

# Electoral Safety Toolkit

*A Practical Guide for 2024 Elections and Beyond*



# Table of Contents

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Introduction</b>                   | 1  |
| • About Vision Change Win             | 2  |
| • Why this Toolkit?                   | 2  |
| • How to Use this Toolkit?            | 2  |
| • VCW Electoral Safety Values         | 4  |
| • What is Electoral Safety?           | 6  |
| ◦ High Capacity Sample Timeline       | 8  |
| ◦ Low Capacity Sample Timeline        | 9  |
| <b>Chapter 1: Before Election Day</b> | 10 |
| • Canvassing Safety Tips              | 11 |
| • Building a Safety Team              | 12 |
| • Recruiting Your Team                | 13 |
| • Security Team Vetting Tips          | 15 |
| • Developing Safety Protocols         | 17 |
| • Training Your Team                  | 19 |
| <b>Chapter 2: On Election Day</b>     | 20 |
| • Communication Safety Tips           | 21 |
| • Before You De-escalate              | 22 |
| <b>Chapter 3: After Election Day</b>  | 24 |
| • Debriefing with your Team           | 25 |
| • Follow Up and Closure Safety Tips   | 26 |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>               | 27 |

# INTRODUCTION

## ELECTORAL SAFETY TOOLKIT

Welcome to the Electoral Safety Toolkit! For many left movement groups, an impending national election means increased safety threats. Whether your group is door-knocking, protesting, or coordinating mutual aid, building safety infrastructure is critical to protect our communities. In this Toolkit you'll find best practices, templates, and questions to consider in the months leading up to a national election in the U.S.



Figure I.1



Figure I.2



Figure I.3

## About Vision Change Win

Vision Change Win Consulting (VCW) is a Black-led team of queer and trans people of color with between 10 and 25 years of experience within social justice movements, working to support organizations in fully manifesting their missions, visions, and values. Founded in 2014, VCW's goal is to support social justice organizations to become more effective, aligned, and liberatory. In this current political climate, Vision Change Win operates as both a strategic partner—offering support to social justice movements and leaders—as well as a movement laboratory, creating innovative programming to fill the gaps that we see based on our analysis of the needs of movement organizations.



More questions about our programs? [CLICK HERE](#) 

## Why this Toolkit?

In recent years, more organizers have requested training support from Vision Change Win. This rise began in the lead-up to the 2020 election, and the need continued to grow during the 2022 midterm election season. These organizers continue to navigate increased threats of violence, especially from the right wing. We anticipate increased demand for this work related to the upcoming 2024 elections and beyond.

## How to use this Toolkit?

This toolkit is for progressive organizers to strengthen their community safety practices to prevent and address violence or harm that may impact their organization. It is especially designed for people in the following roles:



