

Journalist Safety Training in the Philippines

Strengths, Gaps, Recommendations

Key Results of Scoping
and Research Activities
June to August 2025

Overview

This publication, ***Journalist Safety Training in the Philippines: Strengths, Gaps, Recommendations***, consolidates the results of Phase 1 of the project, ***Journalist Safety: A Practical Guide for Trainers***.

Carried out in three phases, the project aims to develop a journalist safety training resource to support media safety in the Philippines.

Phase 1

Review, research, and assessment of safety training programs and activities for journalists

Phase 2

Development and writing of a trainers' guide on journalist safety

Phase 3

Pretesting, pilot-testing and popularization of the trainers' guide

Implemented by the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC) from June to August 2025 in consultation with Mr. Red Batario, Executive Director of the Center for Community Journalism and Development (CCJD), the project is supported by International Media Support (IMS) with funding from the European Union and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The publication draws from a review of documentation of past training programs, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs) through an online questionnaire, and a multi-stakeholder workshop.

The desk review examined the documentation and activity reports of various safety training activities conducted by the International News Safety Institute (INSI) and CCJD in 2006-2013 and by AIJC and project partners in 2018-2024.

Overview

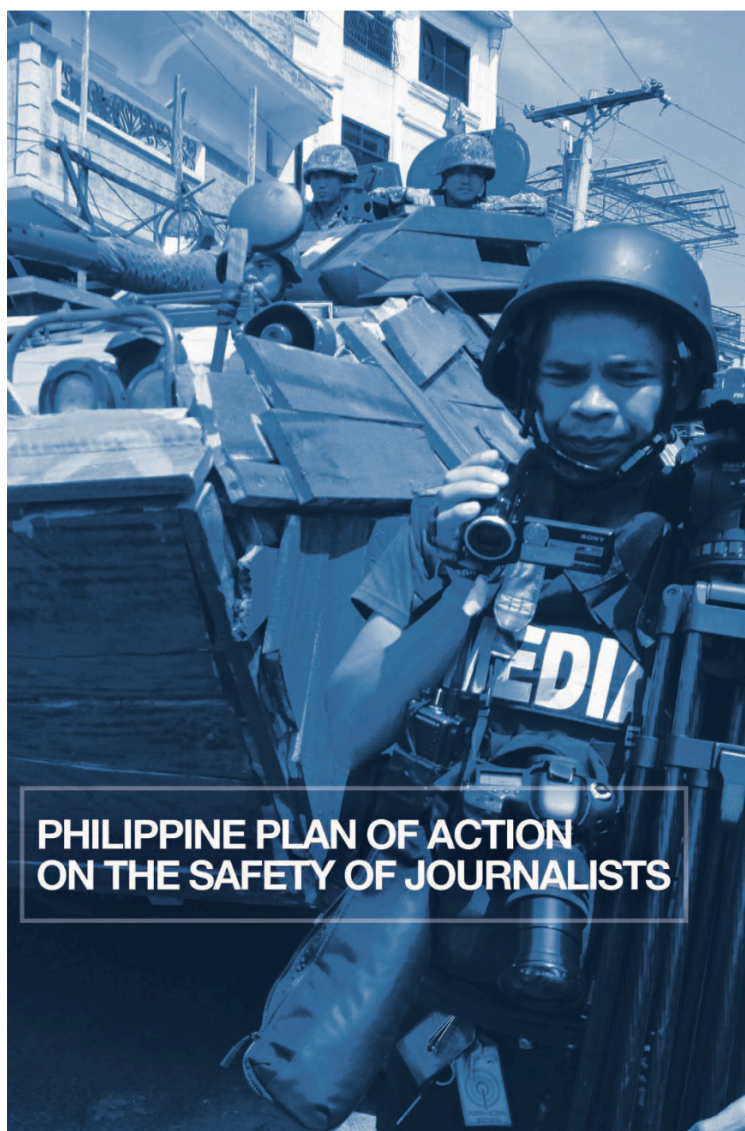
Four in-person FGDs with male and female journalists and with exclusively female journalists were conducted in Metro Manila and Cagayan de Oro City, with a total of 36 participants (14 male, 22 female). The participants included 10 safety trainers, 19 safety trainees, and 7 journalists who have yet to undergo safety training.

Key informant interviews with 8 male and female journalists (2 male, 6 female) in Luzon and Visayas were conducted through the use of an online questionnaire. Of the respondents, 6 are safety trainers or have attended a safety training of trainers, and 2 are safety trainees.

