



ARCC's Safe Events Guide

Whether you're organizing an in-person protest, a virtual teach-in, or something in between, this guide offers practical tools to protect your people and strengthen your message. It's built for grassroots organizers, RJ advocates, disabled leaders, and frontline allies working to make justice movements safer, braver, and more accessible.

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<https://www.arcc-cdac.ca>



Table of Contents

- 3** Introduction
- 4** Foundations of Safety Planning
- 5** Harm Reduction for In-person Events
- 6** Safer & More Accessible In-Person Events
- 7** Environmental & Situational Planning
- 8** Role Breakdowns
- 9** Special Needs & Accessibility
- 10** State Repression/Targeted Surveillance & Post-Event Debrief & Collective Recovery
- 11** Online Event Safety
- 12** Contact Info



Planning a Safe Event

This booklet offers a practical, justice-centred framework for organizing safe, inclusive, and effective events, especially protests and political gatherings, both in-person and online. Rooted in harm reduction, accessibility, and community care, it reflects the lived realities of organizing in Canada's social and legal landscape, especially for marginalized communities.

It's designed to help protect your people — physically, emotionally, and digitally — while building movements rooted in trust, resilience, and collective liberation.



Foundations of Safety Planning

Core Principles of Harm Reduction in Canadian Contexts

1. Do No Further Harm

- Avoid replicating oppressive systems (e.g., security that mimics policing).
- Center the needs of communities most likely to be harmed: Black, Indigenous, trans, disabled, and undocumented people.

2. Informed Participation

- Ensure participants understand the risks and their rights (e.g., right to remain silent, right to legal counsel).
- Offer Know Your Rights (KYR) materials in multiple languages, especially Indigenous and newcomer communities. (<https://ccla.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Know-Your-Rights-Protesters.pdf>)

3. Autonomy and Consent

- Allow people to opt into roles (rather than assigning tasks under pressure).
- Inform participants of police presence, counter-protest risks, livestreaming, and surveillance before they arrive.



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Harm Reduction Practices for In-Person Events

A. Legal Preparedness

- Partner with organizations like the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) or BIPOC-led legal collectives (eg, Canadian Association of Black Lawyers).
- Create a legal hotline with local lawyers in advance.
- Encourage protest-goers to write the legal support number on their arm with permanent marker.

B. Safety Infrastructure

- Safety marshals, street medics, and de-escalators should:
 - Be trained in trauma response.
 - Understand how Canadian police forces typically respond to demonstrations (e.g., kettling in Toronto or horse units in Ottawa).
- Equip medics with supplies to counter pepper spray & tear gas, asthma support, epipens, and electrolyte replenishment.

C. Safety Pods & Buddy System

Safety pods are small, intentional groups of 2–5 people who commit to supporting each other before, during, and after an event.

- **Pods can share contact info** and emergency needs
- Pods/buddies should **arrive and leave together**
- **Check in regularly** during the event (e.g., text check-ins, in-person scans)
- **Stay together** or have a regroup plan if separated
- **Help each other leave safely**, especially if someone feels overwhelmed, threatened, or unwell

Safer & More Accessible In-Person Events

Protocols for Undocumented or Precarious-Status Participants

Avoid collecting personal data. Inform all attendees of **risks related to ID checks or arrests**. Designate **rapid response contacts** and legal advocates for immigration consequences.

Safety for Racialized, Queer, Trans, Disabled Participants

Protect identities and physical spaces. Create **Black-only, Indigenous-only, Queer/Trans- only or disabled-only** breakout spaces or check-ins.

Consider Post-Event Grounding Spaces or Check-ins

See Debrief Section Page 10

Code Words, Hand Signals and Non-Verbal Cues

Common signals include: arms in an X = need a medic; peace fingers up = de-escalate, and raised fist = solidarity/attention. Be sure to assign meaning to signals clearly in advance. Coloured armbands/shirts and whistles are other cues.

Identity Protection and Media Exposure

Avoid press contact without consent. Offer names of media liaisons to deflect questions. Blur faces in post-event photos and videos.

Mental Health Triage

Know how to identify panic attacks, freeze/fawn responses and signs of retraumatization. Offer grounding exercises and emotional first aid.

