

DEMOCRACY DEFENSE AS OFFENCE GRASSROOTS TRAINING FACILITATOR GUIDE

A training template for state-based organizing organizations, congregations, unions, and community groups preparing grassroots leaders for election defense in 2026. Critical Note! It requires a regional or state level plan and strategy based on your states' election system, vulnerabilities and organizational eco-system. That is for you to design.

Informed by Monarca and UnidosMN

Companion to: [Act Free to Be Free: A State and Local Pro-Democracy Framework](#)

Organizing Lab | 2026

TRAINING OVERVIEW

Audience: Grassroots leaders, community members, congregation members, union stewards, neighborhood leaders

Duration: 2 to 2.5 hours (adaptable)

Purpose: Build shared analysis of the election threat, rehearse scenario-based responses, and invite people into concrete teams and commitments for election defense

Group Size: 20-100+ (breakout groups of 8-12 for Part 2)

Materials needed: Printed scenario cards for breakouts, commitment sign-up sheets (one per team option), contact information cards, markers and easel paper (for group reporting), copies of the State Power Analysis Worksheet (for coordinators)

Time	Section	Duration
0:00	Welcome, Grounding, and Opening	10 min
0:10	Part 1: Shared Analysis — What Are We Actually Facing?	40-45 min
0:55	Part 2: Scenario-Based Tactical Preparation (Breakouts)	30-35 min
1:30	Part 3: The Structure	10 min
1:40	Part 4: Your Commitment — Choose Your Team	20-25 min
2:05	Closing	5-10 min

WELCOME, GROUNDING, AND OPENING | 10 minutes

FACILITATOR NOTE: *This is not a lecture. It is a gathering of people who already sense the threat and are looking for clarity and a role. Honor that. Start with relationship and grounding, not information.*

Welcome and acknowledgments (2 minutes)

Welcome everyone. Acknowledge the organizations, congregations, or unions represented. Name the space: we are here because we believe democracy is something you practice, not something you have. And the practice is about to get a lot harder.

Grounding (3 minutes)

A moment of grounding appropriate to your community: prayer, song, a moment of silence, a breathing exercise. This should feel like your community, not a political event.

Framing question (5 minutes — pairs or table groups)

What brought you here today? What is at stake for you, your neighbors, your family? What are you most hoping for from the time we spend together?

Let people talk for 3-4 minutes in pairs or table groups. Do not debrief fully. Say: hold what you heard. We are going to give you a strategic picture that connects what you are feeling to what is actually happening. Then we will talk about what we can do.

PART 1: SHARED ANALYSIS — WHAT ARE WE ACTUALLY FACING?

| 40-45 minutes

FACILITATOR NOTE: *This is the section most trainings skip or do poorly. Do not skip it. Without shared analysis, people can be mobilized but they cannot lead. The goal is not to scare people. It is to give them a strategic picture clear enough that they can make independent judgments when things get chaotic. That is the difference between mobilization and formation.*

1A. The Three Earths (5 minutes — presentation)

Open with the Three Earths framework (adapted from Community Change and Caring Across Generations). This is the big-picture frame that locates people in the moment:

Earth One: Liberal democracy as we knew it. The system we grew up with. Imperfect, unequal, but with real mechanisms for accountability and change. That world is ending, whether we like it or not.

Earth Two: Authoritarianism. A government loyal to one man and his billionaire allies. No accountability. No free elections. No responsive government. The Constitution becomes a piece of paper.

Earth Three: The future we must fight for. Not a return to the old normal, but something better: a multi-racial democracy where government actually delivers for working people. Earth Three is up to us.

The question is not whether the old system is changing. It is. The question is what replaces it. That is what the fight over the 2026 elections is actually about.

1B. What They Are Actually Doing: The Unified Strategy (15 minutes — presentation with visual aids)

FACILITATOR NOTE: *Walk through the threat picture from Act Free to Be Free, adapted for a grassroots audience. Use concrete language and specific examples. Do not assume people know the details. Many will know the feeling but not the architecture. Your job is to give them the architecture. If you have examples from your own community or state, use them!*

Key points to cover (in your own words, with your own examples):

Trump is not preparing to lose the 2026 elections. He is preparing to disrupt and sabotage them. This is not speculation. The strategies are documented, spoken out loud, and partially published.

