

This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

ERIN JORGENSEN:

Hi everyone, welcome to Shout Your Abortion's abortion academy. This is our second session and we're super happy to see everyone here or to know that people are here.

My name is Erin Jorgensen and I use she/her pronouns and I do communications at SYA.

Yeah, so abortion academy is just a place where we learn from friends and colleagues in the movement. SYA folks learn and other people in the movement learn as well, so we're super happy that you are here.

Just a couple ground rules sort of before we get started. Not rules exactly, but we do have the chat disabled just to prevent zoom bombings, anything like this, but we do have a Q&A option so during the presentation go ahead and put your questions in the Q&A and if we have time, we will get to those at the end. This is being recorded and the recording will be available shortly after this.

So today we are hearing from our friend Nix. We're hearing about direct action. So this workshop is for people who want to organize locally for abortion access, but maybe you're a little intimidated by the idea of direct action or don't know what direct action is. So Nix is going to walk us through the basics of how to coordinate attention grabbing impactful. direct actions from flyering to counter protests.

They've done all kinds of cool stuff as you're about to see. So just a little introduction.

Nix, they/she, is an abortion doula, and co-founder of the reproductive justice collective NY, and a coordinator at Advocates for Youth and an organizer with NYC for Abortion Rights. Their work focuses on expanding youth access through policy advocacy, clinic defense, and self-managed abortion support and awareness. And their work has been featured in the New York Times, the New Yorker, NBC News, and numerous other national publications.

And in spring 2023, they successfully led the legislative campaign to get abortion pills on campus across New York State, which is amazing. That's an action that's being replicated across the country as we speak, so hopefully we're going to have an Academy session on that soon.

And, yeah, we're just super excited to have Nix here. They're an amazing person as you're about to find out.

And I'm gonna throw it to you now, Nix.

NIX:

Awesome. Thank you so much for that intro, Erin, and thank you so much to everyone at Shout Your Abortion for helping, you know, support in coordinating this amazing workshop and holding this space.

I am gonna start sharing my screen now. So yeah, like Erin mentioned, this workshop is going to be very much focused on direct action and how to get involved in it, basically.

So this is an overview of what I hope to get to. I want the presentation to be around 40 to 45 min so that we have time for questions and I can talk and you know, community build and share thoughts and ideas because I think that's where all the best ideas come from. So yes, just flagging that.

I don't know if that will end up being true, but that's at least the plan and also throughout if you could just send your questions in the Q&A as they come up, that would be awesome just so you don't forget them later.

Great. So, a lot of the work I do in regards to direct action, I do with an org called New York City for Abortion Rights. NYCFAR is an intersectional collective of socialist feminist abolitionists, fighting for free abortion on demand and reproductive justice. NYCFAR does a lot of different stuff, including clinic defense, monitoring anti-abortion groups, self-managed abortion info shares, talks, discussions, workshops. A lot of great stuff.

So I just want to flag that a lot of these resources and ideas and actions are not just me individually, but the work of an entire collective and it's really great. We do a lot of great work so hopefully you follow us.

Great. So types of direct action.

What is Direct action? This is a quote from CrimeThinc, which I think sums it up really well: "Direct action, simply put, means cutting out the middleman, solving problems yourself rather than petitioning authorities or relying on external institutions. Any action that sidesteps regulations and representation to accomplish goals directly is direct action."

I will flag this to say that you can still have direct actions related to things like policy. You can still have direct actions related to institutional change. It's just grassroots where you get organizers pushing for those things themselves as opposed to, you know, lobbyists or corporate nonprofits.

Why is direct action important? Organizing directly and locally, I would add in your community with your neighbors and friends, is the most radical thing you can do. Even before Dobbs, the fight for abortion access has always been very, very local. This is obviously even more so.

And the most impact I think anyone can individually have is in their immediate and direct community. And change doesn't ever start, at least in my opinion, on a federal policy or a legal level. Those incremental shifts are always a response to grassroots organizing.

And this is true for both our side and their side right like the anti abortion movement extensively uses direct action and grassroots organizing as do a lot of pro abortion activists. But again, I think the problem with starting organizing is that I can feel like, okay, I'm not like an elected representative. I'm not a Supreme Court justice. Like, what is it that I can actually tangibly do or even lower, like I'm not an abortion provider. I am not like a lawyer. What does it feel like I can do?

And to that, I would say that organizing on a grassroots level doing direct actions, you know, supporting people through their abortions- those immediate forms of work are so vital in creating a culture of change.