Communication Tools

Best encrypted tools: Signal (text/calls); Element (Matrix protocol, decentralized), Tutanota or Proton Mail (email). Avoid Facebook Messenger, INSTA DMS and SMS.

Environmental & Situational Considerations

Weather

Outdoor events are subject to the elements, and inclement weather can be a major challenge. A regular pre-event routine should involve monitoring the weather forecast. You may need to have contingency plans in place in case of rain, high winds, or other adverse weather conditions. Contingency plans could include scheduling a rain date, or moving the event to an indoor venue, if possible.

Advice to participants

Be sure to advise your participants to dress according to the weather, eg. rain gear, warm clothes for cold weather, light clothes for warm weather. Let participants know that they should pack sunscreen and water and snacks.

Evacuation Plans

Be sure to have designated exit routes, rendezvous points & vehicles on standby.

Physical Accessibility

Prioritize venues (or march routes) that are **wheelchair accessible** and **near transit** in Canadian cities. And, **avoid routes with high police presence** or known conflict zones, especially near Indigenous and Black community spaces.

Police Surveillance

Be aware that police will use facial recognition software, drone surveillance, license plate recording and undercover infiltration.

Permits and Permissions

Permits may be required for parks or city-owned spaces, road closures & use of sound equipment. Some cities (e.g., Toronto) have "event applications" that ask for organizers' contact info. Permits are **not legally required to hold a protest on public sidewalks or open spaces**, but lack of permit may escalate police response. Some cities may cite noise complaints, trespass notices, park curfews and obstruction of sidewalks or traffic.



Role Breakdowns

In-Person Events

Marshals should guide marchers along the planned route, prevent bottlenecks, keep a steady pace, support mobility needs such as assisting disabled/slow-moving participants, and helping to maintain accessible paths and masked or quiet zones if needed. They should stay in contact with other marshals/organizers, relay key updates (police, medics, disruptions). Spot potential conflicts and calmly redirect or alert de-escalation teams – don't engage physically.

Medics should carry first aid kits + mental health kits (grounding tools, crisis cards); wear identifiable gear (green crosses, visible tags); know how to treat pepper spray exposure (saline, water, milk of magnesia); tear gas (move upwind, rinse, don't rub); dehydration; fainting; sprains; and hypothermia. Medics should also include mental health peer support or crisis debrief teams.

De-escalators should be trained in non-violent intervention. They should identify flashpoints (police, agitators, intoxicated persons); maintain communication with protest marshals/medics; use a calm tone, body positioning and clear instructions. They are there to protect, not police the crowd.

Legal Observers to document police actions. They should film police without interfering, wear identifiable clothing, record badge numbers and use-of-force incidents. Watch for provocateurs aiming to incite violence and unfamiliar faces trying to gain trust quickly (potential undercover officers).

Support Teams to supply food, water, transport.



Accessibility Needs & Considerations

Masking

Masking at events is a key form of harm reduction—not just for COVID-19, but to protect disabled, immunocompromised, and other vulnerable community members from airborne illness and surveillance.

- **Make masking mandatory** at both indoor and outdoor events.
- Provide **N95 masks**, sanitizer, and establish clearly marked masked zones.
- Normalize masking as an act of collective care and solidarity—especially in communities targeted by state violence or neglect (e.g., disabled, Black, Indigenous, chronically ill folks).
- For higher accessibility, offer hybrid formats (in-person + livestream) so that participants with health risks can still attend.

Masking protects your comrades, not just yourself. In disability and reproductive justice spaces, **masking is not optional—it's part of the politics of care.**

Harm Reduction Table: A Community Care Station

Setting up a harm reduction table at your event is a powerful way to support safety, dignity, and bodily autonomy—especially for those most at risk. These tables are a visible expression of community care and mutual aid.

Your table could include:

- N95 masks (ask local Mask Bloc to donate)
- Hand sanitizer
- Pads and tampons
- Condoms and lube
- Drug-checking strips (e.g., fentanyl test kits)
- Naloxone/Narcan (clearly labelled and accessible)
- COVID tests
- Printed materials on Know Your Rights, harm reduction & local support networks



State Repression & Targeted Surveillance

Even peaceful protests are policed.