Sixteen participants (7 male, 9 female) participated in a multi-stakeholder workshop conducted in Quezon City. Of these, 4 represented government (Commission on Human Rights, Presidential Task Force on Media Security), 5 media, 5 academia, 1 CSO (National Union of Peoples' Lawyers), and 1 IMS.

The results highlight strengths and gaps in journalist safety training in the Philippines, forming the basis for recommendations to improve curricula, materials, and stakeholder collaboration for journalists' protection.

The results are presented under four key themes that emerged from the findings: content and structure, training methodology, planning and preparation, and trainer development and support.



PHILIPPINE PLAN OF ACTION ON THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

The project builds on the work of the ***Philippine Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists (PPASJ)***, a national blueprint on media safety anchored in the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

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What's Working: Strengths of Current Safety Training Programs

Content and Structure

The findings reveal that current safety training programs reflect a comprehensive approach, with sessions that integrate ethical frameworks, local context, and a broad range of physical, psychological, digital, and legal dimensions of journalists' work.

- Use of an ethical framework for the training
- Holistic training design based on the local context (including sociocultural context)
- Session on how to navigate the local landscape
- Session on risk assessment and situational awareness
- Session on preparing for assignments (including preparing the crew/drivers)
- Session on physical safety covering basic life support, first aid, self-defense, surveillance, dealing with checkpoints, different types of gunfire, avoiding conflict
- Session on covering hazardous events such as volcanic eruptions, typhoons, floodings, earthquakes, pandemics and disease outbreaks, chemical and oil spills
- Session on digital security/cybersecurity
- Session on gender-related safety based on local context
- Session on psychological safety (including dealing with trauma, “psychosocial maintenance” or dealing with the long-term effects of covering stressful environments)
- Paralegal training/Session on practical legal guidance for journalists/Media rights and laws relevant to journalist safety



What's Working: Strengths of Current Safety Training Programs

Training Methodology

The findings reveal that current safety training programs use participatory, context-based methods, including needs assessments, presentation of clear learning outcomes, simulations with debriefings, experience and resource sharing, and evaluation.

- Conduct of training needs assessment for adaptive and needs-based training (including physical and mental health condition of participants)
- Presentation of clear learning outcomes for each module
- Simulation exercises/“hands-on practice” design based on the local context
- Debriefing after each simulation exercise and training session
- Integration of experience sharing in training module (drawing lessons from personal experiences of journalists)
- Sharing of experiences by both resource persons and participants
- Use of relevant learning materials and safety references (including updated learning videos)
- Conduct of pretest and posttest among participants



What's Working: Strengths of Current Safety Training Programs

Planning and Preparation

The results reveal that current safety training programs emphasize the inclusion of participants from the three main island groups (including the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), collaboration with media and other stakeholders, the conduct of gender-sensitive sessions, careful participant selection and secure registration, and establishment of formal agreements to delineate roles and responsibilities and follow up on commitments.

- Nationwide coverage (Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao)
- Collaboration among media and human rights defender (HRD) groups
- Safety training sessions exclusive to women journalists, providing a safe space for sharing
- Pre-selection of participants through consultations with regional partners (from the media and other sectors)
- Participant registration system that prevents intrusion or hacking by third parties
- Letter of commitment signed by trainees and their respective organizations to conduct at least three training activities after the training of trainers (ToT)
- Aide Memoire spelling out roles and responsibilities of participants integrated in letter of invitation
- Use of military facilities for simulation activities

What's Working: Strengths of Current Safety Training Programs

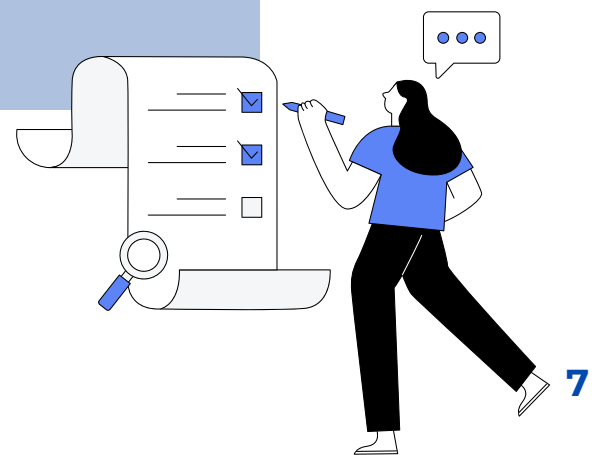
Trainer Development and Support

The findings reveal that current safety training programs are supported by experienced resource persons who combine subject expertise with contextual knowledge of journalists' working conditions, with some sessions further enriched by contributions from the security sector.

