

# COMMUNITY SAFETY AND SECURITY INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD IN 2022 & 2023

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**SUMMARY REPORT**  
July 2023



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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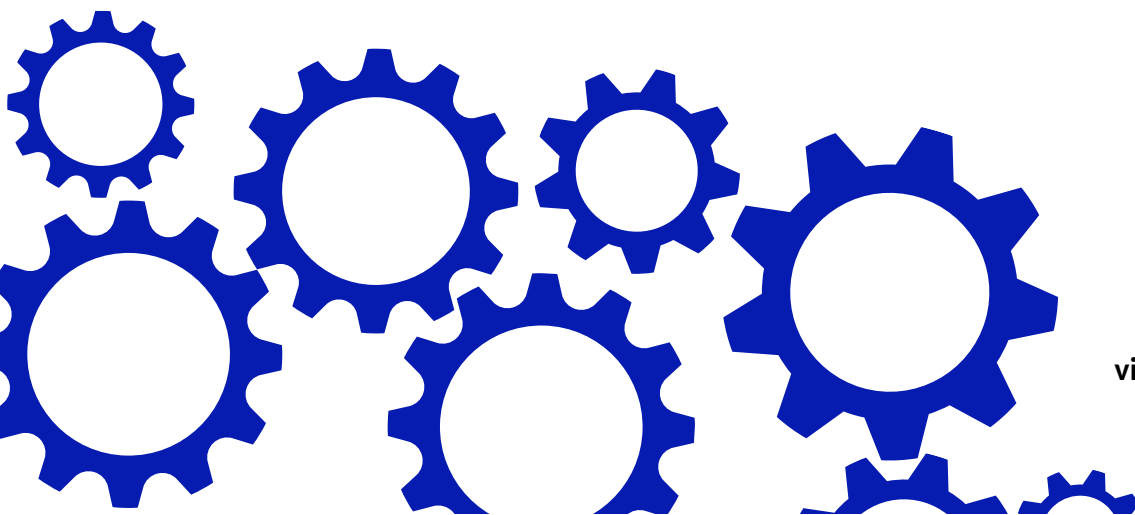
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# INTRODUCTION

Vision Change Win's (VCW) community safety work started in 2018, yet builds on a long legacy of radical leftist people of color community safety movement practices. We know our communities have historically kept each other safe for generations building safety strategies outside of the police, prison, and state, and are continuing to do so to this day. Following the 2020 presidential election and President Biden's election, our communities have seen an increase in power and attacks from the Far-Right as part of a growing fascist movement. These attacks range from legal and policy bills restricting and criminalizing our bodies to varying forms of state and physical violence against our movements.

This report draws on VCW's community safety work from January 2022 to June 2023 to highlight key community safety insights and strategies to build more resilient and sustainable movements.

Goals of this report:

- **Assess** movement security landscape
- **Align** our values and vision to build stronger, resilient, and responsive movements
- **Inform** philanthropic strategy

“OUR GROUPS AND OUR MOVEMENTS NEED TO BE PREPARED AND NOT THE KIND OF PREPAREDNESS THAT HAPPENS AFTER THE THREAT. WE NEED THE KIND OF LONG-TERM PREPAREDNESS IT TAKES TO REALLY BUILD ROBUST MOVEMENTS.”

EJERIS DIXON  
VCW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Through VCW's work providing community safety and security support to our movements over the past few years, the Vision Change Win team has gained many insights on the current state of community safety. Our findings show that many organizations are unprepared and experience low capacity when it comes to addressing their security needs.

As attacks against our movements continue to increase, we need to increase more proactive security infrastructure to support our movements in fighting fascism and building self-determination for our communities. Funders have an important role in providing key interventions to support our movements in building and sustaining community safety practices.

