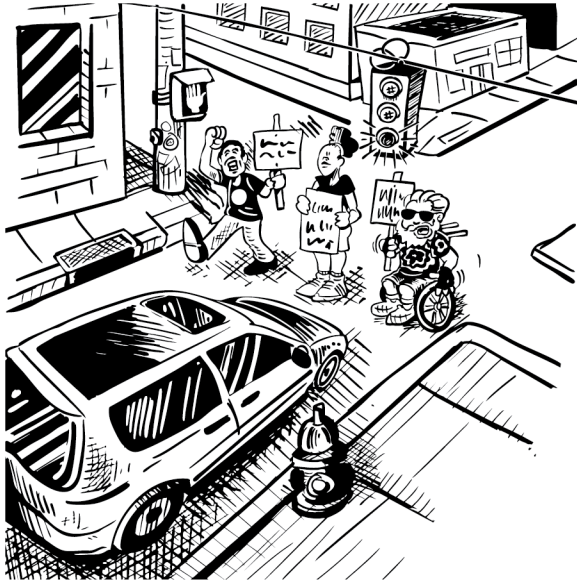
Meanwhile, two other peacekeepers faced the crowd, encouraging the protesters to focus on the speech. Another peacekeeper made sure the biker was okay. The team made sure that all of their people were clear of the intersection before signaling the cars to proceed.

PRACTICE PAGE: OBSERVING CARS

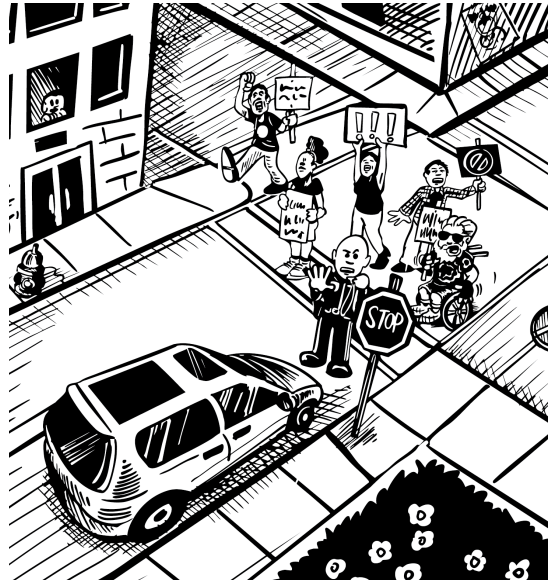
Cars near crowds can create tricky situations. Observation skills are critical.

Look carefully at each scene below. Circle at least one area of risk or concern in each scenario.

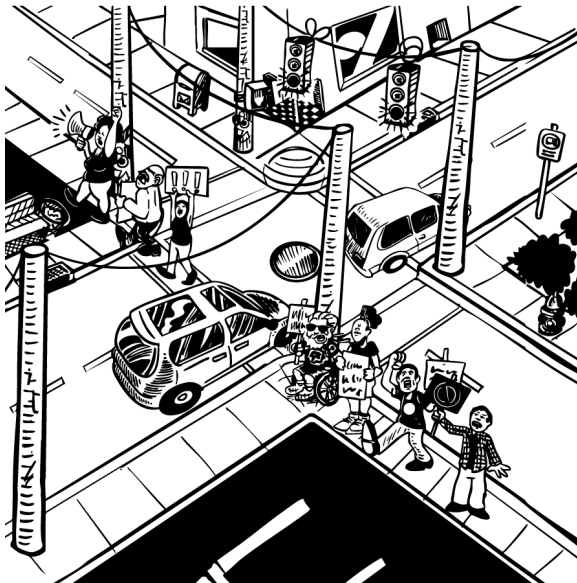
Scene 1



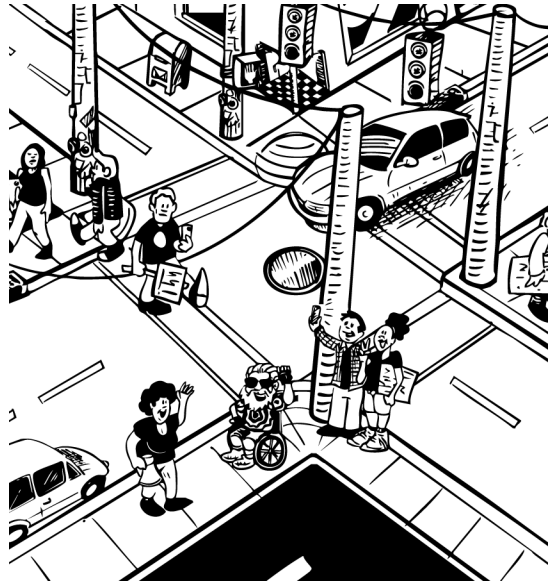
Scene 2



Scene 3



Scene 4



As a peacekeeper in those situations, what actions could you take to support people being safe?

