



UPLIFT
ONLINE COMMUNITIES
AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE

THE CONVENTION TOOLKIT

A GUIDE FOR CONVENTION STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS





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Introduction

Uplift was a nonprofit organization dedicated to combatting sexual violence in fandom communities through education and advocacy. From 2014 to 2023, Uplift worked with creators, platforms, and convention organizers to create safer fandom communities. During that time Uplift partnered with 15 different organizations across dozens of events to create codes of conduct, run staff training, improve volunteer handbooks, and audit events. As we close this chapter on direct partnerships with events, we have compiled our best practices and resources into this guide.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS GUIDE?

This guide is designed for convention staff and volunteers. Most of our expertise lies with fandom events, but the best practices should still be applicable for professional events or events with other focuses. At the center of these best practices is an understanding of your community and how people connect at your event. If you understand your community, you can apply these tips to any event.

While most of this guide focuses on in-person events, the virtual events section later in the guide shares detailed recommendations for virtual spaces and events.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We recommend reading through the guide and noting sections to come back to or to share with others on your team. At the end of the guide, we have a sample timeline for how to incorporate these best practices before, during, and after your event.

After a major change at your organization or as new people join your staff, consider sharing relevant resources with them.

At the end of the toolkit, we also have a set of discussion questions for your organization. As part of a larger staff training or to kick off for your event, have everyone on your team read the relevant sections for their role and then schedule a team discussion to talk about how to apply these lessons to your event.

Building Context

TERMINOLOGY

To understand the recommendations and best practices, we need to be on the same page about the broader context. Each of these terms is complex and may have different meanings depending on the context. These are the meanings we will use throughout this resource.

CONSENT

Consent is explicit permission given willingly and affirmatively. It may be communicated verbally, such as saying 'yes,' or through non-verbal cues like a nod. Crucially, consent must be free from any external pressures.

Consent can not be freely given under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Coercion,



force, or deceitful tactics to obtain consent are unacceptable and prevent consent.

In situations where a significant power imbalance exists, consent cannot be considered freely given. While our common understanding of consent centers around sexual interactions, consent is equally important in other scenarios at conventions.

For instance:

- Requesting permission before hugging someone
- Seeking approval to take a photo with someone
- Obtaining consent before posting a photo online
- Ensuring interest before dancing with someone at the convention ball

HARASSMENT

Harassment, in its broadest sense, encompasses unwelcome conduct. This can be physical harassment, verbal harassment, or online harassment.

Online harassment includes hate speech, slurs, trolling, stalking, cyberstalking, issuing death threats, engaging in unsolicited sexual communication, impersonation, dogpiling*, doxxing**, and more.

Sexual harassment is unwarranted conduct of a sexual nature, which can include explicitly sexual conduct or harassment related to gender or sexuality.

Racial harassment targets individuals based on their race.

** Dogpiling refers to a coordinated attack by multiple individuals against a single person, often in conjunction with other forms of harassment.*

*** Doxxing involves the malicious publication of an individual's personal information online, soliciting harassment from others. This information may include their address, phone number, workplace details, email addresses, usernames, banking information, or details about their family members.*

POWER DYNAMICS

A power dynamic occurs when there are different levels of power between two individuals or communities.

Power imbalances at conventions include:

- Invited guests vs. regular attendees
- Attendees vs. staff
- Speakers vs. attendees
- Extremely successful influencers vs. newer creators
- Well-known fans vs. newer fans
- Older attendees vs. younger attendees

This power can involve access to more resources or information. It can involve the power to lift someone up or push them down. Most importantly, it involves real or perceived influence. When there is a power dynamic at play, consent becomes more challenging and, at times, impossible.



Interaction between fans and invited guests is at the heart of many fan conventions. These guests can be traditional celebrities or social media influencers. Many fans attend these events seeking autographs, photos, or a moment of interaction with their idols and the convention is structured to preserve this hierarchy with additional tickets and long lines required for meet & greets. Invited guests often have a completely different experience of the event with escorts from hotel rooms, exclusive areas of the convention hall, and invite-only events.

Panel discussions also exemplify power dynamics. Panelists, who may be industry experts, creators, or celebrities, assume positions of authority on stage, while the audience engages from a more passive role. This distinction can influence the flow of conversation, with attendees often looking up to the panelists as authorities on a specific topic. The power dynamic is further emphasized in Q&A sessions, where attendees direct questions to the panelists, seeking knowledge or support from these people with influence. While some events have an open call for speakers, many events specifically curate or invite the panelists and the average attendee has no opportunity to be on stage.

Within a fandom, well-known fans wield authority and influence. Moderators or admins of popular online communities, long-time attendees of a certain event, and creators of popular fan sites or blogs have significant power. Within these online communities, they may govern the tone and nature of the discussions. They have the opportunity to invite others in and kick people out. Even in open communities, fans with influence can easily turn members of the community against someone with a simple social media post.

Recognizing and addressing these power dynamics is essential for fostering an inclusive and positive environment at fan conventions. When you are in a position of power, you have a responsibility to understand that power and wield it appropriately.

