The Collaborative Learning Approach to Acceptance Research:
A User’s Guide
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1.1 Acceptance in NGO security management

Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work in complex and often insecure environments around the globe. Over the past decade there has been an increase in major security incidents against relief and development organizations and their personnel. This increasing insecurity has forced NGOs to respond to security threats and adapt to constantly changing security environments. On a daily basis, organizations face the challenge of mitigating the security and safety risks to their staff in order to ensure their programs continue.

Over the past decade, NGO security management has dramatically evolved, gaining in profile, scope, and expertise. Most NGOs subscribe to an ‘acceptance’ approach to security management, which closely aligns with the values of humanitarian and development agencies. An acceptance approach “attempts to reduce or remove threats by increasing the acceptance (the political and social consent) of an agency’s presence and its work in a particular context.” In reality, a range of security approaches are available; organizations often combine these depending on the operational context and organizational vulnerabilities. While an acceptance approach focuses on removing or reducing threats, organizations may also adopt a protection approach that uses protective devices (e.g., locks, walls, etc.) and procedures to decrease an organization’s vulnerability to threats. A third approach, deterrence, “aims to deter a threat with a counter-threat.” Deterrence can include legal actions, economic or political sanctions, or suspension of programs.

Many organizations have created security departments, hired a Head of Security and other security staff, and/or developed security management plans and policies. Numerous models of security management exist. These models are often structurally different and include varying combinations of acceptance, protection, and deterrent security management approaches.

Many NGOs either subscribe to acceptance as a security management approach or simply espouse acceptance as a critical part of their mission and work, yet there is little evidence of how organizations implement an acceptance approach to security management. In order for an organization to develop an effective acceptance approach to security management, the staff and organization as a whole need to understand what acceptance is and what its application entails. There is a dearth of research on how organizations and their staff understand and implement acceptance both at the headquarters and field levels and a general lack of documentation as to whether acceptance is effective as a security management approach and under what circumstances. This Guide leads researchers, practitioners from organizations, and other interested groups or individuals on how to conduct research on acceptance at the field level. The Guide was written
by the project team of the Collaborative Learning Approach to NGO Security Management Project, an 18-month grant by the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

1.2 The Collaborative Learning Approach to NGO Security Management Project: An overview

The Collaborative Learning Approach to NGO Security Management Project explored acceptance as an approach to NGO security management. The Project aimed to promote a better understanding of acceptance as a security management approach, including what acceptance is and in what circumstances it can be effective. The Project held a series of events, which are detailed below. In April of 2011, the Project team entered the second phase of the Project, which involved carrying out field research on acceptance in Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda. The team produced three country reports and a final report on the findings of the research (available at: http://www.acceptanceresearch.org).

As its name suggests, the Collaborative Learning Approach to NGO Security Management Project aimed to promote collaborative engagement and learning. Each Project activity and event was designed to promote thinking, learning, and collaboration, which guided the field research on acceptance conducted in East Africa. In the first phase, Project staff organized two International Consultations in Washington, D.C., USA, and Geneva, Switzerland, with headquarters-based security professionals and senior staff, to discuss the key concepts of acceptance and how organizations implement an acceptance approach to security management. Project staff drafted an “Acceptance White Paper” which explored these issues and consolidated and expanded current thinking on acceptance. The white paper was circulated to participants for review and feedback. The consultations and collaborative process of drafting the white paper informed the Project team’s analytical thinking about what acceptance is and generated the research questions for phase two of the Project.

The second phase of the Project was designed to field test the ideas in the white paper. First, project staff drafted a research framework that delineated three specific questions about acceptance:

(1) How do organizations gain and maintain acceptance?
(2) How do organizations assess and monitor the presence and degree of acceptance?
(3) How do organizations determine whether acceptance is effective in a particular context?

The three research questions explore basic conceptual aspects of acceptance and seek examples of actual practices. The framework identified potential sources of information and methods for the research, using a qualitative grounded-theory approach. The field research, referred to as collaborative learning activities (CLA), took place in two parts. Project staff first reached out across the NGO community in the USA, Europe, and East Africa to solicit field-based participants from different NGOs in Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan. To prepare participants for the collaborative learning activities in Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan, Project staff first held a Regional Consultation and Training Workshop in Nairobi. After the workshop, participants returned to their country of work or origin and took part in field research activities as part of a country research team. Staff members from 16 international NGOs and local organizations participated in the workshop and the subsequent field research.
The Project staff adopted a qualitative research approach to answering these questions. In particular, the Project staff applied a grounded-theory approach, which seeks to develop a theory about a process generated through analysis of information provided by individuals or groups of individuals, who have in some way experienced this process. The understanding of the process that results is thus ‘grounded’ in the reality of the people who live it. In applying a grounded-theory approach to the research questions, the Project staff aimed to maintain focus on the process of adopting and applying an acceptance approach to security management and to ensure that the research findings reflect and are informed by the realities that organizations and their staff members face.

Each country research team was comprised of participants from one country and led by one Project staff person and a co-facilitator. Participants and team leaders conducted interviews with NGO staff (e.g., Country Directors, Program Managers, Security Focal Points, Logisticians, Human Resource staff) as well as government officials and community leaders. The team held focus group discussions with groups of community members, including NGO project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and staff from local organizations.

A key element of the collaborative learning approach involves reflecting on what participants—serving in the capacity of researchers—and team leaders learned throughout the data collection process. Project staff provided all country team members with a journaling notebook and encouraged them to reflect on changes in their knowledge and attitudes regarding acceptance as a security management approach. In addition to individual journaling, each collaborative learning team held regular debriefings in the field. These debriefings aimed to capture key observations and new information, challenges, difficulties, and adaptations (including changes to questions/guides), and preliminary key words and themes.

1.3 Outline and purpose of the Guide

The original guide served as the building block for two weeks of research on acceptance in East Africa in April of 2011. It was reviewed by over twenty field staff working in programming, security and other areas and revised and expanded significantly. This Guide is designed to provide resources and tools for researchers, NGO staff, and collaborative teams to conduct research and analyze findings on acceptance as an approach to NGO security management. Those NGOs interested in assessing their acceptance approach should use The Acceptance Toolkit.

The Guide is organized into six main parts:

1. Introduction
2. The Conceptual Basis of Acceptance
3. Acceptance as a Security Management Approach
4. Research Approach and Methods
5. Research Process and Tools
6. Sharing Findings and Collaboration

The first three sections provide background on acceptance as a security management approach and explore the key components of an acceptance approach to NGO security management. The last three sections of the Guide focus on the actual process of preparing for and conducting field research on acceptance as well as analyzing and presenting findings.
This section seeks to present a holistic concept of acceptance that expands on the definition provided in the Introduction. The concept of acceptance can be traced to the founding and development of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Gaining consent from warring parties, a forerunner of ‘acceptance,’ was a critical condition for gaining access to victims of war in order to provide assistance. The ICRC attributes its acceptance in most conflict-affected countries in large part to adherence to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. The ICRC’s unique position established by international humanitarian law, its global reach, and the broad range of unique and systematized services it offers to civilians and belligerents (from prostheses to prison visits), give it a degree of name recognition and credibility few other organizations can equal. Most multi-mandate organizations have similarly based their application of acceptance on their mission and values and have sought to gain the acceptance of communities through good programming and by demonstrating humanitarian principles.

While many organizations had previously incorporated some form of acceptance into their basic programming strategies, acceptance gained additional recognition as a security management approach through the publication of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Good Practice Review 8, Operational Security Management in Violent Environments (GPR8), first published in 2000 and revised in 2010.

For those organizations subscribing to an acceptance approach, defining and conceptualizing acceptance has proven challenging. Attempts at formulating a definition are complicated by the broad nature of acceptance and its many intersections with other areas of organizational operations. The starting point for most organizations seeking to define acceptance is generally the definition presented in the original and revised GPR8. Even among organizations that may have a definition of acceptance, few have developed security plans and policies that incorporate the nuances and details advanced in the original GPR8. For example, definitions often focus on engaging with the “community at large” instead of providing specific guidance on the categories of actors who are critical for acceptance. Fast and O’Neill (2010) propose the following definition of acceptance: “Acceptance is founded on effective relationships and cultivating and maintaining consent from beneficiaries, local authorities, belligerents, and other stakeholders. This in turn is a means of reducing or removing potential threats in order to access vulnerable populations and undertake program activities.” Acceptance, therefore, is not only a matter of addressing existing threats in order to protect staff, but of ensuring access and enabling programming. Given the dynamic nature of the contexts in which aid agencies operate, acceptance must be continually sought, monitored, and maintained over time. Conceptualizing acceptance in this way involves thinking about who and what.

Who
The “who” of acceptance can be divided into three different questions: who gives consent, who is accepted, and who works to gain acceptance? First, who gives consent, is of critical importance. At a basic level, acceptance must include at least some degree of tacit consent from those who can obstruct program activities or cause harm to NGO personnel and beneficiaries. Key actors who might give their consent (or confer
their acceptance) for an organization’s presence and activities include host governments, local leaders, militant groups, the community at large, and “all those who can affect the security of agencies.” These groups of key actors can be broken down into sub-groups. For instance, local leaders refer to local government officials, religious authorities, and traditional leaders. In countries where the host state does not embrace an organization or its activities, the organization might face additional difficulties or be unable to secure access to populations. At a minimum, without permission from the host state to operate, an organization lacks legitimacy or legal standing.

Second, asking who is accepted has to do with the transferability of acceptance. Is acceptance limited to a specific staff person or a particular group of staff members? Acceptance may be based on that group’s work on a particular program or on a shared characteristic such as gender, religious affiliation, class, caste, or ethnicity. At what point does the acceptance gained by an individual transfer to the organization the individual represents? Organizations must consider whether consent transfers from one level (i.e. the individual) to another (i.e. the organization). Moreover, the dynamics of acceptance for national and expatriate staff will likely differ. For national staff, acceptance may change depending on whether they are from the area, on gender or ethnicity, and/or on other characteristics that have meaning or importance in the context. Given the dynamic and sometimes fleeting nature of acceptance, a clear understanding of who is accepted, and why, is imperative.

The third question relates to who within the organization works to gain acceptance. Those charged with security management cannot be the only ones involved in gaining acceptance. While the nature of acceptance relates directly to the security of staff, gaining and maintaining acceptance can be affected by decisions made in many other areas of an organization. Any effort to systematize an acceptance approach will involve working with program development, staff selection, and other personnel outside of the usual parameters of security management.

Program and field staff are key players in gaining and maintaining acceptance, since they are in direct contact with local communities and other stakeholders. There are many other staff, however, who directly affect an organization’s levels of acceptance. Guards and drivers, for instance, interact with community members on a regular basis. Other staff include the public relations and communications personnel responsible for communicating external messages and the logisticians and procurement staff who contract for the purchase and delivery of goods and supplies. The role of these staff members in promoting acceptance, though less visible, may have a profound effect on local perceptions of the organization, and thus its levels of acceptance.

What
The “what” of acceptance is directly tied to two interconnected issues: how an organization conceptualizes acceptance, and whether an organization takes deliberate action to generate consent from stakeholders. It presumes the need to do nothing more than provide beneficial services in order to automatically generate consent. Active acceptance must be continually negotiated, monitored, and maintained. Conceptualizing acceptance in this way, as we do in this paper, suggests the need for proactive engagement in activities and actions to gain and maintain consent from stakeholders and takes account of the idea of degrees of acceptance and the dynamic nature of consent.

An organization adopting an active acceptance approach engages in a number of actions to gain acceptance. It may reach out to a
variety of constituents and educate the community about what the organization seeks to do and why. An organization may provide assistance based upon humanitarian principles and/or community-defined needs. Through these activities an organization hopes to gain some degree of acceptance. Experience indicates that the degree of acceptance follows a continuum with tolerance at one end (e.g., “we don’t really like you but we want what you bring or do; therefore we tolerate your presence”) to full acceptance at the other (e.g., “we value what you provide and want you to stay; therefore we will work to make sure you are safe and do all we can to ensure you don’t leave”).

To effectively monitor whether staff are working to actively gain acceptance or to gauge their understanding of acceptance may require the development of specific verifiable “indicators.” It is important to balance flexibility and adaptability to the context and changing circumstances with a range of activities and assessment tools that monitor whether staff are working to actively gain acceptance and help to determine levels of acceptance over time. A comprehensive understanding of what acceptance is and what activities effectively implement an acceptance approach to security management will provide the foundation for developing such tools.

Acceptance, however, cannot be reduced to only a set of formulaic activities. Any degree of acceptance for an organization’s presence and activities may be fleeting and is dynamic and responsive to changes in context. NGOs operating in Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake discovered that an initial welcome dissipated over time as frustration increased with the slow pace of reconstruction, and in some cases, over opposition to the perceived values that NGO programming promoted. It is for this reason that organizations should also determine reliable means to assess whether they have gained (or still maintain) acceptance. The dynamic nature of acceptance means that trying to assess acceptance with a checklist of activities or defined set of output indicators could be detrimental since it may create a false sense of acceptance (i.e., if one checks all the boxes, one has gained acceptance). Organizations cannot presume to have acceptance even if they have completed certain activities and assessed the specified indicators (with positive results), much in the same way that acceptance is not synonymous with good programming or consent from a beneficiary community.

In Part three of the toolkit, we further expand on what acceptance is by presenting several key components of acceptance. These components include: principles and mission; stakeholder and context analysis; relationships and networks; programming; negotiation; and communications. In addition, two cross-cutting components of acceptance are staffing for acceptance and image and perceptions.
This part of the Guide builds on the conceptual basis of acceptance presented in Part two to provide additional depth regarding the main components of an acceptance approach. The purpose of Part three is to promote systematic thinking about what an acceptance approach to security management is and to help the user identify specific research questions.

Part three is structured to reflect the three areas of implementing an acceptance approach to security management listed in the Introduction, which include: (1) gaining and maintaining acceptance; (2) assessing and monitoring the presence and degree of acceptance; and, (3) determining whether acceptance is effective in a given context.

As with all parts of this Guide, this section is meant to serve as a resource that can be adapted, used in part or in whole, and expanded to meet the needs and objectives of the user.

### 3.1 Applying an acceptance approach

**3.1.1 Acceptance in security management**

This section aims to document how organizations approach acceptance and how that approach fits within their broader security management structures. The matrix below lists three topics that relate to how acceptance fits into security management at organizations. These topics include: organizational policies, security coordination, and organizational understanding of acceptance.

The matrix is structured to provide guidance on where to find information on each topic. It directs you to relevant documents.
where you may find information on security policies and acceptance and also tells you who within your organization may have information on a given topic.

Asking questions of security and program staff may elicit different answers to the first statement about a “definition” of acceptance. Security and program staff may be thinking of similar ideas but call them by different names. This is why we recommend that you speak to people in different departments/units within organizations (listed under key informant interviews and focus group discussions).
### Acceptance as Part of Security Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES</th>
<th>SECURITY COORDINATION</th>
<th>ORGANIZATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF ACCEPTANCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Is acceptance the primary security management approach, or one of several approaches?</td>
<td>- With whom do you coordinate on security matters?</td>
<td>- Definition of acceptance?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- How often is the security management approach reviewed?</td>
<td>- With whom do you share security information?</td>
<td>- Are the key elements covered in the definition of acceptance or described in other documents?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- What departments within the organization are responsible for implementing acceptance?</td>
<td>- From whom do you receive security information (community, other NGOs, UN, government, armed opposition groups (AOGs))?</td>
<td>- What impact does the organization’s level of acceptance have on staff security?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Methods: How to Gather Information</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
<th>Key Informant Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Group Discussions</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Security policy documents</td>
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<td>- Program staff</td>
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<td>- Strategic plan</td>
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<td>- Job descriptions</td>
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<td>- Safety and security management plan</td>
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<td>- Context analysis</td>
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<td>- Safety and security field handbook</td>
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<td>- Security updates</td>
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<td>- Interagency meetings minutes/updates</td>
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<td>- Local or national media stories</td>
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- Country director
- Human resource Manager
- Program staff (where security is part of the normal management line)
- Security director and/or focal point
3.1.2 Key components of implementing an acceptance approach

Throughout the course of the Collaborative Learning Approach to NGO Security Management Project, the Project team identified several key components of an acceptance approach that cut across departments and staff roles. These components emerged from a review of existing literature on acceptance and out of discussions with a range of NGO staff including security directors and national NGO staff in the field.

These key components of an acceptance approach cut across departments and staff roles. An in-depth discussion of these components can be found in our “Acceptance White Paper” (available at: http://www.acceptanceresearch.org). The components include: principles and mission; stakeholder and context analysis; relationships and networks; programming; communications; staffing; and image and perceptions.

The key components are not exhaustive, but instead should prompt thinking about the ways organizations can and do gain acceptance. The matrices in this section correspond to these key components. As with all sections of the toolkit, you should adapt these tools to fit your research objectives, location, etc.

**Principles and Mission**

An organization’s principles, mission, and values and how these are perceived are central to applying an acceptance approach to security management. Values must be consistently demonstrated in practice and not simply stated. Organizations need to clearly articulate and consistently apply their guiding principles and values, understand how these shape their mission and programming, and how these, in turn, might affect their acceptance in a given location.
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<th><strong>topics</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sources of Information on Topic</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principles and Mission</strong></td>
<td><strong>Document Analysis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Principles and Mission</strong></td>
<td>• Organizational mission statement, programming documents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Website</td>
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<td>• Operational and programming policies</td>
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<td>• Program proposals and plans</td>
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<td>• Internal guidance on donor relations</td>
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<td>• Donor review procedures</td>
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<td>• Head of programs</td>
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<td>• Finance staff</td>
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<td>• Country director</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Community members directly affected by programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Community members not affected by programs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Humanitarian Principles</strong></td>
<td>• Program proposals and plans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Internal guidance on donor relations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Donor review procedures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Community members and/or other stakeholders</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Community members directly affected by programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Community members not affected by programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Organizational mission statement, programming documents</td>
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<td>• Community members not affected by programs</td>
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While positive relationships with beneficiary communities are necessary to gaining acceptance, it is important to recognize the limits to a community’s capacity to protect an organization’s programs or staff. It is therefore advisable to identify and cultivate relationships with other actors, especially those who have the power and influence to negatively or positively affect an organization’s security and programming, and cultivate relationships with them. The revised GPR8 emphasizes that relationships must be built through “active outreach” to a wide range of stakeholders. Staff must invest time into building relationships for which excellent social, interpersonal, and communication skills are necessary. In addition, staff must have a nuanced understanding of the meanings conveyed by details, such as where meetings take place, who leads or participates in meetings, and the staff’s ability to listen and show respect.

### Relationships & Networks

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<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO forum documents, minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interagency Safety &amp; Security coordination meeting minutes/reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Memorandums of Understanding</td>
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<td>Membership certificates</td>
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**INFORMAL NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIPS**

- Does your organization host or participate in a community committee or advisory board?
- Do program staff hold regular meetings with community members, government officials, local leaders, businesspeople, or other stakeholders?
- Do program staff meet with community members, government officials, local leaders, or other stakeholders outside the “project cycle”?
- Do program staff build relationships with non-beneficiaries?
- Do staff members reach out to armed opposition groups (AOGs) and all sides of a conflict?
- Other networks the organization uses to gather information and engage in dialogue with stakeholders (e.g., non-beneficiaries, armed actors)?

**PARTNERSHIPS**

- Capacity-building services/programs for local partners (types of programs/services offered and who qualifies to participate)?

