

# Welcome!

Here's how to start your own FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS community group.

**In difficult times, it's good to be together.**

Whether you want to organize change, get to know your neighbors, share inspiration, or commiserate with people you have common values with... when times are tough, it's good to be together in community.

**Here's a roadmap for getting started that has worked for our group.** What we've found is that many people are looking for meaningful community right now and if you build it, they will come! Our group is open to BOTH folks taking policy action, and organizing mutual aid.

If you want support as you get your friends and neighbors together, I am developing a Signal chat for new organizers where you are welcome. I am working on the best way to add new folks in, message me on Signal @seachanger.101 if you'd like to join!

**Below are details you might find helpful, but here's the basic plan:**

- 1. Create a way to communicate with your group**
  - a. Download [Signal App](#)
  - b. Create a chat group in Signal
  - c. Invite like minded friends & neighbors & watch the good vibes roll in
  - d. Write a short guide for the chat so people know the rules & goals
- 2. Plan a meet up on zoom or real life**
  - a. Use templates provided or make your own
- 3. Ask a few others to help lead so you don't burn out**
- 4. Do something**
  - a. No action is too big or small & we're here to help
- 5. Learn more about how to organize**
  - a. We have tips
  - b. Here are big groups you can plug into & learn from
  - c. Here are books & webinars we recommend

## **Step 1. Create a way to communicate with your group.**

### **Download Signal App**

We use Signal app because it's a way to form an organized messaging group that works on all devices and doesn't require a social media platform. Signal is also end to end encrypted, which

means messages cannot be intercepted by algorithmic surveillance. While nothing you write down is 100% private, Signal has more protections than phone messaging apps or Whats App. It is also an independent nonprofit that you can donate to! Users can set their own privacy preferences depending on the level of risk they may experience due to their job or identity.

### **Create a chat group in Signal**

We picked the name Petersburg Friends & Neighbors to get started and found that over time, this name proved accessible and inclusive. *We like how much is implied by the word neighbor – we have a relationship to the people around us and that means we care for our neighbors!* We are happy if you use this name also, whether for your town or neighborhood, or just your friends and their friends who don't live near you. If you do use the name, know that it is intended for inclusive, politically oriented community groups who advocate for the wellbeing of all, including and especially those targeted by the Trump and Musk administration. We are dedicated both to mutual aid and directly helping our neighbors, and to organizing for policy and political action that supports the wellbeing of all.

### **Invite people using the group link Signal provides**

We invited people to join our chat who wanted to talk about the election, share how they are taking action, bring questions about what's happening or how government works, share local threats and opportunities for getting involved, or get support from the group. We have people who may be members of other groups or who may be more or less feisty, everyone's in. The idea is we all have something to add to this moment!

### **Create an intro or guide to your group for new users**

We put a link to a google document in the description of our chat and welcome new users in the chat by directing them to read that document. You could also use a blog post or website or PDF document for this - any doc you can edit and share with others will work. That intro explains how we got started and why we're gathering together, and has info on any upcoming events or notes from previous events. Here is the description & ground rules of our group, which you are welcome to use or modify:

*After a tough election, we are coming together to build the world we want to live in, and to create community that takes good care of all our people. While we are many individuals working in different roles, we stand together in solidarity for protecting the vulnerable and holding our common humanity and all living beings sacred.*

- Bring whatever you find on your mind, and leave room for others to do the same*
- Lessons leave, stories stay (unless explicitly stated otherwise). This means absolutely no screenshots, copy-pasting comments from other people unless it's something like a news article, link, or simply the meme without the other person's name attached.*
- It's okay to mute notifications from the group, or even leave if it's not for you! We all have to do what we need to for our own wellbeing in these times.*
- Be generous with each other. We will all react differently and have our own ways of moving in this situation. Remember we are on the same team at the end of the day.*

*-Anyone can lead! If you want to see something happen and nobody else is stepping up, that means it might be up to you! Don't be afraid to try something new.*

### **Adapt as you grow**

Our group ballooned to 100+ people so we created several other Signal “channels” to focus different conversations. These are listed with short links in our chat description. One of our members also has a community action e-newsletter that is functioning for email announcements for the group. We’re also supporting our local paper by placing ads so new folks from our community can find us by emailing one of the organizers.

