

## **Developing Digital Safety Strategies for Your Organization**

### **Learning Objectives**

In this module, we guide you through the process of developing a digital safety plan for your organization, including risk assessment, digital safety training, risk mitigation strategies, policy development, and reporting options. We will present a variety of options for dealing with anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate and encourage you to reflect on which options are best suited to your organizational needs.

### **Content Warning**

This module includes discussion of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate targeting individuals and organizations.

We encourage you to move on to the next module if engaging with this material doesn't feel like the right thing for you.

If you decide to continue with the module and need support, you can find resources in our resources section at the end of this module.

### **Assessment**

A useful starting point is to assess how anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate is impacting your organization. Ask staff, board members, volunteers, and service users about any online hate they have experienced, details about whether this has ever led to in-person harassment, what supports have been helpful in the past, additional supports that they would find helpful, and any ways they think their role could be changed to mitigate the harms of online hate.

### **Contact Information**

Consider whether it is necessary to have publicly available contact information for each staff or board member. Removing individuals' email addresses and phone numbers from your organization's website can make it more difficult for them to be targeted. You could also ask staff to regularly review their online bios to ensure they are still comfortable with that information being public. Another option is to adjust email settings to filter emails that use specific terms or language.

### **Preparing for Attacks on Individuals**

Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate might be targeted at individual members of your organization, rather than, or in addition to, the organization itself. This could include doxxing, swatting, and other online attacks targeting individuals from your organization. To prepare for these kinds of attacks, you can:

- Encourage individuals to review publicly available information about themselves (personal websites and social media accounts, any contact details, photos that could be used to learn about people's locations such as homes or workplaces)
  - Trans and gender non-conforming staff, board members, and volunteers may want to ensure photos from different stages of their transition are not publicly available if they do not want these to be shared widely. They may also want to check if the name they were given at birth or deadname can be located online and have these removed if they do not want them shared widely.
- Encourage individuals in public-facing roles, particularly if they are discussing topics that are currently being weaponized by right-wing activists like trans rights, to develop crisis plans and support them in doing so
  - Provide these individuals with time during their work hours to spend on developing these plans
- If an individual is being targeted, you can create a buddy system so that someone is designated to accompany the person home, to their car, or to transit

### **Crisis Planning**

- Be sure to make it clear to staff that they do not need to share their crisis plan with their employer, but encourage them to let you know if there are supports the organization can provide as part of the plan
- To create a crisis plan, outline worst case scenarios and what supports you think would help you get through them
  - What supports do you need from your organization? (e.g., additional flexibility to work remotely, additional funding for therapy, group discussion with colleagues, etc.)
  - What other supports do you need? (e.g., from friends, partners, other family members, community groups)

For more details and ideas, you can check out Fae Johnstone's webinar, where she discusses a transphobic online hate campaign targeting her and her suggestions for preparing for such attacks. Her webinar is linked in our resources section.

### **Digital Safety Training**

Consider providing staff, board members, volunteers, and service users with digital safety training, which could help prevent some forms of online hate. Right To Be, a US-based nonprofit, created a Digital Safety How To Guide that can be a useful starting point. The guide includes resources on what to do if you get doxxed, social media safety, privacy measures, and proactive steps to keep your information safe. You can find it in the resources section.

### **Social Media Assessment**

Assess how your organization is using social media. Changes that organizations have made to reduce the harm of online hate include:

- a. Deleting accounts on social media platforms that are difficult to moderate
- b. Limiting their organization's social media use to platforms that are safer and provide better support and/or meaningful solutions when anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate happens
- c. Making social media accounts private so that only community members who are added can access the space
- d. Keeping social media accounts visible but not allowing users to leave comments or send direct messages
- e. Blocking users who are intentionally causing harm and deleting hateful comments and messages. Other organizations give multiple, public warnings to these accounts to demonstrate action, clarify expectations for engaging with their social media, and display a consistent method of response.
  - i. If you want to be able to track what a user is doing online (e.g., if they are organizing protests against your events), restricting how they can engage with your social media rather than blocking them may be a better option.
  - ii. For organizations operating in rural and remote communities, people posting hateful comments or sending hateful messages may have less anonymity, so there may be more opportunities for meaningful engagement and repair.

### **Hide Location Information**

You can take steps to make your location more difficult to find, which can make it harder for someone to dox or swat you. You can use a VPN, turn off location info on social media, and ensure that any resumes you share publicly, such as on LinkedIn, don't include your address or phone number.

### **Online Events and Programming**

If your organization hosts online events or programming, there are options you could consider to reduce the likelihood that your event or program will be targeted. For online events and programming, you can set up a registration process to ensure those who want to attend are the people the event or program is intended for. It's also a good idea to have a moderator for any online events so that anyone engaging in hateful conduct can be removed quickly. Using a waiting room for events ensures that you only let in the users you want to be there.

