

# COMMUNITY DEFENSE

*Beginners Guide & Interactive Workbook*



6 STEPS THAT WILL PROMPT YOU TO ASSESS NEED,  
AUDIENCE, TRAINING, TRIGGERS, CAPACITY, AND RESOURCES  
IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR SPECIFIC COMMUNITY

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**3**

## **INTRODUCTION**

WHAT IS AND WHY COMMUNITY DEFENSE

**4-9**

## **COMMUNITY DEFENSE**

HISTORICAL & PRESENT DAY EXAMPLES

**10**

## **GRASSROOTS MODEL**

A GUIDE TO FOLLOW ALONG TO

**11-13**

## **STEP 1**

COMMUNITY CLIMATE & CONTEXT

**14-16**

## **STEP 2**

PINPOINT SINGLE ISSUE & SOLUTION

**17-21**

## **STEP 3**

AUDIENCE

**22-25**

## **STEP 4**

SKILLS & TRAINING

**26-31**

## **STEP 5**

PERSONAL TRIGGERS & CAPACITY

**32-35**

## **STEP 6**

MATERIALS, RESOURCES, & TOOLS



# INTRODUCTION

Community defense is the way we come together as friends, family, neighbors, lovers, coworkers, gardeners, artists, cooks, crafters, speakers, educators, healers, story-tellers and so on to liberate ourselves from oppressive relationships with state systems.

Through a framework of interdependence we can build autonomous power amongst our communities and make functions of the state obsolete over time.

We can build communal power by replacing state structures with infrastructure that fits the needs of our local community, it begins with various formations of community defense.

Infrastructure can be foundations of support built by and for the community that form through the development of relationships, sharing of skills, and centering of local community needs.

Interdependence could be the root system for which our infrastructure dreams and goals feed and communicate through. When we have mutual healthy dependence on one another we are more likely to sustain collectively.

There are many structures currently managed by the state that perpetuate violence with the purpose of maintaining systemic white supremacy. For example: policing, prisons, courts and psych wards, just to name a few.

Despite the fact that these systems perpetuate violence against our communities many still fear an obsolete state because they do not currently know who they will rely on in time of need.

It's on us as neighbors, friends, family, and local peoples to begin developing the relationships, skills, trainings, and trust required to practice community defense.

This workbook contains a few examples of community defense where grassroots models reclaimed power from the state by intervening and meeting the needs of their community

# THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

## POLICE PATROLS

The Black Panther Party of Oakland, California began patrols as a means to show up for Black community members who experienced frequent harassment and brutality by police. Huey P. Newton wanted to observe police with armed defense and legal knowledge. Newton was self-educated in California law and always carried law books in his car. When police would harass Black people, Newton (or the patrol group) would read the law aloud. The purpose was to educate Black people of their rights and hold police accountable to the law.