“WE NEED PHILANTHROPY TO ACTUALLY BE REALLY INVESTED IN COMMUNITY SAFETY THE SAME WAY YOU ARE INVESTING IN PROGRAMS AND STRATEGY. SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMUNITY DEFENSE IS A CRITICAL PART OF A SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY”

ASH-LEE WOODARD HENDERSON

# OVERVIEW OF VISION CHANGE WIN



## About Vision Change Win

Vision Change Win is a Black-led team of Queer and Trans People of Color social justice leaders dedicated to supporting organizations in fully manifesting their missions, visions, and values. We support organizations to grow their work by deepening racial justice practices, strengthening community organizing, building organizational development, organizational sustainability, conflict transformation, and restorative and transformative justice practices, and increase community safety practices.

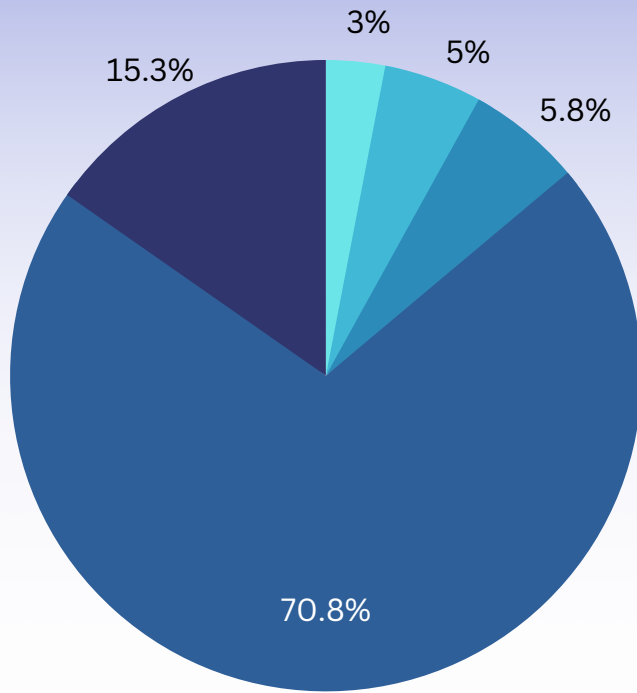
## What is Community Safety?

Community safety and security is a holistic approach to building the collective capacity and ownership for the physical and emotional well-being of those committed to building a just world. Community safety culture is based on the value that we have the power and responsibility to keep our people safe. This work includes but is not limited to action and event security, office and organizational safety, verbal de-escalation, physical de-escalation, personal safety, transformative justice processes, community safety neighborhood strategies, bystander intervention, digital security, and cop watch.

## Vision Change Win's Community Safety Approach

At VCW, we believe that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities have created safety outside of the police and prisons for generations. We draw on a rich generational legacy of community safety initiatives. VCW's approach utilizes an intersectional, trauma-informed, anti-oppression framework. Our trainers and consultants are adept at assessing, addressing, and transforming organizational cultures recognizing that power and privilege are often operating around a myriad of identities simultaneously. Our consultants take the time to ensure that our content is relevant, accessible, and transformative for diverse communities, organizations, and groups.