Okay, so direct action can look like this. This may be the thought that people will think of when they think of direct actions. This is from the 2020 uprising in Minneapolis. But it doesn't have to. Direct action is also accessible to everyone, regardless of the risk levels that they are willing to take on.

So, the way I've structured this presentation is kind of going through various types of direct action and we will escalate from lower risk actions to higher risk actions. And throughout, I am gonna be giving examples of Shout Your Abortion and New York City for Abortion Rights actions that have incorporated these specific types and these techniques just because it really helps seeing what other people are doing.

And just, you know, if you're just staring at a group chat being like: I want to do this, but I don't know where to start, seeing what other orgs are doing is always great.

So, the lower risk action to start is tabling and community fairs. The goal for this type of action is to raise community awareness about a subject. For example, you could be tabling outside a fake clinic. Some location ideas include parks, campuses, street fairs, community fairs, sidewalks. I've included a picture of the Shout Your Abortion zine, which you can, you know, find online and print out and actually distribute which includes calls to actions.

As you can see, this is a tabling event we did at Washington Square Park where we were giving out information for medication abortion and self-managed abortions, a bunch of our zines, and also the Shout Your Abortion abortion pill boxes.

So again, this action was maybe five to six people. We just took a table up, and sat in Washington Square Park and gave out probably hundreds of stickers and flyers and had a lot of great conversations with people who had never even heard of abortion pills. And this is New York City, to be clear.

And the risk obviously with this is the potential of getting disrupted by antis or agitators. This is rare, but if it does happen, it's good to discuss as a group, you know, what your response to this type of situation would be.

We did have someone come up and try to goad us into why we're advocating for XY, and we just basically ignored them and they went away.

And again, an important note, as long as you're not selling anything or obstructing the flow of pedestrian traffic, tabling is perfectly legal and you should not be asked to move.

And we'll get into like a 'know your rights' section later, which kind of covers a lot more of the, you know, where are your rights strongest doing direct action work?

Okay, so info shares and skill shares. This is another type of a lower risk action. The goal here is to provide community education on a specific topic. And these are especially powerful when they leave time for an open discussion at the end.

For example, we screened the film about the Jane Collective in Chicago and then foreloaded up with a self-managed abortion info session. And I thought this action was really cool because the Jane Collective obviously talks about pre-medication abortion, self-managed abortions, where they were more focused on doing D and C's to each other. And then also to talk about, okay, so the landscape is obviously shifted and self-managed abortion with pills is now a thing and what does that mean? What does that look like?

So yeah, we just rented out a space and did this and I think had at least over 70 attendees. And the format for this can be like presentations, demonstrations, screenings.

Possible risk is potential of being disrupted by antis/ agitators sneaking into attendance. The way we prevented this was just used like I think an eventbrite to sign up and then just screened and vetted all the attendants so that there wasn't, you know, a problem with that.

Okay, Chalking. So chalking is also, in New York City specifically, I would really recommend folks look up their local regulations, but chalking is legal as long as it washes away with water or rain.

Again, the goal here is to raise community awareness about a subject. For example, I think we did this outside a church that leads a procession to harass patients and it basically says 'the NYPD enables abortion patient harassment' because they provide a militarized escort to the church group, to Planned Parenthood.

So we just wanted to raise awareness about that. Location ideas for this is any good high traffic area, which includes parks, outdoor campuses, sidewalk outside of fake clinics. The risk obviously is the potential of being disrupted by antis or agitators. I don't think this personally has ever happened to me while chalking. It's fairly innocuous. It is also fairly common, at least in big cities, so I will just fly.

Okay, projection. This is another lower risk action in the sense that it is obviously temporary. And the goal is to raise community awareness about a subject, for example, about your local abortion fund.

These are some projections that Shout Your Abortion has done, including at the lower Manhattan courthouse. And I think that the one on the left is for the Dobbs anniversary projections.

There's a lot of political projection collectives across the country. It is, obviously, I think the impact is more like photographs and then like the propaganda material you can take from them as opposed to people passing it because a lot of people just aren't looking up.

But I will say like the pictures you can get from this and the significance for example of projecting 'God loves abortion' on a church makes for really attention-grabbing material. And then you can use those images, those messages to funnel people into types of calls to action or petitions or, you know, tell five people about abortion pills so it's just some ideas.

