

# NEWS

# ORGANIZATIONS

# SAFETY

# SELF-ASSESSMENT



International  
Press  
Institute



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# INTRODUCTION

The News Organizations Safety Self-Assessment provides a tool for news outlets to review and improve safety practices and protocols that affect the newsroom and journalists out in the field. The Self-Assessment should help news organizations to identify and better understand their own weaknesses and strengths in relation to the security of all the individuals working for them who are exposed to danger, including freelancers. The Self-Assessment should prompt a constructive internal conversation around best practices and encourage practical and effective ways to advance these internally. The suggested Self-Assessment can be used as a template, can be modified and adapted according to the nature of the news organization, or used to inform mechanisms already in place.

## Why conduct a Safety Self-Assessment?

A Safety Self-Assessment should help your organization to better protect all your assets. It can save the lives of reporters, and it can also save your company. Aside from the moral imperative to protect all the individuals who contribute to your news product, investing in building a robust safety policy and associated protocols can save your organization from the financial loss and reputational damage of a crisis that could have been prevented and avoided, or could have been carefully managed.

## Methodology

The Safety Self-Assessment should be conducted by a designated individual/s that has/have the capacity to complete the form. Each news organization should decide internally who is best placed and how best to proceed according to their nature and particularities.

Find below some general basic guidelines and recommendations:

- Allocate proper time and plan how you will conduct the Self-Assessment. Design a work plan that takes into account your capacity and resources.
- Reach across the news organization and especially seek input from those implementing or who are directly affected by your safety protocols, including regular freelancers. You may want to organize focus groups, and may consider engaging an external facilitator who is able to support an open and neutral conversation. Aim at having a plurality of voices capable of highlighting different relevant aspects.
- Learn from your strengths and don't shy away away from your weaknesses. Strengths: study these so you can better understand your organizational and/or individual abilities and how you could use these to improve other safety aspects you may be struggling with. Weaknesses: your best chance to improve is to identify and try to address these.
- This exercise should be led by an individual or a small team that is approachable and able to listen to different individuals across the newsroom, from managers and editors to reporters and photographers; and capable of building a constructive dialogue. You may consider recognised elected workplace representatives to participate or lead this task, making sure mechanisms and resources already in place are optimised. You may also consider having the support or advice of an external facilitator, someone neutral and ideally with safety and security expertise.
- Write down lessons learned, conclusions, recommendations and next steps. Be as concrete as possible and share this across your organization.
- Be aware that some local and international Press Freedom NGOs may be able to help in different ways, with resources or expert advice. Find below relevant links to online materials .

# SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM

## 1 Does your news organization have a safety and crisis management policy and relevant protocols in place?

### Guideline notes and tips

**Safety policy and protocols** establish your organization's security management framework and highlight how this is being implemented. The policy should briefly describe your organization's principles on safety and security, and roles and responsibilities within it. The protocols elaborate further on how these principles may be implemented. In some cases, both are combined in one document. Your safety policy and protocols should be accessible by those directly affected by them and compliance is essential.

Safety policies and protocols have a preemptive approach, the aim is to articulate mechanisms to manage threats and protect all your assets (from your individual reporters to premises). A **crisis management protocol** establishes how to react in the case of an emergency, focuses on roles and responsibilities and actions to be taken with the aim of responding in the most efficient way in front of a crisis, and as a means of protecting all your assets.

## If NO, why not? (lack of awareness, not considered a priority or a need, lack of resources)

### Guideline notes and tips

Some large news organizations have security teams in-house, but most likely you can put together your own basic safety policy and protocols and crisis management protocol if you invest time and utilise the resources you have. You may want to seek professional advice from a safety adviser with relevant experience in the news media sector. Be aware that some local and international Press Freedom NGOs may be able to

help in different ways, with resources or expert advice. The [ACOS Alliance](#) is currently developing a resource dedicated to providing a template and set of guidelines to news organizations interested in creating their own safety policy and protocols.

If your organization considers it does not need safety protocols in place, we would encourage you to do a risk assessment to learn about current and potential threats.

## If YES,

### a) Are these protocols written in a document? Who has written these?

#### Guideline notes and tips

Some organizations work on the basis of an informal verbal understanding of their safety protocols and mechanisms. It is important to have these in writing and clearly articulated, as it increases your chances of using these protocols correctly and succeed in better protecting your organization.

At the same time, be aware that these documents should be treated with confidentiality and shared with discretion. If you are engaged in investigative journalism and cover highly sensitive stories, there may be threatening actors who may be interested in having access to your protocols. You may need to elaborate a strategy to keep these documents as safe as possible.

### b) Do these documents set out roles and responsibilities within the news organization?

#### Guideline notes and tips

These documents need to provide clarity around responsibilities and management structure. For example: Who decides an

assignment is too risky? Who will take executive decisions in the event of a crisis?

