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THE WORKPLACE VIOLENCE RISK ISSUE

Workplace Violence Prevention and Preparedness Strategies for Nonprofits

By Rachel Sams

This article contains information about prevention and preparedness strategies for workplace violence, including physical assaults and mass shootings.

When was the last time tempers got heated at your nonprofit?

Did two or more employees clash? Did people receiving services argue with each other? Maybe someone receiving services disagreed with a team member. Or maybe the conflict arose between an employee and a third party, like an angry family member or spouse.

Hopefully, the people in conflict resolved the incident peacefully, and learned some strategies for how to handle future conflicts at work.

But as nonprofit leaders, we can't just hope to avoid workplace violence at our nonprofit. In a world full of conflict and trauma, every nonprofit faces the specter of workplace violence, but many organizations are unprepared. A 2019 study by the Society for Human Resource Management found that more than 50 percent of HR professionals didn't know if their organization had a workplace violence program.

As nonprofit leaders, we must understand the risks, work to prevent

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violence if possible, and have a plan to respond if prevention efforts fail. In this article, we'll share information about common types of incidents; workplace violence risk factors; prevention strategies for nonprofits; how to create an incident plan; and additional resources for help.

Understanding Workplace Violence

In 2020, there were 392 workplace homicides, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). A joint study on workplace violence found that workplace homicides declined by a total of 58% between 1992 and 2019.

However, the study by the BLS, Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health noted that workplace homicides rose 11% in the final six years of the study period. Homicide comprised about 20 percent of all workplace fatalities for women in 2019, compared to 7.5 percent of workplace fatalities for men.

On average, workplaces experienced more than 1 million nonfatal violent victimizations annually between 2015 and 2019, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey. That includes rape or sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. The number equates to eight nonfatal violent crimes for every 1,000 workers age 16 and older.

Workplaces are the most common site of mass shootings, according to The Violence Prevention Project Research Center, a nonprofit that seeks to reduce violence through research.

Workplace violence can have lasting consequences for both individual survivors and the organization. Individual survivors face physical issues that can range from injury, temporary or permanent disability, and increased risk of health issues like hypertension, all the way to death, the National Safety Council reports. Survivors may experience psychological consequences like PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), sleep disturbances, sadness, fear, and anxiety. They may face financial consequences such as medical costs, lost wages, and running out of sick leave or PTO benefits. And they may experience social consequences, like troubled relationships with friends and loved ones, withdrawal, and an increase in interpersonal conflict.

For a nonprofit, workplace violence can result in employees leaving the organization; absenteeism, tardiness, and sick leave; and reduced ability to provide services. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health estimates the annual economic cost of workplace violence at $121 billion.

Recognize Potential Warning Signs

Sometimes a person with a direct relationship to the workplace, like a current or former employee, commits an act of violence. In other cases, the perpetrator has a relationship with the victim that spills over into the workplace, like an act of domestic violence against an employee. And in some cases, the perpetrator has a secondary relationship to the workplace, like a customer or client. Another possibility is an act of violence that is truly random, but happens in a workplace.

The National Safety Council cites these warning signs that someone could be moving toward violence:

- Direct and indirect threats
- A history of violence or criminal behavior
- Verbal abuse
- Erratic or menacing behavior
- Being uncooperative with peers
- Preoccupation with weapons
- Offensive comments or jokes about violence
- Drug and alcohol abuse

Job-related warning signs can include disregard for health and safety, frequent

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> "It's also important to remember that, while violence often follows a progression, it's not always linear."

and unexplained absences or tardiness, difficulty concentrating, inconsistent work performance and attitude, excessive need for oversight and supervision, deteriorating work performance, and poor health and hygiene.

Of course, it's important to remember that workplace performance and behavioral issues can surface when an employee is just going through a hard time. If you see any of these signs from an employee, check in with them and ask what they need. Keep in mind that the best course of action may be to remind the employee about the availability of support from an Employee Assistance Program or community resources. Speak to the lead HR professional at your nonprofit if you feel you need to share your concern about the employee with someone else—or speak to another member of your management team if your nonprofit doesn't have HR.