CHAPTER 7: DE-ESCALATING WITH GUNS

Guns get attention. Guns may be uncommon at most peaceful events (though some places often see them). When they do appear, it can be very scary. Once people are aware of them, everything may revolve around that threat. Remain calm and grounded — a gun may not mean violence is about to ensue. Focus on everyone's safety and consider your options.

If it is a protester bringing a gun and doing so is not in line with the action, this needs addressing. If someone knows them, using a personal relationship tends to be best. If not, at least grab a buddy. Then explain the shared values or agreements of the action. Discuss risks to by-standers and/or legality (depending on local laws). Assert the peacekeeper's role as primary responders. If a situation cannot be figured out, have the team monitor through the event.

In most cases it is a by-stander or counter-protester with a gun. If someone has a gun, avoid any sudden moves that might increase tension or provoke violence. Recruit other peacekeepers to help the crowd do the same. Observe what the person with the gun is doing to assess whether they are no danger, an immediate danger, trying to intimidate people, or if they are just looking for attention.

For example, notice whether the person is simply displaying the gun vs. aiming at people. If they seem to be preparing to shoot, you need to get people away immediately. If they are just trying to intimidate, here are some things to try to keep the situation from getting worse:

TIPS FOR DE-ESCALATING WITH GUNS

- Don't panic; your composure will influence the crowd and likely the gun owner.
- Keep your hands visible and avoid sudden movements. Don't put hands in pockets or any moves that look like reaching for a gun.
- Speak softly and clearly, avoid shouting or aggressive tones.
- Try to keep distance between the person with a weapon and the crowd, which should move away slowly.
- Have someone from your team face the *protesters* and intervene if anyone attempts to "rescue" the situation, which can make things worse.
- Communicate with other peacekeepers and leaders to coordinate a safe response.
- Be ready to evacuate or take shelter if necessary.

Decide ahead of time your group's policies about if a gun is present. This would include policies about if your group reaches out to police, knowing they can make confrontations worse. If guns are likely, better is to find resources within your group — such as getting training from people about gun identification beyond this workbook (*what is it? is the safety on?*). Having conversation ahead of time can help your team get clear about your preferred response to a potential gun threat.

You are not expected to confront or disarm someone with a weapon — though peacekeepers have in dire situations. If it does look like they may fire, your options have been reduced, but here are things people have tried with success:

- Talk calmly to the shooter and tell them you're not their enemy.
- Repeating a phrase, such as: "You don't have to do this... you don't have to go to jail today... you don't have to do this... you can walk away and not go to jail..."
- Move deliberately to get solid cover (walls, cars) between you and the shooter.
- Get low and out of sight — stay quiet and silence phones.
- Alert allies at a distance from the action about what is happening.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

At a rally, a protester and counter-protester got into a confrontation. Angry, the counter-protester ran to their car to grab a gun. One peacekeeper escorted the initial protester into the crowd and away from the scene. When the counter-protester came back, the crowd began urgently shouting, "He's got a gun!" Another peacekeeper walked over, arms outstretched, and she calmly spoke to the man. Occasionally she wisely shouted to the crowd, "Keep moving, keep moving." Most of the crowd kept moving — a few stayed to watch as the counter-protester got back in their car. The peacekeeper didn't use a lot of words but kept her arms out and hands open and kept herself between the counter-protester and the crowd. Saner heads prevailed.



There was a peaceful mixed-race protest in a small town, where many people have guns. A dueling counter-rally was organized at the same time. Anticipating violence, the initial rally leaders informed police of their plans and discussed police policy if protesters felt threatened. They asked the police to stay out of the way.

When the day came, police backed away to keep the tension down. The dueling rallies were held, with counter-protesters brimming with guns. Several of them broke off and walked to the initial rally. The peacekeepers kept a line in place between the two groups — while police were off-to-the-side.

Peacekeepers explained that the goal of the counter-protesters was to intimidate — so they kept their people from direct confrontations and were able to carry out a rally without incident or violence.

PRACTICE PAGE: OBSERVING WITH GUNS

Look closely at the three images of someone with a gun.

Notice differences in how the gun is carried, their body posture, hand position, and facial expression.

