



INSURANCE BOARD
Partners in Protection

Insurance Board Presents: **A Guide to Conducting and Participating in a Peaceful Protest**

Empowering Ideas. Delivering Innovation

**Loss Control
Resources**



Protests have a long, important history in democratic societies. When done responsibly, they provide a powerful way for people to express their views, raise public awareness, and influence policy.

This Guide Covers:

- How to Organize a Protest
- How to Participate Safely & Effectively
- Legal Rights & Responsibilities
- Safety Tips
- Communication & De-escalation
- After the Protest



How to Prepare For A Peaceful, Lawful Protest

Choose Your Purpose

Before anything else, clarify why you're organizing a protest. A well-defined purpose keeps everyone aligned and strengthens your overall impact.

1. Identify the Core Issue

Pinpoint the specific problem you're responding to. Broad frustration is common, but effective protests focus on a clear issue, such as:

- A policy that needs to change
- A harmful practice you want to bring attention to
- A community need that isn't being met

Tip: Narrowing the issue prevents your message from getting diluted and helps people understand exactly what you stand for.



2. Define the Change You Want

Ask yourself:

- What outcome are you pushing for?
- What exactly needs to happen for your goal to be achieved?

This could be:

- Raising public awareness
- Pressuring an organization to adjust a decision
- Encouraging leaders to adopt or revisit a policy
- Showing solidarity with an affected community

Having a tangible objective gives your protest direction.



3. Craft Your Core Message

Your message is the heartbeat of your event—simple, memorable, and shareable.

Consider:

- What do you want people to hear?
- What do you want them to feel or understand?
- What takeaway should observers or officials leave with?

Strong messages:

- Are easy to repeat
- Can fit on a sign
- Are clear even to someone hearing it for the first time

Guide the tone and spirit of the event

4. Align Your Purpose, Audience, and Tactics

Your purpose should inform how you protest. For example:

- If the goal is awareness, you might focus on visibility, signs, and educational materials.
- If the goal is influencing decision-makers, you may want to hold the event near a relevant institution or coordinate with advocacy groups.

The clearer your purpose, the easier it is to:

- Recruit supporters
- Communicate instructions
- Develop chants, signage, and talking points
- Stay unified during the event



Research Local Laws

Understanding local regulations helps ensure your event remains safe, lawful, and protected. Every city, county, and even specific public space can have unique requirements. Taking time to research these rules helps prevent disruptions and enables effective planning.



Researching Local Laws

1

Know when a Permit is Required

Many cities require permits for:

- Large gatherings in parks or plazas
- Marches that travel on public streets or sidewalks
- Use of amplified sound
- Events expected to draw media coverage or affect traffic

Even if a protest is small, some locations (like federal buildings, public squares, or historic districts) have special rules.

How to check:

Visit your city or county website's "Special Events," "Permits," or "Public Assembly" section. You can also call the city clerk, the mayor's office, or the parks department.

2

Understand Noise & Amplification Rules

Most cities have restrictions on:

- Speaker volume levels
- Hours when amplified sound is allowed
- Use of megaphones or sound systems
- Noise near hospitals, schools, or government buildings

Knowing these in advance prevents citations and allows you to plan how to communicate during the event.

3

Review Guidelines for Marching or Using Public Streets

Cities often regulate:

- Whether you must stay on sidewalks
- When police escorts or street closures are required
- Rules for crossing intersections
- Whether the route must be pre-approved

Some places allow spontaneous demonstrations as long as they don't obstruct traffic; others require advance notice.



Researching Local Laws

Continued

4

Check for Prohibited or Restricted Items

Local rules may prohibit:

- Weapons or anything resembling a weapon
- Glass bottles
- Drones
- Open flames, torches, or fireworks
- Large structures, tents, or stages
- Certain types of signs (e.g., wooden sticks, metal poles)

These rules vary widely, so it's important to verify what's allowed in your specific area.

5

Know Your Right in Public Spaces

Public sidewalks, parks, and plazas are usually open to expressive activity, but there are still guidelines related to:

- Time, place, and manner restrictions
- Blocking entrances or pedestrian flow
- Staying on designated paths
- Curfew times in certain parks

Understanding these helps maintain your event's legitimacy and ensures participants' rights are respected.

6

Use Reliable Sources

The most accurate information typically comes from:

- City or municipal websites
- County government pages
- Police department community relations units
- Parks and recreation departments
- Local ACLU chapters (for general rights information)

If anything is unclear, calling the relevant office can save time and prevent misunderstandings.



