

Green Dot Advanced Ranger Training Manual 2012



2012 Green Dot team Cadre:
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Who we are

Mission

Black Rock City can be a source of overwhelming experiences. The Green Dot team are Black Rock Rangers who support participants who are having an emotional, mental, or spiritual crisis that goes beyond the capacity of their local community and less-specialized Black Rock Rangers to support, but that does not yet need professional services. We are peer counselors for mentally distressed participants.

As Rangers

The Green Dots are a team within the Black Rock Rangers who specialize in one of the kinds of situation rangers often encounter. This is exactly parallel to how the LEAL team specializes in engagement with Law Enforcement agencies, the Intercept team engages with Art Car safety, the RNR team provides late-night coverage of a large city when patrol coverage is sparse, the VC and Mentor teams provide support to new ranger volunteers, and the HQ, Site, and Echelon teams provide logistical support.

Operations

The Green Dot team works alongside the other rangers on patrol. When other rangers or another agency need support for participants in emotional distress that exceeds their capacity to provide, they can request Green Dot support through the ranger Shift Lead.

Whenever possible that support will be provided where the participant is already: the goal of Green Dot interactions is to enable the participant to return to their participation in the larger community of Black Rock City, so providing that support within the BRC community is preferable to removing the participant to Ranger care. Sanctuary is a limited resource that should be reserved for those who have the greatest need for a sheltered experience and will disrupt it least for the other participants who are in intense need of somewhere peaceful to process their experience.

Since emotional crisis often accompanies other forms of crisis, the Green Dot team will frequently give and receive handoffs with other teams and departments. These handoffs will be discussed in more detail below. Green Dot support may be one side of a larger picture, and there is sometimes a “revolving door” pattern to interactions between the Green Dots and other specialized groups within the BRC structure.

The recurring nature of Green Dot situations makes it important to track information about the history of interaction with participants to enable effective work by later Green Dots, while maintaining the privacy of the individuals involved. We'll cover that later too.

History

Until the early 2000s, many of the functions that are provided today by Black Rock City's Emergency Services Department (ESD) and Gate Perimeter & Exodus teams were part of the Black Rock Rangers' mission. It was convenient in those days for the ranger shift lead to be able to distinguish at a glance which rangers were suited to send

to handle various kinds of crisis. That preparation to go beyond the basic sensibility and supportive skills that are expected of most Black Rock Rangers was indicated by a small colored dot on the specialist's laminate. Specifically, a ranger with real-world volunteer or professional fire suppression experience was marked with a red dot, a ranger with first responder or more medical training was marked with a blue dot, and a ranger with strong peer counseling or more psychological skills was marked with a green dot.

In the early 2000s, ESD split off into its own department, with professional fire, medical, and psychological crisis support branches. While the fire control and medical response needs of Black Rock City have very little grey zone between Ranger sensibility and professional response, we found that there were a large number of participants who did not need professional emergency psychological services, but did need more specialized skills for their support than most rangers were prepared to give. To support these participants, the Black Rock Rangers continue to prepare a functional team for those needs.

Since the late 1990s, the ranger Green Dot team operated a shelter for participants whose emotional crises could not be effectively supported out in the rest of the City: a quiet, private space behind Ranger Headquarters called Sanctuary. Shortly after the other departments split from the Black Rock Rangers, a group of non-ranger participants who did research on psychedelic experiences volunteered to assist in supporting participants in Sanctuary. At first, this was a wonderful way to extend the rangers' capacity - allowing more Green Dot rangers to operate out in the city, while providing plenty of support for those who needed a quiet experience that could not be found in their communities or the public.

However, in the later 2000s, the differences between the rangers' support mission and the volunteers' research agenda, coupled with differences in how Sanctuary's mission, history, organization, and function were being represented in public lead to friction between these groups. At the same time, the ranger support volunteers called Echelon, whose mission included what are now the HQ and Site teams, wanted everyone who is critical to ranger functions to have full ranger training and mentoring. As part of that shift, the Sanctuary staff were consolidated within the rangers. Some volunteers who did not fit well with the more general ranger structure went back into the City for their research activities, while we gained many other highly skilled Green Dots who were willing to join the overall mission and methods of the Black Rock Rangers.