Notice the visual clues (e.g., "tense shoulders," "hand near gun," "relaxed face," "gun tucked in," "angry eyes," "loose grip").

With each image, circle clues that suggest escalated or de-escalated threat levels.



Which one feels the least threatening? Which one feels the most threatening?

CHAPTER 8: POST-ACTION STEPS

After an action, peacekeepers need to reflect, learn, and take care of themselves. Debriefing is a chance to talk about what worked well and what could be improved. It helps the whole team get stronger and safer next time. Agree ahead of time where and when you will do this.

A facilitator or lead peacekeeper encourages peacekeepers to pair up and spend a few minutes sharing how they felt during the action. Then in the large group, people can call out the range of feelings, which may include fear and anger as well as empowerment and joy. Affirm the range and remind people that feelings are normal. Ask how people managed their more difficult feelings, affirming any tips on staying grounded.

Invite people to name specific things they did or saw that were helpful to the group. Invite people to name what they would like to do differently next time. Facilitator may ask questions about any safety or communication issues to help the group learn from them.

End with a physical exercise to release stress or at least a reminder to do so.

TIPS FOR POST-ACTION SELF-CARE

- Under stress, your body produces adrenaline and cortisol — you need to move your body afterwards to release them and the “hype” that’s literally pumping in your body. Practice grounding, relaxation exercises, or take a walk to release the adrenaline.
- Encourage everyone to rest, hydrate, and eat after the event.
- Reach out for support if you’re feeling overwhelmed — talk to friends, counselors, or trusted allies.
- Plan for regular self-care to stay balanced over the long term.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

After a tense protest, peacekeepers gathered to talk about how things went. They shared moments when they felt proud and one incident that almost spiraled out of control. These incidents were racialized and gendered. The facilitator asked several follow up questions of those involved, helping them realize that, in the end, they made choices that upheld the peacekeeper goal of de-escalating the situation so the action proceeded without being sabotaged. The facilitator helped them name two behaviors that worked to get to that place: taking a breath and calling for help.

A week later, the same peacekeepers worked together and successfully used these two strategies even more quickly when there was conflict at another protest in their town.

PRACTICE PAGE: DEBRIEF

Being a peacekeeper isn't just about showing up — it's also about showing care afterward. Taking time to rest, reflect, and reconnect helps you stay grounded and ready for next time.

After an action, what do you want to make sure you do?



Debrief with other peacekeepers and action leads



Breathe



Call a friend



Drink water



Eat food/snacks



Rest at home



Exercise (or physical activities to work the adrenaline out of your system)

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL LEARNING

Peacekeeper & De-escalation Trainings

DC Peace Team offers training in nonviolent skills, including peacekeepers, de-escalation, and active bystander intervention (<https://www.dcpeaceteam.org>)

Hands Off: De-escalation and Safety Training: (<https://bit.ly/peacekeeper-deescalation>)

Calming & De-escalation Strategies (not protests): (<https://bit.ly/peacekeeper-calming>)

Beautiful Trouble's Tools for Organizing: <https://beautifultrouble.org/fuel>

Materials on Safety

The Get In Formation toolkit is a deep dive into tools and tactics for action safety: (<https://visionchangewin.org/services-and-programs/community-safety/>)

Indivisible: Safety, Security, and Digital Preparedness for a Second Trump Administration — guide for planning safe and effective events, including choosing secure locations, coordinating transportation, and responsibly publicizing details (<https://indivisible.org/resource/safety-security-and-digital-preparedness-second-trump-administration>)

Greenpeace: Protest Safety Tips provides practical advice for protesters especially in escalated protests that could include tear gas, such as avoiding contact lenses, refraining from rubbing eyes, and steering clear of oil-based lotions (<https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/protest-safety-tips-from-greenpeace/>)

Vision Change Win is an excellent offering about broader community safety beyond just peacekeeping rooted in the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities. (<https://visionchangewin.org/>)

50501 Handbook for Operational Security for Activists: a comprehensive digital resource on security for activist groups (<https://www.fiftyfifty.one/digital-safety>)

Security

Meshtastic — an ideal peacekeeper tool for off-grid communication for limited internet or high security (<https://meshtastic.org/>)

How to Lock your Phone at Protests: (<https://bit.ly/peacekeeper-phone>)

Digital Security for Activist Checklists (<https://activistchecklist.org/>)

Protest: Know-Your-Rights

ACLU: Know Your Rights — Protesters' Rights when attending protests (<https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights>). And Know Your Rights with ICE: (<https://www.aclualabama.org/en/news/know-your-rights-ice>)

United We Dream's Know Your Rights with ICE: (<https://unitedwedream.org/resources/know-your-rights>)

HANDOUT: WHAT DOES A PEACEKEEPER DO?