## **Step 2: Plan a meet up in real life or on Zoom**

We got started using community meeting templates from the [We Are Worth Fighting For](#) coalition, which includes Indivisible, Working Families Party, MoveOn.org and other unions and organizers. You can modify as needed, or just use a part of the template and then add your own, but these are designed to build community, process what’s going on, and look at how we might prepare for what’s next. We got a room at our library for our first meeting.

[Community meeting template 1](#)

[Community meeting template 2](#)

Since we got going after the election, we’ve held about 6 events, ranging from living room strategy chats to a 250 person rally in our small town! We are trying to develop a rhythm that people can look to for community meet ups with food that are kid friendly.

## **Step 3: Share the work with a few leaders**

Make sure you have a few folks helping to keep the Signal chat organized, and set up/facilitate any in person or zoom events so it’s not all one person. We use a separate Signal group to chat about the group, and anyone is invited to be part of that. We have already rotated different folks in to those roles as people get busy or go out of town. Many hands make light work!

## **Step 4: Do something!**

It’s perfectly fine to use your group just for sharing. But we recommend before too long you do something! Most likely this will happen on its own. (Warning: do not spend too much time at the outset working on the group description or plan, the purpose of the group is what it does.)

Example of things you could do:

- Make a guide for contacting your senate or reps you can share with friends
- Take out an ad in the local paper and/or organize letters to the editor from your group
- Organize people to attend an upcoming march or rally, or a protest at a local Tesla dealership.

- Attend meetings or webinars from other groups and share what you've learned or what that group is doing - Indivisible, MoveOn, Working Families Party, Dem Socialists of America, etc. all have regular phone banks, webinars etc. to help inspire you!
- Help support one or more of your members in running for office!
- Organize volunteers to help (or start) with feeding hungry community members, fundraising for abortion funds, housing folks etc. or other mutual aid.
- Still feel stuck on where to get going? Malena is here to help & ready to chat : )

Not all group members need to support or participate in each activity. You can also form related Signal chats to take up sub-projects.

## Step 5: Keep learning more

Malena is working on a group for new Friends & Neighbors organizers. Stay tuned : )

### Tips for organizing

- **One cause, many roles:** the friends and neighbors model means we are building community with everyone who shares our values. People will have different opinions and be drawn to different types of work. It's ok and good to have all kinds!
- **Solidarity vs. unity:** Solidarity means linking arms with folks who are different than us. It's a concept that can help us integrate our diversity, without always having to "unite" under the exact same ideas and then arguing about those.
- **Hub and spokes:** Our group is a place to share what's going on in other groups you may be involved in, such as Indivisible chapter, school board, etc. Both hub & spokes are needed to keep the wheel rolling!
- **Focus on fun** - Redirect toward being lighthearted and supportive and having a sense of humor & plan fun activities. We're in this for the long haul and we want to stay together.
- **Action is better than worrying:** when in doubt, do something!
- **Family friendly for the win.** Incorporate food and childcare into your events whenever possible.
- It's a sprint, it's a marathon, **AND it's a relay** - being part of a movement means you can rest, the movement will carry you. Not everyone needs to do all the things all the time!

### Ways to plug in right now to larger orgs

- Working Families Party [events](#)
- Indivisible [events](#)
- Democratic Socialists of America [events](#)
- Moveon.Org [events](#)
- Tesla Takedown [events](#)
- (List in progress, more coming soon!)

## Resources for learning about organizing

- The [Working Families Party and friends have a series of webinars \(Mass Calls\)](#) that can ground and inspire you, start at #10 to get current info, or practice deep learning with all of them!
- This all star panel of thinkers and doers has a lot of experience and wisdom, their panels are highly recommended. [Panel 1](#). Panel 2.
- [Solidarity by Astra Taylor](#) is a philosophical guiding star that lays out how and why we need to get together right now. Highly recommended for book clubs or audio listening.
- [Let this radicalize you](#) is an inspiring handbook of organizing from Kelly Hayes, who also has an excellent, EXCELLENT, [weekly newsletter](#), among other things.

### About Malena:

I have been what I call an “obligate organizer” all my life! Organizing people to change the world has been my hobby, my passion, and for many years, it was my career. I’ve learned from successes and from failures. But most of all I’ve learned by simply trying to communicate with others and help them take strategic action to bring about the changes we all want to see. What I’ve learned is that the more of us that link arms and stand together, the more likely we are to make good change. I’m here to help!