Location ideas include churches, crisis pregnancy centers, government buildings, any buildings with a large flat surface. Obviously, there's a risk of being disrupted by antis and agitators. This happened to us. I was projecting abortion pills on Campus Now on at Columbia University's main building. And, a group of Columbia students who were anti-abortion came and stood in front of the projection.

We still got really great pictures and I'll be really honest, I think the fact that they blocked our projection and we took pictures of them blocking the projection and posting it on social media led to more publicity about our petition and more signatures. I think we got 500 signatures because our post about them blocking our projection went viral.

So I will say like even if they block it, like if you've already got the pictures like it's not that big of a deal and I think we can really try to like, a lot of people love seeing conflict, I think. So we try to use that interaction as a moment to be like, hi, there are anti choice students who don't want abortion pills on campus in New York at Columbia, Columbia's campus, which most people think is hyper liberal. And it's a problem in our own backyard and stigma exists in our own backyard. And stigma exists in our own backyard.

So again, I think it was about pivoting and using an interruption in a strategic way, which is always possible, I think.

Okay, medium risk actions: picketing and marching on the sidewalk. Here, the goal is to raise community awareness about a subject and gather media attention. Materials needed are signs, a chat list, a megaphone, instruments, noise makers, and flyers to distribute.

There's an asterisk on a megaphone because if you used amplified sound devices at least in New York City, you technically need a police permit. The police didn't use to enforce this, but have started enforcing this. So just caveating that with, you know, you may or may not want to use microphones.

I personally think a crowd chant is as loud as any microphone. And obviously the risk here is potential of being disrupted by antis or agitators like the previous actions, but I will say there's like a good number of you that individual harm that I think can occur is obviously reduced.

Putting up stickers. The only reason this is medium risk is because it can technically count as vandalism, but obviously this is very common and a tactic especially used across the country. So the goal here is to raise community awareness about a subject.

If you go into plancpiills.org, you can order yourself, for free, a bunch of stickers, to put up. I know a lot of comrades in restricted states who are just putting up Plan C stickers across bathrooms across telephone polls across their state.

Location ideas could include outside crisis pregnancy centers and other anti abortion places, subways, bathroom stalls, and covering up anti-abortion stickers. This is not an anti-abortion sticker, but there we covered up a blue lives flag with a gorgeous Shout Your Abortion 'abortion access is a community responsibility' sticker because no one wants to see that, I think.

Risk is potential for a fine if you're caught so look around before you do it. Obviously this risk changes depending on the color of your skin and other identities you may hold. So I always like going stickering in a group. And it's usually like , again, it depends on the mood of the police officer, but I have been fine doing this work personally. But obviously risk assessment is very individual.

Banner drops. This is a high risk action, because it can technically be trespassing if you're somewhere you shouldn't be or if you're doing it on private or restricted property.

The goal here is to raise awareness about a subject, and provoke thought. Best locations for banner drops are things that are very strategic and photographable. You're thinking of a high traffic area building scaffolding, bridges, public monuments. Apart from the actual, you know, shock of seeing a banner over there, I know people who did it literally at the Statue of Liberty.

It's also an excellent photograph and I think because of like, I mean, this is how organizing has always worked. As always, where part of it is the direct action and part of it is what you do after the direct action to use the photos, the messaging, the actual, you know, excitement built or under direct action and converted into like a social media post, an email campaign, like plugging folks into that type of work.

So again, it sometimes feels a little very Gen Z of me to always be like, well, it's great like social media photo, but the reality is also that social media is a really effective way to do a post action

way to get people to plug in and just expand the reach of one particular action so much, which is why I love banner drops, like they are apart from just being visually impactful and raising awareness about a subject and like changing the narrative, maybe changing stigma about abortion specifically. And it can also really be used to grab attention after the fact. And I think it's always important to think of actions as having like a before planning stage and actual action stage and then an after where you're, you know, taking the people you've engaged with and like plugging them in into the movement somehow.

Wheat pasting. I think I have like a resource list of how to wheat paste and everything, but the recipe is honestly very, very easy and available online.

The goal here is to basically raise awareness about a subject, provoke thought, share information. You wheat paste for example about a harmful policy in your legislature with calls to action. I've included a picture of the Shout Your Abortion posters at the bottom and I think also at the top, because they have all these posters and graphics available for free on their website and y'all should totally use them. And it is really great.

