

Safety Considerations & Planning Worksheet for Student Organizers

When taking public action, particularly higher-risk social actions such as protests and rallies, it is essential for student organizers to plan intentionally for participant safety. While planning cannot ensure a completely risk-free event, engaging in safety planning is an **ethical responsibility** of organizers and can significantly reduce the likelihood of harm.

This worksheet is organized to reflect the **timeline of organizing**: before the event, leading up to the event, and the day of the action. This sheet is just meant to get you started. Doing additional research and planning is encouraged. Consult the additional resources listed below for more ideas.

Phase 1: Initial Planning (Early in the Organizing Process)

1. Basic Event Planning

Event Name: _____

Date & Time: _____

Location(s): _____

Type of Action (e.g., rally, march, teach-in):

Estimated Number of Participants: _____

Activities Participants Will Engage In:

- ☐ Marching
- ☐ Occupying Public Space
- ☐ Occupying Private Space
- ☐ Other: _____

Rules, Permits, or Regulations That Apply to This Event:

2. Elect a Safety Captain(s)

Name(s) of Safety Captain(s): _____

The Safety Captain(s) will:

- Lead the safety planning process
- Conduct initial safety research

- Make recommendations regarding:
 - Number of safety team members
 - Needed supplies
 - Risk mitigation strategies

Additional Safety Team Members (if known):

Phase 2: Site Assessment & Risk Analysis (Weeks or Days Before the Event)

3. Site Walk-Through & Environmental Assessment

Date of Walk-Through: _____

- ☐ Walk the full event space or route
- ☐ Identify evacuation routes
- ☐ Ensure at least one evacuation route is accessible for people with mobility needs

Evacuation Pathways Identified:

1. _____
2. _____

Location-Specific Risks (terrain, visibility, traffic, etc.):

4. Risk Assessment

Consider potential risks associated with your event.

- ☐ Counter-protesters
- ☐ Weather-related risks
- ☐ Terrain-related risks
- ☐ Law enforcement-related risks
- ☐ Medical risks
- ☐ Other risks: _____

Brief Description of Key Risks:

Phase 3: Safety Protocol Development

Safety Team Training

The safety captain(s) should prepare a safety protocol proposal that covers all the following areas. The safety captain(s) should meet with all event organizers to present the proposed plan. Together, all organizers should refine the plan.

Training Content Checklist

1. Safety Team Composition

- ☐ How many people should be on the safety team?
- ☐ What considerations should be made regarding who is on the safety team?
- ☐ What supplies does the safety team need and how will you get them?
 - First aid kits (include band aids, ointment)
 - Uniform of some sort
 - Whistles or another backup communication plan
 - Cellphone
 - Other items: _____

2. Communication at the Event

- ☐ How the safety team will communicate during the action (e.g., phone calls, text threads, walkie-talkies)
- ☐ Backup communication methods (e.g., whistles, hand signals)
- ☐ Who communication should be directed to in urgent situations

3. Situational Awareness: What to Watch For & Report

Safety team members should be trained to identify and report the following at minimum:

- ☐ Injuries or medical concerns
- ☐ Counter-protesters
- ☐ Aggressive or highly agitated participants
- ☐ Law enforcement presence or changes in posture/behavior
- ☐ Environmental hazards (weather, crowding, blocked exits)

What additional concerns should the team be briefed to look out for?

Who should these concerns be reported to?

3. De-escalation Principles & Strategies

Safety team member should emphasize **de-escalation over confrontation**.

Key principles:

- Encourage participants **not to engage** with counter-protesters
- Recognize that people under stress may be experiencing a heightened human stress response
- Remember: *People who feel heard are more likely to calm down and listen*

De-escalation strategies to practice:

- ☐ Speak calmly and respectfully
- ☐ Listen actively and acknowledge feelings
- ☐ Encourage physical grounding and space

Concrete actions to help participants calm down:

- ☐ Give them a task (holding a sign, passing out water)
- ☐ Suggest stepping away from the crowd
- ☐ Invite them to go inside or to a quieter area
- ☐ Ensure they are accompanied by a buddy or safety team member

What other calm-down options could be used?

4. Counter-Protester Engagement Protocol

- ☐ Safety team members will discourage engagement with counter-protesters
- ☐ Safety team members will redirect participants away from conflict
- ☐ Safety team members will notify the Safety Captain of escalating situations

What do we know about possible counter-protester activity (who may show up, how many, how they tend to behave)?

5. Law Enforcement Awareness & Protocol

- ☐ Review how law enforcement may appear or engage at the event
- ☐ Identify signs of escalation or increased presence
- ☐ Review who is designated to communicate with law enforcement
- ☐ Safety team members do **not** engage law enforcement unless assigned

What do we know about possible police activity (who may show up, how many, how they tend to behave)?

6. Emergency Shutdown Protocol

What conditions would require shutting down the event? Who has the authority to make this decision? How will the shutdown be communicated to participants?

Emergency Shutdown Signals or Messaging:

Phase 4: Safety Team Training

All safety team members **must be trained before the event**. This training ensures a shared understanding of roles, communication methods, and de-escalation strategies. The safety captain should review the above safety plan based on the details above.

Safety Team Training Details

Training Date: _____

Training Time & Location (or Zoom): _____

Trainer(s): _____

Safety Team Members Present (List All)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Training Reflection (Optional)

What concerns or questions did safety team members raise during training?

Phase 4: Participant Preparation (Before & Day Of the Event)

8. Participant Safety Information

Participant safety information should be compiled into a **small, easy-to-read handout** that is **distributed to participants at the event**.

Information to include on the handout:

- ☐ How to exit or evacuate safely
- ☐ Who to contact if help is needed
- ☐ How to identify the safety team
- ☐ Closest medical provider location

☐ Basic advice on how to keep safe

- ☐ Tell someone you trust where you are going and when to expect to hear from you
- ☐ Write an emergency contact's phone number on your upper arm with a Sharpie (safety team has them)
- ☐ Plan your exit in advance
- ☐ Do not engage with counter-protesters
- ☐ Stay nonviolent
- ☐ If you need help, look for the safety team
(describe what they will look like)

Additional Resources:

- [Human Rights Campaign Tips for Preparedness, Peaceful Protesting, and Safety](#)
- [Wired How to Protest Safely: What to Bring, What to Do, and What to Avoid](#)
- [The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Peaceful Protest and Protest Safety Resources](#)