

Abolition of Policing Workshop

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Developed by Critical Resistance – Oakland

Total Workshop Length: 2 hours

- A. Introduction — 30 minutes
- B. Definitions — 10 minutes
- C. Policing Timeline — 30 minutes
- D. Scenarios — 30 minutes
- E. Resistance & Resources — 15 minutes

Materials You Will Need:

- **Agenda** — written on a poster for participants to see during workshop
- **Definition of Policing** — 1 poster-size, 1 handout per participant
- **Policing Timeline** — 1 copy of wall timeline (includes many print outs), 1 copy of text version per participant (Ideal to use a timeline with local events and history — CR provides a basic timeline)
- **Video/Media Clips** — Optional to use during the timeline activity.
- **Post-it's** — a few per participant for the timeline activity
- **Scenarios** — print at least enough for 4 small groups (there are 4 pre-written scenarios)
- **Resource List** — Take-home information for participants on resistance to policing and local non-police resources

Preparing the Space:

- Use a large room with chairs that can be rearranged to allow for group discussion and small group work
- Post timeline on a large wall or around the room ahead of time. Make sure there is space for people to spread out and walk around as they read the timeline. (budget about 20-25 minutes to set up the timeline!)

A. Introduction

30 minutes

Welcome: 15 minutes

- Introductions (names, access needs, gender pronouns)
- Warm-up
 - Word association: (Scribe on poster paper) When you hear the word policing what are some other words/phrases that come to mind
- Group Agreements
 - Examples: take care of yourself, step-up/step-back, content/trigger warning about discussing police and state violence, anything important to know about the space you are using
- Review Agenda and Framing of Workshop

Framing: Goals of this session are to leave with clear examples of what resistance to policing looks like and have some ideas of where to plug in. Also for participants to start thinking of ways they can refrain from calling the cops, or using alternative resources/strategies.

Goals: 5 minutes

- For people to think about why police exist (to maintain status quo, to keep poor people of color and poor people in check); to have some historical understanding of policing
- Clear examples of what resistance to policing looks like in general and in your local region
- Have ideas about where to plug in to local resistance
- For people to start thinking about a world without police
- To start thinking of ways they can refrain from calling the cops, or using alternative resources/strategies

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Key takeaways: 5-10 minutes

We are assuming that you are here because you are interested in abolishing the police/thinking about what that could look like. We are moving with the presumption that you already have an analysis of why policing is not the tool to bring peace, health & safety to our communities & now you are looking for ways to get rid of it/think about what can replace it.

- This workshop comes from Critical Resistance. Here is that organization’s approach to opposing policing:
 - We work on policing because it is an integral part of the PIC
 - Just as the other parts of the PIC don't constitute a broken system, this portion of the PIC doesn't either and we wouldn't argue for reform. Civilian review, efforts for police accountability, prosecution of cops, etc. don't erode the system. We can't support anything we'll need to undo later.
 - Our approach to policing needs to be integrated into an overall analysis about PIC abolition and must acknowledge all the different kinds of cops we're confronted with—from police forces and border patrol, to private security, community policing, and tips hotlines.

You and/or your organization may choose to highlight different reasons why policing must be abolished. The main interventions of this workshop are: a) that our end goal is not to reform policing but to abolish it, and b) that policing is part of a larger system of violence and therefore cannot be addressed in isolation.

B. Definitions

10 minutes

*Facilitator: **Pass out post-its.** In a second participants will use these to ask questions or add things you feel might be missing to the definition of policing which we'll review shortly. You will also use some of these to add to or ask questions on the timeline of policing during a gallery walk after we review the definition.*

***Hand out the definition of policing to participants.** State that the first part (the part in bold on their handout) is the core of the definition and that the other part of the definition helps fill out and explain that core description. This particular definition comes from Critical Resistance.*

Read the definition:

Have each participant read one line, or have one volunteer read the whole definition.

Policing is a social relationship made up of a set of practices that are empowered by the state to enforce law and social control through the use of force. Reinforcing the oppressive social and economic relationships that have been central to the US throughout its history, the roots of policing in the United States are closely linked the capture of escaped slaves, and the enforcement of Black Codes. Similarly, police forces have been used to keep new immigrants “in line” and to prevent the poor and working classes from making demands. As social conditions change, how policing is used to target poor people, people of color, immigrants, and others who do not conform on the street or in their homes also shifts. The choices policing requires about which people to target, what to target them for, and when to arrest a book them play a major role in who ultimately gets imprisoned.