FAN / CREATOR DYNAMICS

At its best, the relationship between fans and creators can be symbiotic. Fans derive immense joy from the content creators produce, and their attention and support enables creators to earn a living pursuing their passions. Interactions at conventions benefit fans and creators. Creators get to hear feedback about their work and see its impact, while fans appreciate being acknowledged by someone they look up to.

However, it's easy for things to go wrong. Some creators abuse their power and harm their fans. Fans, fearing backlash, may fear speaking out against their favorite creator. Other fans, even when presented with credible allegations, choose to remain loyal to a creator at all costs.

Conversely, fans can also wield a destructive influence. Online spaces become breeding grounds for harassment and bullying of creators. In extreme cases, real-world encounters at conventions escalate into physical harm. Doxxing further jeopardizes the safety of creators.

Identity, too, plays a pivotal role in shaping fan/creator dynamics. Creators from marginalized communities may face heightened threats and harassment, while creators from more privileged backgrounds may perpetuate harmful behaviors. These power dynamics underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of how identity intersects with fan and creator roles.

A healthy fan/creator dynamic hinges on mutual respect and empathy. Both fans and creators



must recognize each other as complex individuals beyond their designated roles. Fans should approach creators with caution and avoid excessive idolization. Creators must acknowledge the influence they hold and refrain from exploiting their fans. By fostering a relationship built on respect and understanding, the fan/creator dynamic can become a positive force, enriching the creative landscape for all involved.

TRAUMA RESPONSE

Traumatic events at conventions can range from harassment to sexual violence to medical emergencies, and the impact on individuals can be profound. In response to trauma, attendees may exhibit behaviors like panic, withdrawal, or emotional distress. These responses may seem unintuitive but are natural reactions to perceived threats. The brain's survival mechanisms during trauma may trigger fight, flight, or freeze responses and short-term memory may be affected.

Attendees may carry unique histories and triggers that can evoke trauma responses. Practicing empathy and trauma-informed practices in your role as convention staff is essential.

It's crucial to avoid pressuring individuals for a linear narrative immediately, recognizing that the logical brain may be temporarily overridden by the instinctive brain's survival mode. Grounding techniques, such as offering a calm and safe space or asking simple, non-intrusive questions, can help attendees reorient themselves in the present moment.

Moreover, training convention staff to recognize potential indicators of trauma, such as signs of stress, withdrawal, or sudden changes in behavior, can aid in early intervention. Trauma responses may not always be immediately apparent, and staff should remain vigilant for cues that someone may be struggling emotionally or psychologically. Providing resources for mental health support and creating a supportive network within the convention community can contribute to a more resilient and understanding environment.

More details about trauma-informed approaches for your event are in [“Staff Training” on pg 9](#)

[Video Resource: Trauma and the Brain](#)

BARRIERS TO REPORTING

Before focusing on how to respond to incidents, it is important to acknowledge that many incidents go unreported. By the time you receive a report at your event, an attendee has overcome multiple hurdles. Potentially, identical events have occurred previously and this is just the first to be reported.

There are many barriers to reporting incidents.

FEAR OF NOT BEING BELIEVED

Approaching a member of staff who you don't know to share a stressful or traumatic moment can be very intimidating. An attendee might worry that they won't be believed, that they will have to defend themselves and their actions, or that they will need to provide excessive details to earn your trust.

If the incident doesn't perfectly fall into a box of how we perceive incidents or if the attendee is worried they didn't “do everything right”, they might hesitate to report.



Additionally, if the perpetrator is in a position of power at the convention as an invited guest, sponsor, or member of staff, it can be particularly intimidating to report.

CONCERN ABOUT AN INADEQUATE RESPONSE

Without being deeply aware of your policies, attendees may doubt that you have the power to help them. Many convention incidents are gray areas or do not have a clear recourse. No one wants to report an issue just to feel like nothing happened or that it was a waste of time.

FEAR OF RETALIATION OR BACKLASH

If there is a consequence for the perpetrator, the attendee may fear being found out and facing backlash. Even if you kick the perpetrator out of the event, they might still harass the reporter at the hotel or a nearby restaurant during lunchtime.

When reporting an incident against a prominent creator, the reporter may fear fan backlash if the perpetrator is forced to cancel events or speaks out about the incident. Conversely, if an invited guest is reporting an incident they may fear being labeled as a troublemaker and worry they might be uninvited from future events.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Many attendees won't know how to report an issue. Every year new attendees go to your event for the first time. For some, this is their first convention ever. As with many aspects of event communication, you will need to remind attendees multiple times of the details.

To spread this knowledge, display how to file reports:

- On the badge or wristband
- On large signs in convention hallways
- In bathrooms
- At the official hotel
- In a prominent place on the website
- In a prominent place on the convention app
- In the day-of attendee emails

Offer multiple ways of reporting and ensure these are clear.

