

Ann Arbor Activism

Introduction to Tactics

*“Tactics mean doing what you can with what you have”*

Saul Alinsky

Thinking Tactically

Tactics are where strategy hits the ground, where hours of planning and collaboration come to fruition in the form of deliberate action and where everything will inevitably not go as planned. There is a saying in the military that “no plan survives first contact,” every plan devised after hours of pouring over maps and studying decade old battles has immediately gone out the window the second bullets started flying. But, there is another, slightly more optimistic saying that “plans are nothing; planning is everything.”

This chapter will attempt to teach you how to approach situations with a tactical mindset, provide a variety of tactics that are readily available to be employed, and remind you of the rights promised to you as you seek a more just world.

We can’t give you a one-size-fits-all plan, but we can show you what planning looks like.

Because there is no one size fits all plan, the best we can offer are frameworks that can be applied to any situation in order to assess it tactically. Take the following framework METTTC for example:

**Mission**: This is the what and how of your activist efforts. What do you want to do and how are you going to do it? What is the immediate end goal of your action? What is the long term goal of your campaign? How do these elements fit together?

**Equipment**: What assets do you have at your disposal? Do people in your organization know how to effectively utilize them? If this is a finite resource, is now the time to use it?

**Time**: How long do you hope to employ this tactic? How long will you employ this tactic if necessary? How long can you maintain this tactic? *(these are 3 separate questions!)* How long can your enemy sustain the damages of this tactic?

**Terrain**: What is the area of operation?

**Troops Available**: How many people are supporting you in this cause? What economic, social, or physical costs are they willing to incur while employing this tactics?

**Civilian Considerations**: How might this tactic effect nearby non-participants? How will the public reception of this tactic help or hurt recruiting? Do you have any control over how the tactic is portrayed in media?

Let’s look at the application of METTTC in the following scenario:

Joe Schmoe’s Pizza in Ann Arbor recently refused to hire a worker on the basis of race. There are also a number of customers that have been called slurs while trying to order or were refused service outright. You and your peers want to hold the racist owner accountable.

**Mission**:

* Successfully organize a boycott against Joe Schmoe’s Pizza and raise community awareness of the owner’s racist prejudice. The short term goal is to close the pizza shop. The long term goal is to set a community standard and culture in Ann Arbor that racism will not be tolerated.
* These fit together by Joe Schmoe’s being used an example of what our expectations are and what the consequences of this behavior will be, in order to do this our efforts and the results need to be broadcasted to the community.

**Equipment**:

* Social media: an infinite, zero cost resource to spread information about our campaign.
* Flyers/posters: finite, non-zero cost resource, requires effort to make and post. Can easily be removed
* Spray paint: finite, non-zero cost resource, spreads information the same as posters, harder to remove, some implications and baggage comes with graffiti

**Time:**

* Realistically, the tactic of boycotting Schmoe’s pizza can be indefinite at zero cost to those participating. The real time constraint is how long do you put effort into spreading the word of the racism and knowledge of the boycott. The more successful this is, the less time Schmoe’s can endure the damages of this tactic.

**Terrain**:

* The area of operation is Ann Arbor. Focus your efforts and spreading information in just this area and those that live it in. Not every activist effort will become national news, focus on getting results and attention on the level that matters.

**Troops Available:**

* This this case we can break our troops into two categories: those that are actively spreading the word about the racist incidents to recruiting others for the boycott *and* those that are joining in on the boycott without working on the operational side. In this case the focus is on getting as many people in the second group as possible.

**Civilian Considerations:**

* What might be some unintended consequences of our efforts? Is there a way we can help the non-complicate workers that might be losing their jobs/taking a pay cut? How will our efforts be perceived in the Ann Arbor area? What different PR moves can we make to frame us as the good guys and Schmoe’s as the bad guys?

During your time in Ann Arbor there will be no shortage of injustice and things that need correcting. Using this framework, you can start breaking down and attacking any problem you may come across. Now that you can plan, let’s talk about ways to execute.

Your Toolbox

For the sake of this handbook we will categorize our tactics into two groups: passive and direct. These two groups, and the tactics that fall within them, all come with their own level of dedication and personal risk. As with any organization, there will be those more committed and capable than others. While not everyone will be able or willing to jump into an occupation or blockage, members that keep their involvement to painting signs and posting on social media are still valuable. Everyone has the potential to be an activist, get as much out of everyone that aligns themselves with you as possible.