Facilitator: Give participants some time to think and write on their post-its. As you discuss, you can mark up the poster-size definition. Underline parts that stood out to people, put up their post-it's if they have things to add. Be creative in incorporating their feedback. CR views this definition as a working document and has altered it to reflect input after workshops.

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Discussing the definition:

- What stands out to you? What thoughts do you have about this definition?
- What's missing?
- What questions do you have?

Key Take-aways to Emphasize:

- Policing is a system. It is not about individual cops. The entire system is predicated on violence and control.
- The system of policing is not broken. It functions exactly as it was meant to.
- Policing and imprisonment are firmly linked. Communities and individuals that are targeted by police are more likely to go to jail/prison.

C. Timeline

30 minutes

The timeline allows us to see dynamic nature of policing and continued use in relationship to changing social conditions. It is not necessarily comprehensive, but meant to reflect a historical perspective of policing as an integral part of the prison industrial complex in the United States (or your local region).

Facilitator: Pass out 1-2 post-it's to each participant for timeline walk activity. Depending on how large the group is, you can have people go up in pairs, in small groups, or one half of the room first, then the second half. Encourage people to have a buddy to look through the timeline with and note or discuss things.

Timeline Walk: 10 minutes

- Walk along the timeline to get an overview and read descriptions of events.
- Add any important things that are missing (example: police murders/violence, funding/laws passed in favor of police, your personal interactions with police, direct actions/resistance to policing, repression of social movements, etc.)

Discussion: 20 minutes

- Talk about key specific events and timeline of policing and resistance as a whole
 - What did people add to the timeline? What was missing?
 - What trends did people notice? What do these connections tell us about the nature of policing (examples: repression of labor movements shows how policing protects capital; the origins of policing in slave patrols reveals it's rootedness in anti-blackness and slavery)
- Relate back to workshop take-home points
 - Are there examples of reforms on this timeline? Did they diminish or further empower policing?
 - How do we see policing interacting with the prison industrial complex? (examples: police carrying out surveillance; police raids resulting in the imprisonment of activists during times of mass social movements)

D. Scenarios

30 minutes

This is an exercise that's meant to help participants put anti-policing politics into practice in concrete ways. We will start by discussing scenarios involving different types of policing and how we would organize to respond to them, and then we will share those out with the larger group

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Facilitator: Break the participants into 4 groups. Give each group a scenario to respond to (there are four scenarios in total, that can also be duplicated).

Small Groups: 10 minutes

- Each group should appoint a note-taker and time-keeper
- Group should work together to decide how to respond to the situation, using the provided questions as a guide.

Discussion: 20 minutes

- Each group has 5 minutes to report back on their scenario and solutions. (Keep track of time!)
 - Use some of that time to let the rest of the participants chime in and discuss solutions.
- Was it easy to come up with solutions? Did people have personal experience with similar situations? What solutions worked or didn't work?
- Key take-aways:
 - People and communities have always been solving conflict without police getting involved. We need to uplift those strategies that mostly exist in communities where policing inflicts the most harm.
 - Police do not represent safety for everyone, and we are often challenged to deescalate by convincing neighbors, community members, authorities not to call on the police.
 - Through policing, the state has built up a monopoly over emergency response, dealing with crisis, resolving interpersonal conflicts and much more. By opposing policing, we are challenged to also create non-police and non-state infrastructure to respond to a variety of issues.

E. Closing: Resistance & Resources

15 minutes

This is when we discuss recent wins against policing, current organizing that is happening, and tools/resources that can help people in their daily lives. Participants will also be challenged to think about ways they resist policing everyday, and one thing they will do to avoid calling/relying on the police.

Some ideas for structuring this conversation:

- On a butcher paper taped onto wall and divided into two columns, have participants draw/sketch/write ways they resist policing everyday, and one new way they will begin to challenge the use of policing/police in their everyday lives.

Ways we already resist policing:	Ways we will start resisting policing:

- If there are organizers in the group, facilitate a (short) discussion about how their organizing can better work towards the abolition of policing.
 - If they are involved in policy or legislative work, how can reforms be designed to not further empower police and build up community-based alternatives instead?
- If your organization or community is involved in anti-police work, share what you are working on and anything that may help participants understand what this work can look like.

Make sure to thank your participants!