

REVERE ACTION TOOLKIT

How to Form Your Own Bird's Nest or Posse

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

We believe that the protection of our constitutional rights will emanate from widespread collective action, but this must be done by smaller, decentralized, interdisciplinary groups of patriotic citizens committed to nonviolent, effective, engagement. Larger organizations serve important purposes, but even a small group of motivated, disciplined citizens can have a tremendous impact. If you have no local groups to join or feel like you have more organizational gifts to give, consider gathering a few trusted friends together to form a new group.

This is essentially community organizing for civic monitoring — a well-established tradition in democratic society. Use this guide to get you started in building a citizen-powered monitoring network.

PHASE 1

Foundational Principles Before You Start

Define your mission clearly and narrowly

- You are a documentation and observation organization — not a protest group, not an intervention group, not a legal aid organization.
- Clarity of purpose protects members legally and operationally, and makes recruitment and training more focused.
- Draft a one-sentence mission: "We document and report federal enforcement activity in our community to support transparency and accountability."

Understand your legal exposure as an organizer

- Organizing itself is constitutionally protected.
- You are not organizing obstruction, interference, or illegal activity — make this explicit in all communications and founding documents.
- Consult a civil liberties attorney early — many ACLU affiliates offer free consultations to community organizations.
- Consider forming a fiscal sponsorship relationship with an established nonprofit, or formally incorporating as a 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) — this provides legal structure, liability protection, and credibility.

PHASE 2

Finding Like-Minded People

Start with existing networks of trusted friends, family and neighbors — don't build wholly from scratch.

First, explore organizations that already organize people around the same shared or similar mission:

- Local ACLU chapter volunteers
- Immigrant rights organizations (legal aid volunteers, rapid response members)



- National Lawyers Guild chapters (they already train legal observers)
- Faith communities with sanctuary designations
- University law school clinics and political science/journalism departments
- Local journalism and press freedom organizations
- Neighborhood associations in affected communities
- Labor unions, particularly in industries with high immigrant workforce representation
- Progressive political clubs (your local party chapter, etc.)

Learn from what they're doing to help you find a unique lane to operate in.

Then find and utilize recruitment channels that preserve operational security:

- Word of mouth through trusted existing contacts first — your earliest members should be people whose judgment and discretion you can personally vouch for.
- Encrypted community forums (Signal groups, Element/Matrix servers).
- In-person meetings at trusted venues before any digital organizing begins.
- Flyers at community centers, libraries, places of worship — with a ProtonMail contact address only, never your personal information.

What to look for in early members:

- Reliability and follow-through over enthusiasm.
- Comfort with technology and willingness to learn secure communications.
- Ability to remain calm in tense situations.
- Diverse skills: tech, legal knowledge, language abilities, local geographic knowledge, writing.
- People already embedded in affected communities — trust is everything.

PHASE 3 Organizational Structure

Keep It Flat and Cellular

The most resilient structure for this kind of work is decentralized and cellular — meaning no single person's arrest, departure, or compromise can disable the whole network:

- Small cells of 4–6 observers who operate together in a defined geographic zone.
- Each cell has one coordinator who communicates upward to a central team.
- Cell members know each other but have limited knowledge of other cells.
- Central coordination team handles data aggregation, map maintenance, and organizational decisions.
- No single person should hold all passwords, all contacts, or all data.

Roles to Define Early

Role	Responsibilities
Field Observer	Goes out, documents incidents, submits reports.
Cell Coordinator	Manages small team, collects reports, relays to central.
Data Validator	Reviews incoming reports for completeness and credibility.



Tech Administrator	Maintains database, map, secure communications infrastructure.
Legal Liaison	Relationship with attorneys, advises on legal questions, knows who to call.
Communications Lead	Manages any public-facing presence, press inquiries.
Trainer	Onboards new members, runs drills and training sessions.

PHASE 4 **Communications Security for the Group**

Layered Communications Architecture

Public Layer	A ProtonMail address and possibly a bare-minimum public website — no names, no personal details, just mission and contact.
Organizational Layer	Signal group chats for each cell; disappearing messages enabled; no real names used — establish callsigns or pseudonyms for operational communications.
Sensitive Layer	For anything involving source information, legal strategy, or member identity — one-on-one Signal only, never group chats.
Never Use	Facebook groups, standard email, SMS, or any platform that is not end-to-end encrypted for anything operational.