Select a Location & Time

Choosing the right place and time is essential for safety, visibility, accessibility, and overall impact. A well-selected location helps your message reach the intended audience while keeping the event organized and respectful of the surrounding community.

1. Prioritize High Visibility

Choose a spot where people will naturally see your gathering.

2. Ensure Safety for Participants

Safety should guide every choice.

Consider:

- Adequate space to prevent overcrowding
- Safe entry and exit points
- Distance from roadways with fast-moving traffic
- Good lighting if the event occurs at dusk or after dark
- Weather conditions (shade, shelter options, seasonal temperatures)

Also think about:

- Nearby medical facilities
- The ability for emergency services to access the area if needed

3. Make Your Location Accessible

Accessibility is essential for an inclusive event. Check:

- Proximity to public transportation
- Sidewalk widths and curb cuts for wheelchair users
- ADA-compliant restrooms nearby
- Seating or rest areas for participants who may need them

3. (Continued)

If your location is difficult to reach, attendance may drop—and you risk excluding people unintentionally.

4. Consider Impact Without Hindering Emergency Services

Choose a space that allows your event to make a statement without causing undue strain on essential services. Avoid:

- Blocking entrances to hospitals, fire stations, or clinics
- Obstructing major traffic arteries
- Interfering with emergency vehicle routes

Many cities have maps of emergency corridors—checking these can help you pick a compliant location.



Select a Location & Time

(Continued)

5. Think About Symbolic Importance

A location can strengthen your message if it aligns with the issue at hand. For example:

- A courthouse for legal issues
- A school board building for education concerns
- A company headquarters for workplace or consumer topics

Symbolic places often draw more attention from media and decision-makers.

6. Choose the Right Time of Day

Different times produce different effects:

- **Mornings:** Good for commuters and media coverage
- **Lunch hours:** High foot traffic in business districts
- **Evenings or weekends:** Better for larger turnouts, especially for working participants

Also check for:

- Scheduled events that may conflict
- Weather forecasts
- Transit schedules

Selecting a time when your audience is most available increases participation and engagement.

7. Confirm Public Space Rules

Even common locations like parks or sidewalks may have:

- Curfew hours
- Permit requirements
- Designated zones for expressive activities
- Limitations on structures or equipment

Knowing these in advance keeps everything running smoothly.

Common Locations for Public Gatherings

- Public parks
- City plazas and town squares
- Sidewalks in high-visibility areas
- Outside civic buildings
- University campuses

These are often designed to host large groups and tend to have clearer guidelines for public assembly.

Organize a Team



Even small gatherings run more smoothly when responsibilities are shared. A well-organized team improves safety, communication, coordination, and overall effectiveness. Assign roles based on people's strengths and comfort levels.

1. Event Coordinator

The coordinator keeps the entire event on track. Their responsibilities typically include:

- Overseeing planning and logistics
- Communicating with team leads
- Managing timelines, tasks, and checklists
- Serving as the main point of contact if anything unexpected happens
- Ensuring the event aligns with its core purpose and message

A calm, organized person is ideal for this role.

2. Legal Liaison

This person helps ensure the event complies with local laws and guidelines.

Tasks may include:

- Researching permit requirements
- Understanding time, place, and manner rules for public spaces
- Knowing what items are prohibited in the area
- Serving as the contact for city officials, if needed
- Providing general rights information to participants

They do not provide legal advice but act as a knowledgeable point of communication.

3. Safety & De-Escalation Volunteers

Safety volunteers help maintain a peaceful atmosphere and support participants. Their role may include:

- Greeting participants and offering directions
- Monitoring crowd flow to avoid blockages
- Identifying potential safety issues (e.g., heat exhaustion, overcrowding)
- Helping calm situations if tensions rise
- Knowing when to call for professional assistance

These volunteers should remain calm, neutral, and observant.

4. Media Contact

If media arrive, a single designated spokesperson helps keep the message clear and consistent. Responsibilities include:

- Sharing the event's purpose and core message
- Responding to questions in a calm, factual manner
- Directing reporters to safe filming areas
- Collecting media contact info for follow-up statements

A media contact should be comfortable speaking publicly and staying on message.

Organize a Team

(Continued)



5. Logistics & Supplies Team

These individuals ensure participants have what they need. Duties often include:

- Bringing water, snacks, sunscreen, or weather-appropriate gear
- Preparing or distributing signs and materials
- Setting up tables, handouts, or first-aid basics if permitted
- Handling trash and cleanup to leave the area in good condition

This team keeps the event running smoothly behind the scenes.