**Community Organizers**



**Electoral Canvassers**



**Electoral Strategists**



**Poll Workers**



**Election Safety Team Members**



**Election Defense Workers**



**Funders of electoral work**



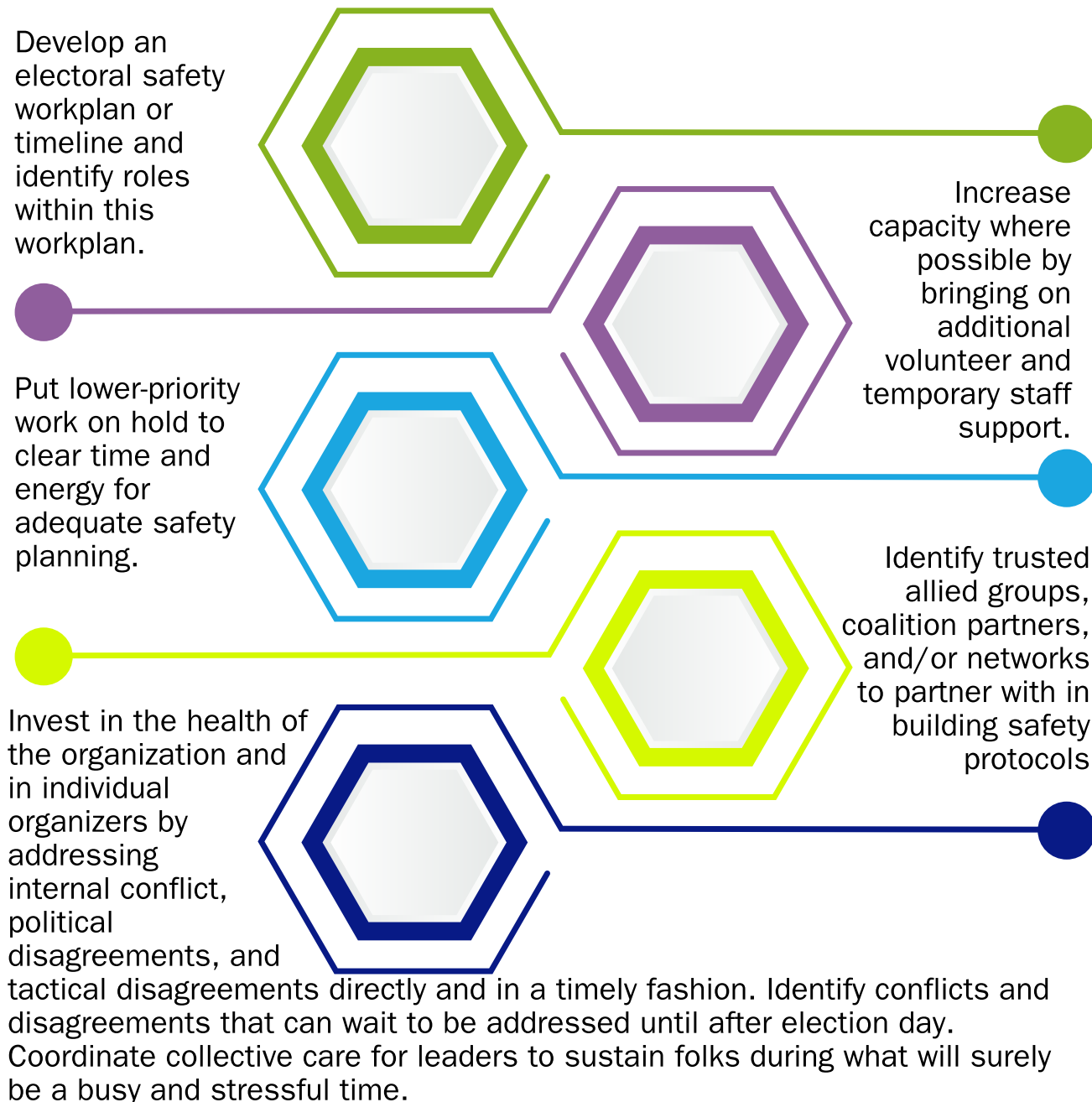
**Those coordinating electoral work at the state or national level**

This toolkit is meant to be a guidepost for best practices, templates, and/or questions to consider within the six months before a national election in the U.S. Groups will get the most out of this toolkit when they pair it with electoral safety training.



For more information on electoral safety training, visit [www.visionchangewin.org](http://www.visionchangewin.org)

Additionally, groups will be best situated to implement strong safety practices when they undertake and prioritize these activities:



# Vision Change Win Electoral Safety Values



Vision Change Win comes from a decades-long legacy of community-based practitioners. We practice the following electoral safety values:

## **Stay ready, get ready**

We believe in staying ready. This means preparing for safety threats by making time for dedicated safety planning within our organizations so that we are more likely to have what we need to address threats as they emerge. When possible, plan ahead and make safety work a part of regular programmatic planning. This way, when the unexpected happens and we need to move quickly, we have preparation from past elections to build from.

## **Local leadership**

We believe on-the-ground local leadership is most knowledgeable about safety threats. When offering support in communities we're not from or don't live in, we follow the lead of local folks who are most directly impacted by safety threats. When folks come in from other places, local leadership should be recognized as the top of the chain of command. This approach is clear and explicit so that everyone knows who to take direction from, and directions across teams do not conflict.

## **Rooted in abolitionist values and movements with histories of resisting state violence**

We see building power as an abolitionist strategy, and people build power through electoral work, through policy work, and through community work that's outside the state. We know the U.S. is filled with oppressive institutions and that we need to build the power of oppressed communities to self-govern outside of these oppressive institutions. We often support progressive movement groups who do not believe in abolition; however, all of the community safety skills in our trainings are meant to be practiced outside of the state (i.e., without any form of involvement or collaboration with law enforcement, including local police, FBI, Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, etc.).

## **Disability Justice informed**

We do not exclude disabled community members or group leaders from our safety plans or safety teams. We reject the ableist myth that security work should be held by only the able-bodied. We make security accessible for all bodies, and adaptive to changing conditions.

### **Leadership of women and femmes**

We lift up the leadership, expertise, and specialized skills that Women and Femmes bring to safety work. We reject sexist, misogynistic, and transphobic practices and behaviors within our safety teams and practices. Those who experience gender-based violence are experts in addressing it, and we learn from the brilliance of these experts to address and intervene in gender-based violence and all forms of harm.