Team Structure

Rangers on patrol who are in good standing as Green Dot team members should make sure they are marked accordingly in the ranger database, and introduce themselves as such to both the Shift Lead team while patrols are being organized, and to the Green Dot team lead for the shift. While we encourage Green Dots to express their preference for working in the City or in Sanctuary, the actual allocation of rangers to venues will depend on the current needs - there is no guarantee to work in Sanctuary. Those who

are not yet full team members but have interest in Green Dot work should similarly identify themselves to the overall Shift and team leads.

Ideally, a Green Dot who is responding to a crisis will have backup from another ranger who is skilled and comfortable with the same kind of situation, and who brings to the situation as different as possible a set of presentation characteristics (like gender, age, or fashion) or type of skills and preparation. This provides the most effective handoffs within the crisis itself without needing further support. However, if coverage for the team's function is thin due to staffing or load, Green Dots may be paired with rangers who are not part of the team on shift, to allow for faster response time within the city.

The team member on a particular shift who supports and organizes the team's activities is the **Green Dot Short**. These rangers are selected by the Cadre for both their experience and capacity in handling the kind of crises that Green Dots specialize in, and for their organizational and communication abilities to successfully interact with the ranger Shift Leads and other logistical and inter-departmental contacts.

If you have worked for a while as a Green Dot and want to take on this kind of responsibility to back up other team members who need advice or support, and to provide effective communication both within the team and between the team and its external interfaces, let one or more of the Cadre members know your interest either well before the event, or on-playa. You will be invited to ride along with a Green Dot Short for a few shifts to get more understanding of the role and activities, and to allow others to help evaluate your suitability for the position.

Any questions that involve the team on shift will go to the Short - if you have any urgent need, let the Short know what it is. The Short will typically have access to Golf Cart level transportation, and is responsible for collecting and handing off documentation for the situations the team covered that shift.

The **Green Dot Long** role takes 24 hours shifts that turn over in the afternoon to cover longer-running crises. Many of our larger issues do not resolve neatly by the end of the shift. We found it important to have team members who have been effective as Shorts that can provide advice and support when the Short needs to kick it sideways, who can assist with continuity of handoffs between shifts and days, and can take the focus for coordinating support of long-running situations. Many cases that require professional support have collateral impact on the community of the focal participant: providing support to the campmates of participants who have been victims of crimes, suffered clinical crises, or died can take a lot of time, and stability across shift changes is important for those situations.

When changes to operational policy are required in real-time to respond to the evolving situation on-playa, the Long on shift is empowered to adjust procedures for the team as necessary. Therefore, the Longs also serve off-playa as the consensus-based coordinating body for the Green Dot program, as its team Cadre within the rangers. We want to expand that group some too - if you have interest, let the Longs know.

What we do

Skills

Green Dots normally bring an off-playa background in counseling, psychology, or altered states. These include a wide range of professional, vocational, and artistic perspectives. One of the critical things to keep in mind is that the relationship between a Green Dot and the participant they are supporting is not a therapeutic one - there was no consent prior to the crisis for the Green Dot to apply their perspective toward helping the participant “make the most” of their experience for personal change. This is in stark contrast to many sources of the necessary skills. We are much closer to crisis-line counselors or the friend on the couch than to an emergency psych tech or shamanic healer. Participants and guests in Sanctuary are not our Clients nor Patients. Our goal is to help them get through the crisis in a way that allows them sooner and smoother reintegration in their home communities. The goal is not growth: it is catch and release.

The most important Green Dot skill is Listening. Participants in crisis often have an acutely keen sense for immediacy and pretension. You need to bring your full authentic presence and focus to the situation. Balancing that with your ranger radio skills can be the hardest part of the job - whenever possible, let your partner monitor the radio while you work with someone in crisis. The simple fact that someone safe, sane, and sensible is paying close attention to them provides a powerful anchor in their internal turbulence. It can be hard to remain focused there, but compassion and patience are critical. You don't need to “talk them down”, and attempts at manipulation usually backfire. Neither confront nor confirm their unrealistic perceptions. Instead, keep your own center and make your heart available to them. Reflecting how their situation seems to a sympathetic and balanced peer back to them is often immensely powerful. You will often not see the effect of your compassionate presence in their immediate presentation, but we are social creatures and we do not fail to notice when another human gives us their focused attention. If that attention is genuine and benevolent without attempting control, the internal effect can be powerfully reassuring.

