RAV CODES:
An Organization's Prep Kit

For social justice groups in unpredictable times

ALIZA DICHTER | 2026

What is this Org Prep Kit, and who is it for?

This is a set of questions that social and economic justice groups can use for various kinds of planning and preparation. It was created for community groups, organizations, and coalitions: leadership teams, working groups, committees, organizing collectives, people who are facilitating or running meetings (etc). The purpose is to share an adaptable approach to prep and planning that can be used in limited time, or to ground a more extensive process. Where there is a known and understood purpose, agenda, or set of goals connecting a group of people, this offers a structure to gather and document critical information in ways that can help you **plan and run your work, react to opportunities, and deal with crisis and risk.**

Being rooted in your group's strengths can help you respond to whatever is ahead. Being clear on how decision-making actually happens can improve collaboration and accountability. In unstable times, working together to gather your core information may be useful for groups in the way that, for us as individuals, it can be helpful to pack a go-bag, keep our extra batteries charged, prep a contact list, gather the items and people we most want to protect, and prepare place to meet up, if needed.

Why was this Org Prep Kit created?

New groups and established organizations often find they need to do planning or risk-management but don't have the time or the outside help; and it seems overwhelming to take it on, especially in the current challenging and unstable conditions. But many of us have also found we can work on planning and preparing — even to be more ready for the unknown — by building on our relationships and strengths.

The questions and ideas selected for this kit come from the input of people who have been working with social change and community groups (over many years), trying and adapting "strategic planning" methods, and learning how people teach and practice emergency preparedness and community safety.

The purpose is to provide a structure that can help with planning and risk prep for your group, even if you have very limited time for that type of organizational care-taking. It is designed to be flexible enough to be used as a quick checklist if you only have a few hours for talking things out, or deep enough to provide the agendas for multiple meetings.

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How does it work?

There are eight categories of questions about your group, with suggestions for how to document and use the information you come up with.

RAV CODES is the acronym for the eight categories: Relationships, Assets, Values, Communications, Observations, Decision-making, Evolution, Special Sauce.

These questions broadly cover “What We Have” (Relationships; Assets; Values) and “How We Work” (Communications; Observations; Decision-Making; Evolution; Special Sauce) and can help your group focus your efforts, get clear with each other, and provide a process for identifying things you want to pay attention to, research, figure out, and/or work on.

You could go through the questions in a series of meetings, or have small teams working on different sections to then share and discuss. Once you go through the question set in the ways that feel right for you, the next move is to use the information that you gathered. The information you generate through this kit can become your custom handbook for planning programs or projects, and something you refer to when welcoming new people or projects, or when facing a new opportunity or challenge.

Depending on the culture and nature of your group, figure out how to document the key information in ways that are useful and accessible to yourselves and other people, and also sensitive to security and discretion. This could be digital documents, charts, or templates; printouts to post in workspaces; or a binder of documents or cards for use in planning sessions.

Going through the sections as a group can:

- Help develop accurate info and answers to questions that can be essential in key moments.
- Offer a process for talking through and developing core ideas and priorities that define and strengthen your group. Build shared, collective collaboration.
- Create a resource guide for your org, a reference tool for planning and rapid-response decisions.

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How can a group use this organized set of questions?

- Create an agenda for a fast (e.g. 2-3 hour) meeting before designing a project — to see what you know, what you don't know, what you do and don't agree on in the group.
- Structure a planning process (e.g. over several weeks) that cycles with involvement from leadership, workers / volunteers, members / participants forming and sharing answers together.
- Organize your group's important data and priorities in advance of a crisis; as part of risk planning, contingency planning, or emergency preparation.
- Sort through a challenging problem in an organized way by going through the eight categories for insights and implications to consider, related to the issue you are dealing with.
- Summarize information to share with new team, group, board, or volunteer members.
- Identify criteria and information for program design and fundraising strategy; to help a planning team account for core needs, existing resources, and what's connected to your work.
- Summarize a full range of foundational info about your group for outside facilitators, consultants, or other organizational support people as they begin working with your group.
- Adapt and create your own version of this question set that works for your folks. To share this "toolkit" or your adapted version with other groups who may find it useful in these volatile times to have an organizational planning and prepping approach rooted in collective strengths.

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You can use your notes from these questions to:

- Hold a strategy process to build on this info to decide what you want to work on and how.
- Identify details about your group's strengths and needs, in order to engage volunteers.
- Set priorities to guide your group on what to include in budget and timeline scenarios.
- Create templated criteria or steps to use when planning projects (eg: which core partners should be consulted, the communications systems to use, what to watch out for...)
- Make a workplan for protecting key assets. Create criteria lists in advance to aid rapid decisions in potential emergency conditions (eg weather/electric/economic/health/legal/etc).
- Setup backup and emergency systems and plans that incorporate the people and groups that you care about and who are essential to your work and your people.

