

# Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users'

## GOLDEN RULES

### FOR GETTING SHIT DONE

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We never changed the law without breaking it

Ask for forgiveness, not permission

Know your enemies, find your friends

You can't change everything overnight. Get ready for the long haul

Look at your community: find out your basis of unity, your strategy and goals

Evolve: weed out bias and stigma in your own group

You can't rely on government. Rely on each other!

It's a war on the poor. It was designed this way

If you're pissing people off, you're doing something right!

No matter what they try to swing at you, don't give up

**I can be a rose in your pocket or a thorn in your side**

~ Tracey Morrison,  
Rest in Power

### On Working with Government

Beware invitations to work with government: they'll water down your goals, take credit for your work, and divide your solidarity.

**"They'll try and buy you to divide and conquer you. Keep your wits about you"**  
~ Flora Munroe (Rest in Power)

**"Most governments will trick you into being an ally, and then puppet you"**  
~ Elder Marge (Heiltsuk)

Before accepting invitations, create your own terms of reference, goals, and non-negotiables. Don't be afraid to walk away if you're being compromised.

And when it comes to police?

**"Sometimes you have to cut your losses. If history shows us anything, it's that police cannot be our allies"**  
~ VANDU Board member Dave Hamm

Do your research:

**"Figure out government's ulterior motive. Anticipate their arguments and strategize your response"**  
~ Elder Clint (Anishinaabe)

**Demand compensation and credit:** our time and energy is valuable! We are expert contractors who deserve fair payment and credit.

**Remember:** they need you more than you need them.

### On Direct Action & Grassroots Organizing

**Build from the bottom up:** success comes from below. Always be democratic in your structures and your principles. Create a grassroots organization with an elected and accountable leadership. Create transparent structures so that people know exactly how they can be involved, how to access the benefits of membership, how to move into leadership positions, and how to exercise their democratic rights as members.

**Doing it yourself is sometimes the best option:**

**"When you agree to work with authorities, you're forced to compromise, and then they take credit for it even if it was your idea"**

~ VANDU Board member Dave Hamm

So many "drug policies" started with the direct action of PWUD. For instance, VANDU ran illegal injection rooms before government ever came on board.

**"We're not gonna let people die just because they said no to us"**

~ Flora Munroe, late VANDU member

**"We'd get shut down, but we didn't stop. We just moved to a different location! About two years after opening that last injection room, the health authority came crawling back and asked us to open a room at VANDU. They realized we were right all along"**

~ VANDU Board member Lorna Bird

**Safety first:** always have a safety plan—ask everyone what they need to safely participate.

**"Different people have different abilities. Figure out what people's risks are: are they more likely to be arrested? To lose custody? To experience police violence?"**

~ VANDU Board member Hugh Lampkin

**Building a movement takes time:** we're in this for the long haul and we won't win everything overnight.

**Find your friends:** in media, on city council, in the community. It helps to have allies with different skills.

**"Sometimes you have to learn to work with people you don't like"**

~ VANDU member Elli Taylor

### On Working with Researchers

**"In the past, researchers would use our expertise and we'd never hear from them again. They'd publish an article in some journal, but we'd still have the same problems on the street"**

~ VANDU Board member Kevin Yake

We've been researched to death: misrepresented, stigmatized, traumatized. We need them to do research with us and not about us. That means getting something useful in turn, like a community resource or teach-in.

**"Researchers should leave the community in better shape than they found it"**

~ VANDU Board member Hugh Lampkin

**"If we can't have self-determination and autonomy, we don't wanna be involved!"**

~ VANDU Board member Delilah Gregg

**Build relationships first:** before committing to working together, ask them to explain their research. Listen to your gut—if it feels like a bad fit, it probably is.

**Demand follow-through:** ask researchers to keep you involved throughout.

**"Before the paper is published, make sure they bring it back to you for review. What you say can be taken out of context"**

~ VANDU Board member Dave Hamm.

**Credit, credit, credit:** if you're contributing, you should be a named author.

**Make sure they've read *Research 101: A Manifesto for Ethical Research in the Downtown Eastside*:** or create your own research guide for your community. Many of us helped draft this set of expectations to guide researchers' process.