**BPP on the steps of California State Capitol defending their right to open carry, 1967.**

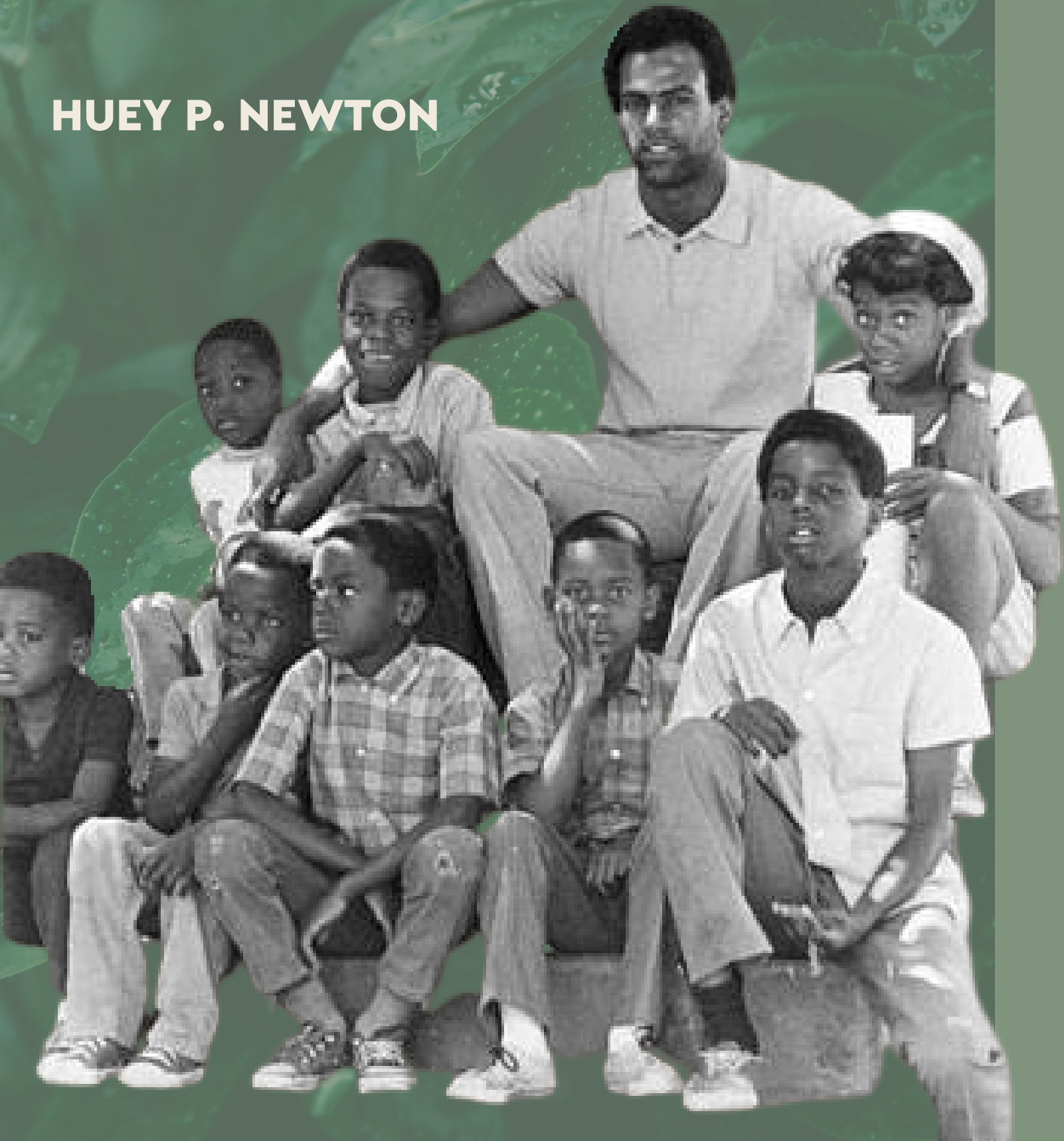
**Black Panther Party created the Free Breakfast Program that would later be co-opted by the federal government after COINTEL PRO violently dismantled the party.**





**"THE CHIEF PURPOSE OF PATROLS  
WAS TO TEACH THE COMMUNITY  
SECURITY OF POLICE."**

**HUEY P. NEWTON**



# THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

## HARM REDUCTION

[Panther Sisters - Harm Reductionists](#)


[The Harm Reduction Coalition](#)



Popularized by Elaine Brown of The Black Panther Party in 1980, harm reduction began as a means of addressing the 1980's crack epidemic. The CIA flooded Black communities with crack cocaine breeding addiction that would later be weaponized to further propaganda about Black Motherhood, a new forefront for Anti-Black eugenics violence. Harm Reduction sought out the root of the crack epidemic and pinpointed white supremacy. Medical facilities, then and now, criminalize and refuse proper treatment for drug users and those struggling with addiction. State funded infrastructures stigmatize drug use as an individual flaw rather than as a disease tied to colonialism, racism, and so on. Harm reduction is a form of community defense that provides community care and proper treatment to users in need.

*"Harm Reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm Reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the right of people who use drugs." Imani Woods, founding member of The Harm Reduction Coalition, 2018.*





***"We believe the government must provide, free of charge, for the people, health facilities which will not only treat our illnesses, most of which have come as a result of our oppression, but which will also develop preventative medical programs to guarantee our future survival. We believe the mass health education and research programs must be developed to give Black and oppressed people access to advanced scientific and medical information, so we may provide ourselves with proper medical attention and care."***

***Elaine Brown  
Black Panther Party  
1972***

# TUCSON COMMUNITY RAPID RESPONSE

Rapid Response builds a community network that, at the alert of ICE presence, will have the capacity to show up ready to defend and protect undocumented community from ICE kidnappings. Rapid Response teams train and build out communal skills proactively so that they can show up prepared rather than reactive in crises.

