

Safety and De-escalation Policy

Introduction

This policy is being developed to ensure the ability of OPIRG Toronto to engage with the public around in-person events to ensure the fundamental safety of members, staff, and all participants. It is written to provide the best-case scenario to ensure the safety of all who would attend OPIRG's events and to ensure that OPIRG is well-resourced in doing so, especially under circumstances where we are faced with harassing, violent, abusive oppositional or otherwise hostile political views.

This policy has been drafted with OPIRG Toronto's current resources and capacity in mind; this means that there are several pieces identified for an ideal future state that we have added to a clause at the end. These pieces will be added to the policy as OPIRG Toronto grows in capacity and acquires the resources and support needed to implement them.

Policy

Fundamental Principles

1. OPIRG Toronto shall engage in the following fundamental principles when applying this policy:
 - 1.1. OPIRG Toronto commits to working to keep its whole team (staff, students, community volunteers, and Board members) safe.
 - 1.2. OPIRG Toronto commits to continuing to carry out its programming in person when safe and ensuring that there are means to access OPIRG's programming for all members.
 - 1.3. OPIRG Toronto will work to ensure that best practices will be developed over time around organizational safety and de-escalating hostile events; these are continuing conversations that will develop as needs change and shift.
 - 1.4. OPIRG Toronto will work to be transparent and straight-forward regarding these policies, working to keep in step with relevant health and safety and human rights legislation.
 - 1.5. In doing this work, OPIRG Toronto will maintain the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of our work. OPIRG will work to ensure

that it can protect itself and those who speak at our events from attack, harm, and misrepresentation by oppositional or hostile political forces.

- 1.6. OPIRG Toronto will reference the *In-Person Health and Safety Policy* to guide the aspects of this work related to health.
- 1.7. OPIRG Toronto strongly opposes any response or de-escalation method that resorts to calling the police or security as a first/only course of action. OPIRG Toronto is committed to taking a course of action that avoids calling the police or security to the maximal extent possible.

Restrictions in Event Spaces

2. OPIRG Toronto may enact restrictions on event spaces. These restrictions may be enforced for events run by OPIRG and its Action Groups. Such restrictions do not infringe on member rights but reflect the freedom of association of subgroups of members and looks toward the safety of all members of the organization. These restrictions may include, but are not limited to:
 - 2.1. Restrictions based on other OPIRG Policies, such as the *In-Person Health and Safety Policy*;
 - 2.2. Restriction on event access to only members of the organization, and not the wider public, as verified by the current OPIRG Toronto membership list (students and community members who have paid their levy fee);
 - 2.3. Restriction on event access to only members of specific Action Groups, Committees or collectives of OPIRG Toronto;
 - 2.4. Restriction on event access that allows for the development of culturally safe discussions for sub-groups of members (ex. an event for QTBIPOC, women and/or trans people); and
 - 2.5. Restriction on event access where individuals or groups with harassing, violent, abusive, oppressive, or otherwise hostile views are likely to cause harm to members or the public.
3. At the start of events and meetings of committees or collectives such as the Dr. Chun Library and Action Speaks Louder collectives, following any statements—such as a Land Acknowledgement—given priority, there will be a statement of ‘Ground Rules’ of expectations for participants to engage in during the event (see section 4). Following these Ground Rules, any

restrictions on the space or other policies in effect will be disclosed to attendees. Such restrictions will also be disclosed when inviting attendees to meetings where feasible, and/or upon invitation to the collective or committee.

Ground Rules

4. The following ground rules will be read at the start of events:

OPIRG Toronto works to challenge systems of racial capitalism, settler colonialism, imperialism, white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, sexism, and ageism from an anti-oppressive, intersectional perspective. This work can create discomfort for those who have limited experiences due to privilege. While we work to ensure that we meet members where they are at, we also hope to expose you to potentially challenging topics and the experiences of others under our current social and political system.