- Competent and experienced resource persons who are experts in specific topics
- Resource persons who are equipped to provide context and discuss the work and economic conditions of journalists
- Members of security forces such as the Philippine Army serving as resource persons and trainers

| What's working?

The **design** of journalist safety training programs in the Philippines has progressed, featuring content that integrates ethics, context, and practical skills; participatory methodologies with post-training evaluation; careful planning and preparation to ensure inclusivity and collaboration; and the involvement of competent resource persons who bring both subject expertise and contextual understanding.



What's Missing: Gaps and Limitations in Safety Training Programs

Content and Structure

According to the findings, future programs need to address gaps in training content and structure.

Outlined below are gaps that can be filled by a **core module** that sets the foundation for every training program, as well as **focused modules** on **psychological safety, women and gender, disaster coverage, legal safety**, and **digital security**.

Core module

- Journalism ethics
- Summaries of important international conventions and national legislation, e.g., UN Plan of Action, PPASJ, Data Privacy Act, Anti-Money Laundering Act, ICCPR, UDHR
- Cultural context awareness and understanding: sensitivity to cultural diversity/differences, appropriate behavior and clothing in different contexts
- Regional situationers
- Discussion on dilemmas faced by journalists (whether to cover a story or prioritize safety)

Psychological safety

- Mental resilience (anticipating/preparing for triggers)
- Mental burden among freelancers, underpaid full-timers, and parents/family caregivers
- Peer support for trainers and peer supporters
- Intervention with a psychologist during the training; psychological first aid
- Clear guidelines for peer support
- Psychosocial training

What's Missing: Gaps and Limitations in Safety Training Programs

Content and Structure (*continued*)

Women and gender

- Women's welfare: workplace measures that support women's health, family responsibilities, and overall well-being, such as paid maternity leave, flexible work arrangements, breastfeeding facilities, and other employment benefits
- Gender issues faced by LGBTQIA+ journalists
- Clear guidelines for implementing simulation exercises for gender-based safety-related issues
- Understanding colonial roots of gender/sex roles
- Strategies for recognizing, preventing, and responding to workplace sexual harassment
- Defining forms of microaggression and sexual harassment, and outlining responses and safety precautions

Disaster coverage

- Covering natural disasters such as typhoons, flooding, mudslides, earthquakes volcanic eruptions
- Covering chemical leaks and oil spills
- Covering disease outbreaks and pandemics

Legal safety

- Common legal issues confronting journalists and practical strategies (understanding libel and cyber libel, dealing with arrests)
- Protocols for various situations, e.g., physical threats, digital threats, gender-based threats; de-escalating confrontational situations such as checkpoints, civil disturbances

Digital security

- Addressing cyber bullying and bashing on social media
- Other digital security updates and practical tips

What's Missing: Gaps and Limitations in Safety Training Programs

Content and Structure (*continued*)

Physical safety

- Context-specific conflict reporting training
- Proper use of safety gear
- Self-defense

Training journalists on how to safely cover and report conflict especially in the context of the Philippines, should be nuanced to consider different factors such as culture, geography, political dynamics, and clan relations.

Other concerns

- Self-defense sessions were not conducted consistently, although generally, this session is specialized and run for custom-designed training activities. Some training sessions were also seen as having very tight schedules that are crammed with too many topics, thus sometimes missing out on interactive and reinforcing activities.
- Safety training programs need to further enhance some sessions to better contextualize and align with real-world needs and situations such as election coverage, mobile journalism, disaster and conflict reporting, mental health support, and gender-related issues including sexual harassment and newsroom microaggressions.

What's Missing: Gaps and Limitations in Safety Training Programs

Content and Structure (*continued*)

Missing topics

- Safety in election coverage including handling political tension
- Training specific for mobile journalists
- Proper conduct and interpersonal relations among journalists during coverage (refraining from physical aggression against colleagues during coverage)
- Addressing the “macho” attitude among journalists and the microaggressions in newsroom/media culture (misogynist remarks, “green jokes”)
- Specific to training for journalists from, and those covering, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), it is important to include a multi-dimensional analysis of the region especially in relation to the election and the peace process for better context

What's Missing: Gaps and Limitations in Safety Training Programs

Training Methodology

The results reveal gaps in training methods, including inconsistent self-defense sessions, limited interactive and reinforcing activities, overloaded schedules, and the omission of some topics.