Examples of community built infrastructure:

- 24 hour hotline to immigrant facing arrest
- "Community observers" to witness interactions with law enforcement
- "Accompaniment volunteers" support families throughout detention process
- "Know Your Rights" for scenarios in your car, at home, work, or school

## TUCSON COMMUNITY RAPID RESPONSE

**520-221-4077**

COMMUNITY RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

Equipo Comunitario de Respuesta Rápida

Raids • Prolonged Stops • Interactions with ICE or Border Patrol

Redadas • Paradas Prolongadas • Interacción con ICE o la migra

Request witnesses and community presence to ensure your rights are respected

Solicita testigos y presencia comunitaria para asegurar que tus derechos sean respetados



**"THE TUCSON COMMUNITY RAPID  
RESPONSE NETWORK PROVIDES A WAY FOR  
PEOPLE TO RESPOND TO FEAR AND  
ANXIETY IN OUR COMMUNITY AS A RESULT  
OF THE INCREASE IN IMMIGRATION  
ENFORCEMENT AND ATTACKS AGAINST  
OUR COMMUNITIES. WE BELIEVE IN THE  
IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY PRESENCE IN  
ORDER TO HOLD LAW ENFORCEMENT  
ACCOUNTABLE."**

**TUCSON COMMUNITY RAPID RESPONSE**

**SMASH**



**FASCISM**

# **MODELING GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY DEFENSE**

Capitalism and white supremacy spend a lot of resources undermining our access to education and interdependent relationships. Without access to education and interdependent networking we lack the skills, tools, and relationships to care for one another confidently. We are then forced into a relationship with the state, in other words, we are dependent on a 500+ year old systemic abuser.

The Abolition of police, prisons, and all other weapons of white supremacy require that we grow our relationships to one another and self-educate as a means to liberate ourselves from the systems that keep us reliant on our oppressor. Interdependence is our root system, a network that will provide for us and remind us of compassion and interconnectedness, two tools that white supremacy has tried so hard but failed to eliminate.

*We will model a grassroots community defense model that takes the form of a safe ride service.* This workbook will provide a step-by-step prompts that will help you situate your vision, service, skills, resources, and capacity in the context of your specific community. These steps and prompts are NOT exhaustive and only guide users based on the experience of one model. I would recommend that you work through each step with your community organization with days to process each step individually and then collectively.

This workbook has space to grow. Collaboration and critique are welcomed. We can always edit, revise, and re-upload new versions.



# **STEP 1**

## **COMMUNITY CLIMATE & CONTEXT**

### **GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- 1. Where do you see a lack of attention, resources, or support falling through in your community?**
- 2. What issues persist unchallenged?**
- 3. What are the needs of the local grassroots Black and Indigenous organizations?**
- 4. What set of skills does your group possess or what are you all most interested in learning?**
- 5. What points of systemic violence are you most interested in addressing?**

**Although capitalism and white supremacy are rampant in all of our communities it is important to understand the way that these systems of oppression specifically affect the community you reside within. White supremacy is insidious because it has the ability to mold and evolve to fit many different political climates and local contexts.**

**Try to lay out the way white supremacy operates in your community, be specific and center the communities most impacted.**

# **STEP 1**

## **COMMUNITY CLIMATE & CONTEXT**

### **GUIDING MODEL**

A grassroots community defense organization emerges in the fall of 2016 around the time of Trump's election. A small neoliberal town sees white power and anti-immigration sentiment rise in the form of hate groups, hate crimes, and fear mongering. A group of Queer, Trans, Gender Variant, Disabled, BIPOC pinpoint that community is experiencing heightened harassment, discrimination, and violence in the downtown bar scene. Outward discrimination and removal of Black, Indigenous, Queer, and Trans people from public spaces by white supremacist bar staff, security, police, and patrons. Queer and Trans people feel increasingly unsafe at work, in bathrooms, and in downtown bars.

In latine neighborhoods, there is an increase in police presence that leads to an increase in arrests, brutality, and surveillance. Anti-Immigrant hate groups spring forth with organized attempts to patrol and actively spread fear throughout town. ICE has a more frequent and aggressive presence in town and kidnaps several families.

At the university, we see a growing harassment and surveillance of leftist professors and student organizers. White supremacist youth patrol town with Blue Lives Matter, American, and Trump flags attached to the backs of large trucks where they are frequently seen harassing Black and unsheltered relatives on the streets.

I believe it is important to name the context we are organizing in because it will help us adapt a model to fit the needs of our specific community climate.



# STEP 1 - BRAINSTORM

Name the political climate in your local setting. Where do you see a lack of attention, resources, or support falling through in your community? What are the needs of the most impacted people/presently existing Black & Indigenous orgs? What is your current experience doing community work? Where are you called in movement work? Notice patterns below.

**COMMUNITY  
CLIMATE**

**NEEDS OF MOST  
IMPACTED**

**MOVEMENT TIES  
/ HEART WORK**

## **STEP 2**

### **PINPOINT SINGLE ISSUE & SOLUTION**

The issues we endure under white supremacy may feel infinite. It will be easy to become overwhelmed believing that we can or must attempt to tackle them all with one community defense organization. Our community defense formations need sharp focus.