The first part of the kit focuses on **what you have** within your group.

The second goes through **how you do your work** as an organization.

The third section has real examples of group situations and how this Prep Kit did, or could, help.

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Stewardship

For the group of people discussing and documenting these questions:

We are caretaking for

_____,

NAME OF ORGANIZATION

which is a _____

ORGANIZATION ROLE

for _____.

WHO/WHAT COMMUNITIES

Pages 6 to 13 are designed so you can copy and paste the relevant questions for your group into your own agenda, survey, worksheets, chart, or other document.

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WHAT WE HAVE (R.A.V.)

Relationships, Assets, Values

1 Relationships (organizations are a set of relationships, internal and external)

Gather useful, specific information:

- In a digital format you can refer to later, or with pieces of paper if you're in person, create categories and lists of the various types of groups your organization is connected to.
- Document core relationships, new/emerging relationships, and types of people or organizations you need to interact with.
- Be responsible with the level of detail recorded, and who has access to your information, given collective security and privacy needs.

Questions You Might Ask Yourselves

- Who -inside and outside of our group- is essential to the work our team is trying to do?
- Who are the people and groups who rely on our group? (e.g. for information, assistance, money/jobs, connections/access, parts of multigroup projects, etc)
- Who do we trust and in which ways? Who trusts us?
- Who among our members, partners (etc) is our group most values-aligned with?
- Who do we need in an emergency? Who needs us for protection or aid, or other help in crisis?
- How do we engage with and relate to groups that are less fully aligned with our values, goals, or approach?
- How do we assess people and groups in terms of how we will work with them?

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WHAT WE HAVE (R.A.V.)

Relationships, Assets, Values (cont'd)

2 Assets (what can you use, offer, share, protect)

Gather useful, specific information:

Make lists of your group's assets, e.g.:

- The time and commitment of team members and their individual and collective experience, skills, creativity, and other forms of expertise.
- Equipment, supplies, physical spaces, software tools, data.
- Reputation, influence, your following or ability to engage people.
- Volunteers' time (participants, board members, etc) and connections.
- Legal and financial structures, formal organizational set-ups.
- Money, donors, paid staff, vendor contracts, donated services.
- Access to philanthropy {aka unequally hoarded and distributed wealth}

Questions You Might Ask Yourselves

- What are the strengths and skills in our team and our partners?
- What are the resources that our group controls or is stewarding?
- Who and what do we need to take care of and keep in good condition?
- How is what we have of value to the community, the people we care about? How is that accessible / useful to folks now, and what might change?
- What things might be important to reserve for unexpected situations; to protect in multiple forms; to have accessible to use and share in emergencies?
- What is where and who has control and access? (Inside our organization and out: software company, banks/credit unions, landlord, lawyers, contractors, etc)

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WHAT WE HAVE (R.A.V.)

Relationships, Assets, Values (cont'd)

3 Values: (what guides and binds your group, what you do, how, and why)

Gather useful, specific information:

- List of essential values that define and shape what you do as a group and how you do it. Definitions of core values to share across team and with partners.
- Additional points of agreement or alignment that are important to your leadership collective.
- Other core principles or beliefs that are important to the communities and people you work with and for.

Questions You Might Ask Yourselves

- What are we about as a group? What is most important to us?
- What's most important about who we work with, what we work on, and how we work?
- Where do our core values align and differ with the people, communities, and groups we work with?
- In tough organizational decisions in the past, what were the priorities that mattered (or should have)?
- Where is our group on the Bold & Safe framework, for which kinds of issues and which kinds of risks??

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HOW WE WORK (C.O.D.E.S.)

Communications, Observation, Decision-Making, Evolution/Exit, Special Sauce

4 Communications (tools, people, and practices)

Gather useful, specific information:

- Make a list of the multiple paths of communication—tools, tech, roles, and standards—your group uses to listen, gather information, connect with people, and share info and stories.
- Decide and document what backup communications tools and systems to use; when and how.

Actions to strengthen communications:

- Check that communications systems enable as much accessibility as possible for everyone that your group needs and wants to connect with.
- Change any communications tools and/or how you use them, if needed, to protect community members, your group, and your partners.
- Assign (and then prepare to support) team members—e.g. staff, board, other volunteers—to serve as backup for anyone who has a critical communications responsibility.

Questions You Might Ask Yourselves

- Who do we need to listen to and get information from? How do we access sources and voices?
- Who do we need to reach with our questions, information, messages, visuals? Do we communicate in different styles to different groups?
- Do/should we communicate externally in multiple languages (when and which)? When do we include interpreters, captions, or other accessibility supports?
- What stories do we tell? Who are our storytellers? How can we support and expand that group?
- How do we communicate among ourselves and externally? What tools, channels, platforms, do we rely on? (e.g. text groups, online docs, meetings, social media, email, press outreach, partners?) Are they working for what we need? Are there alternative tools if needed?
- Who else might access or follow our communications, and does that matter?
- What are our off-hours, real-time, emergency ways to reach people and info?