- Inconsistent sessions on basic and practical self-defense
- Not enough interactive and physical activities to make the training more experiential
- Not enough reinforcement of lessons through repetition in exercises
- Some training sessions viewed as having overly tight schedules, crammed with too many topics, which left little time for interactive or follow-up activities
- Omission of some topics in training sessions: Although training sessions were packed with numerous subjects, the tight scheduling meant that facilitators sometimes rushed through material or had to drop some topics altogether

What's Missing: Gaps and Limitations in Safety Training Programs

Planning and Preparation

The results emphasize the need to set realistic goals, assess long-term impact, and prepare participants for possible exposure to trauma.

- Assessing what can realistically be accomplished within the limited time (otherwise lessons become “diluted”)
- Assessing long-term impact of training; monitoring and measuring results
- Preparing the participants to prevent “war shock” or trauma
- Avoiding duplication of training activities across organizations, and focusing on each organization’s strengths in training
- Considering the age of participants and customizing training sessions accordingly, as different generations have different attitudes toward safety
- Including family members of journalists at risk as participants in some sessions or post-training activities (such as in psychosocial sessions)
- Conducting the training in a staggered manner, so that journalists will be able to attend (For example, a five-day training can be conducted over a period of two weeks, although this would have implications for output delivery and cost and should therefore be studied more carefully.)

What's Missing: Gaps and Limitations in Safety Training Programs

Trainer Development and Support

The results indicate gaps in having trainers who are experienced, context-sensitive, and responsive to participants' needs, including language and cultural considerations. Limitations were also observed in time management, fostering a culture of care, conducting post-training debriefings, and providing sustained support for trainers.

- Time management
- Culture of care/duty of care (context-specific; considering size of newsrooms in the regions; looking at it from a community perspective)
- Post-training debriefing sessions with trainers
- Sometimes safety trainers do not conduct simulation exercises
- Providing post-training support and facilitating networking opportunities, such as post-training group chats, to encourage continued collaboration among participants
- Providing purposive refresher courses and follow-up training
- Conducting regular review and updating of modules in terms of content and process

| What's missing?

The findings reveal that journalist safety training programs need to address the concern on fragmented sessions and "misalignment" with real-world needs. Gaps were noted in content areas such as election coverage, mobile journalism, disaster and conflict reporting, mental health support, and gender-related issues including sexual harassment and newsroom microaggressions.


In terms of methodology, areas for improvement include inconsistent self-defense sessions, limited interactive and reinforcing activities, overloaded schedules, and omitted topics.

Participants also emphasized the need for stronger planning, including realistic goal-setting, long-term impact assessment, age-sensitive customization, family involvement, and staggered schedules that will make training programs more accessible to working journalists.

Trainer development and support were seen as critical, with emphasis on experienced and context-aware trainers, attention to time management, fostering a culture of care, debriefings, simulation exercises, and updates to training modules. Trainers need sustained support and reassurance that their work is valued and makes a difference.

Research participants also noted the irregular conduct of safety training programs—how they are “few and far between.” It was noted that journalists would benefit from refresher sessions and advanced modules following basic training.





The Way Forward: Recommendations for the Safety Trainers' Guide

Content and Structure

The findings reveal that a safety training guide should provide a **common frame** usable both as a refresher for those with prior training and as an introduction for first-time participants.

The Guide should embed **freedom of expression as framework**, emphasize intersectional vulnerabilities (health, safe working conditions, generational needs, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression or SOGIE), and **align with the 4Ps in the PPASJ: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnerships**.

The structure will consist of **stand-alone yet interconnected modules**, with gender issues integrated across all sessions and a core module that includes cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Guidance for trainers, practical teaching tools, localized protocols, and regional case studies were also identified as essential elements.

Specific recommendations for content and structure, training methodology, planning and preparation, and trainer development and support are listed below.