It's also important to remember that, while violence often follows a progression, it's not always linear. Every person and every situation is unique. Risk factors for violence should never be ignored.

Create a Workplace Violence Prevention Plan

A strong workplace violence prevention plan can make employees feel safer and encourage them to report risk factors for violence. Violence prevention plans can also lead to higher morale, lower insurance costs, and a stronger organizational safety culture, according to the National Safety Council. If you work for a large nonprofit, consider asking for volunteers for a task force to create your plan. Seek input early on from all team members, with an emphasis on those who do your organization's highest-risk jobs.

Many states require some types of workplaces to have violence prevention plans. The Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act, currently before Congress, would require the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to create a standard that requires health care and social service employers to create and implement workplace violence prevention plans.

According to the National Safety Council, factors that can make it more likely that a workplace will experience violence include:

Environmental

- Lack of natural surveillance (providing client services in isolated rooms, etc.)

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- Obstructed entry or exit routes
- Poor lighting in areas like corridors or parking lots
- Unstable political or social environment
- High crime rates in an area
- Working in or near establishments that serve alcohol

Organizational

- Acceptance of workplace violence as "part of the job" and/or fear of retaliation
- Chronic disputes between management and employees
- Frequent grievances filed by employees; perceptions of injustice, unfairness, or double standards
- Chronic dangerous work conditions
- Frequent injury claims, especially for psychological or occupational stress
- Understaffing and/or excessive demand for overtime
- Low employee engagement results, including HR grievances, stressors, or high conflict

Occupational

- Prolonged or irregular shift work
- Working alone, in isolated locations or a patient or client's home
- Public-facing work, especially in service professions
- Working with people who display volatile or unstable behavior
- Working with people with a history of violence or drug and alcohol abuse
- Working in community-based settings, such as rehabilitation centers and group homes
- Handling cash and valuables
- Working where alcohol is served
- Delivery of passengers, goods, or services

Assess your workplace for these risk factors and create a plan to mitigate the most significant risks you find. This could mean taking action to make the physical space at your nonprofit safer, like adding lighting, removing obstructions of sight lines, installing panic buttons, holding client meetings in areas within sight and sound of other staff, and clearly marking entrances and exits. Get employee input on the changes you plan to make, and ask what else you could do to make employees feel safer at work. Follow up on all suggestions to let employees know what you changed, what you didn't, and why.

Training can also help lessen the likelihood of workplace violence and prepare you if it happens. All employees should receive training about workplace violence issues at orientation, along with annual refreshers. Training should describe the types of workplace violence, emphasize the role that all employees play in raising concerns about violence, provide information about de-escalation strategies and how to respond in an emergency, and let employees know how to report workplace violence. (For more on de-escalation, see our article in this issue.) Workplace violence incidents often happen quickly and end before law enforcement arrives, so training should help employees develop skills and awareness they'd need to survive in a fast-moving situation, according to the FBI. Managers and supervisors should receive additional training on how to recognize and respond to the potential signs of workplace violence.

If an employee faces stalking or threats from someone inside or outside the workplace, ask the employee what kind of support they need from your team, and give them as much of what they ask for as you can. This trauma-informed practice empowers an employee who faces a scary situation where they have little control. And if the employee knows the perpetrator, the employee can provide helpful information on how to protect themselves and the workplace, according to Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence, a national coalition.

One of the most important things employers can do to reduce the threat of workplace violence is to foster a culture anchored in psychological safety. If employees feel they can speak up about

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worries and concerns without retribution, they'll be more likely to help you identify risk factors for workplace violence, and more willing to report things that seem or feel concerning, so you can address them before an incident happens.

Some key steps to cultivate psychological safety:

Lead with trust. Leaders must demonstrate that they trust their employees and their peers to be trusted in return. This will take time, patience, and consistency. Leaders should spell out that they allow and even welcome honest mistakes and feedback about concerns, and there won't be consequences. Then they must demonstrate that, time and again.

Treat disagreement as a gift. The more perspectives a team can gather, including reasons why an exciting idea might raise safety concerns, the more valuable insight they will have and the better prepared you will be if an incident occurs. Welcome and invite disagreement on your team.