State and institutional actors often monitor and repress organizers—especially those advocating for reproductive freedom, gender justice, and racial equity.

Be aware of:

- **Doxxing and online harassment** targeting outspoken activists
- Inform attendees that in Canada, **facial recognition and data scraping** (including livestreams) are used by police
- **Undercover officers** posing as allies
- **Legal intimidation** targeting BIPOC, trans, disabled, or migrant organizers
- Consent violations (e.g., unwanted photos and media exposure)

You can mitigate harm by:

- Protecting ID of organizers/speakers with lived experience
- Using encrypted tools (Signal, ProtonMail)
- Appointing media liaisons
- Blurring faces in post-event media; avoid tagging
- Building legal support networks in advance

This isn't paranoia — it's pattern recognition.

Safety is a collective responsibility.

Post-Event Debrief & Recovery

Safety doesn't end when the protest does. After an action, **host a group debrief** to reflect on **what went well, what felt unsafe, and what could improve next time**. Offer **anonymous feedback tools** (e.g., CryptPad.fr or Signal), and **check in on vulnerable participants** – disabled, racialized, queer or trans people, or those who were harassed or arrested.

Support emotional processing with grounding circles, art-making, storytelling, or referrals to culturally relevant peer support workers or therapists.

Debriefing strengthens trust, healing, and long-term movement resilience.



Safer & More Accessible Online Events

Quick Tips for Harm Reduction, Security & Inclusion

A. Security Risks

Use secure platforms with waiting rooms, passwords and restricted screen/audio sharing. Online harassment (e.g., Zoom-bombing, doxxing) is common, especially for trans and racialized organizers in Canada.

B. Moderation & Facilitation

Train moderators in anti-oppression and trauma response. Be prepared for rapid intervention if participants experience racist, sexist, or queerphobic attacks.

C. Mental Health Considerations

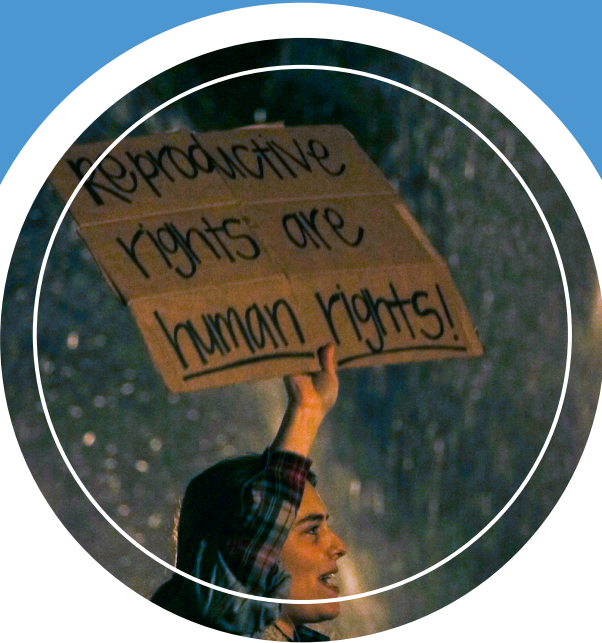
Online spaces can retraumatize; open events with grounding exercises and offer post-event community decompression or peer-support debriefs.

D. Cultural and Language Access

Provide interpretation in ASL, LSQ (Langue des signes québécoise), and other non-English languages. Use plain language materials for neurodivergent, low-literacy, or newcomer attendees. Provide live captioning.

Zoom-Specific Safety Tips

- Update Zoom to enable latest security features
- Require a numeric password (don't share publicly)
- Avoid using your Personal Meeting ID (PMI) for public events
- Allow only authenticated users to join
- Disable "join anytime" to prevent early entry by unauthorized users
- Don't embed the password in one-click links; make participants enter it manually
- Use a Waiting Room to screen attendees before admission
- Keep links private – don't post on social media or public calendars
- If someone disrupts the event, remove them and/or lock meeting, mute, disable video/chat/file sharing as needed.



**Connect
With
Us!**

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