We can destroy white supremacy in our communities but it will require a lot of organized effort and strategy to take our power back, redistribute our resources, and build a larger communal network that is willing to show up for one another in a variety of capacities (i.e. cop watch, rapid response, crisis response, harm reduction, community gardening, rent strike, COVID mutual aid, and so on).

Community Defense is possible and already has a long history of success providing care to our communities. The Black Panthers were so efficient in their movement work that many of their community grown projects are now social programs that provide needed infrastructure, like the free breakfast program.

We can achieve large-scale change when we pinpoint a single issue and work first from a local scale. With time, we will develop the resources, skills, and connections for broader long lasting change so that we can liberate ourselves from the many ways in which the state serves to fail us.

### **QUESTION**

What is one issue that you can pinpoint from your local context and what is one way you can counter or provide a solution to said issue?



## **STEP 2**

### **PINPOINT SINGLE ISSUE & SOLUTION**

#### **GUIDING MODEL**

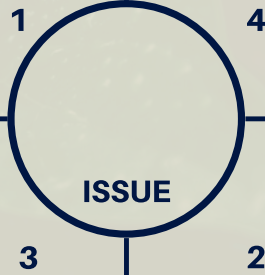
**The single issue in this community was the heightened fear of not making it home safely. Street harassment, stalking, hate crimes, MMIW trafficking, police surveillance, ICE presence, and the brutal winter that can be fatal once the sun sets.**

**The single issue was that people were not getting home safely and the way of addressing the issue was to provide safe rides for people in need. The amount of solutions any single issue might need will vary. Rides were just a single first step in violence prevention.**

# STEP 2 - BRAINSTORM

What issue have you landed on and what are a couple solutions you can think of?

**SOLUTIONS**





# **STEP 3**

## **AUDIENCE**

### **GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- 1. Who are you providing a resource, support, or service for?**
- 2. Is there a community most impacted by your issue?**

**Center those most impacted by the issue so that you do not make the mistake of funneling resources and support into the hands of those who already have access.**

**For example, in the height of George Floyd protests in summer of 2020 we witnessed white Portland protesters being swept up in vans by federal agents. This sparked a lot of outrage amongst the left but the parallels between this incident and the ICE kidnappings that happen regularly in the southwest (and nation wide) was jarring for many immigration organizers who had been calling attention to the tactic for over a decade.**

**Immigration activists shared rapid response tactics with these organizers. It was an opportunity for skill sharing and broadening our understanding of most impacted and least resourced.**

**Everybody deserves support and safety, there is no question about that. But if we feel called to action because we have more sympathy and willingness to support white organizers who already have hands in resource pools... then we might be replicating white supremacy.**

**If we create community defense models that center those in the most need, then our capacity to respond to heightened events will be greater and our ability to show up for those least impacted will require less resources of us.**

# **STEP 3**

## **AUDIENCE**

### **TRANSPARENCY**

**On the flip side of this, it would be harmful to claim that we can provide support for a specific community if we do not actually have the skills, training, relationships, or resources to support the community in need.**

**For example, if you make a point to center disabled people in your safe ride escort services but do not actually have the training or a vehicle that can safely and securely transport a wheelchair user then you will likely fail to support the person and community in need which can be misleading, damaging, and counterproductive.**