Make talking about mistakes comfortable. Sometimes we all fail, including teams. Set the expectation that some experiments will fail, that failure is part of growth, and that it won't involve punishment. Leaders must share their own mistakes and failures to show that it's ok to do so.

Don't give up. It takes time, effort, and consistency to cultivate psychological safety. You and your team will likely slip into old patterns over and over. When you see that happen, name it, and give yourselves and your team members grace. Remind yourself and each other why you're doing this work, what progress you've made, and how the journey will benefit your team and the people and communities your nonprofit serves.

How to Respond to Workplace Violence

If workplace violence takes place at your nonprofit, leaders should follow the organization's emergency and evacuation plans, as well as your guidelines on when to call 911. Follow all organizational procedures on reporting and investigating the incident.

Immediately after an incident, your nonprofit should:

- Make sure all employees and clients are safe and accounted for.
- Provide first aid or get medical attention for anyone who needs it.
- Inform employees about what happened and what actions they need to take.
- Immediately make counseling services available at no charge to employees for an extended period.
- Assess and arrange for longer-term support for employees as needed. This might include additional counseling, medical care, financial or legal assistance, and extra time off.
- Communicate clear expectations to your team members. Every step you take to clearly communicate what work must get done during this time and what can wait will make people feel more comfortable.
- Create return-to-work plans with employees who need time away from the office to recover. Stay in touch

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with thoughtful cards, occasional check-ins, and visits as the employee feels comfortable. You want to show care and concern, not create pressure. As the employee's return approaches, consider any job modifications they may need to come back to work.

- Depending on the severity of the incident, your team may need more help to process what happened, like a conversation led by a mental health professional, or a memorial service for a co-worker who died.
- Reach out to the family members of employees who were severely injured or killed to show your support.
- Follow your crisis management plan to communicate with outside parties, like the public, donors, and clients, as needed.
- Studies have found that social support in the days, weeks, and months following workplace violence can make it less likely that affected employees will experience depression. Social support can include expressing care and concern, providing concrete support like time off and flexibility in work hours and location, and listening when employees share their experiences.

Whether you also witnessed the incident or not, it can be emotionally challenging to support your team after workplace violence. You might be tempted to stop talking about what happened as soon as possible. But the consequences of violence can stay with teams for a long time, and all of you will be better equipped to heal if you acknowledge what you're feeling.

Start with yourself. Write down what you feel, whether it's sadness, anger, frustration, all of the above, or something else. Get enough sleep and nourishing food, so your body has time and sustenance to process emotions. Name what you're feeling with your team. This helps show them that it's OK to feel a range of emotions after what happened.

If a team member shares something they are struggling with:

Listen.

Ask what support they need.

If they don't know, offer a few options and see how they respond. You may need to agree to revisit the topic later.

Do say: "I'm sorry you're going through a hard time."

"I'm here to support you."

Don't say: "I know exactly what you're going through because…[personal story here.]" No two experiences are the same—even if both of you were in the room when the violent act happened. If someone shares something with you, don't make it about you.

Strengthen Your Team Through Prevention

A thoughtful workplace violence prevention plan can help prevent many turbulent situations from escalating into violence, and provide straightforward 'what to do' guidance that many team members will appreciate. Careful attention to workplace violence prevention can also help employees feel more secure at work and strengthen a team.

Violence can happen even in a workplace that has taken measures to prevent it. But if it does, your team can rely on the work you've done to prepare—and turn your attention to healing.

Rachel Sams is a Consultant and Staff Writer at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. Reach her with questions and ideas about how nonprofits can prevent and respond to workplace violence at rachel@nonprofitrisk.org or 505.456.4045.

Violence Prevention Resources:

These resources can help your nonprofit work to prevent violence and respond if it occurs.