Again, location ideas for this would be a high traffic area, bridges, buildings, scaffolding, public monuments. Risk here is fine or arrest if caught, especially on private property. It i... Oh, definitely a little nerve racking sometimes doing wheat pasting as we wheat pasted outside of a tech giant's office. And it is stressful, but it's also again individual risk assessment. At the end of the day, it's probably more likely than not going to be a fine.

And I think it can be a really great way to-

It's very cheap to print out, you know, a bunch of things in an A four-shaped black and white A 4 sheet of paper, and especially if you do it in a high traffic area, it's a great way to get the word out.

Civil disobedience, sit-ins or blockade. This is a high risk action because if you're doing a civil disobedience, you are actively breaking a law. For example, at the bottom right, that's comrades actively blocking a street, unlawfully. So they're taking on the assumed risk of arrest.

And, like the point of a CD or civil disobedience is often like to get arrested to draw attention, media attention to injustice or a specific situation. So, and also obviously if you're talking about the police and if you're talking about explicitly openly breaking laws, the risk also exists of direct contact with the police, and physical injury. The goal here is to demonstrate dissent about a specific person, subject or group and raise awareness about your issue.

Civil disobediences are a lot more likely to get media attention, especially if arrests are made. I was tentatively planning a sit in before Bernard agreed on our campus clinic to demand medication abortion on campus.

I didn't have to do it, but you know, we were willing to break whatever school rules, in order to demonstrate our frustration at Barner's unwillingness to listen to what students were asking for.

Obviously, CDs take a huge number of different forms. I will say self managing your abortion and helping mail abortion pills is also like a form of civil disobedience. Again, I think these can look very large scale. These can look very individual. I think the reason I'm trying to move through them with this much detail is also to show that direct actions are definitely accessible to a lot of people.

Okay, and the last type of action I want to cover is counterprotest. The goal here is to sabotage or disrupt an opposing group and its activities. For example, an anti-abortion or a right-wing march planned in your area. I think this was, at the bottom, like, a young Republicans for life affiliate march in New York City. And it was tiny and we knew at least in New York, we were going to be able to bring out a sizable counter protest.

So, that's what we did and it was very fun and our vibes are very joyful and accepting of all types of abortion and all, you know, the spectrum of pregnancy experiences and I think that counter of joy to what looked like very depressed and kind of cranky young Republicans really emphasize the just difference between our movements.

And on top I think that's a kind of protest right outside of SCOTUS. And obviously the risk here is arrest or direct confrontation with opponents. Sometimes if you kind of protest, right wing actors will literally film you which leads to a risk of doxing. I always wear my mask at counterprotests apart from just being COVID safe, given that we work in a supposedly public health field. It is also a really great way to prevent concrete identification.

I do also have a doxing care guide that I have included in the list of resources to be shared. But there are lots of measures you can take to prevent boxing and also to deal with the aftermath.

Doxing, I should mention, is when a group posts your full name and address. Hard doxing is address. Soft doxing is your full name when you don't want that shared when you want that private.

Okay, so here is a quick summary that I thought would be helpful from lower risk to medium risk to higher risk.

The reason I wanted to present it on this table is also to mention that all of these actions can be combined for maximum accessibility and they should be combined because that's actually how you end up having accessible actions. So you can have someone doing a civil disobedience but on the side you could have people flyering as well as stickering, right? So you're kind of combining all of them so people can like plug in where they feel most comfortable plugging in.

And I also, I'm going to use this moment to talk about how risk assessment in my opinion is kind of like consent. So you should never assume someone's risk level just because they've done a

higher risk action in the past doesn't mean their situation is the same and they can do a higher risk action now. You should always ask. You should always, you know, make sure the people are consenting without coercion, into a higher risk action.

Again, it's really important, I think, to protect each other when doing direct action work. It is inherently something that, you know, lies not on the state, not on systems of policing, relies outside of it and taking care of each other and part of taking care of each other is checking in on each other, which is why we always recommend a range of accessibility levels.

Okay, so now onto some basic 'know your rights' stuff. Because this is a national training and I'm assuming there are people here from all over the country. I'm going to talk in broader terms, but I would also really recommend you look up your local protest laws. If you have an ACLU state affiliate, they probably have a guide.

Okay, so this is the basics from the national ACLU. So your rights are usually strongest in what's known as traditional public forums such as streets, sidewalks, and parks as long as you are not blocking access. The reason this usually applies across the country is this is federally protected by the constitution's first amendment.

