

# JUSTICE POWER...

ACCOMPANIMENT

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HOW TO GUIDE ON...



# ACCOMPANIMENT



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The guide was created in consultation with Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD), a Justice Power member organization. It was also informed by conversations with other member organizations and experts.

This How to Guide offers guidance for those interested in creating an accompaniment program.



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## GROUNDING

### GROUNDING



Consider why you want to develop an accompaniment program and what gaps it might be filling.

For example, at the beginning, OCAD did not have access to attorneys but still wanted to support people with navigating immigration court. As a result, OCAD developed a [court watch program](#) to accompany community members to their court hearing.

- Consider who your community is (*i.e.*, non-detained, detained people).
- How you will assist them (*i.e.*, taking notes for them, supporting with legal/social service referrals, connecting them with your or another organization's pro se legal clinic and supporting them with next steps as outlined by the immigration judge while they continue their search for a lawyer, etc.).
- The nature of your existing relationships to that community.
- The durability of your commitment to a project involving them.
- What steps you will take to ensure other members of the community can give feedback to the accompaniment program.



## GROUNDING



*Izabela Markova*

## GROUNDING



Consider what volunteers gain from the accompaniment program (e.g., knowledge about the immigration system and providing tangible support for fellow community members) and how that might inform other programs you develop (e.g., Know Your Rights workshop, etc.).

Create short-term and long-term visions of success, and set time to reflect on and reassess your vision and needs.



## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM

### CREATING A PLAN



Justice-impacted people have first-hand experience navigating the immigration system and understand the type of emotional support people might request. They are oftentimes best positioned to offer accompaniment (as well as deep insight in the development of an accompaniment program).

Partner with community members who request accompaniment.

Organize volunteers who will offer accompaniment.

- Do not record the gatherings to ensure confidentiality and a safe space.
- Fill out intake forms to assess requests and who can volunteer to accompany.
  - For example, OCAD held assemblies twice a month pre-pandemic. There, both members and non-members invite people who request support navigating the immigration system. These assemblies create a cycle of involvement and build up new members.



## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM

### CREATING A PLAN



Assess the requests of community members to gauge the type of support they want, including the number of volunteers needed for the accompaniment, and for what your team has the capacity. These assessments can be led by volunteers, organizers, or paid staff.

Some assessment questions may include:

- What court hearing is this (e.g., first, individual)?
- Have you been to immigration court before?
- Have you tried looking for an attorney? Why or why not? What did they say?
- Are you alone or with family? Are some receiving court hearings and others not?
- Was there a violation in the way in which you were placed in deportation?



*Silvana P. Duncan  
for ArtistsForClimate.org*



## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM

### CREATING A PLAN



Assessment questions may also include:

- Are you willing to do something public, *e.g.*, a press conference or rally, before or after the court hearing? If so, consider having the support of a trusted immigration attorney who can assess you on any possible risks or consequences.
- How many people would you like to come with you, particularly for your individual hearing?
- Would you (also) like accompaniment at an ICE or ISAP check-in?

Also, cross-check the information community members supplied against whatever information is available in the EOIR portal and review the community member's paperwork.



## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM

### CREATING A PLAN



In response to how many people they want to do accompaniment, explain to the community member the benefits and drawbacks of different options and how immigration judges might react.

Examples include:

- At a master calendar hearing, courtrooms tend to be crowded so it may be more comfortable to only have one or two people accompanying a community member to their hearing.
- For individual hearings, the community member should consider the details of their case and the personal nature of their testimony to decide how many people they want in the room and how many can show up with them to the courthouse but remain outside.
- But note if some immigration judges have clear preferences about members of the public in their courtroom.
- Share that traveling with a big group makes entering the courthouse and arriving at the courtroom take more time, so the meet-up time should be scheduled accordingly.





## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM

### CREATING A PLAN



What other requests might the community member(s) have?

Consider the following:

- Childcare
- Rides to/from court hearing
- Meals/water
- Accessibility needs (e.g., interpreter, note-taker during the hearing)

Keep track of people's immigration court appointments in a calendar with which volunteers can sign up for accompaniment. The calendar can include notes from the previous hearings.

