

INTO THE



K.L. JAMISON

ASSEMBLING YOUR 'WILD BUNCH,' PART 1

President Donald Trump is distracted by impeachment hearings. The NRA is preoccupied with internal disputes. This year the right of self-defense will be the one that needs the most defending, and this must begin at the grassroots level. Grassroots work is not done on cool green terraces but is rather a matter of journeying into the weeds.

The first step in grassroots action is to form a group. This isn't as complicated as it sounds; it is simple to piggyback on an existing group. Gun-rights activist and former NRA Board Member Neal

Knox explained that how he became "the gun lobby" was when the president of his gun club decided they needed a committee to protect gun rights.

Without a parent group, the new group must invoke the "eagle strategy." When Ross Perot was building his company Electronic Data Systems (EDS) and searching for good employees, he fittingly declared, "Eagles don't flock. You have to find them one at a time." Perot nicknamed his original 30 employees the "Wild Bunch" and built his company out from this core of reliable individuals. Anyone passionate about gun rights knows other individuals with the same beliefs, but finding the

EWEEDS



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ones who want to do something about it is another matter.

There are any number of people who will adamantly declare, “They will take my gun from my cold, dead hands.”¹ Unfortunately, that is the extent of the effort they will put into saving their rights for their grandchildren. It’s a declaration without action. If they are unwilling to attend a meeting or rally, they are unlikely to show up in a cold ditch waiting for government tanks. Avoid these types of people.

Some individuals will reason that they don’t need to fight for their rights since they “have the Second Amend-

ment.” The problem there is that we live in a society in which some politicians claim that the Second Amendment protects the absolute constitutional right to join the National Guard, and some presidential candidates announce their intent to seize guns from inoffensive citizens. The Second Amendment does not enforce itself. It requires people to stand up for it. Anyone claiming the Second Amendment is “the last word” on the subject is either delusional or intentionally inattentive. Though the Second Amendment should be the last word, it is not.

Others will express concerns about “being on a list.” We are all on a list. Anyone who has bought ammunition,

holsters or accessories with a credit card is on a list. Subscribers to outdoor or gun magazines are on a list. Merchants use these lists to send out catalogues, flyers and emails. If the government does not automatically have these lists, it can form a company and buy them (it has done so before). We are all on a list, so make it worth something.

Some folks asked about gun rights speak enthusiastically about a second civil war. Such romantic fantasies will not survive the first shot, and they are a distraction to persons working to avoid that first shot.

START WITH THE DOERS

Look for your eagles among those who have already done something, such as write letters to newspapers and magazines or call in to talk-radio programs. This shows some level of activity, and such persons may be looking for a forum.

issues may be the catalyst. Once formed around issues of local concern, the group can expand as needed.

Someone may claim that all that is necessary is to proclaim himself a “sovereign citizen,” which is alleged to make a person exempt from all laws of which he disapproves. Another will insist that forming a militia will restore all firearms rights. Fall for neither of these old gags. A quick review of federal precedent finds scores of cases in which “sovereign citizens” lost — and lost big. To add insult to injury, they had to pay the government’s attorney fees. There are no reported cases in which the “sovereign citizen” came out on top.

A group calling itself a “militia” may assist in local defense or disaster, but politicians will not talk to its members. The brand was irrevocably tarnished by the individuals surrounding the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Certain groups have

GET MOVING

When all agree on the problem, the next step is to move toward a solution. An initial Board of Directors will be selected, and a third of this board will be elected each year. This practice typically prevents a faction packing a meeting and drastically changing the direction of the group.

By drawing lots, each board member determines if he or she has a one-, two- or three-year term, and the number of board members is determined by the number thought necessary. A small group of people functions better than a congress, and the actual number may be a function of the various interests forming the group. Whatever it is, it should be an odd number to prevent tie votes. The board can be supplemented with *ex officio* members, extra members on the board by virtue of special tasks performed. These members have a voice in the group’s affairs but do not vote.

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Persons who have been abused or insulted by authority or the media are a fertile ground for recruitment.

The internet bulges with contributors declaring their devotion to gun rights. These persons content themselves with blasts to other like-minded contributors and are often unlikely to crawl out in the daylight and deal with real people.

