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Video for Change
Impact Toolkit

Risk Assessment
and Mitigation Tool

Identify and anticipate the risks involved in
your film project

Introduction

The Risk Assessment and Mitigation Tool guides you in identifying and anticipating the risks involved in your film so you can better look after yourself, your team, your subjects, and the communities you work with.

This tool is designed to encourage informed decision making throughout your film project, so that your film can tell its story without putting anyone in harm.

Seek help when you doubt your ability to mitigate any of the identified risks. The resources section at the end offers guidance and allows you to dive deeper into specific issues.

You will identify and anticipate risks in five areas:

1. Team
2. Legal
3. Location
4. Subjects
5. Audiences

Stay safe and keep filming!

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How digitally secure are your team's communication channels?

Using digitally secure messaging apps can help protect your communications from being monitored.

☐ Very Secure ☐ Secure
☐ Somewhat Secure ☐ Not Secure
☐ Not Sure

What are you doing to increase your team's digital security?

Do any of your team members have illnesses or disabilities that you need to take into consideration?

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

What additional risks does your team face due to illnesses and/or disabilities?
Consider different stages within the project and strive for meaningful participation.

Is your team mentally and emotionally prepared to start?

No one is immune to the emotional impacts resulting from covering vulnerable topics and subjects.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

What types of circumstances affecting your team's mental and emotional health might occur?

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Are you working in communities that have different beliefs from your team members?

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

Is there an increased risk as a result of any of your team members' gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, age, religious beliefs, nationality, or disability?

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

List down the people that can offer your team support (e.g., friends, family, therapist, psychiatrist).

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Exposing stories and perspectives that are marginalised or hidden may challenge existing power dynamics. Those currently in power might use legal action against you.

NOTE: Opponent is used here for all people or groups who might oppose the issues you are dealing with in your film.

Are the issues discussed in your film sensitive?

Highly sensitive topics that are not widely covered by the media pose more risks.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

What sensitive facts or opinions are you exposing?

List the specific issues that will be exposed in your film.

How likely are you or your team members going to face legal threats?

☐ Highly likely ☐ Likely ☐ Unlikely ☐ Not Sure

Is your team prepared to face lawsuits and other legal challenges?

☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not Sure ☐ No

Will your video footage or audio files contain sensitive or confidential information?

Examples include crime, incriminating information, exposure of unethical or illegal behaviour, abuses, and human rights offences.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

Will opponents be interested in accessing your video footage or audio files?

Opponents trying to obtain these may lead to physical violence and/or digital security threats.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

2 | **Legal**

Exposing stories and perspectives that are marginalised or hidden may challenge existing power dynamics. Those currently in power might use legal action against you.

Are opponents clearly identified and named in your film?

The more public the names and images of opponents are in the video, the higher the risk.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

Will the opponents you expose likely come after you?

Assess the nature and connections of the institutions and/or individuals you are exposing. The more powerful they are, the higher the risk.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

How informed are you about your rights and obligations with regards to the laws and regulations affecting your film?

☐ Fully informed ☐ Somwehat informed
☐ Uninformed ☐ Not Sure

List down the names of people/organisations that can offer legal support (e.g., lawyers, counsellor, legal aid).

Make sure to inquire about the costs and accessibility of their services.

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Once on location, the goal is to minimise dangers to everyone involved on site. You will need to balance how transparent you want to be about your film's impact goals and agenda when considering the security of all involved.

Do you need (formal) permits to film in the location? If you don't have permission, then you need to manage risks to keep yourself and your team safe. ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**Do you have trusted local contacts that can assist you?** Having trusted contacts minimises the risk, especially if you don't have permission to shoot in that location. ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No
Could you immediately seek help in case of arrest, injury or attack? ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**Are opponents of your film able to reach you in the location?** Having those who feel negatively impacted by your film in the location increases the risk. ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No
List potential risks regarding the place where you are staying.	**Are extra security measures needed at the place you will be staying?** ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

3 | Location

Once on location the goal is to minimise dangers to everyone involved on site. You will need to balance how transparent you want to be about your film's goals and agenda when considering the security of all involved.

Is safety equipment needed for filming in the location? Areas of conflict, recurring civic violence, or viral disease prone localities might require you to use safety equipment. ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**What safety equipment will you bring to the location?**
Are you shooting in a location prone to environmental disasters (e.g., flooding, storms, extreme tides)? ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**Are you prepared for any environmental threats that may occur on site?** ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No
Are there risks involved with bringing your filming equipment to the location? ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**How are you making sure your filming equipment is safe on location and during travel?**

3 | Location

Once on location, the goal is to minimise dangers to everyone involved on site. You will need to balance how transparent you want to be about your film's impact goals and agenda when considering the security of all involved.

List (nearby) organisations or institutions that could offer help on site (e.g., police, medical support, legal aid).

People participating in your film (subjects) need to make informed decisions around risks and opportunities. Every participant's consent is required. Relevant information regarding your film, its impact goals, and your subjects' role in it have to be shared.