Beyond that, there are a wide variety of considerations that can make a difference. These will be discussed in more detail in the training sessions themselves, and make for great conversation between calls when you're working with other Green Dots. For example: awareness of gender complexity and reactions runs quickly to deep currents; attention to the background setting of the scene for noise, symbols, signals, and other sensory and representational input has dramatic leverage; keeping in contact with your core ranger skills, processes, and resources provides a rich set of tools; understanding the signals, characteristics, and effects of various physical, chemical, psychological, and spiritual stresses provides powerfully nuanced perspective; assessing their history in the situation can make critical differences - what is their experience as a burner, and community of support both locally and at home? what medications have they taken, or not taken? what powerful psychological events in their past have memories of been triggered? what kind of framework for understanding do they bring to their experience?

Caring for the body of the person in crisis is often the most effective way to change their experience. The usual assumption is that the mind is a mystery, and its train of thought drives the emotions, and the body then reacts to the emotional impulses and situations the mind directs it into. Our experience is that the reverse is often a more accurate and effective perspective: the health of the body in its situation drives the emotions toward either flight-or-fight when survival is in jeopardy, or relaxation when safety is assured; the mind then reacts to the emotional tone with a train of thought in either confused crisis response (often ineffective), or introspection, philosophy, joy, or slumber when they have the freedom to explore those more pleasant modes.

As a final note here, cycling in the participant's train of thought and speech is quite common. They are processing a set of considerations linearly, or at least communicating in a linear stream of symbols, but the complexity of the processing leads them to take repeated "passes" through the set of considerations. Do not be surprised, nor distressed, that the conversation is looping - this is actually a powerful advantage when you notice it. It allows you "rehearsal" time internally - when you see the same thread coming around again, you can reflect on other ways to respond to it, and keep trying variations in your approach till you find one that helps. Also, the length and complexity of the loop can give you indications of the direction their mental integration is proceeding: if they are losing the capacity to communicate, their cycles will become shorter, tighter, and more urgent; if they are gaining mental and expressive capacity, their cycles will become longer and contain more complex material. In the former case, be prepared to escalate their level of care; in the latter, you have the opportunity to help them find perspectives that lead them back to reintegration.

Sanctuary

For many outside the team, Sanctuary is the most salient representation of our team. However, it is also our most limited resource. Sanctuary is intended to be a quiet, sheltered environment for a few of the most disoriented participants. Using it as a drunk-tank or an automatic dumping ground for anyone who is acting troublesome is counter productive, and makes it unavailable or ineffective for the kind of support that it is often the only available resource for. Sanctuary is for those whose level of being overwhelmed requires a kind of shelter that cannot be found elsewhere in BRC.

Sanctuary usually consists of multiple shelters located behind ranger HQ. Please do not invite others to "check themselves in" there, nor direct them to find it on their own. People who need access to Sanctuary (for themselves or their friends) should go through the rangers on shift to make that connection. Many unnecessary interruptions to the function of the space can be avoided by going through channels that can address the participants needs in other ways. The main dome of Sanctuary is the primary space for quiet care. It will have a relaxing atmosphere, gentle stimulation, opportunity for rest (including a few cots), and some simple food, hydration, and environmental support. The other structure(s) allow people who do not fit well with the others in the main dome to have somewhere else they can go: they are less complex and less supported, but still sheltered, quiet, and simple.

One of the rangers working in Sanctuary each shift will be designated the Host by the Short. This person is responsible for the interfaces between Sanctuary and the rest of the world, rather than for interacting at length with the guests. The Host manages intake / drop-offs, organizing and initiating paperwork, hand-offs out of Sanctuary or other forms of guests departure, and maintaining supplies and resources for the space. The Host will be monitoring a dedicated Sanctuary radio channel: normally quiet, but used by other rangers to inquire about the availability and status of the dome, and due discretion for privacy, about the presence of people brought in earlier. The Host will be able to use their own normal radio channels to reach out for other ranger support.

The other staff in Sanctuary normally split their activities between roles of Sitter and Writer. Sitters provide focused attention to the guests, while Writers assist by capturing information and providing logistical support within the dome. The records of a visit to Sanctuary can provide invaluable information to help resolve situations later in the week that have developed further from their initial visit, including home camp and the background of the crisis. Sufficient information to confirm that a participant is the same individual between the records and a later visit is important, and the source / destination as they come and go from our facility is also important.

What do you do with a drunken burner?