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<tr>
<th><strong>Stakeholder &amp; Context Analysis</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>The objective of stakeholder analysis is to accurately identify and analyze the motives, attitudes, capabilities, and relationships of actors who might influence programmatic success, including security. Context analysis examines the environment and circumstances in which an organization operates, with a particular focus on how context and organizational values, mission, and programming might interact. An organization should identify how its programs (e.g., type of program, who it serves), presence (e.g., hiring of staff, office/housing rental, wages), or activities (e.g., assistance, capacity-building) will affect different stakeholders and how they, in turn, might react. While the</td>
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community at large may respect an organization, a particular individual or group may perceive the organization as a threat. In short, organizations must ask: “Who benefits, who loses, who is bypassed by...programme[s]?”  

This question prompts organizations to consider how program design and activities influence social, political, and economic power structures and what unintended consequences they may have.  

Stakeholder and context analyses can help determine the appropriate parties to engage in dialogue and negotiation in order to enhance staff security. National staff will have a key role to play in identifying stakeholders, contextualizing messages, and acting as organizational interlocutors.  

Stakeholder and context analyses can also highlight the potential limitations of acceptance, by identifying actors who neither gain nor lose from the organization’s activities or presence but who may see an attack against the organization, its staff, or its resources as a political, criminal, or financial opportunity. In forming a security strategy in a given location, organizations must therefore consider the limitations of an acceptance approach and devise alternative approaches appropriate to the context. These analytical tools are critical to effective security management and the appropriate application of an acceptance approach.

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<tr>
<th>Stakeholder and Context Analysis</th>
<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ANALYSIS PROCESS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Document Analysis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Does the organization have a specific process for stakeholder analysis for its programs and/or specific projects?</td>
<td>Stakeholder analysis documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Does the organization consult the same people/categories of individuals?</td>
<td>Security manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does the organization collect information on the local security environment?</td>
<td>Security protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sources of Information on Topic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Whether the organization has a stakeholder analysis that takes into account:</td>
<td>Previous stakeholder analysis documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Who they need acceptance from?</td>
<td>Do no harm analyses</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ How important it is to gain acceptance from those individuals and why?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ How they can influence it?</td>
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What types of context analysis does the organization conduct?
- Does the organization analyze potential strengths and limitations of acceptance in the context?
- Does the analysis consider how programs may influence local power and economic structures?

**Who is involved**
- Who provides information?
- Does the organization receive security information from local project partners and local security bodies (e.g., district security officer, police, and local leaders)?

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<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
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</table>

- Security protocols
- Security reports or situation reports
- Interagency S&S coordination meeting minutes/reports
- Security focal point and/or security staff
- Country director and/or senior administrative manager
- Program staff

**Programming**
Acceptance is widely recognized as connected to good, effective, and responsive programming that meets the needs of a community. Community participation, consultation, and local partnerships are often key elements of effective programming. The ability of an organization to meet people’s needs in a transparent and accountable way is often critical for how the community perceives the organization. However, even if programs meet the needs of beneficiaries they may adversely affect specific actors and/or change political, economic, and social power structures. Insofar as good programming is an essential component of acceptance, acceptance cannot be assumed from good programming alone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEEDS ASSESSMENTS</td>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is an assessment of the security context included in the organization’s program/needs</td>
<td>Assessment design and guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment tools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Assessment Methodology

- **What kind of follow-up does program staff do with communities after needs assessments?**
- **How are needs assessments participatory and inclusive?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Assessment reports</td>
<td>• Assessment reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Needs assessment documents</td>
<td>• Needs assessment documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Visit reports</td>
<td>• Visit reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Budgeting

- **Do project planning and budgeting processes include acceptance-related security activities?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Proposal and budgeting guidance and templates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Project proposals (different sectors)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Does the monitoring and evaluation process include a review of acceptance-related security activities?**
- **Does the M&E process assess community perceptions of whether the program meets their needs?**
- **Does the M&E process assess whether community feels ownership of the program?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Country program monitoring plan (if available) and/or sample of project monitoring plans, guidelines, and indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Field security officer/security focal point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Country director; senior administrative manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Head of programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Field security officer/security focal point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Country director; senior administrative manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Head of programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Program staff (different sectors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Program staff (different sectors)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

- What types of feedback mechanisms does the organization make available to community members?
- Are community members and others aware of feedback mechanisms?
- Are feedback mechanisms incorporated into program design from the beginning?
- Do project officers make regular visits, outside of program cycles (e.g., needs assessment, M&E, trouble-shooting) to connect with the community?

| • Suggestion box | • Program staff |
| • Feedback reports | • Community members |
| • Monitoring and evaluation documents | • Local leaders |
| • Project budgets | |

### TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- What mechanisms, if any, does the organization have to ensure or increase accountability and transparency?
- Are project budgets made available to communities?

| • Program documents | • Program staff |
| • Audit reports | • Community members |
| • Monitoring and evaluation documents | |

---

**Negotiation**

Acceptance depends on successful negotiations with actors at many levels, from individuals to governments. These negotiations can be formal, as in the case of negotiations with national, regional, or local governments to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for an organization’s operations. Negotiations at other levels may be less formal and relate to gaining access to needy or vulnerable populations, as with soldiers or rebels at a checkpoint while traveling to project sites, or with local officials at a port or airport to access relief supplies. NGO staff must be equipped with specific communication and negotiation skills, including attention to tone, subtle changes in demeanor, negotiating styles and social meanings, in order to build relationships and negotiate access effectively across cultural and other boundaries.23
## Negotiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING</th>
<th>TRAINING</th>
<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Do staff carry letters from local leadership (government officials or unofficial leaders) that indicate consent or acceptance?</td>
<td>- Is negotiation training available for staff? Which staff qualify to participate?</td>
<td>Document Analysis: Letters of support or affirmation of the organization’s work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Does the organization have a formal MOU with the government/national authorities?</td>
<td>- Are staff trained in how to negotiate for access?</td>
<td>Key Informant Interviews: Formal MOU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Does the organization have an MOU or negotiated agreement with local authorities?</td>
<td>- Do staff evaluations include an assessment of whether the staff has received negotiation training and/or demonstrated negotiation skills?</td>
<td>Document Analysis: Training materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Communications

Communications from the acceptance perspective refers to the explicit and implicit messages an organization projects about itself as well as statements others may make about an organization. Whether unofficial or official, informal or formal, an organization’s communications about its mission, values, and activities should be clear and consistent. All staff, including senior and junior staff, as well as drivers, guards, or cleaners should understand and be able to communicate the goals and principles of the organization. Public messages from the organization or critical statements from outside sources can also affect how an organization is perceived, as can advocacy efforts on human rights or other issues. Organizations must consider the implicit and explicit messages of public statements and public silence and how these may affect how the organization is perceived, and, in turn, how the means of communication and messaging affect their level of security.
## Communications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
<th>Key Informant Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Group Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **IN-COUNTRY COMMUNICATION** | - Communication strategy document  
- Website content  
- Annual reports  
- Press releases  
- Local media coverage (newspapers, radio, and TV transcripts)  
- Translated documents  
- Orientation materials  
- Training materials  
- Branded materials such as t-shirts  
- Leaflets | - Field security officer/security focal point  
- Country director; senior administrative manager  
- Public affairs officer  
- Information/communication officers  
- Program staff  
- Head of programs | |
| - Does the organization have a local communication strategy to educate the public about the organization's mission and programs?  
- Does the organization actively seek out media coverage of its programs, events, etc?  
- What types of communications are used to educate the public about its mission and programs?  
- Do staff carry documents in local languages about the organization's purpose or mission in vehicles?  
- Do staff disseminate documents in local languages? | | |
| **MEDIA MONITORING** | - Collected media articles  
- Weekly media summaries | | - Country director  
- Public affairs/communication officer |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY</th>
<th>• Communications strategy</th>
<th>• Public affairs officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization’s communication strategy include using local channels of</td>
<td>• Policy guidance on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication?</td>
<td>communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization’s communication strategy ensure consistent and clear messages</td>
<td>• Statements, press</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about the organization?</td>
<td>releases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does the organization ensure clear and consistent messages?</td>
<td>• Internal media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do organizational communications (including media, print and statements) purposely</td>
<td>protocols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasize specific values and/or principles that align with local cultural/religious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>values and sensitivities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| INTERNAL COMMUNICATION (WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION)                                        | • Orientation materials   | • Senior administrative |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------| • Training materials      |  manager                |
| - How does the organization ensure that all staff (including drivers, logisticians, etc.)| • HR documents            | • Program staff          |
|  can clearly communicate the organization’s mission and program activities?              |                           | • Guards and drivers     |
| - Does the organization provide communication-skills training?                           |                           | • Human resource manager |
|                                                                                        |                           | • Public relations staff  |

| GLOBAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY                                                           | • Communications strategy | • Country director       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------| • Country director        |                          |
| - Does the organization’s global/local communication strategy take into account how      | • Communications/         |                          |
|  communications and references to the organization in the media may affect perceptions  |  public relations staff   |                          |
|  of the organization?                                                                   |                           |                          |
**Staffing for acceptance**
Organizational personnel play a central role in promoting or hindering acceptance. Staffing decisions can affect acceptance in many ways. The following areas of staffing in particular affect acceptance:

*Staff skills and qualities*
Staffing decisions determine in large part whether NGO personnel have the necessary qualities to gain acceptance from communities, including the ability to communicate effectively, negotiate, and build relationships. In addition to these skills, staff behavior and willingness to respect cultural norms can have an important impact on an organization’s ability to gain acceptance.

*Staff composition*
In some cases, staffing for acceptance might offset identity (e.g., nationality, region, religion, gender, social status, or ethnic background) with programmatic or professional competencies. The composition of an organization’s staff and whether there is a mix of personnel from different social, ethnic, urban/rural, or religious groups may also affect perceptions of an organization, its values, and espoused principles.

*Recruitment, firing, and compensation practices*
Staffing decisions also affect perceptions of the organization through the ways in which local, national, and international staff are hired, fired, and compensated. Discrepancies between international and national staff salaries and the resource availability of people in communities compared to that of the organization can be sources of tension.

*Staff turnover*
In cases where acceptance is linked to an individual staff member, if that staff person departs, the organization may lose stakeholder consent for its presence and activities in the community. At a minimum, the organization must work to maintain that acceptance through the transition. In addition, the organization loses the local knowledge and relationships maintained by that staff member, which may be crucial to acceptance.
## Staffing for Acceptance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Document Analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SKILLS AND RESPONSIBILITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are acceptance-related skills and responsibilities included in the organization’s job descriptions and performance evaluations?</td>
<td>• Evaluation form (blank form with standard format used)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is there acceptance-related skills development in staff orientation and training? What skills are needed and how are these developed?</td>
<td>• Job descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• HR lists of core competencies for staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• HR policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Orientation guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Staff training design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Training outlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HIRING AND FIRING PRACTICES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization hire staff from different groups (ethnic, religious, urban/rural, gender, etc.)?</td>
<td>• HR manual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization hire staff from different regions (e.g., local, national)?</td>
<td>• National labor law documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is regional or group composition taken into account when making decisions about hiring and sending staff to regional/area offices?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization attempt to hire locally whenever possible?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are open positions disseminated through government channels?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do hiring and firing practices conform to national employment laws?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### HIRING AND FIRING PRACTICES, CONT’D

- Does the organization clearly specify reasons for termination of employment (e.g., specify that decisions are not related to group membership)?
- Does the organization hire local staff who do not speak fluently in the organization’s dominant language (e.g., French, English)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- HR manual</td>
<td>- National labor law documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• HR manager</td>
<td>• Country director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Program manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ORIENTATION/INDUCTION

- Does the organization provide orientation for new staff (expatriates, in particular) on the local culture, history, and current issues?
- What topics are covered by orientation?
- Does the organization provide local language training; which staff qualify to participate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Orientation materials</td>
<td>• HR policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• HR manager</td>
<td>• Country director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Country director</td>
<td>• Senior administrative manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### STAFF TURNOVER

- What methods does the organization have to ensure consistency in programming in areas with high staff turnover (e.g., introductions/referrals, exit interviews)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• HR manager</td>
<td>• Country director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Country director</td>
<td>• Senior administrative manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

- How does the organization determine local and international staff salaries and compensation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• HQ staffing policies</td>
<td>• Country director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• HR manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECURITY MANAGEMENT
- Does the organization provide security training for all staff?
- Do security policies vary based on risk profiles (e.g., based on position in the organization (guards, drivers, administration, program/field staff), for women/men, national/expatriate staff)?

- • Security policies and training materials
- • Training staff
- • Security focal point
- • Country director

Image and Perceptions
The image and perceptions of an organization are central to acceptance and are affected by a variety of factors, including global dynamics and whether an organization and its staff successfully implement the components of an acceptance approach at multiple levels within the organization. For instance, the image of an organization relates directly to its relationships, communications, and programming. Perceptions are also influenced by staff behavior and composition.

In addition, how an organization operates in the field—including where its offices are located, what types of vehicles staff drive, and how wealthy the organizations appears in comparison with the local population—plays an important role in shaping perceptions of that organization.26

In sum, gaining and maintaining acceptance is not only predicated on the values, principles, programs, and relationships an organization exhibits in the field, but also by a much broader range of variables that affect local perceptions of the organization. To understand this complex relationship, organizations and their staff need to better understand how operational choices, program design and outcomes, and global dynamics influence the perceptions of local communities and other stakeholders, and how these in turn affect the security of their staff and operations.

Image and Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEDIA/COMMUNICATIONS</td>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the global/local communication strategy take into account how communications and references to the</td>
<td>• Communication strategy document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization in the media may affect perceptions of the organization?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the organization have guidelines on staff interaction with media?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CODE OF CONDUCT**
- Does the organization have a code of conduct for staff? If so, what regulations and/or guidance does it include?
- Topic areas (e.g., does it include:)
  - Dress
  - Showing respect
  - Behavior
  - Associations

**BRANDING**
- How does the organization decide whether or not to “brand” vehicles/compounds/program sites (who is involved, at what level of the organization)?
- What criteria are used in making these decisions?

**PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE**
- How does the organization decide what type of facility to work out of?
- How does the organization decide where to locate offices and guest houses/employee compounds?
- How does the organization decide what type of transport to use in a given location?
- How does the organization decide whether or not to use an armed escort?
- Do these decisions consider how vehicles and facilities influence local perceptions of the organization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>senior administrative manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public affairs officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODE OF CONDUCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• HR policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRANDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Security focal point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Country director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Security focal point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Country director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Logistics manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2 Assessing and monitoring the presence and degree of acceptance

In previous sections of the Guide we highlighted the importance of developing ways to assess and monitor whether an organization is accepted in a given context (and by whom it is accepted). In this section, we present, first, a matrix on tools and methods organizations may have to assess and monitor acceptance, and second, we provide guidance on several topics related to determining whether an organization is accepted.

We purposefully use two distinct verbs in the title of this subsection—assess and monitor. Acceptance is by nature a dynamic phenomenon. Relationships built over time can be destroyed by one negative interaction with a new staff member, for instance. A critical part of applying an acceptance approach to security management is the ability to assess whether an organization is accepted at a given time and in a specific location, but also to monitor that level of acceptance.

This part of acceptance is one of the least understood and developed aspects of acceptance as a security management approach amongst NGOs. Thus it is an important area for further research, innovative thinking, and recommendations.

Finally, it is important to distinguish between gaining acceptance and acceptance being effective. If an organization develops tools to assess whether they are accepted and determines that they have a high level of acceptance in one location, this does not necessarily mean that acceptance will prevent security incidents or threats to their staff. Despite a potentially high level of acceptance, bandits from a neighboring area could burglarize an NGO complex, for instance, before the community has knowledge of the impending attack. There are a host of complex environmental factors that can impact the effectiveness of acceptance. The topic of effectiveness is further discussed in section 3.3.

3.2.1 Tools and methods to assess and monitor the level of acceptance

The matrix below aims to help researchers or research teams gather information on what tools and methods organizations have in place to monitor and assess their levels of acceptance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools and Methods to Monitor and Assess Acceptance</th>
<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSESSMENT TOOLS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization assess whether it has gained acceptance?</td>
<td>● Security management plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What tools are used?</td>
<td>● Program assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization conduct separate assessments for different stakeholders?</td>
<td>● Security assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Training documents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does the organization provide training for staff on how to assess perceptions and, if so, the type of training?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSESSING PERCEPTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the organization have methods to assess how it is perceived by the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do these methods consider the perceptions of community members, belligerents, and other actors who are not beneficiaries of the organization’s programs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are perception assessments performed for than once? If so, how often?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With whom does the organization consult to assess perceptions (i.e. beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, local leaders, local government officials, other stakeholders)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Monitoring and evaluation documents
- Program evaluations
- Needs assessments
- Feedback documents
- Security policy documents
- Security training manuals
- Meeting minutes or reports

- Security focal point
- Program staff
- Community members

### 3.2.2 Determining whether an organization is accepted in a context

Experience indicates that the degree of acceptance follows a continuum with tolerance at one end (e.g., “We don’t really like you but we want what you bring or do; therefore we tolerate your presence”) to full acceptance at the other (e.g., “We value what you provide and want you to stay; therefore we will work to make sure you are safe and do all we can to ensure you don’t leave”). An organization may fall at one or the other end, or anywhere in between. In addition, acceptance is context-dependent and while an organization may be accepted by the community in one location, there may be other actors who do not accept the organization’s presence.

It is critical that organizations have tools (see matrix above) to determine their level of acceptance. The matrix below provides several topics that directly relate to whether or not an organization is accepted. Determining whether an organization has achieved acceptance in a location requires seeking information from sources both inside the organization (such as program staff) as well as sources outside the organization (such as community members).

As we have highlighted throughout this Guide, the guidance and tools we provide are not blueprints that can or should be adopted exactly as they are. You should choose the tools that are relevant
to your research objectives and location and adapt them accordingly. The matrices below provide additional ideas and issues which we hope will stimulate your thinking and foster further innovation for the development of acceptance-related tools.

### Determining Whether an Organization is Accepted in a Given Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMAGE &amp; PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do community members and other stakeholders describe the organization?</td>
<td>• Communications strategy</td>
<td>• Country director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In the communities where the organization works, have people have heard of the organization?</td>
<td>• Incident reports (threats, aggression, etc)</td>
<td>• Public relations officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What image does the organization aim to portray?</td>
<td>• Local media accounts (newspaper articles, local radio and TV transcripts, etc.)</td>
<td>• NGO staff working in other communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In assessing perceptions, has the organization encountered anything that does not match the image it wants to portray?</td>
<td>• Letters to the editor</td>
<td>• Local leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do community members accurately understand the organization’s mission and mandate?</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Local security personnel (e.g. district security officer, local police, local army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are the perceptions of the organization by communities where it works?</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual community members directly involved in program activities (e.g. community health workers, local water committee members, teachers, etc.; depending on program focus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are perceptions of the organization by communities where it does not work, but may travel through or visit?</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Community members (not directly involved in program activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Community members (directly affected by program activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Armed actors, where appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Other NGO staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do local media portray the organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do informal information sources/informants (e.g., cab drivers, bar and shop owners, market vendors) and other official and unofficial actors portray the organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the organization is perceived to be affiliated with any other group and if so, why?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Community stakeholders (e.g. local government officials, local leaders, etc) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participatory program evaluations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local leaders (e.g. community level elected officials, clan leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders, others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual community members directly involved in program activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Community members |
| Other NGO staff |
| Armed actors, where appropriate |
### WHETHER STAFF ARE PERCEIVED AS RESPECTFUL

- How is respect earned and demonstrated in the local context (e.g. through the way that staff dress, drive their vehicles, through attendance at local cultural events, etc.)?
- How does the organization respond to these differences? (e.g., guidance for staff, etc.)
- Are local actors likely to have differing expectations for national and expatriate staff regarding respectfulness for local culture?
- Do different expectations impact how the organization is seen as a whole?
- Do local leaders feel they are respected by the organization? Why or why not? (i.e. Are there indicators related to the way in which meetings are organized or held, how relationships are built or information shared?)