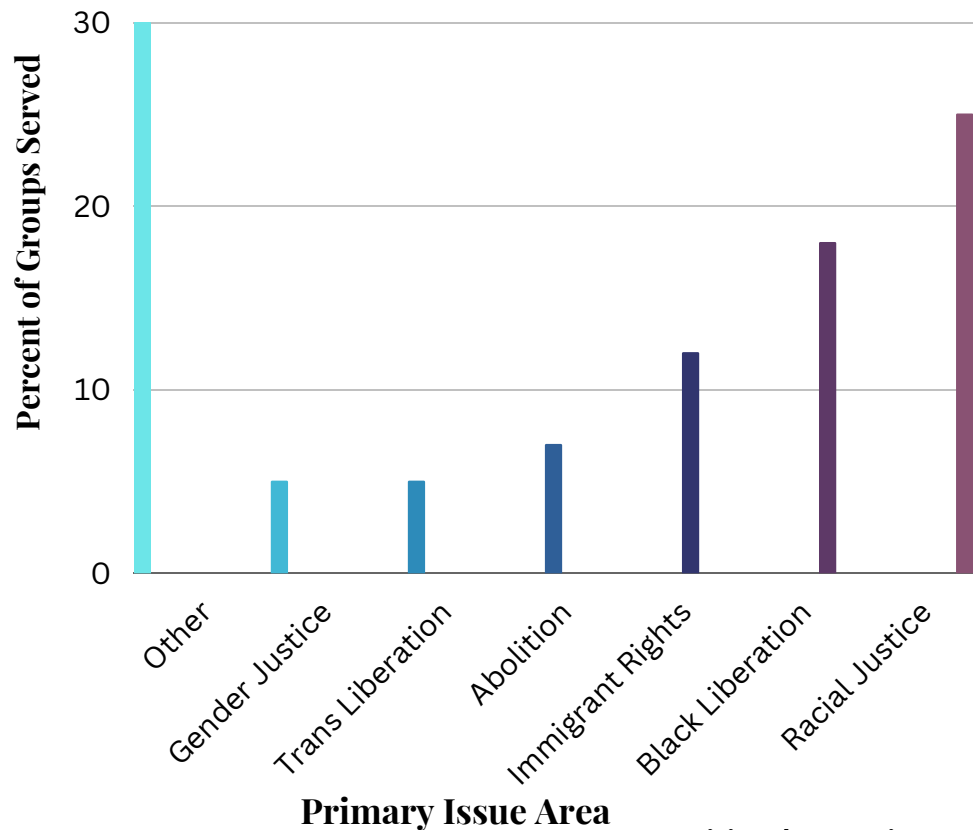
# ORGANIZATIONS VCW HAS SUPPORTED



- **Community Safety & Security School**  
-Nine-month Intensive Training
- **Office Hours**
- **Rapid Response**
- **Get In Formation Training Series (GIFTS)**  
-Monthly Community Safety Training
- **Building Our Own Training Series (BOOTS)**  
-Quarterly Electoral Safety Training

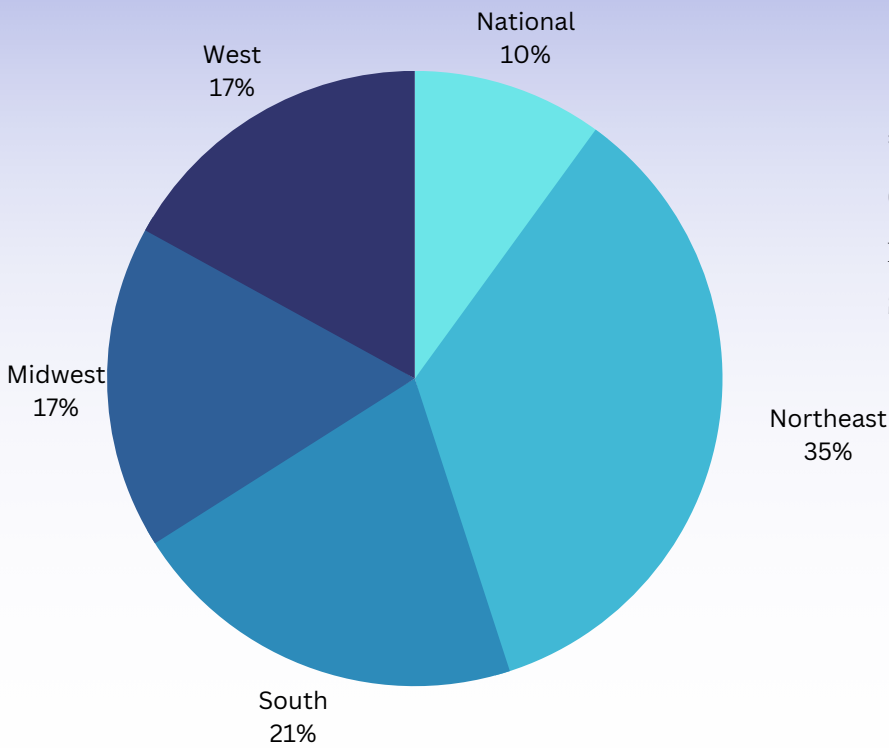
**\*Figure 1**  
Percent of organizations attending VCW specific programs between January 2022 and June 2023

