

Responding to Racist Violence in Local Communities –

A Guide for NAVCA Members (August 2024)

Introduction

NAVCA and VCSEP (VCS Emergencies Partnership) have produced this guidance for NAVCA members on supporting your communities, including guidance from trusted organisations and examples of what local infrastructure organisations are already doing.

This guide is grouped around the key areas to focus on.

Communications

Good communications will be key, to make sure your communities know what is happening, and to avoid any vacuum being filled with misinformation, or the fear of a lack of information. Tell people often what you know, as well as what you don't know. Be as open as you can be.

Avoid using social media as your primary way of communicating with at-risk communities. Use email and direct communication to inform people of the support that is available, especially if it is related to any specific sessions/events you are running.

If someone sees or receives threatening or racist messages on their social media channels, or anything signalling a threat to their safety, they should take a screen shot and report it directly to the police.

When circulating communications outside your organisation, be clear what status the information has, such as verifying its source or finding corroborating information, including whether it can be posted on social media or not.

VCSEP have created a dedicated [Community Tensions channel on SLACK](#) (an online tool for updates in an emergency) to post updates and resources for partners. Please join the channel and share any relevant information you may hold locally. If you can't access it, [please contact VCSEP here](#).

Public statements

It may be helpful to release a public statement condemning the violence, and setting out your approach. You can adapt our statement for your local context:

<https://www.navca.org.uk/news/statement-on-recent-violent-disorder>

Civil Society Group statement: <https://www.civilsocietygroup.org.uk/>

NAVCA is happy to sign member statements. Please email comms@navca.org.uk to confirm, and we can provide a NAVCA logo where applicable.

Useful documents

You can download the following documents from the [NAVCA website here](#). If you do not have an account with us, please email Emily at comms@navca.org.uk.

NEON have produced a messaging guide when communicating more widely about the violence, called '**Far Right Violence: A Messaging Guide**'. This contains helpful guidance and practical suggestions on language and challenging racist rhetoric.

Hope Not Hate have produced a document called '**Staying Safe Amidst Far Right Violence**', which pulls together some basic considerations to guide decisions about how to keep staff, volunteers and the people they are working with feeling safe and supported. The guide contains information for:

- organisations supporting people seeking asylum in Home Office hotels.
- charities and community groups on centre- and service-based safety.
- charities and community groups on community-based work, including housing managed in the community.
- people fearful of or at risk of being directly targeted by far-right violence.

Identifying and addressing risks

It is vitally important that all staff, volunteers and service users are able to safely carry out their work and activities. You will need to undertake rapid risk assessments, and review them in light of information which emerges. Risks to VCFSE organisations working with communities in affected areas are significant and real. We are aware of:

- VCFSE organisations working with asylum seekers or in asylum hotels appearing on online 'lists' and being targeted. Asylum Link Merseyside closed their offices and told staff not to come in as concerns over staff and client safety.
- Staff especially from racialised communities are in fear of carrying out their ordinary work in some places. Voluntary Action Leeds sent one member of staff home in a taxi as they were genuinely in fear of travelling on public transport.
- Organisations are afraid of putting their head above the parapet particularly on social media for fear of attracting attention and putting staff and/or volunteers at risk, particularly if they live in an area where there has been violent disorder or where it is planned. This having a detrimental effect on communications and service delivery.

It is important to ensure the welfare of our staff and volunteers, who are all being affected differently. Check in with colleagues and ensure their needs are met. If there is concern about commuting to the office, consider remote options until the risks are lowered. Pay attention to visibly Muslim colleagues, such as Muslim women who are often targeted for wearing the hijab, as well as to others from racialised communities.

During this period of uneasiness, talk to colleagues about how they are feeling as they may be distressed. Create a safe space for colleagues to share experiences and feelings if they want to.

It is crucial to understand and plan for risks in advance and then to mitigate them. 'Staying Safe Amidst Far Right Violence' from Hope Not Hate, available on the NAVCA website, has advise for before and during violence taking place:

- Ensure that no one works in a building alone and actively use or introduce a system to check on the location of staff members. Avoid lone working in the community.
- Minimise the need to travel in areas at risk, and encourage staff to work remotely from home as appropriate. Consider closing premises for a short period of time until safety is clearer.
- Be prepared to cancel any large-scale events or in-person meetings where you are unsure of risks or there is a clear risk presented.
- Let voluntary sector partners know about the situation and the reason why decisions are being taken. Stay connected with the local community.
- Liaise regularly with police, local authorities and other statutory partners.

Hope Not Hate have an extensive range of publicly available resources to support community engagement, community events and changing the local narrative:

<https://hopenothate.org.uk/communities/community-resources/>

LIOs working in affected areas

Members in affected areas are working across a wide range of issues. Activities include:

- **Acting as the main point of contact for the VCFSE sector in affected areas**, supporting and enabling accurate communications as much as possible and feeding information from communities quickly back into partners, including the Local Resilience Forum.
- **Being the first point of contact** for the VCFSE sector, for statutory partners and emergency services, and to **connect the two together**. This includes **linking to Gold Command in the local authority and police**.
- Coordinating activity in the aftermath of riots, including clean ups and other emergency responses, coordinating spontaneous volunteering and more organised activity.
- **Helping to counter disinformation** by ensuring that VCFSE organisations and communities have access to accurate and up to date information, in partnership with the local authority and other organisations. Tell MAMA UK have published an [article about how disinformation around the Southport stabbings escalated online](#).
- **Offering solidarity to Muslim communities and other communities affected**. Messages of solidarity can be made through official statements, or messages directly to personal contacts or organisations you know already. Volunteers, staff and community members are likely to welcome the support and [Muslim Charities Forum](#) is encouraging partners to do this. Reach out directly and connect with communities and organisations who are at risk.
- **Providing support for spontaneous volunteers and voluntary activity**, working with them rather than seeking to control or direct.
- **Proactively engaging with VCFSE organisations working in areas already directly affected or where there is a threat of violent disorder**, to provide support and advice, especially for organisations with staff directly affected by the racial violence.
- **Building on established relationships** to connect directly with VCFSE organisations to provide reassurance and to find out what the groups and organisations currently need.

- **Coordinating fundraising activities** with local Community Foundations and other local funders.

Priority issues that need immediate advice and engagement

NAVCA is aware of the following areas where support is needed, and we have escalated these to Government for action.

1. Offer guidance and support on how to corroborate information and ensure what is circulated is as accurate as it can be, to avoid a vacuum filled with disinformation, provide appropriate reassurance, and reduce community tensions where possible.
2. Immediate access to relatively small amounts of money to support clean-up operations and other activity, as well as the convening, supporting and coordinating role the VCFSE is playing. Currently, the sector is relying on small scale private giving or existing limited resources.
3. Provide clear guidance on keeping staff and volunteers safe when carrying out essential frontline work in communities, beyond the immediate clear up operations.
4. Share guidance on how to counter far right narratives within communities, especially where this is hidden rather than overt, e.g. in Tamworth there had previously been little concern about the asylum hotel, but commentary on local public social media sites indicated roughly half of respondents excused or supported the action to burn down the hotel. This contrasts with other areas e.g. Sunderland, where the narrative that nothing is done for local people, only for refugees and incomers, was previously known.
5. Connect with Local Resilience Forums: there is a lack of connection to the community organisations involved. The response is initially largely police-led, focusing on specific incidents. But community organisations and LIOs have a major role to play in these earlier stages and need to be involved to help with communication and accurate messaging.

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