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HOW WE WORK (C.O.D.E.S.)

Communications, Observation, Decision-Making, Evolution/Exit, Special Sauce (cont'd)

5 Observations (including both opportunities and opposition)

Gather useful, specific information:

- List, chart, or map what you already collectively know about the conditions of your work, communities you work with, and any potential changes ahead. Identify questions to research.

Actions to strengthen observations:

- Create a timeline and process for regularly gathering input and feedback from your community and participants.
- Brainstorm a list of others who do similar work or work with same or similar communities; and ideas for how to learn about/with them.

Questions You Might Ask Yourselves

- How does our organization and team learn things about the people, places, and ideas in our work?
- What do we know about the current conditions around our work (goals) and our group? Where do we see openings and opportunities? Dangers?
- What might be in our way? Do we have direct opposition? What do we know about them? How do we learn about and monitor opposition and obstacles?
- How does our group acknowledge and address changes, opposition, and challenges?
- How and when do we look around, assess the situation? What helps us interpret what we are seeing and hearing, and learn how it is affecting our group?
- What do we know from experiences of similar groups in the past and in other places?

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HOW WE WORK (C.O.D.E.S.)

Communications, Observation, Decision-Making, Evolution/Exit, Special Sauce (cont'd)

6 Decision-Making (roles and criteria, reality and aspirations)

Gather useful, specific information:

- Create a diagram, chart, or memo showing who is responsible for larger vs day-to-day decisions, who are backups, how group decisions are made (e.g. majority vote, weighted vote, consensus.)
- Make a checklist, chart, matrix, or map of the decision-making criteria important for your group.

Actions to strengthen decision-making:

- Identify points and steps to improve how decision-making happens and is communicated.
- Timeline a workplan for changing/ adding decision-making information, criteria, people, roles, and support for decision-makers as needed.

Questions You Might Ask Yourselves

- Who makes what types of decisions for our group, and how are they made? Does that change under specific conditions?
- Who influences the decision-makers? Who supports the decision-makers?
- What criteria and/or priorities are decision-makers expected to consider?
- What affects who is able to participate in decision-making? Are there roles or situations where people are expecting (or expected) to have decision-making power but there are limits on their participation or shared leadership (e.g. timelines, meetings style, or other dynamics)?
- Whose input should be gathered and considered in decision-making?
- What is our group's risk tolerance; our uncertainty tolerance? How do we stay Bold & Safe?
- When has decision-making been confusing, or seen by team members as conflicting or unclear?

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HOW WE WORK (C.O.D.E.S.)

Communications, Observation, Decision-Making, Evolution/Exit, Special Sauce (cont'd)

7 Evolution / Exit / Escape (what transformation might look like)

Gather useful, specific information:

- Make lists and files of operational info for the people who will provide backup up if needed.
- Identify organizational backup options: groups who could provide support in emergency, alternative locations, alternative legal/entity structures, other places to bank or store assets

Actions to strengthen ability to transform:

- Brainstorm a list of which other groups/organizations could take on your projects or programs that are needed by your community, if your org could no longer provide.
- Make plans to build those relationships, well in advance of need.

Questions You Might Ask Yourselves

- What other group(s) might be in position to take on some of the work we do, or could provide us with key resources if our current set-up needs to change?
- What happens if leaders or staff are unavailable or need to be replaced?
- Are there minimum levels for volunteer participation, partner support, community endorsement, collective safety, funding, (etc), when we must pause and re-assess?
- What expanded or new work would we do together if one of our current projects had to end, (e.g. if it wasn't effective, or there was no more need)?
- What could it look like to exit specific work, organizational housing or structure, location, or funding? Is there a different, distributed model?
- Who are the allied groups that could temporarily (or longer) house our projects, our team or type of team, and/or any of the assets of our group if disbanded?
- How can our organization help employees find other positions if they lose job/hours due to cuts/changes, and/or to keep their skills and value serving the community?

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HOW WE WORK (C.O.D.E.S.)

Communications, Observation, Decision-Making, Evolution/Exit, Special Sauce (cont'd)

8 Special Sauce (build on strengths, protect what is precious)

Gather useful, specific information:

- Make lists, sketches, poems, whatever format makes sense for your group to express its value.

Actions to strengthen your core:

- Include notes on what's great about your organization wherever core org info is documented.
- Find ways for the whole team to share and revisit the lists of most important relationships and values.
- Refer to this info when planning, designing programs, or making hard or emergency choices.