# SECTORS TRAINED



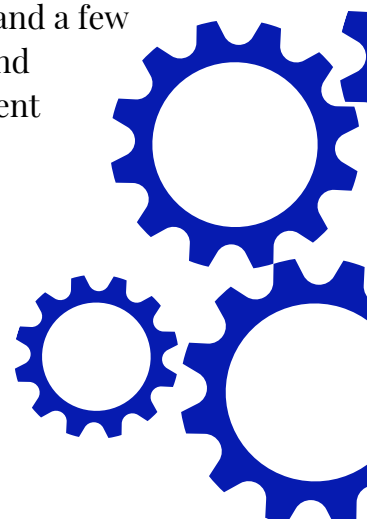
**\*Figure 2**  
Top six issue areas of organizations seeking training or support

# REGIONAL REPRESENTATION



**\*Figure 3**  
Groups served with rapid response support by region

The data and insights highlighted in this report has been compiled across Vision Change Win's community safety and security programs between January 2022 and June 2023. In this 18 month span VCW has supported nearly 500 organizations (see figure 1) and over 1,600 individuals. The organizations VCW has supported range from newly formed mutual aid groups to grassroots organizations to national capacity building organizations. These leftist organizations focus on the following issue areas most notably: Racial Justice, Black Liberation, Immigrants Rights, Prison Industrial Complex Abolition, Trans Liberation and Gender Justice (see figure 2). The "other" issue areas include and are not limited to: Reproductive Justice, Electoral Justice, Education Access, Healthcare Access, Youth organizing, Disability Justice and Labor Rights. A majority (approximately 56%) of rapid response requests came from organizations based in the Northeast and South (see figure 3). Across all of VCW programs, a majority of organizations receiving support were based in the Northeast, South and Midwest, with the rest spanning throughout the US and a few organizations outside of the US. The range of organizations, issue areas, and geographic representation inform VCW's assessment of the leftist movement security landscape.



# MOVEMENT SECURITY LANDSCAPE: TRENDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our community safety work VCW has observed that leftist movements are struggling to meet and sustain our safety needs despite the rising attacks against our communities by the Far-right. **Our left movement organizations remain largely unprepared and low capacity for safety threats because they lack the resources, infrastructure, and security consciousness to develop and maintain safety practices.** Because of this, movement-building groups tend to respond to safety threats from a reactionary, rather than a grounded place. For example, an organization may spend months planning an event/action and only begin developing security protocols a week or days prior after learning a Far-right group is planning to disrupt. This leads to an organization scrambling to develop security infrastructure without enough time to address their security gaps. Organizations should begin security planning at the same time as they start planning the event/action.

“  
THE REASON WHY [OUR  
MOVEMENTS] THINK OF  
SECURITY  
PERIODICALLY IS  
BECAUSE NOBODY  
WANTS TO THINK  
ABOUT SECURITY DAY  
TO DAY.  
”  
-SALA CYRIL  
VCW COMMUNITY  
SAFETY DIRECTOR