An action peacekeeper (sometimes called an "event marshal") helps keep people safe and keep the group to its agreements and purpose. You support the action to reach its goals as powerfully as possible — undistracted by disruptors.

ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES

- ☐ Cell phone, fully charged
- ☐ Contacts for Police Liaison, Legal Observers, and other key action roles
- ☐ Schedule of events
- ☐ Map with route and key locations
- ☐ Identifiable vest or armband
- ☐ Water, snacks, sunscreen
- ☐ First aid (if there aren't medics)
- ☐ Your id, in case of police issue

DE-ESCALATION OPTIONS

- Listen attentively.
- Ask what the person needs.
- Create alternative energy: sing, hand out water, start a chant.
- Isolate: Tell the crowd to keep moving.
- Walk disruptive people to the perimeter.
- Link arms and surround disruptors.
- *Keep trying things & be creative!*

THE "HELPER" SKILLS NEEDED

- **Handle fear:** Notice fear in yourself or others. Take a breath.
- **Enlist allies:** Don't ask a crowd for help, ask an individual, "Can you help?".
- **Listen and observe:** Scan the crowd, notice body language.
- **Project confidence:** Stand steady and keep your body relaxed.
- **Empathize with others:** Show care, even if you don't agree. Empathy helps.
- **Recall options:** There are many different ways to handle any situation. Remember that chaos and fear help the opposition and detract from your goals.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Before the Action

- **Prepare Supplies.**
- **Get Oriented:** Learn the action plan, route, roles, and communication channels.
- **Meet Your Team.**
- **Ground Yourself:** Show up rested, hydrated, and emotionally ready.

During the Action

- **Be Present and Observant.**
- **Look for trouble, especially at common trouble spots:** The front and back of events, stages, bottlenecks, intersections, and counter-protesters.
- **Use Your Body Language:** Open posture, eye contact, and calm gestures. Unless it's an absolute emergency, walk, don't run.
- **Know Your Limits:** Ask for help when things get beyond your capacity.
- **Stay Flexible:** Plans change. Be ready to adapt and respond to new challenges.
- **Look out for Vulnerable Participants.**
- **Take Care of Yourself.**
- **Be available the whole time.**

After the Action

- **Release tension, rest, recover, and debrief with the team.**

2-HOUR SAMPLE PEACEKEEPER TRAINING AGENDA

Use this agenda to help train peacekeepers for your action, practice key peacekeeping skills, and build relationships! This workbook can be complementary.

WELCOMING ACTIVITY

Song/Chant: Use a song or chant to welcome the group.

Introductions: Have people get up and introduce themselves to someone new. Share names and why they are here.

Now, introduce to someone else, this time using their entire body — especially their hands, arms, and voice.

Using the entire body, meet 3 new people as far as possible from them in the room, sharing their name and learning theirs.

Debrief: What does this have to do with peacekeeping?

REVIEW GOALS & AGENDA

STORIES OF COURAGE

Share a time you saw someone courageously intervene/defuse a conflict. Make a list of qualities and what they did.

Debrief with **HELPER skills** (see *handout*).

KEY SKILLS

Distribute handout on peacekeeping — have the group collectively read aloud. Pause after each section to discuss.

THE ACTION PLAN

Describe in detail the goals, routes with maps, and other logistical information. Share identifiers (vests, hats, armbands, etc.) and communication plans. If roles or pairs are being assigned, do this now. Affirm action agreements and roles.

BREAK

PRACTICE!

This is the bulk of the session (~an hour). Do at least three role-plays where people take turns practicing peacekeeping skills.

Start simple, and pause after each one for the group to name what worked or anything they learned. Add challenges each round with the final role play being more demanding.

Choose role-plays focused on the kinds of protests likely to happen in your area:

- Group marches: Peacekeepers need to turn the crowd.
- Crowd moves, but 3 people want to “stay right here” because they want a better view of the stage.
- Hecklers distract the crowd, and some protesters want to argue.
- Counter-protesters arrive with weapons.

CLOSING

Use a two column evaluation format (“what worked” / “suggestions for improvement”) – or your own preferred evaluation.

Closing • Complete the following sentences in large group: “I am excited about. . .” “I still need. . .”

Affirm why it’s important that you’re all building skills together or something else likely to motivate your group. Confirm when you are meeting before the event, then send them on their way!