[Alcohol] causes “a state of shortsightedness in which superficially understood, immediate aspects of experience have a disproportionate influence on behavior and emotion.” Alcohol makes the thing in the foreground even more salient and the thing in the background disappear. That's why drinking makes you feel attractive when the world tells you otherwise: the alcohol removes the little constraining voice from the outside world that normally keeps our self-assessments in check. Drinking relaxes the man watching football because the game is front and center, and alcohol makes every secondary consideration fade away. But in a quiet bar his problems are front and center - and every potentially comforting or mitigating thought recedes. Drunkenness is not disinhibition. Drunkenness is myopia."

from Malcolm Gladwell's article "Drinking Games"

The New Yorker, Feb. 15 & 22, 2010

In the hypersensatory world of BRC, this disconnect about the effects of alcohol can be especially problematic. People overindulge because it is what they imagine is expected or necessary to fully enter the intensity they are seeking or the less-inhibited self they are searching for. Instead, they frequently confront their problems, which come to meet them against one of the biggest examples of solitude they have ever encountered. No wonder many folks are undone by alcohol consumption on the playa, especially when dehydration, unfamiliar food schedules, and high expectations are added to the mix.

So, what to do with a Drunken Burner?

If the problem appears to be exclusively alcohol-related, don't bring them to Sanctuary!

The only things that can help someone who is drunk are distraction and sleep, with water in either case.

In the intensely introspective atmosphere of Sanctuary, the mental myopia induced by alcohol actually may become worse. They may also pose a difficulty towards any other mental work going on in the dome - if the drunken person is excessively weepy or belligerent, they can become a real distraction for others who are in a very emotionally malleable state. What to do? Look for a distraction to point the person toward, and some friends, old or new, to keep them focused upon something exterior to themselves and drinking water. Moving and walking can also help by being a focus point and keeping the metabolism up. If at all possible campmates or other friends should be enlisted in this venture, if they are unknown, enlist the help of the community. In the end, the participant will need a place to sleep, make sure that any helpers are prepared to help the participant find a place to sleep. Just a reminder: As many of us know all too well, drunken myopia can make a person very suggestible. Exercise good judgement in leaving a drunk in the company of new folks: we don't want anyone taken advantage of in any way.

Sanctuary beds are a limited resource, it is better if they are taken up with someone who can benefit from the introspective vibe of the dome. If the person is simply in need of sleep, a suitable place should be found. Ideally, this should be in their camp. If at all possible, their camp should be located and campmates enlisted to help the ailing citizen. (The finding of the camp can be enlisted as a distracting game of sorts if done right...) If this is impossible, another place to sleep should be sought, preferably in a low-traffic area that is open to the public at large with couches or hammocks. A space like Center Camp Cafe is unsuitable for sleeping - they regularly wake those who seem to be using the place as a personal campsite, causing a new call for the Rangers if things take a bad turn.

If a person seems to be suffering in a very bad way - unable to walk and/or completely disoriented, then the participant should be taken to medical for an evaluation and professional diagnosis.

Handoffs

Who:

The Green Dot team works at a nexus of other resources and roles - the revolving door between types of care is key to our work. Participants often pass through an intense mental crisis on their way into and out of other forms of crisis. We act in partnership with the groups that provide support for those other types of crises. Knowing when and how to give and receive the handoff of a participant and their situation is key.

The Ranger Patrol team is our primary community facing partnership. The Shift Lead team will direct Green Dot resources to participants identified in the city who may need

our support, and provides the coordination for all other ranger resources and inter-departmental interactions as they do for all rangers. When a participant is ready to return to their role in the city outside our support, Patrol rangers are often the ones to accompany them for that transition.

The same situations that must be reported to Khaki by all rangers still apply in every way to your interactions as part of the Green Dot team. It can be challenging to balance your sympathy for the participant and role advocating for them with the need to protect their health and the safety of other participants in the City. If you have concerns for the health of the participant you must get medical services immediately. Similarly, if you suspect that they may have been involved in a crime on playa this year, you must get Khaki involved as soon as possible. This is often best done through your partner: "I think Khaki needs to hear this" is usually sufficient to get a face-to-face started, and you can then return your full attention to supporting the participant.

The Emergency Services Department are our next most-frequent partners. In many cases, mental and medical crises go hand-in-hand. If you even have doubts about the medical condition of a participant, get support as usual from ESD Medical for an evaluation. This can usually be done in the field - only transport a patient to a Medical station if you think they will need care that would be hard to provide in the field. Similarly, ESD has a professional psychological crisis team - the Mental Health Branch (MHB, also formerly known as CIT). In cases where the participant is either directly involved in what may be a current criminal case, where they may be a danger to themselves or others, may need restraint or observation at a medical facility due to the intensity of their crisis, or show signs of acute mental health issues - like the inability to distinguish factual reality that is typical of a psychotic break: hand over immediately to the professionals in MHB. The other participants in their camp may need Green Dots.