#### INDICATORS

- **Code of conduct**
- **HR policies**
- **Meeting registers or attendance lists**

### INDICATORS OF ACCEPTANCE

- Does the organization have access to target populations or populations in need (indicator of tolerance, not necessarily acceptance?)
- Does the organization receive open feedback from community and stakeholders?
- What is the level of involvement of community and local leaders in projects, meetings and events?
- Has the organization received community warning of potential threat (information-sharing)?
- Have community members or leaders advocated publicly on organization’s behalf?
- Has the community acted to protect

#### INDICATORS

- **Incident reports**
- **Meeting minutes**
- **Feedback sources**

### RESPONSIBILITY

- **Local leaders**
- **Community members directly involved in program activities**
- **Local leaders**
- **Local security personnel (e.g. district security officer, local police, local army)**
- **Armed actors, where appropriate**
- **Individual community members directly involved in program activities**
- **Other NGO staff**

#### RESPONSIBILITY

- **Community members (not directly involved in program activities)**
- **Community members**
- **Other NGO staff**
3.3 Determining whether acceptance is effective in a context

While many organizations may have activities to gain and maintain acceptance, they lack ways to determine whether they are accepted and if acceptance is effective in a context. Being accepted by community members and other actors (local businessmen, local leaders, armed actors, etc.) is not necessarily sufficient for ensuring continued access and staff security. Because many factors influence how effective acceptance can be in a given context, it is critical that organizations have tools and procedures in place to document whether acceptance is “working” to reduce the risk to staff and thus, promote access to populations in need.

In particular, the topics below highlight important aspects of an organization’s acceptance approach in order to systematically document indicators of effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of an acceptance approach.

These indicators are not a checklist, however; having indicators of effectiveness does not necessarily ensure the security of staff. The indicators are meant to help you think through what aspects to document when trying to determine the effectiveness of acceptance.
## Determining Whether Acceptance is Effective in a Given Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
<th>Sources of Information on Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDICATORS OF EFFECTIVENESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have community members ever intervened in security situations to help the organization?</td>
<td>- Incident reports</td>
<td>- Security focal point and/or security staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do community members share security-related information with the organization? (i.e. road and access issues or warning of potential threats)</td>
<td>- NGO security forum meeting minutes</td>
<td>- Country director; Senior administrative manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Has this information been accurate and credible?</td>
<td>- Security assessment report</td>
<td>- Local leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Examples</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Local security personnel (e.g. district security officer, local police, local army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have staff from the organization passed through a potentially hostile checkpoint because someone recognized the organization and/or advocated on their behalf?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Individual community members directly involved in program activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Has an actor has advocated on an organization’s behalf to a party imposing a threat in order to resolve or mitigate the threat?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Program staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have actors or parties posing a threat to the organization ever decided not to harm the organization (i.e. release of an abducted staff, etc)?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Key Informant Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Group Discussions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Community members (directly affected by program activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Community members (not directly affected by program activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Field staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **INDICATORS OF A LACK OF EFFECTIVENESS** | | |
| - Has the organization been hindered from accessing areas where it needs to go for programs (i.e. freedom of access and | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
movement) and why?
- How frequently the organization’s access has been hindered (i.e. an isolated incident v. a developing trend)?
- Has the organization suffered security incidents (major or minor) and/or near misses?
- If so, were these incidents perceived to be related to acceptance or to other factors?
- Has the organization been asked to close operations?
- Have any specific actors impeded the organization’s acceptance in a location and how?

**LIMITATIONS TO EFFECTIVENESS**
- Does the organization consider what factors might impede an acceptance approach in a given context?
- Has the organization decided that acceptance alone *would not work* as a security management approach in a given context? If so, why did they decide this?
- Has the organization decided that acceptance alone *would work* in a given context? If so, why did they decide this?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>report</th>
<th>Local security official</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incident reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Stakeholder or context analysis |
| Safety and security management plan |
| Meeting minutes (from meeting with community members, local security officials, etc.) |

| Country director |
| Program manager |
| Security director/Security focal point |

| members (not directly affected by program activities) |
| Field staff |
4.1 Ethical considerations

4.1.1 Background on research ethics

Every researcher must consider the ethical aspects of their work. An entire body of literature has been developed around research ethics, much of it stemming from the medical field in the period since the Nuremberg War Crime Trials. Today, three basic principles underlie research ethics across study fields. These three principles are: (1) respect for persons; (2) beneficence; and (3) justice. The three principles are used to judge the ethical integrity of research directly involving people (known as “human subjects research”). Since two of the three research methods introduced below for the study of acceptance involve human subjects, it is important to incorporate these three basic principles into this Guide and its approach. This following sub-sections detail the principles and application of the principles through standard research practices such as informed consent. Much of the material is based on information found in *The Belmont Report*, a 1979 report of the US National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, outlining basic ethical principles and guidelines to be followed in order to implement those principles.

**Three basic principles**

1. **Respect for persons.** Research must be conducted in a manner that (1) recognizes the autonomy of individuals; and, (2) gives protection to individuals with limited autonomy. Autonomy, as applied to participation in research, refers to the ability of individuals to decide for themselves if they want...
to be part of the research and their ability to act on that decision. A person with limited autonomy may not be in a position to decide for him/herself to act on his/her own wishes.

What does this mean for your research on acceptance?
You must ensure that individuals providing information in the research (e.g., key informants and participants in focus group discussions) document their participation in the research as autonomous individuals who have received information about the research, personally considered it, and decided for themselves that they are willing to participate. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure each person understands the purpose of the research, the process to be used, the use of specific information provided, and how the research will be used more generally. The researcher must answer any questions about the research and ensure the individual understands that they are free to decide not to participate without negative impact. This process is referred to as “informed consent” and is documented through the participant’s signature of an informed consent form.

Respect for persons is by no means limited to the informed consent process. Respect for persons also implies that throughout the research activity, participation is entirely voluntary. An individual who has provided informed consent might decide during an interview that, for whatever reason, she no longer wishes to continue. She is free to decide if she wants to stop, when she wants to stop, or if she would like to forego answering certain questions. Respect for persons underlies the fact that participation is fully voluntary at all stages. Respect for persons also implies that researchers must respect participants’ culture, gender, age, social status, religion, and any other characteristics such that their right to truthful and complete answers to questions about the research, and that their right to decline participation is in no way tied to their personal characteristics. Just as humanitarian organizations strive to provide assistance based on impartiality, respect for persons is not tied in any way to an individual’s characteristics.

2. Beneficence. As applied to human subject research, beneficence refers to researchers’ obligation to design and implement studies that promote the well-being of individuals and/or communities and reduce risks to a minimum. More specifically, two fundamental concepts related to beneficence are: (1) research must not harm or endanger participants (i.e., do no harm); and, (2) research must maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms. This is perhaps most easily understood in medical research. Experimental medical tests and treatments must be shown not to endanger participants’ health in any way. When this happens, researchers are ethically obliged to immediately discontinue the study. In the case of research on acceptance as a security management approach, risks and benefits might be less obvious, but must also be considered carefully.

What does this mean for your research on acceptance?
This research has been designed to provide maximum benefit to both aid workers and the communities in which aid workers live. In theory, the possible harms are minimal. However, you must at all times throughout the research process consider the local context where you are working and the dynamics of the research as it unfolds, always remembering your ethical obligation to ensure the beneficence of the research. If at any time the researchers, interviewees, or community members where you are working become threatened as a result of the research, you must take immediate steps to address the issue. This could range from providing a counseling referral to a participant who experiences traumatic flashbacks, to managing a security incident as a result of
your questions, to discontinuing the research altogether if the researchers, participants, or general community members are, or feel that they are, in any way directly threatened or targeted for harm as a result of the work.

3. **Justice.** Justice within the framework of research ethics is based on the idea that the benefits and burden of research should be distributed evenly across affected groups. Ethical research cannot ask for participation (i.e., the research burden) from one group for the betterment (i.e., the research benefit) of another group. This is easy to consider in terms of medical research. For example, it would be unethical to conduct a cancer screening test in one city—Nairobi, for example—if the results of the research are to be used for the benefit only of those individuals living in Mombasa (and not Nairobi). Research plans must specify the ways in which positive results are expected to benefit the communities in which the research takes place. Research participants are not identified only by their location—that is just one example. The same principle applies to groups of different socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, etc. In short, those who participate in research should not be expected to carry undue burden for the exclusive benefit of others.

**What does this mean for your research on acceptance?**
As mentioned above, the research on acceptance as a security management approach has been designed to involve a minimal burden on participants. Typically, you will be asking for one to two hours of people’s time, their insights, perspectives, information, and opinions on a topic that is relevant to them. It is also anticipated that there is very little risk to participants, and you may find that participants are actually eager to share their views. Nevertheless, there are some important justice-related aspects to this research, most importantly that the results be used to generate knowledge eventually translated into NGO security policies, guidelines, and practices aimed to improve the job-related security of all staff. This means the research is carried out in a way that burdens and benefits are distributed across both national and international staff, female and male staff, highly experienced and new staff, staff who work in cities and rural areas, and any other categories of staff you think could be relevant to the research process and results.

4.1.2 **Informed Consent**

Some of the ways you can be sure that you are applying the three basic principles of ethics research have already been described in the examples above. The informed consent process is also a critical part of ensuring the ethical conduct of research.

**What is informed consent?**
As noted above, informed consent is based on the concept of “respect for persons” and the idea that each person makes an autonomous, free decision, without undue influence by others, regarding whether they want to participate in the research. In order to do that, you must incorporate the following into your approach:

**Information.** In order to make an informed decision about whether to participate in the research, each individual must be given enough information about the planned research and what you are asking of them. This includes:

- **Research purpose:** Explain clearly the stated goal and objectives of your research and let the participant know how you intend to use the information they provide.
- **Research procedure:** Indicate how/why the participants have been chosen, how long you anticipate the interview or
focus group discussion to last, and what kinds of questions you will be asking. For focus group discussions, highlight the importance of confidentiality.

- **Possible risks and anticipated benefits**: Provide an honest assessment of any possible risk of participating. In interviews and focus group discussions, this mainly involves the potential emotional discomfort (or possibly trauma) participants could experience when discussing difficult personal issues. If you think this is likely, you should ensure that counseling referral information is available for participants. Benefits of participating in interviews and focus group discussions most often involve the participants' opportunity to contribute to a deeper understanding of the research topic. Financial benefits are sometimes offered in medical research but are not advised for the type of research covered in this Guide.

- **Confidentiality**: In addition to explaining how the information participants provide will be used, you should specify the degree of confidentiality you are able to ensure and any limitations to the confidentiality of information.

- **Opportunity for participant questions**: After you have read the research statement to the participants (or they read this statement themselves), you must explicitly ask if there are any questions and answer them completely and honestly.

- **Opportunity for the participant to withdraw from the research at any time**: It should be clear to the participants that they have the right to stop the interview or leave the discussion at any time without experiencing negative consequences.

**Comprehension.** The way in which you communicate this information is as important as the information itself since consent to participate cannot be “informed” if the information is inappropriately presented. The information you present about the research must match the participants’ level of comprehension. It is best to use simple and straightforward language and to present concepts about your research in a comprehensive but basic manner.

**Voluntariness.** The decision of an individual to provide informed consent to participate in research must be made independently and voluntarily by the individual. In no way should you attempt to inappropriately influence the person to participate either by threatening negative consequences of not participating, or offering excessive rewards. For example, it would be unethical to tell a potential participant that if they do not consent to being interviewed, you will inform their supervisor and recommend disciplinary action. Many researchers, especially in the medical field, find they must offer financial incentives to get a sufficient number of participants for their research. For the research outlined in this Guide, it is not advised that you offer participants a financial reward, and it is important to let the potential participant know that there will be no negative impact if they decide not to be interviewed or be part of a group discussion.

**Documenting informed consent**
The informed consent of an individual (or group of individuals) who participate in your research must be documented. The issues described above are usually covered through the use of an informed consent form. Typically, you will read a statement about the research to the individual or group, and their possible participation in the research. This should include all of the points described above. The information you provide to each research participant should be the same. One of the reasons for having a
statement section on the informed consent form is to make sure that what is told to each person or group of persons is standardized. After you have read the statement section, you must ask if there are any questions and take the time needed to answer these questions fully and honestly. Finally, for individual interviews, you will ask the person you are about to interview to sign the informed consent form in order to document the process, noting that they have received the information needed to make a decision about whether or not to participate and they agree to participate. If the individual is not able to write, he/she may use a fingerprint instead. In the case of focus group discussions, you may wish to document informed consent of each person by asking them to sign an informed consent form you have designed for the focus group discussion. However, this can be time-consuming and many times an oral informed consent is used. Read a statement about the research aloud to the entire group and ask if participants have any questions. Offer any individuals not wishing to participate the opportunity to leave, and inform those who stay that in staying it is assumed that they consent to participate. It is good practice to sign a statement indicating you have done the oral consent process and to have a witness also sign.

Suggested readings:


4.2 Research as learning: An introduction to what research is and the use of qualitative research methods in understanding acceptance

What is research, what can we learn from it, and why is it useful and important to do? This section of the Guide offers background information to answer these and other questions, while later sections in the chapter introduce research approaches, methods, and basic steps. By the end of reading this section, you will have an understanding of the role of research in understanding acceptance and the use of qualitative research methods as applied to the challenge of understanding acceptance in the setting where you work.

According to The Concise Oxford English Dictionary, research is “the systematic investigation into and study of materials, sources, etc. in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions”. There are some useful terms to think about in this definition. Research is a form of study. It allows us to investigate something. We do it because we want to discover or establish an understanding of a phenomenon, practice, or situation. Research as a process is, by definition, careful and systematic. When we do research, we think things through and reflect upon what we have learned. We try to
plan carefully what we are researching and why and be systematic in the way we collect and analyze information (data). At the conclusion, we hope to have a better or new understanding of what we set out to study, which may or may not be different than what we expected to find. The definition provided goes so far as to say that research allows us to establish facts or principles. As we will see, qualitative researchers do not always have this goal in mind, but the idea that understanding and explaining a situation in a way that can contribute to sound policies and principles is at the heart of much research. It is certainly relevant to research on acceptance as outlined in this Guide.

The nature of research is typically either quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative research in field settings relies for the most part on surveys, with questions using predetermined response categories (yes/no, multiple choice, rankings, etc.), administered to specifically sampled individuals in order to test a specific hypothesis, often using statistical analysis. In contrast, qualitative research uses a variety of methods, including individual interviews, focus group discussion (essentially a group interview), document review, detailed observation, field notes, photographs, recordings, and other information sources found in the environment being researched. This is done in order to gain a better conceptual understanding of what is happening and perhaps why. In many cases, researchers use both qualitative and quantitative methods as part of their inquiry. Quantitative research might be used to determine whether boys or girls are more likely to complete primary school in a certain area, while qualitative research can help identify the reasons why some children are more likely to complete school than others and whether this is based on gender, distance to the school, birth order, parents’ income level, or any number of possible explanations.

The decision to undertake quantitative or qualitative research is based upon the nature of the issue being studied and the methods used. Some studies use a mix of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This Guide proposes the use of qualitative research applied to the acceptance-related questions presented in earlier sections. Why is this? Let us go back to the rationale for this Guide. The Guide is designed to steer the user to answer three questions about acceptance:

1. How do organizations implement an acceptance approach?
2. How do organizations assess and monitor the presence and degree of acceptance?
3. How can organizations determine whether acceptance is effective in a specific context?

These questions are fundamental, conceptual queries about what is happening with regard to acceptance: what is it, how is it done, and what it can accomplish in your setting. These are questions that cannot be answered through the statistical analysis of a survey. These are questions you can answer by looking at how acceptance is defined and described in documents like security manuals; by talking with and listening to people such as NGO managers and other staff, local leadership, and community members; and also by simple observation. These methods lend themselves to qualitative research.

4.3 Qualitative research: Characteristics and basic approach

Considering that qualitative research is the best way to get answers about acceptance as a security management approach, let us look a bit more at what qualitative research is and how it can be used. There are many good books and technical guides about
qualitative research. The following list of key characteristics of qualitative research has been adapted from Creswell’s book on qualitative inquiry and research design

- **Natural setting**: Qualitative research takes place in the field, in the “natural setting” of your research. You collect information by observing the environment and talking with people within that environment. Qualitative researchers have a direct interaction with the research location.

- **Multiple sources of information**: Qualitative research usually relies on more than one method to collect information. Qualitative researchers gather data from multiple sources and organize it into categories based on themes common across the various sources.

- **Meaning as defined by participants**: Qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of issues, events, or phenomena—whatever is being researched—according to the research participants; that is, those who are providing information through interviews, discussions, or documents. Many qualitative research reports include direct quotations from the people interviewed (if consent to do by the interviewee has been properly obtained). Qualitative researchers report and analyze what participants think without injecting their own opinions and ideas as part of the data.

- **Flexible design**: Certainly qualitative research involves determining an approach and a plan prior to starting field activities. But qualitative research design is also flexible and may change depending on what the researchers learn in the initial stages of fieldwork. As Creswell explains, the phases of a process can change after data is collected, which could include changes to the questions, locations, individuals interviewed, or even the form of data collection. Qualitative research is flexible enough to allow for changes to design based on the dynamic process of learning in the field.

- **Interpretive in nature**: Although qualitative researchers strive to ensure that they accurately understand and can describe the meaning participants place on the issues under study, researchers have a very direct role in interpreting that information. Researchers do this by placing the information in a more general context, sometimes based on earlier research or existing information about the issue. The researchers’ own experiences, background, and ideas will also necessarily play a role in their interpretation of the data. (As a preliminary step, qualitative researchers usually document their own ideas and opinions about the research topic before starting to gather data in order to be more conscious of over-personalizing their interpretation of information.)

- **Holistic understanding**: Qualitative research can get “messy.” Often, qualitative research is used to find answers to complex questions. Making sense of the information gathered and interpreting it systematically is an important aspect of the research, with the aim of producing a synthesis of multiple perspectives and interaction of factors to create an understanding of the issue under study that is as holistic as possible.

If you have done qualitative research before, you will recognize some or all of these characteristics. You may also be familiar with
different qualitative research approaches or frameworks. Several helpful resources exist which can provide more information on the range of qualitative research approaches that have been developed. For the purposes of this Guide, which looks specifically at the issue of acceptance as a security management approach, we will focus on just one: grounded-theory. What is the grounded-theory approach to qualitative research, and why does it matter to your research work? We now turn to answering these two questions and provide references for additional information if you would like to read more about this and other approaches.

Grounded-theory research aims to develop a theory about a process generated through analysis of information provided by individuals, or groups of individuals, who have in some way experienced this process. The resulting understanding of the process, and the theory that comes from that understanding, is “grounded” in the reality of the people who live it. Why does it matter to your research work? Or, in other words, how does it help you to know that you are undertaking grounded-theory research? There are at least three reasons:

1. Different qualitative research approaches have different underlying motivations. As you undertake the fieldwork and are faced with the challenge of processing a large amount of information, it is helpful to have a formal, fundamental approach by which to proceed that will help you work within an approach appropriate to the overall research question.

2. Specific methods are associated with different qualitative research approaches. These methods have been tried and developed by many other researchers and “fit” the research approach. Again, these methods will guide you in answering the questions at hand.