NOTE: Some subjects want to be propelled into the public's attention, as they feel it may advance their advocacy.

Has rapport been established between your team and the film's subjects? Developing a relationship with subjects and their community takes time. ☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**List potential areas of conflict between your team, your subjects, and the wider community.**

Are subjects clearly identified and named in your film?

The more recognisable the names and images of your subjects are, the higher the risk.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

Will opponents be able to reach the subjects of your film?

Are addresses and/or frequently visited locations of your subjects recognisable in your film?

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

Are subjects aware of the risks they might face?

Identify possible risks together and ask if subjects have mitigation plans.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

Are all subjects able to (formally) give consent?

Consent must always be sought prior to anyone participating in your film.

☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No

4 | **Subjects**

People participating in your film (subjects) need to make informed decisions around risks and opportunities. Every participant's consent is required. Relevant information regarding your film, its impact goals, and your subjects' role in it have to be shared.

Are subjects aware of the possible long term impact of their participation? Key subjects in your film might still be impacted years after your film is finished. ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**List down the potential long term impact for your film's subjects.**

Check what kinds of harm your subjects might face.

Have an open discussion with your subjects about the risk they face due to participating in your film. You may not be aware of all the risks.

PHYSICAL	LEGAL	ONLINE	OTHER THREATS
☐ Harassment	☐ Defamation	☐ Hacking	☐ Verbal threats
☐ Physical violence	☐ False accusations	☐ Trolling	☐ Ostracisation by community
☐ Stalking	☐ Arrest	☐ Spreading of false information	☐ Negative rumours
☐ Trespassing	☐ Lese-majesty	☐ Cloning of accounts	☐ Threats to loved ones
☐ Destruction of equipment	☐	☐ Hate Speech	☐
☐ Destruction of property	☐	☐	☐
☐		☐	
☐			

5 | Audiences

Here you consider the protection of your team and your film's subjects from harm caused by audiences, among whom there might be opponents of your film.

Will there be public screenings of your film? ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**Can opponents do harm to your team or your film's subjects at public screenings?** ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No
Will public screenings be supported by institutions or organisations? Getting support from institutions and big organisations lessens the risk. ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ Some screenings ☐ No	**Can communities host their own screenings?** Provide guidance on safety issues to communities hosting screenings. ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No
Will your film be available online? Platforms have different security levels. Be aware of possible hate speech and negative comments in the comment sections. ☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No	**List the ways audiences could harm your team or your film's subjects online.** Either during online screenings, on social media, or on video hosting platforms.

5 | Audiences

Audiences might include individuals who could do harm to you and your subjects. Think about what could happen to audiences when your film is distributed online, publicly screened, or posted about on social media.

Will you be using social media to promote your film?

Ask consent before tagging people on your posts.

☐ Yes   ☐ Not sure   ☐ No

List all the ways in which you plan to reach audiences.

For each one, reflect on the risks involved to your team and your film's subjects.

Resources

Team

Protecting your data and video footage

- Digital Security Guide - Rory Peck Trust
- Committee to Protect Journalists - Digital Safety Kit (July 2019)
- Digital Hygiene 101: How to practice digital safety and security – EngageMedia

Protecting yourself online

- How can we protect journalists from online hate speech
- Protecting yourself in the digital space with VPNs - EngageMedia
- A journalist's guide to online anonymity and secure communications

Mental health

- Mental Health Tips and Resources for Journalists
- RTDNA Mental Health Resource Guide
- Mental Wellness Resources - Asian American Journalists Association

Legal

Legal Support

- The Assistance Desk of Reporters Without Borders, could offer financial and administrative support to journalists or filmmakers faced with reprisals because of their reporting.
- Freedom House can provide emergency assistance to human rights defenders and frontline activists.
- A Journalist's Guide to Avoiding Lawsuits and Other Legal Dangers

Location

High Risk Locations

- ACOS Alliance's Freelance Journalist Safety Checklist
- Committee to Protect Journalists - Security Guide
- Guides for covering protests – Witness

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Resources

Subjects

Ethics and Values

- Ethics and Values section of the Impact Toolkit
- From Reflection to Release: Framework for Values, Ethics, and Accountability in Nonfiction Filmmaking
- Center for Media and Social Impact – Honest Truths report on Documentary Ethics

Consider your subjects

- Doc Society's Impact Field Guide – Consider Your Subjects
- Radio Lab – Getting the Story: Working with Victims of Conflict, Human Rights Abuses and Trauma

Audiences

Screenings

- Guide to Outdoor Screenings - Independent Cinema Office
- Preparing the Audience: Creating a Safe Space for Difficult Screenings

Hate Speech Online

- 5 tips for recognizing and dealing with online hate - Equitas

Acknowledgements

The Risk Mitigation Assessor is based on the Video for Change Impact Toolkit and the Safe + Secure Handbook by Doc Society.

In July 2022, a co-creation lab was held in Quezon City, Philippines where independent documentary filmmakers and video collectives were invited to further develop the Risk Assessment and Mitigation Tool.