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HOW TO GUIDE ON...



COMMUNITY HOTLINES



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The guide was created in consultation with organizers and Justice Power members, Alicia Torres and Claudia Muñoz, in their individual capacity.

This How to Guide offers guidance for those interested in creating a hotline.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Grounding2
- Logistics.....4
- Training.....10



GROUNDING



Izabela Markova

GROUNDING



Consider why you want to develop a hotline: e.g., to address the immediate needs of your community, disrupt the arrest-to-deportation pipeline within the immigration system, or bring change?

This will inform the volunteer training you will create and the types of volunteers you will need.

Consider who your community is (i.e., geography, immigration status, spoken language) and what their needs are; the nature of your existing relationships to that community, the durability of your commitment to a project involving them, and what steps you will take to ensure other members of the community can give feedback to the hotline.



GROUNDING

GROUNDING



Determine how the hotline will be aligned with your organization. Explore how the hotline can respond to community members' questions and serve as an organizing tool.

Consider what volunteers gain from the hotline (*e.g.*, knowledge about the immigration system, providing tangible support for fellow community members, getting organized, etc.) 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.

Know that finding the right software for your hotline will be challenging. Allow yourself some time to do the research on what hotline software works best for your hotline needs and organization. There are still not many softwares that allow for multi-language hotlines.



LOGISTICS

HOURS



Determine the hours of your hotline:

- You might consider operating hours from Monday - Sunday 9:00 am - 9:00 pm.
- You might consider switching to a 24-hour mode of operation if there is a crisis, like a possible ICE raid.

SUPERVISION



Select 1 or 2 experienced organizers to oversee the hotline:

- Ensure that multiple people can be on at one time and that one of the experienced organizers can enter the hotline at any given moment.
- Each lead organizer should alternate being on call (*i.e.*, responding to volunteer questions, emergencies, etc.) every week.
- There should be agreement on accessible internal communication between volunteers and the lead organizers.
- If your organization has capacity, the best practice is to have 1 full-time organizer who only handles the hotline.



LOGISTICS



Asis Percales for Fine Acts

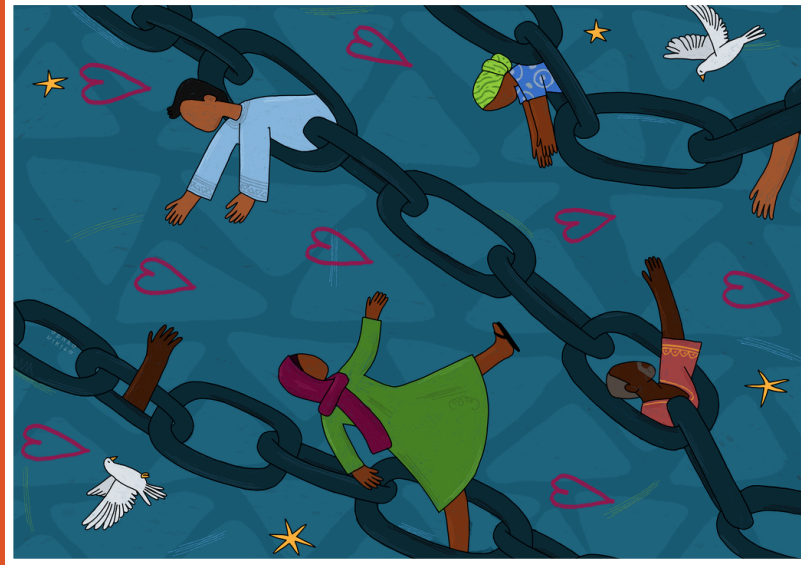
SUPERVISION



- Organizers can identify patterns that show up in the calls and create campaigns, which helps build legitimacy around the hotline and your organization.
 - For example, in Texas, organizers successfully campaigned for a public defender's office after they saw a pattern of bad judge-assigned private criminal attorneys advising non-citizens to take plea deals without explaining the immigration consequences.
 - Or, if someone calls because their child was arrested when their DACA lapsed, the organizers can visit the caller and the child to get more information, and launch a campaign for the child's release.



LOGISTICS



Nikita Abuya

VOLUNTEERS



Recruitment:

- Volunteer recruitment should reflect the needs and goals of your hotline. Consider language accessibility needs and volunteer value alignment with your organization's work.
- Consider what systems knowledge volunteers should already have to be successful at answering calls? (E.g., immigration system knowledge, criminal legal system, local area resource knowledge).
- Explore if your organization has capacity to do volunteer trainings.
- Recruit through word-of-mouth, your organization's and attorneys' networks, and presentations at law school clinics, and social work and sociology schools.



