Risk Management Is Not About Expecting The Worst

A Practical Guide to Resilient Volunteer Leadership

Reframing Risk

Risk management isn't about assuming failure — it's about preparing for reality. Strong programs don't avoid risk; they anticipate it, adapt to it, and grow stronger because of it.

Reactive Mindset	Resilient Mindset
Responds after something goes wrong	Plans for "what if" scenarios
Focuses on fixing problems	Builds systems, not dependencies
Relies on a few key individuals	Strengthens operations, reputation, safety, and long-term impact

Four Types of Risk to Consider

Operational Risk: Breakdowns in day-to-day processes
Reputational Risk: Impact on volunteer or community perception
Safety & Compliance Risk: Gaps in policies, training, or oversight
Strategic Risk: Barriers to growth, sustainability, or long-term success

Three Shifts Toward Resilience

1. From Avoidance to Awareness

Identify where risk exists across your program.

- **Try this:** Hold a quarterly *"what-if" reflection.*

2. From Control to Preparedness

You can't control every outcome — but you can prepare your response.

- Document key processes *(Operational)*
- Clarify expectations *(Reputational)*
- Reinforce policies *(Safety & Compliance)*
- Align roles with goals *(Strategic)*

3. From Individuals to Systems

Build programs that don't rely on one person.

- Cross-train critical roles
- Standardize volunteer experience
- Create repeatable, safe practices
- Support long-term growth

What Resilient Programs Do Differently

- Continue operating despite disruptions
- Maintain trust and positive experiences
- Protect people through clear practices
- Adapt and grow with confidence

Your Take-Away: Build Your Resilience Plan

1. Spot a Vulnerability

Where is your greatest risk right now?

☐ Operational ☐ Reputational ☐ Safety & Compliance ☐ Strategic

Write it down:

_____

2. Imagine the Impact

If this happened tomorrow:

- What would be the immediate challenge?
- Who or what would be affected?
- How significant would this impact be on your program?

Write it down:

_____

3. Choose One Action

Start small — focus on one step.

My action:

_____

4. Make It Real

I will complete this by: _____

Final Thought

Risk management isn't about expecting the worst — it's about being ready to protect the mission that you care about: **Operations • Reputation • Safety • Strategy**

Resilience is built one intentional step at a time.