### **News Media**

News media can also be a source of online hate. One participant in our research explained that they work to prevent negative news coverage of their events and programming by crafting positive news stories to be released after the event. If mis- or disinformation about your organization is published, you can make a public statement to counter the mis- or disinformation. If members of your organization are being attacked after their names are published in a news article, you can ask the publisher to remove those details.

## **Policies & Procedures**

Establish a committee to review and update policies and procedures about online activity. People who have had experience with online hate should be included in these committees. One process that can be useful is creating a matrix to assess each incident based on risks and impacts, and outlining the ideal organizational response in each scenario. It's often helpful to do some research about other organizations' online safety policies and procedures to become better informed about the range of policy options. The committee should review policies that are developed on a regular basis so they can respond to the changing landscape of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ online hate.

## **Rapid Response Team/Person**

Depending on the size of your organization, you could create a rapid response team or designate someone who online hate will be reported to and who will be able to respond.

- Create a response system that doesn't require the person being targeted to repeat their experience multiple times
- Ensure members of the response team are trained in trauma-informed support
- Create a documentation process. Tracking comments/messages, particularly those that are violent or threatening, can be helpful.
- Ask the person being subjected to online hate if they would like the organization's leadership to issue a statement of support

## **Legal Options**

Your organization should decide in advance if there are any scenarios in which you would consider contacting the police. Abolitionist 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations may never consider the possibility of contacting the police. While some people may think contacting the police is the only available option in some scenarios, Black Lives Matter makes the argument that police typically only respond after a violent incident has taken place and may not take a threat of violence seriously if the threat is not against "the right type of victims." Other organizations might consider contacting the police if the person being targeted by online hate requests it, if there is an explicit threat of violence (e.g., comments saying armed protesters are going to attack staff at the organization's offices or an upcoming in-person event), or for some other reason. One participant in our research shared that they had had productive collaboration with police, but the majority of participants were reluctant to work with police because of the ways they have harmed and continue to harm 2SLGBTQIA+ people. If your organization decides that there are situations in which you would call the police, you should have a plan in place to protect staff, board members, and volunteers from police violence and/or discrimination. Your plan should take into account that the following people are most likely to be harmed by police, and that you may not know if someone from your organization is a member of one or more of these groups:

- f. Black, Indigenous, and racialized people

- g. Transgender and gender non-conforming people. Trans femme folks are more likely to be targeted by police, particularly BIPOC trans femme folks
- h. Sex workers
- i. People who use drugs
- j. People whose mental health could make police see them as a threat
- k. People who are unhoused or living in poverty

For more information on the limitations of the legal options available to those being targeted by online hate in Canada, we recommend the webinar Rosel Kim from the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund did with ODLAN (linked in resources).

### **Reflection**

Which of the options we've presented do you think would work well in your organization?

What would the process be for implementing these changes?

What barriers do you think you might encounter when trying to implement these changes?

### **Mental Health Resources**

1. TransLifeline | Trans Lifeline provides trans peer support | (877) 330-6366 (operates 24/7)
2. Réseau ACCESS Network | Sudbury, Ontario | Provides: Case Management, Counseling, Psychiatric Services and more for ALL age groups | 705.688.0500 or 1.800.465.2437
3. CAYR Community Connections | Newmarket, Ontario | Provides: Crisis support services, Harm Reduction and more | 1-800-243-7717 | Off Business Hours Support Line - 1-855-310-COPE (2673); or 905-953-5412
4. Sexual Health Infoline Ontario (SHILO) | free and anonymous counseling services for ALL Canadians | 1-800-668-2437 (Mon-Fri 10 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.; Weekends 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.)
5. Toronto PFlag | Provides: Confidential Support Line for ALL ages | open 9AM-9PM 7 days a week | 416-406-637

### **Resources**

ODLAN & Wisdom2Action's research report, "The Internet Isn't All Rainbows: Exposing and Mitigating Online Queerphobic Hate Against 2SLGBTQ+ Organizations":

<https://odlan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Mitigating-Online-Hate-ODLAN-Full-Report-Digital.pdf>

Fae Johnstone's webinar on preparing for transphobic online hate campaigns:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cSQ0\\_Y\\_2Ps](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cSQ0_Y_2Ps)

Digital Safety How-To Guide from Right To Be:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/198xjY981uhvrSp1trf0-wjr5rXRskRD7v8aJ2vUWfjA/edit>

Black Lives Matter on alternatives to the police: <https://defundthepolice.org/alternatives-to-police-services/>

Rosel Kim (Women's Legal Education and Action Fund) webinar on legal options for addressing online hate in Canada: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FESOAGAHylo>