LOGISTICS

VOLUNTEERS



- Recruit from your organization's first inner circle, such as base members if your organization is a base-building organization. For example, children of base members are the ones who are bilingual and best positioned to be effective hotline volunteers given their system knowledge and language skills.
- Recruit mostly directly impacted people from your at-large community as a way to also organize them.
- Seek out students but to avoid major turnover, they should not be the majority of your volunteers.
- Develop a schedule in which you have a consistent group of volunteers for 2 or 4-hour shifts to ensure stability and sustainability and that all calls are covered.
 - Volunteers will hold a lot of knowledge and responsibility. So you should have a total number of volunteers that ensures no one volunteer will have to cover more than one shift to get all hotline shifts covered.

Osheen Siva for Fine Acts





LOGISTICS

VOLUNTEERS



Create a communication channel for volunteers to seek answers and guidance on how to best support callers but also each other; add and delete volunteers as necessary.

Show your volunteers appreciation (e.g., holiday lunches) and follow up with them to let them know about success stories.

Volunteers form part of your organizing. Engage and activate them in campaigns that stem from the hotline.

RECORD-KEEPING



Design and/or use a secure database/record-keeping system to take and store information.

- The [LawLab](#) by the Innovation Law Lab is a possible software but note that it is not free.
- Ideally, your interface can be accessed in multiple languages.

Design an intake that captures the information your organization wants to track but also allows room for people to offer information about which you might not be directly inquiring.

Build in time in your regular work hours to review intakes.



LOGISTICS



Adonis Papadopoulos for Fine Acts

RESOURCES



- Establish a vetted list of resources and referrals for other issues that callers might face (e.g., eviction, locating loved ones within the immigration or criminal systems, low-cost or pro bono attorneys, employment, domestic violence, healthcare, etc.).
 - Upkeep and update the list frequently as you learn about new situations your community encounters.
 - Ensure this resource list is created in an accessible format.
 - Often university student groups are a great resource to ask for help vetting and keeping an up-to-date resource list, as necessary as a semester project.
 - Consider having insight and contact information into out-of-state hotlines so that you can refer out-of-state callers to them (e.g., someone might be traveling through your state, or someone is helping their loved one move from your state to theirs).



TRAINING



Alina Marinescu for Fine Acts

GOAL



- Train volunteers on the why of your hotline, its purpose, and how it serves your organization.
 - For example, if your hotline is about deportation defense, you will need a curriculum that explains the local deportation process, gives case examples, and analyzes the arrest-to-deportation pipeline and how the hotline will disrupt it.
- Train volunteers on a trauma-informed approach.
- Create space for in-person training with roleplay.
- Train and create space for volunteers to engage with the hotline software before their first shift.



TRAINING

INTAKE



Create a call intake form for volunteers. Some questions to consider using:

- Have you been arrested before; if so, by what law enforcement agency and when?
- Do you have an upcoming court date?
- Have you gone to court before?
- Are you working with an attorney ? Why or why not?
- If you do have an attorney, what did they say?
- Were you placed in deportation?
- Have you worked with other organizations?

The intake should allow for absolutely necessary information to be collected over the phone. If it is a local call, leave room to make the ask for an at-home visit to allow for organizing with that caller.

Train volunteers on what is considered sensible information and might be best not recorded.



TRAINING

SCRIPT



Train volunteers on how to answer calls. Callers are often making the call in a moment of crisis and vulnerability. Empathy should always be present in the call to assure the caller that they are not alone.

- Volunteers must clearly state that they are not attorneys but can offer insights into how to navigate the systems about which the caller might be calling. *Note this can only be said if as an organization you are willing to train your volunteers on the inner workings of these systems. *IT SHOULD NOT BE AN EXPECTATION THAT VOLUNTEERS WILL KNOW THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE SYSTEMS AGAINST WHICH YOUR ORGANIZATION MIGHT BE ORGANIZING.*

Volunteers must be disciplined in letting callers know what they cannot answer or provide.

Volunteers must note who is calling, why they are calling, and what is happening on the ground in real time to communicate any urgent needs to the organizers in charge of the hotline.

- For example, if your hotline is about deportation defense, information collected can inform advocacy strategies to prevent deportation. Hotlines can provide information about oppressive systems and an opening to pursue change.



TRAINING



Pietro Soldi for Fine Acts

EVALUATION



Volunteers should invite callers to join the organization's base group meetings if the organization hosts such meetings.

Volunteers are not expected to be case managers; they will record and give the information to the organizers in charge of the hotline.



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