**Don't be discouraged by a lack of training, if you want to do the work you will find ways to get the training.**



# **STEP 3**

## **AUDIENCE**

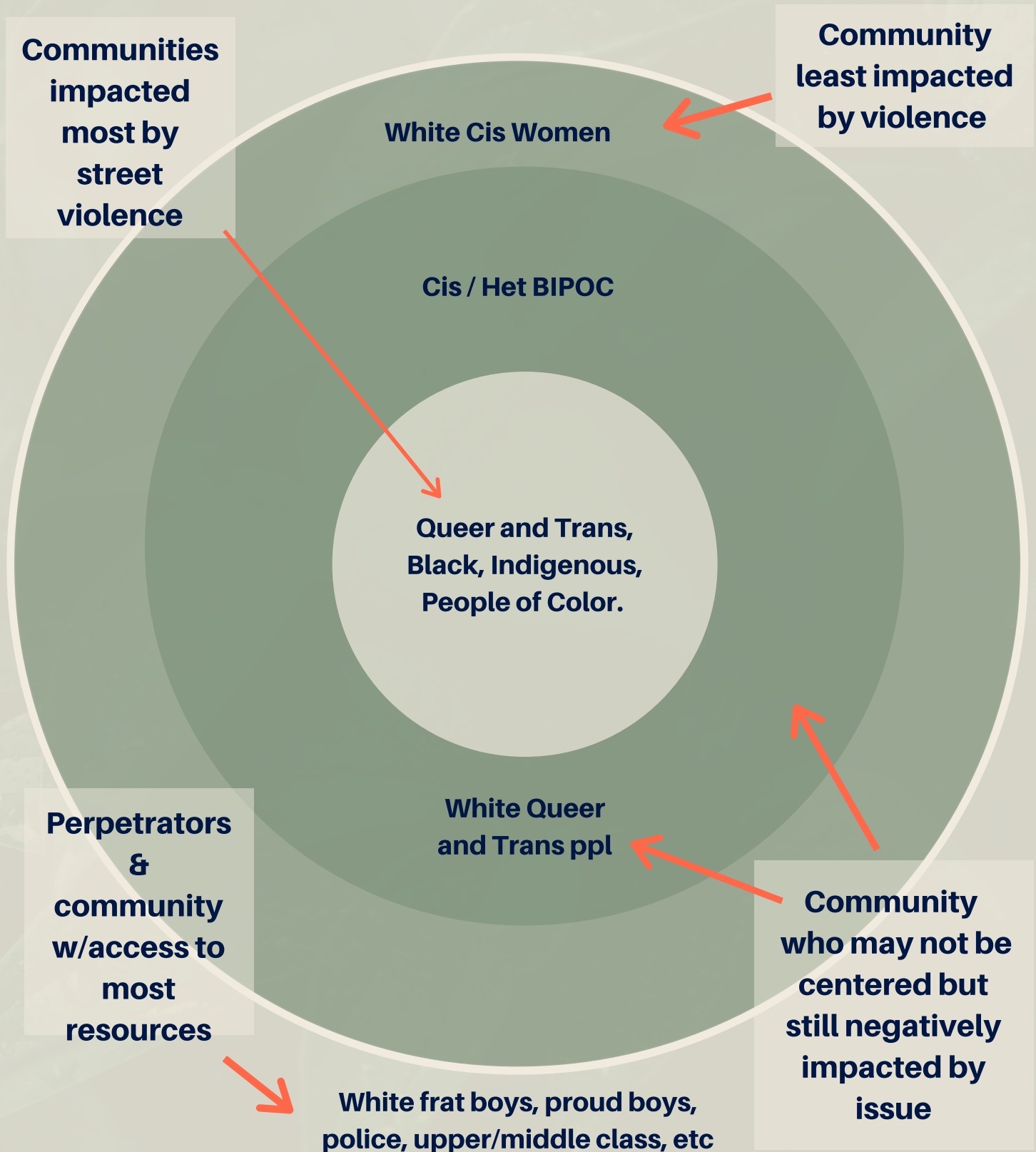
### **MODEL**

The first instinct was to provide a Safe Ride service to people of the LGBTQIA2S community. Primarily because that was the community all of us identified with and where our roots were most strong in the community. We had a clearer understanding of the climate for LGBTQIA2S people having experienced it ourselves and so we believed with confidence that we could provide support. Then we were flooded with nuance. What if a Black person needed a ride but they identify as straight? Would it be easier to identify who we do not provide a service for? There are a lot of moral obligations and entanglements wrapped up in these questions.

We wanted to help people in need but we didn't want our service to become flooded with calls by drunk and often violent white fraternity brothers who actually have the resources to provide for themselves and are able to navigate the world with security. Versus Queer BIPOC who cannot trust the driver of a local Uber ride. It would be important for us to make our audience clear and later use our tools to screen calls and make priorities when the moment arose.

Utilize intersectionality and the context of your environment to find the community most impacted by your chosen issue. Nuance will help you to be open to communities who are not at the center of violence but still lacking resources. Your local context will also show you what community you do not intend to support, ie. police, proud boys, abusers etc.

