



# Women's Visionary Congress

## **Manual of Best Practices for Radical Risk Reduction**

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Annie Oak**

Communities of all types can become stronger by developing new ways to resolve conflict. As more people feel empowered to speak out against sexual coercion, harassment and assault, many social groups are reflecting on their collective values about safety and how to uphold them. Radical Risk Reduction is an approach which makes the most of the limited resources available to settle community disputes and reduce safety risks. The goal of these ideas is to develop sustainable systems that have the greatest impact on encouraging resiliency in troubled times.

For event organizers, effective conflict resolution and risk reduction is especially important. They are responsible for the safety of participants at their parties, conferences, and festivals. In 2014, the WVC responded to the resurgence of interest in psychedelics by creating a list of [Safety Tips for those participating in ceremonies where psychoactive substances are used](#). This present list of recommendations for Radical Risk Reduction is a continuation of that initial effort to address community needs.

The best practices suggested here are also based on support for community education and mutual responsibility. They include ideas for addressing the potential for overdose and accidental poisonings from adulterated substances - especially materials cut with the synthetic opioid

fentanyl. WVC created in 2015 a series of [risk reduction workshops](#) to teach drug safety skills. These protocols for Radical Risk Reduction include lessons learned from three years of conducting these trainings. They also reflect ideas presented in [an essay](#) on the topic posted in November 2018. Suggestions for subsequent versions are welcome at [annie@visionarycongress.org](mailto:annie@visionarycongress.org).

However your community chooses to act, taking responsibility for the safety is an ethical duty. These suggested measures require courage and a commitment to stand up and act in the defense of others. Communities that endure through times of social upheaval learn how to resolve conflict. Effective risk reduction protocols reduce the potential for harm and create internal safety agreements. Train and empower people in your community to create a system that works for your culture. Budget carefully the collective energy you have available to resolve conflict and keep your community safe. Build resiliency. Practice Radical Risk Reduction.

### **Best Practices For Radical Risk Reduction**

- \* Identify the leaders in your community or group of event organizers
- \* Empower these leaders or organizers to make decisions about safety
- \* Draft documents that set expectations for safety at community gatherings and events
- \* Consider the benefits of private, invitation only events where attendees must be sponsored by an established participant to attend and are accountable to that person
- \* Ask participants at private events to refrain from posting any details of the gathering on social media or other public places
- \* Develop an in-house ranger crew or safety team to uphold safety agreements at events
- \* Hire professional medics or EMTs to provide medical services at your event
- \* Create a quiet space and train a staff to provide care at that location for participants having difficulty
- \* Organize a rapid response team to react swiftly to consent or safety violations at events
- \* Develop a system to publicize how to report consent or safety violations during events - and also outside your events if that information is considered
- \* Hire professional counselors to host workshops about consent during gatherings

- \* Publicize information to support affirmative consent. You could say, for example, "Make sure that every 'yes' is a 'hell yes!' A 'no' requires no explanation or qualification."
- \* Form a group of mediators with training as counselors to consider complaints about consent or safety violations and help organizers make decisions to support community values
- \* Consider limiting decision makers to a small group as opposed to a larger collective process that may delay or dilute firm action and exhaust participants
- \* Develop protocols to gather information about a safety or consent disputes and limit the size of the group doing this work
- \* Reflect on the idea that conflict resolution may be especially challenging for women who may need to overcome socialization that encourages them to be accommodating and agreeable
- \* Consider that people may attempt to intimidate or manipulate those trying to settle a dispute
- \* Decide critical procedural questions such as whether to consider anonymous accusations or allow accusers to conceal their identity from the accused
- \* Determine who in your community will make decisions about excluding participants for violating community safety and consent agreements
- \* Understand that the capacity to engage conflict and uphold safety is a limited community resource
- \* Support those who wish to make formal legal complaints about sexual assault
- \* Empower community decision makers to act with firmness and clarity and also recuse themselves if they are too close to a person that is a party in a mediation case
- \* Set a blackout period for considering disputes three weeks before an event unless considering an incident that takes place within that window
- \* Remove those involved in mediation cases from projects critical to any upcoming event
- \* Prepare for the fact that a person excluded from an event for violating safety standards - or their friends - may attempt to lobby or pressure decision makers to reconsider their actions
- \* Consider different forms of restorative justice for the accused and the accuser in mediation and conflict resolution cases
- \* Embrace the possibility of removing those who violate community values from invitation lists and enacting the time-tested idea of social banishment

- \* Decide if there will be an appeals process for those removed from invitation lists or disinvited from community events
- \* If there is a path back to the community after a safety or consent violation, decide who will evaluate the person's fitness to return, the timeframe, and what criteria will be used
- \* Consider a process where there is no path back for offenders in recognition of limited community resources to fully analyze that person's ability to change their behavior
- \* Cultivate relationships with professional therapists and refer both accusers and the accused to these practitioners for care
- \* Allocate a budget to provide outside professional counseling to people who have been harmed at events you organize
- \* Determine how your community will or won't publicize decisions to exclude people and - and consider how publically sharing this information may invite possible defamation cases
- \* Consider how your community will respond to requests that you share your list of banned persons with other groups
- \* Set boundaries on how organizers will talk about mediation decisions with community members or outsiders. Reserve the right to decline to discuss these matters in person or on social media.