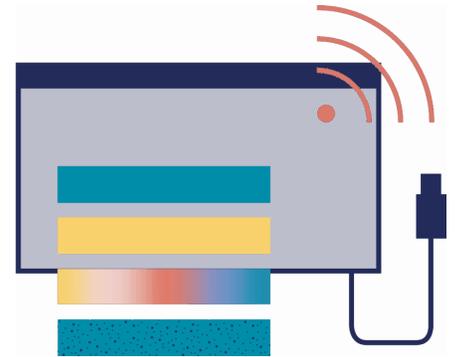# Organizational Use of Technology Best Practices and Policy Toolkit

When considering a violence against women (VAW) shelter or transition house organization's use of technology, which can include email, case management systems, photocopiers, assistive tech, and online communication services, the safety and privacy of survivors must be at the centre of decision-making.

This is because communicating with survivors through technology comes with benefits and potential risks. This toolkit provides anti-violence programs with suggestions for:

1. Organizational devices and hardware
2. The provision of digital services
3. The use of electronic databases and case management systems

Before starting any type of digital services within your organization, the following are key considerations.

Using Tech Safely in Anti-Violence Organizations

The type of technology that VAW shelters and transition houses use and how it's implemented can have a profound impact on the safety and privacy of both women1 and organizations, whether it is being used to communicate with others, store and manage information about service users, or manage daily work. Through proper security and effective technology policies, shelters and transition houses can minimize safety and security risks.

The following tip sheets provide information about privacy implications and suggested policies for the most common technologies that organizations use in their work. We've also included a template guide on the use of technology to guide women's shelters and transition houses in developing policies around safer tech use.

Technology Safety for Anti-Violence Organizations: Questions to Consider

Passwords: Increasing Organizational Security

Wi-Fi Safety & Privacy: Tips for Anti-Violence Organizations

Shared Computers & Internet Access: Best Practices for Privacy & Security

Designing Websites to Increase Survivor Safety and Privacy

Social Media Policy Guidelines for Anti-Violence Organizations

Best Practices for Phone Communications

Best Practices for Faxes

Video Camera Use in Anti-Violence Organizations

Interior Video Surveillance Considerations

Exterior Video Surveillance: Minimizing Harm

Use of Technology Policy Template Guide for Women's Shelters and Transition Houses (PDF)

Communicating with Survivors through Digital Services

"Digital services" describes the use of technology-based tools such as web chat, text, video calls, and cell phones to provide support services to survivors by anti-violence organizations. Many VAW shelters and transition houses have considered how to expand their digital support services to supplement in-person and crisis line support during the COVID-19 pandemic and report that they will continue to use these services.

Information is provided below for organizations that are exploring digital support services.

Assessing Readiness

Organizations should assess their current readiness to provide digital services and develop policies and procedures that will ensure effective services that are centred on informed consent and the safety and privacy of women, children, and youth. The following resources will assist with this assessment.

Assessing Readiness for Digital Services Worksheet (PDF)

Is a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Program the Right Choice for Your Organization? Privacy and Security Risks of a BYOD Program, Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada

Choosing Technology

In choosing a digital services platform, you should consider which type of digital tool is best suited to the support services your organization provides and how using that platform may enhance your support services while ensuring the safety and privacy of employees and survivors. This vendor checklist will help you compare the many vendors that exist in Canada and elsewhere to choose one that suits your work. A trial period with the selected vendor will help to ensure that it is the right fit for your program.

Choosing a Digital Services Company Checklist (PDF)

Promising Practices for Digital Service Delivery

These guides inform the use of digital tools to ensure the safety and privacy of survivors and employees.

Phone Communications: A Guide for Anti-Violence Organizations

Mobile Phone Use: A Guide for Anti-Violence Organizations

Texting: A Guide for Anti-Violence Organizations

Using Email: A Guide for Anti-Violence Organizations

Online Chat and Messaging: A Guide for Anti-Violence Organizations

Video Communication: A Guide for Anti-Violence Organizations

Online Support Groups for Survivors: A Guide for Anti-Violence Organizations

The following templates are designed for VAW shelters and transition houses to use and adapt to develop their own set of policies.

Informed Consent for Digital Support Services: Anti-Violence Organization Template

How to Speak with Survivors about Safe Methods of Contact

Safe Methods to Contact Form Template, National Network to End Domestic Violence

Resources For Survivors Experiencing Violence

Seeking Help Online: Safety and Privacy Considerations for Survivors

Additional Resources

Collecting personal information and consent, Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada

Safeguards of Personal Information and Privacy Breaches, Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada

Tips for Public Bodies and Organizations Setting Up Remote Workspaces, OIPC BC

The Canadian non-profit TechSoup compiles information on products and technology for non-profits, including discounted software licenses and hardware, technology training for staff, and resources. Tech Soup provides general support to non-profit organizations and their day-to-day program operations.

Webinars

Considerations for Anti-Violence Programs Starting an Online Chat and Text Crisis Line, BCSTH

Online Communication Training for Anti-Violence Workers, BCSTH

Databases and Case Management Systems: Confidentiality and Privacy

According to anti-violence workers, databases can help streamline the collection and storage of personal information and make data more accessible. However, in the context of women, children, and youth experiencing domestic and sexual violence, stalking, trafficking, and harassment, having personal information stored in an electronic database can put their safety at risk through online interception, subpoenas, third-party, requests and data breaches. The following reports and guides provide anti-violence organizations with information about the privacy and security considerations needed before implementing an electronic database in their programs.

Database Considerations for Anti-Violence Organizations

Data Security Checklist to Increase Survivor Safety & Privacy (PDF)

Questionnaire for Potential Database Vendors (PDF)

Database Review Chart (PDF)

This toolkit was created by Women's Shelters Canada's Tech Safety Canada Project and adapted with permission from the Safety Net Technology Project at the National Network to End Domestic Violence in the United States, based on their Agency Use of Technology and Digital Services Toolkits.

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A Note on Language

In this toolkit, we will sometimes use the word woman/women and feminine pronouns for simplicity and to recognize the significant impact technology-facilitated violence has on women and girls. We recognize that TFGBV also impacts trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people. We hope that all people impacted by TFGBV will find these documents useful.

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