The Way Forward: Recommendations for the Safety Trainers' Guide

Content and Structure (*continued*)

Core module

- Core module: This will provide overall context to all the modules, and should include a session on cultural awareness and sensitivity, specific to the cultural/religious/historical context of the community or region of the participants
- Guidance for trainers: Principles and guidelines on how to teach adult learners should be covered
- Teaching tools: The Guide should include a teaching aid, i.e., how to use the material; teaching tips on handling specific situations, e.g., gauging when to insert comments or cut off a discussion
- Localized safety protocols: The Guide should help media participants build or create local safety protocols, trauma protocols, digital security protocols, among others
- Regional situationers and case studies from the areas of coverage of participants will provide local context to the Guide

Psychological safety

- Include in the discussion overall mental well-being of journalists (rigors of day-to-day work), not just cases triggered by trauma



The Way Forward: Recommendations for the Safety Trainers' Guide

Content and Structure (*continued*)

Women and gender

- Set up clear guidelines for conducting simulation exercises related to gender-based safety
- Include a session or topic on defining, identifying, and addressing microaggressions and sexual harassment
- Include a session or topic on women's welfare and work benefits, such as maternity leaves and safety gear customized for women

Disaster coverage

- Include a sub-module on how to safely cover natural hazardous events, human-induced disasters, disease outbreaks, and pandemics

Legal safety

- Note that this topic cuts across sessions on physical, digital, psychological and gender safety
- Include session on determining when the Safe Spaces Act is weaponized or misused especially in relation to gender-based attacks
- Provide guides, tips or resources for legal assistance
- Conduct simulation exercises for legal safety such as serving of subpoena, arrest warrant, search warrant, cyber warrant
- Include digital surveillance when discussing the Anti-Terror Act

Digital security

- Include a session on addressing cyberbullying and social media bashing
- Provide practical tips and updates in addition to the current digital security module



The Way Forward: Recommendations for the Safety Trainers' Guide

Content and Structure (*continued*)

Physical safety

- Include in the session on situational awareness the use of body-worn cameras by the police (where, when, and how)
- Include session on how to protect your source/whistleblower (this is covered in the core module, e.g., observing the “no-harm rule”) and also how to vet sources or contacts
- Discuss rescue, repatriation, and relocation support in the session on planning and preparing for deployment to dangerous assignments or very hostile environments (worst case scenario) such as covering disasters, hazardous events, riots, anti-drug operations

Other concerns

- The Guide should provide online references and links to training materials that could be used by trainers and participants
- Safety 101: A complete module for a short (one-day) safety training should be developed. Start with FAQs, then encourage self-reflection on what to do; emphasize that there are no hard and fast rules and explain why these are the recommended practices (rationale) - emphasize need to customize based on situation
- Develop a separate course on peer support training
- Minimize duplication of training activities across organizations
- Tailor training sessions to different age groups
- Engage journalists' families in safety training programs
- Implement staggered training schedules to increase training participation




The Way Forward: Recommendations for the Safety Trainers' Guide

Training Methodology

The findings emphasize the need for practical, accessible, and context-sensitive approaches, including clear language, case-based learning, relevant anecdotes, and smooth transitions between modules. Recommendations also highlight tailoring activities to different generations and newsroom roles, integrating both in-person and online formats, and using interactive tools such as participant-chosen pairings, situationers, and simulation exercises.

- Compare regional/provincial situationers with national/international cases to help participants better understand the overall safety context
- Consider contextualized approaches for participants of various age groups, e.g., boomers, Gen X, millennials, Gen Z; also include newsroom leaders such as gatekeepers in training activities
- Consider pairing participants based on their own choices when conducting simulation exercises
- Enable a cohesive session flow or transitioning from one module to the next
- The Guide should be easy to understand, using simple language in explaining technical terms or complex concepts
- Use a practical approach by providing do's and don'ts as well as relevant anecdotes
- Consider writing the Guide for both in-person and online training (taking into consideration the limitations of online training)
- Use first aid mannequins for anti-sexual harassment simulation exercises
- Consider case-based learning; highlight experiences of media lawyers (for session on legal safety)



The Way Forward: Recommendations for the Safety Trainers' Guide

Planning and Preparation

The findings stress the need for clear criteria in selecting participants and determining when to conduct basic, advanced, mixed, or women-only training. Other recommendations include expanding inclusion to underrepresented journalists, incorporating medical and ethical safeguards, providing certificates for monitoring, and strengthening security measures for the training activities.