3. When describing your research, and eventually the results and conclusions you draw from it, it is important to be able to describe why the methods used were appropriate for the research task you undertook. The research approach provides a framework that helps you articulate this to anyone who is using the research—be it communities, program staff, policy makers, donors, or other researchers.

Again, this Guide provides only an overview of grounded-theory research. For additional information, the following readings are suggested.

Suggested readings:


4.4 Methods: How do you gather information you need?

There are a variety of ways qualitative data can be gathered to help you get the information to answer your research questions. However, most methods can be placed into one of the following three categories (adapted from Patton, 2002):

1. **Interviews**: You can use in-depth interviews on a topic, with individuals (e.g., key informant interviews) or groups (e.g., focus group discussions), using open-ended questions about people’s perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge on specific
themes. Qualitative interviews require a level of interaction between the researcher and individuals or groups that can help the researcher form answers to the research question. The qualitative research interview has sometimes been described as a purposeful conversation or conversation with meaning. Interview guides help to standardize the information collected by asking the same questions to each individual.

2. **Observations**: Some qualitative researchers gain insights into people’s lives and experiences by living in their communities, working alongside them, getting close enough to them to carefully observe their interactions and relationships, noting how they handle certain challenges, what they do and say, etc. By documenting and critically reflecting on these observations, the researcher can contribute to a better understanding of the research topic.

3. **Document review**: Documents can tell us a lot, and reading documents with an eye focused on meaning relative to the research question is an important and common part of qualitative research. Depending upon the research question, you might review documents such as memos, letters or emails, policy documents, news reports, radio transcripts, or any number of other written sources of information.

In your research on acceptance as a security management approach, you will most often use interviews and document reviews to gather information. If time if available, observational research could be added, but this typically requires more time and concentration than is possible with the type of research plan we have outlined. In the following sub-sections, we will present an overview of document review, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. For each method, we provide guidance on the following:

a. Overview of the method: What is it?
b. How does the method apply to research on acceptance? (benefits/rationale for including it)
c. Implementation: How do you do it? (with application to research on acceptance)
d. How do you document results?
e. Possible pitfalls/limitations

4.5 **Key informant interviews**

4.5.1 **What is a key informant interview?**

One type of qualitative research that can be used for investigating acceptance as a security management approach is “key informant interviews,” sometimes called “in-depth interviews.” Key informants are individuals in the research setting who you believe can offer important perspectives and insights into your research question. Although it is important to think carefully about the types of questions to include and prepare an interview guide with a list of topics and questions to discuss during the interview, key informant interviews are much less structured than survey interviews and rely on open-ended questions leading to other topics and ideas during the interviews that you had not previously considered.

Key informant interviews can “…resemble a conversation among acquaintances, allowing a free flow of ideas and information.” However, the researcher must be a skilled listener, sufficiently familiar with the issues under study, and flexible enough to know how to direct the conversation in the most productive way. If a
key informant misunderstands a question or gets off track, the researcher must bring the discussion back on course. The researcher must also probe for additional detail and find ways to uncover the deeper meaning behind general topics, as well as be flexible enough in his/her thinking to allow the discussion to move into new directions. In these and other ways, the interview is much more than a casual discussion about a topic of interest.

The information that you can collect through key informant interviews offer several advantages including the following:\textsuperscript{35}

- Key informants can provide information that might be unavailable through other methods, including perspectives otherwise difficult for the individual to convey through documentation or discussion in a group setting.

- As noted earlier, key informant interviews sometimes lead the researcher to new ways of thinking about an issue based on a specific back-and-forth dialogue between the researcher and the informant. The researcher has the opportunity to learn on the spot and probe for additional information.

- Although undertaking key informant interviews requires skills in listening, drawing conceptual connections on the spot, and finding ways to most effectively probe for the details, these are skills that many field staff have already developed through their work with community members and partners.

Key informant interviews are relatively inexpensive to conduct and straightforward to organize, yet this method can yield major insights.

4.5.2 How do key informant interviews apply to research on acceptance?

Many of the questions we have about acceptance as a security management approach can only be answered by individuals who have unique experiences and perspectives on the topic. An NGO security field officer, a district security officer, and the leader of a community-based organization may each have different responses to the same questions when asked. Their responses could vary little or to a great extent, but they are likely to be distinct in ways that can tell you quite a bit about what acceptance means to different people.

As well, some of the questions asked about security management can be controversial. Key informant interviews allow for private discussion of potentially sensitive topics; allowing individuals to feel comfortable and confident in voicing their opinions. Asking two staff members the same question may put one in a difficult position, especially if the two people have different views and one is lower in the organizational hierarchy. Organizational hierarchy, or the relationship between NGOs and beneficiary communities, can lead to a situation where people may not feel sufficiently free to tell you what they think when in a group setting.

Research on acceptance as a security management approach is new. Indeed, there is much about acceptance implemented at the field level that we do not yet fully understand. We expect that you will uncover new ways of thinking about acceptance through key informant interviews, in particular, as well as focus group discussions. The flexibility offered by key informant interview is very important to generating a more complete understanding of acceptance than has previously existed.
4.5.3 Implementation: How do you do it?

Like other qualitative research methods, planning well for key informant interviews is important, but maintaining a flexible approach throughout the process is vital. Although key informant interviews often have a casual and relaxed feeling, they require focus and sensitivity on the part of the interviewer. Each research study involving key informant interviews may vary from one another a bit in process, but basic steps include: (1) define the topic and general questions to discuss; (2) select key informants; (3) create interview guides; (4) arrange meeting logistics; and, (5) conduct the interviews. Each of these steps is described in further detail below.

Define the topic and general questions to discuss
The research topic and questions guiding your work have likely already been defined, and you may have refined these further depending on the specifics of the security environment in which you work. It is useful to think more specifically about the topic and research questions in terms of what you need to ask and who you need to interview in order to get that information. One tool to use in mapping this out is a simple matrix starting with the data collection plan outlined in part 3. Looking at some of the sections highlighted below, you can put together another matrix to help you think through exactly where to get the information you need.

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<tr>
<th>Key Informant Categories</th>
<th>Themes to Discuss</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian organization head of mission and/or country directors</td>
<td>Organizational understanding of acceptance, Applying acceptance, Principles and mission, Stakeholder and content analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian organization security personnel</td>
<td>Programming, Negotiation, Communication, Staffing for acceptance, Image and perceptions, Effectiveness of acceptance in the security context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian program personnel</td>
<td>Organizational understanding of acceptance, Relationships and networks, Programming, Negotiation, Communication, Assessing and monitoring acceptance, Effectiveness of acceptance in the security context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian program finance personnel</td>
<td>Principles and mission, Programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Select the key informants
For the purposes of this research, key informants could include government officials, NGO directors, security and/or other NGO staff, local leaders, managers of community-based organizations in the field, or others unique to your situation. The selection of key informants is not based on job descriptions and titles per se, although this can help you to identify what kind of information and perspective an individual might have to offer. Look back to your research questions and consider who might best help you answer them. Remember also the need for multiple perspectives. Plan to target a well-rounded mix of individuals. The matrix provided above gives a good overview of the categories of key informants. From this listing, begin thinking about the specific individuals who fit these categories. The number of informant interviews will be dependent upon your research needs, as well as your available resources. Qualitative studies can include anywhere from 5–25 key informant interviews. The general rule of thumb is to continue interviewing key informants until you find that you are not getting new or useful information. If time or resources are in short supply, you will also need to prioritize your interviewees, and consider what other methods might be useful in gathering your research.

Create interview guides
To make the most of your limited interview time and to ensure you ask relevant questions, it is important to create an interview guide ahead of time. In researching acceptance as a security management approach, several different interview guides may be necessary depending upon your varied key informants (e.g., country directors, security officers, community leaders). The work and experience of the key informants should dictate the shape of the questions. However, the process for creating an interview guide is the same for each type of key informant interview. There may be several different themes to discuss with each type of key informant, so consider which topics make the most logical starting point. Within each theme area, three basic types of questions should guide the discussion:

1. Main questions/introductory questions
2. Follow-up questions
3. Probing questions

Start with “introductory questions”—broad, open questions which start the conversation on a specific topic, or change to a new topic within an on-going interview. Introductory questions are informative for you, the researcher, because they are broad
enough so as to open the door to an even wider view of the topic than expected. These opening questions provide an excellent opportunity to clarify what the interview is really about. Next, use “follow-up questions” to get into more specific information. This is also an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the respondent and to ensure that the interview flows like a conversation. Be prepared with a list of follow-up questions, but remember to be flexible and open new directions. Finally, use probing questions to gain clarification on something specific the respondent has told you, or simply to encourage the respondent to engage in more detailed conversation.

Below are examples of each question type, specifically how a country director might use an organization’s management tools and activities to promote acceptance as a security management approach. To put these questions into context, general questions may have already been asked regarding how the organization defines acceptance.

Main question about acceptance in program management:
- Tell me about the management tools and activities this country program uses to promote acceptance.

Follow-up questions:
- What policies, guidelines or other documentation, if any, does your organization have in place related to acceptance?
- How, if at all, do project planning and budgeting procedures incorporate the possibility for integrating acceptance-related activities?
- How, if at all, does your organization’s monitoring and evaluation process review activities that are related to acceptance?

Probing questions (to be used depending on the need for clarification on specific topics):
- Can you tell me more about…
- What are examples of…
- Why do you think…

No formula exists for asking good questions. Researchers learn this over time and through practice. Although no step-by-step guide exists to create the best possible interview guide, the following tips are important to think about for the quality of the research.

- Consider the conceptual flow of the questions. The order of your questions can influence the quality of the interview in at least two ways. First, there is the natural flow. In order to put the respondent at ease during the interview, you need to create an experience that almost feels like a conversation, with logical links between one topic and the next. An interview that is too disjointed, or one covering too many topics without connection between ideas, can confuse the respondent. Secondly, it is useful to build up to specific themes or ideas by asking initial questions meant to guide the respondent to think through important information or experiences. Look at the following two examples of the same questions for NGO security officers asked in different order:

Example 1
1. What types of communications does your organization use to educate the public about the organization’s mission and programs?
2. What principles guide your programming?
3. What are the key elements of acceptance within your organization’s security management approach?
Example 2

1. What are the key elements of acceptance within your organization’s security management approach?
2. What principles guide your programming?
3. What types of communications does your organization use to educate the public about the organization’s mission and programs?

The questions are the same, but in the first example the order of the questions does not promote a logical connection between topics. The questions are at first very specific, and then broad in nature. By contrast, in the second example, the order has been changed to improve the natural flow between one question and the next. The questions begin broad and become more specific. In the second example, it seems more likely the respondent will make a connection between acceptance, programming, and communication with community members. This could also help the respondent better understand your line of questions, and he or she is more likely to provide information closer to what you need. At the same time, it is important to consider the possibility that the order of questions could also lead respondents to answer in a certain way. This leads to the next point:

- Do not ask “leading” questions. Ensure that the way in which you phrase the questions does not influence the respondent to answer in a certain way, or suggest an opinion or judgment on your part. Consider, for example, the following two questions:
  - What do you believe are the negative impacts of the acceptance approach on national field staff?
  - How do you think the acceptance approach impacts national field staff?

Both questions inquire about acceptance as a security management approach relative to national staff experiences. However, phrased in the first way, the question clearly leads the respondent to think about the negative aspects of the approach. The second question provides a more open response, allowing the respondent an opportunity to conceptualize the issue on their own.

- Aim for balance between structured and unstructured. All qualitative research questions are meant to be “open.” That is to say, questions should be asked in a way that encourages people to talk. Open-ended questions provide more insight, generally, than do yes/no questions, or those requiring only short responses. At the same time, the discussion needs to have some focus and structure to be most useful. Look at the following sets of questions and consider the different kinds of information you might expect from an NGO country director:

Question set 1

1. Does your organization use acceptance as a security management approach?
2. Does your organization’s staff hold regular meetings with community members?
3. What kinds of vehicles does your organization use?

Question set 2

1. Tell me about your organization’s security management approaches and any ways that acceptance is incorporated.
2. How often does your organization hold regular meetings with community members, and how might this impact your organization’s acceptance?
3. How might your organization’s decisions about which vehicles to use at a project location influence local perceptions about the organizations?

- **Consider both facts and meaning.** Some research questions are meant to help researchers understand the facts around a research topic. For example, in research on acceptance as a security management approach, you might be interested in learning if it is common for human resource managers at the NGOs to include acceptance-related skills in staff recruiting, training, and discipline-related processes. Because this is qualitative research, you cannot say whether the results you receive are representative of all other NGOs, but you will get some fact-based information. You also want to understand how human resource managers understand the meaning of acceptance and what it means to incorporate acceptance into their work. Different types of questions are needed—both fact-and meaning-based—to get the overall picture. Below are examples showing the difference between these two types of questions:

  **Meaning-based question:**
  “What does acceptance as a security management approach mean within the work of the human resources department?”
  The respondent will likely answer this type of question with a fairly conceptual response such as: “To the human resources department, acceptance as a security management approach means that organization staff need to communicate well with the community so that they know what we are doing and that our staff are helping them.”

  **Fact-based question:**
  In what ways does your organization implement acceptance as a security management approach?

  The respondent will more likely answer in concrete terms such as: “When we recruit program managers we ask them to explain to us how they think about acceptance for both program implementation and security.”

Again, no formulas or recipes for the perfect interview guide exist, but these are some points that can help you think about how to write the interview guide and use it to get the information that need.

**Arrange meeting logistics**
The meeting logistics for key informant interviews are fairly straightforward. Ideally, a date and time should be set with the respondent in advance of the interview. Sometimes opportunities to arrange an interview come up without notice. In either case, identify a quiet, private, and convenient location to meet. Many researchers conduct interviews alone, rather than in teams, and use a tape recorder to capture information. However, this also involves transcribing the recording into text, which can be time-consuming and costly. In addition, recording the interview can make some respondents uncomfortable and perhaps less likely to be fully open. For the purposes of the research described in this Guide, it is advised to use teams of two persons—one to manage the discussion and another to take notes. Teams larger than two persons are not necessary and can be overwhelming for some respondents.

**Conduct the interviews**
Qualitative interviews generally follow a pattern (outlined below), but there is no specific step-by-step guide for how to conduct an interview. Each interview will vary depending upon the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent, as well as the content of the interview. Your practice and skills as an interviewer become very important. To get the most usable and
valuable information from an interview you should keep in mind the following points.

- **Begin well.** Most often, when you start a key informant interview you are meeting the respondent for the first time. First impressions count. Consider what the thoughts and questions of the respondent might be prior to beginning the interviewing. The respondent may have some anxiety regarding the interview regarding time, confusion about the purpose of the interview, or insecurity about delivering the information you are hoping to receive. The respondent could be suspicious about research in general and have concerns about how the information you collect is going to be used. Personal issues may also distract the respondent. On the other hand, the person could be completely worry-free, confident, relaxed, refreshed, focused, and eager to answer all of your questions. There are many possibilities. The important thing is to be observant about the interviewee and establish a positive initial contact within the first few minutes of the interview.

  **How do you do this?**

  By this time you have already explained a bit about the purpose of the research and briefly described key points about the interview (for example that it is voluntary, how long the interview will last, etc.). The consent form will be signed. At this point, you should provide a bit more detail about the interview itself by highlighting some of the general topic areas that you will cover, how it relates to the rest of the research project, and how you hope this research will help organizations implement security management practices that protect their staff. Let the respondent know that you are interested in hearing their views and experiences, and that no right or wrong answer exists to any question. Acknowledge that the respondent’s time is valuable and your gratitude for the opportunity to talk with them. Finally, ask if the respondent has any questions before beginning.

- **Ask questions, actively listen to responses, and be prepared for surprises.** You have already spent time developing an interview guide, and you should use it. However, depending on the answers you receive to these original questions, be prepared to adjust your questions while still staying on track with the general line of research you are investigating. Listen carefully to the responses and ask yourself:

  - **Am I getting the information needed from these questions? Does the respondent understand the questions as they have been phrased?** If not, you may need to re-phrase or ask new questions on the spot, remembering to keep the questions neutral.

  - **Is there something more to this?** It is possible you will get answers to questions you never asked, but are important to the research question. Listen carefully for new ideas and information you had not considered, pause for a moment, and then ask some brief clarifying questions if necessary. These new questions may mean that time will not allow for you to get through your full interview guide. Qualitative interviewing is focused but flexible. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) have said: “The interviewer must continually make on-the-spot-decisions about what to ask and how, which aspects of a subject’s answer to follow up—and which not; which answers to comment on and interpret—and which not.”

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Are we getting off-track? Although the direction of the interview depends to some extent upon how the respondent answers questions, the interviewer is responsible for keeping the discussion on track. If the respondent goes off-tangent and starts to spend time on information not really relevant to the research, politely guide the respondent back on course.

What is the respondent telling me without saying it? Communication between people occurs in different ways—with words, tone of voice, and body language. Listen with your ears but also pay attention to visual cues. Does the respondent’s tone of voice sound frustrated, curious, resigned, or pleased? What does the respondent’s body language say within the context of local culture? Keep a mental note of this until have time later to add this to your observations and notes.

• Briefly summarize the key points you have learned from the interview. During the interview, you are likely gaining new insights into the research question. It is a good idea to debrief at the end of the interview to reflect about the key points you have learned during the interview. This is the chance to check the accuracy of what you have heard, probe for any last details on specific issues, and invite the respondent to share final thoughts.

• Close the interview. Some researchers use a standard “closing statement” as a way to finish the interview. This can be helpful if multiple teams are working on the same research project to ensure everyone includes the same main points. This includes thanking the respondent for their time and support, informing the respondent how they might access a summary report about the research, or other means of feedback, and confirming contact information for the research team should they have further questions or information to add to the report.

4.5.4 Documenting results?

For the purposes of the research activities highlighted in this Guide, it is recommended that results are documented through note-taking during each interview. The notes generated through your key informant interviews serve a greater purpose—they are data. Interview content will be used when searching for themes and trends to form conclusions from data gathered from multiple sources. This information will be the basis for your final research report. Your research could be questioned by others, either because readers of your report want more detail about a specific issue or perhaps even question the validity of parts of your report. Much of the analysis process of the research is dependent upon the note-taker. The note-taker has a crucial role in listening and documenting responses in a way as complete, accurate, and unbiased as possible.

Researchers approach this in various ways, but ideally, researchers will work in teams of two, with one researcher as note-taker, and the other as discussion facilitator. No specific procedures exist for note-taking during interviews, however, the following tips may prove helpful:

• Structure the layout of your interview guide to include the name and title (or category) of the respondent, contact information, date, total length of time the interview lasted, and location.
• On the interview guide, leave enough room between questions for writing notes. Document questions not included on the guide as they arise.

• Notes can be taken in whatever style works best for the note-taker: complete sentences, bullet points, key phrases or words, etc. If bullet points or key phrases are used rather than full sentences, make sure when notes are finalized that the full meaning can be understood by those researchers not present at the interview.

• Remember that your job as the researcher is to record what the respondent tells you, not what you think the respondent should be saying. Opportunity to insert personal opinions and views will occur during interpretation, but when taking notes it is important to document information without bias.

• As noted above, respondents can describe much through what they say, what they do not say, and through their body language. Add additional notes about anything you find to be significant in any of the categories of information. This will be especially helpful later if someone else is using your notes for analysis and/or as a reminder to yourself as you are analyzing the information.

• The process of analyzing interview data, in this research project, depends on the identification of key themes and topics. Analysis starts during the data collection as you begin to think about the key themes arising during interviews and information gathering. It is helpful to clearly identify these themes in your interview notes as you hear them during the interview, or afterwards when you are finalizing your notes.