## Leftist Movements are Unprepared

### Lack of security protocols:

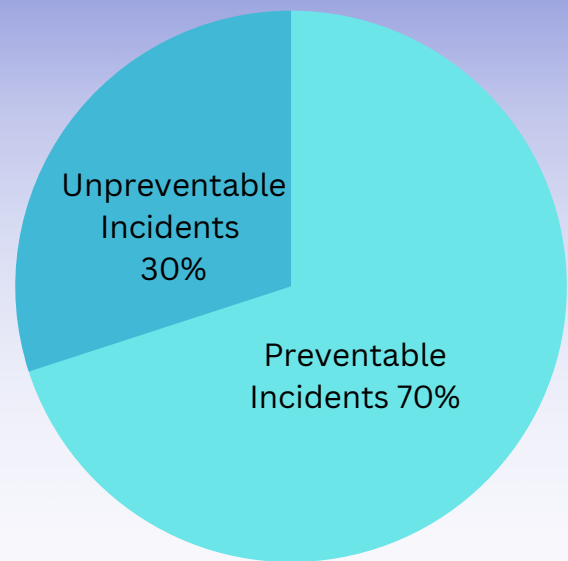
- **About half of groups attending VCW programming did not have security protocols or practices in place before attending a training.** Groups attending VCW's intensive programming were more likely to have security protocols in place (47%) compared to shorter-term workshops (15%).
- **A significant amount of organizations (90%) reaching out for rapid response support did not have security protocols in place.**

### Most community safety incidents were preventable.

- Most organizations that attend VCW's community safety training programming have experienced at least one security incident. **For a majority of organizations, these incidents could have been prevented with better security planning or training support.**



- After organizations examine their existing event safety practices, nearly all (87%) participants shared that last minute event planning contributed to one or more security gaps during the event.
- **A majority (70%) of rapid response incidents could have been prevented with better security planning or training support.**
- A substantial amount of organizations (15%) that reached out for rapid response support in anticipation of a security threat, reached out less than a week before an event/action/campaign was supposed to occur with no security planning. **This is not rapid response – this is a lack of resources and knowledge for security planning.**
- **Lack of security knowledge leads organizations and funders to over-rely on rapid response and reactive security measures.** Leftist movements need proactive security infrastructure.



**\*Figure 4**  
Preventable vs.  
Unpreventable Rapid  
Response Incidents

## Security Recommendations

- **Implement short-term, intensive security programming, and rapid response supports to movement groups to help them build capacity and better prepare.** Funding organizations that build capacity and offer training is necessary.
- **Security planning** is a key part of organizing. Security must be incorporated into all organizing efforts as leftist movements develop strategies. It should be interwoven throughout campaigns, actions, events, and organizations.
- **Deep training** through security orientations, intermittent training throughout the year, security training connected to political education, regular practice and collaboration. If woven into movement culture, this can prevent more incidents from happening.

# Leftists Movements are Low Capacity

## Lack of Security Staffing:

- **An overwhelming amount (90%) of organization's served across all VCW programs had no dedicated security staff or security-focused committees run by a combination of staff and members .** Groups attending VCW's intensive programming were more likely to have dedicated security staff (13%) or have security-focused committees run by a combination of staff and members (20%) compared to short-term workshops less than 2%). None of the organizations requesting rapid response support had security staffing in place.

## Organizations often have low capacity for security:

- A majority of groups dealing with urgent security incidents had little capacity to receive rapid response support, leading to their security concerns remaining unaddressed until the next incident. **These organizations often felt overwhelmed, had little security infrastructure, no security staffing, and were looking for solutions that did not match their need or urgency.**
- Organizations that have dedicated staffing or a committee are often navigating issues related to low capacity. **Many of these organizations have active campaigns or provide regular services to community members which can sometimes pull dedicated security staff into supporting these areas of work.**

## Security Recommendations

- **Every organization needs one - two experienced security point people.** Many organizations don't have people trained and experienced within their organizations to address the threats and share the information internally through trainings and mentorship.
- **Every organizations needs a security budget.** Increase funding for security needs. Security infrastructure needs up-to-date equipment and technology, training, and staffing. **This should be done holistically**—not just funding digital security needs or physical security needs alone.