## STEP 3 – AUDIENCE: MODEL





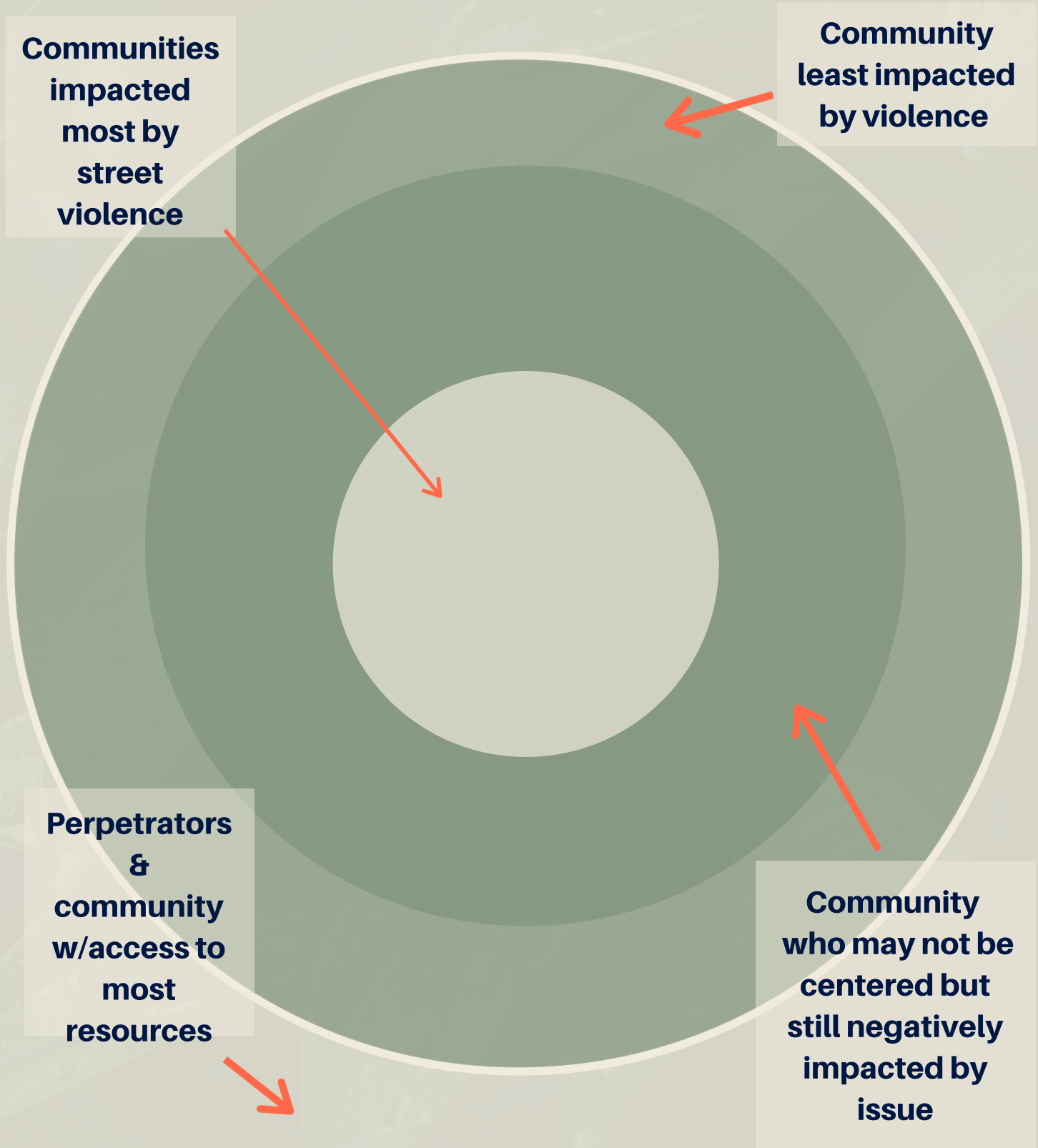
## STEP 3 – BRAINSTORM

**Communities  
impacted  
most by  
street  
violence**

**Community  
least impacted  
by violence**

**Perpetrators  
&  
community  
w/access to  
most  
resources**

**Community  
who may not be  
centered but  
still negatively  
impacted by  
issue**



# **STEP 4**

## **SKILLS & TRAINING**

The skills we need to be equipped with so that we can support our community are infinite. Learning and growing exist on a horizon that we can always pursue but never reach, or complete. **HOWEVER**, there are usually some essential training or skills pertaining to the support we intend to provide.

- 1. Identify what trainings / skills you need.**
- 2. Identify what skills / training already exist amongst your group.**
- 3. Locate who already provides the training in the community.**
  - i. We don't want to recreate the wheel**
  - ii. We want to practice interdependence - relying on one another to build power**
  - iii. These will be key relationships to build**

Always be honest about what skills and training you have as an organization so that you do not make the mistake of misleading community members in need. If you want to support the least resourced of people then survey them to see where their needs are. A good rule of thumb anytime you intend to support someone is to ask them what they need rather than assuming and inflicting more harm or exasperating an already inflamed situation.

Internally, the members of the organization may have a variety of different skills, training, and connections to resources. Map out each of your skills, resources, and connections and identify if anyone has the ability to train others or get in contact with someone who can train. You might learn that each of you will fill a different role based on your knowledge and comfort levels, this is okay. We do not each need to know everything and it is unlikely we will all have the same knowledge or experience.