For example:

- In-person - At a prominent place that is clearly labeled on the venue map or by approaching any member of staff, as long as it's clear what color shirts or badges identify convention staff.
- Phone - Make it clear to attendees whether this is a voicemail reporting system, whether they will speak to someone on the phone, or whether they can text. If someone is answering the phone, ensure you have 24-hour coverage throughout the event or clarify the hours.
- Email - Ensure these emails are flagged for importance and sorted separately from general logistic questions that you may receive during the event.
- Slack / Discord - Have a dedicated person to DM or a bot form that triggers the message



being shared in a staff channel.

- Online Form - Make sure your form collects enough information to act on the report. Allowing reports to be submitted anonymously can make them harder to act on, but will increase the number of reports you receive.

DIVERSE EXPERIENCES

Male Survivors

There is a societal perception, that sexual violence is primarily a women's issue. But 1 in 6 men have been sexually abused or assaulted. ([Source](#))

Societal expectations around masculinity make it difficult for men to acknowledge their abuse, report the abuse, and seek support. This stigma can make it harder for male attendees to report incidents at your event.

Never assume the gender or pronouns of the perpetrator or the sexuality of either person, as doing so can make the person reporting even more uncomfortable. It is crucial to respond to incidents with care and compassion regardless of the person's gender.

Survivors of Color

People of color are statically more likely to experience sexual assault. Indigenous women face 2.5x higher rates of sexual violence than white, Black, or Asian women in America. ([Source](#)) 1 in 5 Black women are survivors of rape, 1 in 4 Black girls are sexually abused before the age of 18, and for every Black woman reporting rape, at least 15 do not report it. ([Source](#))

Culture, race, and ethnicity can affect reporting rates of sexual assault. Stigma within communities, fear of shaming the family, and fear of deportation of undocumented individuals, can all play a role. Additionally, Black, Latine, and Indigenous communities may be more likely to distrust the police and could fear reporting through official channels.

Stereotypes such as the misconception that Latinas are inherently seductive, or the historical stereotype of the Jezebel affecting Black women, play a role in which survivors are believed.

As convention staff, remember to never force someone to report to the police and ensure your policies and procedures are designed to treat all attendees equally regardless of race or ethnicity.

LGBTQIA+ Survivors

Queer and Trans survivors face additional barriers to reporting. Attendees may fear homophobia or transphobia could affect whether they are believed and this community may be likely to distrust the police and want to avoid escalating the report further. Reporting the incident may also involve outing themselves to your staff or other members of the community.

When responding to incidents, never assume the gender of the perpetrator or the sexuality of anyone involved. Avoid using pronouns or mirror the pronouns used by the reporter. As with any report, avoid pressing for additional details that are not necessary for the report, such as explicit details about the assault or how a certain person could be assaulted by someone of the same gender.



Your Community

To create a safe and inclusive experience for all attendees at your next event, you first need to understand your community.

- Who is in your community? What types of people come together within it?
- Who is in the majority and who is in the minority? What groups or people are marginalized within your community?
- What challenges has your community faced in the past?
- What challenges do you anticipate facing this year? What might be different?

Think about the different types of attendees. How will their experience of the event be unique? What matters to them at your event?

Examples:

- Invited guests
- Vendors / Sponsors
- Panelists
- Long-term attendees
- First-time attendees
- Children
- Teenagers
- Parents/Guardians accompanying children
- Attendees purchasing a day-pass

Does the community interact online before the event or during the event? This could be through official means like your event app or the event discord but also unofficial means like the event hashtag or an unofficial Facebook group. Think about how the online interactions would influence the in-person interactions and vice versa.

Throughout the rest of this guide and as you're planning your convention, think about the different members of your community coming together at your event and how their interests and needs will require different responses. These best practices can only take you so far, knowing your community and adapting to their needs will give you the best results.

COMMON ISSUES

Through our years of surveying convention attendees and observing events, here are the common issues experienced at conventions.

As you read through this list consider whether you have faced similar issues before and how you've handled them. For issues you haven't faced, consider whether this is something that could happen at your event and what steps you might need to take to prevent it in the future.

Crowds

- Mobs forming at concerns, over a giveaway in the expo hall, or when seeing an invited guest.



Photography

- Inappropriate or non-consensual photography of attendees.
- Filming someone without their permission.

Physical Boundaries

- Hugging, touching, grabbing, kissing, or dancing with someone without their consent.
- Sexual violence
- Physical violence
- Inappropriate comments
- Treating cosplayers as if they are the characters themselves (harassment, implying you have a romantic relationship, etc.)
- Sexual harassment
- Slurs and other violent language

Trans Inclusion

- Lack of gender-neutral restrooms
- Lack of signage about gender-neutral restrooms
- Attendees mocking pronoun stickers

Accessibility

- Attendees not respecting service animals
- Lack of access to ASL interpretation
- Blocking the path of wheelchairs or touching someone's mobility aid without their consent.
- Challenges with reserved seating - Reserved seating claimed by people who don't need it or challenges accessing the reserved seating
- Unclear process of requesting accommodations before the event.
- Lack of quiet spaces within the general convention area to calm down when overwhelmed

Alcohol / Drugs

- Drugging attendees
- Giving alcohol to minors
- Inappropriate behavior while intoxicated at the event

Security

- Security or venue policies prohibit attendees from bringing medically necessary items (food, drinks, medicine).
- Inappropriate or violent action by security when not warranted.
- Security not following expectations outlined in your code of conduct.

