



## Organizing Sustainable Survival Self-Reliance Groups

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### Introduction

Having been involved in the survival/preparedness movement I have observed the formation of a variety of successful and long-lasting preparedness groups. I have also seen many groups' flounder or self-destruct. The growing acceptance of the Survivalist philosophy and preparedness initiatives calls for effective leadership and mission-based organization on the local and regional levels. The need for these organizations will be more urgent as young families and the youth collide with the "perfect storm" of hazards and hardships that lie ahead. The misdirection's and meltdowns of the past must be avoided. **These organizations must endure and thrive to play a key role in the preservation of lives and freedoms in the coming decades. Failure cannot be an option.**

### The Right People, the Right Size, the Right Activities

Remember the story of Goldilocks? Some things were too big and some things were too small, but some things were "just right". While national organizations like ours are essential for networking' support, training and advocacy, they are too large to implement effective emergency plans and mobilization when truly large-scale disasters occur. In a truly serious event, transportation systems (e.g. roads, etc) and communication systems (e.g. internet, phones, cell phones) will breakdown, making the coordination, and gathering of people outside of walking and short driving range impossible and dangerous. Even group training and supply distribution under normal conditions becomes difficult past the county area range. Furthermore, future trends in fuel prices and economic conditions will make national and even regional gatherings more expensive and difficult. On the other hand, single-family survival and self-reliance efforts are severely limited in terms of finances, manpower and range of skills. This is especially true when you consider the possibility of large groups of looters and criminals that may be encountered in a crisis. So what's "just right"? Probably the most effective size for a survival, self-reliance team is from 5 to 20 families spread no further than 40-miles apart. The group should be no larger than 40 families (over 100 people) and no further than 100-miles apart. Such teams do not need to be "stand alone" organizations. They can be developed within an existing community, fraternal,

veterans, or religious organization or networked with adjoining teams. Of course they can also be organized “from scratch” starting with one family or just a few individuals.

How formal an organization you create depends on how large you get and how complex your activities become? If you get too complex to work well in normal times, it will fall apart in a disaster. The old “KISS” (keep it simple stupid) principle” should be a rule when it comes to organizations and plans that have to work under emergency conditions. How you organize is also a decision for the group, but you do need to have some structure. You will need to have a designated leader (president, coordinator, leader?), and several designated officers that will take over if the leader is not available. The last thing you need is “who’s in charge” conflict in the middle of an emergency. In fact, you need to be sure there is no ego driven, “I’m the boss” types in your group. Good leaders are good listeners and good followers to. While each individual and family is expected to achieve a high level of self-reliance and survival capacity on their own, they are enabled to do this more effectively with the support of the team. Furthermore each family is interdependent and mutually supportive for key services and support that would not be available to the lone citizen. Specialized tasks can be distributed among the members or assigned to the best-qualified individuals. There are at least three important tasks that require special designation of responsibility.

### **Planning**

Someone needs to be in charge of analyzing the potential hazards and developing detailed emergency plans for each situation. These plans must take into account the geography and demography of the area and the capacities of the group’s members. This person will need to conduct tabletop exercises and when possible field tests of the plans. These plans should cover anticipated natural disasters, economic deterioration, political and social upheavals, epidemics and any combination of situations. The team should also have plans to help fellow members with individual and family emergencies.

### **Purchasing**

There are two kinds of purchases that the group will make. First, are purchases of bulk quantities of supplies such as food, medicine, clothing, fuel, ammunition, and sanitation supplies. Provisions have to be made for storage and distribution as well. The group can save money on non-emergency items as well. Secondly, there are those items that are too expensive for one person or family, but important to have. These can range from large generators and water purifiers to military surplus tents and even heavy-duty four-wheel drive trucks. Maybe you need to share food dryers, grain mills and smokers. You may also want to consider stocking up on various barter items to facilitate an emergency economy. This initiative can go as far as establishing a business that improves the economic security of the whole group.

### **Training**

The subject of survival and self-reliance is so broad that no one can be an “expert” on everything. One of the main values of a group is that each individual has or can acquire special skills to share with others. There are three ways to build the skill level of the group.

- Internal education through sharing of existing knowledge. This can be facilitated through book swapping, showing and discussing educational videos, taking turns doing short classes, and through show-and-tell at meetings.
- Group participation in local and regional education programs such as first aid, self-defense, firearms instructions, gardening, and other self-reliance related subjects.
- Sending one member to advanced survival, medical, defense or other training programs with the understanding that they will return to share what they learned. The group should share at least 50% of the costs.

If your group is big enough to require dues, you will need to elect a treasurer. You may need to have a communications coordinator if you are going to use radios for internal or external communications. If you are not fortunate enough to have a Doctor or a Paramedic in the group you definitely need to assign someone to get all the possible medical aid training they can and stock up on medical supplies and medications.

### **Community Outreach & Responsibility**

One of the most important decision the group needs to make at an early stage is whether to be a “closed” or an “open” organization. This will depend on the concerns of the group and the culture of the surrounding community. Many communities today welcome and respect self-reliance and preparedness groups, but not everyone has accepted this view. You can limit your recruiting to a person-to-person approach or to just members of your parent, organization. This may limit your access to some highly qualified members, but will also improve your security. If you are going to go public, you should do so through well managed outreach activities such as doing preparedness programs at local fraternal, community or religious groups. You may want to consider purchasing a post office box and printing some flyers stating your groups’ mission and benefits. Some groups even set up tables at gun shows and have booths at county fairs. If you are “public” your members should build the groups relations and reputation through participation in the local Crime Watch, Civilian Emergency Response Teams, Red Cross, Scouts and other survival related organizations.

