



SAFEGUARDING ARTS & CULTURE SPACES

A Pro-Democracy Guide for Idaho Venues

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview	1
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Building Safe and Inclusive Venues: Framework	3
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Applying the Framework	4
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Common Cultural Venue and Event Scenarios	
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Considerations	8
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When Should I Call Western States Center?	10
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WESTERN STATES CENTER

Based in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain States, Western States Center (WSC), a 501c3, and Western States Strategies (WSS), a 501c4 affiliate, work nationwide to build a democracy where we all thrive in a just, caring, and connected society. Since 1987, we've played a catalytic role in advancing justice by convening, developing, organizing, and supporting the communities most affected by inequities. Our core strategies include cultivating leaders, resourcing organizers and movements, and sharing political education and analysis. We take regional action for national impact, equipping impactful leaders, pro-democracy institutions, and courageous coalitions with the tools needed to effectively counter bigoted social movements.

ABOUT CULTURE LAB

Culture Lab is a Western States Center program that collaborates with artists and musicians to harness their influence as catalysts for social change, aiming to promote inclusive democracy and counteract anti-democracy movements. Since its inception in 2020, Culture Lab has convened several artist cohorts, encompassing Americana, independent touring musicians, Black rockers, and hip-hop artists. Through these efforts, Culture Lab leverages the power of art and culture to inspire action, foster community engagement, and strengthen democratic values.

SUPPORTERS

This guide was developed with input from venue owners, safety experts, and community organizers who understand the unique challenges and opportunities in Idaho's cultural scene. Together, we hope to build safe and inclusive event spaces that are protected from bigoted movements.

Special thanks to our Idaho Venue Working Group who helped to develop this guide into what you're reading today. They've collectively experienced protests, doxxing, threats to their venues and events, and more in the past few years and navigated these challenges with the help of community members, artists, fellow venue owners, and community organizations like WSC.

Andrea Marcoccio, Co-Founder, Matchwood Brewing

Jessica Tingley, The Pearl Theater

Nathan Walker, Duck Club Entertainment/ Treefort Music Fest/ Music Idaho

Blair Williams, Owner, The Art Spirit Gallery



PURPOSE

Gathering spaces have always been more than just places to enjoy music, art, or entertainment. They're where communities form, people connect, and shared experiences spark joy, creativity, and belonging. When local venues open their doors to a wide spectrum of identities, cultures, and experiences, they don't just enhance the cultural landscape—they strengthen the very fabric of our communities.

Our work with Idaho venues is an extension of Western States Center's ongoing commitment to strengthening resistance and resilience in the face of bigoted and anti-democracy movements. This guide will equip venue operators with strategies and tools for creating safe and inclusive spaces, which is especially important in today's climate where cultural spaces must push back against harmful and authoritarian actors.

Readers will gain the resources to develop policies, protocols, and practices that can be the foundation for a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment. This will help venues respond to challenges and build capacity for mitigating and managing difficult situations. By committing to these principles, venues do more than provide a space for entertainment—they become critical pillars in the fight for a more just, inclusive, and democratic society.



WHY IDAHO?

Idaho is often seen by bigoted and anti-democracy groups as a proving ground for their strategies (e.g., the use of intimidation and political violence, threats to free expression, and attempts to shape local culture and silence marginalized people). Over decades, Idahoans have learned to meet these challenges with creative and flexible responses, determination and resilience.

Many small businesses and cultural venues in Idaho are determined to host inclusive events, stand up for their clientele, and keep their leaders, staff and volunteers safe in the face of threats and harassment. Idaho's cultural scene is fiercely independent and has had to learn how to operate safely without corporate backing and resources - a position we imagine many of our readers are in.

FRAMEWORK

Building Safe and Inclusive Venues



Scenario A: Navigating Requests for Advocacy Spaces

A local activist group requests to set up a table at an event. Staff and event organizers express concerns about the group's message.



Call Western States Center if you...

- ARE BEING HARASSED, TARGETED OR IDENTIFIED BY BIGOTED ACTORS. WE CAN HELP ASSESS THREATS AND MITIGATE RISK.
- WANT TO CREATE A POLICY FOR EVALUATING THIRD PARTY REQUESTS.
- WANT TO ASSESS WHETHER A THIRD PARTY GROUP IS CREDIBLE.
- ARE HOSTING A GROUP/EVENT THAT MIGHT BE TARGETED, AND WANT SUPPORT WITH RISK MITIGATION AND SAFETY PLANNING.

Scenario A: Navigating Requests for Advocacy Spaces



Scenario B: Hate Speech in a Public Forum

The headlining performer uses hate speech or discriminatory language during their performance at your venue, creating a tense atmosphere and alienating attendees.