CHALLENGES FOR ORGANIZERS

Running a successful convention of any size requires so much work and dedication and you cannot always do everything at once. Here are some challenges convention organizers have expressed to us over the years.



Limited Resources

Whether it's funding, volunteer time, staff time, or venue limitations, limited resources can make it challenging to realize your goals of safety and inclusion. You may want to do more but not have the capability. Maybe you personally want to do more, but leadership is not on board.

Prioritize the recommendations most critical and achievable for your event this year and jot down ideas to add for future years. Taking some action is better than taking no action.

Lack of Control

Many aspects of the convention are outside the control of your event, but will influence your attendees' impression of the event:

- Behavior of third-party security team
- Venue staff
- Hotel staff
- Hotel guests not affiliated with the event

When contracting with a third-party security company, share the values and expectations you have for the tone of the event. When training the security team on your ticketing policies, share best practices for accessibility and inclusion to ensure they're setting the right tone with attendees from their first moment at your event.

When possible share your event policies and best practices with the hotel. Sometimes they might be able to accommodate. Discuss your incident response plan with them, in some serious cases if an attendee is kicked out of your event, the hotel may want to kick them out as well.

Make your staff team visible. Many attendees may confuse venue staff and security staff as directly representing the convention. When possible, make your convention staff team visible with specific shirts or vests and have a consistent place to find a member of staff, like a table in the exhibitor hall.

Not everything will be reported

Sometimes you will only find out about issues after the event. Sometimes you will never hear about a major issue. You don't know what you don't know and that can be frustrating.

Focus on making your reporting system seamless and easy and ensure you have a clear process for dealing with reports and getting back to reporters quickly.

Staff Training

Reporting an incident especially if it involves disclosing assault or harassment can be very challenging. The reporter may fear they will not be believed, feel shame or guilt, and be worried about potential retaliation. Whether they are reporting a minor policy violation or a more serious offense, attendees deserve a thoughtful and empathetic response from you.

While representing the convention, you are in a position of power and will play a huge role in an attendee's experience. Staff members should approach each disclosure of assault or harassment with respect and sincerity, attempting to treat the report as valid, even if uncertainties



exist. Choose your words carefully, ask for help, and follow the policies your organization has developed.

What to Do

Sexual violence is at its core a theft of agency. When responding to an incident it is crucial to listen with empathy and ensure the next steps taken are their choice. Be compassionate, but don't tell them how to feel. You are not a counselor. Allow for silence and listen to what the survivor is asking for.

Simple phrases like, "I'm so sorry that happened to you" and "I believe you" can make survivors feel heard and validated. Offering assistance by asking, "How can I help?" and respecting the survivor's choices regarding reporting or seeking professional help is crucial. Before hugging or touching them, ask for consent.

If they are reporting the incident in a crowded or loud place, ask if they would like to follow you to somewhere more private to talk. If they are alone, you can ask if they would like to find a friend to accompany them while sharing this story. When possible, offer a warm drink like tea. It can be grounding to hold something warm while opening up about a serious topic.

When discussing the incident, mirror the language the survivor uses. If they call the event "rape" or "harassment" address it as such. If they call it "a thing that happened" use this phrasing. Sometimes a survivor is not ready to define what happened with precise terminology and that is okay.

If you determine that you need to escalate their report to another staff member, give a warm handoff to this staff member by walking with them, waiting with them if necessary, and introducing them to the staff member with the appropriate context. This is especially important if the person is in distress.

What to avoid

Sharing the details of an incident can be re-traumatizing. Avoid asking intrusive questions or implying blame. Avoid probing into intimate details, collect only as much information as you need to process the report, and focus on providing support and resources. Steer clear of victim-blaming statements like:

- Why didn't you fight back?
- What were you wearing?
- Why were you alone with them?
- How much did you have to drink?
- How long had you known them?

Make sure to follow your organization's policies and procedures and don't overpromise what the outcome will be unless you are the sole decision maker.

Next Steps

Maintaining confidentiality is paramount when responding to disclosures. Recognize that the survivor's story is not yours to share. Sharing details without consent can be harmful and potentially dangerous. Respecting the survivor's choice and timing regarding disclosure is



essential.

However, to process the report, you may need to discuss the incident with other members of staff. Share a brief overview of the process at the end of the conversation with the survivor and get their buy-in for the next steps whenever possible.

As you work with other staff members to respond to the incident, keep in mind what the survivor shared and what they were asking for. If the survivor is asking for the perpetrator to be removed, but that is not possible, develop a safety plan for the survivor. This is a way for the survivor to feel back in control of their experience. This could look like giving them a direct line to staff or letting them know that the response will be escalated. You could also give exact instructions on how they could directly report if something additional occurred. For example: “We will let security know that if they get a call from you they are to contact us and we will respond.”

Ensure you have their contact information and share incremental updates. Once there is a clear resolution, share the outcome in person.