4.5.5 Possible pitfalls/limitations

There are a number of limitations and possible pitfalls involved in the use of key informant interviews. These include the following:

• As with other qualitative methods, the information obtained through key informant interviews is specific to the study setting. The information provided is usually very specific to the key informant interview and his/her particular perspective. The researcher must consider not only what is being said, but who has said it and what specific motivations might influence them.

• Key informants should be carefully selected. For example, including security officers from humanitarian organizations as key informants, without also speaking with district security officers or other government officials with security responsibilities, may mean you get a skewed security perspective of the reality of acceptances. This pitfall can be avoided by carefully planning who to select as your key informants.

• It is often challenging for the researcher to leave his or her own beliefs and opinions about the research topic out of the discussion during a key informant interview. If the key informant provides information in line with what the researcher also thinks, the researcher may be tempted to place more value on that key informant’s perspective and perhaps minimize the more contrary views voiced by other key informants. The researcher can face difficulties in maintaining objectivity. This is true of all research but especially in key informant interviews when there is a one-on-one interaction between the researcher and the data source.
• Although research based solely on key informant interviews can be done (and can be informative), it is generally better used in the context of other research methods. Key informant interviews can be time-consuming and individuals voice only their individual perspectives. They cannot necessarily represent the range of opinions and views that might exist across the wider community. Therefore, it is important to use additional research methods in order to supplement the information generated from interviews. For the research described in this Guide, we have identified document review and focus group discussions as good complements to key informant interviews.

Suggested readings:


4.6 Focus group discussions

4.6.1 What is a focus group discussion?

The focus group discussion is another commonly-used qualitative research method that can help the researcher better understand how people think and feel about an issue. A focus group discussion provides researchers with information on specific topic using facilitated discussion and interaction between a limited number of individuals selected on the basis of shared characteristics. Researchers using focus groups observe group dynamics (i.e., interactions between individuals in the group), gaining a wealth of information in a short period of time. Focus group discussions differ from other types of qualitative research because group interactions and the sharing of perspectives, ideas, and opinions in a crowd generates feedback unlike what you might hear by simply asking the same questions to each person in turn. The researcher serves as a facilitator of the discussion and the added value of this research method is that focus group participants respond not only to the facilitator but also by talking amongst themselves. Although researchers usually choose participants who are similar to each other based on characteristic like age, gender, or occupation, those in the group often vary in their views. The objective of a focus group discussion is not to
reach agreement between individuals regarding specific questions, nor is it to find one “correct” answer. Rather, a focus group discussion offers the opportunity to hear a variety of opinions at once. Researchers using this method should pay close attention to both what is being said and how the information emerges through group interactions.

The discussion process is at the heart of focus groups and directly influences the quality of the information generated. Several factors can affect the discussion process including group composition (who is in the group), group cohesion (whether or not people feel they can relate to each other), the physical setting of the discussion, and the facilitator’s approach and skill level.

Therefore, managing a focus group discussion is not as simple as bringing a group of people together to ask a few questions. You A number of factors must be considered in advance in order to obtain the most relevant information possible for your research question. Focus group discussions offer researchers a number of advantages including the following:

- **Added value of group interaction to generate new information.** Interactions between individuals in a group can generate a deeper level of information than simply interviewing individuals might because participants listen to one another and form their responses in reaction to what others are saying. Sometimes group discussion can lead individuals to subjects they might not otherwise have considered or perhaps had been hesitant to discuss in an individual interview. Hearing others’ responses may encourage people to be more forthcoming with their opinions, or raise an issue of importance because they are reacting to another participants’ view.

- **Opportunity to observe the dynamics between participants.** Researchers using focus group discussions have a chance to observe interactions between participants during the discussion, which can lead to valuable insights. If the topic of a focus group discussion is somewhat controversial, you may be able to observe differences between people’s opinions based on a shared characteristic. In a focus group discussion, there is opportunity to observe who is talking about what and how; these observations can become an important part of your data collection.

- **Time efficiency.** Focus group discussions are generally less time-consuming than other research methods because information is being gathered from multiple sources at once.

### 4.6.2 How do focus group discussions apply to research on acceptance?

Acceptance as a security management approach is a very real concept, yet has been challenging to describe and define. The concept can mean different things to different people. Using focus group discussions as one of your research methods also allows the opportunity to hear multiple perspectives on this issue at the same time. Participants will likely bounce ideas off each other in a way that is only possible through a focus group discussion—this interaction and sharing of perspectives will be very valuable as you start to build a picture of what acceptance means at the field level.

Some people may be reluctant to share their observations if they think their comments are controversial or different from what they believe you want to hear. For example, if you ask program beneficiary what they think about an NGO’s ability to gain
acceptance in their community in an individual interview, he/she might be hesitant to tell you anything negative. The same person could still remain quiet on the topic in a focus group discussion, but if there are others who are commenting freely about it, (including feedback pointing to the NGO’s shortcomings), it is more likely a person will feel encouraged to add their views to the discussion.

As you implement focus group discussions, keep in mind the unique opportunity this method can provide to observe conversation patterns, differences of opinions based on various personal characteristics (age, gender, job, employment status, etc.) and the ways in which ideas are expressed.

4.6.3 Implementation: How do you do it?

The basic steps to implement focus group discussions are similar to those presented for key informant interviews: (1) define the topic and general questions to discuss; (2) select the focus group participants; (3) create interview guides; (4) arrange meeting logistics; and, (5) conduct the focus group discussion sessions. Many of the points included in the guidelines under key informant interviews are relevant to focus group discussions. However, differences exist between the two methods, particularly in the areas of selecting participants, drafting the discussion guides, and conducting the discussion sessions. The role of the facilitator in guiding focus group discussions is critical to the experience of participants and to the quality of information you will receive from the group. This is discussed in much greater detail under the sub-section about conducting focus group discussions.

Define the topic and general questions to discuss

As with key informant interviews, you may wish to modify the focus group discussion guidelines based on the security situation in which you work. It can again be helpful to consider who can best answer various research questions using a matrix. In many cases, fewer specific topics will be covered in a focus group discussion compared to a key informant interview. Focus group discussions give several people opportunity to comment on each topic, allowing more information to surface, but taking more time.

Depending on the topic(s), it may be advisable to consider different sub-categories of focus group participants. For example, if you think it is important to understand the difference in perspectives between more and less experienced NGO staff, or national and international NGO staff, or male and female program beneficiaries, plan accordingly. The following table is provided as an example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Themes to Discuss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGO program staff</td>
<td>• Security concerns specific to national staff</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Near misses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local NGOs/CBOs</td>
<td>• Community acceptance of international NGOs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interactions between national and international NGOs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Perceptions about past security incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community members and/or other stakeholders</td>
<td>• NGO approach to programming in terms of principles, values, neutrality, and beneficiary targeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appropriate and beneficial program technical approaches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Select the focus group participants
The selection of focus group participants greatly influences how group discussion develops and the kind of information you will gain. For example, a focus group with community member participants will share different perspectives than a focus group with NGO staff members as participants. Researchers have also observed that participants’ opinions and characteristics can influence what other participants are comfortable discussing. Characteristics of group members, such as age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, income levels, and political group membership can impact how people in the group interact with one another. In research on acceptance as a security management approach, a situation can be imagined in which project beneficiaries would not feel at liberty to discuss their perceptions and views about NGOs in their area if other NGO staff are in the same focus group. Focus groups should be created that include participants who share background characteristics important to the research (i.e. homogenous groups). Research on the use of focus groups indicates that those including people similar to each other in ways important to the research work well and are more productive. This does not mean participants need to be identical to each other. In a focus group using NGO program staff, the common characteristic will be job function, i.e., each person work within NGO programs. However, within this group there may be both males and females, individuals of different ages, different ethnicities, etc. If you think that male NGO staff, compared to female NGO staff, have varied perspectives consider breaking them into separate focus groups.

No strict rule exists regarding the structure of a particular focus group, but as the researcher, you should be able to explain how participants were selected, who selected them, what criteria were used, and why. As with key informant interviews, you should look carefully at the research questions you have created and consider which groups would be in the best position to answer those questions freely. In general, eight to ten participants are included in a focus group. This is a large enough group to ensure interaction between people, generate discussion, and hear a variety of perspectives. A discussion in a group larger than ten can quickly become difficult to facilitate and the group dynamics may become unproductive. Although a focus group represents only sample of individuals who embody on the characteristics you believe are important to the research questions, do not generalize the results of focus group discussions to other people or similar groups in other settings. Because this is not your aim, it is not necessary to use scientific sampling methods as you would do in a quantitative survey. Simply select participants who are in a good position to provide the information needed answer the research question and who are willing and available to do so. If you are getting assistance in indentifying focus group participants, be sure your colleague(s) has a good understanding of the common characteristics you are seeking in group members.

Create interview guides
Several points regarding the creation of interview guides for key informant interviews also apply to focus group discussions. First, it is important to have a discussion guide. Although focus groups are less predictable than key informant interviews, developing some key research questions can help you to plan how to lead the
discussion to those topics at the appropriate time. As with key informant interviews, you also need to create an introductory statement to explain your role and the nature of your research. Again like key informant interviews, the discussion guide should be created using broad questions first, followed by more specific and probing questions as needed. More guidance on this issue can be found in the section on key informant interviews.

The need for flexibility, while staying within your main research question, is a key characteristic of focus group discussions. At the same time it is easy to get off course in a group discussion because you cannot predict the direction the discussion will go. For this reason, you should place your most important questions early in the discussion guide. This is called the “most-to-least-important rule”. You will likely ask fewer questions in a focus group as compared to a key informant interview; more time is needed to gather responses from multiple persons. For this reason as well, the way you prioritize the questions is important. Another point to keep in mind when setting the order of focus group discussion questions is response fatigue. Some questions—especially highly technical queries or emotionally-charged issues—may generate intense responses and cause fatigue for respondents. In research on acceptance as a security management approach, you might want to ask for examples of security incidents and whether or not acceptance, or a lack of it, played a role in the outcome of the issue. This is not a topic to enter into immediately in the discussion because it is fairly specific. Also keep in mind that it is a question that, for many people, will return them to a situation that may have caused feelings of anxiety, stress, loss, and sadness. Participants’ energy will become more drained as you move through the discussion, especially after an intense topic. It is important to consider these factors when you prioritize and order your focus group discussion questions.

After you have prioritized the general questions look at them again with a view to checking the logical flow. To the extent possible, while recognizing the important of prioritizing topics, you want to guide the discussion in a way that creates a natural link between one theme and the next. Again, focus groups are unpredictable and can take on a life of their own. A skilled focus group moderator can guide the discussion in a way that covers all the bases. As you try out your focus group discussion guides, take note of new issues, how people shifted from one theme to another, and consider how you might modify the guide for a future focus group.

**Arrange meeting logistics**

Consider carefully the best location to hold the focus group discussion. The location needs to be easy for all participants to find and not too far away from where participants live or work. As with key informant interviews, it is important to find a place that is both quiet and private. Also consider the impact the atmosphere and physical layout of the area might have on the group’s level of comfort and interaction with each other. For example, if a focus group is held for community members to discuss their views on acceptance and security of NGOs in their area, will they feel more at ease in the meeting room of a large NGO (which might be air-conditioned and close to where the research team is staying), or at the local community center (which might have no electricity or closing doors, but lots of mosquitoes and the noise of grinding mill next door). There are several factors to consider and compromises might need to be made, but remember that this is a decision worth contemplating carefully.

Once you have located a good space for the discussion, reflect on what some researchers call “the human aspect” of the group in the meeting place. That is to say, consider how the space is laid out. You may want to re-arrange the seating so that people can
see each other, and you, when discussion occurs. To feel at ease, some people need more personal space than others, so be sure the space will not feel too crowded. Ultimately, you want people to feel comfortable and secure enough to openly share their thoughts and perspectives with you and each other.

**Conduct the focus group discussions**

**Facilitation/moderation of focus groups**

Focus group discussions are obviously different from key informant interviews in how they are conducted. The person managing the discussion is referred to as the focus group facilitator, or moderator. As with key informant interviews, a note-taker should be present at every focus group discussion. As noted above, the role of the focus group moderator is crucial to the quality of information you will receive. Focus group moderators should be:

- **Friendly.** The moderator should be able to quickly put participants at ease and create a professional but relaxed atmosphere. This does not mean trying to be everyone’s best friend immediately; but the moderator should have an open and approachable manner.

- **A good listener.** The moderator should listen to what respondents are saying and the ways respondents choose to express themselves, while also noting what respondents do not discuss.

- **Flexible but focused.** The moderator needs to keep pace with the discussion as it unfolds and allow participants enough time to explore key issues, but also should recognize if things are starting to head off track and pull the conversation back to the key research questions.

- **Objective.** Every moderator comes to a focus group discussion with his or her own ideas and experiences, but he/she must be able to keep personal views and opinions out of the conversation.

Focus group moderation can be challenging on a number of different levels. Here are some important things to keep in mind:

- **The focus group moderator should ask questions in a clear and simple manner.** It is impossible to know how discussion group participants are going to interpret questions or whether they will be confused. Occasionally, a question is met with a period of silence. Participants should be given time to consider your question. There is a natural tendency to want to fill up the silence in some way. In this situation, it is appropriate to re-phrase the question in different ways in order to help people grasp your meaning. But this can backfire and cause further confusion. It can also cause difficulty for the note-taker to clarify the specific question being answered if several similar but slightly different questions have been asked at once.

**What should you do?**

Keep your questions clear and concise. Pre-test your questions with people similar to those who will be in the group. Modify the questions as needed. If a long silence occurs after asking a question, be patient, allowing participants the opportunity to consider the question. If no one responds, then ask what they believe you are trying to ask.

- **Different participants in the group are speaking, listening, and thinking at the same time.** At any given time in a focus group, someone is speaking. Other participants are listening and thinking, forming reactions to what is being said,
considering their own experiences and opinions, and deciding whether they want to add to the discussion. All of this occurs at once. Researchers have noted that when focus group participants are listening to someone else speak, their own thoughts are interrupted, and this can decrease the flow of new ideas. Important ideas and perspectives may remain unspoken due to this dynamic. Yet, it is natural for this to happen and to a large extent it cannot be prevented.

**What should you do?**

Pay attention to the pace and flow of the discussion, not only in terms of who is talking, but also considering who is saying what. After one person has been speaking, do the following speakers have new ideas or are they just repeating what the first speaker has said with different wording? As a moderator in this situation, consider the group dynamic and ask others in the group if they have any different ideas about the question. You may find that everyone is in agreement, but taking this step before moving on to the next topic may yield additional and important perspectives.

- **Focus group discussions can be unpredictable.** One of the key characteristics of a focus group discussion, and a major reason for using them, is that participants’ interactions with each other can lead to a new understanding of the topic. This is exciting and it is easy to get caught up in the new ideas. But, as the discussion moves in a different direction than anticipated, the clock is still running. The moderator must decide if this is an issue that should be further probed, or if it is time to get back to the questions on the discussion guide. This can be a difficult decision: you do not want to miss critical new information, but you want to ensure you have enough time to cover what you want to do and keep the group’s energy focused.

**What should you do?**

Consider the pros and cons of moving the discussion in a new direction. Edmunds (1999) recommends considering the following questions in this kind of situation:

- Is the new issue directly related to the overall focus of the discussion?
- Will the issue help you to meet the research objectives?
- Are others in the group drawn to this issue?
- Will it promote participation of others in the group or is it more of a platform issue for one individual in the focus group?

There is no right or wrong way to handle the situation. Closing off the topic, might mean that you miss some useful information. Allowing the discussion to follow a new path may lead to important insights but lose time to follow up other issues. No matter which decision you make, keep note of the topic and consider how to address it in a future focus group discussion.

- **Individuals in a focus group have different communication styles and priorities.** In a focus group of eight to ten people, you are going to find eight to ten diverse personalities. Each person will communicate differently, both verbally and non-verbally. Levels of interest in the topic will vary and each person may have a slightly different interpretation of the group discussion. Some participants will dominate the discussion, while others will be attentive but quiet, either because they are shy or concerned about their answers. There may be confusion, or a willingness to provide answers with less than helpful information. You may also find some participants are bored by the whole experience, tired, pre-
occupied by other things and unable to focus, or in other ways generally “checked-out” of the discussion.

**What should you do?**
It is unlikely you will encounter all of these personalities or situations in one focus group. However, participants can influence one another’s behavior for better or worse, and you must pay attention to communication styles, managing the discussion so that you will get the most information from the people who are there. If you notice a participant jumping to answer every question, commenting on other people’s observations, or giving too much detail, be polite but firm. Respond by saying, “Thank you for that interesting contribution. Now, let’s hear from a couple others.” If certain individuals appear hesitant to speak, remind the group that you are interested in hearing everyone’s opinions. Avoid focusing on the non-speakers if you sense that they will further retreat if specifically identified. Try something like, “This discussion is really helping to clarify some important points regarding perceptions about NGOs. As we move forward, please remember that there are no right or wrong answers and I am keen to hear from as many people as possible.” If some participants appear uninterested in the discussion, try to bring them back in somehow. People sometimes are bored if the discussion becomes too theoretical. If appropriate, give a quick but concrete example of an experience you have had or heard about that can illustrate the point. Ask people to share stories about their own experiences. This might help bring distracted individuals back into the picture.

- The focus group moderator is also part of the group dynamic. As the facilitator of a focus group discussion, you may find yourself so engrossed in the interactions between participants that you forget that you also have a direct influence on what is being said, or not, and by whom.

Whether you think about it or not, you are also reacting to what is being said and your interpretation of the discussion determines how you handle it. At the same time, participants are reacting to what you say, how you facilitate the discussion, and your personal characteristics such as gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, or education level. Depending on their perceptions of you as the moderator, focus group participants may not share information and opinions as freely as you hope they will.

**What should you do?**
This is not a problem in itself, but it should be considered. In research on acceptance, could focus group participants have concerns about who is moderating the discussion? Obviously, it is not possible to change the moderator in the middle of a discussion. But it can be kept in mind for the next group. Will other members of the research team relate better to participants, based on age, nationality, length and/or type of current or previous work in the security field. It is not possible to predict, but is something to keep in mind as you manage the research process.

Once you have covered the questions in your discussion guide, or note that time is short, begin to close the discussion. It is a good idea to summarize the main points raised during the discussion. Confirm with participants regarding your understanding of what has been said, and, if time allows, inquire about final observations of the group. You should have a prepared closing statement, thanking participants for their time and input, reminding them that there will soon be a summary report available.
3.6.4 How do you document results?

While it is recommended that researchers work in teams during key informant interviews (see previous section), it is essential in focus group discussions to have both a moderator and a note-taker. Focus group moderators are typically far too busy concentrating on the discussion to take notes, and writing things down in the midst of the discussion will likely break the flow of the conversation. Depending on the size of your team and the dynamics of the focus group, it might be helpful to have more than one researcher serving as a note-taker. The same bullet pointed tips provided in the section on documenting key informant interviews are directly relevant to focus group discussions and are not repeated here. However, one additional note for focus group discussions involves the sharing of observations by the moderator and note-taker following the group meeting. The pace of a focus group discussion can be very fast, ideas are usually presented quite rapidly and sometimes easy to miss. The moderator and the note-taker should work as a team, thinking through what was said and by whom, how it was stated, what was left unsaid, and what common themes were identified.

4.6.5 Possible pitfalls/limitations

One of the most important features of focus group discussions is the group dynamic created when people interact in such a way that they talk about things differently than they might otherwise. Just as this is strength of focus group research, the risk also exists that the group dynamic becomes a pitfall. An imbalance between focus group participants in either real or perceived power can lead some people to become more vocal than appropriate, while others might feel inhibited and unable to share their authentic views. Participants who feel intimidated by the setting and the process may remain quiet, or worse, they may give answers that they think others in the group expect or want them to provide rather than telling you what they really think. The focus group facilitator must be observant and facilitate carefully to balance the dynamic of the group in a productive way.