Call Western States Center if you...

- ARE CONSIDERING WHETHER TO MAKE A STATEMENT OR NEED HELP WITH PRESS INQUIRIES POST-INCIDENT.
- WANT HELP TO CREATE A POLICY IN ANTICIPATION FOR A SCENARIO LIKE THIS.
- ARE FEELING OUTNUMBERED OR NOT SURE WHERE TO GO. WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO CONNECT YOU WITH RESOURCES.
- WANT HELP TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF CENSORSHIP FOR PRIVATE ENTITIES.

Scenario B: Hate Speech in a Public Forum



CONSIDERATIONS

POLICY

- **Event Monitoring:** Use community monitoring networks to keep tabs on local signs of hate (e.g., graffiti or flyering) and specific threats.
- **Event Format:** Event format may affect safety, so adjust security protocols accordingly.
- **Venue Accessibility:** Include event pricing for low-income attendees, all-ages events, and ways for people to safely access your space (ramps, parking, lighting, NA beverages, etc.).



TRAIN

- **De-escalation Training:** Train staff, contractors, and volunteers to identify and de-escalate potential conflicts.
- **Regular Safety Briefings:** Equip your team with knowledge of local threats and ensure they know how to report and respond.
- **Community Monitoring Networks:** Build partnerships with venues, orgs and local authorities to share information. Use the [Global Extremist Symbols Database](#) to stay informed of symbology and [our newsletter](#) for threat monitoring in the PNW & Intermountain states.



COMMUNICATE

- **Pre-event Messaging:** Use your website, social media, ticketing systems, and emails to share your venue's commitment to safety and inclusion.
- **Event Promotion:** Ensure messaging for performances is value-aligned.
- **Signage and Decor:** Ensure signage and decor is value-aligned and includes safety messages (near lines, bars, bathrooms, etc.).
- **Internal Communication:** Include safety protocols and policies in employee handbooks and contracts with third parties.
- **Community Partnerships:** Include resources from supportive community orgs at your events (crisis hotline, LGBTQ center, food bank, etc.).



CONSIDERATIONS

RESPOND

- **Incident Escalation:** Have an escalation process, including when to involve law enforcement and community groups, and when to cancel or adjust an event.
- **Documentation:** Keep an internal log of incidents and responses, noting if local authorities or law enforcement were contacted.
- **Public Response:** Communicate transparently to key stakeholders. Offer updates and reaffirm your venue's values and stance against hate.
- **Support Targeted Communities:** When an incident occurs in your event or community, be prepared to offer support to affected individuals and groups (host a restorative event, develop a creative fundraiser, share public solidarity).



LEARN

- **Feedback:** Gather feedback from staff, volunteers, performers, attendees, and the community. Tell people where you want to hear from them (forms, listening sessions, email address) and be open to receiving feedback in methods and tones you may not prefer (social media comments, someone sharing frustrations at an event, online review boards).
- **Community Campaigns:** Partner with local groups to launch or support campaigns against bigotry. Hosting community forums or cultural events can help restore trust and unity.



PROCEED

- **Policies and training:** Build understanding and buy-in by sharing incident anecdotes to highlight why you have certain policies in place.
- **Connection to Community Partners:** Incidents often highlight ways that your venue is not meaningfully connected to parts of your community. Relationship-building takes time, but genuine efforts toward connection will result in related and sometimes unpredictable benefits.



WHEN SHOULD I CALL WESTERN STATES CENTER?

- WHEN A BIGOTED GROUP IS OPERATING IN YOUR TOWN
- EEK, YOU ACCIDENTALLY BOOKED A BIGOTED ACT!
- YOU RECEIVE ONLINE THREATS, BACKLASH OR HARASSMENT
- YOUR VENUE OR PERFORMERS ARE BEING TARGETED BY ANTI-DEMOCRACY OR BIGOTED GROUPS

- YOU LEARN THAT AN EMPLOYEE OR CONTRACTOR IS ENGAGED IN PROBLEMATIC ACTIVITIES
- YOU WANT SUPPORT IN DEVELOPING POLICIES, COMMUNICATIONS, OR TRAININGS
- YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PROACTIVE VOICE AGAINST BIGOTRY AND HATE

**WESTERN
STATES
CENTER**

**Reach us at: culturelab@wscpdx.org
westernstatescenter.org**

This guide provides a framework for protecting your venue and events from bigoted movements as you continue to host inclusive community and cultural gatherings. Digging into specifics is dependent on your business, community, event type, political climate, and more. In these situations, we hope you'll reach out! WSC understands the nuance of the events, culture, and entertainment businesses and we combine that with 40 years supporting civic institutions and organizations to build safety and resist bigoted and anti-democracy movements.



W / S / C