If you are a survivor

If you are a survivor yourself, approach disclosures with sensitivity. You are not obligated to disclose your own experiences, but sharing some details about similarities can help survivors feel less alone. However, you should ensure the focus remains on the survivor’s disclosure and emotional state rather than turning it into a counter-disclosure.

If you find yourself triggered by someone else’s disclosure, it is crucial to prioritize your own mental health. Communicating the need for a break and assuring the discloser’s safety during that time is essential. You should be honest about your feelings and take the necessary steps to care for your well-being. If you are in crisis, you cannot help others.

RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS

When listening to a report from a survivor, there are many resources you can share. Don’t encourage or discourage the survivor to take a particular action, but offer these resources as options for them. Remind them that they are brave whether they choose to report or not.

Reporting to the police

Some incidents may benefit from reporting to the police. However, this can be very scary and feel like an escalation because it is. Survivors may worry they will ruin the perpetrator’s life or fear backlash. Many communities and individuals are distrustful of the police and may have bad experiences from reporting in the past.

Going to the hospital

In the event of rape, the survivor can get a rape kit at the hospital. A nurse will perform an exam and collect evidence (swabs, photos, etc.) to be used in a future court case. A rape kit is best if administered immediately following an assault, but can be performed up to a few days after.

This experience can be very traumatizing as it will involve re-telling their story many times and being touched by medical staff in the same places they were touched by the perpetrator. Survivors may worry about the out-of-pocket costs of going to the hospital.



Rape Crisis Centers

Local rape crisis centers can be a great place to refer survivors. They can help with counseling, they can ensure the survivor understands their rights and resources, and they may be able to provide an advocate to accompany the survivor to the hospital when getting a rape kit.

Many rape crisis centers have 24/7 hotlines or chat lines and they may have additional resources on their website. Look up the local rape crisis center near your event so you will be able to share this resource with attendees.

Additional Resources

- online.rainn.org - National Sexual Assault Hotline
- 1in6.org - Resource for men who have experienced violence
- translifeline.org -- Trans peer support

Policies and Procedures

CODE OF CONDUCT

Understand Your Community

Instead of writing a code of conduct from scratch, many events find a code of conduct for another event online, change a few words, and consider their work done. Many conventions use the Geek Feminism code of conduct or the Game Developer code of conduct. Both of these are good on their own, but by adapting them to dozens of conferences with different cultures, tones, sizes, and methods of communication, they lose their value. Codes of conduct need to be customized to a community. Before writing one, ensure you understand your community and the unique needs of this community.

Define violations of your policy

Good codes of conduct will include sections on how the group or organization responds to comments promoting violence or hatred against members of marginalized groups as well as sections about physical, verbal, and sexual harassment or assault. Remember to focus on all methods of community interaction. Even if your event meets in-person, your code of conduct should address violations that could occur in online spaces.

Again, you do not want to just copy-paste another code of conduct here. The language and the number of examples you use will vary based on your community values and past problems you have experienced. For example, some communities will want to list out examples of harassment if there have been issues with people not realizing certain behaviors were violations.

Define methods of reporting

- Share the specific ways of reporting issues that occur at your event. Include both the methods of reporting and how to report.
- When possible, share the process and timeline that attendees can expect when reporting an issue.

Define enforcement

- Ensure you understand the enforcement mechanisms and limitations available to you



based on your venue or platform. For example, if you are running a convention in a hotel, you can likely kick violators out of your event spaces, but not the hotel most guests are staying at.

- Define what will happen if someone violates a policy.
- Define under what circumstances someone will get a warning, how many warnings they will receive, under what circumstances they will get kicked out, and if they will be allowed back after a certain period of time.
- Make sure to leave room for your discretion as some egregious violations should result in immediate removal.

Refine over time

A strong code of conduct should be a living document. After a series of incidents have occurred, add additional notes to the code of conduct. As your community expands, update the code of conduct.

As new staff members and volunteers join, encourage their input. New perspectives will yield better outcomes.

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

A volunteer handbook is a document shared with event staff and volunteers that describes roles and responsibilities, event policies, incident response, and other logistics. Depending on the size of your team, you may create separate handbooks for different departments detailing specific aspects of each role.

The handbook is a tool volunteers can reference before and during the event and should serve as a playbook for representing the event and responding to incidents.

Here are some sections to include:

Roles

For each role, describe the basic duties of the role, common issues that can occur, and steps for mitigating them.

For the registration team, you can include the steps for registering attendees and what to do if someone doesn't have an ID, if their payment didn't go through, if they are a minor, if they lose their badge, etc.

For the concert team, you can include what to do if attendees congregate too early, if an attendee shows up intoxicated, if a mosh pit forms, or if an attendee reports inappropriate behavior.

In addition to describing the volunteer roles, describe the role of specific staff members and how to identify them or contact them during the event.

For example:

- Department Head
- Volunteer Manager
- Safety Officer



- Head of Security

Policies

Starting with your code of conduct as a base, elaborate on different policies and typical consequences. This does not need to be comprehensive, but should give volunteers an understanding of the category of issues.