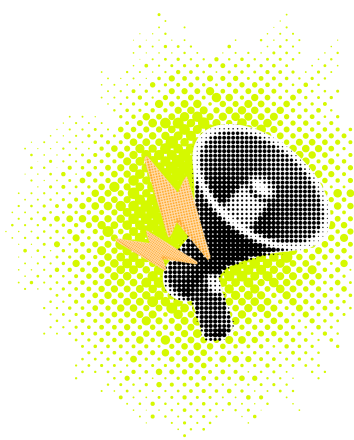
### **No shortcuts to on the ground experience**

We believe that community safety is deep work that takes time to learn. Practice is the only way to gain and improve community safety skills. We believe in rigorous training and that community safety trainers should not only be familiar with the curriculum but must also be able to answer tough questions based on their lived experience.



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## What is Electoral Safety?



“We have to build our own power. We have to win every single political office we can, where we have a majority of black people... The question for black people is not when is the white man going to give us our rights, or when is he going to give us good education for our children, or when is he going to give us jobs. If the white man gives you anything – just remember when he gets ready he will take it right back. We have to take for ourselves.”

– Fannie Lou Hammer

**Electoral safety** is a collection of community safety practices used to protect electoral organizing projects and electoral organizers from safety threats such as verbal and physical harassment, digital attacks, intimidation, and other forms of violence. These electoral organizing projects can include canvassing or outreach efforts, get out the vote events, rallies and demonstrations, community forums, campaign events, and more.

**Election protection** is a set of organizing, legal, and campaign strategies used to ensure that all voters have equal opportunity to vote and have that vote count. Election protection strategies intervene in and prevent voter

suppression tactics like restrictions on mail-in voting, voter and community intimidation, voter ID requirements, criminalizing election officials, restrictions on line warming, and more.

**Together, electoral safety and election protection** can work in tandem to ensure voting access and community safety for organizers, voters, and their broader communities.



Figure I.4

## How to use this Toolkit



The toolkit is broken into three sections: Before Election Day, on Election Day, and after Election Day. Because we know that safety threats increase as we move closer to Election Day, we strongly encourage progressive movement groups to consider safety planning as soon as possible. Safety infrastructure takes time to develop. The next two pages contain a few sample timelines based on your group's capacity for building your safety and security infrastructure before a major election.



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# High Capacity Sample Timeline



This sample timeline is for groups who have a regular safety planning practice, have begun safety planning at least six months before the election, or have dedicated or increased capacity to implement safety practices.

| Timeline                                       | Electoral Safety Goals                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Toolkit Reference      |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Six months before Election Day</b>          | <u>Research potential threats:</u> Talk to allied groups, coalition partners, and national researchers to best understand the current threat landscape. Identify a security team coordinator.                                            | <b>pp. 11 - 14</b>     |
| <b>Five months before Election Day</b>         | <u>Take inventory:</u> Survey your current safety and security infrastructure, including existing safety practices, skills within your team, available resources, and funding.                                                           | <b>pp. 17 &amp; 18</b> |
| <b>Four months before Election Day</b>         | <u>Develop or update safety infrastructure:</u> Build a budget that reflects anticipated safety and security needs. Craft workplans around major dates. Consider bringing on staff, consultant, and/or volunteer support.                | <b>pp. 17 &amp; 18</b> |
| <b>Three months before Election Day</b>        | <u>Recruit safety team members:</u> Build your safety team with community members and member-leaders you know and trust. Reach out to coalition partners, networks, and allied groups to fill role gaps.                                 | <b>pp. 12 - 16</b>     |
| <b>Two to three months before Election Day</b> | <u>Develop or update safety protocols and vetting practices:</u> Identify likely safety threats and develop safety protocols to address these threats. Develop an agreed-upon process of vetting current and new organizational members. | <b>pp. 17 - 18</b>     |
| <b>One month before Election Day</b>           | <u>Train safety team, staff, and volunteers:</u> Use safety protocols to practice intervening in likely scenarios with your safety team members. Fine-tune protocols based on practice, and identify and address potential gaps.         | <b>p. 19</b>           |
| <b>Election Day!</b>                           | <u>It's go time!</u> Bring your best self to Election Day by showing up rested, hydrated, and well-fed. Be in consistent communication with team members, organizational leaders, and coalition partners to remain informed.             | <b>pp. 21 - 23</b>     |
| <b>One to four weeks after Election Day</b>    | <u>Wrap up:</u> After necessary rest and recuperation, close out member and volunteer roles with exit evaluations and exit vetting. Debrief with safety teams and identify areas of growth.                                              | <b>pp. 24 - 25</b>     |

## Low Capacity Sample Timeline

This sample timeline is for groups who don't have a regular safety planning practice, or have begun safety planning less than four months before the election.