Questions You Might Ask Yourselves

- What are some projects, ways of acting, resources, or other things our group is proud to be known for?
- Why are we grateful this group exists, and what does it provide?
- What do we think makes our group work its best, when the group is at its best?
- What are favorite bits of feedback or positive things people have said about our group?
- Who else should know about our group and what we provide?
- What are things about what our group does and how it works that we would like to see replicated in other groups or places?

The following pages share four emergency use examples.

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Emergency Use Examples

This is a “Prep Kit” because going through these questions in advance can both strengthen your team for challenges ahead, and also help you pre-assemble information that then can be useful in an organizational emergency or other unexpected situation. Here are some real-life examples:

Regrouping when the work or team changes

Example: A local all-volunteer group grew quickly with a few successful campaigns that ended. The organizers that have been holding the group coordination now need to step back. There’s been many project ideas raised in meetings, but the members who already have the motivation, time, and ability to drive community efforts are busy doing so in their other commitments. A few volunteers are willing to coordinate the next group meetings and communications; the nature, structure, and future of the group is uncertain.

1. A caretaker team prepares posters listing the Relationships, Assets, and Values of the group so far, and designs an open meeting that embodies the “Special Sauce” that is the group itself. At the meeting, participants are invited to review, discuss, and offer their own additions to those lists.
2. The meeting is designed to invite people to share/learn the history and current nature/work of the group, and then collaborate in and across small groups on Communications (including hands-on making materials); Observations (including discussing past and potential campaigns and projects, community conditions); and Decision-Making and process (how the group’s structured).
3. The participation and info gathered in that meeting becomes the basis for the caretaker team to propose an Evolution strategy.

Loss of funding or new urgent need to raise $

Example: A community-serving nonprofit has less access to grants due to federal cuts and suppression, and is blocked from public funds when state legislature passes restrictions targeting their type of work.

1. The leaders review Relationships- who do they know or are connected to that could be a source of income? Who do they know that might be connected to people who fund this type of work?
2. Observations- reflections and research: What is known about potential sources of income, and what it will take to bring in money from them? How to find out more information? What can be learned from how similar groups are funded and have responded to changing funding conditions?
3. Internal discussions that focus on how potential fundraising strategies intersect with the group’s Values can be a foundation for a plan, which they build by reviewing the group’s Assets and Communication strengths and how those can be deployed to raise money.
4. Depending on the financial urgency, it may be time to review Evolution plans, e.g. which partners could provide resources the group can use, or new homes for programs, people, or services.

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Emergency Use Examples

Threats from political pressure or attacks

Example: A nonprofit receives a letter from a government agency threatening tax status revocation unless they take specific actions. They can take the actions with support from a compliance expert. They also want to assess their situation and tighten up all around, given the scrutiny and surveillance they may be facing.

1. A focus on Relationships and how any changes or shared information may affect core partners and collective safety can guide decisions/actions discussed with legal experts.
2. Any decisions can be vetted through a review of the group's Values, and the Bold&Safe framework. Discuss the organization's "Special Sauce" and how that can be helpful and protected.
3. A fast audit or cataloging of the organization's Assets can focus on what can be useful, what needs to be cared for,what can be shared or distributed or adjusted if needed. The team can consider options to move, decentralize, or otherwise shift how org resources are kept.
4. It may be time for daily Observations-sharing and finding ways to monitor potential developments.
5. Creating clear-eyed Evolution/Exit emergency plans can enable the work to outsmart opposition.

Weathering an institutional storm

Example: A 12-person team is part of an association that is under financial water. The association's administration is taking drastic measures to reduce spending and debt, evaluating each office and department with a level of scrutiny and unpredictability that is stirring up fear, mistrust, and miscommunication.

1. Because high stress can sometimes make it easy to repeat bad patterns, and to lean on external frameworks that are not actually aligned with the best about the group (such as corporate "standard practices" that don't incorporate equity or the humanity and conditions of a group), it can be useful for anyone with decision-making power (particularly over other's income or services received) to check in with the Values, to be rooted and creative about how to handle crisis.
2. Leaders can be specific about Decision-making, clearly communicating the processes, people, and criteria that are involved in determining the type and speed of changes that will happen.
3. The team can focus on Relationships: identify the trusted organizations, people within those organizations, and connected community members who can best help the team understand its value and what to try to preserve through transition; and review which partners could become homes for parts of the work, approach, or even employment that may be lost in a squeeze.
4. The team can look at their list of Assets to see what could be provided by partners if internal resources are reduced; and what types of loss might be important for internal decision-makers to consider. They can support each other in understanding their own personal and professional assets that will help team members move into new roles, or even find new positions if needed.
5. This is the time to review prior discussions about Special Sauce and Evolution: by focusing attention on what has been best about the team and its work, taking care of the people, and thinking creatively about what new forms the programs can take, the group can aim to bring its best work to the hard process of financial cuts.

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