Create a system or database to check monthly for any updates in community members' pending cases.



## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM



### CREATING A PLAN



Assign one or two people to coordinate logistics.

This may include:

- Coordinating holistic support (see above).
- Creating a space or communication channel for volunteers to seek answers and guidance on how to best support people but also each other; add and delete volunteers as necessary.
- Scheduling accompaniment shifts for volunteers. This is especially important for long court hearings (see above).
- Identify allies who feel comfortable showing their IDs and can support by entering federal court.



## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM

### CREATING A PLAN



- Assigning volunteers roles based on experience, risk level, and community requests, if determined to be effective. Practice the principle of “do no harm.”
  - People who are comfortable taking bigger risks may stand up during the hearing, wear supportive shirts under their clothes, etc., and show visible support of the person to the judge.
  - People who feel comfortable entering the courtroom (and are less comfortable with taking a risk) may monitor wait times and interactions with judges, individual counsel, and other courtroom actors.
  - Other people may rally outside of the courtroom or courthouse, hold a press conference or livestream on social media, check on someone’s case status, and ensure people exit the court safely.
  - Those supporting virtually may repost content on social media, share petitions, and raise awareness.



## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM

### CREATING A PLAN



Facilitating communication between volunteers and community members. Coordinator should check-in regularly to ensure volunteers and community members feel comfortable and well supported.

- Holding trainings on courtroom etiquette, tips, and best practices for new volunteers and follow-up guidance. These may include:
  - Key elements of the immigration process, deportation defense, and crimmigration.
  - Courtroom etiquette and best practices (how to dress, how to engage with courtroom staff and security, how to not negatively interfere with the record of the court, what items to avoid bringing to court; and troubleshooting being asked to speak about your presence or otherwise on the record).
  - Space to people to prepare emotionally for individual hearings.



## PLANNING FOR AN ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM

### CREATING A PLAN



- There may be times when there is a need for a public campaign and open-call for support at the courthouse (e.g., appealing to the governor for clemency, letters of support for those applying for asylum, etc). Pursue digital forms of engagement: Visuals on Instagram and Facebook that give information about the person who requests support and can be easily shared to ask people to show up.
- Email listservs and newsletters with the same visuals targeting other audiences like decisionmakers and allied organizations.

- The visuals can link to developed anti-deportation petitions if necessary.
- There may be times when there is a need for fundraising/creating a gofundme for the financial needs related to immigration costs.
- Give updates to let your network know what is happening on the ground, including safe dispersal at the end of the accompaniment.



## DEBRIEFING

### DEBRIEFING



#### Debriefing with the community member(s):

- A more experienced volunteer should assess how the person who was accompanied feels, respond to their questions, and identify next steps and additional resources immediately after leaving the courtroom, ensuring that other volunteers do not contribute their observations until their own debrief.
- For example, you may need to inform people who have Temporary Protected Status or are applying for asylum on what these processes entail, or how to prepare people for what to expect at their master calendar hearing or individual hearing.

#### Debriefing with volunteer(s):

- Separately, away from the accompanied person, the same or another volunteer, should assess how people who provided accompaniment felt and what they observed immediately after leaving the courtroom.
- Show your volunteers appreciation (e.g., holiday lunches) and follow up with them to let them know about success stories.
- Celebrate that community came together. OCAD values “We Keep Each Other Safe.”



## DEBRIEFING



*Asis Percales for Fine Acts*

### FOLLOW-UP



Establish follow-up organizing and pressure for release if the person did not get out of detention.

- Create a plan to post on socials, make calls, and/or sign petitions, for people's cases, especially if they are part of a public campaign.

Update others if a detained person did get released, and no further action is needed.

Evaluate if the person requests further physical accompaniment for future court hearings, for example.

Consider using social media for live conversations and follow-up post-accompaniment.



## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



*Pietro Soldi for Fine Acts*

### OTHER CONSIDERTIONS



Explore if you have the capacity to provide accompaniment in other settings (e.g., eviction defense, schools, hospitals, etc.).

Examine whether your accompaniment program will be all volunteers, some paid staff, or both.



Please refer to the [Resources](#) to access more information (intake form, training presentations, etc.).