| Timeline                                     | Electoral safety goals                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Toolkit Reference  |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Four months before Election Day</b>       | <u>Research potential threats:</u> Talk to allied organizations, coalition partners, and national researchers to best understand the current threat landscape. Identify a security team coordinator.                                     | <b>pp. 11 - 14</b> |
| <b>Three months before Election Day</b>      | <u>Take inventory:</u> Survey your current safety and security infrastructure, including existing safety practices, skills within your team, available resources, and funding.                                                           | <b>pp. 17 - 18</b> |
| <b>Two months before Election Day</b>        | <u>Develop or update safety protocols and vetting practices:</u> Identify likely safety threats and develop safety protocols to address these threats. Develop an agreed-upon process of vetting current and new organizational members. | <b>pp. 17 - 18</b> |
| <b>One to two months before Election Day</b> | <u>Recruit safety team members:</u> Build your safety team with community members and member-leaders you know and trust. Reach out to coalition partners, networks, and allied groups to fill role gaps.                                 | <b>pp. 12 - 16</b> |
| <b>One month before Election Day</b>         | <u>Train safety team, staff, and volunteers:</u> Use safety protocols to practice intervening in likely scenarios with your safety team members. Fine-tune protocols based on practice, and identify and address potential gaps.         | <b>p. 19</b>       |
| <b>Election Day</b>                          | <u>It's go time!</u> Bring your best self to election day by showing up rested, hydrated, and well-fed. Be in consistent communication with team members, organizational leaders, and coalition partners to remain informed.             | <b>pp. 21 - 23</b> |
| <b>One to four weeks after Election Day</b>  | <u>Wrap up:</u> After necessary rest and recuperation, close out member and volunteer roles with exit evaluations and exit vetting. Debrief with safety teams and identify areas of growth.                                              | <b>pp. 24 - 25</b> |

# CHAPTER 1

## BEFORE ELECTION DAY

Stay ready so you don't have to get ready. Safety practices get stronger the more time we take to implement them. So don't wait until the last minute to get your safety plan together. Check out our sample timelines on pages eight and nine for suggestions on how to build a six-month or four-month electoral safety plan. Use this section for safety tips before Election Day.



Figure 1.1

# Canvassing Safety Tips



1. **Test your Turf.** When canvassing in a new area, visit the area beforehand. Note places where there is poor lighting, broken or no sidewalk, or light pedestrian traffic. Also note any community presence. Is this an area where residents are out on their porches or stoops? Are there political or candidate signs displayed? Do community members have a culture of saying hello to passersby? Notice those who seem friendly and those who don't.



2. **Have a meet-up spot.** Map out and visit businesses that will be open at the time and day you plan to canvas to get a sense of potential safe havens in case of an emergency. Note businesses that are friendly and ones that are not so canvassing teams are prepared.



3. **Buddy-up.** Always hit the doors in groups of two or more. Avoid door knocking solo, especially in areas you're less familiar with.



4. **Check-in with your crew.** Before heading out to canvas, have a conversation with your crew about how to best support each other if things get uncomfortable. How would you want to be supported if someone is argumentative or threatens harm? Consider making a signal to wrap up the conversation and leave literature.



5. **Debrief. Document. Decide.** After canvassing, discuss any incidents with your canvassing team (no incident is too small!). Debrief how you supported each other. Which tactics worked well? Which ones didn't? Write down each incident in detail and share documentation with your organization. Decide whether to canvass in the area again in the future.



## Building a Safety Team:

A safety team's role is to reduce harm, violence, arrests, and harassment so community members are able to vote. Safety team members should not play additional roles while they are on the safety team. They serve as a buffer between community members and people who may cause harm.

### Safety Team Roles

- Tactical team: This team consists of a security coordinator, program point person, and a police negotiator. Tactical decides on security protocols and usually makes major decisions on the day-of.
- Security coordinator: The point person of a security team. Makes decisions on formation, de-escalation tactics, and participates in tactical team decisions. Sometimes trains team.
- Police negotiator (PN): The designated person to interact with police, show permits, and communicate between tactical and police. Generally the role of the PN is to delay police interference and anticipate potential arrests. **For poll support it's important the police negotiator has basic election "know your rights" training.**
- De-escalators: These are the eyes and ears of a security team. All de-escalators should have some training in verbal de-escalation. Some de-escalators may be trained to intervene in physical violence, or use physical de-escalation tactics.

