

## About the NYCLU

The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) is one of the nation's foremost defenders of civil liberties and civil rights. Founded in 1951 as the New York affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, we are a not-for-profit, nonpartisan organization with eight chapters and regional offices and nearly 50,000 members across the state.

Our mission is to defend and promote the fundamental principles and values embodied in the Bill of Rights, the U.S. Constitution and the New York Constitution, including freedom of speech and religion, and the right to privacy, equality and due process of law for all New Yorkers.



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KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:  
**Demonstrating  
in New York City**



**New Yorkers have the right to engage in peaceful, protest activity on public sidewalks, in public parks and on public streets in New York City. This includes the right to distribute handbills or leaflets; the right to hold press conferences, demonstrations and rallies; and the right to march on public sidewalks and in public streets. The City can and does impose certain restrictions on these activities, and in some instances one must obtain a permit before engaging in certain activity. This brochure is intended to inform New Yorkers of the basic rules governing demonstration activity.**

**Do I need a permit?**

It depends on what you want to do. If you want to distribute handbills on a public sidewalk or in a public park; have a demonstration, rally or press conference on a public sidewalk and you do not intend to use amplified sound, you do not need any permit. If you want to use amplified sound on public property; want to have an event with more than 20 people in a New York City park; or wish to conduct a march in a public street, you will need a permit. You will also need a permit if you want to conduct a procession involving 50 or more vehicles or bicycles in a public street. If you wish to have an event on the steps of City Hall or in the plaza in front of the

steps, you need to make special arrangements with the Police Department.

**If I want to distribute handbills; have a demonstration, rally, press conference; or march on a public sidewalk, what do I need to do?**

Nothing but plan your event. If you want, you can notify the Police Department, but that is not required. If you do notify the Police Department, officers may appear at the event; if your event involves a significant number of people, the Police Department may set up a “pen” in which they will ask you to stand.

In conducting your event, you cannot block pedestrian passage on a sidewalk, so you should leave at least one-half of the sidewalk free. You cannot block building entrances.

**What if I want to march in a public street?**

You may be able to march in a public street (as opposed to on a sidewalk) in some circumstances. In every instance, you must obtain a permit from the Police Department. If you expect to have fewer than 1,000 people in your march, you can apply for a permit at the precinct in which the march will originate. If you expect 1,000 people or more, you must apply at Police Headquarters (1 Police Plaza, Room 1100A) in lower Manhattan. You can download a permit application from the front page of the NYPD’s website (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/home/home.shtml>), which has a link on the left-hand side under the “Find Services” section to “permits.”

There is no fee to apply

for a parade permit. As a general rule, the Police Department will only allow marches to take place in the street if the group has enough people so that it is not safe or otherwise reasonable for the group to march on the sidewalk. In those instances in which a group is allowed to march in the street, the police will close a portion of the roadway for the group.

**Can I have a vehicle or bicycle procession in a public street?**

You are entitled to drive or ride as a group on a public street, but if you have 50 or more vehicles or bicycles in the procession, you will need to obtain a parade permit from the Police Department. These permit applications are handled the same way as applications for street marches.

**What if I want to use amplified sound?**

If you want to use amplified sound in a public place, you must receive a permit from the Police Department. You can download an amplified sound permit application from the front page of the NYPD’s website (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/home/home.shtml>), which has a link on the left under the “Find Services” section to “permits.” Once you complete the application, you will need to file it with the precinct in which your event is taking place, and that precinct will issue the permit. The fee for a one-time sound permit is \$45.

Though city rules specify that permits must be sought at least five days before the event, you are entitled to receive a permit even if you apply less than five days before

your event. City rules prohibit the use of amplified sound within 500 feet of a school, courthouse or church during hours of school, court or worship, or within 500 feet of a hospital or similar institution. In many instances, the permit may specify a decibel limit on the level of permissible sound. City rules also prohibit the use of amplified sound between 10 p.m. and 9 a.m. in nonresidential areas; in residential areas, amplified sound is not permitted between 8 p.m. or sunset, whichever is later, and 9 a.m. on weekdays and between 8 p.m. or sunset, whichever is later, and 10 a.m. on weekends.

Finally, if you intend to use amplified sound that requires electricity, you are not allowed to tap into public power (e.g. a light

pole) unless you have made specific arrangements with the city to do so.

**What if I want to have a rally, press conference or demonstration in a city park?**

You are entitled to distribute expressive materials or have a rally, press conference or demonstration in a city park. If the event will include more than 20 participants, you must obtain a special events permit from the Parks Department. You can obtain a permit application, which contains the general rules governing the permit process, from the Department’s main office in the borough where the park is located or you can apply online at the Parks Department’s website ([www.nycgovparks.org](http://www.nycgovparks.org)).

The application fee is \$25.

You also are entitled to use amplified sound at an event in a city park. As with amplified sound in other public places, you must obtain a permit from the Police Department to use amplified sound in a public park. Generally, the Police Department will not issue a sound permit until you obtain your Parks Department permit.

**What if I want to have an event in front of City Hall?**

You are entitled to have a rally, press conference or demonstration on the steps of City Hall or in the plaza directly south of the steps. (City Hall Park also is open for such events, but these are subject to the normal rules for parks events.) You do not need a permit for events in front of City Hall, but you do need

to schedule your event with Police Department officials at City Hall.

To schedule an event, call the Police Desk at (212) 788-6688. Though you are entitled to have an event, there are certain restrictions at City Hall. Groups are limited to 300 people, and only a portion of the steps may be used. All attending an event must pass through a metal detector.

**What else do I need to know?**

The most important thing you can do to ease the permit process is to apply for your permit as early as possible. Be persistent in pursuing the process, keep copies of any paperwork you submit, and have the names of the public officials with whom you deal.

In many instances

groups holding events on public property in New York City, whether with a permit or otherwise, will receive a phone call from the Intelligence Division of the Police Department seeking general information about the event. The Police Department is entitled to ask such questions, but you are entitled not to answer them, if you choose not to.

You are free to use signs at your event, but the Police Department does not want them affixed to wooden sticks or metal poles; use cardboard tubing or hold them. Signs are not permitted to be affixed to public property, such as light posts or police barriers.