

AFFINITY GROUPS

At best, members of an affinity group should know each other before taking action together, although in practice some affinity groups are formed on the spot. In the affinity group, you should be able share your hopes and fears, and experiences. The group is the basic unit in the decision making process during the course of the action.

The optimum size of an affinity group is 9-12 members, but of course you decide yourself. In case everything gets a bit messy, it is useful to form sub groups with 3-4 people. This helps to keep an eye on each other, to support each other during the action, and to be able to act as a group. So it is important to agree on the form of your action in advance (or at an early stage), to be able to go through the action together. It should be obvious that acting responsibly includes being aware of your own limits, and to accept these limits as a group.

Tasks of an affinity group

Affinity groups are your best protection in the course of the action. You should be able to support each other in case of arrest, injury or shock. Where possible, each affinity group should also have a legal observer, who should avoid arrest, and can help the legal support team to identify those who have been arrested.

Where possible affinity groups should practise quick decision-making. You should have a discussion about how each of you wants to act during the action. Below are some questions you can discuss in your affinity group:

- Name, and address
- What is your motivation for participating in this action?
- What are our fears?
- What do you expect from the affinity group?
- How do we stay together during the action? Do we stay together after the action?
- How is our decision making procedure in the group?
- Who represents the group in the spokescouncil, who is the observer?
- Where do we meet?
- How does each of you want to react in case the police intervene?
- How can we achieve that each of us can better deal with stress, group pressure, police violence?
- Which tasks can we take on as group? How can we take responsibility for the overall structure of the action?
- How do we deal with frustration and feeling of powerlessness?
- How do we deal with persons who chose a different form of action?
- How do we approach people watching us?

It is useful to have a short name for your affinity group, which can easily be shouted and recognised. This is especially useful in case your group is split and you get lost - shouting the group's name helps you to find each other.

SPOKESCOUNCIL

A spokescouncil makes it possible to make decisions during the action - as one group. The Council discusses decisions, and enables affinity groups to take part in the decision making process. The spokescouncil should prevent us from losing control over the action. The spokescouncil will meet whenever necessary. There will be one spokescouncil for each of the two gates.

Each affinity groups needs to send a representative and an observer to the spokescouncil. If possible, these people shouldn't change.

CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

During the action we want to take decisions by consensus, because this is the only way to make sure that everybody is behind the action. Consensus doesn't mean that everybody always agrees, but that everybody can support the decision. It can be useful for someone to facilitate the discussion in your affinity group. The task of the facilitator is to structure the discussion, to formulate decisions, to make proposals for a consensus, and to make sure that everybody gets heard. It might be useful to follow the procedure below:

- Define the problem or the decision that needs to be made as clearly as possible.
- Brainstorm possible solutions. Write them all down (if possible).
- Create space for questions of clarification on the situation.
- Discuss the options. Modify some, eliminate others, and develop a short-list. Which are the favourites?
- State the proposals or choice of proposals so that everybody is clear.
- Discuss the pros and cons of each proposal - make sure everybody has a chance to contribute.
- If there is a major objection, return to step 6 (this is the time consuming bit). Sometimes you may need to return to step 4.
- If there are no major objections, state the decision and test for agreement. Acknowledge minor objections and incorporate friendly amendments.
- Discuss.
- Check for consensus.

Levels of consensus

- **First class consensus** "I agree with the proposal"
- **Consensus with reservations**
"I have (strong) reservations, but I will go along with it."
"I don't have problems if you go and do this, but I won't take part."
- **Veto (no consensus)**
"This decision contradicts my basic beliefs. The group shouldn't carry it out."

Vetoing a proposal is a serious act, and should only be used very responsibly. Before vetoing a decision, please think if standing aside wouldn't be more appropriate.