

How to Build a Safety Savvy Culture



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Building safety savvy into your nonprofit's culture has many benefits. When safety is top of mind, it helps you keep employees, participants, clients and visitors safe; avoid injuries and accidents; and free up time you might otherwise spend filing claims, defending lawsuits, and implementing contingency plans.

Safety awareness can also help your team members work smarter and safer, boost employee morale and increase the likelihood that talented team members will stay with you longer. It can even nurture your reputation in the community, as word spreads that your nonprofit is an employer and service provider that's committed to safety.

Not sure how to get started building a safety savvy culture? It doesn't start from the top down—it begins with incorporating feedback from your team and community. Here's a blueprint you can use to take all the great things your nonprofit already does to keep people safe and build on them to create a risk-aware culture.

Gather feedback from employees, volunteers, participants, clients and visitors.

- Create a safety survey or add questions about safety to meetings with team members, volunteers or participants. What do they think your nonprofit does well on safety? Where could you improve?
- Create easy-to-access tools visitors can use to share feedback, like a three-question survey on a tablet in your lobby.
- Review the feedback you receive. Identify strengths you can build on and problems you can address.

Assess hazards and safety opportunities in your current environment.

- Where are potential or perceived hazards? Who could be harmed by them, and how?
- If people perceive a hazard where your leadership team does not, what might be causing their perception? How can you take a fresh look and respond to the concern?
- How are you addressing the hazards? What else do you need to do? Who's responsible for doing it, and by when?

Create or review safety and risk policies and procedures.

- Communicate your new or existing policies and procedures through multiple channels.

- Review your policies regularly and update them as needed. For example, are policies free of jargon? Are they tailored to the audience? Have at least three people who don't specialize in the subject reviewed the policies?

Spell out management's safety commitment and responsibilities.

- Ensure regular safety inspections.
- Coach managers and leaders on the benefits of 'walking around' your premises and facilities and sharing or addressing safety concerns promptly. For virtual teams, encourage informal, unscheduled check-ins by phone. Not every interaction between colleagues should be scheduled!
- Investigate incidents and near-misses and take appropriate action. Focus on uncovering the true root causes of the incident rather than assigning blame.
- Set and enforce the expectation that safety is a top priority.
- Provide safety training, tools and guidance in reasonable doses. Try not to overwhelm staff with lengthy manuals.

Spell out all employees' safety responsibilities.

- Always be alert for safety issues at work.
- Follow safety rules and regulations.
- Develop and maintain habits to keep themselves and others safe.
- Work with colleagues to make safety a priority.
- Share any (and all!) concerns and ideas about safety.
- Identify and remedy safety hazards.
- When in doubt, ask!

Create or review your incident reporting plan.

- Select or build a simple, accessible, low-burden incident reporting tool (e.g., a short form on your website or intranet)
- Determine how you will evaluate an incident's impact.
- Assign a point person to monitor reports and track progress.
- Watch those reports for concerning (and encouraging!) trends and discuss how to respond to those trends as a leadership team.

Provide training and education. Teach employees:

- How to be safety savvy. What potential hazards should they be mindful of?
- How to take action.
- How to report.
- How to share ideas and feedback.

Evolve and improve your program.

- Discuss as a leadership team: Is your organization safer today than six months ago? How?
- What surprising pushback did you encounter to your safety efforts? What can you learn from it?
- What one thing could your team do to keep improving?

If you involve team and community members from the beginning, you'll be well on your way to building a safety savvy culture where team members know how to contribute to a safe environment and feel empowered to do so.

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