OPIRG Toronto prioritizes contributions that individuals from marginalized communities bring to our organization, and strives to create spaces where Indigenous people, Black people, and people of colour; poor and working-class people and those on social assistance; women; gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer-oriented, transgender, transsexual, non-binary, intersex and Two-Spirit people; single parents; members of ethnic or religious minorities; immigrants, migrants, refugees, and undocumented people; disabled people; and people from non-academic backgrounds feel safe and empowered to contribute.

We hope and expect that attendees will:

- *Affirm and respect the feelings and experiences of others, while speaking from your own experiences.*
- *Ask for what you need and check in with organizers if you need something!*
- *Remember this is a space of un/learning and growth for everyone.*
- *Remember that people's anger and other expressions about their experiences of oppression are valid. Don't take that inward and make it about yourself, but challenge yourself to change.*
- *Leave space for the folks who are actually impacted by the issue(s) at hand, and make sure folks with lived experience are able to access the space and are at the centre of the discussions.*
- *Help take care of the space! Be mindful that this is a shared space and keep it clean.*

- *Help make the space accessible for everyone; be fragrance free, leave room for mobility aids, respect people's pronouns and gender expressions, and ask for consent for physical touch.*

If you wish to engage in this event, you agree to these basic understandings of OPIRG Toronto's work and respect event staff, speakers, guests, and members who are present in this space.

De-escalation in Event Spaces

Principles

5. When considering event de-escalation, we must first acknowledge some key bases of this work:
 - 5.1. Within 12 months of the implementation of this policy, at least 50% of OPIRG staff, board, and volunteers who will be holding events must be trained in general de-escalation techniques. This training will be renewed at least every two years/offered to all new staff, board, and volunteers. In the interim, OPIRG Toronto will do their best to acquire marshals for events where harmful disruption is anticipated and develop a Safety/Risk Mitigation Plan.
 - 5.1.1. If marshals or other support people trained in de-escalation are not available and harmful disruption is still anticipated that can put staff, board, volunteers, and/or attendees at risk, the event will be postponed or canceled.
 - 5.2. All reactions to harmful or violent disruption or intensive response must be measured against potentially internalized expressions and positions against marginalized communities. In consideration of how some responses to keep an event safe, like involving security officials/police, can disproportionately impact and harm some communities, **every** feasible alternative measure will be taken before involving security officials/police.
 - 5.3. No amount of policy can fully replace individual judgment, situational awareness, and understanding. These steps are broad guidelines, ones which require thoughtful application by OPIRG Toronto staff, board members, and volunteers.

Steps

6. In the scenarios below, "designates" refer to a minimum of two of either of the following:
 - 6.1. Marshals who have been brought on to support an OPIRG event

- 6.2. Staff, board, or volunteer who has completed their de-escalation training

Scenario 1: Mild/Repairable Disagreement or Disruption

7. When situations intensify in an event where a member disagrees with an event expectation or disrupts an event in a mild or repairable fashion, the following steps on de-escalation are to be followed:
 - 7.1. The designates will ask the member to step aside (away from attendees and/or staff, board, volunteers) so they can speak privately and determine if there are other steps to be taken, collaboratively. They will never do so alone and will be joined by another designated staff or volunteer.
 - 7.1.1. If the member refuses to step aside and allow the event to continue, the designates will either attempt to continue the conversation in the least disruptive manner possible or move to the steps under Clause 8.
 - 7.2. The designates will listen and assess the issues raised by the member.
 - 7.3. The designates will attempt to provide alternative means for the member to access the event, if possible and in line with other OPIRG policies. The member will be invited to provide solutions as well, if they are open to collaboration.
 - 7.4. If the member is unwilling to cooperate, the designates will again express the clear boundaries set under this policy and related OPIRG policies.
 - 7.5. If the member is unwilling to reach an acceptable compromise and cooperate with the designates, they will be asked to leave the event. If they refuse to leave, move to the steps under Clause 8 starting with 8.3.