- Develop clear criteria for the selection of training participants
- Develop a directory of training participants, with their profile and the background of their media outfit
- Establish a method on how to determine when to hold “mixed” training and women-only training (based on envisioned outcomes). For example, what could be the indicators for a safety training designed specifically for women journalists?
- Consider developing/running two versions: one for journalist-trainers, one for teachers
- Develop criteria for determining when to offer basic vs. advanced training
- Include more provincial journalists as training participants.
- Extend safety training to sports and lifestyle reporters as they also face threats and attacks
- Involve more campus journalists as training participants
- Provide certificates of completion with codes to aid in monitoring participants
- Conduct threat/risk assessment and security plan for trainers and the training activity
- Provide guidance on when peer supporters/trainers should refer participants to a medical professional



The Way Forward: Recommendations for the Safety Trainers' Guide

Planning and Preparation (*continued*)

- Consider including a waiver or a medical certificate attesting to medical and mental fitness of participant as prerequisite to the training, e.g., clearance from a psychologist (has cost implications)
- Consider signing of terms of engagement on ethical behavior, anti-sexual harassment guidelines applicable to trainers, resource persons, staff, speakers, and participants, to ensure a genuine safe space for all
- Set up hotline for sexual harassment cases that may arise during training

Trainer Development and Support

The findings underscore the need to define trainer competencies and provide guidance on needs assessment tools.

- Define skill set needed/list of competencies of trainers for: (1) basic safety training and (2) training of trainers
- Include section on how to develop training needs assessment tools
- Resource persons: (a) Design training based on participants' needs and local context (e.g., customization for alternative media); (b) Must be experienced and knowledgeable; (c) Preferably be able to speak the local language; (d) Trainers should not invalidate the experiences of participant; (e) Trainers should avoid sharing their own experience that might contradict safety considerations; (f) Be conscious of information overload

The Way Forward: Recommendations for Other Media Safety Initiatives

The rich discussions during the FGDs and multi-stakeholder workshop, as well as insights from the online questionnaire, provided practical ideas and concrete recommendations beyond the scope of the Safety Trainers' Guide that could help enhance current media safety training programs and related initiatives. Below is a distillation of the recommendations:

- Consider having safety trainers pretest the guide after the peer review
- Do consistent post-training debriefing sessions with trainers
- Regularly review and update the training design/modules
- Plan for regular (annual) refresher training activities
- Monitor where the trained journalists are and reestablish links for safety training sustainability
- Create a pool and database of trainers who know the local context across the country
- Have a system in place that motivates/encourages trainers to commit to their training tasks and develop a “culture of care” among the community of trainers
- Gather best practices from news organizations, media NGOs, and trainers in relation to strengthening knowledge management for journalist safety training programs

The Way Forward: Recommendations for Other Media Safety Initiatives

- Advocate among decision-makers to institutionalize a culture of safety in newsrooms, e.g., conduct orientation for newsroom gatekeepers
- Involve/tap community mechanisms, e.g., Media-Citizen Councils, for strengthening participation and support for media safety
- Build a support network with legal organizations, technology security groups, and psychological support providers for participants in times of need (post-training)
- Provide insurance coverage or develop program on insurance for journalists especially freelancers, similar to the Artists' Welfare Project
- Explore integrating the Guide into an app or digital tool that journalists can easily access and consult
- Organize/develop a clearinghouse for information/resource exchange among organizations that conduct safety training and for avoiding unnecessary duplication of efforts.
- Push for integration of journalist safety in the college-level curriculum or as an elective, to better prepare students for dealing with real world situations (Lobby with the Commission on Higher Education's Technical Panel for Broadcasting, Communication, and Journalism)
- Encourage law students to specialize in media law as there is a need for lawyers who have a better understanding of the workings and challenges of the news media in terms of providing legal support and paralegal training

The Way Forward: Recommendations for Other Media Safety Initiatives

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

The findings underscore the need for stronger systems to monitor and assess the results of safety initiatives. Suggested measures include building databases such as one for SLAPP cases, adopting practical rights-based practices, strengthening understanding of cyber threats, and developing tools to measure chilling effects. Participants also highlighted the importance of aligning with existing mechanisms, such as UNESCO KPIs and national tracking systems, and assessing long-term outcomes like legal reforms and improved safety protocols.

- Develop Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) database that will serve as an important resource when training participants in tracking/monitoring SLAPP cases, given that many of these cases are quashed early
- Adopt practical habits such as asserting rights and protective practices, especially when facing threats or attacks. “Do journalists invoke their rights during incidents (that might impact their safety and security)?”
- Trainers, journalists, and organizations should have a better understanding of cyber threats and attacks and know the proper responses to these attacks
- Develop chilling effect reduction systems or strategies to determine the level of confidence of journalists in freely undertaking their profession (find out through interviews, surveys, FGDs, etc.)
- Check UNESCO’s Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), Presidential Task Force on Media Security (PTFoMS) tracking system, and Philippine Press Institute (PPI) mechanisms through the Media-Citizen Councils regarding monitoring of threats and attacks
- Assess long-term effects, such as cases that produced legal procedure, legislative and policy reforms, influence on protocol rules

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