

Cosa Nostra

Sponsorships, Affinity-based vetting and recruiting

APS

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I'm writing this as a quick guide to screening people one might invite to the anarchist collective, since we seem to have an issue at the present where some reactionary elements have entered nominally Anarchist spaces. Not to mention the threat of entryism by those in the Maoist-aligned National Democratic movement. The information here is a synthesis of conversations I've had with other organizers, written records of existing anarchist organizations and as well as my own experiences having to organize spaces for planning and action, however small they may be.

Map out your social circles

I've been told once by some autonomist organizers based in the US that as long as you have a neighbor, you have another possible comrade. They were talking in the context of organizing a rent strike, of course, but I think it could be generalized further. All of us over the course of our lives have met and formed various relationships with different types of people. And with social media allowing us to record our thoughts on certain issues, gauging people's general political tendencies is easier than ever.

Maybe it's just my poor memory, but I prefer having an actual list of people to watch out for. A local file on my computer rather than one on google docs or some other online platform, it has too much sensitive info to keep on the cloud safely. Some might prefer to write it down and bypass electronics completely, and more power to them. I just happen to be in front of a terminal most of my waking hours.

Going back, this is important because this provides you with a map of people within your life that could potentially help you with the things you might want to organize in the future.

Things to take note of:

- Name (could be an online handle, or just a number)
- Relation to yourself
- Stance on key issues (see example below)
- Relation to counterrevolutionary forces (see below)
- Relation to future potential invites

All the above could be kept on some type of record like I mentioned above, or if you are truly paranoid, all in your head.

Probe their positions on key issues

Remember that a conversation is a give and take. Make sure that whenever they make a response that seems counter to yours, that you acknowledge why that would seem reasonable in their circumstances. This would mean having a lot of patience and understanding. This is also a good reason why we should start with people within our social circles, our friends, family, workmates, etc. Because we could at least have some level of respect, understanding and affection for them. Pretty difficult to keep your patience up for people you honestly don't care about. I know that we as radicals should care about all people, though some of my Egoist comrades might disagree

with that, we have to admit that human compassion and patience is a limited resource. Best we use it on people we actually care about.

After acknowledging, that's when you then respond with your own answer. As much as you can, avoid technical or academic jargon especially if the person you're talking to doesn't have a background in radical politics. Learn how to gauge the conversation and change the topic if need be when the discussion gets heated.

"Key Issues" will of course vary between collective to collective, but here's an example of one for a general anarchist collective:

1. State Interference (via the police, the military, bureaucratic red tape, etc)
2. Capitalist Oppression (alienation, labor issues, land reform, artificial scarcity)
3. Environmental Decay (Anthropogenic Climate Change, megacorp abuse of resources)
4. Gender Struggles (Heteropatriarchy, Transphobia, Homophobia)

Like what was mentioned earlier, one has to ask about these issues in a conversational manner. Maybe show them a news article related to what you are trying to ask about and start the conversation there.

But make sure to make it as conversational as possible. No one likes being asked these questions out of the blue. And talk about specific issues instead of wide-reaching abstract social ills. Make sure to let the person talk more, with you just asking to clarify what their points are and why they believe the way they do. A rough estimate is at least 80%/20% in the other person's favor.

Also, even though we're trying to make this conversational, it's still important to keep some basic interview pointers in mind:

- **Stay relevant.** When you get the conversation going, make sure to stay on-topic. Circle back to the original topic if needed.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Allow them the space to explore their own ideas, and ask follow-up questions that can help clarify their position and why they have that position. Nuance is key.
- **Ask clear questions.** Avoid asking vague questions that might confuse the person you're talking to, and rephrase questions as needed. Better to fumble and get the right question out, than to speak straight and ask unclear questions.
- **The questions are applicable to your Prospect.** Make sure that the questions you ask your Prospect are those that they are in a position to have an opinion about.

Watch out for red flags

We want to keep our collectives and organizations inclusive, that's a given, however there are simply those who will do all that they can to see us fail. This is not to say they are horrible people

outright, but some of them certainly are, but that it is in their material interests that we do not succeed.

People with those interests, and thus cannot be admitted into the collective, include but are not limited to:

- Members of a Fascist and Ultranationalist Groups
- Active members of Religious Fundamental Groups and Movements
- Those in Active Duty in Law Enforcement, Prison Guards, etc, employed by the State or by a corporate entity.
- Membership and/or Active duty in a private army.
- Owns a business which employs other workers, legitimate or otherwise,
- Officer of a Political Party

(adapted from the IWW's Bylaws, Membership section)

Similar to the section on probing for key issues, one also has to ascertain all of this by conversation. However, it's also a good thing that you could also do some research of your own based on their social media posts and, if you're able to pull it off, talking to their friends-of-friends. The goal is to find out whether or not they are involved with those groups mentioned above or if they are related to them in any way. If the latter is true, we also need to figure out if their relation to possible counterrevolutionary forces will put the collective in danger, or at the very least, hinder its operations.

Remember the 80%/20% rule, and let them talk more than you. Take note of important parts of their responses. At the end of the day, do not forget to update your map or dossier on them.

Gauge their willingness to act in a group

Say you're making headway with your potential prospect, when you're ready, begin floating the idea of getting more people involved, and how more could get done with more hands and minds put to any task you all might want to do as a response to what you've been talking about. Depending on their response, you could immediately skip to the next section and discuss your invite with the rest of your collective. If they respond negatively, it may be time to seriously reconsider going through with this, as even individualists understand the value of the occasional collective action when it suits their own purposes.