It is not possible to generalize the points raised in one focus group to the rest of the population or others similar to the focus group participants. This is a limitation of all non-statistically based group samples. But because focus group discussions allow you to hear perspectives from multiple individuals it can be tempting to believe that they have greater representation than they do. Remind yourself, however, that a focus group of NGO staff from six different organizations may have very different opinions than those of six other different organizations. The responses you get from participants in one focus group discussion are based on a variety of factors that cannot be controlled for or even necessarily identified during the time that you are together. This limits your findings to the particular context of the focus group discussions that you have had, and you should make note of this when you think about the results and conclusions of your research.

Focus group discussions, like key informant interviews, use open-ended questions. This is by no means a limitation in and of itself, quite the opposite. However, it can make the synthesis of information and report-writing somewhat complicated. Multiple perspectives are addressed in the data collected from a focus group discussion. What does the data mean in the end? How do you explain opposite views provided in answer to the same question? You can put your findings only into the context that you are aware of but this may lead to new research questions rather than answering your original questions. You may find it frustrating and unsatisfying to have concluded your focus group
with no definitive answers. This is not unusual when researching an under-researched topic.

Suggested readings:


5.1 Conducting field research

Part four explored how a qualitative research approach and methods apply to the key questions presented on acceptance as a security management approach. This section builds upon that discussion by providing sample tools that can be used to answer the three main research questions. Before utilizing these tools, refer to Annex I: Field Research Guidelines for additional information conducting research and leading research teams in the field. The Field Research Guidelines are specifically targeted for research team leaders and facilitators.

As is true for all sections of this Guide, researchers, non-governmental organizations, and other users should draw from these tools. These tools are not a blueprint that must be followed, but rather a resource to utilize and adapt to specific research inquiries about acceptance. In the following sections, the Guide provides key informant interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and document review.

5.1.1 Key informant interviews

The key informant interview guides below are specific to different positions within organizations or to categories of community members. These interview guides draw on the topics and sub-questions presented in the matrices in Part four. Each key informant interview guide provides a heading specifying the type of staff member (e.g., country director, security focal point, etc.) or community member (e.g., local security official, local leader, etc.) for which the interview guide is intended.

The following page provides a section on “Introductory and Concluding Statements” the research team should refer to prior to beginning key informant interviews. At the end of this section, a sample reporting form is provided for recording interview notes. Following this page are key informant interview guides for the following types of NGO staff and community members:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO Staff Guides</th>
<th>Community Member Guides</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Country director</td>
<td>• Local leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human Resources staff</td>
<td>• Local security official</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Program manager</td>
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<td>• Security focal point or security director</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Senior administration manager</td>
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<td>• Communications staff</td>
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</table>
Introductory and Concluding Statements for Key Informant Interviews (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Introductory Statement Talking Points

• Introduce yourself and your affiliation. Allow other team members to introduce themselves. Explain roles (note-takers, observers, etc.).

• Explain the project: “We are studying how organizations interact with communities, their leaders and others in order to learn more about how this affects their safety.”

• Indicate that you want to make certain respondents understand the research and its purposes. Read the informed consent form for interviewees or focus group participants.

• Indicate your interest in hearing their views and experiences, explaining that there are no right or wrong answers to your questions.

• Thank the respondents for agreeing to meet with you. Acknowledge the value of their time, ensuring you will not take more time than they have available: “This interview should last between 30-60 minutes (depending on interviewee)/This focus group should last around one hour.”

• Ask if they have any questions before beginning.

Then begin the interview or focus group discussion. Make sure the note-taker or observer keeps track of time!

Closing Statement Talking Points

• Thank respondents for their time and responses, which have provided additional insight into the topic.

• Remind respondents how they can access a summary report: NGO participants should contact you, the team leader, or the designated person; FGD participants via the FGD organizer.

• Confirm contact information for you, the team leader, or the FGD organizer, in case they have any additional information to add or questions regarding the project.

• Collect signed informed consent form from interviewees, if you have not already done so.

• Sign the informed consent focus group form.
Key Informant Interview: Communications/Public Relations Staff

*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

**Overall organizational approach to acceptance in security management**

1. **How does your organization define acceptance? What are the key components of acceptance?**
   
   Probe if no clear understanding of acceptance: How does your organization develop relationships with communities, local leaders, and others? How does this affect access and staff security?
   
   a. What policies, guidelines, or other documentation related to acceptance does your organization have in place?
   
   b. Do all staff in your organization think about and understand acceptance in the same way? (Probe: Provide some examples of how you know whether or not staff understand acceptance as a security management approach?)

**Implementing acceptance across the organization**

**Communications strategy**

2. **How does your organization’s external communication strategy promote acceptance?**
   
   a. What audiences do you try to reach with your communications approach?
   
   b. What specific communication methods do you use to educate the public about your organization’s mission and programs? How might these methods affect staff security? (Probe: Please provide some examples.)
   
   c. How does your organization ensure consistent and clear messages about your work and mission?
   
   d. Do your organization’s communication strategies (media, printed materials, statements) purposely emphasize specific values and/or principles that are in line with local cultural/religious values?
   
   e. How does the organization’s communication strategy use local channels of communication?

**Local perceptions**

3. **Describe how your organization assesses local perceptions about the organization?** (i.e., organizational programs, staff, values, and principles)
   
   a. Does your organization regularly monitor local media coverage of its activities?
   
   b. Does your organization use any formal or informal feedback mechanisms to monitor local perceptions? (e.g., survey of local markets, note comments from local and religious leaders, SMS feedback messaging)
Key Informant Interview: Country Director

*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Overall organizational approach to acceptance in security management

1. How does your organization define acceptance? What are the key components of acceptance?

   Probe if no clear understanding of acceptance: How does your organization develop relationships with communities, local leaders and others? How does this affect access and staff security?

   a. What policies, guidelines, or other documentation related to acceptance does your organization have in place?
   b. Do all staff in your organization think about and understand acceptance in the same way? (Probe: Can you provide some examples of how you know whether or not staff understand acceptance as a security management approach?)

2. How does your organization gather and use security-related information?

   a. Does your organization receive security information from other actors in the NGO community?
   b. If so, who provides the security information?
   c. Does information shared across organizations include acceptance-related observations?

Effectiveness of acceptance:

*Freedom of movement, access to field sites, experience of security incidents*

3. How effective is acceptance as a security management approach?

4. How does your organization determine the effectiveness of acceptance?

   a. Does your organization have specific indicators to determine the effectiveness of acceptance?

5. How has acceptance, or a lack of it, affected your organization's access to program areas and populations?

6. Have community members, local leaders, or others shared security-related information with your organization? (Probe: Any examples? Why do you think community members, local leaders or others share (or do not share) this kind of information?)

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7. How, if ever, have community members, local leaders, or others intervened in security situations in order to help or warn your organization about potential dangers? (Probe: Why do you think this happened to your organization? Do you think these experiences were related to acceptance, or other factors?)

8. Think about some of the recent security incidents your organization has experienced. Did your organization’s level of acceptance play a role in the occurrence or outcome of any of these?

9. Can you think of a potential incident that was prevented or avoided because of your organization’s level of acceptance?

Implementing acceptance across the organization

Program management

10. How does acceptance as a security management approach fit into program management in your organization?
   a. What processes are in place to identify and analyze important stakeholders? Does this analysis include an assessment of stakeholder concerns with regard to security and/or acceptance?
   b. How, if at all, do project planning and budgeting procedures incorporate acceptance-related activities?
   c. Do monitoring and evaluation processes include a review of your organization’s acceptance in the field? How, if at all, do these processes assess the impact this might have on staff security?
   d. Are there any other key program design and management functions that include acceptance as a security management approach in your organization?

Human resource management

11. In your view, what human resource management functions relate to acceptance? (Clarification: functions such as recruitment, orientation, evaluation, disciplinary procedures, compensation, termination, etc.)
   a. What acceptance-related skills and responsibilities does your organization incorporate into job descriptions? Or performance evaluations? (Clarification: skills to gain acceptance such as negotiation, relationship-building, stakeholder analysis, etc.)
   b. In what ways, if at all, does your organization incorporate acceptance-related skills and responsibilities into staff orientation and training?

12. Does your organization have a code of conduct for staff?
a. If so, what guidance is included about dress, showing respect in the local culture, behaviour, and socialization?
   b. Do you believe these issues have a direct relevance to acceptance within a security context?
   c. How do you monitor compliance with the code of conduct?

13. How, if at all, does the rate of staff turnover at your organization affect staff security? How do you manage this?

14. Explain how, if at all, your organization’s security management approaches differ for national and international staff.

Communications

15. How does your organization’s external communication strategy promote acceptance?
   a. What audiences do you try to reach with your communications approach?
   b. What specific communication methods do you use to educate the public about your organization’s mission and programs? How might these methods affect staff security? (Probe: Please provide some examples.)
   c. Do you think communities can distinguish your organization from others based on branding? How does this affect the security of your staff?
   d. Do you think community members can identify project funding sources (i.e. donors)? How do you think this affects acceptance and staff security?
Key Informant Interview: Human Resources Staff

*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Overall organizational approach to acceptance in security management

1. How does your organization define acceptance? What are the key components of acceptance?
   - Probe if no clear understanding of acceptance: How does your organization develop relationships with communities, local leaders and others? How does this affect access and staff security?
   - a. What policies, guidelines, or other documentation related to acceptance does your organization have in place?
   - b. Do you think all of the staff in your organization think about and understand acceptance in the same way? (Probe: Can you provide examples of how you know whether or not staff understand acceptance as a security management approach?)
   - c. In what ways do international and national staff face different security risks?

Organization’s approach to incorporating acceptance in human resource management

Human resource management

2. In your view, what human resource management functions relate to acceptance? (Clarification: recruitment, orientation, evaluation, disciplinary procedures, compensation, termination, etc.)
   - a. What acceptance-related skills and responsibilities does your organization incorporate into job descriptions? What about performance evaluations? (Clarification: skills to gain acceptance such as negotiation, relationship-building, stakeholder analysis, etc.)

3. In what ways, if at all, does your organization incorporate acceptance-related skills and responsibilities into staff orientation and training?
   - a. What topics related to local culture, history, or current affairs does your organization’s orientation include for new staff (expatriates in particular)? Is there a connection between orientation on these topics and staff security?
   - b. Does your organization provide local language training? If so, which staff qualify to participate?

4. Does your organization have a code of conduct for staff?
   - a. If so, what guidance is included about dress, showing respect in the local culture, behaviour, and socialization?
   - b. Do you think these issues have a direct relevance to acceptance within a security context?
c. How to do you monitor compliance with the code of conduct?

5. How, if at all, does the rate of staff turnover at your organization affect staff security? How do you manage this?

6. Explain how, if at all, your organization's security policies and procedures differ for national and international staff.
Key Informant Interview: Program Manager

*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Overall organizational approach to acceptance in security management

1. How does your organization define acceptance? What are the key components of acceptance?
   a. Who does your organization need acceptance from?

Implementing acceptance across the organization

Program management

2. How does acceptance as a security management approach fit into program management in your organization?
   a. What values guide your organization’s programming?
   b. Does your organization conduct context analysis for its programs or specific projects? What elements does your context analysis include? What elements does your context analysis include?
      For example:
      - Stakeholder analysis
      - Relationships between/among stakeholders
      - Power relations
      - Overlap of local values and organizational priorities and values
      - Impact of programs on local power and economic structures
   c. Do monitoring and evaluation processes include an assessment of how your organization’s acceptance affects staff security?
   d. Are there other key program design and management functions that include acceptance as a security management approach in your organization? (Probe: please provide examples)

Community-level interactions, relationships, and perceptions

3. How does your organization develop relationships with various stakeholders?
   a. Is your organization’s approach to communities, local leaders, and others direct, indirect, or through the use of intermediaries?
   b. What cultural considerations does your organization make in developing relationships with communities, local leaders, and others?
c. How do your staff earn and show respect in the local context? (Probe: ask for examples)

4. How do your organization’s relationships with communities, local leaders, and others affect the security of your staff?
   a. What formal or informal networks does the organization use to engage with stakeholders and gather information? Does this include security-related information?
   b. Do staff carry a letter of endorsement (from local leaders, officials, or others) in vehicles?
   c. What mechanisms does your organization provide for beneficiary and non-beneficiary feedback?

Communications

5. How does your organization’s external communication strategy promote acceptance?
   a. What specific communication methods does your organization use to educate the public about your mission and programs? How might these methods affect staff security? (Probe: Please provide some examples)
   b. How does your organization ensure that all staff (including drivers, logisticians, etc.) are able to clearly communicate the organization’s mandate, mission, and values?

6. Can communities distinguish your organization from others? How does this affect the security of your staff?
   a. Do you believe community members can identify project funding sources (i.e. donors)? How might this affect acceptance and staff security?

Effectiveness of acceptance

Freedom of movement, access to field sites, experience of security incidents

7. How effective is acceptance as a security management approach?

8. How do you determine the effectiveness of acceptance?
   a. Does your organization have specific indicators to determine the effectiveness?

9. How has acceptance, or a lack of acceptance, affected your organization’s access to program areas and populations?

10. Have community members, local leaders, or others shared security-related information with your organization? (Probe: Any examples? Why do you think community members, local leaders, or others share (or do not share) this kind of information?)
11. How, if ever, have community members intervened in security situations in order to help your organization or to warn you about potential dangers? (Probe: Why do you think this happened to your organization? Do you think these experiences were related to acceptance, or to other factors?)

12. Think about some of the recent security incidents your organization has experienced. Did your organization’s level of acceptance play a role in the occurrence or outcome of any of these?

13. Can you think of any potential incident that was prevented or avoided because of your organization’s level of acceptance?
Key Informant Interview: Security Focal Point or Security Director

*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Overall organizational approach to acceptance in security management

1. How does your organization define acceptance? What are the key components of acceptance?

   (Probe if no clear understanding of acceptance: How does your organization develop relationships with communities, local leaders, and others? How does this affect access and staff security?)

   a. Who does your organization need acceptance from?
   b. What policies, guidelines, or other documentation related to acceptance does your organization have in place?
   c. Do your staff think about and understand acceptance in the same way? (Probe: Please provide examples of how you know whether or not staff understand acceptance as a security management approach?)

2. How does your organization assess the local security environment?

   a. Does your organization receive security information from other actors in the NGO community?
   b. If so, who provides the security information?
   c. Does information shared across organizations include information about acceptance and/or access?

Effectiveness of acceptance

Freedom of movement, access to field sites, experience of security incidents

3. How effective is acceptance as a security management approach?

4. How do you determine the effectiveness of acceptance?

   a. Does your organization have specific indicators to determine effectiveness?

5. How does acceptance affect your access to program areas?

   a. Has your access been hindered? Why do you think it was hindered?

6. Have community members, local leaders, or others shared security-related information with your organization? (Probe: Any examples? Why do you think community members, local leaders, or others share (or do not share) this kind of information?)
7. How, if ever, have community members, local leaders, or others intervened in security situations in order to help or warn your organization about potential dangers? (Probe: Why do you think this happened to your organization? Do you think these experiences were related to acceptance, or other factors?)

8. Think about recent security incidents your organization has experienced. Did your organization’s level of acceptance play a role in the occurrence or outcome of any of these?

9. Can you think of any potential incident that was prevented or avoided because of your organization’s level of acceptance?

Implementing acceptance across the organization

National staff security

10. In what ways do international and national staff face different security risks?

11. How does your organization address national staff security risks?

12. Explain how, if at all, your organization’s security policies and procedures differ for national and international staff.

Program management

13. How, if at all, do monitoring and evaluation processes include a review of your organization’s acceptance in the field? How, if at all, do these processes assess the impact this might have on staff security?

   a. Are there any other key program design and management functions that include acceptance as a security management approach in your organization?

Communications

14. How does your organization’s external communication strategy promote acceptance?

15. What specific communication methods do you use to educate the public about your organization’s mission and programs? How might these methods affect staff security? (Probe: Can you please provide some examples?)

16. Do you think communities can distinguish your organization from others? How does this affect the security of your staff?

   a. Do you think community members can identify project funding sources (i.e. donors)? How do you think this affects acceptance and staff security?
Community-level interactions, relationships, and perceptions

17. How do your organization's relationships with communities, local leaders, and others affect the security of your staff?
   a. What formal or informal networks does the organization use to engage with stakeholders and gather information? Does this include security-related information?
   b. Does your organization ensure that all staff (including drivers, logisticians, etc.) are able to clearly communicate the organization’s mandate, mission, and values? If so, how?
   c. Do staff carry a letter of endorsement (from local leaders, officials, or others) in vehicles?
   d. Does your organization provide any training in negotiating access? If so, how has this affected your organization’s acceptance, if at all?

18. How does your organization develop relationships with various stakeholders?
   a. Is your organization’s approach to communities, local leaders, and others direct, indirect or through the use of intermediaries?
   b. What cultural considerations does your organization make in developing relationships with communities, local leaders, and others?
   c. How do your staff earn and show respect in the local context? (Probe: ask for examples)

19. Tell me about how your organization assesses the local security environment. What kinds of security information are collected? From whom, and why?
Key Informant Interview: Senior Administration Manager  
(e.g., Operations Director, Financial Officer)  
*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Overall organizational approach to acceptance in security management

1. **How does your organization define acceptance? What are the key components of acceptance?**
   
   (Probe if no clear understanding of acceptance: How does your organization develop relationships with communities, local leaders and others? How does this affect access and staff security?)

   a. What policies, guidelines, or other documentation related to acceptance does your organization have in place?
   b. Do you think all of the staff in your organization think about and understand acceptance in the same way? (Probe: Can you provide examples of how you know whether or not staff understand acceptance as a security management approach?)

2. **How does your organization gather and use security-related information?**
   
   a. Does your organization receive security information from other actors in the NGO community?
   b. If so, who provides the security information?
   c. Does information shared across organizations include acceptance-related observations?

Implementing acceptance across the organization

Program planning (including budgeting) and implementation

3. **How does acceptance as a security management approach fit into your organization’s planning and budgeting processes?**

   a. Do project budgets, or other organization budgets (e.g. communications, security, etc.) include line items that directly or indirectly address the organization’s acceptance? (Probe: What kinds of expenses are budgeted for this? Is there agreement within the organization about how to cover these kinds of costs?)
   b. What part of the organization’s security budget is used for acceptance-related activities, compared to protection measures or other security costs (rough estimate of percentage)?
   c. How, if at all, do monitoring and evaluation processes include a review of your organization’s acceptance in the field? How, if at all, do these processes assess the impact this might have on staff security?
**Human resource management**

4. **In your view, what human resource management functions relate to acceptance?** *(Clarification: recruitment, orientation, evaluation, disciplinary procedures, compensation, termination, etc.)*
   
a. What acceptance-related skills and responsibilities does your organization incorporate into job descriptions? What about performance evaluations? *(Clarification: skills to gain acceptance such as negotiation, relationship-building, stakeholder analysis, etc.)*
   
b. In what ways, if at all, does your organization incorporate acceptance-related skills and responsibilities in staff orientation and training?

5. **Does your organization have a code of conduct for staff?**
   
a. If so, what guidance is included about dress, showing respect in the local culture, behaviour, and socialization?
   
b. Do you think these issues have a direct relevance to acceptance within a security context?