Similar to ESD Medical, "Rampart" or HGH (Humbolt General Hospital) are medical professionals operating on-playa. They are somewhat less integrated into Black Rock methods and expectations, but also have greater emergency-room capabilities for care, including an on-duty emergency medical doctor. They may request support for patients under their care, or more often for those leaving their care to reintegrate into the City. Similarly, someone under our care whose medical condition is getting significantly worse quickly may need to go directly to the on-playa ER. These hand-offs out to them should be coordinated through Khaki, and request for hand-off from them will usually go through Khaki or the Green Dot leads.

Additionally, the various Law Enforcement agencies have a very cooperative interaction with the Green Dots. They provide essential backup when a participant becomes violent or was the victim of a crime, and they are likewise very grateful to have someone they can hand off particularly disoriented participants to without having to write in their report that the unruly individual was released directly into the public. They treat us as allies, and we maintain that by treating them the same way. A few years ago, one Sheriff was talking to the campmates of someone who had just been restrained 2 days into an intense psychedelic experience, and said "If you can find out where he got this

stuff, don't tell us – we have to enforce the law. Tell the Black Rock Rangers and they'll see that it's handled appropriately.” That kind of trust is invaluable.

How:

The essential characteristic of a good handoff is efficiency: in only a few sentences, get across the critical information to begin documentation and care for the case. This doesn't follow exactly the same process as reporting a crisis for ambulance response: there is already more context, including location. Neither is it a full mind-meld of everything we know about the person under care. Instead, consider it a combination of A) how to identify the case for the records, and B) what are the facts that will be important for their continued care? Begin with a quick summary of their ID, knowing that this will be the start of their official records – name (at least first or play), age (as best you know it), how they came into care (what channel / location / source), and the chief complaint / problem, and finish with any important supporting details like camp location and medication status. You should expect that, and request it when needed, from others, and provide it efficiently when giving a handoff. This will build professional trust between organizations.

Be considerate, detailed, and concise when giving information, and if the information you receive doesn't seem complete, ask immediate questions. Once you say “okay, thanks”, the people handing off will feel free to leave and get on with their shift; make sure you either know everything you need or that the people handing off to you don't have access to it either.

Documentation

The Green Dot team log is an invaluable resource later in the week when we see participants who are part of an evolving situation. Relatively few crises are fully resolved in just a few hours. It is also helpful in the off-season as we plan and budget. The Green Dot Short is responsible for collecting the records for each shift, and the Long will take those for longer-term tracking between shifts and days.

Each participant a Green Dot has a more-than-trivial interaction with should be captured on one of the Green Dot forms. These are available in HQ, or the Sanctuary dome. There are small quarter-sheet forms for use in Field interactions, and more detailed forms for guests in Sanctuary. Also note that there is a privacy release form for Sanctuary guests – when practical, get this signed early in someone's stay. It allows us to tell their friends, family, or campmates about how to find them and what happened to them. Without this, privacy restrictions can get in the way of what would otherwise be sensible. Those inquiries may come a few shifts or even days later.

Membership

This role is only open to Black Rock Rangers in good standing. Any of those who have interest in the role and take this training are welcome to be mentored for the team. Returning team members are expected to take a refresher course every year to stay current on policies and practices, and help support the growth of newer team members. Any ranger who demonstrates difficulty in working appropriately on the team may be

removed by the consensus of the Cadre. New members who are just joining the team will be asked to ride along with a designated team mentor to both let us get to know them, and them to get to know the live practice of the team's functions. When those mentors in discussion with the Green Dot Short or Longs decide that they are up to speed to coordinate with the rest of the team as a full member, those leads will tell HQ to update the ranger's record with the team role, and the ranger to introduce themselves as a Green Dot any time they're willing and able to take on the work.

Final notes

There is no single way. This is an art within an art, and relies on some of our deepest skills to succeed. Get support from your other rangers – the point of the team is to have others who can help. A particular situation may need diverse, and changing, skills and characteristics to resolve well. Take care of your own physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual state. Green Dots help not only the participants, but each other and any other ranger who is overwhelmed by their participation on-playa. Be well, stay centered.