### Useful roles outside the safety team

- Legal support: A lawyer who is on-call (and off-site) to advocate for the release of anyone who is arrested during the action.
- Legal observers: A team who records all police activity and DOES NOT intervene in physical or verbal incidents. Usually wears matching hats or shirts to distinguish them from the security team.
- Medics: People with first aid or EMT training who can support anyone with emergent medical needs and injuries.
- Home base: A person who is off-site, holds key information such as emergency contacts and is available to support the tactical team with anything that can or should be done from off-site. Additionally, this person can help the team with navigation, monitoring social media or monitoring the news for relevant information.
- Hype squad: These folks' job is to keep the energy up, play music, sing and dance, lead chants, engage with people in line, etc.

## Recruiting Your Team



Safety teams do important and sacred work. The responsibility to maintain loving discipline in service of our communities is an honor. The standards for safety team members are high, sometimes higher than for other volunteers. Because of this, it is important to recruit safety team members with care. Recruit first from your pool of most trusted member-leaders. When building out your team, reach out to coalitions, networks, and other organizational partners for support filling roles. Regional and national organizations will often send out-of-town volunteers to a place to support on-the-ground groups during a big election. Especially when building a safety team composed of both out-of-town folks and local folks, it's important to make sure each member is clear on their role, others' roles, and what likely threats the team as a whole can address. Consider recruiting team members who can move into a role at the last minute in case other team members are unavailable or in case of emergencies.

Here are qualities to look for:

- No strangers
- People whose intentions you understand
- People who represent the organization and are accountable to the community
- Familiarity with de-escalation and consent
- Willing to agree to the temporary security team hierarchy and can take direction from it
- Ability to work well with others
- Demonstrated leadership capacity
- Ability to maintain confidentiality
- Ability to get arrested

**Vetting Safety Teams** Vetting is a process that verifies safety team members' skill level, compatibility with the rest of the team, and identity/intentions for joining the team. Vetting is a decades-old left movement practice that provides a layer of protection for the organization against infiltration, bad actors, and folks who may be a bad fit for the team. When vetting is new to an organization, it can sometimes be perceived as exclusivity or even cliquishness. To build an effective and transparent vetting system, vetting practices should be used for everyone on a team, even folks you may already know.



**Vetting Methods** How you vet largely relies on a few factors:

- 1) What sorts of threats are you anticipating your team will address?
- 2) What is your capacity?
- 3) How big is your team and/or how many folks on your team are from out of town?

Here are some different ways to vet people:

- One-on-ones: Meet with each potential safety team member and ask them a short list of questions about their skills, experience, and reasons for volunteering.
- Vouching: Ask each potential safety team member to share references or people who can vouch for their organizing work. References can speak to a safety team member's: years in movement work, organizing skills, community safety skills, etc.
- Survey: In a time crunch vetting questions and reference requests can be sent out to potential safety team members in a survey. Special care should be made to collect and file answers in a digitally secure way.
- If you decide to not work with someone because of a concern raised in the vetting process, make sure you document the decision.
- To prepare for closing out well after Election Day, be sure to keep a list of everyone you've brought on and what information and accounts have been shared with them (for more on this, see the "Follow-up and Closure Safety Tips" section). This includes not just safety team folks but also seasonal or temporary volunteers, canvassers, and members.

### **Onboarding safety seam members**

- Track logins and access points: As new seasonal or temporary supporters are brought on (after they've been vetted), write down which supporter receives access to what information, such as access to databases, voter information, social media accounts, etc. When possible, create temporary logins with a timed expiration date. And don't forget to track who has been given keys to office space, filing cabinets, storage rooms, or any other physical space.
- Gather contact info: Seasonal or temporary supporters should share contact information including a personal email and/or phone number in case you need to get ahold of them after they've left their temporary role.
- Control access to information: Develop clear guidelines on who should have access to sensitive information and when. Never share sensitive information with someone before they are vetted.

# Security Team Vetting Tips



**Challenge assumptions:** We're in the midst of frightening times, and within frightening times, oppressive assumptions can show up. Don't use this political moment to fall into the trap of assuming that only masculine, tall, able-bodied, cis, straight, or aggressive people are the best security people. Sometimes aggressive folks don't listen, or don't take direction well. Remember that we can co-create safety outside of these assumptions.



**No new folks:** Safety threats against left movement groups increase in the two-four months before a national election. During the two-four months before an election left movement groups also tend to have an increase of new members and supporters. This can open up groups to potential infiltration. As such, this is not the time to add new people into your security team. We know that most groups have limited security capacity, and we encourage you to form teams with coalition and organizational partners.



**Give people roles outside of security:** While new folks shouldn't have security roles, you can involve them in activities like outreach, mutual aid, attending actions, and see how they show up in these spaces. Dedicated commitment to your organization should be a requirement for a security role.



