



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
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DEVELOPMENT

| FACTSHEET



STORYTELLING RISKS

What are storytelling risks?

Storytelling can be a risky business. 'Storytelling risks' highlight possible harm that can occur during the collection, publishing and storage of storytelling information. Storytelling risks affect the people and institutions involved in collecting, publishing and storing of storytelling information.

Why they're so important

As part of their work, NGOs share some important – yet difficult – stories. Sometimes their stories show injustice and harsh realities. While these are important stories for the world to hear, inherent in undertaking these activities is a level of risk. Misunderstanding cultural norms and mismanaging storytelling content can harm both the people NGOs strive to support, as well as their organisations.

What does the Code say about them?

Assessing and managing all types of risk is covered in several parts of the Code – as a way of **preventing unintended harm**, **analysing the contexts** in which we work and **managing our resources effectively**. Reflecting on potential storytelling risks is one way to ensure that the collection of information, images and stories does not harm people or the environment (6.2.2).

Identifying risks

It's important for your organisation to know the risks involved in your storytelling activities. These will reflect the people and contexts in which you work, and how communications are managed in your organisation. The following questions are not exhaustive, but will provide a useful starting point for identifying storytelling risks.

Who could be impacted by your storytelling activities?

Some possible groups to consider include:

- Program participants
 - What are the potential consequences for people and communities who contribute to communication materials?
 - Are the risks greater for certain groups or individuals that you work with?
- Staff and volunteers
 - Are there risks to the well-being of staff or volunteers as a result of collecting or being involved in communications work?
 - Is there adequate training and support provided for all staff involved in the communications process?
- Your organisation
 - Are there risks to your organisation's reputation or other areas of its operations, e.g. fundraising, advocacy?
 - Has your organisation had complaints or issues with its communications materials in the past that you can learn from?
- Your audience
 - How might your activities impact on supporters, the general public, political influencers and public figures?

What actions or situations could contribute to an increased level of risk?

Some examples could include:

- Policies or procedures that are unclear or not implemented consistently
- Limited knowledge, capacity or experience of communications requirements by partners/contractors who are involved in your communications activities
- Ignoring cultural norms and expectations related to images and storytelling
- Inconsistent or insecure processes for storing images and personal information
- Having only one person involved in decision-making
- Sourcing materials from third parties

Does your organisation engage in higher-risk activities?

Some activities and contexts will have an inherently higher level of risk associated with them. These include:

- Responding to humanitarian emergencies
- Operating in regions with active conflicts and/or health epidemics
- Advocating on highly political issues
- Working with communities affected by intergenerational trauma, sexual violence and family violence.

Higher-risk activities may require more comprehensive procedures to be developed.

When might risks be highest?

There might be points in your storytelling process where the risk to people or the organisation is greater. Consider the 'ethically important moments' suggested in the [example EDMF](#). Your EDMF and other procedures should help ensure risks are monitored and mitigated at these moments.

Assessing risks

A risk rating table, such as the following, can be used to assess the level of each risk identified.

		CONSEQUENCE		
		Low	Medium	High
LIKELIHOOD	High	Medium	High	High
	Medium	Low	Medium	High
	Low	Low	Low	Medium

Mitigating and monitoring risks

It is important to consider how you will mitigate the risks that have been identified. You might need to:

- Review and assess the effectiveness and implementation of existing policies and procedures
- Include strategies in your EDMF or other documents to address or reduce identified risks
- Regularly monitor and review communication risks
- Have effective complaints handling procedures

Consider how your organisation might undertake regular reviews of its communications risks. A risk log, similar to the following, can be used to document and monitor risks and mitigation strategies.

Activity	Communication risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Strategies already in place to mitigate risk	Risk rating	Action to reduce risk	By whom	When

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