# **STEP 4**

## **SKILLS & TRAINING**

### **MODEL**

**For a Safe Ride service we were able to brainstorm several scenarios in which we would need de-escalation training, bystander training, and potentially self-defense.**

**We did not want to replicate white supremacy and show up to a dangerous situation and provoke or escalate, much like police do, when our sole purpose was to get somebody home safely. We sought out the resources to receive training for bystander, self-defense, and de-escalation and each of these trainings required us to implore our comfort levels in a number of different scenarios.**

**For example, in bystander training we learned that there is a variety of responses to intervening in a violent scenario. This was new to me; I always believed that not being a bystander meant to confront the threat and that was the only option. I learned in this training that a skill I naturally possess is to confront and take a "Direct Action" response to a threat. I learned that my confrontation in situations of violence was actually a fight trigger and could be potentially inflammatory to de-escalating a potentially hazardous situation. Others might take a "Distraction", "Delay", or "Delegation" response to a threat.**

**Training gives us the opportunity to learn more about ourselves and initiate an honest conversation with our collective about our personal comfort levels and boundaries concerning community defense.**

# **STEP 4**

## **SKILLS & TRAINING**

**Below are some of the trainings and skills we had or wanted to acquire to perform our safe ride service:**

- **Communications - press releases / digital comms / etc**
- **Hotline and phone script**
- **Incident documentation**
- **De-escalation training**
- **Grounding technique**
- **Self-defense training**
- **Bystander training**
- **Know your rights training**
- **Driving and navigating locally**
- **Firearm training**

**To take a step beyond training would be to learn the skill of training others. Just because we have a skill doesn't mean we are capable of training others in the skill. Many grassroots organizations are willing to share their training models if you ask. With the ability to train people in the community comes the ability to recruit and build the organization and thus the organization's capacity. It's also important not to recreate the wheel. If someone in the community already trains people, rely on them for support. Let's practice interdependence!**

**The Boston Pink Pistols "are dedicated to the legal, safe, and responsible use of firearms for self-defense of the sexual-minority community."**





# **STEP 4 – BRAINSTORM**

**List skills/trainings the organization will need to provide the intended support**

**List skills/trainings that members of the group already have**

**List skills and trainings that you can connect with locally**

# **STEP 5**

## **PERSONAL TRIGGERS & CAPACITY**

Knowing our triggers is just as important as being well trained and skilled. Many of us doing community work are survivors of violence or neurodivergent in some way. It's important that we are self aware enough to recognize what situations we will be most helpful and capable of staying grounded and calm in. As much as we might want to help or support, if we are in a triggered or panic state we can no longer perform support in the capacity needed to center the victim or person in need. Even well trained organizers in crisis support might have no-go zones or boundaries. When we practice self-awareness, we protect others and ourselves.

- 1. Assess the way trauma / mental health impact your ability to show up.**
- 2. What triggers are you still working through that might inhibit your ability to show up in a grounded state?**
- 3. What support do you need from your collective should you be triggered in unpredictable circumstances?**
- 4. What boundaries are you placing in around specific situations?**

Below is a link to the Fireweed Collective who provides a number of mental health resources including the “Mad Maps” that help people to map out the way trauma, oppression, and mental health affect us and allows us space to brainstorm the types of support we need to prevent us from reaching crisis.

[FIREWEED COLLECTIVE \\_ MAD MAPS](#)



## STEP 5 - BRAINSTORM

Take advantage of the Mad Maps resource listed previously. It is a thorough tool and requires intentional thought and time. For now, we can begin assessing trauma and capacity in baby steps. What triggers you? (drunk men, yelling, tight spaces, specific physical touches, etc.) What grounds you? (breathing exercise, stepping away, shaking it out, calling a trusted person, etc.) Keep in mind the issue you are trying to organize around and potential scenarios you will face.

TRIGGER

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GROUNDING METHODS

# **STEP 5**

## **PERSONAL TRIGGERS & CAPACITY CONT'D**

Disability Justice Organizers are on the forefront of the work and language around capacity, rest, and calling out the ableist frameworks of social justice organizations that expect community members to martyr themselves for the labor of a movement. Assessing our individual capacity and energy levels is a radical act in a world where rest is associated with negative stereotypes and capitalism aims to work us to death.

Many of us have a burnout cycle due to overproduction or over-commitment. If we are unaware or dishonest about our true capacity then we over-commit or feel obligated to take on more tasks. When we are spread too thin we might fall through on tasks, grow debilitating anxiety, neglect our self-care, and enter a vicious cycle where we burnout, grow resentment, or reach crisis.

Burnout, resentment, and crisis are very hard to bounce back from, they leave us, and even our community feeling damaged. Ultimately, we have no business replicating capitalism, this means killing the boss in your head that denies you rest. If we are all brutally honest about our capacity then we will have made space for rest and care.

Anti-violence work will be ongoing but our bodies and minds are not. If we want to show up for the long term then we need sustainable organizing not reactive and urgent organizing. Below are resources from thought leaders on these topics.