Incident Prevention and Response Strategies - Workplaces Respond to Domestic and Sexual Violence https://www.workplacesrespond.org/resource-library/incident-prevention-response/

National Domestic Violence Hotline - 1-800-799-SAFE, thehotline.org

Preventing and Responding to Workplace Violence - Chubb https://www.chubb.com/us-en/businesses/resources/preventing-and-responding-to-workplace-violence.html

A Manager's Handbook: Handling Traumatic Events https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/worklife/reference-materials/traumaticevents.pdf

What Nonprofits Need to Know About Conflict De-Escalation

By Rachel Sams

Imagine you're the director of client services at a nonprofit that serves unhoused people. You hold an open house to educate the public about your work and the challenges unhoused people face.

A community member aggressively and repeatedly questions your executive director. She politely thanks the community member for his feedback and invites other attendees to share their thoughts. The man remains quiet for the rest of the meeting, but afterward, he walks up to you, saying he doesn't want his tax dollars going to services for unhoused people. He gets into your personal space. His voice is just below a shout.

What do you do?

There's no single right answer. But conflict de-escalation skills can help your nonprofit team evaluate challenging situations like this in the moment and make an informed decision on how to respond.

Nonprofit employees face many situations that hold the potential for conflict, from workplace tensions to confrontations with members of the public or people who receive services. Conflict de-escalation skills are more necessary than ever in a stressed society with hate crimes rising and acts of gun violence increasing. In this article, we'll explore what conflict de-escalation is, how to practice it, and how to know when to seek additional help.

Understanding Conflict

Conflict de-escalation seeks to defuse heated confrontations before they escalate into violence. If successful, de-escalation can eliminate or lessen the need for law enforcement to intervene in a situation, according to Right to Be, a nonprofit that works to end all forms of harassment.

Over a third of workers (36%) report dealing with conflict often, very often, or all the time, up from 29% in 2008, according to research firm Myers-Briggs' 2022 report on conflict at work.

Conflict, or disagreement, can arise among members of your team, or between members of your team and people they meet in their work.

Within teams, conflicts often arise in three areas, according to Myers-Briggs:

- Task conflict - People might disagree about work assignments, workplace policies, or how your nonprofit allocates resources.
- Relationship conflict - Team members could have disagreements rooted in personality differences or preferred work styles.
- Values conflict - People might disagree on ethics, social norms, diversity in the workplace, and more.

The same dynamics can also cause

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conflict between team members and members of the public. People your nonprofit serves might feel they are being treated unfairly, or that your nonprofit has allocated resources wrongly. People might be angry about not getting enough of something they need and express that anger to the person they are dealing with at your nonprofit.

Most of us experience some form of conflict almost every day, and many of those experiences don't result in violence.

What to Do When Conflict Surfaces

If you notice low-level conflict at work—for example, team members avoiding each other, complaining about each other, or frequently nitpicking each other—here are some things to try.

- Make sure you're fostering an environment that's open, collaborative, and communicative. Consider working with your team to come up with a short list of "rules of engagement." It could include things like "we don't interrupt each other unless absolutely necessary" and "we use language that is respectful of others."
- When you see conflict, the Society for Human Resource Management recommends determining if employees can resolve it on their own with some guidance from you; if you need to step in to resolve or mediate it; or if you need to involve HR. Seek HR or legal help from employment counsel licensed in your state for anything that involves a protected employment class like race or gender; allegations of retaliation; or extreme behaviors that reflect gross misconduct in your organization.

If you need to step in:

- **Hear from all sides**, ideally together. Listen actively to understand, rather than respond. Ask the people involved to use "I" rather than "You" statements. Invite them to check their assumptions—what are they assuming? How do they know it's true?

"Most of us experience some form of conflict almost every day, and many of those experiences don't result in violence."

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"How do you know whether you need to intervene in a conflict immediately? First, observe the situation from a safe distance."

- **Explore best and worst-case scenarios.** What do they see as the best possible outcome? The worst? Where might room exist for compromise?
- **Agree on next steps.** Ask each party to make a verbal commitment to act—e.g., "I agree to keep you informed by inviting you to all meetings on this project."
- **Document the conflict.** Write a summary of the conflict, what caused it, the solution you agreed on, and the plan to implement it. This will give you a record of what happened if the conflict later escalates.