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“SAFETY DOES NOT HAPPEN PERIODICALLY. THE INFRASTRUCTURE [FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND SECURITY] NEEDS TO BE BUILT OVER TIME AND CONSISTENTLY SO PEOPLE ARE NOT AFRAID WHEN THEY ARE FACING THREATS BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN IN PRACTICE OVER TIME. WE NEED TO BUILD CONSISTENT MOVEMENT DEFENSE AND HAVE CONSISTENT LONG-TERM PRACTICE

—EJERIS DIXON  
VCW FOUNDING DIRECTOR”

## National Safety Incident Insights

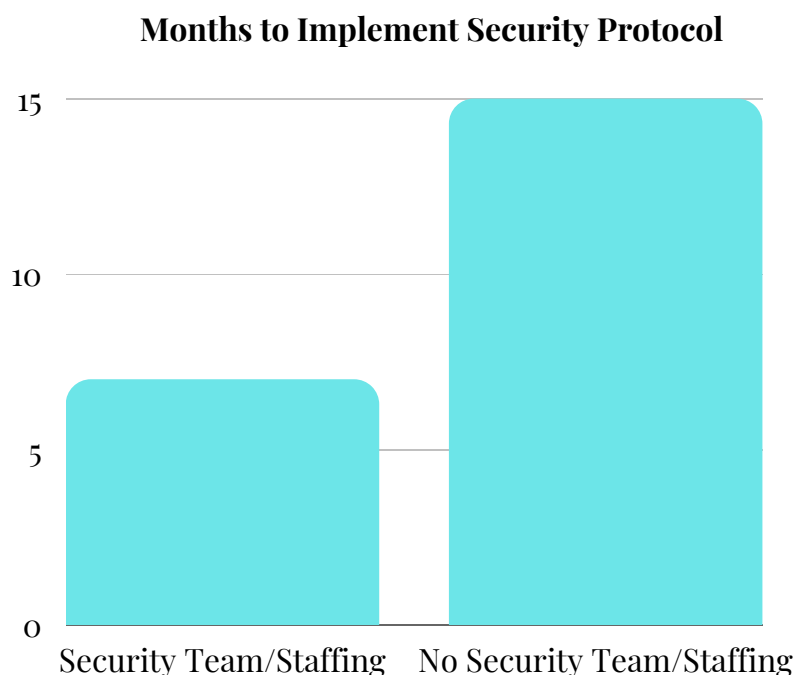
- **Following national safety incidents, attendance at VCW’s community safety programming soars.** After Roe was overturned in June 2022, attendance in July more than doubled from the previous month. After the Colorado Springs nightclub shooting in November 2022, the GIFTS December attendance more than tripled from the previous month.
- **Some organizations requesting rapid response support following a national safety incident reach out after realizing their organization does not have any security infrastructure in place.**
- Organizations dealing with urgent security incidents connected to a national safety issues often are overwhelmed, have little capacity to address safety needs, and focus on short-term incomplete solutions to meet their needs.

## Security Recommendations

- **Implement security short-term and intensive programming and rapid response supports to movement organizations to help them better prepare and build capacity.** Funding organizations that build capacity and offer training is necessary.

## Implementation of Security Protocols

- **Implementation of security protocols takes time.** Organizations with no dedicated staffing or committees usually take about twice as long (about 15 months vs 7 months) to implement new safety practices as those who do. This is often due to organizations struggling to figure out how to prioritize their protocols and a lack of clear decision making within their organizations.



- **Organizations that have implemented security protocols (especially through VCW programming) before requesting rapid response support are substantially more prepared to address the incident.** These organizations often attend rapid response sessions with a security plan, having reached out to allies for support and identified specific security needs. This leads to organizations having increased capacity to implement security recommendations quickly and effectively.

## Security Recommendations:

- **Clear decision-making within organizations:** Clear decision-making processes within an organization can support an organization in prioritizing and finalizing their implementation plan, writing new protocols, and/or training staff on current protocols.
- **Security staffing:** at least 1-2 individuals who can dedicate the time and capacity to focus on building security infrastructure within organizations
- **Consistent trainings and wrap around support:** Have organizations attend long and short-term security trainings multiple times, have them send other staff members who haven't attended the trainings before. This supports building security culture and increases security consciousness within our movements.

“WE WANT TO MOVE AWAY FROM SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON RAPID RESPONSE BECAUSE IMPLEMENTATION TAKES TIME. WE DON'T WANT TO BE RUNNING FROM FIRE TO FIRE NOT ACTUALLY BEING ABLE TO BUILD THE LONG-TERM SAFETY WORK WE NEED. IF IMPLEMENTATION TAKES TIME, LONG-TERM FUNDING IS NEEDED.”