You don't need a permit to march on sidewalks, as long as marches don't obstruct pedestrian traffic. Private property owners, however, can set rules for speech on their individual property. And the government may not restrict your speech if it is taking place on your own property or with the consent of the property owner. So, you know, that's something to think about in terms of working with the friendly coffee shop to table outside of it.

And police must treat counter protesters and protesters equally. Obviously this is the theory which may not necessarily be the reality as we often know police are inherently on the opposite side of reproductive justice. But police are permitted to keep antagonistic groups separated, but should allow them within sight and sound of one another. These are some like national guidelines.

Okay, go moving on to purchase monitors and legal observers. Protest monitors are usually from the ACLU. These are NYCLU or New York Civil Liberties Union. Protest monitors, at the bottom, are primarily there to document police behavior. Because especially, I mean, throughout organizing history, but especially, I think, as the police in this country have become more militarized.

The police have been cracking down more and more on speech and direct actions. Obviously this is true. This has been true since like the era of the Black Panthers in the sixties. But now at least, I think there's an active effort to try to document this more through phones and things like that, so that's kind of the role of the protest monitor. They're not supposed to intervene or engage. They're just there to document police behavior.

Legal observers, which are usually from your local chapter of the national lawyer guild who are also there to document police behavior.

LG members are usually lawyers, but they are not there to give you legal advice. You shouldn't really talk to them. Again, they're trying to document what is happening in case like, you know, a charge arrest or a lawsuit needs to be filed.

You can request both of these people at your actions, at their individual websites or help lines, especially if you're doing a very large action. These can be extremely helpful to have. They're also clearly identifiable by the police. The police should know who these people are, and we strongly recommend to request both in advance if you're planning a march or something larger scale.

Okay, so I could obviously do a whole presentation on police interaction and best practices around that. I mentioned this at the start when talking about New York City for Abortion Rights, but I think I can maybe expand on it here, but we are an abolitionist organization in that we believe in the abolition of the prison industrial complex and the police system. We view that as inherently compatible with our values of reproductive justice.

I don't think reproductive justice can fully exist in a system where the police controls and surveils and incarcerates so many bodies. So I'm not gonna go on the whole tangent about that, but I would highly recommend the work of a thousand different abolitionist feminists including Dorothy Roberts and Angela Davis and our comrade, Mariame Kaba.

So, all that aside, interacting with the cops. So filming police, you have the right to film protests and police activity.

This is a federal right. No cop should ever be able to tell you that you're not supposed to film. That doesn't mean they won't tell you that, but that's what your legal rights are. Talking to the police, you do not have an obligation to speak to them during an action or to answer their questions.

We usually recommend against having a police liaison just because that places a lot of pressure on an individual person to interact with the police, and usually you don't have to interact with them.

Cops may ask you things like who you're from. Who is in your group, what you're planning, where you'll be marching, how long you're gonna be there, how many people you estimate will be there. You don't have to answer any of these questions, no matter how innocuous it may seem. Again, the police aren't on our side and they haven't been for a very long time.

How to stall cops. You can ask them to fetch a higher up or a legal officer. You can just ignore them or walk away. You can tell them you're fetching someone else or never come back or you can just say you can't hear them.

Again, obviously, depending on your identity, all these tactics to stall cops may inherently be riskier. We know the Black and brown people are at increased risk of police violence. But I think it's still important to lay the rights out there.

Again, risk assessment is very individual but these are your rights. And obviously if you choose to engage with cops if that's what feels safest to you, within that moment, then that's what totally makes sense.

Okay, some final things to consider when doing an action. Weather: is your action rain or shine? If not, is there a rain date or an alternate plan if the weather isn't good? If it's extremely cold or extremely hot, again, thinking about accessibility and making sure direct actions or something everyone can plug into. Consider either postponing or providing attendees with weather tips before an action as well as materials to keep them cool or warm.

We had an action during, I think, some form of Polar Vortex over in New York and it was extremely cold, but people still showed out as well as medics who came and comrades who just came with a bunch of hand warmers, and extra gloves and hats. And again, I think when doing a direct action, the framework of we're keeping we're keeping each other safe, and we're taking care of each other. That's kind of the entire point of this work.

Okay, is it gonna be a public action or a "whisper" action? A public action is advertised and open to all. Benefits of this is obviously potential for bigger turnout and more press. Cons is that if you have a public action, then there is a potential for antis to come disrupt and for cops to be on the scene.

And we would say public actions are best suited for low risk actions and actions where the goal is just maximum turnout and you're okay with the idea of antis or cops being there.