For example,

- Violations that need a simple warning (ex: running in the exhibitor hall)
- Violations that should be reported upwards (ex: inappropriate comment from a speaker during a panel)
- Violations that require a more comprehensive immediate response (ex: major safety concern).

You can group these policies by role or aspect of the event. For example, exhibitor hall policies, concert policies, panel policies, online policies, etc..

Incident Response

This section will also build off of the code of conduct.

Sections to include:

- Frontline response - What steps to take if you are the first person to receive a report
- Escalation - What criteria should be met to escalate, how to escalate, and any documentation that should be completed.
- Flowchart detailing the specific steps, communication plans, and timelines for a report.
- Any other details about the investigation and mediation process.

Ensure your handbook include a process for when the report is about a member of staff. At minimum, the person being reported should be recused from the investigation process. Strong communication and transparency when responding to incidents involving leaders is key for maintaining the health of your community. Attendees and volunteers need to be able to trust that your event has a fair process for handling incidents. If a volunteer is allowed to violate your policies without consequences it will erode the trust of your community.

Frequently Asked Questions

Regardless of role, volunteers may receive questions from attendees about a variety of topics. Including common attendee questions and their answers will help your event run more smoothly.

In this section, you can include local resources such as the local Rape Crisis Center, local emergency numbers, and online hotlines that volunteers can pass on to attendees.

It will also be helpful to include a map or other instructions for how to access different parts of the venue.

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At the end of each event, review your volunteer handbook and volunteer training and update it.

- What aspects of the event were confusing for attendees or volunteers?



- What incidents occurred and was it clear what steps needed to be followed?
- What policies would have made the event more functional?

Consider asking volunteers to brainstorm and discuss with their department leader or in a larger brainstorming forum.

CREATING SAFE CONVENTIONS

To summarize the last few sections, here is a quick checklist to make your event safe and inclusive.

Codes of conduct and harassment policies

Make the code of conduct clear, readable, and easy to understand. Ideally, attendees should have access to the code of conduct on your website, as well as physically at the convention center.

Process for reporting harassment

- Have a hotline, but do not stop there. Provide a variety of ways to report issues— in person, over the phone, via email, or anonymously on your site.
- Have staff immediately available to respond to potential harassment issues. Ideally, staff are wearing a shirt, vest, or badge that makes them easy to identify from a distance.
- Ensure all staff and volunteers are trained to respond and know when to escalate. This includes people working the event who are not directly working for your organization.
- Follow through on policies and the code of conduct- respond, and quickly, by following the steps outlined in your volunteer handbook. Put together an incident response plan in advance of the event.

Gender inclusivity

- Clearly marked all-gender bathrooms. If the venue does not already have them, add signs designating certain bathrooms as gender-neutral before the event begins and ensure these are clearly marked on physical and digital maps provided to attendees.
- Make the language in event materials gender-inclusive.
- Provide ways for attendees to share their pronouns. You could have pronoun ribbons or stickers at registration or designate a section on the badge for attendees to write their pronouns. Remember, not everyone will feel comfortable sharing their pronouns, but providing this as an option goes a long way.

Accessibility

A comprehensive accessibility plan needs to include asking attendees in advance what accommodations they need and creating the budget, infrastructure, and training to make it a reality.

Best practices:

- Use a venue that is accessible to people of all abilities- for example, will there be stairs? If so, will there be elevators with full access to the convention space? Consider the venue itself as well as the hotel and surrounding area.
- Ensure programming is accessible. Include interpreters in your budget. Include a designated section of each mainstage, breakout space, and concert area for accessible seating.



- Respect service animals — Train staff to look out for attendees mistreating service animals and consider posting signs reminding attendees not to touch service animals.
- Include a quiet space for attendees to recharge.

Programming

- Make sure programming is sensitive and inclusive, reviewing it through that lens.
- Consider who is featured in the convention. Will attendees feel unsafe because of the inclusion of any of the invited guests?
- Ensure volunteers at each panel understand the code of conduct and have a plan to step in if the code of conduct is violated from the stage. Use attendee feedback to investigate speakers violating the code of conduct and ensure they are not invited back to speak.
- If possible, explicitly address issues of safety and harassment in programming. Ensure presenters give appropriate content warnings at the beginning of their session.

Virtual Events

BEST PRACTICES FOR VIRTUAL EVENTS

Policies

- Make the code of conduct clear, readable, and easy to understand. Ensure attendees read and agree to the policy before participating.
- Include guidelines for being respectful of other attendees (i.e. respect choices of attire, respecting boundaries).
- Establish that the event is an inclusive space for people of all genders, races, abilities, sexualities, etc. This can be helpful to include on the website, in the pre-event communication, and verbally at the start of the event.
- Use waiting room style features to ensure that everyone entering the event is registered and has recognized the code of conduct.
- Utilize moderators for the chat during the event and ensure they have enough privileges to DM attendees and delete comments. These moderators can also help collect questions for the Q&A portion at the end of a session.
- Harassment can often occur through private messages over event spaces- encourage attendee connection, but ensure that it is specifically clear in the code of conduct that harassment over DM or in breakout sessions would still be a violation of event policies.