**Observation:** Some say how a person does one thing is how they do everything. You can assess a person's ability to uphold organizational principles and to be accountable to security culture by how they've done other things. From what you or their references have seen, do they fulfill their commitments? Do they receive and internalize feedback well? Are they insightful and observant? Do they maintain confidentiality? Are they always in conflict? Do they gossip?



**Do Your Research on Folks:** It's important to check on whether people are who they say they are. Some organizations do formal background checks (not about a person's criminal record but around this verification), others have more informal methods. Ask around about people. For example, did they say they came from California from a particular organization? Ask someone you know in that organization what their experience was of the person. Bring up any concerns directly, because a lot of harm can result from rumors that someone is unsafe.

A key part of safety and security is ensuring you have a clear, principled process to address concerns about people. It's also important to recognize that formal background checks get tricky for folks who've had name changes, or who have private information about themselves that they'd like to stay private.



**Use Your Gut:** It's important to listen to your instincts if something feels off or if someone makes you uncomfortable. Is this person asking unnecessary questions? Are they obsessed with getting access to sensitive projects and information? Are they trying to advance quickly within the organization or get involved in many different areas at once? When these things happen, your gut will often tell you.



**Taking direction:** Security is inherently about taking direction and giving direction. To ensure that your team is functional, you must confirm that people can take direction, listen to and internalize feedback, and give feedback with discernment. Do they always want to be in charge? Do they know when to bring things up (i.e., in the debrief, not at the event or in response to a request from the team lead)?



**Formal Conversations:** It's important to have formal conversations for clarity when vetting people for security roles, the same way you should when people join organizations. Ask people why they are interested in security and what connected experiences they have; talk through the need to adhere to a chain of command, and whether they understand the risks they will be taking on. This is also a chance to give observations and feedback on whether or not the person has shown up as principled and accountable in their involvement so far.

## Developing Safety Protocols



**Risk Assessment:** The first step in developing protocols is to survey the current political landscape to assess conditions so that you can develop a grounded understanding of what kind of risks and threats you are facing, what harms are most likely to occur, and how impactful those harms would be. This allows you to focus your protocols on the most important security threats.

Every election season is different, but we have found that the two to six months before and the two to four months directly after a major election tend to see an increase in safety threats to left movement groups. Understanding these political trends can help create more effective safety protocols and prevent harm. This requires doing a bit of research.

- **Measuring likelihood:** There are many electoral safety threats, but because we are often working with limited resources, people power, and time, it can help our capacity by prioritizing 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 history by talking to former group leaders, members, and staff to assess if your group has addressed this threat before.
- **Gauging impact:** Some threats may be very likely to occur but their impact on an organization or its people is low. Others may be less likely but have a lot of potential for harm if they do occur (e.g., an angry person with a weapon at a polling place). The combination of likelihood and impact can help your group prioritize which threats to develop protocols for.
- **Background:** Research voting laws regarding handing out food, distributing materials, what kind of sound is allowed, what permits may be needed, whether you can set up chairs, etc. Check out the location and look for security guards, exits, and nearby businesses. Note the nearest police precincts and nearest hospitals. Ask other local groups and leaders about previous election community safety successes and challenges.
- **Mapping risk:** After doing research, start to develop a map of where likely safety threats such as police presence, political opposition, and agitated community/challenging community dynamics may arise. Note any other environmental or situational factors such as weather, body fatigue, etc.

**Protocols** give your security team direction when the threats you have planned for are realized. They guide you through likely scenarios so that there's agreement on what security should and shouldn't do to provide an appropriate buffer between community members and potential harm.



### Consider the following in developing protocols:

#### What are the most likely harms/threats ?

These usually are grouped in three categories (police/arrests, internal conflict, and conflict with external people/political opposition) Other threats may come up in your research (weather, traffic, etc.). Identify between about three and ten most likely threats based on your research. If applicable, rank them by level of impact on your organization.

#### How would security address them ?

For each threat, decide how security should intervene. Keep in mind security goals, the size of your team, and everything you have learned in your research. Identify when to call on legal support and other auxiliary support teams.

#### Develop a regular training and practice schedule ?

Training and scenario practice should occur at least once a year so that staff, organizational leaders, and participating members can get hands-on experience in implementing your protocols.

#### Evaluation and updates to protocols ?

Review your protocols as conditions change, new staff or members are brought on, or leadership changes.

# Training Your Team



Once you've built your team and developed protocols, it's time to train together. Training is an opportunity for your team to introduce themselves to each other, discuss protocols, and practice commonly used interventions. Training is also a great place to do a final assessment of how the team works together, make last minute role changes, and identify role gaps.