The goal is not to cancel the elections or even win them. The goal is to create enough chaos, enough legal uncertainty, enough manufactured doubt, to suspend certification. And in that void, power consolidates around the people already holding it. Courts are slow. Appeals take time. And while the lawsuits grind, Congress cannot be seated.

This is a coordinated strategy with multiple fronts working together:

- **Ballot seizures:** manufacturing a false evidence base. FBI raided Fulton County, seized 656 boxes. A California sheriff seized 650,000 ballots over 103 votes.

- **Voter roll demands:** suing 29 states for voter data to build the tools for mass purges, targeting dense, diverse urban counties. Even Republican states refused.
- **Loyalists installed in key positions:** election deniers placed at DHS, in the White House, and as local election judges and commissioners across the country.
- **The Maduro play:** capturing a foreign leader to manufacture a "witness" for the debunked Dominion conspiracy theory.
- **ICE at the polls:** Bannon has explicitly called the airport deployments a "test run" for November. The mere presence suppresses legal voters.
- **The pre-emptive fraud narrative:** seeding millions of people with false claims of fraud BEFORE the election, so that when they claim fraud in November, people feel they already knew.

Group discussion (5 minutes):

- Where have you seen evidence of this strategy in your state? What have you noticed?
- What is the intended impact of these moves on everyday people? (Confuse, create despair, divide and distract.)
- Why can a strategy like this work? What does it rely on?

Take 2-3 sharings from the room. Name the through line: this strategy works when people are confused, isolated, and convinced it is too big to fight. Shared analysis is the antidote.

1C. The Racial Logic (5-7 minutes — presentation)

FACILITATOR NOTE: *This section is essential. Do not treat it as optional. The racial targeting is the engine of the strategy, and for many people in the room, it is already personal. Name it clearly and connect it to what people are already experiencing.*

None of this is race-neutral, and we should stop analyzing it as if it is.

The ballot seizures target Fulton County, not suburban Atlanta. The voter roll purges target dense, diverse urban counties, not rural ones. ICE at the polls suppresses Latino and immigrant communities by design. Ken Paxton's lawfare in the Texas primary targeted Black voters in Dallas. The "fraud" narrative has always been a racial narrative in procedural clothing: "fraud" means Black people voted in Detroit and Atlanta and Philadelphia. "Illegal voting" means immigrants existed near a ballot box in Phoenix and Houston.

This is not incidental to their strategy. It is the engine. The right has used racial division to break democratic majorities for generations. The specific genius of the current play is that it launders white nationalist voter suppression through the language of "election integrity."

Our response only works if we refuse the racial division their strategy requires. That is why multi-racial formation is not just a value we hold. It is a strategic necessity. Black, brown, white, Indigenous, and immigrant communities organized together, with shared analysis, shared stakes, and the trust that comes from having fought together before the crisis arrived.

Group discussion (5 minutes):

- Too often, if an immigrant community, a Native community, or a Black community are the targets of a smear campaign, aggressive lawfare, or state violence, the collective "we" does not get in

Take 2-3 sharings. Name what you hear. The through line: their strategy depends on us staying in our corners. Our strategy depends on refusing to.

1D. What We Know Works: The Minnesota Proof of Concept

(or other stories from Chicago, Los Angeles, North Carolina, or from your own community!)

(5-7 minutes — presentation or testimony)

FACILITATOR NOTE: *If you are in Minnesota, use local testimony from people who were in the ICE fight. If you are in another state, tell the MN story and then connect to your own state's experience. The point is: this is not theory. We have done this. It works.*

When ICE and CBP occupied Minnesota communities for two and a half months in early 2026, organized civil society acted free to be free. Tens of thousands of trained constitutional legal observers documented every encounter. Small businesses refused warrantless entry. Local law enforcement mostly stood aside. And when called, 50 to 70 percent of the general population showed up.

That mobilization repelled 3,500 federal agents, gave the Governor room to fight, gave the AG's lawsuits political standing, and won the national media narrative. Up to 350,000 Minnesotans withheld their labor on the Day of Truth and Freedom. It worked because all of it together created a reality the federal government could not overcome.

The woman in the pink coat who stepped forward with her iPhone when CBP was murdering Alex Pretti made a courageous choice that exposed the lies of DHS. That kind of leadership does not emerge from nowhere. It emerges from formation through organizing, from shared analysis, from people who have already processed the stakes and know what they are willing to risk.