Computers are essential for organizing and communicating with other activists, but they remain a means to an end. The aforementioned consider approval of a pro-rights post an end in itself.

Gun shops and gun shows may allow recruiting literature to be put out, and patrons of such places are basically our people. Do not treat the business as a billboard though. Drop by frequently, talk to the staff and buy something. Support the store that supports us, even if the big-box store is a nickel cheaper.

GET REALISTIC

Your pro-gun-rights group can be formed for any number of reasons. The Second Amendment may not be generally threatened by local authorities, but hunting, range protection and other is-

announced that membership in a militia allowed them to have machine guns. They have gone to prison.

GET SPECIFIC

After gathering a half-dozen dissidents in a room, the group can begin to take shape. The moderator or chairperson of the meeting can be either the person who organized the gathering or some respected local individual. This person’s job is to gently guide the proceedings through suggestions, but do bear in mind that giving orders to firearms enthusiasts promotes laughter and little else.

The chairman will open by stating that the organization’s intent will be to help prevent discrimination against gun owners as potential murderers. The second speaker will say something to the effect that he is tired of claims that he is a murder waiting to happen. The third speaker will say that he is tired of entertainment and media portraying gun owners as buffoons and psychotics. Conversation will continue in the same vein. This may appear to be wasted time, as everyone seems to be saying the same thing, but it is essential for the group to bond in this way.

EDITOR’S NOTE

Hang in there, folks. Your next issue of CCM will contain Counselor Jamison’s conclusion, but in the meantime, it might be wise to start looking for your “eagles.”

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ENDNOTES

(1) *Charlton Heston can say this. He was president of the NRA.*





K.L. JAMISON

OPTIMIZING YOUR ORGANIZATION

Into the Weeds, Part 2

Editor's note: *This article is a continuation from the April edition of CCM. In Part 1 of the column, Jamison provides information on how to find and organize the right people to form your group. In Part 2, he addresses how to optimize your organization.*

The Board will elect officers from among its number. The basics — president, vice president, secretary and treasurer — are all that are needed to start. One person can hold multiple offices, although all becomes easier if the load is equally distributed. Specialty offices — such as press officer, spokesman, newsletter editor and webmaster — are also essential, but creating a legal entity comes first.

The organization requires a name. There is a school of thought that the name should be a generic safety or civil rights label that does not refer to guns, the theory being that these are socially acceptable terms that will gain the group entry into certain circles. But it is not “certain circles” the group must enter. The group must raise a banner to rally gun owners. The name must state the purpose of the organization and must be short and specific.

It need not be an acronym. One organization called itself Gun Rights for Individuals Now (GRIN), and the Gun Owners' Action League (GOAL) is a successful Massachusetts group. The Western Missouri Shooters Alliance (WMSA) has the advantage of being geographically and issue-specific,

though its moniker does not roll off the tongue quite as fluently as the aforementioned.

GET OFFICIAL

A not-for-profit organization is incorporated with paperwork obtained from your secretary of state. Street addresses of the incorporators are required. The National Rifle Association is incorporated in New York even though its headquarters is now in Virginia. State laws differ, but a not-for-profit group can be organized by a single person; the organizer files paperwork, and a new organization is born. This incorporation will prevent the group's name from being hijacked by some other group.

Nearly all clubs incorporate as non-profit corporations. State law governs the operation of not-for-profit groups, and a review of the state statutes might be useful. In order to qualify as a charity, the non-profit must have specific language in its incorporation document. This language appears in IRS Publication 557, which is available on its website. A set of bylaws will be needed. These can come from other groups and be adapted to meet local needs.¹

The shiny new organization needs a registered agent, a taxpayer ID number, a bank account, a phone number, a website and a post office box. All of that said, it does not need a physical office. Few grassroots organizations depend on walk-ins for volunteers or donations anymore.

“EVERY MEMBER WILL DISAGREE WITH SOME BOARD DECISION AT SOME POINT, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, THE MEMBERS ARE ALL ON THE SAME SIDE AND MUST, AS THEY SAID IN THE OLD COWBOY NOVELS, ‘RIDE FOR THE BRAND.’”

The registered agent can be any person with a physical address at which that person receives communications for the group. There are certain businesses that provide this service, but the expense is usually unnecessary.

