

## *Banner Making for Activists 101*

In demonstrations, vigils and anywhere else you are making a public statement, banners are terrifically useful. They tell who you are and either graphically or by their presence in a place, declare your intent. They also help you get a group together in a large gathering, or focus the TV cameras, as well as catching the eye of other, related groups that may want to associate themselves with you.

There are one-time only banners, made with a specific message for a specific occasion, and they are typically made quickly and with less care than a banner to identify a group that may be used many times. However, some basic principles apply to all of them.

### **Materials**

A lightweight polyester-type fabric is most useful. Banners get heavy if you have to carry them a long time, and in case of rain, it's important that you have something that will dry as quickly as possible. Use rich, deeply saturated (bright) but dark colors. Dark red, marine blue, deep purple are best. Fabric 58-60 inches wide is best, but get what you can. Haunt discount fabric places, and buy when you find it. 2-1/2 yards is the max most carriers can manage. My biggest banner finished at roughly 7.5 feet wide by 4 feet high.

### **How to Lead**

Sew basic banner first. Make deep hems on bottom and sides to add a little weight and stability. You'll want a pocket all along the top, a couple of inches deep, so a pole can slide through easily.

Put large grommets (you can buy grommet kits at many fabric stores) at each end for two purposes:

- A. Cords to tie banner to pole to reduce slipping back and forth
- B. A place to attach several multi-colored fluttering ribbons, the better to attract attention.

Plan your message.

The name of an organization and its logo are essential, and sometimes that is all you want. Clear and simple are the watchwords. Remember, if your letters are too small or too ornate, nobody will be able to read your message. Figure that in a march you have 5 seconds or less to make an impression on the mind of a watcher.

Measure carefully.

Use chalk lines so that your writing is straight. After all the painting is done and dry you can brush them off or wipe them off with a barely damp rag. If your group includes someone very good with lettering, let that person sketch out the message and whatever else is planned. If you are appliquing anything, do that first.

Cut your shapes carefully, allowing for a 1/2 inch turn-under on each piece. Baste the turn-under smoothly. Place the pieces and stitch around each one, either by hand or machine. Then remove basting. If you want to tack the pieces down with fabric glue first, do it sparingly, then stitch. Don't depend on glue alone to last through even a single session outside.

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[www.TrainingForChange.org](http://www.TrainingForChange.org)

Paint your letters/shapes.

Use white or cream-colored paint for letters; I prefer latex, some folks prefer acrylic. Don't use oil-based paint. It might soak in and run along the weave of the fabric, ruining your banner. Work slowly and use a good brush, preferably almost the width of the planned letters.. Keep a towel, rag or paper plate under your brush as you reach from the paint pot to the point to be painted, because those drips are extremely difficult to remove. If your banner is quite large, you may need several sessions, working from different angles to complete all your words. Let it dry for as long as you can, but at least 24 hours.

A wonderful telescoping pole can be obtained from the web site [intothewind.com](http://intothewind.com). It is very lightweight, but does cost about \$25. Otherwise you need to figure out how to have a pole all along the top of the banner, and still be able to carry it in a car or bus.

Now, carry it with pride and joy, and hang it up somewhere if you can when it is not traveling, so that you and your group can always see it and be reminded of why it was made.

## **Where This Tool Comes From**

by Anne Ewing