## **Team Building**

A safety team is most effective when team members know and trust one another. Start with an activity to break the ice and allow team members to get to know each other. Discuss individual skills, access needs, and any other information your team members might need to know about each other to work well together.

## **Practice**

Once the team is familiar with the safety protocols, practice interventions using likely safety threat scenarios. Running scenarios may identify gaps in protocols, additional safety team roles that are needed, or changes you should make to existing roles. Develop opportunities for trust-building practices to build familiarity amongst team members and foster healthy team cohesion.

## **Roles**

Review safety team roles and explain how each role supports the team. Go over the decision-making structure based on roles and order of arrest. Take time to answer any questions.

## **Contingency Plans**

Discuss any likely scenarios that may significantly change the day-of plan such as larger-than-expected police presence, intense weather changes, or changes to the team's capacity. Review meet-up locations and communication methods if the team is separated.

# CHAPTER 2

## ON ELECTION DAY

Today is the day! Whether you're bringing joy to the polls, coordinating a polling place safety team, doing outreach in your community, mobilizing or rallying, or staying on freedom with ongoing political work, safety threats are bound to increase today. Use this section for tips on Election Day safety practices.



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.1



Figure 2.3



## Communication Safety Tips

Building strong communication and practicing before the big day will ensure that your group is able to respond to safety incidents swiftly and intentionally. Your communications plan depends on clear safety protocols and safety team roles, so develop those first (see chapter 2 for safety tips before election day). Then you can move to developing your communications plan. Here are recommendations to keep your comms ready.

A good plan considers:

- What is being communicated: Is this sensitive information?
- How urgent is it? (Note that some information will probably be urgent for some members of the team and not others.)
- Who needs to take action? When do they need to act (immediately versus in a few hours or days)?
- Who needs to be informed after the fact?



Make sure folks are informed: Decide on a communications plan and make sure you use it! Each member of your team should be aware of what information they will receive and what information they might not receive, as well as what information they should share and with whom.

How to communicate: There are tons of communication tools to pick from, each with strengths and weaknesses. Decide on the one that's right for you based on your group's needs. Fill out this grid to help you think through your decision:

| Comms tools                         | Strengths | Weaknesses | Considerations |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|----------------|
| Walkie talkies                      |           |            |                |
| Signal                              |           |            |                |
| Whatsapp                            |           |            |                |
| Low data phones<br>(burner phones)* |           |            |                |
| SMS Texting                         |           |            |                |

\*Burner phones can sometimes be traced back to their purchaser or user if: the phone was purchased with a credit card, the applications on the phone are linked to personal profiles with identifying information, and/or a user shares identifying information through messages sent on the phone. To mitigate these risks, consider entering minimal personal information on burner phones. Low-data phones can be intentionally kept free of information that could pose risks if confiscated by law enforcement.

# Before You De-escalate



## **Know Yourself**

- Consider ahead of time: What are your strengths, what are your limits, what are your triggers, how do you show up and care for yourself in tense situations?
- How will you stay centered when de-escalating? What are ways for you to be in the moment, be in your body, and show up fully? We all have different practices and traditions we can draw from; plan to use what works for you.
- Let go of ego or the need to be right; intervening to prevent harm ultimately comes from a place of care.

## **Plan Ahead**

- Buddy up! When canvassing or doing poll support work it's important to be in pairs so that you have de-escalation support.
- Know your people! Having an understanding of who you will be interacting with can help you to prepare (and also might effect who you send to canvas which areas).

**Assess:** Effective de-escalation requires strong assessment. To best understand what the safety threat is, and what de-escalation tool will interrupt potential harm, first assess the situation.

- What/who are the threats/risks? Consider the big picture before moving or stepping in. Which factors may impact how you choose to intervene? Examples: cops, disgruntled community members, political opponents, weather, etc.
- What are your assets? What can I use to help me? Examples water/snacks/swag (when available/legal), chairs, other folks, etc.
- Who are potential allies? Who is noticing what I'm noticing? Who might support me? Examples: friendly poll workers, nearby businesses, foot traffic in the area, etc.
- What are exit points? How can I leave? How can I help someone else leave? How can I create space between people? Be aware of gated communities with one way in/out, not getting too close to someone's front door, etc.
- What is visible? What can't I see? Can others see me?



**Perceptions:** Consider how you are being perceived relative to this situation. Where is your privilege/power, and what are your vulnerabilities? Additionally, consider how your perceptions of others and potential biases may color how you notice or assess what's happening. Where are you clear about what is happening versus making assumptions? Who can you double-check these assumptions with?



