

Assessing Risk

A mini toolkit to support left movement groups in building risk assessments to address safety threats. This mini toolkit is the first part of a series of resources on building organizational safety plans.

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How to use this mini toolkit:

This mini toolkit is intended to guide left movement groups through building a risk assessment for an event, action, or for your work more broadly. Risk assessment is the first step in organizational safety planning.

To get the most out of this toolkit, groups should set aside time to meet and review the toolkit prompts together, as well as time to research question prompts that may require more background information.

There is no set amount of time needed to complete this toolkit, though groups who are new to risk assessments should plan on at least three (3) hours of meeting time and about five (5) hours of research time. Groups who have previously developed risk assessments may need less time. Groups who have existed for over five (5) years may need more time.

What you'll need:

- At least three to seven (3-7) leaders of your group (fewer people might mean spending more time gathering contextual or historical information about your group while more people might mean more time for conversation)
- Any documented safety threats your group has experienced in the past
- Any documented safety support your group has received in the past
- Something to write on/brainstorm with collectively
- A secure place to take and store notes from your conversations

Definitions



Adversary: People or groups that can impact our ability to do our work. Ex: Groups organizing against your group's goals, police, antagonistic politicians, etc.



Assets: Information we are protecting, wouldn't want to be made public, and/or wouldn't want in the hands of our adversaries. Ex: strategy, private/confidential/vulnerable information on members or staff.



Capacity: Anything that increases security or safety. Ex: skills, resources, community/partnered organizational support.



Vulnerability: Any factor that makes it more likely for harm to occur. Ex: an unaddressed internal conflict between members of a safety team may make it more likely the team communicates poorly.



Threat: Types of harm, violence, or damage. Ex: harassment, intimidation, threats, revocation of non-profit 501c3 status, loss of funding, etc.



Resources: Anything that increases security or safety. Ex: personal abilities, community support, organizational support, and more.

What is a Risk Assessment?

The first step in developing a safety plan is to assess what kind of risk or harm is most likely to occur. A risk assessment surveys the current political landscape to assess conditions so that groups may develop a grounded understanding of which threats are likely and which ones are not.

Why are risk assessments important for left movement groups?

Risk assessments allow groups to focus safety practices on most likely and most imminent security threats. Understanding political trends can create more effective safety protocols and prevent harm.

A note on risk assessments and trauma:

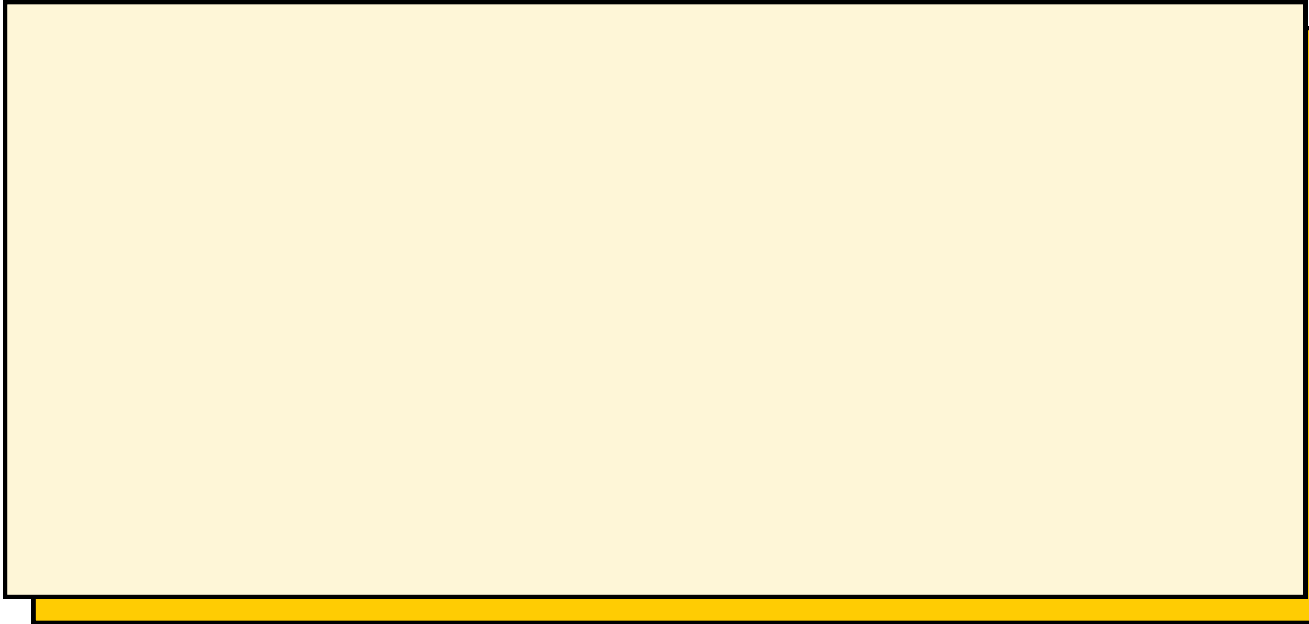
Many of us have ways of addressing safety that have supported us through, or even saved us from harm in the past. These ways can include fight, flight, freeze, appease, or other forms of disassociation. These are sometimes referred to as trauma responses. While these responses may have helped us in the past, they can become stuck in the past responding to each current threat the same way. They also tend to focus on individual safety, sometimes missing opportunities for collective safety structures. Risk assessments tend to more accurately measure likelihood than trauma responses.