Device discipline:

- Encourage members to use a secondary device for all group activities — a cheap prepaid Android with Signal installed, used only for this work.
- No mixing of personal social media and organizational activity on the same device.
- Establish a clear rule: if it's operational, it's not on personal devices.

Meeting security:

- First meetings should be in person at a neutral location — library meeting room, community center, place of worship.
- Ask members to leave personal phones in their cars or in a separate room during sensitive planning discussions.
- Rotate meeting locations.
- For ongoing coordination, Signal calls are preferable to in-person meetings once trust is established.

PHASE 5 **Training Program**

Every member should be trained before going into the field. Build a curriculum covering:

MODULE 1**Legal Rights & Limits** (2 hours)

- First Amendment right to observe and film
- State-specific stop and identify laws
- What to do if approached, detained, or arrested
- Guest trainer: local civil liberties attorney or NLG legal observer trainer

MODULE 2**Observation & Documentation Technique** (2 hours)

- The incident log template
- Camera and phone technique (zoom, stabilization, timestamp, backup)
- What to prioritize documenting in a fast-moving situation
- Role-playing exercises in pairs

MODULE 3**Secure Communications & Device Hygiene** (1 hour)

- Installing and using Signal correctly
- ProtonMail setup
- Cloud backup practices
- What NOT to do

MODULE 4**Personal Safety & De-escalation** (1 hour)

- Maintaining safe distance
- How to respond to hostile agents or bystanders
- Never physically intervene — how to be useful without being a target
- Buddy system protocols — no one observes alone

MODULE 5**Data Submission & Quality** (1 hour)

- How to use your specific reporting tool
- What makes a report credible vs. not
- Chain of custody for video and photo evidence
- What happens to their data after submission

PHASE 6**Operational Protocols****Deployment**

- Observers always work in pairs minimum — never alone.
- Each pair has a designated check-in time — if they miss it, a specific person makes contact.
- Establish a legal emergency contact: one attorney's number that every member has saved and memorized.
- Before any deployment, pairs confirm: charged phone, Signal working, cloud backup enabled, incident log template ready.

Shift Structure

- Coordinate coverage across geographic zones and time windows based on known or reported activity patterns.
- Morning deployment (6–9am) tends to be highest activity for enforcement operations.
- Courthouse vicinities warrant dedicated coverage on court days.
- Rotate assignments so no observer becomes a known face in one location.

After-Action Protocol

- Submit incident log within 2 hours of observation.
- Back up all media before submitting.
- Brief debrief call with cell coordinator — verbal context that doesn't go in the written log.
- Flag anything requiring urgent legal or press attention immediately.

PHASE 7

Sustaining the Organization

Preventing burnout:

- This work is emotionally taxing — witnessing enforcement operations, especially involving families and children, takes a toll.
- Build in regular peer support check-ins — not just operational debriefs.
- Rotate high-stress assignments.
- Connect members to mental health resources proactively.

Maintaining trust and discipline:

- Establish a clear code of conduct from day one: no vigilantism, no interference, no sharing data outside approved channels, no speaking to press without authorization.
- Have a defined process for removing members who violate protocols — this protects everyone.
- Conduct periodic security audits: are people still using secure devices? Are check-in protocols being followed?

Legal defense fund:

- Establish a small reserve fund for legal expenses — even one member detention can generate legal costs.
- Organizations like the NLG Mass Defense Program and ACLU sometimes provide representation, but a local fund provides immediate response capability.

Relationships with aligned organizations:

- Formal data-sharing agreements with immigrant rights legal organizations.
- Press relationships established before you need them — not during a crisis.
- Coordination (not merger) with other regional monitoring groups to share patterns and avoid duplication.

KEY PRINCIPLE: DISCIPLINE OVER SCALE

A network of 20 disciplined, trained, security-conscious observers is vastly more valuable — and safer — than 200 loosely organized enthusiastic volunteers.

Grow slowly. Vet carefully. Train thoroughly. The integrity of your data and the safety of your members both depend on it.

Disclaimer: This document is for general informational purposes only and is not professional, legal, medical, technical, or other expert advice. Content and links to third-party resources are provided "as is" for convenience; we do not endorse or control external sites or sources and accept no responsibility for their content or availability. You assume all risk from using this site or acting on its information. Consult a qualified professional for advice tailored to your situation. To the fullest extent allowed by law, the site owners and affiliates disclaim all liability for any loss or damage arising from use of the site or linked resources.