6. **How, if at all, does the rate of staff turnover at your organization affect staff security? How do you manage this?**

**Communications strategy**

7. **How does acceptance affect your approach to external communications?**
   
a. What audiences do you try to reach with your communications approach?
   
b. What specific communications methods do you use to educate the public about your organization’s mission and programs? How might these methods affect staff security? *(Probe: Please provide examples.)*

**Effectiveness of acceptance**

**Freedom of movement, access to field sites, experience of security incidents**

8. **How effective is acceptance as a security management approach?**

9. **How does your organization determine the effectiveness of acceptance?**
   
a. Does your organization have specific indicators to determine the effectiveness?

10. **How has acceptance, or a lack of acceptance, affected your organization’s access to program areas and populations?**
11. Have community members, local leaders, or others shared security-related information with your organization? (Probe: Any examples? Why do you think community members, local leaders or others share (or do not share) this kind of information?)

12. How, if ever, have community members, local leaders, or others intervened in security situations in order to help or warn your organization about potential dangers? (Probe: Why do you think this happened to your organization? Do you think these experiences were related to acceptance, or to other factors?)

13. Think about recent security incidents your organization has experienced. Did your organization’s level of acceptance play a role in the occurrence or outcome of any of these?

14. Can you think of any potential incident that was prevented or avoided because of your organization’s level of acceptance?
Knowledge about NGOs in the area

1. What NGOs work in your area? Who are they? What do they do?
   a. What kinds of interactions do you have with these NGOs?

2. Do some NGOs in your area experience more security problems than others? (Probe: please provide examples)
   a. If yes, what do you think explains this?

Perceptions of NGOs

3. How would you describe your relationship with NGOs? (Probe: Are these relationships generally positive or negative? Why?)
   a. How are your relationships with local NGOs and foreign NGOs different? (Probe: Why? Please provide some examples.)
   b. What do other officials think about NGOs working here?

4. Do community members view international organizations differently, or do they view them all as the same? (Probe: Do community members distinguish between one international organization and another? If so, in what ways?)
   a. How do you think communities view the international organizations working in this area? (Probe: Is the general opinion positive, negative, or mixed? Why do you think this is the case?)
   b. Do you think community perceptions of organizations differ according to whether or not an organization works in that specific community? (Probe: Are organizations seen differently by communities in which they work compared to communities where they do not work Please provide examples.)
   c. How do community relations with NGOs affect the NGOs’ security? (Probe: Please provide examples.)

5. In your opinion, how do messages about NGOs through the local media affect community perceptions? (Probe: Do these messages affect the NGOs’ security?)

Demonstrating and Earning Respect
6. **How does one earn and show respect in this community?** *(Probe: How do you know if someone is being respectful or disrespectful to you?)*
   a. Do the ways in which people earn or demonstrate respect vary among different groups? *(Probe: Does this depend on where the person is from? On their age, position or gender?)*

7. **How does being respected or disrespected by NGO staff affect your relationship with that NGO? With other NGOs?**
   a. Are you aware of officials or local leaders who think organizations do not respect them? Why or why not?
   b. How does the level of respect (both earned and shown by NGOs) in the community affect the security of NGOs?
Key Informant Interview: Local Leaders  
(e.g., Community Level Elected Officials, Clan Leaders, Religious Leaders, Youth Leaders, Others)  
*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Knowledge about NGOs in the area
1. Which NGOs work in your area? Who are they? What do they do?  
   a. How do you interact with these NGOs?
2. Do some NGOs in your area experience more security problems than others? (Probe: Please provide examples?)  
   a. If yes, what do you think explains this?

Perceptions of NGOs
3. How would you describe your relationship with NGOs? (Probe: Are these relationships generally positive or negative? Why?)  
   a. Is your relationship with some NGOs better than with others? Why?  
   b. How do your relationships with local and foreign NGOs differ? (Probe: Why? Please provide examples.)  
   c. What do community leaders think about NGOs working here?
4. How does the behaviour of an NGO’s staff member affect your views of that NGO?  
   a. Do you have different expectations for the behaviour of national and international staff?
5. How does the type of assistance and programs an NGO provides affect the way your community views the NGO?  
   a. Does the assistance and programs they offer meet your needs?
6. How does your community view the international organizations working in this area? (Probe: Is the general opinion positive, negative, or mixed? Why?)  
   a. Do community members view international organizations differently, or do they view them all as the same? (Probe: Do community members distinguish between one international organization and another? If so, in what ways?)
b. Do you think community perceptions of organizations differ according to whether or not an organization works in that specific community? (Probe: Are organizations seen differently by communities in which they work, as compared to communities they do not work in? Please provide examples.)

c. How do community relations with NGOs affect the NGOs’ security? (Probe: Please provide examples.)

7. **What is the community’s responsibility to keep the NGO staff safe?**

   a. What specifically have you done to keep NGOs and their staff safe?

8. **In your opinion, how do media messages about NGOs affect community views about them?** (Probe: Do these messages affect the NGOs’ security?)

*Demonstrating and Earning Respect*

9. **How does one earn and show respect in this community?** (Probe: How do you know if someone is being respectful or disrespectful to you?)

   a. Does how people earn or show respect vary among different groups? (Probe: Does this depend on where the person is from? On their age, position, or gender?)

10. **How does being respected or disrespected by NGO staff affect your relationship with that NGO? With other NGOs?**

    a. Are you aware of other officials or local leaders who think organizations do not respect them? Why or why not?
    b. How does the level of respect (both earned and shown by NGOS) in the community affect the security of NGOs?
This form will be the record of the key informant interview used to process the data. Below, as part of processing the interview in your team, include the phrases, ideas, and points that best capture the substance of the interview. These points should have enough information to be clear to someone who did not participate in the interview.

**Key informant interview (Category): _________________________________**

### Respondent Information

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### Research team information

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### Informed consent?

This form will be the record of the key informant interview used to process the data. Below, as part of processing the interview in your team, include the phrases, ideas, and points that best capture the substance of the interview. These points should have enough information to be clear to someone who did not participate in the interview.

**Topic/Question#: ___________________________________________**

**Topic/Question#: ___________________________________________**

**Topic/Question#: ___________________________________________**

83
Topic/Question#: ________________________________________________________________

Topic/Question#: ________________________________________________________________

Topic/Question#: ________________________________________________________________

KEY WORDS:
5.1.2 Focus group discussion guides

The focus group discussion guides provided in this section build on the information presented in Section 3.2, *Assessing and monitoring the presence and degree of acceptance*. Focus groups are an excellent way to bring community members together in order to see how they perceive an organization.

Please remember to use the *Introductory and Concluding Statements for Key Informant Interviews (KII*s) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)* as the starting point for any focus group discussion. These statements will help you introduce yourself and explain the purpose of your research to participants.

In addition, a sample reporting form is included at the end of this section which can be used or adapted for research team note-takers.

The focus group discussion guides provided in the following pages are also tailored to specific groups of people. For example, community members who are directly affected by programs have a separate set of questions from community members who are not directly affected by programs. These two groups may have different sources of information and varied perceptions of the organizations working in their own or nearby communities.
Focus Group Discussion: Community Members, Directly Affected by Programs

*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Knowledge about NGOs in the area

1. Which NGOs work in your area? Who are they? What do they do?
   a. How do you interact with these NGOs?
   b. Why do you think NGOs work in your community? (Probe: What values motivate their work?)
   c. Why do you think NGOs choose to work with certain people or groups?

2. Do some NGOs in your area experience more security problems than others? (Probe: Please provide examples.)
   a. If yes, what do you think explains this?

Perceptions of NGOs

3. How would you describe your relationship with NGOs? (Probe: Are these relationships generally positive or negative? Why?)
   a. Is your relationship with some NGOs better than with others? Why?
   b. How do your relationships with local and foreign NGOs differ? (Probe: Why? Please provide examples.)
   c. Can you give us examples of the ways in which your relationships with NGOs are positive and/or negative?

4. How does the behavior of an NGO’s staff members affect the way in which you that NGO?
   a. Do you have different expectations for the behavior of national and international staff?

5. How do the type of assistance and programs an NGO provides affect the way your community views the NGO?
   a. Does the assistance and programs they offer meet your needs?

6. How does your community view the international organizations working in this area? (Probe: Is the general opinion positive, negative, or mixed? Why?)
   a. Do community members view international organizations differently, or are they all viewed in the same way? (Probe: Do community members distinguish between one international organization and another? If so, in what ways?)
b. Do community perceptions of organizations differ according to whether or not an organization works in that specific community? (Probe: Are organizations seen differently by communities in which they work compared to those where they do not work? Please provide examples.)

c. How do community relations with NGOs affect the NGOs’ security? (Probe: Please provide examples.)

7. **What is the community’s responsibility to keep the NGO staff safe?**

   a. What specifically have you done to keep NGOs and their staff safe?

8. **In your opinion, how do messages about NGOs through the local media affect community views about them?** (Probe: Do these messages affect the NGOs’ security?)

**Demonstrating and Earning Respect**

9. **How does one earn and show respect in this community?** (Probe: How do you know if someone is being respectful or disrespectful to you?)

   a. Does how people earn or show respect vary among different groups? (Probe: Does this depend on where the person is from? On their age, position, or gender?)

10. **How does being respected or disrespected by NGO staff affect your relationship with that NGO? With other NGOs?**

    a. Can you give examples of how NGOs and their staff demonstrate respect?
    b. Can you give examples of how NGOs and their staff are not respectful?
    c. How does the level of respect (both earned and shown by NGOs) in the community affect the security of NGOs?
Focus Group Discussion: Community Members, Non-Beneficiaries
(Not directly benefitting from any NGO programs, even if located in communities where NGOs are working)
*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Knowledge about NGOs in the area
1. Which NGOs work in your area? Who are they? What do they do?
   a. How do you interact with these NGOs?
   b. Why do you think NGOs choose to work with certain people or groups?

2. Do some NGOs in your area experience more security problems than others? (Probe: Please provide examples.)
   a. If yes, what do you think explains this?

Perceptions of NGOs
3. How would you describe your relationship with NGOs? (Probe: Are these relationships generally positive or negative? Why?)
   a. Is your relationship with some NGOs better than with others? Why?
   b. How do your relationships with local and foreign NGOs differ? (Probe: Why? Please provide examples.)
   c. Can you give us examples of the ways in which your relationships with NGOs are positive and/or negative?

4. How does the behaviour of NGO staff members affect your views of that NGO?
   a. Do you have different expectations for the behaviour of national and international staff?

5. How does your community view the international organizations working in this area? (Probe: Is the general opinion positive, negative, or mixed? Why?)
   a. Do community members view international organizations differently, or are they all viewed in the same way? (Probe: Do community members distinguish between one international organization and another? If so, in what ways?)
   b. Do community perceptions of organizations differ according to whether or not an organization works in that specific community? (Probe: Are organizations seen differently by communities in which they work compared to those where they do not work? Please provide examples.)
   c. How do community relations with NGOs affect the NGOs’ security? (Probe: Please provide examples.)
6. **What is the community’s responsibility to keep the NGO staff safe?**
   
a. What specifically have you done to keep NGOs and their staff safe?

7. **In your opinion, how do messages about NGOs through the local media affect community views about them?** *(Probe: Do these messages affect the NGOs’ security?)*

**Demonstrating and Earning Respect**

8. **How does one earn and show respect in this community?** *(Probe: How do you know if someone is being respectful or disrespectful to you?)*
   
a. Does how people earn or show respect vary among different groups? *(Probe: Does this depend on where the person is from? On their age, position, or gender?)*

9. **How does being respected or disrespected by NGO staff affect your relationship with that NGO? With other NGOs?**
   
a. Can you give examples of how NGOs and their staff demonstrate respect?
   
b. Can you give examples of how NGOs and their staff are not respectful?
   
c. How does the level of respect (both earned and shown by NGOs) in the community affect the security of NGOs?
Focus Group Discussion: Local NGOs/CBOs
*Complete interviewee’s contact information on reporting form. *Read the standard introductory statement before beginning; conclude with the standard closing statement.

Interactions/relationships between local and international organizations

1. How would you describe your organization’s relationship with the community in which you work? (Probe: Are these relationships generally positive or negative? Why?)
   
   a. How do your organization’s relationships with the community affect your organization’s security? (Probe: Please provide examples.)

2. How would you describe your relationship with international organizations? (Probe: Are these relationships generally positive or negative? Why?)

3. How do the local and international organizations interact with each other in the areas where you work?
   
   a. Can you give examples of positive relationships or interactions between local NGOs and international organizations?
   b. Are there challenges in the relationships between local NGOs and international organizations? (Probe: If so, what kinds of challenges?)
   c. Can you give examples of negative relationships or interactions between local NGOs and international organizations?
   d. How, if at all, have the actions or inactions of international organizations affected the security of your organization/other organizations?

Local organizations’ views about international organizations’ acceptance by the community

4. How would you describe the way the community, local leaders, and others view international organizations working in this area?
   
   a. Do community members view international organizations differently, or are they all viewed in the same way? (Probe: Do community members distinguish between one international organization and another? If so, in what ways?)
   b. Do community perceptions of organizations differ according to whether or not an organization works in that specific community? (Probe: Are organizations seen differently by communities in which they work compared to those where they do not work? Please provide examples.)
   c. How do community relations with NGOs affect the NGOs’ security? (Probe: Please provide examples.)

Security incidents
5. Think about recent security incidents that have occurred in your area. Did the organization’s relationships with community, local leaders, or others play a role in the occurrence or outcome of any of these incidents?

6. Can you think of any potential incident that was prevented or avoided because of organization’s relationships with community, local leaders, or others?
Focus Group Discussion (Participant Category): _______________________________

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<th>Focus Group Discussion Information</th>
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**Research team information**

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This form will serve as the record of the focus group discussion used to process the data. Below, as part of processing the FGD in your team, include the phrases, ideas, and points that best capture the substance of the discussion. These points should have enough information to be clear to someone who did not participate in the discussion.

**Topic/Question#:** ______________________________________________________________________

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5.1.3 Document review tools

One of the main three methods for gathering information on acceptance is through document analysis or review. Documents often contain essential information on the policies and procedures an organization has in place on a certain topic or issue. Oftentimes, when an organization is seeking to improve or change policies on a topic or issue, that change is made first in organizational documents and then implemented accordingly. Reviewing your organizational documents can provide important insight into how acceptance is implemented at your organization. This section presents several tables that can be used to review various documents at your organization. We include not only security management documents, but those related to programs, human resources, and operations.

An effective acceptance approach to security management must be implemented across departments. The decisions and policies of different departments affect an organization’s ability to gain acceptance. Thus, as you assess your organization’s acceptance approach, these tools provide a template and encourage you to look at different sets of documents. Each matrix covers a general organizational category (such as security management or programs) and includes topics that should be included in the documentation for that category. The matrices guide you through specific questions or issues to look for in those documents. They also provide an area for you to take notes, record information, and make recommendations. As you work through a matrix you may realize, for instance, that your organization does not have a definition of acceptance in any of its security management documents. One of the recommendations that might emerge from your assessment, then, may be to develop a definition of acceptance and where in your documentation that definition belongs.
### SECURITY MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTS
For example: Security policy/manual/guidelines; SOPs; Safety and security management plan; Safety and security field handbook; Security protocols; Security updates or SitReps; Safety & security assessments; Security audit reports; Incident reports

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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details/Notes</th>
<th>Document references (titles and pages)</th>
<th>Recommendations (additions, changes, etc.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES</td>
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<td>- Is acceptance the primary security management approach, or one of several approaches?</td>
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<td>- How often are policies reviewed?</td>
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<td>- Which departments within the organization are responsible for implementing acceptance?</td>
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<td>- What positions/job descriptions are responsible for implementing acceptance?</td>
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<td>SECURITY COORDINATION</td>
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<td>- With whom does the organization coordinate on security matters?</td>
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<td>- With whom does the organization share security information?</td>
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<td>- From whom does the organization receive security information (community, other NGOs, UN, government, AOGs)?</td>
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<td>SECURITY MANAGEMENT</td>
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<td>- Does the organization provide security training for all staff based on risk profiles (e.g., based on position in the organization (guards, drivers, administration, program/field staff), for women/men, national/expatriate staff)?</td>
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<td>- Is there a definition of acceptance?</td>
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<td>- What are the key elements covered in the definition of acceptance or described in other documents?</td>
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<td>- How does acceptance fit into security management at this organization?</td>
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<tr>
<th>CONTEXT AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS PROCESS</th>
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<td>- Does the organization have a process for stakeholder analysis for programs and /or specific projects?</td>
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<td>- Does the organization consult the same people/categories of individuals to conduct stakeholder/context analysis?</td>
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<td>- How does the organization collect information on the local security environment?</td>
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<td>- Who provides information?</td>
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<td>- Does the organization receive security information from local project partners and local security bodies (e.g. district security officer, police, and local leaders)?</td>
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<th>TOOLS FOR ASSESSING PRESENCE AND DEGREE OF ACCEPTANCE</th>
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<td>- Does the organization assess whether it has gained acceptance?</td>
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<td>- What tools are used?</td>
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<td>- Does the organization conduct separate assessments for different stakeholders?</td>
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<td>- Does the organization provide training for staff on how to assess perceptions and if so, what type of training?</td>
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### Tools for Assessing Perceptions

- Does the organization have methods to assess how it is perceived by the community?
- Do these methods consider the perceptions of community members, belligerents, and other actors who are not beneficiaries of the organization’s programs?
- Are perception assessments performed more than once? If so, how often?
- With whom does the organization consult to assess perceptions (i.e. beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, local leaders, local government officials, other stakeholders)?

### Indicators of Effectiveness

- Do community members ever intervene in security situations to help the organization?
- Do community members share security-related information with the organization (i.e. on road and access issues or warning of potential threats)? If so, has this information been accurate and credible?
- Have staff from the organization passed through a potentially hostile checkpoint because someone recognized the organization and/or advocated on their behalf?
- Has an actor advocated on an organization’s behalf to a party imposing a threat in order to resolve or mitigate the threat?
- Have actors or parties posing a threat to the organization ever decided not to harm the organization (i.e. release of an abducted staff, etc)?
## Indicators of a Lack of Effectiveness

- Has the organization been hindered from accessing areas it needs to go for programs (i.e. freedom of access and movement) and why?
- How frequently has the organization's access been hindered (i.e. an isolated incident v. a developing trend)?
- Has the organization suffered security incidents (major or minor) and/or near misses?
- If so, were these incidents perceived to be related to acceptance or other factors?
- Has the organization been asked to close operations?
- Have any specific actors impeded the organization’s acceptance in a location, and how?

## Limitations to Effectiveness

- Does the organization consider what factors might impede an acceptance approach in a given context?
- Has the organization decided that acceptance alone would not work as a security management approach in a given context? If so, why was this decision made?
- Has the organization decided that acceptance alone would work in a given context? If so, why was this decision made?
**PROGRAM-RELATED DOCUMENTS**

For example: Organizational Mission Statement; Program/project documents; Program/project proposals and plans (different sectors); Proposal and budgeting guidance and templates; Program assessments/evaluations; Assessment tools / reports; Needs assessment documents; Monitoring and evaluation documents; Internal guidance on donor relations.

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<th>Details/Notes</th>
<th>Document references (names and pages)</th>
<th>Recommendations (additions, changes, etc.)</th>
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**PRINCIPLES AND MISSION**

- What principles and values guide the organization’s assistance and programming in the country?
- What humanitarian principles?
- What other principles/values?
- Are all staff members oriented to and educated about the organization’s principles and mission?

**HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES**

- How do humanitarian principles affect program decisions?
- How does the organization decide who qualifies for assistance?
- Does the organization provide assistance based on need alone?
- In contexts where the presence of an international or foreign military is contested (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan), does the organization accept funds from governments of parties to the conflict?
- On what issues has the organization taken advocacy positions?
- Do the organization’s internal and external
<table>
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<th>Communications reflect these advocacy messages?</th>
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<tr>
<td>- What impact might this have on how some stakeholders perceive the organization?</td>
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**OTHER PRINCIPLES/VALUES**

- What other principles/values guide the organization’s work in the country?
- Are these values important in the local context?
- What values/principles are important to the beneficiaries and project partners?

**NEEDS ASSESSMENTS**

- Is an assessment of the security context included in the organization’s program/needs assessment methodology?
- What kind of follow-up do program staff implement with communities following needs assessments?
- How are needs assessments participatory and inclusive?
- Are security personnel involved in conducting program needs assessments?

**BUDGETING**

- Does the project planning and budgeting process include acceptance-related security activities?

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

- Does the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process include a review of acceptance-related security activities?
- Do the M&E processes assess community perceptions regarding whether the program meets their needs?
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<th><strong>- Do M&amp;E processes assess whether the community feels ownership of the program?</strong></th>
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<td><strong>FEEDBACK MECHANISMS</strong></td>
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<td>- What types of feedback mechanisms does the organization make available to community members?</td>
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<td>- Are community members and others aware of feedback mechanisms? How is this tracked by the organization?</td>
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<td>- Are feedback mechanisms incorporated into program design from the beginning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Do project officers make regular visits outside program cycles (e.g., needs assessment, M&amp;E, trouble-shooting) to connect with the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What mechanisms, if any, does the organization have to ensure or increase accountability and transparency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are project budgets are made available to communities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOOLS FOR ASSESSING PERCEPTIONS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization have methods to assess how it is perceived by the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do these methods consider the perceptions of community members, belligerents, and other actors who are not beneficiaries of the organization's programs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are perception assessments performed more than once? If so, how often?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With whom does the organization consult to assess perceptions (i.e. beneficiaries, non-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators of Acceptance</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization have access to target populations or populations in need? (indicator of tolerance, not necessarily acceptance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the organization receive open feedback from community and stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are community members and local leaders involved in projects, meetings, and events?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Has the community warned of potential threats? Have community members or leaders advocated publicly on the organization’s behalf?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Has the community acted to protect the organization’s assets or staff during times of insecurity?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# CONTEXT & STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS
For example: Context analysis; Stakeholder analysis documents; Do no harm/Conflict sensitivity analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details/Notes</th>
<th>Document references (names and pages)</th>
<th>Recommendations (additions, changes, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## ANALYSIS PROCESS
- Does the organization have a process for stakeholder analysis for its programs and/or specific projects?
- Does the organization consult the same people/categories of individuals?
- How does the organization collect information on the local security environment?

## CONTENT
- Does the organization have a stakeholder analysis that takes into account:
  - Who they need acceptance from?
  - How important it is to gain acceptance from those individuals and why?
  - How they can influence it?
- What types of context analysis does the organization conduct?
- Does the organization analyze potential strengths and limitations of acceptance in the context?
- Does this analysis consider how programs may influence local power and economic structures?

## LIMITATIONS TO EFFECTIVENESS
- Does the organization consider what factors
might impede an acceptance approach in a given context?
- Has the organization decided that acceptance alone *would not work* as a security management approach in a given context? If so, why was this decision made?
- Has the organization decided that acceptance alone *would work* in a given context? If so, why was this decision made?

**INTERNAL & EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

For example: Media reports (local or international); Local media coverage (newspapers, radio and TV transcripts); Statements; Press releases; Communications policy/strategy; Website content; Annual report; Translated documents; Formal MOU; Letters of support or affirmation of the organization’s work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Details/Notes</th>
<th>Document references (names and pages)</th>
<th>Recommendations (additions, changes, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN-COUNTRY COMMUNICATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Does the organization have a local communication strategy to educate the public about the organizational mission and programs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Does the organization actively seek out media coverage of its programs, events, etc.?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What types of communications are used to educate the public about organizational mission and programs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Do staff carry documents in local languages about the organization’s purpose or mission in vehicles?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are all staff are able to discuss the organization’s purpose and mission?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
- Do staff disseminate documents in local languages?

**MEDIA MONITORING**
- Does the organization regularly monitor local media (newspaper/print, radio, and internet) coverage of its activities?
- Does the organization regularly monitor international media coverage?

**COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**
- Does the organization’s communication strategy include using local channels of communication?
- Does the organization’s communication strategy ensure consistent and clear messages about the organization?
- How does the organization guarantee a clear and consistent message?
- Do organizational communications (including media, print, and statements) purposely emphasize specific values and/or principles that align with local cultural/religious values and sensitivities?

**GLOBAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**
- Does the organization’s global/local communication strategy and/or staff consider how communications and references to the organization in the global media may affect perceptions of the organization?

**MEDIA/COMMUNICATIONS AND IMAGE**
- Does the global/local communication strategy take into account how communications and references to the organization in the local media
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAGE &amp; PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- How do community members and other stakeholders describe the organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In the communities where the organization works, have people have heard of the organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What image does the organization aim to portray?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In assessing perceptions, has the organization encountered anything that does not match the image it wants to portray?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do community members accurately understand the organization’s mission and mandate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are perceptions of the organization by communities in which it works?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are perceptions of the organization by communities where it does not directly work, but may travel through or visit?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does local media portray the organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do informal information sources/informants (e.g., cab drivers, bar and shop owners, market vendors) and other official and unofficial actors portray the organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is the organization perceived to be affiliated with any other group and if so, why?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HUMAN RESOURCE AND STAFF MANAGEMENT DOCUMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For example: Human resource (HR) policy documents; Staffing policies; HR core competencies; Job descriptions; Performance evaluation forms; Orientation/induction materials; Training materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **SKILLS AND RESPONSIBILITIES** | - Are acceptance-related skills and responsibilities included in organization’s job descriptions and performance evaluations?  
- Is acceptance-related skills development included in staff orientation and training (specify skills)? | | |
| **HIRING AND FIRING PRACTICES** | - Does the organization hire staff from different groups (ethnic, religious, urban/rural, gender, etc)?  
- Does the organization hire staff from different regions (e.g., local, national, etc.)?  
- Is regional or group composition taken into account when making decisions about hiring and sending staff to regional/area offices?  
- Does the organization attempt to hire locally whenever possible?  
- Are open positions disseminated through government channels or local media?  
- Do hiring and firing practices conform to national employment laws?  
- Does the organization clearly communicate reasons for termination of employment to employees (e.g., specify that decisions are not related to group membership)? | | |
| **ORIENTATION/INDUCTION** | | | |
5.2 Analyzing data

Once the research team has carried out key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and reviewed organizational documents, the next step is analyzing the data collected. The amount of information or data the research team collected may be overwhelming at first, but organizing this information does not have to be difficult. This section provides a basic overview of data analysis and coding to help researchers and research teams organize, understand, and interpret the data collected. For additional information on analyzing qualitative data, a useful guide is available at:
http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/g3658-12.pdf.

5.2.1 Before the analysis begins

The research team can begin the data analysis process while key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document review are still in process. Two important things for research team members to do during this phase of the data collection process are (1) track key words, and (2) reflective journaling.

In the previous sections on key informant interview and focus group discussion guides, we provided a sample reporting form. At the end of this form there is a section for key words. Setting aside time at the end of each interview or focus group discussion
to reflect on and record the key words which emerged from the interview or discussion will be very useful for the process of data analysis. Key words can include topics that strike you as important, points that the respondent(s) emphasize, or ideas that are repeated. The section below describes how these key words will help with coding the data.

Reflective journaling is an important way to track the research team members’ thoughts and ideas while they are conducting interviews and focus group discussions. By journaling, team members reflect upon how their original ideas and thoughts about the research may have changed along the way, and it provides opportunity to consider new questions, hypotheses, and thoughts.

5.2.2 Getting to know the data

The first step of the analysis process is getting to know the data. The process of data analysis is time-consuming; the research team should anticipate dedicating significant time to this endeavor. Read through the data (the key informant interviews, focus group discussion notes, and document analysis notes) multiple times if possible. Team members should take notes as they read, recording their impressions and thoughts.

5.2.3 Coding the data

Next, the research team begins to code the data. For this section, the members of the research team engaged in data analysis will be referred to as the analysis team. Coding involves organizing data in order to gain new understandings of what the data is revealing. Coding helps researchers sort through large quantities of information and focus on important themes. A code is a label assigned to something, a descriptive word or phrase. Coding is, “the process of combing the data for themes, ideas and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label so that they can easily be retrieved at a later stage for further comparison and analysis.”

To start coding, the analysis team must first create a list of “codes.” Key words and ideas from the research team’s reflective journals can help the analysis team identify several codes with which to begin. This first list of codes is what are called “preset” categories. As the analysis team combs through the interview and focus group notes and reflects upon their journals, they will search for and mark passages or discussion focused on the identified codes. If the interview notes are typed on a computer, start a new document or file for each code. For instance, if the word “relationships” seemed significant while conducting interviews, designate it as a code. The analysis team can then create a document with this code, copying and pasting those sections of text into the new document. A master list of codes should be created, including a description of each one. Note that many passages in the interview notes will discuss more than one topic, and one passage may correspond to multiple codes.

As the analysis team reads through the data a second time, new issues, ideas or categories will emerge that did not present themselves before. The team should add these new or “emergent” categories to the list of codes. As coding occurs, it is important to record ideas. Memos are one way to track ideas and reflections. A memo can record a theme, topic or simply a thought, question, or hunch. It is important to realize that memos do not need to be formal or professional—they are simply a record of a team member’s reflections.

As the team codes, they should look for themes. A theme is broader than a topic or category and runs through the data (meaning it appears in numerous places). When looking for
themes, it is useful to step back and ask, “What is this all about?” The coding example on the next page shows excerpts from a focus group discussion and an interview. The example illustrates how the reader may code the passages and record themes that emerge. As the analysis team looks for themes, they will also discover relationships between themes. Team members should ask themselves: “How do things relate? What data support this interpretation? What other factors may be contributing?”

5.2.4 Interpreting the data

Once the data is coded and the analysis team has identified themes and patterns, what does this all mean for the research findings? The next step in the analysis is interpreting the data, or “attaching meaning and significance to the analysis.” The team can begin by creating a list of important points and findings discovered through the process of coding. The team should step back from the data and ask themselves these questions:

1. What main lessons that the data illustrate?
2. What new things did I learn?
3. What does this information mean for my organization’s acceptance approach?

5.2.5 Presenting the findings

There are many different ways to present your findings. A first step is to develop an outline for your presentation and/or writing a report. Choosing to orally present your findings or documenting them in a written report depends on how you want to use them, who your audience is, and how much time you have available. Section seven provides additional guidance on how to write a briefing paper, which is one way to present your findings.

Whether the analysis team presents the findings at a meeting, creates a PowerPoint presentation, or writes a report, it is useful to include quotes and examples from the original data to illustrate your findings. Diagrams can also be useful for illustrating relationships and can give a holistic view of the findings. Whatever method the team chooses to present the findings, sufficient time should be dedicated to this.
Coding Example

Code: relationships

Excerpt 1: Focus group discussion with community members

Q: What are your relationships with NGOs like?

- NGOs involve communities in projects
- Benefits are not distributed equitably (some get cows, some get goats)
- Relationship positive – NGOs have assisted the community (e.g. school fees, treatment)
- NGO staff are high handed, do not seek to understand community
- Our elders accompany NGO staff

Excerpt 2: Interview with Program Manager

Q: How does your organization build relationships with community members?

- Collaboration on projects
- Encourage leaders to take a positive interest in the projects (even if they do not personally benefit)
- Building trust
  - Honor promises
  - Do what you plan/agree to do

Relationships (between NGOs and communities)

Community member relationships w/NGOs

- NGOs involve communities in projects
- Benefits are not distributed equitably (some get cows, some get goats)
- Relationship positive – NGOs have assisted the community (e.g. school fees, treatment)
- NGO staff are high handed, do not seek to understand community
- Our elders accompany NGO staff

Themes & Relationships

- Community members view their relationships with NGOs both positively and negatively
- Community involvement in projects is important for relationships

Memo

- How does staff behavior affect their relationships with the community?
- Look back at notes for more information on this!
6.1 The need for collaboration

Collaboration on acceptance can help identify and disseminate best practices, and improve the application and efficacy of an acceptance approach to security management. There are many reasons for organizations and researchers to collaborate on security management in general, however, this section focuses on the need to collaborate and share findings on acceptance in particular.

Collaboration among organizations and researchers on acceptance-related issues is critical for the further development of methods for applying acceptance. Collaboration includes sharing information on current practices of acceptance, challenges to implementing an acceptance approach, as well as collectively brainstorming and innovating responses to these challenges. As this Guide illustrates, acceptance can be applied in many departments, by many staff members, using various methods. Collaboration and sharing of information on acceptance can promote best practices for applying acceptance and can help organizations determine whether they are received, and whether or not acceptance is effective in different contexts. Sharing information provides a platform for the innovation of additional tools on acceptance.

6.2 Options for collaborating on acceptance research

Collaboration on acceptance research can and should take place both between NGOs and research institutions as appropriate, as well as between organizations and local communities. As mentioned in the introduction, this Guide is part of the Collaborative Learning Approach to NGO Security Management Project. This Project adopted a ‘collaborative learning’ approach—participatory approach based on observation, shared learning, and reflection. The diagram below illustrates this process.
For instance, an organization may observe and reflect on what their highest priorities are for security management, then share and solicit information from other organizations about their greatest concerns. If acceptance is identified as an area needing further development, they can collaboratively plan and carry out research (such as the process presented in this guide) or other activities to gather information and best practices. The cycle then returns to observing the outcome and reflection in order to learn from the process.

In addition to collaboration among organizations, there is also room to collaborate with academic and research institutions which may have staff and faculty with experience in conducting field-based research and/or in data collection and analysis.

Finally, a third level at which collaboration can take place is between international NGOs and local organizations and key community members. Organizations and research teams can collaborate with local organizations and involve their staff both as researchers and interviewees throughout the research process. In particular, organizations seeking to conduct research on acceptance in areas where they operate have an even greater incentive to truly engage local partner organizations and community members. Local organizations and local leaders play a crucial role in an organization’s level of acceptance in a given area, whether or not the organization actively collaborates with them. Sharing information with and soliciting information from these actors can positively influence both an organization’s ability to gain acceptance and the effectiveness of acceptance. In addition, collaborative processes build relationships—a cornerstone of an acceptance approach. Local organizations and community members have a depth of knowledge organizational staff may not have, including a more accurate awareness of how an organization is perceived and what actors could harm staff or facilities. Working with local organizations builds their capacity as well and can promote a positive perception of the organization, as well as good relationships for collaboration on other issues such as programming.

6.3 Options for sharing research findings

This Guide leads the user through a learning and research process. Part five provided tools for collecting and analyzing large amounts of information. One of the difficult aspects of the research process can be presenting the research findings in a way that condenses information but does not lose the richness and complexity of the data. Many possible ways of sharing research findings exist. The type of research and the intended audience will shape how the findings should be presented. In an NGO setting, for example, it is often useful to have a brief, easy-to-read document that succinctly highlights the most important points and recommends specific actions.
6.3.1 Briefing papers

One effective way to share information is through a briefing paper (also called a briefing note). Briefing papers are generally short (2-5 pages), and can be used for many different purposes and topics. They are often used to brief decision-makers but can also be helpful for sharing information in a concise and readable way. An effective briefing paper should quickly and clearly familiarize the reader with the most important aspects of an issue. A good briefing paper should be:

**Short:** The document will be more effective if you keep it brief.
**Clear:** Only include necessary information.
**Persuasive:** Aim to convince your audience on the best course of action or to adopt recommendations.
**Evidence-based:** Cite examples and use evidence when possible.
**Accessible:** Use simple language and avoid jargon.

A briefing paper, note, or memo can be structured any way, but it is useful to think of at least three main parts: (1) purpose, (2) a summary of the facts or current state, (3) conclusion and/or recommendations. Use subheadings to make the paper more readable and easier to digest. Below is a sample briefing paper outline. The headings and length will depend on what issue the paper is exploring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Briefing Paper Outline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Purpose (also issue or topic):</strong> Briefly state the issue or problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Background:</strong> Provide information the reader needs to understand the situation, including previous problems or actions related to the issue. <em>Be concise!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Current situation:</strong> Describe what is happening currently regarding the issue being discussed.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. **Key Considerations:** Summarize important developments, relevant facts, and considerations.

5. **Next Steps (also options):** Briefly describe potential options for next steps and pros or cons associated with those.

6. **Conclusion and/or Recommendations**

6.3.2 Additional ways to share

There are many innovative ways to share information and practices related to acceptance and NGO security management. In addition to briefing papers, we suggest the following possibilities:

**NGO Security Forums**

Several NGO security forums, such as the European InterAgency Security Forum, the InterAction Security Advisory Group, and regional security-sharing mechanisms, collect and share information on security. These forums often have resource libraries available for us (e.g., [http://www.eisf.eu/resources/home.asp](http://www.eisf.eu/resources/home.asp)). If an organization works in an area with no regional, national or local NGO security forums, then they may want to work with other organizations to consider whether this would be a useful option to consider together. Less formal sharing forums are an alternative or complementary approach to collaboration. Many online blogs (e.g., [http://www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)) or groups (e.g.: google groups) are available for little to no cost. These can provide an online space for organizations to share documents, analysis, security information, joint-assessments, and tools.

**Meetings**
Local and/or regional meetings can serve as an important part of effective information-sharing. Meetings can be scheduled regularly and when needed when security situations arise. Many possible structures for collaborative meetings exist. If meetings focused on collaborating on acceptance and developing best practices, then the meetings might include presentations by different organizations on their most innovative approaches to gaining acceptance or assessing the degree of acceptance. Meetings provide a good forum for open discussion, presentations, and sharing lessons learned. Users should take the time to investigate what coordination and information-sharing forums already exist, in order to tap into these already existing structures.

**Joint acceptance assessment exercises**

Often several organizations work in one community or area. The actions and policies of one organization can affect the acceptance of all organizations in an area, and all organizations in an area can benefit from enhanced better understanding and application of an acceptance approach to security management. Holding focus groups and conducting interviews with local actors or conducting a perceptions survey, can be time and staff intensive. Joint acceptance research activities can help offset the time that would be required by any one organization to conduct them alone. In addition, if organizations carry out research together, each one has a stake in seeing the results of the joint efforts. Information generated from joint research and collaboration is more likely to reach a wider audience, simply because more organizations have a stake in the results.

Finally, there is much room for the further growth and development of new methods of sharing information and collaborating on acceptance. This Guide encourages organizations to expand their thinking and to generate new data and information on acceptance to determine how it can be an effective approach to security management.
Notes


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 This white paper has since been revised and accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of the journal Disasters. Fast, L., Freeman, F., O’Neill, M. & Rowley, E. (Forthcoming). In acceptance we trust? Conceptualizing acceptance as a viable approach to security management. Disasters.

6 This section also appears in a forthcoming article in the journal Disasters. Journal. Fast, L., Freeman, F., O’Neill, M. & Rowley, E. (Forthcoming). In acceptance we trust? Conceptualizing acceptance as a viable approach to security management. Disasters. An earlier version of the article was published as the “Acceptance White Paper” (see http://www.acceptanceresearch.org.)


17 Humanitarian Practice Network. (2010), 58.

18 Ibid. 61-62.

19 See Humanitarian Practice Network. (2010), sections 2.3 and 2.4.


22 Humanitarian Practice Network. (2010), 58.


25 Ibid. 62-63.
28 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
38 Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009), 166.
43 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
64 How to write a briefing note.