"Whispered" actions are usually actions that are only advertised in specific signal groups. This includes text groups, basically a closed circuit, something that you know those people and you trust them.

Pros for this is obviously that cops and antis are taken by surprise. Either they won't show up or the response time will be longer. Cons is that there's a smaller turnout. They're not always because you know the reach for these actions can be bigger than I think a lot of people accept if you're just telling your friend to share it with three friends that they trust. And obviously some people may feel left out. This is best suited for higher risk options and actions where antis and cops need to be avoided at all costs.

Flyers. So whether you're having a public action or whisper action, you need to advertise it so some considerations for flyers. This is one, I think from our March clinic defense but thoughts include who's gonna design it, what should the flyer include.

I think the most important thing is not any fancy design but legibility. You want your flyer to be as legible as possible. It doesn't matter if it looks fancy and has great graphics if people can't read it. And again, taking accessibility into account, making sure to include things like alt text, taking into account the contrast on images, things like that.

Okay, press outreach. Another really important part of actions. Do you want to invite press to your action? This may not always be the case. You can also just choose to contact the press after.

So there's two different ways they can deal with the press. Usually there's a media advisory, a picture of which is shown here, which is sent to a select group of, you know, trusted reporters beforehand, which will be things like, you know, like who, what, when, where, why, of the action. Usually just that length or even shorter.

And again, this is only for trusted press that you want at the actual action. A press release comes after, which is more broadly distributed, sometimes even posted publicly to social media accounts or, you know, just like a mailing list of reporters.

Reporter emails are also often available on their websites or LinkedIn or Twitter. So, you know, you can just search up who's covering abortion in the area you're in to try to find reporter contacts.

Press release is sent after. You can include pictures in this. Always remember to include a contact email in both the media advisory and a press release. And yeah, so you can also have a media liaison as part of your direct action. This can be helpful because the press can sometimes be tricky to deal with in terms of knowing exactly what to say to them, what are the best things to say to them, and how to phrase your talking points. That often requires work and if you aren't used to dealing with the media, that can be like a steep hill climb, which is why we have media liaisons at actions.

I've done a bunch of press, so I personally feel fairly comfortable in navigating reporters as well as knowing who's friendly press and who's someone we don't maybe want to give an interview to.

Okay, and then to kind of sum it up here, we're just gonna talk through an action example with kind of all the roles and like considerations you would have.

So the roles: we'll usually have a safety team, we'll have a chat lead, we'll have someone to hand out flyers, a media liaison, jail support. And I think I've included a zine about this in the resources. Basically the practice where if someone is arrested, you go to the precinct at which

they're held usually for all of this at least in New York, you're just let free with a desk appearance ticket to come back at a future date but comrades will wait outside the jail until the person comes out because an action isn't over until everyone is out.

And some consideration for marches for example is the March length and route, accessibility. I would add all the previously mentioned things of reporters, flyers, publicity as well.

Okay, post action care: listening to what your body needs, hydrate, eat, take a nap, treat yourself. Again, I often just come home and collapse and have a really long nap after actions, and cuddle with my dog. It can be really draining to, you know, do some types of action. Sometimes it doesn't like after a tabling, I usually feel fine. And, but, you know, after things like a counter protest and stuff, I just need to disengage and unplug.

So, yeah, just know that could be what your body needs. Listen to what it wants and it's really important to take care of yourself because sustainability in this movement is vital.

Okay, so I am going to, obviously, open the floor for any questions if there are any. But before that, just quickly flash the resources that I am going to be sharing, with you all or Shout Your Abortion will be sharing in a follow-up email. It includes basic first aid, protest 101, some INFOSEC basics, things about a campaign, activism burn out and rest tips and protocols. Again, a lot of these are geared towards higher risk direct actions, but they again, very much, don't have to look this way and I would always recommend combining them with lower risk actions, as mentioned earlier.

So yes, I think I am exactly on time. I'm really proud. I was able to do that. But we're basically just gonna be doing questions now. And you know, no question is too specific. I'm happy to think through folks' campaigns, and ideas.

MICHELLE VERAS:

Thank you so much, Nix. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Michelle Veras and I'm the chief of staff at Shout Your Abortion, and I will be reading off questions from the Q&A for Nix.

But Nix, I just wanna say again, thank you so much for your presentation. I feel like every time I hear you speak or and when I got to meet you, I'm just so impressed by the work that you're doing and also so grateful that you exist in the world. And especially in New York where this work is so important.