As organizers we want to have many tools for addressing harm in today's current changing political landscape. Risk assessments help us to respond collectively to what we assess is likely to happen, rather than individually from our limited trauma responses.

Getting Started

When building a risk assessment, it can be useful to include the right folks in the conversation. Use the prompts below to identify who should inform this risk assessment.

Who holds key information about your group's safety threats?



How will these key information holders inform your risk assessment?



Mapping Adversaries

Adversaries (also known as opposition) are people or groups that are organizing against your group's goals and can impact your ability to do your work. Ex: police, antagonistic politicians, far right groups, etc. Use the following prompts to map out your adversaries and share your answers in the boxes below.

Who are your adversaries? What do they have the power to do?

What do your adversaries care about? Who has power over them?

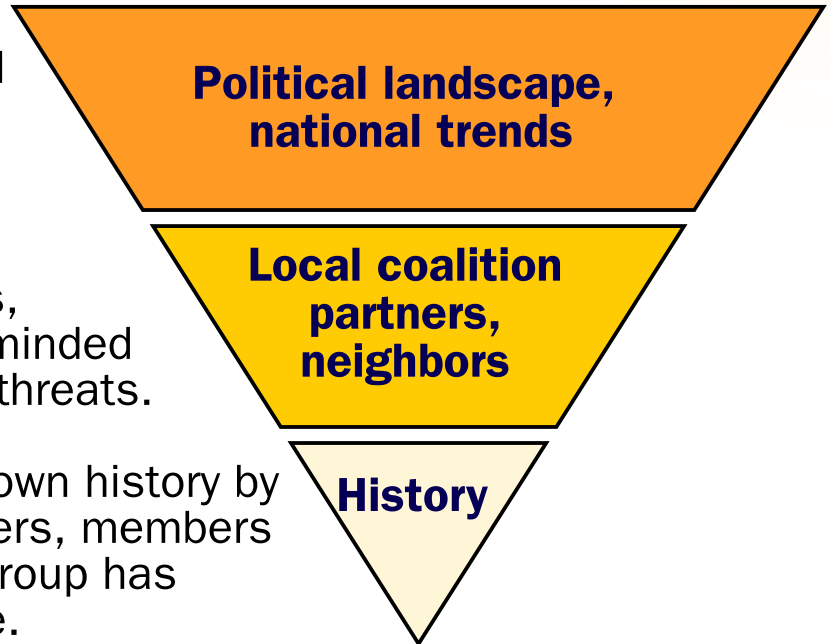
Measuring Likelihood

There are many safety threats but because we are often working with limited resources, people power, and time, we must focus our energy on addressing only the most likely safety threats.

Start to measure likelihood by first researching potential threats at the national level (searching for keywords on national news media).

Next, talk to local organizers, coalition partners, and like minded businesses about potential threats.

Lastly, look at your group's own history by talking to former group leaders, members and staff to assess if your group has addressed this threat before.



Take some time to brainstorm likely threats below:

A large, empty rectangular box with a yellow border, intended for brainstorming likely threats.