-CHE JOHNSON-LONG, VCW COMMUNITY SAFETY AND EDUCATION COORDINATOR

## Electoral Security Landscape :

- Most (about 65%) electoral organizing groups who attend Building Our Own trainings have experienced a recent incident and have some safety practices in place. The most common incidents are harassment while canvassing before the election or at polling sites on election day. **Beyond this, electoral organizing groups generally do not have existing safety teams or infrastructure.**
- Following one of VCW's training sessions, **75% of participants shared that a lack of connection to electoral safety organizations is a key barrier to implementing safety and security infrastructure.** Participants often report during trainings that while many organizations have access to Know Your Rights training support, they lack electoral safety support. Increased communication between electoral organizers accompanied by rapid response support is key to ensuring groups are aware of increasing threats and are able to create timely safety structures to address these threats.

## Security Recommendations:

- **Organizing was never meant to be done alone.** Collaborating across organizations allows groups to have a wider reach and fill capacity gaps in security teams. It allows organizations to make more thorough risk assessments and to share threats and security concerns with one another. Healthy organizations can collaborate with other organizations that are value aligned with less concern about conflict
- **Increased communication between electoral organizers accompanied by rapid response support is key** to ensuring groups are aware of increasing threats and are able to create timely safety structures to address these threats.

## Why our movements are unprepared and low capacity:

- **Lack of security infrastructure:** A majority of organizations have been coming to VCW while an incident is happening. Often times these organizations have few if any security protocols, staff trained in security, or security teams in place. This prevents organizations from being able to proactively prepare for security incidents and quickly address incidents as they arise.
- **Lack of Long-term capacity:** Few organizations have any dedicated security staff, after receiving incident support, there's little capacity to attend trainings or develop long-term security infrastructure.
- **Overwhelm:** Often times following a security conversation or incident organizations and individuals begin to realize how many safety threats they need to address internally and externally and get overwhelmed with the amount of work that needs to happen.
- **Lack of Security Consciousness:** Our movements are struggling to talk to each other about the security threats we are moving through. Often times organizations haven't reached out to other organizations locally or within their sector to discuss incidents or find out what safety practices their organizations are implementing. Some organizations are trying out new tactics/strategies without first doing a risk assessment, especially when confronting the far-right. Without this risk assessment organizations are not developing appropriate practices and protocols for their tactics or figuring out which tactics make the most sense for their goals.

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“SAFETY DOES NOT HAPPEN PERIODICALLY. THE INFRASTRUCTURE [FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND SECURITY] NEEDS TO BE BUILT OVER TIME AND CONSISTENTLY SO PEOPLE ARE NOT AFRAID WHEN THEY ARE FACING THREATS BECAUSE THEY'VE BEEN IN PRACTICE OVER TIME. WE NEED TO BUILD CONSISTENT MOVEMENT DEFENSE AND HAVE CONSISTENT LONG-TERM PRACTICE.”

-EJERIS DIXON

# BUILDING RESILIENT AND RESPONSIVE MOVEMENTS

## How we build strong, resilient and responsive movements.

VCW's Community Safety Director Sala Cyril said it best, "building a healthy security culture and practice within organizations trains our boxers. Creating safety teams toughens the skin; digital security wraps the knuckles; community safety education strengthens the muscles; research, data and threat analysis supports hand-eye coordination; regional practice and collaboration is the sparring partner. Rapid response is like cleaning and icing a wound after a hard hit from the Right. Necessary in order to keep going. Without that attention and care the movement orgs are impaired. Fighting the Right is not possible without each component. We are training the Southpaw boxers. The Left. Holistic community safety and security allows us to train well-rounded movement boxers ready to fight the Right. We need the gym, the trainers, and the equipment to be funded. We have boxers with raw talent that are enthusiastic and driven, and their training needs to be funded. We don't need to be the security teams or the boxers, we need to build them. Train them. With that preparation, we have a chance."