So I'm gonna start with the first question that we have from one of the attendees: how do you advise small groups to go about funding for tabling signage, etc?

NIX:

Yeah, so again, I think, maybe the perceived barriers to what would maybe be required for things like tabling and funding is harder, is higher than people think.

We started off with doing like A5 flyers, which were effectively like half page flyers on black and white pieces of paper and a lot of comrades would just use their work's printer to, you know, liberate some copies from there. And like you can get a lot out of there.

If you are a part of a more formal collective as NYCFAR has become, we do dues so we just have like a collective only for those who are able to pay them, obviously. But we have like a collective printing fund is mainly what we use it for, but more often than not, we don't end up needing it for, but more often than not, we don't end up needing it because people will just use their work printers and things like that. People will have folding tables that they'll bring out to an action.

If you do, you know, want to fundraise specifically, I have seen folks, you know, very clearly put up on their Instagram story, for example: 'Hi, can you, if you're able to, it'd be awesome if you could venmo me amount for this tabling I am planning on doing, and if you'd like to come join us, do that totally.' And yeah, I think looking at sort of like non institutional and super formal solutions, like obviously you can partner with a nonprofit and have a fiscal sponsor and all those things. But again, starting with what resources and capabilities you already have, I think people will be surprised to find that there's a lot you can already do if that makes sense.

MV:

Well, I love that answer and I've definitely been in situations where I'm like, hey, do you have, you know, 20 chairs I could borrow for this thing and you'd be surprised when you put that ask out to community, the folks that respond.

So the next question we have is about vetting, and you described, vetting people for the phone screening. So could you talk a little bit about how that worked? And if in a situation like that you would turn someone away at the event and maybe what that looks like in terms of thinking about security.

NIX:

Definitely. Yeah. So vetting for us usually looks like a spreadsheet and which will have questions we ask of participants. Usually we'll ask a name if they're comfortable sharing, if anyone in the community or a collective that maybe we're familiar with like we'll always ask for organizational affiliations if those folks can vouch for them.

And if not, we'll ask for public social media or anything like that. You know, there are some times there's been older folks who don't have things like social media and stuff, in which case we'll be like, could you give us the phone or email of someone who could like vouch for you.

Yeah, it can sometimes be a little time consuming more often than not with how public and digital we all live our lives. It's often just a very quick Google of the person, looking up their name and things like Instagram or Twitter to just see, you know, what their activity has been and things like that.

And obviously there can be different standards for vetting, right? Like you may only want someone, like if it's like a space for people who are already involved in the movement and like already part of organizations, that looks very different than something that's a public call in which case you're just making sure they're not an anti, or a cop, frankly.

So that's what vetting usually looks like. We'll often just have that spreadsheet, divide the names amongst ourselves, and vet folks. We'll also have people who are, you know, more intimidating physically than I tend to be, who, you know, can step in at events in case you know we need to turn someone away and we don't feel comfortable doing that.

If it's a really off site tight event, we probably won't even post the location publicly and it will just be something that we only share with the folks who we vetted and are able to attend so there is no possibility of anti is coming because they won't know the location. Like we'll give the neighborhood out in our public flyers, which obviously in New York means, just cause you know the neighborhood, it's not gonna specify where the action is going to be.

MV:

Awesome. Thank you. Another question we have is: all of your actions look fun in some way, so do you think that fun is an important part of direct action and how do you balance fun with staying safe?

NIX:

Yeah, I mean, I think, abortion access work, I mean, at least for the past year has been really hard in terms of, I mean, I'm an abortion doula, so I also work with folks in restricted states. I work in abortion funds in restricted states. I do organizing and I do policy work also and all of that can be important and really frustrating, but I also want some forms of direct action space to be a space for joy because that's how you get people into the movement like no one wants to go to a public action at least not always that where the vibe is just very depressing, and very somber.

And also, I think it helps push back against this narrative that abortion itself is something really deep, stigmatized and shameful and something we need to be quiet about.

So that's always something we try to keep in mind, when organizing abortion-specific actions, too, about being very loud and proud and happy about abortion access and proudly pro abortion. I would obviously recommend Thank God For Abortion here who like, you know, we've collaborated a bunch with in the past and do a lot of work with about like the joy they bring to actions. So yeah, that's kind of the frame of mind.

And I think it's very possible when it comes down to being safe like for example with vetting or you know OPSAC, you know, those are things that have our safety and aren't necessarily super fun to do. No one likes volunteering vet a hundred names but it's necessary so that we can have fun so that we can build community, right?