### c) Are these documents accessible to those affected by them? Are those affected familiar with the content of these documents?

#### Guideline notes and tips

This is one of the main challenges you may face. Often, these documents have been elaborated by managerial staff and/or external security advisers. Also, as it was mentioned before, you may need to treat these documents with absolute discretion. However, if your aim is for these documents to be effective, you need to find ways to explain them and make sure they are being

used properly. Elaborate an action plan that responds to your capacity and resources, keeps your protocols safe and your staff well informed. You may consider dedicated in-house workshops and meetings to explain your protocols and apply them across your newsroom.

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## **d) Are these protocols being used or tested? How often do you review them?**

### **Guideline notes and tips**

Threats evolve and our protocols should adapt accordingly to respond to these changes. This is a challenging aspect for any news organization. You need to come up with your own mechanisms to review and update your protocols as necessary.

You may want to involve key players from across your newsroom in this process to make sure changes are relevant and have the best chance of being implemented successfully.

## **e) Collect feedback from the individuals implementing these protocols. Reach out to news managers, commissioning editors and journalists, including regular freelancers.**

### **Guideline notes and tips**

Reach across the news organization and especially seek input from those implementing and who are directly affected by your safety protocols, including regular freelance reporters and photographers. You may want to organize focus groups, and

may consider having an external facilitator able to support an open and neutral conversation. Aim at having a plurality of voices able to highlight different relevant aspects.

## **2 Do you have a clear procedure or mechanism in place for all players to provide input into your protocols and raise safety concerns?**

### **Guideline notes and tips**

If so, is it being used? Is it effective? It's important to establish a clear mechanism for anyone to provide relevant input on safety issues from an ongoing basis. Essential and updated safety knowledge and information may be lost otherwise.

## **3 Do your protocols contemplate the following aspects?**

### **Guideline notes and tips**

The following aspects should be an integral part of your protocols, but are often overlooked. You may want to include dedicated sections to address these in your protocols.

### **a) Gender issues**

#### **Guideline notes and tips**

Does your protocol take into account gender-based risks and violence against female journalists? While there are specific gender-based risks out in the field, research shows that the largest percentage of sexual harassment incidents take place

between working colleagues. Your protocol should provide guidance on how to report these incidents and explain how they are dealt with within the organization.

Practical resources:

<http://womeninnews.org/resource/41>

(a toolkit for dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace. It includes a practical guide for media employers and employees, a sample sexual harassment policy and communications templates)

Background reading:

<https://www.iwfmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IWMF-Global-Report.pdf>

<https://www.iwfmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Violence-and-Harassment-against-Women-in-the-News-Media.pdf>

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## b) Psychological safety, trauma and resilience

### Guideline notes and tips

Does your news organization have a process to address mental health concerns amongst its staff and freelancers? Are key staff and managers prepared to recognize the impact of traumatic stress and other psychological injury, promote self-care and provide appropriate organizational support?

The [Dart Center For Journalism & Trauma](#) website has many useful resources --reports, videos and articles around the issue of trauma. You may want to check these links:

<https://dartcenter.org/content/covering-trauma-impact-on-journalists>

<https://dartcenter.org/content/tragedies-journalists-6?section=all>

<https://dartcenter.org/topic/self-care-peer-support>

## c) Digital security needs

### Guideline notes and tips

Does your protocol provide clear instructions on how to safely use digital devices and what to do if any of these are compromised? Please note there is a tendency to discuss digital aspects separately from our physical and mental safety when these are all interlinked.

Does your protocol address the issue of online harassment? There is an overwhelming amount of resources and materials on digital security for individual journalists. We would advise you to review these, select which ones you find more useful, and adapt these to your organizational framework.

<https://securityplanner.org/#/>

<https://www.internews.org/resource/saferjourno-digital-security-resources-media-trainers>

<https://www.internews.org/resource/speaksafe-media-workers-toolkit-safer-online-and-mobile-practices>  
(also available in Spanish and Arabic)

<https://safetag.org/>

<https://safeandsecure.film/digital-security>

<https://freedom.press/training/>

<https://rorypecktrust.org/resources/Digital-Security-Guide>

<https://cpj.org/tags/digital-safety-kit>

<https://www.accessnow.org/help/> (Digital Security Helpline)

<https://ssd.eff.org> (Surveillance Self-Defense)

<https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/> (includes best practices for employers)

<https://rsf.org/en/online-survival-kit>

<https://gijn.org/digital-security/> (includes a relevant list of resources)

<https://ipi.media/programmes/ontheline/>

<https://totem-project.org/>

## d) Working with freelancers, fixers and other contributors

### Guideline notes and tips

Does your protocol establish clear parameters on how you work with freelancers, fixers and other contributors? Does your protocol address issues of sexual harassment towards or from these groups?