Scenario 2: Serious/Threatening Disagreement or Disruption

8. When situations intensify in an event where a member disagrees with an event expectation or disrupts an event in a fashion that is a potential threat to members or is based on a fundamental disagreement with the principles laid out in this policy:
 - 8.1. The designates should attempt to identify those who are disrupting the event and request them to stop.

- 8.2. The designates should inform those who are disrupting the event of the existence of this policy and other relevant OPIRG and University policies.
- 8.3. If the disruption continues, those responsible should be asked to leave two further times.
- 8.4. If they refuse to leave and it is not possible to remove them without risking violent resistance, the meeting should be paused or ended.
- 8.5. If there is a risk of violent resistance or attack, and no internal security has been prepared for, 211 may be called to support crisis intervention. If the situation is escalating rapidly, then Campus Security or wider Police Services may be called as a last resort.¹
- 8.6. OPIRG Toronto will attempt to reconvene the event as soon as possible after members are evacuated from the initial event space with further protections, including:
 - 8.6.1. Working with community defense groups or organizations to better prepare for possible oppositional political forces.
 - 8.6.2. Working with the University—with all the limitations of such a suggestion—to prevent further disruption and danger.
 - 8.6.3. Holding the meeting itself online to prevent physical disruption.
 - 8.6.4. Holding the meeting in a more secure location.
 - 8.6.5. Redoubling efforts to ensure communications are not being monitored by oppositional political forces.
 - 8.6.6. Seeking the advice of legal counsel on steps to deal with the issue.
9. At any time when violence is directly threatened against staff, board, or volunteers, their safety should be ensured directly aligned with the steps and considerations of the above clauses. These steps can be escalated or bypassed based on the judgment of designates to ensure the safety of members, staff, and the public.
10. For public demonstrations, marches, or other activities, the roles of designates should be extended to appointed marshals for those specific events where appropriate.

¹ We know that we are oppositional to securitization and the police, however, under our current system there may arise unavoidable situations where they must be utilized if no other options are available, as in the case of assault by fascists or neo-Nazis that we have not otherwise prepared for, for example. That said, we must also balance the urge to use these organizations to our ends with the reality that our members are more likely to be criminalized than those we seek to defend ourselves from.

Reporting

11. Any instance where event de-escalation is required, even if minor, will be recorded in Health and Safety incident reporting required within the organization. An Incident Report will include:
 - 11.1. Name of the person completing the report
 - 11.2. Names of the people involved in the incident (other staff, board, volunteers)
 - 11.3. Date, time and location of the incident
 - 11.4. Description of the disruption in as much detail as is relevant and possible
 - 11.5. Description of the de-escalation response to the disruption in as much detail as is relevant and possible
 - 11.6. The outcome of the disruption after de-escalation attempts were made
 - 11.7. Reflection on the de-escalation response:
 - 11.7.1. What worked well?
 - 11.7.2. What can be improved?
 - 11.7.3. Are any edits required to this policy?
 - 11.8. Any follow ups needed such as mental health checks for those involved in de-escalation attempts, communications to attendees, etc.

Future Implementation

These pieces have been removed from the above sections as OPIRG Toronto is at present unable to implement them due to resource, training, or capacity limitations. It is our intention to revisit this policy annually and implement these pieces as our capacity grows.

- 5.1. All staff, board, and volunteers and those who will be holding OPIRG events must be trained in general wider de-escalation techniques, at least every two years bi-annually. Events where harmful disruption is anticipated, OPIRG Toronto will designate a dedicated de-escalation team and develop a Safety/Risk Mitigation Plan.
7. In either scenario below, OPIRG staff and the designated board member/volunteer are primarily responsible for de-escalation attempts. Where staff are not present, the volunteer with de-escalation training is considered designated for this responsibility. For the rest of this policy, staff, board members, and volunteers will be referred to as “the designates”.