## Movement Organizations Need Security Culture

An encompassing security cultures takes time, funding, and capacity to develop. With and within movement organizations, many groups often lack an overall security culture that leaves them unprepared for navigating external threats. The Leftist movement needs to build a stronger, deeper, and more prevalent security culture that is value-aligned. In collaboration with funders we can strengthen movement security culture to be resourced and sustained.

## Movement Security Needs

- **Security budget.** Security infrastructure needs up-to-date equipment, technology, and training.
- **Deep training.** Security orientations, intermittent training throughout the year, security training connected to political education, regular practice, and collaboration.
- **Mentorship.** Modeling every day practices for all staff/members, training the next tier of higher-level practitioners so the knowledge is passed on.

“THE THREATS THAT ARE COMING AT US ARE COMING FROM THE DIGITAL REALM AND THE PHYSICAL. WE DON'T GET TO CHOOSE WHICH SECURITY TOOLS WE WANT. WE NEED HOLISTIC TOOLS AND WE NEED IT BUILT IN AND EMBEDDED IN OUR ORGANIZATIONS.”

- EJERIS DIXON

- **Every organization needs one - two experienced security point people.** Many organizations don't have people trained and experienced within their groups to address the threats and share the information internally through trainings and mentorship.
- **Security planning.** As a key part of organizing, security planning must be foundational to organizational structure, protocols, campaigns, events and actions.

## Supporting Healthy Organizational Culture

- **Clear decision-making structures:** Groups who lack a clear decision-making process often struggle with security protocol implementation, writing new protocols, and/or training new staff.
- **Protocols to prevent and address conflict and grievances:** Groups who don't address internal conflict struggle to get buy-in on new safety practices because of a lack of trust within the organization.
- **Clear and embodied values:** Groups who lack clear and embodied values struggle to get collective internal engagement when trying to respond to security incidents. Group values should be stated upon entry and reviewed regularly.
- **Collaboration amongst values-aligned groups:** Organizing was never meant to be done alone. Collaborating allows groups to have a wider reach and fill capacity gaps in security teams. Healthy organizations can collaborate with other organizations that are value-aligned with less concern about conflict.

“  
 “SECURITY IS BUILT ON  
 RELATIONSHIPS”  
 —  
 - SALA CYRIL”

# FUNDER RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Fund long-term holistic security infrastructure.** Building holistic and resilient security within movement takes time, experience, and dedication. Invest in organizations and institutions that support our leftist movement to continue to grow our movement security capacity ranging from threat intelligence research to rapid response support to developing long-term security infrastructure for our movements. Organizations like Political Research Associate, Center for Constitutional Rights, Information Ecology, Highlander Research and Education Center, Nonviolent Peaceforce, and Vision Change Win.
- 2. Fund safety planning for targeted leaders.** Invest in our movement leaders, as attacks continue to target BIPOC, Women, Queer and Trans and disabled movements, our leaderful movements need support in addressing the targeted attacks from the far right directed at our movement leaders. This means supporting rapid response and safety planning initiatives.
- 3. Utilize BIPOC, Women, Queer and Trans, Disabled practitioners and make sure to center these folks in your funder strategies.** Invest in this rich generational legacy of community safety initiatives led by BIPOC , Women, Queer and Trans, and disabled communities who have created safety outside of the police and prisons for generations.
- 4. Fund electoral security strategies 1-2 years prior to major elections.** Security planning is key. Investing early provides time for leftist movements to build more robust electoral security infrastructure focused on pre, day of, and post-election day safety.
- 5. Fund organizations to hire security staff.** Organizations need at least 1-2 security-oriented staff to prioritize the organization's safety needs, ranging from providing risk assessments to the development of security protocols to ongoing training.
- 6. Fund Security teams.** Organizations should have robust and sustainable security teams that match their organization's needs and values, so they can avoid the use of external militaristic security teams for support.