That is what this training is about. Not a guarantee. A readiness.

1E. Table Discussion *(5 minutes)*

Discussion questions (choose one or two):

- What did you hear that you did not know before? What changed in your understanding?
- What scared you or created tension? What made you angry?
- Given what we just heard, what is at stake for your community specifically?
- Where in this picture do you see a role for yourself?

Take 1-2 sharings from the full room. Do not over-process. Say: now we are going to move from analysis to action.

PART 2: SCENARIO-BASED TACTICAL PREPARATION | 30-35 minutes

FACILITATOR NOTE: *This is not a lecture. It is a rehearsal. People need to practice the conflict before it arrives so that when the adrenaline hits, their body already knows what to do. Break into groups of 8-12. Each group gets one scenario. They have 15 minutes to work through it, then 10 minutes to report back. Print these scenarios on cards and hand them out.*

Setup (3 minutes)

Explain: we are going to practice. You are going to get a scenario — something that could actually happen in our state between now and January 2027. Your job as a group is to answer three questions for your scenario:

1. What is actually happening here? What is the play?
2. What do WE do? Who does what, in what order?
3. Who do we call? What is the chain of communication?

Breakout Scenarios (15 minutes in small groups)

Choose 3-5 scenarios appropriate to your state. Below are six options. Print each on a card with the three questions above.

SCENARIO A: ICE at the Polls

It is Election Day morning. A volunteer calls to report that two unmarked vehicles with federal plates are parked across the street from a polling place in a heavily Latino neighborhood. People in line are leaving. A man in a vest that says "DHS" is standing near the entrance but not speaking to anyone.

- What is the play here? What are they trying to accomplish?
- What do our poll observers do? What do our election guardians outside do?
- Who do we call first? (Legal? Press? Elected officials? All simultaneously?)
- How do we keep voters in line and reassure them of their rights?

SCENARIO B: Federal Agents Demand Ballots

It is two days after Election Day. The count is not finished. Two men in suits show up at the county election office, show FBI badges, and demand access to the ballot storage room and the counting equipment. They have a piece of paper they say is a warrant. The county clerk calls you.

- What is the clerk's legal authority to refuse? What should they do right now?
- Who do we call? (Our pre-positioned election lawyer? The AG's office? The press?)
- What does our grassroots team do? Where do we show up and how fast?
- What is the public message? Who delivers it?

SCENARIO C: County Board Refuses to Certify

SCENARIO D: "Stop the Steal" at the Counting Center

It is Election Night plus one. The count is ongoing at the county election center. A crowd of 50-100 people with "Stop the Steal" signs has gathered outside. They are loud, some are armed, and they are demanding to be let inside to "observe." Election workers inside are frightened. A local TV crew is filming.

- What is the play? What are they trying to accomplish?
- What do our trained teams do? Do we counter-mobilize? If so, how and with what discipline?
- How do we support the election workers inside? Who is our liaison?
- What is the media message? Who speaks?

SCENARIO E: The Fraud Narrative Goes Viral

It is three days before Election Day. A video is circulating on social media showing someone at your county election office allegedly "stuffing" a ballot box. It has 4 million views. Your local TV news is asking questions. The video is misleading — it shows a normal process of delivering mail ballots — but the damage is spreading fast.

- What is the play? Why is this video surfacing now?
- What is our counter-narrative and who delivers it?
- How do we support the election official being smeared?
- What do our grassroots teams do on the ground in the next 24 hours?

SCENARIO F: Congress Is Not Seated

It is January 3, 2027. Trump allies have filed legal challenges contesting the election of Democratic members in six states, alleging foreign interference. The challenges are based on the Maduro conspiracy theory and the "evidence" from the Fulton County ballot seizure. A federal judge has issued a temporary restraining order preventing three newly elected members from being sworn in. Without them, Democrats do not have a majority.

- What is at stake if Congress is not fully seated?
- What did we prepare for this moment? (Mass mobilization? Sustained presence?)
- What does our state do? Governor, AG, state legislature?
- What does mass non-compliance look like? Are we ready?

Report-Backs (10 minutes)

Each group has 2 minutes to share: what was the scenario, what was the play, and what did you decide to do? Facilitator highlights patterns across groups: the need for speed, the need for pre-positioned lawyers, the need for disciplined grassroots response, the need for a media plan.