6. Communications/ Digital Updates (Optional but Helpful)

If your gathering is large or spread out, a communications lead can:

- Post updates on social media
- Share maps, meeting points, or schedule changes
- Coordinate with group chat moderators or team leads
- Help participants find each other if the crowd is large

Clear communication reduces confusion and strengthens turnout.

7. Accessibility Coordinator (Optional but Important)

This person helps ensure inclusive participation by:

- Identifying accessible routes and seating areas
- Helping participants with mobility, hearing, or sensory needs
- Sharing information about accessible restrooms or transit stops

Inclusivity improves safety and makes the event welcoming to everyone.

Why Assign Roles

Clear roles help:

- Prevent confusion
- Distribute workload
- Respond to issues quickly
- Maintain safety
- Keep messaging consistent
- Boost morale among volunteers

Even a 10-person gathering benefits from shared responsibilities.



Notify Authorities (When required)

Ensuring your event complies with local rules helps keep participants safe and prevents interruptions. While not all gatherings require formal approval, understanding—and when appropriate, coordinating with—local authorities can help the event run smoothly.

1. Apply for Permits Early

If your city requires a permit for:

- Marches using streets
- Large gatherings in parks or plazas
- Use of amplified sound
- Temporary street closures
- Stages, tents, or structures

...apply as early as possible. Some cities need only a few days' notice, while others may require weeks.

Submitting applications early:

- Gives you time to address questions or paperwork issues
- Helps secure your preferred time and location
- Avoids last-minute changes that can disrupt plans

2. Understand Situations Where Notification is Helpful (Even when not mandatory)

Even if no permit is legally required, some organizers choose to give authorities courtesy notice. This can help ensure:

- Traffic flow is safely managed
- Emergency vehicles have clear access routes
- Pedestrians and participants remain protected
- The event stays peaceful and well-organized

This doesn't mean asking for permission—only ensuring public safety is considered.

3. Coordinate on traffic and Safety Planning

Local agencies may assist with:

- Crossing guards or traffic officers (if available)
- Temporary barriers or cones
- Suggested safe routes for marches
- Identifying areas that should remain clear for emergency access

This type of coordination helps prevent confusion and minimizes risk.



Notify Authorities (When required)

(Continued)

4. Identify the Correct Points of Contact

Depending on your city, the relevant contacts could include:

- **City Clerk or Special Events Office** (permits and scheduling)
- **Parks & Recreation Department** (if using a park or green space)
- **Local Police Community Relations Unit** (for general safety coordination)
- **Transit Authority** (if close to stations or bus routes)

Using the correct office speeds up the process and prevents delays.

5. Maintain Clear, Professional Communication

If speaking with officials:

- Keep communication factual and respectful
- Provide essential info: date, time, location, expected turnout
- Ask about any restrictions or safety requirements
- Document everything (emails, confirmations, phone call summaries)

Professional communication helps build trust and reduces misunderstandings.

6. Have a Point Person for Authorities on Event Day

Assign one team member—often the coordinator or legal liaison—to:

- Answer questions from officials
- Communicate route changes (if any)
- Relay safety information to volunteers
- Handle unexpected issues calmly

This keeps communication streamlined and supports a peaceful atmosphere.

7. Know Your Rights

While coordination can be beneficial, participants still have protected rights to gather peacefully in public spaces. Understanding your rights helps ensure:

- Your event remains lawful
- Participants feel confident and informed
- Everyone understands what is and isn't required by local rules

A clear understanding prevents confusion for both your team and the public.

Prepare Materials



- Signs
 - Water
 - Sunscreen
 - First aid kits
 - Megaphones (if allowed)
 - Maps or instructions for participants
- Keep messaging respectful, accurate, and on topic.
- **Promote the Event Responsibly**

Use:

- Social media
- Email lists
- Flyers

Avoid sharing sensitive info like personal details or internal planning chats. Emphasize the protest's **peaceful** and **lawful** nature.



How to Participate Safely and Effectively



Know the Purpose and Expectations

Understanding the purpose, goals, and guidelines of the event helps you participate confidently, stay safe, and contribute in a constructive, coordinated way. Before attending, take a few minutes to read all materials provided by the organizers.



Understand the Event's Core Purpose

Knowing why the event is happening helps you support its message. Review:

- The primary issue being highlighted
- The key message organizers want to convey
- The intended audience (public, officials, media, etc.)
- Any specific calls to action

This ensures that participants share a consistent understanding of what the gathering is meant to accomplish.