When A Conflict Escalates

How do you know when you need to intervene in a conflict immediately? First, observe the situation from a safe distance. Gauge the level of conflict, whether you have the emotional resources and any needed support to respond, and whether your intervention could increase the risk of harm. If the person's behavior or the situation is escalating and you believe violence may occur, leave the situation, go to a safe location, and seek help.

Here are some warning signs that a conflict is escalating, which increases the risk of violence.

AGITATION, the lowest level of conflict, can involve aggressive body language, sighing loudly, and eye-rolling. (Note: at times, some neurodivergent people may display gestures such as eye-rolling without aggressive intent.)

ESCALATION, the middle level of conflict, can include pacing, finger pointing, using an aggressive tone of voice, raising one's voice, or arguing.

PEAK CONFLICT, the highest level, includes verbal abuse (like shaming, humiliating, or harassing someone); spitting or inappropriate touching or gestures; physical aggression; or the display of weapons.

If you decide to take action to de-escalate conflict, here's what to do.

Take a few deep breaths to ground yourself before you act.

Change the setting. Remove people from the area if you can. This could mean asking some of the parties in a conflict and any onlookers to leave.

Respect personal space. Maintain a safe distance, and don't touch the person who's upset.

Listen. Give the person your full attention. Nod. Ask questions when you can. Don't change the subject or interrupt.

Empathize. Show genuine concern and do not judge the person.

Speak slowly and calmly. Monitor your volume and do not raise your voice. Avoid emphasizing words or syllables, which can escalate a situation. See the sidebar with this story, which gives examples of language and body language to use and avoid when de-escalating conflict.

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"When a situation of conflict ends, take some time to reflect."

Even if you don't feel safe actively intervening, you might be able to do bystander intervention, which interrupts a potentially harmful situation. If you feel safe to try it after assessing the situation, you could attempt one of Right to Be's 5 D's of Bystander Intervention.

Distract. Ignore the harasser and engage with the person who's being harassed. You could ask them for the time, or just spill or drop something to shift attention away from the harasser.

Delegate. Ask someone else to take a specific action to help you intervene. This could be a person better positioned to step in—a supervisor, or someone the person who's upset trusts.

Document. If someone else is already helping the person being harassed, you can record or take notes about what's happening. Ask the person who was harassed what they'd like you to do with the recording or notes and respect their wishes.

Delay. Check in with the person who was harassed after the incident ends. Ask them how you can support them.

Direct. If you and the person being harassed are physically safe, the situation seems unlikely to escalate, and you can tell the person being harassed wants somebody to speak up, you could do so. Keep it short and succinct: "That's inappropriate." "Leave them alone." "Please stop right now."

After Conflict: Learn, Process, Heal

When a situation of conflict ends, take some time to reflect. What worked well? What do you wish you had done differently? Acknowledge that whatever happened, you handled the situation as best you could in the moment, and you're committed to

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learning from it. Lean on your nonprofit's workplace violence prevention strategies (see our article in this issue) for help.

Take some time to calm and restore yourself, too. Find a quiet space, take a walk outside, talk to someone you trust, or do any other activities that ground you.

Conflict is a fact of life. With all the pressures on nonprofits, the people and communities they serve, and the team members who serve them, conflicts will surface. If you can quickly assess situations and use de-escalation or bystander intervention when it's safe, you'll be well prepared to meet those conflicts. In the best-case scenario, everyone involved will learn something about how to meet conflict next time. That's something we can all strive for.

Rachel Sams is a Consultant and Staff Writer at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She will present a webinar about de-escalation for NRMC affiliate members in November. Reach her with questions or thoughts about this article at rachel@nonprofitrisk.org or (505) 456-4045.

Continue Your Learning

Learn more about how to de-escalate conflict with these resources.

5 Ds of Bystander Intervention - Right to Be https://righttobe.org/guides/bystander-intervention-training/

How to De-Escalate Conflict - NRMC https://www.risk-resources.org/2023/08/03/how-to-de-escalate-conflict/

How to Stay Calm in Tough Situations - NRMC https://www.risk-resources.org/2023/07/25/how-to-stay-calm-in-tough-situations/

De-Escalation: How You Can Help Defuse Potentially Violent Situations - Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/De-Escalation_Final%20508%20%2809.21.21%29.pdf

Say This, Don't Say That

Here are some examples of language and body language that can help de-escalate conflict.