[\*\*MIA MINGUS\\_LEAVING EVIDENCE\*\*](#)

[\*\*LEAH LAKSHMI PIEPZNA-SAMARASINHA\\_CARE WORK\*\*](#)

[\*\*CRISTIEN STORM\\_LIVING IN LIBERATION\*\*](#)



## STEP 5 – CAPACITY BRAINSTORM

Write your schedule. Include rest, work, socializing, children, and whatever else you need to make time for. This way you can be honest about commitment and capacity for community defense.

<b>S</b>	
<b>M</b>	
<b>T</b>	
<b>W</b>	
<b>TH</b>	
<b>F</b>	
<b>S</b>	

# **STEP 5**

## **PERSONAL TRIGGERS & CAPACITY CONT'D**

### **MODEL**

It is not uncommon for an organization to burn out or come to an abrupt end. Often it is because we are so focused on helping others that we neglect to help ourselves. Much of it has to do with replicating capitalist standards of work or holding people to ableist standards of urgency. Much of it has to do with our individual trauma and triggers rising to the surface and ultimately fracturing safety or trust amongst the group.

An organization that intended to step up for their community members ultimately failed to show up for one another. Discussions of growing the organization to confront suicidal ideation, intimate partner violence, and abuse within the community were not addressed internally. When members reached crisis the organization did not have the resources or capacity to support or prevent what would ensue. This in part is on the fault of individuals lacking accountability for their mental health and it is in part the fault of capitalism for not providing the resources to do so.

If there is any advice I could offer it would be to take your mental health and trauma as seriously as you do community organizing. Be accountable to your needs whether that be adequate rest, three meals, therapy, taking your medication, creating work boundaries, learning emotional regulation skills, ceremony, etc.

If you can take the time to learn about yourself and allow others to share with you what they have learned about themselves you will be able to grow the true trust and support that is required to show up for the community in a radically healing and liberating way.

***“When wounded individuals  
come together in groups to  
make change our collective  
struggle is often undermined  
by all that has not been dealt  
with emotionally.”***

***bell hooks***

***All About Love, 1999***





# **STEP 6**

## **MATERIALS, RESOURCES, TOOLS**

### **GUIDING QUESTIONS**

**Materials, resources, and tools will be the actual objects, electronics, systems, subscriptions, etc. you need to get the work done.**

- 1. What physical tools and materials do you need so that your organization can provide the support offered to the community?**
- 2. How will you do community outreach or spread awareness about your organization and the support you provide (flyers, social media, ads, websites, etc)?**
- 3. How will you communicate during a pandemic with security culture in mind?**
- 4. In what ways will you organize schedules, documents, resources, and flyers?**
- 5. Will you need money to purchase materials?**
  - a. how will you maintain the money (budgets / org card) ?**
- 6. What tools? (vehicles, internet, laptops, hotlines, printing, etc.)?**
- 7. Do you need a physical location or office space?**

***"We're planning a dance. We can help as soon as we get money. I have the names and addresses of people that are in jail, and we're going to write them a letter and let them know that we've got them a lawyer, and have these lawyers go down there and see if they can get their names put on the calendar early, get their cases put out of court, make a thorough investigation."***

***Marsha P. Johnson  
Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries***





# **STEP 6**

## **MATERIALS, RESOURCES, TOOLS**

### **MODEL**

For a Safe Ride Service we needed the following items, this list is not exhaustive:

- **Phone Script**
  - Assess emergency status of situation
  - Rider location/appearance/name/number
  - Prepare support team for situation/come with correct tools/trainings
  - Assess accommodations/need
- **Shared drive**
  - Scheduling
  - List organizer phone numbers
  - Incident documentation
  - Phone scripts
  - Flyers/resource sheets
- **Signifying item of organizers**
  - Name tag
  - Tshirt
  - Business card
  - Resource sheet for riders
    - Suicide hotlines
    - Other community orgs
    - Who to call instead of police
    - Mental health
- **Outreach: Flyers/business cards/social media/email**
  - Who we are
  - What we do
  - Audience
  - Phone Number/email
  - Website/social media link
- **Vehicles w/drivers & licenses**
  - Accessible for wheelchair/cane users
  - Seating for small group (2-3) plus rider
- **Burner Phone**
  - Cheap at Walmart
  - Provides safety for organizers
  - Can be passed around to whoever is on call
  - Prevents overwhelming of personal phone
- **Encrypted communication**
  - Protonmail for email
  - Signal for messaging
  - Jitsi for video/call conferencing
  - ProtonDrive



# STEP 6 - BRAINSTORM

**List materials, resources, and tools you will need to engage with this work.**