To have a bank account, the organization must have a taxpayer ID number, often called a Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN). Visit the IRS website and fill out the appropriate form, and a number is provided. It works very much like a gumball machine, though there is no fee. Without this number, the organization cannot open a bank account, obtain insurance or perform other mundane tasks. It takes about a half hour's work on the IRS website to get one.²

The group will ultimately have to declare its status for the purpose of the tax code. The two likely choices are 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(7).

Under 501(c)(3), contributors to the group can deduct contributions from their taxes, but since the government loses money on this status, it can be difficult to obtain. The group can engage in “educational” activities but cannot support candidates for office. Endorsing candidates for office is a purpose of grassroots political organizations, though educational activities can include referrals to the websites of political organizations.

Under 501(c)(7), contributions to the group are not tax-deductible, but the group can endorse political candidates. This declaration is made on IRS Form 1024 and is available with instructions in Publication 557 at IRS.gov/charities.

Until recently, not-for-profit groups did not have to file tax returns unless they brought in more than \$25,000 per year. Currently, such groups must file an electronic “postcard return,” Form 990-N.³ Instructions for the postcard are on the IRS website. The kinder, friendlier IRS has gone from being no problem at all to being a postcard-sized problem.

COVER YOUR BASES

The bank account must require two signatures for a check to be valid. This prevents the treasurer from making impulsive payments or holding the organization's finances hostage to a particular action. Such things have happened to some organizations, and the two-signature rule helps keep honest people honest. For convenience, multiple officers may be on the signature card. A bank with multiple branches is convenient for when the treasurer changes so the replacement may find a convenient branch without changing the account.

All aspects of the organization must be legally in the name of the organization rather than in the name of an individual member. A member may put his or her name on the post office box or phone line and even pay the bills as a contribution to the group, but if said member dies or becomes disenchanted, the disruption to the organization can be terminal.

Any number of companies offer telephone systems, which is convenient because someone will have to collect voice messages. A website also requires some attention. As we all know,

an organization does not exist in the 21st century unless it has a website.

A post office box should be established at a convenient post office. The person assigned to pick up the mail will change over time, as will costs associated with the mail-end of the organization's operations. The cost of a mass mailing is greatly reduced if the options are discussed with the post office rather than addressed by mailing organizational materials like one might mail Christmas cards.

SPREAD THE WORD

The organization requires a newsletter, providing information about how the organization relates to over-arching gun rights on a local, state and national level. Contributors will be tempted to address other issues in passing, but this must be limited. The risk of offending some members or blurring the purpose of the organization is too great. As the Bible says, “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?”⁴

When more than one approach to solving a gun-rights issue exists or two equally favorable candidates for office run against each other, the newsletter may offer a forum for debate. The group will get a great deal more done if everyone has an opportunity to have his or her say, but when the decision is made, that should be the end of it. The power of a group is that it acts as a group. A member cannot be forced to participate in a project but should not work to undermine it and shall not be allowed to use the organization's assets to do so. Every member will disagree with some board decision at some point, but at the end of the day, the members are all on the same side and must, as they said in the old cowboy novels, “ride for the brand.”⁵

Some organizations have had success by sending newsletters by email. This saves on postage, but an actual newsletter is often the only physical benefit of membership. It is something for the members to hold, to show to friends and to leave in public places. In fact, extra copies of the newsletter can be distributed to potential members. Five or six sheets of paper weigh an ounce and can be mailed with a single stamp, and the post office will mail identical pieces of mail, from the same post office, at the same time, at a reduced rate, though a minimum number of pieces must be mailed to qualify for this program.

RAISE SOME MONEY

The bank account must be fed, and membership dues typically cover little more than the cost of the newsletter. A donation jar can be put out at gun shops or gun shows, but at some point, a fundraising project will be necessary. Raffles are popular fundraising efforts, but these sources of funds are illegal in some states and limited in others. Often a raffle can get by if it is a “drawing” and the tickets contain language saying, “No purchase is required; for a free ticket, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to (the organization's address).” A single ticket is returned in each envelope. This often takes the exchange

out of the gambling definition. The tedious nature of the transaction discourages oppositional persons from grabbing handfuls of tickets.