Reporting issues

- Ensure event leaders are actively online during the event and that these leaders are there to respond to any reports. At the beginning of the event, establish who the online admins are for the event, and how to contact them.
- Provide a variety of ways to report harassment- perhaps via email, chat, and an online anonymous form. Since the event is online, make it as easy as possible to get in touch with a member of staff.
- Ensure online staff are trained to understand the code of conduct and how to apply it.

Gender inclusivity

- Ensure pre-event communication is gender inclusive and remind speakers not to assume anyone's pronouns during the Q&A portion of the event.
- Encourage speakers to use their pronouns in their introduction. If possible on the



platform, allow attendees to include their pronouns in their profile. Normalize the use of pronouns without pressuring anyone to share their pronouns.

Accessibility

- Online events can be more accessible – attendees can log in from wherever they are, without travel constraints and other limitations, but it is still important to be proactive.
- Proactively share accessibility accommodations and provide an option for attendees to share what accommodations they need as part of registration.
- Ensure your programming is accessible through offering Captions and ASL Interpreters. When sessions are pre-recorded it can be even easier to require captions to be included as part of the recorded material. Consider securing a license to an auto-captioning software (ex: Loom, Veed) to support presenters in captioning their content.
- Because your event may depend on visual and audio experiences, include image descriptions, transcripts of events, in as many languages as you can.
- Consider providing a recording of all major sessions so attendees can explore them later. This allows attendees to experience events on whatever timeline is best for them. It may work best to keep the recordings up for a few weeks to encourage attendees to catch up soon after the event.

After the event

- Survey attendees to understand how you can improve including how to improve accessibility, safety, and inclusivity of your event for future years.
- Use feedback to plan for next time.

MODERATION

Whether you are running a virtual event, a mid-year livestream to promote your event, or building community through discord and other platforms, strong moderation is essential for maintaining the health of your community.

Choosing your moderators

Before approaching people to be mods, identify the time commitment you are looking for and what responsibilities they will have. Is this a weekly commitment? Do you need them to check in a few times a day or is there a set schedule? What platforms do they need to support? How many other mods will there be?

A good moderator:

- Exemplifies the ideals you want to uphold in your community
- Understands the community
- Has enough time to dedicate to modding
- Can act independently, but knows when to escalate or check-in with other mods
- Can be direct and firm and is comfortable handling confrontation

Depending on your community, you can seek mods from your existing event volunteers, solicit applications from your community, or invite active members of the community to join.

Remember this is a volunteer position so set them up for success by having a team size that's appropriate to the work and allows people to have time off when needed. Develop a process for checking in, identifying burnout, and offering breaks to allow your team to stay energized in the



long-term. Burning out your mods will harm your community. Consider what incentives or perks you will offer to your mods and how you will regularly show your appreciation.

Moderator Training

Once you have your team, it's time to train them on the standards you want to uphold within your community.

A key part of this training is ensuring everyone is on the same page. As a team, they'll need to work together and support each other.

Include the following in your training process:

- An overview of the code of conduct and how it will be applied on each platform
- Accessible language. Some platforms may be family friendly, others may have 18+, some may allow swearing, but not a lot, etc.
- Playbook for moderation
 - ◇ What actions will result in warnings verses what actions will result in a ban?
 - ◇ How will you detect and handle spam?
 - ◇ How many warnings before banning someone and how is this tracked across mods?
 - ◇ What steps are taken when a warning is given and what steps are taken when a ban occurs?
 - ◇ When is a conversation or thread stopped verses when is it allowed to continue with a warning?
 - ◇ Will violators experience consequences at the event and will event violators be kicked off the online platform? If so, what is the process for doing that.
- Bystander Intervention - Deescalation tactics for public forums.
- Example scenarios and how to handle.

When you have an established team and a new mod is joining, consider having them observe or shadow another mod for a bit before going solo and develop a process where they can ask for a second opinion from another mod throughout their training process.

Reporting Mods

It is important to hold mods to high standards in the community. Ensure you have a process for community members to report a mod, when necessary. When issues occur, hear them out, and offer warnings or behavior modeling to correct the behavior, but don't be afraid to remove mods that purposely go against your rules or continually push too far. You never want your mods to create a hostile environment for you or your community.

Sample Event Timeline

6 MONTHS BEFORE THE EVENT

- **Review and update the code of conduct** - Read through the existing code of conduct and make changes based on past incidents, the attendee survey, new policies, new venue rules, and any other anticipated changes. Review drafts with your moderators, volunteers,



department heads, and any other stakeholders. Ensure the final version is updated on your main site and registration site.

- **Appoint Department Heads** - Assign leaders for different departments. Ensure each department head is aware of their responsibilities regarding safety and has begun drafting a safety plan.
- **Volunteer / speaker recruitment** - Being the process of recruiting speakers and volunteers. Clearly communicate the importance of safety and the code of conduct to potential volunteers.