Clarity helps you and freelancers to better manage risks and expectations.

You may want to consult the [Freelance Journalist Safety Principles](#), a set of safety practices for news organizations and freelancers.

# SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM

## 4 Have you conducted an organizational risk assessment, looking into main threats and risks the organization and its individuals are exposed to? Has this informed your protocols?

### Guideline notes and tips

Your protocols need to adjust to your threats. Check whether your protocols have been formulated around an organizational risk assessment that spells out current threats. The organizational

risk assessment should look into main threats that affect all your assets, from your offices to your reporters.

## 5 Do your commissioning editors and journalists, including photographers and freelancers, use risk assessments and communications plans as part of their news production?

### Guideline notes and tips

Individual and/or reporting teams' **Risk Assessments** are an essential tool aimed at helping to manage and minimise risks. Through a risk assessment you ask yourself a series of questions that will help identify and assess the threats you and/or your colleagues may face when working in hostile environments or on sensitive stories that may be challenging from a safety perspective.

A risk assessment should include a **Communications Plan** that spells out your strategy to keep regular safe communications, so it's easy to keep track of everyone's safety. The Communications Plan should include all the necessary contact information to respond fast and effectively in case of an emergency.

As a news organization, we encourage you to design your own risk assessment and communication plan templates adjusting to the particularities of your news organization and reporting. You may find the templates and guidelines offered by the [Rory Peck Trust](#) and the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) (CPJ) useful.

In creating or reviewing your own templates, you may want to ask: does the risk assessment process take into account gender-based risks? Does the risk assessment discuss digital security? Does the risk assessment identify threats to freelancers

or staff that may be incurred after a story's release? Does the risk assessment take into account the particular risks that photographers, female journalists and fixers may face? Does an editor approve the parameters of an assignment based on the risk assessment, and in writing? Do you know if your insurance is certain to cover the activities of your staff and freelancers? If NO: does your protocol establish when you intend to self-insure an incident, or recommend individuals take out additional policies?

INSI and CPJ produce regular advisories for working on specific conditions and in preparation to upcoming critical stories, respectively. Please check:

<https://newssafety.org/safety/advisories/>

<https://cpj.org/safety-advisories/>

IFJ, CPJ and RSF have security guides and safety handbooks for journalists. Please check:

[https://www.ifj.org/what/safety.html?tx\\_wbresources\\_list%5Bresource%5D=198&cHash=fe79110a506a750d90c6c8a7b9d18139](https://www.ifj.org/what/safety.html?tx_wbresources_list%5Bresource%5D=198&cHash=fe79110a506a750d90c6c8a7b9d18139)

<https://cpj.org/reports/2012/04/journalist-security-guide.php>

[https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/2015-rsf-safety-guide-](https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/2015-rsf-safety-guide-for-journalists.pdf)

[for-journalists.pdf](https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/2015-rsf-safety-guide-for-journalists.pdf)

## 6 How is your organization approaching safety training needs?

### Guideline notes and tips

Does your protocol establish who may need safety training and how to access this?

# APPENDIX: Glossary of terms

## Safety policy and protocols

These documents establish your organization's approach to safety. The policy should briefly describe your organization's principles on safety and security, and roles and responsibilities within it. The protocols elaborate further on how these principles may be implemented. In some cases, both are combined in one document. Some news organizations chose not to have these in writing, however your safety policy and protocols should be accessible by those directly affected by them and compliance is essential. Having your safety policy and protocols in writing will facilitate its implementation, good performance and review. Safety policies and protocols have a preemptive approach; the aim is to manage threats and protect all your assets, from your individual reporters to premises.

## Crisis management protocol

While safety policies and protocols have a preemptive approach, a crisis management protocol provides clear guidelines on how to react in the case of an emergency. It focuses on roles and responsibilities and actions to be taken with the aim of responding in the most efficient way when a crisis occurs. A good crisis management protocol will help a news organization to navigate a crisis adequately, minimising negative consequences. Efficient safety and crisis management protocols have a positive effect in the mental well-being of those individuals working for a news organization. They feel valued, protected and professional, thus impacting productivity and the reputation of the news organization.

## Risk assessment

This is an essential exercise aimed at helping to identify threats and potential risks so you can manage and minimise these with concrete preemptive measures. A risk assessment can be applied in the context of an organization or an assignment. Organizational risk assessments should look into the main threats affecting all assets, from offices to individual reporters. Individual and/or reporting teams' risk assessments may focus on the particular safety challenges that an assignment may have and define practical ways to mitigate risks.

## Communications Plan

A risk assessment should include a **Communications Plan** that spells out a clear strategy to keep regular safe communications between the assigned journalist or photographer and a designated emergency contact (a colleague, an editor), so it's possible to keep track of whether those on the ground are safe. The Communications Plan should include all the necessary contact information to respond fast and effectively in the case of an emergency.



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