FACILITATOR NOTE: *After report-backs, name the through line: every scenario requires infrastructure that is built BEFORE the crisis. That is why the structure and commitments in Parts 3 and 4 matter. We are not asking people to be brave on the spot. We are asking them to prepare now so they are ready when the moment comes.*

PART 3: THE STRUCTURE | 10 minutes

FACILITATOR NOTE: *This is a brief overview of the infrastructure people are joining. Keep it tight. The goal is orientation, not a detailed briefing. Part 4 is where people make their commitment.*

Explain the structure in your state. Adapt this to your organization. The key elements:

County Defense Teams: locally rooted teams in priority counties that attend board meetings, build relationships with election officials, and are prepared to respond when something happens. Led by people who live there.

Polling Place Guardians: our people placed inside the election infrastructure as election judges, party observers, or stationed visibly outside as trained guardians. They arrive early, they help voters, and they intervene if problems arise.

Communication Tree: the chain of communication that fires when something happens. You call your team lead. Your team lead calls the coordination hub. The hub activates legal, press, political, and grassroots response simultaneously.

Rapid Response Network: people on a signal chain ready to show up when called, whether for a press event, a direct action, or an emergency response to interference in real time.

The Nerve Center: the state-level coordination body linking legal, elected officials, movement leaders, and grassroots organizations. You do not need to know the details. You need to know it exists and that when you call, someone answers.

None of this works if people are isolated. Every piece of this structure is a team. You are not being asked to be a hero alone. You are being asked to join a team, connect to your neighbors, and take action together. That is how ordinary people generate extraordinary power.

PART 4: YOUR COMMITMENT — CHOOSE YOUR TEAM | 20-25 minutes

FACILITATOR NOTE: *This is the most important section of the training. Everything before this was preparation for this moment. Have commitment sign-up sheets printed and ready at stations around the room (or on tables). Have team leaders identified and standing at their stations. Have real dates for next steps written on easel paper where everyone can see them. Do not let this section feel abstract. It should feel like signing up.*

4A. The Invitation (5 minutes — presentation)

You have just heard the analysis. You have just practiced the fight. Now the question is: what are you going to do about it?

We play our role not by worrying alone, not by doomscrolling, not by hoping someone else handles it. We play our role by being on teams, by connecting to our neighbors, and by taking action together. Isolation is their strategy. Connection is ours.

We are going to walk through a menu of ways you can plug in. These are real teams doing real work between now and January 2027. Each one has a team lead, a next meeting date, and a way to stay connected. Your job right now is to choose at least one.

4B. The Menu: Six Ways to Plug In (10 minutes — walk through, then sign up)

FACILITATOR NOTE: *Adapt this menu to your state and organization. Not every option will be relevant everywhere. Add options that fit your context. Remove ones that do not. The point is that people leave with a concrete commitment, a team, and a next step.*

1. Rapid Response Team

Join a signal chain. When something happens, you get the call and you show up. Press events, direct actions, emergency responses to interference or sabotage in real time. This is the team that moves fast.

- Join the Signal group before you leave tonight
- Commit to responding within 2 hours when called
- Attend one rapid response drill before Election Day

2. County Defense Team

Build a presence in your county. Conduct a research meeting with your county election officials using the Election Defense Visit Template. Invite your neighbors to attend county board and city council meetings so that election administrators see a real public presence behind the decisions they are making. This is the slow, steady, relational work that makes the fast work possible.

- Attend (or organize) a research visit with your county election officials
- Show up at county board meetings with at least 3 people from your community

3. Election Observer / Poll Guardian Training

Get trained as an official election observer, election judge, or polling place guardian. Your state or county may offer formal training. Your organization may offer supplemental training. Either way, we need our people inside the election machinery and visibly present outside it.

- Sign up for observer or election judge training (dates provided by your organization)
- Complete the required county training when scheduled
- Accept your polling place assignment and commit to Election Day and the days after

4. School and Parent Teams

Build a signal network at your kids' school, in your neighborhood, at your place of worship. This is how you stay connected to the people closest to you and make sure information moves fast when it needs to. These are the teams that turn 10 people into 100.

- Identify 5-10 parents, neighbors, or congregation members to join a signal group
- Host one conversation using this training's analysis with your network
- Stay connected to the larger coordination structure through your team lead

5. Train the Trainers: Host This Training

Take this training back to your own school, church, union hall, or community center and run it yourself. We will train you to facilitate it. Every time this training runs in a new room, the network gets wider and the capacity gets deeper. This is how we scale.

