

# Pre-Flight Checklist: Are You Actually Ready?

**Stop. Before you read another page, answer these questions honestly.**

This manual is not therapy. It's not a book club discussion guide. It's an operational toolkit for building transformative political power in communities where people are scared, exhausted, and conditioned to expect betrayal.

If you cannot honestly answer "yes" to at least four of the six questions below, **stop here**. Go build that capacity first. Otherwise you're wasting your time and potentially harming the people you're trying to help.

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## The Six Questions

### 1. Can you win something material in the next 3-6 months?

Not "raise awareness." Not "start a conversation." Can you **stop one eviction, block one pipeline, win one contract, pass one local ordinance, or defeat one specific piece of harmful legislation?**

If your answer is "we're still building relationships" or "we're focused on long-term systems change," that's a no. You're not ready.

**Why this matters:** Movements that never taste victory don't build power—they build cynicism. You need to prove to people (and to yourself) that organizing works before asking anyone to take bigger risks.

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### 2. Can you mobilize 50+ people for sustained action?

Not for a one-time march. Can you get **50 people to show up consistently** over 3-6 months for meetings, actions, canvassing, or mutual aid work?

If you're thinking "we'll build that as we go," that's a no. You need an existing base, however small.

**Why this matters:** Every tactic in this manual assumes you have some collective muscle. If you're starting from zero, you need a different manual (try *Hegemony How-To* by Jonathan Smucker or *Rules for Radicals* by Saul Alinsky first).

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### 3. Can you hold the "enemy's" voice without collapsing?

Go back and read the Cold Open from the blog post—the Trump voter explaining why he feels calmer even as his grocery bill spikes. Can you sit with that level of rage, resentment, and accusation without:

- Immediately fact-checking and dismissing it as "false consciousness"
- Collapsing into shame and self-flagellation
- Numbing out or dissociating

If you cannot regulate your own nervous system enough to **hear unbearable dissonance without flinching**, you cannot build the container for anyone else's transformation.

**Why this matters:** Every person you're trying to organize is carrying some version of that voice—the part of them that's terrified of change, that clings to the familiar even when it's killing them. If you can't hold that voice with compassion in yourself, you'll unconsciously judge it in others. And people

can smell judgment from a mile away.

**If this was hard for you, try this:** Find one person you politically disagree with. Listen to them for 5 minutes without interrupting, correcting, or rebutting. Your only goal is to repeat back to them, in your own words, what you heard them say and what they *feel* about it. Do this until you can do it without your heart racing.

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#### 4. Do you have a Plan B if this campaign fails?

Not "we'll just try harder." What is your **specific contingency plan** if you lose? How will you keep people engaged? What smaller win can you pivot to? How will you process the grief and rage without the group dissolving?

If you haven't thought about this, you're not ready.

**Why this matters:** Most campaigns fail, especially early ones. If failure means your group implodes and everyone goes home demoralized, you're not building power—you're setting people up for retraumatization. Resilience requires planning for defeat.

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#### 5. Can you fundraise or mobilize resources?

Do you have access to **any** of the following:

- \$5,000-\$10,000 in funding (grants, donations, member dues)
- A space to meet regularly (union hall, church basement, community center)
- People with specific skills (legal, media, design, logistics, tech)
- Relationships with allied organizations who might back you

If every answer is "no," you're starting from a very difficult position. Not impossible, but this manual assumes you have *some* resources to work with.

**Why this matters:** You can organize without money, but you need *something*—space, skills, allies, infrastructure. Pure volunteerism burns people out fast.

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#### 6. Are you doing this for power, or for catharsis?

Be viciously honest. When you imagine "success," what do you see?

**Catharsis looks like:**

- "We made our voices heard"
- "We raised awareness about the issue"
- "We showed solidarity"
- "We spoke truth to power"

**Power looks like:**

- "We forced the city council to pass rent control"
- "We got 300 tenants to withhold rent until the landlord fixed the heat"
- "We stopped the eviction and the family is still in their home"
- "We won a union contract with a 25% raise"
- "The other side is now spending real money and resources to defeat us"

If your vision of success is primarily about *expressing* your values rather than *changing material conditions*, you're seeking catharsis. And catharsis is fine—it's just not what this manual is for.

**Why this matters:** Cathartic actions feel good and accomplish little. Power-building actions feel scary and risky and accomplish change. This manual is written for people who want the second

thing.

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## Scoring Yourself

**6 out of 6:** You're ready. Keep going.

**4-5 out of 6:** You're close. Identify which gaps you need to fill, spend 3-6 months building that capacity, then come back.

**2-3 out of 6:** You're not ready yet. This isn't a judgment—it's a diagnosis. Go build your base first. Try starting with a single-issue campaign (stop one eviction, win one grievance, block one harmful policy). Come back when you've won something.

**0-1 out of 6:** Stop. You need to build foundational organizing skills and community relationships before this manual will be useful. Start with something like *Organizing: People, Power, Change* by Marshall Ganz or find a mentor in an existing campaign.

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## If You Passed: A Warning

This manual will ask you to do hard things:

- Stop the bleeding before you heal the wound (which means you'll have to get your hands bloody)
- Build power before you open grief portals (which means you'll have to hold people's pain without processing it yet)
- Honor values you might despise (Blue traditionalism, Orange meritocracy, healthy Red aggression)
- Channel rage into discipline instead of catharsis
- Win ugly compromises instead of pure moral victories

If any of that sounds like a betrayal of your principles, this manual isn't for you. Go find a community that shares your values and build something beautiful together. That's valid work. It's just not *this* work.

Still here? Good.

Turn the page.