

## Police Liaison

Police Liaison can be a very critical role to the success of an action; particularly actions in which arrests are likely or planned, where there are more than one affinity group or a large number of people participating, or in which the action is “open” to spontaneous participation. Regardless, it is important to understand the role of police liaison.

The police liaison acts as a “go between” the people participating in the action and the police to ensure clear communication of demands, expectations, needs, responses, etc. This person plays a critical role in minimizing reckless behavior on the part of the police and helping to de-escalate situations that are moving out of control (or strategically escalate when necessary). The police liaison helps our side maintain control of the action, on our terms, rather than letting the authorities dictate the terms of the action.

The police liaison is **NOT** a negotiator. The Police liaison is not usually empowered to “cut deals” or make compromises with the police. The most common trap that police liaisons fall into is becoming “deputized” in which they simply help the police execute their agenda, rather than helping facilitate smooth execution of the action objectives.

A good police liaison will:

- **Be Assertive, not aggressive**, with the police. The first thing a police liaison must do is establish credibility and role clarity. Approach the highest ranking officer on the scene as soon as possible. Reach out your hand and introduce yourself, giving your full and proper name. For example, “Hello Captain, my name is Gopal Dayaneni, I am the police liaison for the group. I’m here to make sure we have smooth, and clear communication between police and the folks taking nonviolent action.” Get the officers name. Write it down.
- **Be clear** that the role is to facilitate communication. Point out that the role is designed to make it easy to know whom to talk with if anything comes up. Be clear that you don’t make decisions for the group. Point out that random people might come up and try to get involved, but you were assigned the role, by the group, to make sure that things go smoothly.

- **Stay close** to the officers at all times, except when moving information between officers and people participating in the action. It can often be helpful to chat with officers to establish a sense of their expectations of the group. Be clear that you are not risking arrest and have no desire to get arrested.
- **Stay calm.** If the police liaison is anxious or is expecting the worst, the police will be anxious and expect the worst. Also, by staying calm, you have room to escalate if the police behave badly.
- **Give the police the least amount of information necessary** at any given time. The police will try to find out, “What the group is planning,” or “What’s next.” You can always say that you don’t know exactly what their plans are, but if there is anything that needs to be communicated you can relay the information.
- **Force officers to follow chain of command.** If the police liaison establishes a good relationship with the ranking officer, they can use that relationship to get restraint from other officers. By establishing a good relationship, you can often maneuver for leeway– for example, helping support people stay close to people risking arrest.
- **Stall for time.** One important aspect of creating a communication bottle-neck between police and people participating in an action is that the police liaison can “buy the group time,” simply by going back and forth. The police liaison can explain to the officer, “I’ve let them know that you want them to leave in 15 minutes or you will arrest them. They are deciding how to respond. They just need a bit more time to make a decision. As soon as they do, I’ll let you know what they say.” If you have a “chummy” relationship with the officer, you can go as far as to say, “We make decisions using consensus process, which, you might imagine, can take a little bit of time.”

Sometimes it makes sense to meet with police before an action to introduce yourself and attempt to establish some clear protocols; (but not always) for example, “No riot squads hiding,” “No police dogs;” or to determine what their force strength will be, i.e. Will they have horses? What different forces will be deployed? What jail will people be taken to in the event of arrests? In these meetings, it is also important to assert that the actions are nonviolent and if there are participation guidelines (i.e. no drugs, no weapons, etc.)

that those are shared. Do not share too much information. They will want to know march routes, what actions people plan to take. All you need to say is what is already public and constantly reiterate that the actions will be nonviolent. Repeat the message.

Such meetings can be greatly helped by the presence of media either at the meeting or immediately after to announce any statements the police made about their intentions. This is a good way to hold the police accountable and get pre-media for your action.

Of course, if the deployment of the action requires secrecy to be effective, do not alert the police in advance of the plans.