- Attend a train-the-trainers session (date provided)
- Commit to hosting at least one training in your community before October
- Report attendance and sign-ups back to the coordination hub

6. Other: What Are We Missing?

You know your community. Maybe there is a role we have not named. Maybe you have a skill, a network, a platform, or an idea that does not fit neatly into the options above. Tell us. We will find a way to plug you in.

- Write your idea on the commitment sheet
- Talk to one of the team leads before you leave
- We will follow up within one week

4C. The Go-Around (5-10 minutes)

FACILITATOR NOTE: *This is the moment of public commitment. It matters. When people say out loud what they will do in front of other people, they are far more likely to follow through. Go around the room (or table by table for larger groups). Keep it tight: name, team, and one sentence about why.*

Go around the room. Each person says:

My name is _____. I am committing to _____. I am doing this because _____.

For large groups (50+), do this at tables and have each table report its commitments. For smaller groups, go around the full room. Either way, make sure every person in the room has said it out loud.

4D. Before You Leave *(make sure everyone has these)*

FACILITATOR NOTE: *Do not let anyone walk out without all five of these. Station team leads at the exits with sign-up sheets if you have to. The relationship built in this room is the one that holds under pressure. If they leave without a connection to a team, you have lost them.*

1. Their team commitment (signed on paper, today)
2. Their team lead's name and phone number
3. The next meeting or training date for their team (a real date, written down)
4. The Signal group or contact chain for their team (joined before they leave the room if possible)
5. One person they will personally invite to the next training or meeting

CLOSING | 5-10 minutes

Bring the room back together. This should feel like a commitment, not a conclusion.

Final reflection *(ask for 2-3 voices)*

What are you willing to risk for your community's right to free and fair elections?

Close with the animating principle of the entire framework:

Act free to be free.

We do not ask permission to exercise our rights. We exercise them — at scale, in public, together, without waiting to be told it is safe to do so.

Close with prayer, song, or whatever is appropriate to your community.

Remind people: what happens next depends on what people decide. That is why democracy is hard. And it is why it is worth fighting for.

PART 3: ROLES, STRUCTURE, AND COMMITMENT | 20-25 minutes

FACILITATOR NOTE: People have just practiced the fight. They are activated. Now give them a place to land. This section should feel like signing up, not like listening. Have sign-up sheets ready. Have team leaders identified. Make the path from this room to the next meeting concrete.

3A. The Structure You Are Joining (5 minutes — presentation)

Explain the structure in your state. Adapt this to your organization. The key elements:

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The Nerve Center: the state-level coordination body linking legal, elected officials, movement leaders, and grassroots organizations. You do not need to know the details. You need to know it exists and that when you call, someone answers.

3B. Choose Your Role (10 minutes — sign-ups)

Present the roles. Adapt to your organization. People should sign up for ONE primary role today.

Win the Election

Voter engagement, voter registration, early voting support, GOTV. This is the core electoral work. Election defense sits on top of it.

Poll Observer / Election Guardian

Serve as election judge, party observer, or stationed outside as a trained guardian. Requires additional training (dates provided). Priority placement in vulnerable counties.

County Defense Team Member

Attend county board meetings, build relationships with election officials, fight off hand-count resolutions and other sabotage attempts, and be ready to respond if certification is threatened.

Rapid Response / Direct Action

Trained, disciplined, ready to mobilize within hours. Protect counting centers, counter "stop the steal" mobilizations, provide visible presence. Requires scenario training and non-violence discipline.

Counter Narrative / Press Support

Strike Preparation

Prepare for mass non-cooperation if the constitutional order is suspended. Build the infrastructure for sustained economic withdrawal: work stoppages, business closures, sustained physical presence.

3C. Concrete Next Steps *(5 minutes)*

Before anyone leaves, make sure they know:

- Their role (signed up on paper, today)
- Their team lead (name and phone number)
- The next meeting or training date for their role
- How to reach someone if something happens before the next meeting
- One person they will invite to the next training

FACILITATOR NOTE: *Do not let people leave without signing up and getting a phone number. The relationship built in this room is the one that holds under pressure. If they walk out without a connection to a team, you have lost them.*

CLOSING | 5-10 minutes

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Final reflection *(ask for 2-3 voices)*

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