Just a quick reminder here to be careful about mistaking social anxiety with being unwilling to join a collective effort. One has to proceed with caution and avoid rushing to have them join the collective as being forced to participate may do them more harm than good. Perhaps introducing them to your comrades one at a time at different separate occasions may work better as opposed to meeting them all at once.

Discuss your possible invite with your collective

Like most things, run your prospective member by your comrades first. Describe them, the results of your vetting process with them and their political leanings and prior associates if you know of any or were able to uncover during the process. Describe whether or not they tend towards acting on their own or their willingness to work with the rest of the group. Present what skills or accomplishments this person has and how they might contribute to the collective.

Once everyone is comfortable with your potential invite, it's time to actually invite your prospect.

Invite, Introduce and Intensify

Invite

Here is where you make your prospect aware that you are part of an initiative that they may be interested in, based on your prior conversations about current events, or issues. Just give them enough details to be interested, and answer any questions that come up. Be careful at this stage, this might make or break your particular prospect's chance of getting introduced.

And as a matter of security, do not mention anything about any of your organization's underground activity. Your prospect has not made any commitments to you or the collective, and cannot be expected to keep a secret yet.

Introduce

If your collective has a group-chat or other similar form of communication, this is when you add them into the conversation. This is where your other comrades need to contribute by welcoming them warmly and answering questions, keeping the conversation going, and keeping the tone casual. At this phase, the invite is basically on probation and the full members of the collective need to monitor the newbie. This is of course the main responsibility of the invite's sponsor, but the other members of the collective might have some prior experiences and insight that could help weed out undesirable elements.

As ominous as that last sentence was, everyone must remain cool and casual. Their spaces, virtual or physical, must always remain forums of open, but principled, discussion.

Groups involved in underground work might be well served with the invite being introduced to a single comrade at a time for security reasons, and so that the others can gauge for themselves if they'll be comfortable with working with the newbie.

Intensify

Prior to any recruitment drive, write down the different tasks one might have to do while being a member of your collective. Once you all have agreed on a general list of activities, discuss and rank them according to the amount of effort and commitment each activity requires in order to be done properly. This forms a "ladder of tasks" that you could use to judge how willing a certain prospect is and nudge them towards greater and greater tasks, making them more invested in the collective's success.

This is a practical application of the Especifist concept of “Concentric Rings of Participation” where the more committed you are and more tasks you perform for the collective, the more opportunities you’ll have to vote on decisions. This is because of how, following the principles of self-management, only those who participate in an action, or will be affected by its outcome somehow, will have a say in how it is performed.

Now, it bears repeating that because we are anarchists, and this author endorsing Especifist forms of organizing, that being a committed member of the collective and thus being in its inner circle of members, doesn’t give one authority over those in outer circles. If a certain action involves both fresh recruits and seasoned militants, each individual comrade only has one vote each.

Responsibilities as Sponsor

Managing Expectations

This comes into play early in the process of inducting your Invite into the collective. Make sure you are realistic about the collective’s purpose, goals and current capabilities.

On the other hand, one must also be transparent to the rest of the collective about the Invite’s tendencies, attitude and disposition. This is in order for the rest of your comrades to at least be somewhat ready to meet with the newbie.

Mediating between the Invite and the Collective

In circumstance where the Invite may be displaying undesirable behavior or an issue emerges between the Invite and some other member of the Collective, it is your responsibility as their Sponsor to mediate. Many other works on conflict mediation has already been written, and this is not the best space to talk about it. Just a quick note that in the event of an issue forming between you *and* your Invite, the collective will have to assign you two a mediator and try to resolve things from there.

Once the newbie goes from being an Invite to a full member of the Collective, conflict mediation can then be done by any other member of the collective, unless both parties are alright with the newbie’s Sponsor mediating for them.

Ensuring the constant development of their Invite

Similar to what was stated in **Intensify**, as Sponsor, you should help get your Invite more involved in the Collective. In order to do that, you would need to help them develop their capacity to perform the tasks involved. Of course, your comrades can also help in certain aspects of the struggle based on their expertise, but it is your responsibility as Sponsor to ensure the Invite gets that training in one form or another.

It might be best if your collective creates a reading list based on your organization’s tendency and introduce your invite to certain introductory pieces of literature in order to get them started. If you’ve worked in a Call Center before, maybe help train your invite in public speaking and overcoming objections. And if they ask about something that you don’t know much about, either look it up for them or put them in touch with someone who does.

And if possible, also expand and enable their material capacity to pursue the class struggle. Lend or donate old pieces of equipment you don't use anymore when they need it, help them get to functions and picket lines when they're short on cash, carry some extra meds for them in case they run out of them on the road or during a demonstration. All of these things count just as much, if not more than, their own mental and moral capabilities.

Conclusion

As our material conditions change and history progresses, this text cannot possibly be taken as spoken gospel, and I ask each and every one of you who thinks that any of the ideas and processes described here to be useful, to adapt them to your specific situation. In summary, what I was trying to say in so many words above is to:

- Be aware of who you interact with
- Check if their views coincide with yours and your collective's
- Check if they are affiliated or related with those whose goals run counter to our own.
- See if they can collaborate with the rest of the collective, and if they can, to introduce them in the way best suited to both your collective's and your Invite's needs

Once again, I wish you all to remain safe and to never give up the fight.

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Retrieved on 2020-06-05 from libcom.org
A guide on recruitment and vetting for your own affinity groups.

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