I was talking with Michelle and Erin earlier about the importance of in-person actions and physical gathering because as much as zoom and, I say this is a GenZ who lives my life mainly online, but as much as zooms have really been amazing and helping connect people, there's like a sense of comradery that comes when you're meeting regularly with the same people occupying the same space, talking to your neighbors and your friends and the people around you.

And that's also really fun for me because now a lot of my friends, and the people who just mean a lot to me in my life are my comrades. So it doesn't often feel like a super intense strategy planning. It also just feels like hanging out with friends and maybe tabling on a random weekend. And I think that helps ensure sustainability and prevent burnout that I think can very quickly set in if you're just constantly in a very combative mindset and like an angry and depressed mindset which is not to say that we aren't angry, we aren't like sometimes just deeply sad at the state of so many things in this country. But that, you know, hope is a discipline and hope requires constant practice. And joy is a very important part of that.

MV:

Yes, I could not agree more and I think that like those in person actions really re energize you and feed that part of you, and sustain us for the next action, the next part of our work.

Okay, next question: With abortion being protected in New York, is there a specific goal to work towards with actions here? Are there broader specific goals to be working towards?

NIX:

Yeah, I mean, abortion is partly legal in New York, cause we still have a viability band, so just caveating that. But abortion is partly legal, but it is not fully accessible, right?

You look at funding. I know the New York Abortion Access Fund paid, I think, close to \$13,000 a couple of months ago for a single abortion. We have folks coming in from all of these states where abortion is completely banned, which means that our clinic wait times are increasing.

It also means that protesters from those states, which currently don't have clinics, are literally being flown out to harass patients in New York. This is true with a group called Love Life, for example, who I think last October literally had a plane of close to 100 advocates to just come and harass patients in New York.

All that to say is that access even in New York is not as much as it could be. In fact, I would say far from it, but on top of that, because we are in a state with a certain amount of legal protections afforded to us, we have a responsibility to then use our voices, use our platforms to empower and uplift efforts in less restricted states like more restrictive states like I can take a certain level of legal risk because I am based and reside in New York, and like my comrades in Texas cannot. So things like posting publicly about self-managed abortion, having workshops where I'm like publicly talking about menstrual extraction and what that looks like. Those are

things that can obviously only happen. Like I feel comfortable taking that risk in some part because I'm in New York, not to say that organizing doesn't happen in restricted states, but I can be more public about it.

So yeah, I think two fold a -there's a lot to do in New York and then B-there's a lot to use our position with in terms of access and increasing access and taking some of the heat in a lot of ways, if that makes sense.

And again, always be looking to uplift grassroots actions in other states, right? Like New York is also a very wealthy state, like apart from donating to our own local abortion fund, I've also done a bunch of events with funds like Buckle Bunnies, which is based in Texas, trying to get some of that New York money going to Texas abortions.

So yeah, just to say that there's a lot to do.

MV:

Amazing. Okay. Well, we are right at 9 o'clock. If anyone in the audience puts a question in the QA, we will follow up with you via email. We'll forward these questions to Nix, just an interest of time.

But thank you so much, Nix. This was absolutely amazing. And are there any other things that you'd like to share in the last couple of minutes before we sign off?

NIX:

Yeah, I'll just share the New York City for Abortion Rights Instagram. I would really encourage folks to just DM us on there. If you're interested in planning anything, we also have an email. We are, I think, a fairly large collective at this point and are always working with other groups to help and provide support in any way that we can.

So again, I really do mean it in terms of emailing us. If you're looking for flyers and materials, I would also really recommend the Shout Your abortion Website. There's a lot of information out there and it's truly as easy as texting two friends and going to do something.

MV:

Thank you so much, Nix. Thank you everyone for coming this evening. Before you sign out of or as you're signing out of Zoom, a survey should pop up on your screen and it really just is a chance for you to provide us some feedback about Abortion Academy, tell us who you'd like to hear from next and what other topics you'd like to learn about.

The next abortion academy will take place on August 31st and more information will be going out about that shortly. As Erin mentioned, at the top, we will provide the recording for this evening. Usually takes us about a week, so look in your email for more information on the recording and also we'll send all of the links that were in the chat during tonight's webinar.

And thank you, everyone. Thank you so much, Nick. They really, really just again, love listening to you talk about your work and I'm so appreciative.

NIX:

Thank you all so much for coming.