Measuring Risk Matrix

Developing a list of threats and adversaries may feel like an overwhelming task with the potential for a long list. To ease the challenges of this exercise, consider prioritizing using the risk/threat matrix below. Start by taking the threats you brainstormed on the previous page, and entering them into the matrix below.

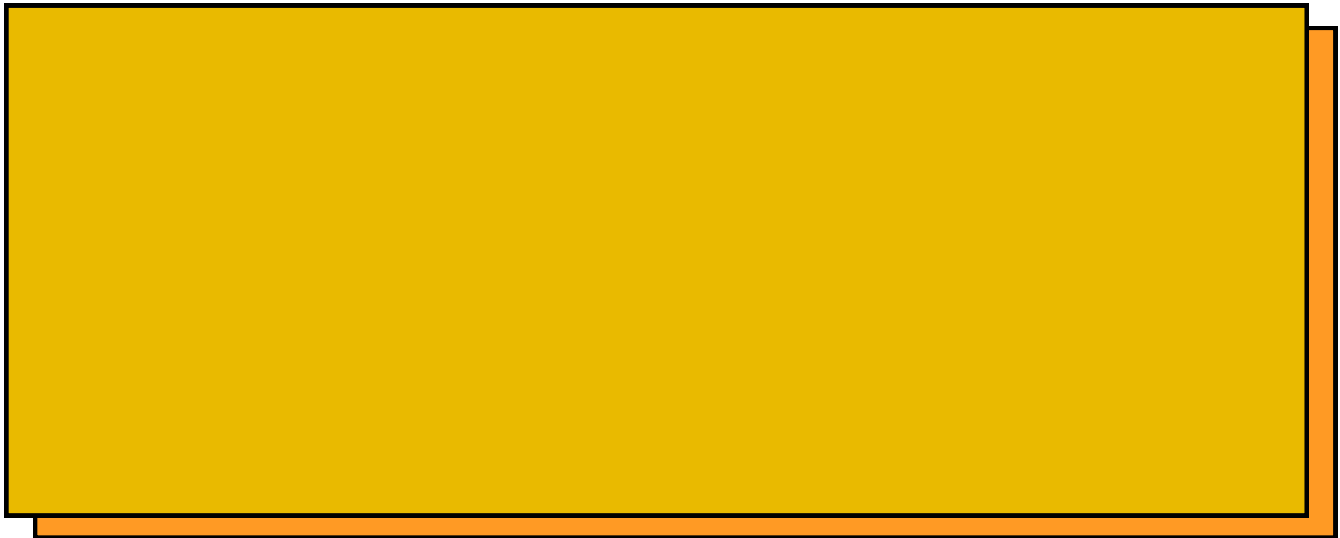
Some threats may be very likely to occur but their impact on an organization is low. Others may be less likely but have a lot of potential for harm if they do occur. The combination of likelihood and impact can help your group prioritize which threats develop protocols for. Risks that are both high impact and high likelihood should be prioritized.

Impact					
5 - Very High					
4 - High					
3 - Medium					
2 - Low					
1 - Very Low					
Likelihood	1 - Very Low	2 - Low	3 - Medium	4 - High	5 - Very High

Prioritizing Risks

Likely risks are usually are grouped in three categories: police, internal conflict, and external (ie: far right groups, anti's, etc.) Other risks may come up in your research period (weather, traffic, etc.). Take your answers from the previous page and identify three to ten (3-10) most likely risks. Use the boxes below to identify which threats you'll prioritize safety planning for first.

High / Very High Likelihood & High / Very High Impact:
Safety Planning First Priority



Medium / High Likelihood & Medium / High Impact:
Safety Planning First Priority





Thank you for dedicating the time, energy, and resources into building an organizational risk assessment. Your work contributes to the safety of your group, and the broader left movement. Every choice we make to build safety today makes a safer, brighter world for future generations of organizers and change makers.

For more Safety Planning resources, trainings, or rapid response support, visit us at www.visionchangewin.org

Next up

Organizational Safety Planning: Part 2

Building an Inventory

This mini toolkit is the first part of a series of resources on building organizational safety plans. This mini toolkit was designed by Emmy Esquerre. Pieces of this mini toolkit have been adapted from Vision Change Win's Get in Formation Toolkit, the original drafts of which were written by Ejeris Dixon with contributions from Che Johnson-Long, Krystal Portalatin, Ang Hadwin, YaliniDream, and Lindsey Charles.