Looking first at our passive tactics, these are low risk, largely nonconfrontational, and legal ways of seeking change. A few benefits of these tactics are even your most risk adverse members can actively employ them. Also, because there is no legal repercussion, they can be broadcasted and advertised by the movement, increasing visibility and aiding with recruitment. Here is an incomplete list of some passive tactics:

* Boycotting
* Social media campaign
* Letter writing
* Phone blockage: blow up a number as to prevent it from receiving calls
* Filing lawsuits
* Posting flyers
* Holding a public rally
* Having members book appointments and not show

Our direct tactics on the other hand, are more confrontational and may fall into a more legally grey area, they may also come with a higher chance of personal risk. Should your organization choose to employ any of these, it should be purposefully and premeditated. Everyone involved should understand what it is exactly that they will be doing and how the situation may escalate. Again, things will go wrong and the situation will not always be in your control. Here is an incomplete list of direct tactics:

* Occupations: physically occupy an area with a group of activist, sit-ins for example
* Blockages: physically prevent the passage through a specific path/building
* Marches: take to the streets in mass and make your voices heard
* Graffiti: spread your message, get creative and make it memorable
* Civil disobedience

This section on direct tactics is purposefully short and vague, but there is no shortage of examples of how being confrontational can effect change. The summer 2020 BLM protests may have cost millions in damages, but it also resulted in the fourth police officer in US history being convicted of murder…

For more tactics see: <https://www.beautifultrouble.org/toolbox/#/tactic>

Know Your Rights

The City of Ann Arbor and University of Michigan recognize, and even claim to support, your rights as an activist. Beyond the god given rights enshrined in our Constitution allowing you the freedom of speech and assembly, it is important to understand what your rights are as an activist in Ann Arbor and the required avenues to practice them. This section will also be incomplete as law is an incredibly specialized field and it would be impossible to provide all necessary information to employ all the tactics listed above. We will however, provide you the information you need to get started.

You do not need any permission to exercise your First Amendment right, however you are not protected in any form of disobedience that purposely violates the law to make a point. For example, it is completely legal to assemble as likeminded activists, however if this assembly were to block traffic, you would be breaking the law. The following events are likely to require a city permit:

* A march or parade that does not stay on the sidewalk, and other events that require blocking traffic or closing streets;
* A large rally requiring the use of sound amplifying devices; or
* A large rally at certain designated parks or plazas that require permits.[[1]](#footnote-1)

For University of Michigan students that hope to hold an event, DPSS can help you organize a safe and legal event at this link: <https://dpss.umich.edu/content/about/contact-us/>

There are also a number of restrictions on what you can carry on campus property regardless of what affiliation you have with the University. The following are important to note as any violations could result in serious legal repercussions and be detrimental to the movement’s image:

* Quoting directly from DPSS’ website "Possession of firearms, dangerous weapons and knives (longer than four inches) is not permitted on property owned, leased or otherwise controlled by the University of Michigan, even if you have a concealed weapons permit."
* It is against Michigan law to carry any pepper spray with an oleoresin capsicum (OC) concentration greater than 10%

Again, law incredibly nuanced specialty and we would be doing you a disservice to act as if this handbook can provide all the answers. Use the recourses at your disposal to understand what is and is not legal. For students of the University, the following resources are available:

* Student legal services, to include free counsel: <https://studentlegalservices.umich.edu>
* Free community legal resources for non-students: <https://www.law.umich.edu/clinical/generalclinic/Pages/communityresources.aspx>

Even if your organization takes all the necessary measures to ensure your tactics are lawful, it is still more than likely that at some point you will have an interaction with the police. When this happens there are a number of things you can do to ensure that interaction goes safety:

* Keep your hands visible, drop anything that you do not intent to use
* Speak clearly and loud enough for the police officer to hear you, be polite whenever possible
* Remember your rights: remain silent and refuse search
* Determine if you are being detained and if you are free to go

If you see a fellow activist interacting with the police, record the entirety of the interaction with audio if possible. It is inadvisable that you ever run from or touch a police officer. To be candid, when dealing with the police you have the toe the line between self-respect and self-preservation. Everyone in this country entitled to be treated a certain way by the police, however as the protestors at Kent State will tell you, a flower in the barrel of a gun will not stop it from firing. Despite what the law says about use of force, there are bad officers that will not hesitate to do you harm and the power differential between you and them is beyond description. Comply with the police, keep yourself alive, and seek justice after the fact.

1. <https://www.aclumich.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/knowyourrights_demonstrations_and_protests.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)