### **Keeping It Together**

I have seen more survival/self-reliance groups’ burnout or whither away than I have seen survive over the years. As we are facing multiple disasters and crises over a long-term, it is essential that new and existing groups build for an ongoing and increasingly challenging environment. I have identified the five most common deadly errors for survival/self-reliance groups that I have seen over the past 40 years.

### **Loss of Focus and Vision**

Groups that start out without a clearly defined long-term mission are bound to fail after a few years. As members feel that they have achieved a desired level of

knowledge and preparedness the group starts to atrophy and lose momentum. If the mission is not one of perpetual growth and outreach its decline is inevitable.

### **Inactivity**

There is no minimum number of members needed to launch activities. Activities will eventually build membership. Members must be involved in more activities. This will facilitate more and better programs that attract more and better members. Do it and they will come! Keep at it and you may reach a “critical mass” in your community. This is where the group starts to grow from a person-to-person chain reaction. Be patient, but be active.

### **Mission Creep**

You look up one day and realize that your “preparedness” group is now a social club or a “meet eat and retreat” political group. A poorly defined mission or one that you fail to use as your guide will result in drifting, misdirection and failure. Review your actions and goals against your mission and avoid members who try to install other agendas.

### **Internalization and Paranoia**

I have seen more groups go under as a result of being too closed and paranoid than from being infiltrated or persecuted. In fact I have never seen a true survival/self-reliance group attacked in any way. Yes “You have nothing to fear but fear itself”. My own organization was heavily publicized on TV, radio and the press in the 1980s when “survivalists” were far less popular than today. There was not one instance of harassment or persecution for any member or for the group. We cannot survive alone. The sooner we are accepted as responsible parts of our communities and the sooner we reach out to recruit and develop more and more like-minded families the safer we will all be.

### **Lack of Determination**

During the 1990 our organization went from nine-hundred members in every state and four countries to about thirty-five members, mostly in the Chicago area, but the core-group and most of the network survived. This is only because we willed it to be so and kept going. Like surrounded solders we still had the mission and each other. Your group will have challenges and hard times. Determination defeats every adversity. Find ways not excuses. Adapt and create opportunities. After all; a “survival group” should be able to survive anything.

### **There is no such thing as failure only people who fail the mission.**

I have learned these lessons through years of work building Live Free USA at my career as a safety professional, and at life. The study of leadership in business’s and military strategies confirms these lessons. Those of you who would be chapter leaders, event organizers and leaders must know this in advance to assure success in all you do.

**50 to 75 percent of all events, meetings and program will be a failure or a waste of time but:**

- (1) You have no way of knowing which ones will fail and which ones will be the key to success
- (2) Failures often turn out to provide the elements of success weeks, months or even years later
- (3) Often a failure can be the fulcrum for a later success. In fact: the more frequently you try and fail the more inevitable your success becomes.
- (4) So success is the product of constant activity and even frequent failures and frustrations
- (5) Only inactivity and capitulation can stop you from succeeding
- (6) Most importantly: a success that is not followed promptly by efforts towards building greater things is still a failure.**

Constant and unwavering focus on the mission while ignoring failures and building on successes (no matter how small) is a guarantee of success.

### **Conclusion**

As survival and self-reliance become more popular and urgent in our society, the need for and the potential for organized local groups will become more apparent. Our experience is showing that a growing percentage of the population is interested in becoming part of local organizations dedicated to helping them prepare for future emergencies and cope with ongoing challenges. In many cases there are dozens of interested people and families waiting for *others* to step up and start a group or offer a program. Live Free USA and Live Free members are uniquely qualified to be the "others" who act and lead in their communities and existing organizations. Being part of a small local group can greatly enhance each member's security, and survival capacity. Maintaining a clear idea of the group's mission and responsibilities is critical to the long-term survival and success of any organization.

We will be happy to assist anyone contemplating the organization of a survival, self-reliance related group or anyone who is involved with a group that wants to assure its sustainability and growth. The following may be used as a guide to building a team (group) mission statement.

### **The Mission of a Survival-Self-reliance Team\***

1. To mutually support each-others efforts to achieve greater levels of self-reliance and independence.
2. To mutually support each-others effort to prepare for emergencies and disasters
3. To cooperate in the acquisition of survival and self-reliance equipment, supplies and training.
4. To develop mutually supporting emergency plans for all perceived disasters and threats.
5. To participate in and support local and community emergency response and survival education programs.

## **Live Free USA Chapters and Affiliated Groups**

Networking with other groups and sharing resources becomes more and more critical as deteriorating conditions and multiplying emergencies and hazards threaten every community and family. So called “virtual networks” are useful for sharing knowledge, but are dependent on the very systems that are subject to deception and collapse. Live Free USA seeks to build true, “boots on the ground” networks of responsible and active groups that can build the survival and self-reliance movement, strengthen their communities and lead towards freedom and security together.

### **Each chapter is required to:**

1. Have at least 2 paid LFUSA members
2. Have a designated Chapter leader and Deputy Chapter leader (LF Members) with contact information provided to Live Free USA.
3. Conduct or participate in at least one public survival/preparedness education program in their region each year.
4. Conduct at least one open meeting or training event open to LF members and guests each year
5. Conduct all activities legally, responsibly and in accordance with the Live Free, USA mission statement.

### **Live Free USA would support the chapters by:**

1. Refer new members
2. Conduct periodic combined events
3. Provide publicity and website contacts
4. Publicizing activities in the newsletters and flyers
5. Provide literature instructors and speakers.
6. Support the groups programs, and events
7. Coordinating combined programs that benefit all members and chapters
8. Establishing discount programs and multi-chapter purchases when possible.

For further help in organizing groups or community education activities contact: [survivorjj@aol.com](mailto:survivorjj@aol.com) . Live Free USA membership including the American Survivor newsletter is \$20.00 per year or \$50.00 for three years

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