Avoid: "Calm down."
Say: "I can see that you're upset."

Avoid: "I can't help you."
Say: "I want to help, what can I do?"

Avoid: "I know how you feel."
Say: "I understand that you feel..."

Avoid: "Come with me."
Say: "May I speak with you?"

Avoid: Standing rigid directly in front of the person
Try: Keeping a relaxed, alert stance at the person's side

Avoid: Pointing your finger
Try: Keeping your hands down, open, and visible at all times

Avoid: Faking a smile
Try: Maintaining a neutral, attentive facial expression

How to Create and Iterate Firearms and Weapons Policies

By Melanie Lockwood Herman

Safety at work is top-of-mind for employees across the diverse nonprofit sector. In some workplaces, employees feel comfortable sharing their concerns about the risk of workplace violence, mass shootings, terrorism, and other events that potentially put them in harm's way. In other situations, employees keep their concerns to themselves.

Strong views about guns in the U.S. make the very topic of weapons touchy and 'off limits' in many workplaces. Yet regardless of how individual team members feel about guns, unaddressed fear of being the random or targeted victim of gun violence makes it impossible to work productively and ensure the focus a nonprofit mission deserves. And while no set of strategies or protective practices forecloses the risk of violence involving a firearm, a weapons policy may provide clarity and a sense of safety to your team.

Fit to Suit

There is no single weapons policy that is appropriate for all private sector nonprofit employers. Each organization must determine what rules and expectations are mission appropriate. Employers that implement weapons policies must reflect on their commitments to workplace security, employee privacy, and much more. This article explores what to consider as your nonprofit decides whether to adopt a weapons policy, and what that policy should include if you do.

Federal and State Law Considerations

There is no federal law that limits or restricts the right of private, nonprofit employers to allow, encourage, restrict, or prohibit weapons in the workplace.

Some state laws provide a conditional right to bring firearms to the workplace. These laws sometimes include caveats. State laws may:

- require that firearms be stored in a locked vehicle (examples include Ohio and Oklahoma)
- prohibit employers from requiring that employees disclose that they own weapons
- prohibit retaliation against employees who own or use guns, and

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"The scope section of your policy should define what items (weapons) the policy refers to, to whom the policy applies, and where the policy applies."

- require private businesses that restrict weapons to post notices (Alaska, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Wisconsin)

Start with Your Purpose

As you develop a firearms or weapons policy for your agency, it's important to decide whether you will:

- Strictly *prohibit* the possession of weapons in the workplace, or
- *Provide guidance or restrictions* on the possession of weapons in the workplace.

If your decision is to *permit* the possession of weapons, you may need to remind employees and constituents that permission to bring a weapon (concealed carry) is a privilege that may be restricted, changed or withdrawn at any time. A safety-oriented policy that permits the possession of firearms should set forth clear rules, such as:

Any employee who brings a gun to work must:

- Follow all federal, state and local laws regarding firearms possession and use
- Maintain a valid concealed carry permit if required by state or local laws
- Keep the gun safely holstered at all times
- Keep the gun safety mechanism on at all times
- Maintain possession of the gun at all times, unless a designated gun locker is available on premises
- Keep the gun concealed at all times

If your agency permits employees to carry firearms, also consider a "no brandishing" rule. For example:

"Employees who bring guns to work may never: 1) use a weapon to intimidate or threaten a co-worker, and 2) open carry a gun in the workplace."

Scope Your Policy

The scope section of your policy should define *what items* (weapons) the policy refers to, to *whom* the policy applies, and *where* the policy applies.

What: Explain what constitutes a weapon or dangerous weapon under the policy. Examples include:

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"A common mistake in policy drafting is to use legalistic or formal language, or jargon that people covered by the policy may not understand."

- Firearms, explosives, knives, and other weapons that might be considered dangerous or that could cause harm (source: SHRM)
- Any device from which a projectile may be fired by an explosive, metal knuckles, any spring blade knife, or any instrument that can be used as a club and poses a reasonable risk of injury

Whom: Describe who the policy covers. For example: "This policy covers all persons staffing or participating in our programs. A license to carry a weapon does not supersede this policy."