If the organization is to raffle something off, the legality of the drawing must first be investigated. Just because a church or PTA gets away with a raffle does not mean that an organization devoted to being a thorn in the side of politicians will be able to do the same.

MAKE SOME ALLIES

A great Missouri legislator once said that what a politician needs most is not money or power but rather friends. When a legislator gets a letter on a subject, he or she believes it signifies an issue he or she must watch. When a legislator receives 10 on the same subject, he or she believes it signifies a crisis upon which he or she must take a position. When these same 10 correspondents form an organization, it signifies a groundswell of public opinion that he or she must placate. By the simple process of organizing, advocates not only increase their effectiveness but also encourage more advocates.

An organization means a network of influence, a mailing list, willing workers, fundraising, endorsements and more — friends. This is why politicians fear and covet these kinds of organizations.

A grassroots group must be nonpartisan. This gives the group more flexibility, as there are persons in both major parties who favor us and who hate us. Working both major parties against each other can be useful. Being nonpartisan does not mean non-political though; it is quite the contrary. To be effective, the group must be political, and the group will set out to establish influence with politicians. Each state posts computerized directories listing the state legislators, officials, employees and offices. It may also list state news organizations, which will be valuable to the press officer. The internet will also provide the group with some important background on the politicians.

FIND YOUR POLITICIANS

It is surprisingly easy to see a politician. Even without an appointment, when a legislator is told that a group of constituents would like a word, he or she will usually

scurry to curry favor. Meetings are often in small rooms, which increases intimacy. The group should not squander the opportunity with strong aftershave or perfume; legislators have complained of such odors. Even more importantly, no matter how strong the group believes in an issue, no legislator reacts well to demands or shouting. Excruciatingly polite interactions with the legislator and his or her staff — especially his or her staff — are called for.

A politician's priority is re-election, and he or she will say, or not say, anything to achieve that priority. During Missouri's long fight for concealed carry, a legislator told the advocates that he was their guy and would have the law passed. The advocates later received evidence that the legislator had told the opposition that he was their guy and would see that the law would not pass. When faced with opposition or duplicity, the organization must not threaten to defeat the politician in the next election. Some districts are so safe that the party could run a yellow dog for office — a dead yellow dog — and it would be elected. Do not squander the organization's credibility on empty threats.

In some elections, the "cemetery precincts" have been crucial to the outcome. But these matters require effort and money. The more opposition a politician has, the greater the effort and money he or she must raise to rally the party faithful, and rallying the zombie vote is even more expensive. Though threats of ousting an elected official should be avoided, telling the politician that the organization cannot support him or her tells that politician that his or her life has become more complicated — and, even worse, complicated by a group that knows how the game is played.

PLAY IT STRAIGHT

The group will be asked how many members it has, and a vague answer leads to exaggerations of the group's strength. One group claimed that its membership "was in three figures." When it was discovered that the group boasted exactly three members, the claim lost its luster. It can be accurately stated that the group consists of activists representing all the gun owners in the legislative district, but do not press your luck beyond such a claim.

FURTHER READING

Hutton, Stan and Frances Phillips. *Nonprofit Kit for Dummies*. 5th ed. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015. The book contains a CD with sample forms.

It is wise to establish a working relationship with your NRA-ILA state legislative liaison. Some groups have not been able to do so, though this appears to be a failure to coordinate efforts more than anything else. Though the NRA representative may be dismissed as an outside agitator, the grassroots organization consists of local "true believers."⁶ The group represents local votes — those people who put out signs, pass out literature and form wildly cheering crowds when such crowds are needed. These individuals are a local face for the message.

The late Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill famously said, "All politics is local." He was not our friend, but he was right.

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ENDNOTES

(1) The Western Missouri Shooters Alliance and the Missouri Sport Shooting Association have copies of their bylaws on their respective websites. See WMSA.net and MissouriSportShooting.org. (2) The form is a W-9. See IRS.gov/forms-pubs. The site also contains advice specific to various types of not-for-profits. (3) See www.IRS.gov/charities-non-profits/required-form-990-series. (4) See 1 Corinthians 14:8. (5) A cowboy saying indicating loyalty to the group. (6) See Eric Hoffer's book of the same name.

