



How to Build a Local Group

Many thanks to Incite! Women of Color Against Violence for much of this organizing information. Visit them at <http://www.incite-national.org/>.

SOA Watch is made up of hundreds of local groups around the hemisphere, doing work in their own communities to lay the groundwork for a successful campaign to close the School of the Americas. Your work to connect with others in your own community is a key part of our movement's work to close the SOA.

Chances are, you do not need as many people as you think to do effective organizing. Three people are enough to begin a local group. Even if your group does not attract lots of members, you can still do important work in your area.

It's important to understand that people will put in varying amounts of time into organizing efforts. A few people will do lots of work; some will contribute every once in a while; others will show up at special events; some will only contribute financially. Rather than become frustrated that not everyone is putting in the same amount of work, learn to work with what people *are* able to do and make the most of what they *are* willing to contribute. That way, they will not become alienated from the work, and will hopefully later increase their commitment to the group.

You do not need to know as much as you think to do organizing work. Most successful organizers learn by doing and by trial and error. Don't become disheartened by failure and mistakes. It is through mistakes that one learns how to organize effectively. For every successful event or campaign someone organizes, they probably were involved in ten events or campaigns that did not work!

Local SOA Watch groups are listed on the SOA Watch website here: <http://www.soaw.org/groups.php>. On this page, you can look at groups by state and list your own group and contact information so that others in your area can find you.

You can also contact your regional representative on the SOA Watch Grassroots Council to find out more about local organizing happening in your area. Visit the "About SOA Watch" section of www.SOAW.org for more information.

Possible Activities for Local SOA Watch Groups:

1. Form study groups to educate yourselves on the issues of the School of the Americas, U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America, institutional and personal racism and militarism.
2. Do education in your community. Host a public video showing of a film about the SOA (*Visit our website for a list of available videos*). Table at local events and hand out flyers about the School of the Americas. Support the work of community organizations in your region, and work to connect local issues with the SOA. Cut and paste SOA Watch's flyers to make them relevant to current community struggles. Host a speaker in your community to talk about the SOA.
3. Coordinate petition or letter writing campaigns urging Representatives and Senators to suspend operations at the SOA/ WHINSEC.
4. Coordinate, sponsor and actively participate in discussions, rallies and demonstrations addressing issues central to militarism, to US foreign policy towards Latin America, to racism and to the lives of those most affected by places like the SOA.
5. Conduct teach-ins and consciousness-raising sessions among your communities.
6. Promote activities that create dialogue and coalitions among activists working for justice.
7. With your local group, write letters to the editor of local papers responding to coverage of militarism, of Latin America, of community struggles for justice.
8. Promote activities that organize and advance the leadership of youth, especially youth most affected by places like the SOA.
9. Use media advisories, news releases and follow-up calls to get media coverage of your community events, vigils, speakers or demonstrations.
10. Produce and distribute public information in the form of flyers, stencils, graffiti, posters, etc.

Ready to organize? Visit our www.SOAW.org for more information on:

- Creating egalitarian structures
- Researching and framing the issues.
- Building community and developing allies.
- Developing a campaign.
- Organizing actions
- Holding meetings
- Speaking publicly
- Fundraising