Where: Describe where your policy applies. Some leadership teams may decide the policy applies on the nonprofit organization's owned or rented premises. Others may decide the policy applies anywhere work is being performed, to include events at public or private facilities, or while visiting the homes or premises of individual or institutional clients. If your agency permits staff to carry, subject to local and state laws, consider including a "Firearms and Business Travel" section of your policy reminding staff that:

"Employees must respect the firearms policies of other businesses they visit, and follow all state and local laws regarding firearm possession and carry while traveling to other locales as part of their assigned duties."

Involve Internal Constituents in Policy Design

The NRMC team believes involving staff with diverse perspectives in policy design is the best way to ensure varying points of view are considered early on. Doing so also increases the likelihood that the policy will be well received and supported. Could this involvement stir up strong emotions or reveal differences in perspective? Possibly. Will involving a team mean that it will take longer to draft a policy? Certainly. Although you may be tempted to assign policy drafting to a single team member and hope that others will support that final product, this approach limits the perspectives that are key to developing the best policy for your agency and building support for that policy slowly and thoughtfully.

Use Clear Language

A common mistake in policy drafting is to use legalistic or formal language, or jargon that people covered by the policy may not understand. Keep in mind that ambiguity can lead to varying interpretations, confusion, and unintended policy violations. Also, review other workplace policies at your nonprofit to identify the tone and style that you customarily use. Apply that same style in your weapons policy.

Note Exceptions

A weapons policy will often include exceptions for persons who may be permitted to have a firearm, such as security personnel, or representatives of law enforcement agencies.

Highlight Employee Responsibilities

Consider describing employee responsibilities under the policy. For example:

- Employees should report any violations of the policy to HR or any member of management.

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- Employees who make reports in good faith are protected against retaliation of any kind.
- Employees who have questions about any aspect of the policy should speak to HR or any member of management.

Describe Enforcement and Consequences

Indicate how you will enforce the policy, and what will happen if an employee violates the policy. For example:

- We reserve the right to search organization property, including vehicles, workstations, and desks. Any staff member, volunteer, client or visitor who violates this policy is subject to discipline, including dismissal or ineligibility for future participation.
- Employees who are found to have violated this policy are subject to discipline, up to and including termination from employment.
- Any employee found to be in violation of this policy will be terminated without notice.

Final Thoughts

A weapons or firearms policy is one element in an organization's overall commitment to workplace safety. As is true with any new workplace policy or practice, engaging team members with varying perspectives and roles helps build support early on. Yet it's important to recognize that team members may have very strong views about guns, shaped by their own personal experiences. An effort to formulate a weapons policy should focus on what makes sense for your unique nonprofit at this time. It is possible for a policy that permits—or prohibits—weapons in the workplace to be respectful of differing views.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. Reach her with questions or thoughts about this article at melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703-777-3504.

Resources:

"Workplace Gun Policies: What Employers Need to Know, by Emmanuel V.R. Boulukos, May 5, 2021, www.icemiller.com/ice-on-fire-insights/publications/workplace-gun-policies-what-employers-need-to-kno/

"Position/Policy Statement – Safe Firearms," National Safety Council, www.nsc.org/getattachment/a5c8b662-d154-40c6-927e-2a74d85b3f89/hc-safe-firearms-168#:~:text=NSC%20believes%20that%20all%20employers,of%20firearms%20on%20their%20property.

"Parking Lot Laws: Their Content and Applicability," Duke Center for Firearms Law https://firearmslaw.duke.edu/2020/06/parking-lot-laws-their-content-and-applicability/

"Can Your Employees Bring Firearms to Work?," Wyatt Employment Law Report https://wyattfirm.com/can-your-employees-bring-firearms-to-work/

"Changes in Gun Laws Affect the Workplace," Society for Human Resource Management https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/guns-at-workplace-bruen.aspx

SAMPLE #1: Prohibition of Weapons in the Workplace Policy

In order to provide a safe, welcoming environment for our staff, volunteers, clients, participants and guests, ABC Nonprofit prohibits the wearing, transporting, storage or presence of firearms and other dangerous weapons in any ABC facility, office, or program site.