Review the Planned Routes and Schedule

Organizers often share logistical details such as:

- Where to meet
- Expected start and end times
- March routes or walking paths
- Designated areas for standing, sitting, or gathering
- Rest points or water stations, if available

Familiarity with the plan helps reduce confusion and keeps movement orderly and safe.



Know the Safety Protocols

Safety plans may include:

- What to do if the crowd becomes too dense
- How to handle heat, cold, or weather changes
- Where medical or first-aid support is located (if provided)
- Who to contact if you see unsafe behavior
- Steps to follow if the event needs to shift or disperse
- Meeting points in case people get separated

Understanding these protocols ahead of time helps you respond calmly and appropriately in the moment.



How to Participate Safely and Effectively

Know the Purpose and Expectations
(Continued)



Follow Behavior Expectations

Most events outline guidelines to promote a peaceful, respectful atmosphere. These often include:

- Staying non-confrontational
- Respecting public property and nearby businesses
- Keeping pathways clear for wheelchairs, strollers, and pedestrians
- Following instructions from event volunteers
- Avoiding behaviors that could escalate tension
- Maintaining awareness of your surroundings

Behavior guidelines help protect participants, bystanders, and the integrity of the event.



How to Participate Safely and Effectively



Know the Purpose and Expectations (Continued)

Identify Key Contacts

Before attending, note:

- Who the organizers are
- Where to find safety volunteers or marshals
- Any communication channels the group uses (texts, apps, or social media updates)

Knowing where to go for help or information keeps you connected and informed.

Bring Essentials

Recommended:

- Water & snacks
- Weather-appropriate clothing
- Comfortable shoes
- Phone (charged)
- ID (optional, based on comfort and local laws)
- Medication, if needed

Stay Peaceful

Remaining calm and composed helps protect everyone involved and ensures the purpose of the gathering stays at the forefront.

Why Peacefulness Matters

Staying peaceful:

- Protects you by reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings or unsafe situations.
- Protects others by maintaining a safe, stable environment.
- Protects the cause by keeping attention on the message, not on conflict.
- Reinforces credibility with bystanders, community members, and media.

How to Maintain Peacefulness

- **Stay aware of your emotions.** Crowds can amplify feelings—take deep breaths, stay grounded.
- **Do not engage with aggressive individuals.** Walk away or notify event volunteers if you encounter hostility.
- **Avoid shouting matches.** If someone tries to provoke you, staying silent or calmly moving away is often the safest option.
- **Follow organizers' instructions.** Marshals and volunteers help keep the event orderly and safe.
- **Stay focused on the message.** Peaceful participation reinforces the event's goals and keeps it on track.



How to Participate Safely and Effectively



Know the Purpose and Expectations (Continued)



→ Stay With the Group

Staying together helps maintain order, ensures safety, and supports clear communication throughout the event.

→ Why Staying with the Group is Important

- **Improves safety.** Organizers choose routes with safety in mind.
- **Helps marshals do their job.** Volunteers can't support or guide individuals who separate from the crowd.
- **Prevents confusion.** Straying from the group can lead to uncertainty, missed updates, or moving into unsafe areas.
- **Strengthens visibility and impact.** A unified group sends a clearer, stronger message.

→ Best Practices

- **Follow designated marshals or organizers.** They are trained to guide movement and manage pace.
- **If marching, stay on the planned route.** Avoid side streets or unapproved areas.
- **Keep a steady pace.** Don't push or rush; allow spacing for strollers, wheelchairs, and slower walkers.
- **Use buddy systems during the event.** Attending with at least one partner helps everyone stay connected.



How to Participate Safely and Effectively

Know the Purpose and Expectations

(Continued)

→ Practice Respectful Communication

Respectful communication helps maintain a safe atmosphere and ensures interactions stay constructive.

→ General Guidelines

- **Stay calm and polite.** Tone matters—calm communication can quickly defuse tension.
- **Keep conversations short and purposeful.** Long debates in crowds can become stressful or unsafe.
- **Stay focused on your message.** Avoid getting pulled into unrelated arguments.

→ Interacting With Police

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- **Use buddy systems during the event.** Attending with at least one partner helps everyone stay connected.

→ Interacting With Bystanders

- **Stay positive and courteous.** Many people may simply be curious.
- **Avoid confrontations.** If someone disagrees, calmly disengage and return to the group.
- **Share the purpose if asked.** Keep explanations simple, factual, and peaceful.