3 MONTHS BEFORE THE EVENT

- **Schedule volunteer training sessions** - Set dates for volunteer training sessions on safety protocols and the code of conduct. Coordinate with department heads to tailor training content to specific roles.
- **Complete staff training** on supporting survivors, incident response, and bystander intervention. Review example scenarios and how you would address them.
- **Coordinate with the security team** - Establish communication channels with the security team. Share event details and known risks.
- **Review and update volunteer handbook** - Read through notes from last year's event, solicit input from volunteers and department heads, and consider what changes are needed to adapt to this year's event. Ensure FAQs and external resources are still accurate.

1 MONTH BEFORE THE EVENT

- **Finalize volunteer handbook** - Ensure the policies and procedures for reporting incidents and responding to incidents have been finalized.
- **Print physical signs** - Design and print physical signs displaying safety policies, the code of conduct, and any emergency procedures.
- **Moderator Training**: Conduct training sessions for moderators on enforcing the code of conduct during the event.
- **Communicate with invited guests** - Ensure guidelines and expectations for the event as well as safety offerings are communicated to speakers and other invited guests.
- **Finalize Department Plans** - Confirm that each department head has a finalized plan in place, especially regarding safety measures.

WEEK OF THE EVENT

- **Volunteer Training** - Conduct volunteer training with all volunteers, emphasizing specific roles and responsibilities. Consider breaking this out by department depending on the number of volunteers. At minimum cover example scenarios, bystander intervention, and the incident response process.
- **Coordinate with security** - Conduct a final briefing with the security team, providing updated policies, attendee numbers, and escalation processes.
- **Review Emergency Procedures** - Review emergency procedures with all staff. Conduct a walkthrough of the venue, pointing out emergency exits and medical stations.
- **Test reporting mechanisms** - Ensure the hotline, online form, and any other reporting mechanisms are working.



DURING THE EVENT

- **Ensure daily check-ins** with department heads and their teams about major changes, new policies, or safety concerns.
- **Handle emerging incidents** - Ensure a core group of leaders are informed about all serious incidents, that the reporter hears back in a timely manor, and that the incident process is followed.
- **Document all reported incidents** (large and small) for future reference and to have an audit trail.
- **Communicate with attendees** if major changes are made to the safety protocols.

AFTER THE EVENT

- **Solicit feedback** from volunteers, staff, invited guests, and speakers.
- **Survey attendees** and flag safety concerns or reports for future years.
- **Meet with department heads** to brainstorm what changes are needed for future events

Discussion Questions

Community

- Who are the attendees of your event? What is special about your event and the people who attend?
- How does your community interact? What are the official and unofficial ways your community participates in your event?
- What are past challenges your community has faced? What types of challenges do you anticipate could occur in the future?
- What power dynamics exist at your event?

Policies

- Read through your code of conduct, does it meet the recommendations described in the code of conduct section? What does it do well?
- Read through your volunteer handbook. What does the handbook do well? What could be improved?
- What type of issues have you been unsure about how to handle in the past?

Department

- What are the core responsibilities of your department?
- What are the main safety issues that come up in your department?
- What steps should you take to report an incident that occurs at the event?
- How can the department improve to support attendees or the other volunteers?
- What aspects of the department would new volunteers find confusing or challenging?

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS

Imagine someone is reporting any of the following scenarios.

Ask yourself:

- Does this violate my event's policy?



- What actions could we take to address this incident?
- What would I say to the person reporting?
- What resources or support could I offer?

REPORT 1

On Saturday night, a group of men ambushed my friend with a camera and microphone without his consent and asked him political questions. He refused to answer them, and they dispersed. I considered calling security but was unsure whether this was a violation of the code of conduct or an actionable offense

REPORT 2

There was a woman in a provocative cosplay and I saw a security guard walk up behind her and took multiple photos of her butt without asking. He then continued to circle her while taking photos of her without her consent and knowledge that this was happening. He saw that me and my friends watched the entire thing and shrugged it off after we confronted him.

REPORT 3

At the evening event on Saturday night I had several men following me and getting uncomfortably close to me and my friends and “accidentally” touching/brushing up against me. I left within 10 minutes of getting there because I felt horribly unsafe.

REPORT 4

Someone followed me unsolicited to my hotel room on Friday night. They cornered me in the hallway for a few minutes trying to talk to me and I was eventually able to get away. They may have been well meaning, but it was super creepy.

REPORT 5

The person right over there has been following my friends and I around all weekend and taking photos of us without permission. We have asked them to stop several times.

REPORT 6

A panelist yesterday used two slurs during their panel. A few people laughed. The moderator did nothing. My friends and I felt really uncomfortable.

Conclusion

Congratulations on making it through this guide and for your commitment to your community. We hope your next event goes well and will be cheering you on from the sidelines.

READ MORE

- [Right to Be's Safety Guidelines](#) for specific social media platforms
- [Cosplay Survivor Support Network](#) - A community for cosplayers
- [TakeThis](#) - An organization that runs AFK rooms at fan conventions
- [Additional Resources from Fandom Forward](#)
- [Other Uplift resources](#)