An employee who is found to be in possession of a firearm or other weapon while on ABC business may face discipline, up to and including termination. A client, participant, or visitor who violates this policy may be deemed ineligible for participation in future ABC programs, and may be reported to the authorities.

Possession of a valid concealed weapons permit is not an exemption under this policy.

Firearms or other dangerous weapons include:

- Any device from which a projectile could be fired by an explosive
- Any simulated firearm operated by gas or compressed air
- Sling shots
- Sand clubs
- Metal knuckles
- Spring blade knives, or knives that are opened by an outward or downward thrust or movement
- Any instrument or device that can be used as a club and poses risk of serious injury

This policy does not apply to:

- Members of a law enforcement agency engaged in their official duties
- Employees of a security agency engaged in their official duties
- Members of an official U.S. or state military unit engaged in official duties.

If You See Something, Say Something

Please alert a member of management or security if you believe someone is in possession of a weapon prohibited under this policy.

SAMPLE #2: Weapons in the Workplace Policy

ABC Nonprofit permits staff members who have a concealed carry permit to bring their weapon to the workplace. We prohibit the open carry of firearms and other dangerous weapons in any ABC facility, office, or program site.

- Permission to bring weapons to the workplace is a privilege that can be restricted, changed, or revoked at any time by management. Employees who are found to have violated this policy are subject to discipline, up to and including termination from employment.

Any employee who brings a gun to work must:

- Follow all federal, state and local laws regarding firearms possession and use
- Maintain a valid concealed carry permit if required by state or local laws
- Keep the gun safely holstered at all times
- Keep the gun safety mechanism on at all times
- Maintain possession of the gun at all times, except if a designated gun locker is available on premises
- Keep the gun concealed at all times

Furthermore, employees who bring guns to work may never:

- use a weapon to intimidate or threaten a co-worker, and
- open carry a gun in the workplace.

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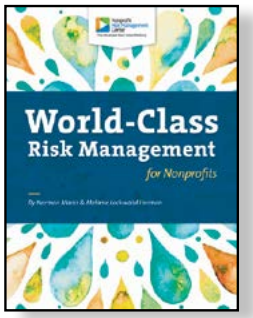

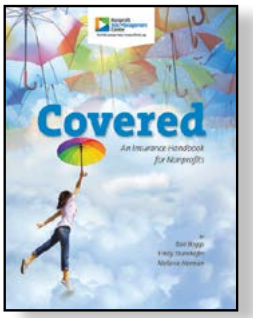

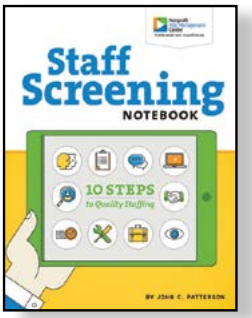

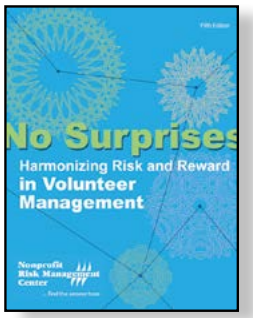

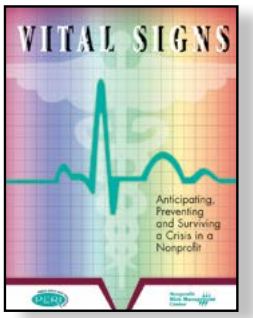

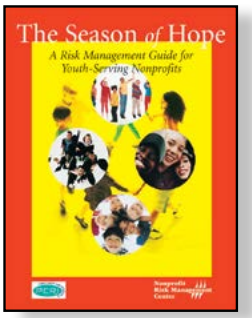

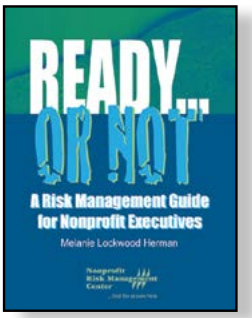

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