→ Interacting With Counter-Protestors

- **Do not engage in arguments.** Engagement can escalate quickly.
- **Stay focused on your group's message and guidelines.**
- **Allow organizers or marshals to handle tense moments.**
- **Move away from conflict rather than toward it.**

Respectful communication helps reinforce unity, reduces risk, and keeps the event focused on its intended purpose.



How to Participate Safely and Effectively

Know the Purpose and Expectations
(Continued)

➔ Practice Respectful Communication (Continued)

➔ You Must Follow

- Local permits
- Traffic laws
- Noise restrictions
- Lawful police orders for safety (e.g., emergency reroutes)

When in doubt, consult a local civil liberties organization.

➔ Stay Aware of Your Surroundings

Awareness is your most important safety tool.

Stay mindful of:

- **Crowd movement:** Note when the crowd grows dense or begins shifting in a direction.
- **Nearby exits or safe areas:** Know how to leave quickly if needed—side streets, open plazas, or designated gathering points.
- **Potential hazards:** Uneven sidewalks, curbs, bicycles, or vehicles entering the area.
- **Changes in mood:** If the crowd begins to feel tense or compressed, reposition to a calmer spot.

A general rule: the moment you feel uncomfortable, calmly create space or move to the edge of the crowd.



How to Participate Safely and Effectively

Know the Purpose and Expectation (Continued)

If Tension Rise

Most events remain peaceful, but large groups can sometimes experience moments of stress or conflict. Staying composed helps prevent escalation.

What to Do

- **Move away from confrontations:** Avoid direct engagement with individuals who appear agitated or confrontational.
- **Follow organizers' and marshals' instructions:** They have planned safety procedures and know recommended routes or exit options.
- **Stay calm and breathe:** Keeping a steady, calm demeanor helps you think clearly and reduces panic.
- **Avoid pushing or shouting:** These actions can escalate situations or create crowd movement that endangers others.
- **Rejoin the main group in a safer area,** if possible, or exit the event if you feel uncomfortable.

What to Avoid

- Don't argue or try to "win" verbal exchanges
- Don't respond to provocation
- Don't assume others will de-escalate on your behalf. Prioritize your own safety first.





How to Participate Safely and Effectively

Know the Purpose and Expectation (Continued)

Protect Your Health

Being prepared for environmental conditions and physical demands helps you stay comfortable and safe throughout the event.

Weather Preparedness

- **Wear appropriate clothing:** Layers for cold, breathable fabrics for heat, waterproof gear for rain.
- **Sun protection:** Sunscreen, hats, sunglasses, and hydration to prevent heat stress.
- **Footwear:** Comfortable, closed-toe shoes protect against crowded conditions and long standing.

Health in Large Crowds

- **Consider wearing a mask** if the crowd is dense or if you prefer an extra health precaution.
- **Bring water and snacks:** Staying hydrated maintains energy and focus.
- **Use hand sanitizer:** Especially after touching shared surfaces.
- **Take breaks when needed:** Step aside to rest, hydrate, or breathe if you feel overwhelmed.

Communication & De-Escalation

Organizers Should:

- Train volunteers on de-escalation
- Create clear communication channels
- Have a plan for emergencies or disruptions

Participants Should:

- Avoid shouting matches
- Walk away from antagonistic individuals
- Support each other if someone becomes overwhelmed



AFTER THE PROTEST

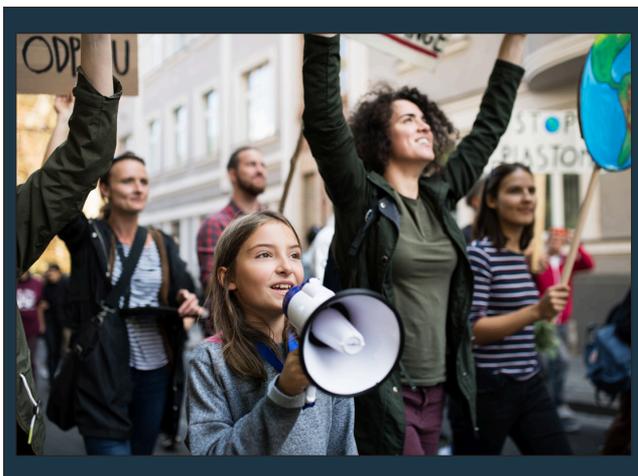
Debrief

Organizers can evaluate:

- What went well
- Opportunities for improvement
- Follow-up actions

Final Thoughts

A peaceful protest is a powerful civic tool when done responsibly. Whether you're organizing or participating, the keys are **preparation, respect, safety, and lawfulness.**





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