**Consent:** How do you know it's OK to intervene? Your intuition is a great source of knowledge and over time can get stronger with practice. Noticing a person's body language can help you to tap into intuitive or gut knowledge. (Are they facing you or moving away from you? Are they making eye contact or avoiding your eyes?) If you are offering support to a stranger, consider asking a few different ways if they'd like support from you (e.g., "You cool?" "You good?" "Do you know this person?" etc.). Make an offer like, "Can I walk with you to the bus stop?" Sometimes it's awkward or your support is denied. The more you practice noticing or listening for consent, the more skilled you'll be.



**Impact:** At the end of the day, de-escalation is all about lowering the emotional temperature so that a bad situation doesn't get worse. At times, you may assess that you're not the right person to intervene, or that an intervention in the moment might make things worse later on. Always consider the immediate impact an intervention might have. Sometimes no intervention is the best intervention to keep things from escalating.

# *CHAPTER 3*

## **AFTER ELECTION DAY**

We made it! You are tired. Beyond tired. And (hopefully) feeling accomplished after a long stretch of safety planning and implementation. Rest is in order. This section contains tips and best practices for closing out your post-election safety practices.



Figure 3.1

## Debriefing With Your Team



Debriefing is essential! Because many safety teams use a temporary hierarchical decision-making structure on Election Day, key criticism and feedback is often not shared on Election Day. In order to improve team skills and avoid repeating mistakes, it's important to have a thorough debrief. Debriefs are most effective the closer they are to Election Day, and feedback should be shared openly with as many members of the safety team as possible. You may choose to include additional folks in your debrief such as street medics, legal support, or vibe checkers.

Here are sample debrief questions:

☐

What were the safety goals of the day? (Review safety protocols.)

☐

What was your role?

☐

What did you personally do well that helped the team to meet these goals?  
What could you personally do differently in the future to better meet these goals?

☐

What did the team do well that helped the team to meet these goals?  
What could the team do differently in the future to better meet these goals?

☐

What material resources, training, or tools does the team need to better meet these goals in the future?

## Follow-up and Closure Safety Tips



Many organizations have an influx of volunteers, canvassers, and members who turn out to activities leading up to Election Day. Just as you should vet incoming supporters as they join your group, it's important to close out properly. After Election Day, follow-up on by through writing down evaluations and feedback. Would you work with them again? If not, document why. Additionally, removing access to databases, contact lists, and similar information is essential to protect against bad actors and minimize the risk that information is unintentionally exposed.

Here are some recommendations on closure safety:

1

**Beforehand:** Before you reach Election Day, it's important to track information as it's shared out with seasonal or temporary volunteers, canvassers, and members.

2

**Track logins and access points:** As new seasonal or temporary supporters are brought on (after they've been vetted), write down which supporter receives access to what information, such as access to databases, voter information, social media accounts, etc. When possible, create temporary logins with a timed expiration date. And don't forget to track who has been given keys to office space, filing cabinets, storage rooms, or any other physical space.

3

**Gather contact information:** Seasonal or temporary supporters should share contact information including a personal email and/or phone number in case you need to get ahold of them after they've left their temporary role.

4

**Exit interview or survey:** Feedback keeps our movements strong. Consider setting up time to hear from temporary or seasonal supporters about what worked well and what could be changed. Feedback can be gathered by one-one sessions, a group session, or a written survey. Ask about any safety incidents supporters may have experienced, what interventions worked well, and which ones didn't.

5

**Use documentation of logins and access points:** As temporary and seasonal supporters are transitioning out of their role, return to your access points tracking sheet. Ensure that logins have been deactivated, passwords have been changed, and relevant materials have been returned. Collect keys, fobs, and anything else supporters have used to access your physical space or materials. Remove supporters from any communication threads and/or delete threads altogether.

6

**Document your debrief findings:** Summarize notes from your debrief meetings and exit interviews or survey results. File this information in a secure place that's accessible to full-time staff or leaders.



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Electoral Safety Toolkit Designed by Emmy Esquerre



# ***FIGURE SOURCES***

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## **Introduction**

Figure I.1 Dan Budnik/Contact Press Images, New York Times

Figure I.2 Matt Herron | Take Stock | TopFoto

Figure I.3 Danny Lyon | Selected Images of Berkely and Alabama, Sotheby's

Figure I.4 Bettman via Getty Images

## **Chapter 1**

Figure 1.1 Kheel Center Archives | flickr

## **Chapter 2**

Figure 2.1 Ken Thompson | General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church

Figure 2.2 Frances Albrier | National Museum of African American History and Culture

Figure 2.3 George Ballis | Creative Commons

## **Chapter 3**

Figure 3.1 Maurice Sorrell | Johnson Publishing Company Archive | Courtesy J. Paul Getty Trust and Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture