The Acceptance Toolkit

A practical guide to understanding, assessing, and strengthening your organization's acceptance approach to NGO security management

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1. Introduction and Purpose

Although many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) either subscribe to acceptance as a security management approach or simply espouse acceptance as a critical part of their mission and work, little evidence exists regarding how they actively implement an acceptance approach. In order for an organization to develop an effective acceptance approach to security management, the staff and organization as a whole must understand what acceptance is and what it entails.

Organizations should create policies, procedures, and tools to address three main areas of an acceptance approach. These include:

1. Gaining and maintaining acceptance.
2. Assessing and monitoring the presence and degree of acceptance.
3. Determining the effectiveness of acceptance.

> This Toolkit is designed to help NGO staff understand, assess, and strengthen their organization's acceptance approach to security management.

An acceptance approach is dynamic and can be hard-won or quickly lost; for that reason it requires active outreach and planning as well as

monitoring. If organizations do not employ methods to assess whether they are accepted, they have no way to determine if their actions are gaining acceptance. Similarly, assessment of specific actions NGO staff are taking is necessary in order to promote an acceptance approach within their organization, to determine if an acceptance approach is benefiting staff security, and, ultimately to verify if it is an effective security management approach.

This Toolkit was developed and designed primarily for NGO security managers at all organizational levels (headquarters, regional, and field) and is useful as a tool for NGO staff more generally (country directors, program managers, finance and administration staff, logisticians, etc.).

The Toolkit aims to help users better understand acceptance as a security management approach and provides tools for users to assess their own organization's approach to acceptance, as well as identify gaps and areas for improvement. The Toolkit can be used to conduct a baseline assessment of your organization's acceptance approach, including how the organization understands acceptance, what it does to implement an acceptance approach, how it determines whether it has gained acceptance, and whether acceptance is an effective security management approach. By providing a framework to systematically examine an organization's approach to acceptance, the Toolkit enables users to identify gaps and areas for further development, thus helping to strengthen acceptance as a security management approach.

Figure 1: Implementing Acceptance

Acceptance as Security Management

Key:
- Internal actions
- Engaging external actors

1. Defined organizational approach

Key Action: Engage with senior management to assign responsibilities to develop an acceptance strategy

2. Program management incorporates acceptance actions

Key Action: Engage with program management to assign responsibilities and work plan. Training and workshops recommended.

3. Contextualized HR procedures and training programs designed and implemented

Key Action: Engage with relevant managers to assign responsibilities and work plan.

4. Internal & external communications plans implemented

Key Action: Engage with relevant managers to assign responsibilities and work plan. Seek assistance from comms & media departments.

5. Key actors identified & approached

Key Action: Actively identify and create opportunities to engage with key persons.

6. Relationships developed & maintained

Key Action: Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness

7. Effectiveness of acceptance strategy monitored and assessed.

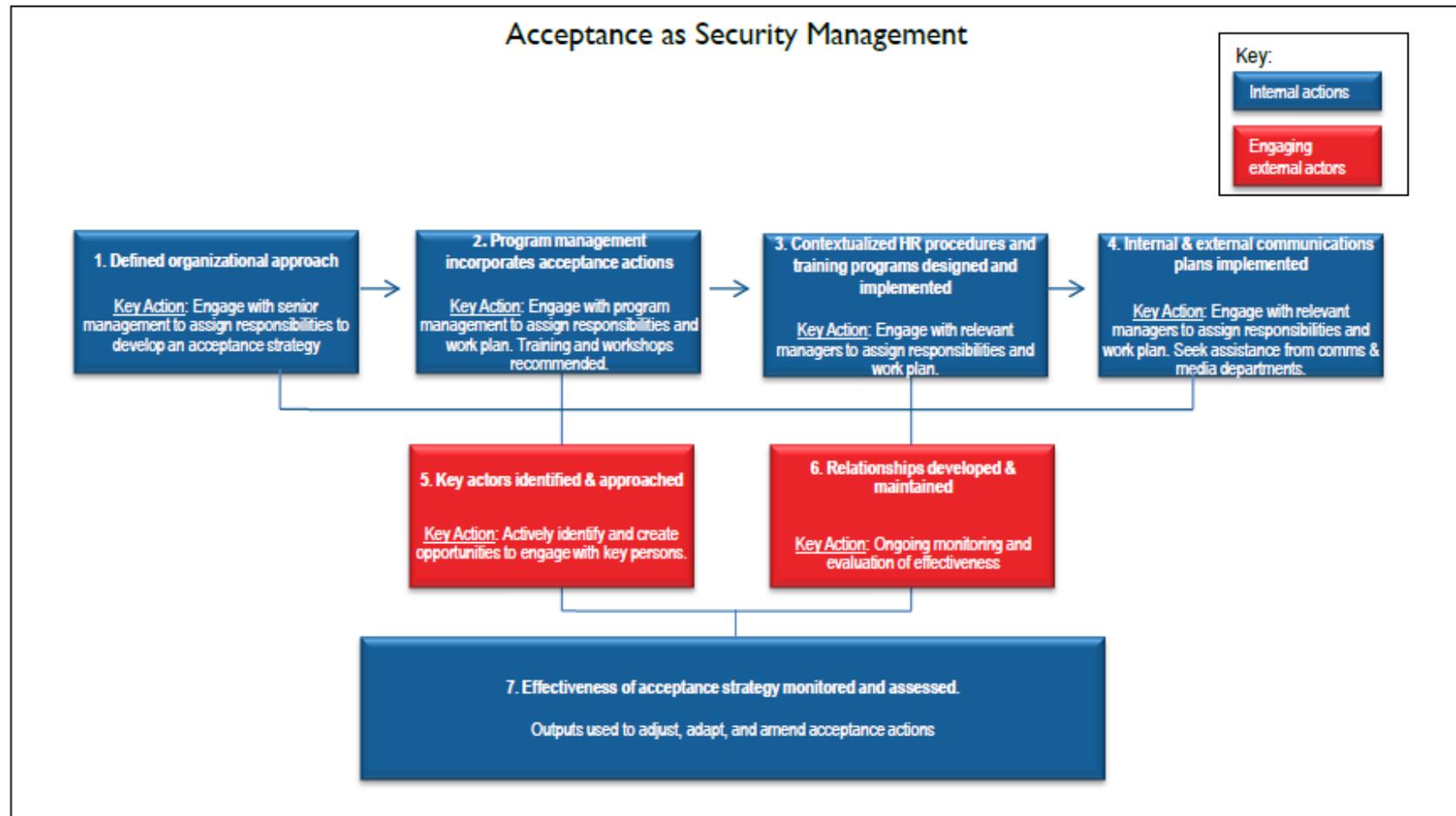Outputs used to adjust, adapt, and amend acceptance actions

Figure 1 depicts an illustrative model of a series of components and corresponding actions an organization should consider when assessing and implementing acceptance as part of its security management approach. The ideal process (indicated by arrows) shows that outputs from one component inform inputs to the next component (stepping through boxes 1 to 4). In practice these steps may be completed concurrently rather than sequentially. In order to ensure a consistent approach is applied to gaining and maintaining acceptance and to reduce the risk of inaccurate information being communicated to stakeholders, it is important that components 1-4 are addressed prior to engaging with external actors.

The level of an organization's acceptance and its presence and activities may be fleeting, but it is also dynamic and responsive to changes in context. Thus, trying to assess acceptance with a checklist of activities or a defined set of output indicators could be detrimental as this may create a false sense of having gained acceptance (i.e., if one checks all the boxes, one has gained acceptance). Organizations cannot presume to have gained acceptance simply by the completion of certain activities and/or the assessment of specified indicators (with positive results), much in the same way that acceptance cannot be considered synonymous with good programming or consent only from a beneficiary community. **The indicators presented in this Toolkit are intended to provide a baseline from which to make contextualized decisions about acceptance.**

2. Understanding the Conceptual Basis of Acceptance

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. Many multi-mandate and humanitarian organizations subscribe primarily to an acceptance approach to security management because it aligns with their values, mission, and mandates, and it is seen as allowing NGOs to deliver programs to vulnerable populations in complex and insecure environments.

For those organizations adopting an acceptance approach to security management, defining and conceptualizing acceptance has proven challenging. This Toolkit proposes 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 programme activities"**[1]. Given the dynamic nature of the contexts in which aid agencies operate, acceptance must be continually sought, constantly monitored, and systematically 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.

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? 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).

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. Because they are in direct contact with local communities and other stakeholders, program and field staff are key players in gaining and maintaining acceptance. However, all staff (across each of the organization's departments) contribute to the degree to which an organization is accepted.

What
The "what" of acceptance is directly tied to two interconnected issues: how an organization conceptualizes acceptance, and what deliberate actions an organization takes to gain consent from stakeholders. Acceptance requires **proactive engagement in activities and actions to gain and maintain consent** from stakeholders, taking into account the **degrees of acceptance** and the **dynamic nature** of consent.

Image and Perception
Depending on *who* is giving consent and *how* your presence and programs are perceived, your organization may find itself along a continuum from no acceptance at all, through tolerance, to full acceptance. The image and perceptions portrayed by 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 organizational levels. For instance, the image of an organization relates directly to its relationships, communications, and programming. Perceptions are also influenced by staff behavior and composition. Figure 2 illustrates the continuum between full acceptance and no acceptance (being rejected or targeted). It indicates examples of the different ways an organization or its staff may be perceived and the risks and appropriate actions related to the level of acceptance.
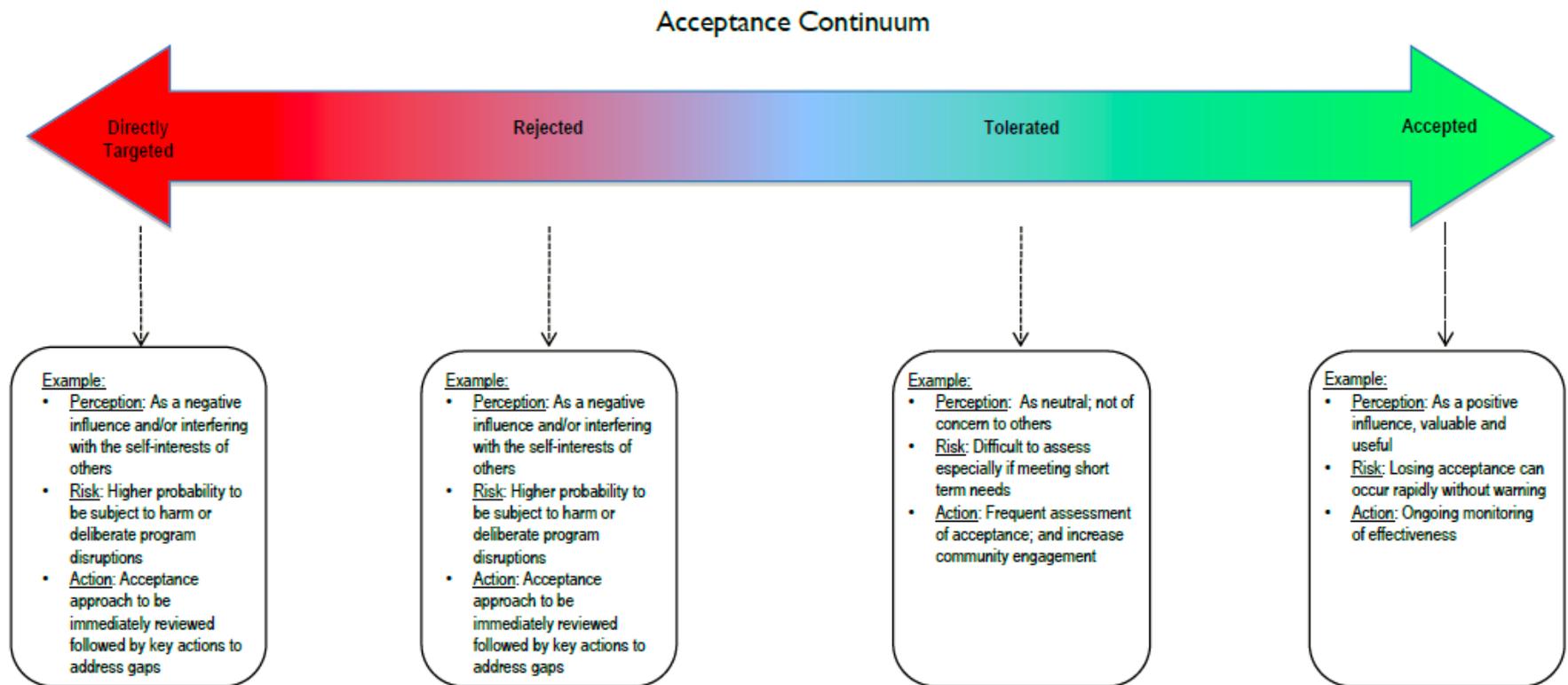
How an organization operates in the field—where its offices are located,

the types of vehicles staff drive, and how wealthy the organization appears compared to the local population—plays an important role in shaping perceptions of that organization.[2]

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.

An organization adopting an acceptance approach engages in a number of actions to gain acceptance. It may reach out to a variety of constituents and educate the community, as well as other stakeholders, about what the organization seeks to do and why. Through these activities, an organization should gain some degree of acceptance. An important part of an acceptance approach is monitoring whether and how staff at all levels are working to gain acceptance and ensuring that staff understand what acceptance is and why it is important.

Figure 2: Acceptance Continuum [3]

Acceptance Continuum

Directly Targeted — Rejected — Tolerated — Accepted

Example:
- Perception: As a negative influence and/or interfering with the self-interests of others
- Risk: Higher probability to be subject to harm or deliberate program disruptions
- Action: Acceptance approach to be immediately reviewed followed by key actions to address gaps

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Example:
- Perception: As neutral; not of concern to others
- Risk: Difficult to assess especially if meeting short term needs
- Action: Frequent assessment of acceptance; and increase community engagement

Example:
- Perception: As a positive influence, valuable and useful
- Risk: Losing acceptance can occur rapidly without warning
- Action: Ongoing monitoring of effectiveness

3. Three Key Parts of an Acceptance Approach

As mentioned previously, three key parts of an acceptance approach must be considered. These are:

1. Applying an acceptance approach.
2. Assessing and monitoring the presence and degree of acceptance.
3. Determining the effectiveness of acceptance.

Applying an Acceptance Approach to Security Management

Once an organization subscribes to acceptance as an element of their security management approach, how does it apply acceptance in practice? Many areas of organizational operation influence acceptance. We identify several key and cross-cutting components of acceptance below and explain why they are critical for effectively applying an acceptance approach to security management.

The key components of acceptance are principles and mission; stakeholder and context analysis; relationships and networking; programming; negotiating access; and communications. Each of these is explained with the corresponding assessment tool below.

Cross-Cutting Components of Acceptance

In addition to key components, we have identified two components of acceptance with a uniquely cross-cutting nature: (1) staffing (discussed in the human resources assessment tool below), and (2) image and perceptions (discussed in section two above). As with the key components, each cross-cutting component is examined with a corresponding assessment tool below.

Assessing and Monitoring the Presence and Degree of Acceptance

Acceptance is, by nature, a dynamic concept, influenced by decisions and actions taken throughout an organization. Many key components of acceptance are interdependent. It is critical that organizations not assume they have gained acceptance but develop tools to assess and monitor whether they are accepted in a given context, by whom, and how this changes over time in a dynamic context.

Determining the Effectiveness of Acceptance

Many NGO staff not only assume they are accepted but often believe acceptance is effective; meaning, they believe it is working to reduce risks to staff and programs. It is important to realize there may be environments limiting an organization's ability to gain acceptance from key stakeholders, and/or that acceptance will translate into improved security. In some contexts, high levels of gang violence or disorganized rebel groups may threaten staff security, making it difficult or impossible to gain sufficient acceptance from all necessary stakeholders. But even in such cases of limited acceptance, stakeholders who do accept the organization may share critical information about the context. In other words, while acceptance may not prove to be "effective" in a criminalized environment, it may still offer important security benefits.

4. Assessment Process and Tools

The previous section outlined the components of acceptance, and now, we will focus on preparation for and assessment of acceptance in your organization. The following tools can be used to gather and analyze information regarding how your organization applies an acceptance approach to security management and to identify areas needing improvement.

This Kit provides several 'tools' that can be used in whole or part for acceptance assessment; however it is up to you to determine which tools apply to specific tasks. The more you utilize the tools included here, the more proficient you will become. We encourage you to modify the Toolkit to reflect organizational values and the contexts in which you operate.

When carrying out an acceptance assessment, you will be seeking information from others as well as asking questions of yourself. The tools contained here will help you assess your knowledge as you work through the guiding questions. It may not be possible to obtain answers for every question; in such cases the tool helps identify the information gaps, prompting the assessor to seek further information.

Tool 1: **Overall Organizational Approach to Acceptance**
Tool 2: **Program Management**
Tool 3: **Human Resources Management**
Tool 4: **Implementing Acceptance across the Organization**
Tool 5: **Training**
Tool 6: **Communications**
Tool 7: **Relationships**
Tool 8: **Assessing the Degree of Acceptance**
Tool 9: **Effectiveness of Acceptance**

4.1 Assessment Tools

Tool 1: Overall Acceptance Approach:
Part A—Document Review

Organizational documents contain essential information about the policies and procedures an organization has in place. In addition, when an organization is seeking to improve or change policies, that change is often first made within organizational documents and then implemented accordingly. Reviewing your organization's documents can provide important insight into how your organization considers and implements acceptance.

Please note: this template (and the ones that follow) are designed as an electronic form to record assessment outcomes and key actions. Remember to consider the impact your documented assessment may have if read by a third party; this is particularly important if documenting names and relationships of individuals or groups. You will also need to be mindful of privacy, data protection laws, and regulations relevant to your operating context.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Document Review *How does your organization define and communicate acceptance?*	**Security management documentation** • Security policy, manual, or guidelines • Standard operating procedures (SOPs) • Safety and security management plan • Safety and security field handbook • Security updates or situation reports • Safety and security risk assessments • Security audit reports • Incident reports **Program-related documentation** • Organizational mission statement • Program/project documents • Program/project proposals and plans (different sectors)	• Explicit reference to acceptance-related actions and guidance • Examples and case studies to contextualize policy positions • Clear policy statements regarding the organizational position on acceptance as a security management approach • Logical processes for documenting and communicating acceptance-related actions and guidance • Risk assessments, including analysis of threats and vulnerabilities that may be treated by acceptance measures • Explicit reference to lessons learned and how the organization has adapted acceptance actions and decisions	After completing the assessment, are you able to identify and confidently describe how the organization defines and communicates acceptance as an active security management approach? Across all functional department policies and procedures?	

	• Proposal and budgeting guidance and templates • Program assessments/evaluations • Assessment tools/reports • Needs assessment documents • Monitoring and evaluation documents • Internal guidance on donor relations • Context analysis reports • Actor/stakeholder mapping **Internal and External Communications** • Media reports (local and international) • Local media coverage (newspapers, radio and TV transcripts) • Press statements • Communications policy/strategy • Website content • Annual report • Translated documents • Formal MOU • Letters of support or affirmation of the organization's work **Human Resources Management** • HR policies • Code of conduct • Staffing policies • HR core competencies • Job descriptions • Performance evaluation form • Orientation/induction materials • Training materials			

Tool 1: Overall Acceptance Approach:
Part B—Assess the Overall Approach

Principles and Mission

An organization's principles, mission, and values—as well as 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 must clearly articulate and consistently apply their guiding principles and values, recognize how these shape their mission and programming, and consider how these might, in turn, affect their acceptance in a given location.

Stakeholder and Context Analysis

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 those who might obstruct or harm programs and staff. An organization's stakeholder and context analyses will later prove critical to identifying how programs (e.g., type of program and those it serves), presence (e.g., hiring of staff, office/housing rental, wages), and activities (e.g., assistance, capacity-building) will affect different stakeholders and how they, in turn, might react. Stakeholder and context analyses are critical to determining the appropriate parties needed to engage in dialogue and negotiation in order to enhance staff security.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information & References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Overall Organizational Overall Approach to Acceptance *How does your organization define acceptance and what are the key components of acceptance?* • What policies, guidelines, or other documentation related to acceptance does your organization have in place? • Do you think your staff think about and understand acceptance in the same way? • Can you provide examples of how you know whether staff understand acceptance as a security management	• Security policy, manual or guidelines • Standard operating procedures (SOPs) • Safety and security management plan • Safety and security field handbook • Security updates or situation reports • Safety and security risk assessments • Security audit reports • Incident reports • Key interviews • Focus group discussions • Staff surveys	• Explicit reference to acceptance-related actions and guidance • Examples and case studies to contextualize policy positions • Clear policy statements regarding the organizational position on acceptance as a security management approach • Logical processes for documenting and communicating acceptance-related actions and guidance • Formal mechanisms involving national and international staff regarding information sharing, threat and risk analysis, as well as mitigation response. • Explicit reference to lessons learned and how the organization has adapted acceptance actions and decisions • A clear definition of acceptance and what it means within your organization • Consistent understanding of acceptance across the organization's workforce • A systematic approach to analysing threats and	After completing the assessment, are you able to understand and confidently describe how the organization defines and applies acceptance as an active security management approach?	

approach? *How does your organization assess the local security environment?* • Does your organization receive security information from other actors in the NGO community? • If so, who provides the security information? • Does information shared across organizations include information about acceptance and/or access? • How involved are national staff in sharing and analysing security information?		assessing risks that includes an assessment of acceptance • Risk assessments include analysis of threats and vulnerabilities that may be treated by acceptance measures • Evidence of a two-way communication flow with other relevant actors regarding the sharing of safety and security information		

Tool 2: Program Management

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 to 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.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Program Management *How does acceptance as a security management approach fit into program management in your organization?* • What values guide your organizational programming? • In what way are the principles of acceptance part of your organization's approach to programming? • Does your organization conduct context analysis for programs or projects? • What elements does your context analysis include? (i.e., stakeholder analysis, relationships between/among stakeholders, power relations, overlap of local values and organizational priorities and values,	• 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 • Context analysis reports • Actor/stakeholder mapping • Key interviews • Focus group discussions	• Explicit reference and consideration of acceptance in program plans, needs assessments, etc. • Communicated context analysis reports with explicit reference to acceptance as a security management approach • Explicit reference and consideration to acceptance in program monitoring and evaluation tools	After completing the assessment are you able to understand and confidently describe how program planning, implementation, and management include acceptance-related actions and decisions?	

impact of programs on local power and economic structures) • How do monitoring and evaluation processes include an assessment of how your organization's acceptance affects staff security? • Are there any other key program design and management functions that include acceptance as a security management approach in your organization?				

Tool 3: Human Resources Management

Staffing

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 staff have the necessary qualities and skills to gain acceptance from stakeholders, 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 a significant impact on an organization's ability to gain acceptance.

Staff composition

In some cases, staffing for acceptance might require balancing identity (e.g., nationality, region, religion, gender, age, social status, or ethnic background) with programmatic or professional competencies in order gain or maintain acceptance. The composition of an organization's staff and whether there is a "defendable 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, regional, and international staff are hired, fired, and compensated. Discrepancies between international and national staff salaries and the resource availability to people in communities compared to that of the organization can be sources of tension and may be further exacerbated by a lack of transparency of processes and decision-making.

Staff turnover

In cases where acceptance is exclusively linked to an individual staff member, the organization may lose stakeholder consent for its presence and activities in the community when a staff member departs from an organization. In addition, the organization loses local knowledge and the relationships developed by the staff member.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information & References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Human Resources Management *In your view, what human resource management functions relate to acceptance?* (<u>Clarification</u>: functions such as recruitment, orientation/induction, evaluation, disciplinary procedures, compensation, termination, etc.) • What acceptance-related skills and responsibilities	• HR policies • Code of conduct • Staffing policies • HR core competencies • Job descriptions • Performance evaluation form • Orientation/induction materials • Training materials • Focus group discussions Employment contracts, job descriptions, and terms of reference	• Explicit reference and consideration to acceptance-related responsibilities in job descriptions • Explicit reference to safety and security in orientation briefings with clear and logical links to acceptance considerations • Communicated processes for assessing and managing the security impact due to staff turnover • Where relevant, policies, and procedures communicate any safety and security management differences between staff (e.g., local, national, regional, and international) with logical reasoning for the differences	After completing the assessment, are you able to understand and confidently describe how human resource management functions relate to acceptance actions and decisions?	

does your organization incorporate into job descriptions? What about performance evaluations? (Clarification: skills to gain acceptance such as negotiation, relationship building, stakeholder analysis, etc.) • What topics related to local culture, history, or current issues does your organization's orientation include for new staff (expatriates in particular)? Is there a connection between orientation on these topics with acceptance and staff security? *Does your organization have a code of conduct for staff?* • If so, what guidance is included about dress, showing respect in the local culture, behaviour, and socialization? • Is there a link made between the guidance offered and expected staff behaviour with direct relevance to acceptance within a security context? • How to do you monitor compliance with the code of conduct? What enforcement mechanisms exist, if any?	documents • Context analysis reports • Key interviews with human resource managers • Key interview with safety and security managers and/or staff with these specific responsibilities)

How, if at all, does the rate of staff turnover at your organization affect staff security? How does your organization manage this? *Explain how, if at all, your organizational security policies and procedures differ for national and international staff.*				

Tool 4: Implementing Acceptance across the Organization

In seeking to gain acceptance, organizations need to consider various ways to systematically integrate an acceptance approach as part of good programming and effective security management. On the one hand, good programming that involves communities in respectful, participatory dialogue and meets their needs in an accountable and transparent manner enhances an organization's relationship with key stakeholders. These stakeholders, in turn, prioritize the security of organizational staff and assets (if for no other reason than to continue to reap program benefits). On the other hand, an effective security management approach that engages many of the same stakeholders in a manner enabling organizations and their staff to access communities in need contributes significantly to successful program delivery. In short, implementing an acceptance approach for programming has implications for staff security and implementing acceptance for security has implications for programming.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Implementing Across the Organization *In what ways do staff groupings face different security risks (e.g., gender, regional, national, sub-national, international, job/role, etc.)?* *How does your organization address these differences with regard to an acceptance approach?* *Explain how, if at all, your organization's security policies and procedures differ for national and expatriate staff.* *How, if at all, do monitoring and evaluation processes include a review of your organization's acceptance in the field?* *How do these processes assess the impact this might have on staff security?*	• Organizational policies, plans, and procedures • Safety and security policies, plans and procedure documents, MOUs, and grant agreements with local implementing partners • Key interviews with the senior management teams at head office, regional, and country offices • Key interviews with program managers and heads of departments • Key interview with safety and security managers and/or staff with these specific responsibilities	• Where relevant, policies and procedures communicate safety and security management differences between staff, with logical reasoning for the differences • Ways in which different departments or sectors share (or fail to share) acceptance-related insights and observations	After completing the assessment, are you able to understand and confidently describe how management functions implement acceptance across the organization?	

• Are there any key program design and management functions that include acceptance as a security management approach in your organization? *In what ways do the departments and sections within your organization incorporate acceptance actions and decisions in their usual business activities?* *In what ways do the departments and sections within your organization communicate regarding cooperation and/or coordination of acceptance as a security management approach?*			

Tool 5: Training

Building the capacity to manage safety and security risks will require a commitment by the organization to train its workforce. The training strategy should be informed by an assessment of the required skills and competencies required to fulfil the program objectives and take into account staff members' relevant experiences, knowledge, and previous training. Preparing staff to manage risks includes technical training (e.g., first aid qualifications, driving skills, etc.) and 'soft' skills such as communications, negotiation, inter-personal relationship building, and leadership and management. Many opportunities to integrate acceptance-related skills and knowledge into training courses exist. Staff should have access to relevant training opportunities and specific training goals should form part of annual performance appraisals. In doing this, training objectives can not only be planned for and budgeted, but the organization can also demonstrate their commitment to investing staff, potentially reducing staff turnover.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Training *In what ways, if at all, does your organization incorporate acceptance-related skills and responsibilities into staff training?* *Does your organization provide local language training? If so, which staff qualify to participate?* *How involved are non-senior staff in safety and security discussions and training?* *Are non-senior staff (including cleaners, gardeners, etc.) sensitized to core values, principles, and acceptance?*	• Training, learning, and development strategies • Training course content documentation • Safety and security plans, procedure documents, and local briefings • Internal training, learning, and development course content • Key interviews with staff responsible for training • Key interviews with contracted external trainers • Key interviews with staff responsible for management and supervision of others • Focus group discussions with (new) staff members • Discussion with non-senior staff on values, principles, and	• Explicit reference to acceptance as a security management approach in all relevant training courses and staff orientation/induction briefings • Specific details regarding how the organization defines and implements acceptance as a security management approach • Specific details regarding staff attitudes, behaviours, and responsibilities related to supporting the organization's stated approach to implementing acceptance	After completing the assessment, are you able to understand and confidently describe how the organization's approach to staff training, learning, and development relate to acceptance?	

	understanding of safety and security and acceptance			

Tool 6: 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 official or unofficial, informal or formal, an organization's communication about its mission, values, and activities should be clear and consistent. The impact messaging has on external perceptions of the organization is significant, and these perceptions affect organizational acceptance and staff security. 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 in concise and simple terms. Public messages from the organization or critical statements from outside sources can also affect how an organization is perceived,[4] as can advocacy efforts on human rights or other issues. Organizations must consider the implicit and explicit messages of public statements and of silence; both may affect how organizations are perceived and, in turn, their level of security.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Communications *How does your organization's external communication strategy promote acceptance?* • What specific communication methods are used to educate the public about your organizational mission and programs? • How might these methods affect staff security? • How does your organization ensure that all staff (including drivers, guards, logisticians, etc.) are able to clearly communicate the organization's mandate, mission, and values? • How does your organization monitor others' perceptions of your organization?	• Media reports (local or international) • Local media coverage (newspapers, radio, and TV transcripts) • Press statements • Communications policy/strategy • Website content • Annual report • Translated documents • Formal MOU • Letters of support or affirmation of the organization's work • Input to organizational feedback mechanisms • Key interviews • Focus group discussions	• Documented internal and external communications plans with clear and consistent key messages linked to specific audiences, options for delivering the key messages, and methods for receiving feedback from specific audiences	After completing the assessment, are you able to understand and confidently describe how the organization's internal and external communications and media strategies promote and support acceptance?	

How do you determine whether communities can distinguish your organization from others? • How does this affect the security of your staff? *How do you determine whether community members can identify project funding sources (i.e., donors)?* • How do you think this affects acceptance and staff security?				

Tool 7: Relationships

While positive relationships with beneficiary communities are necessary to gain acceptance, a community's capacity to protect an organization's programs or staff is often limited by the security realities they also face. 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.

Negotiating Access

Although negotiation skills are important, they are especially relevant to an organization's strategy for entering a new community, for gaining access to vulnerable populations, and for establishing good relationships with numerous stakeholders. This is a broader conceptualization of access than what is commonly referred to as "humanitarian access," which relates to the ability of an organization to reach vulnerable populations to provide emergency, life-saving assistance. "Negotiating access" refers both to the need to negotiate for access to populations (as in a short-term or emergency context), as well as negotiating relationships between NGOs and stakeholders (e.g., negotiating for entry and exit pertaining to longer-term development projects).

Gaining acceptance invariably depends upon successful negotiations with diverse actors at many levels, from individuals to governments. These negotiations can be formal, such as 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 vulnerable populations; for instance, negotiating with armed actors 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 trained in specific communication and negotiation skills, including attention to tone, subtle changes in demeanor, negotiating styles and social meanings to build relationships, and negotiating access effectively across cultural and other boundaries.[5]

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Relationships *How does your organization develop relationships with various stakeholders?* • How does your organization identify the appropriate stakeholders with whom relationships are important? Is there a stated link between these relationships, program success, and staff security? • Is your organization's	• Context analysis • Stakeholder/actor mapping • Key interviews • Focus group discussions • Program planning and proposal documentation • Minutes/reports of meetings with stakeholders • Grant agreements with local implementing partners • NGO security forums or local security networks	• Inclusion of stakeholder and actor mapping in program planning and context analysis • Identified key actors and action points for engaging with them • Methods of soliciting and recording safety and security information from both formal and informal networks • Status of current relationships with the various key stakeholders against optimal stakeholder mapping	After completing the assessment, are you able to understand and confidently describe how the organization develops and maintains relationships with key actors for the purpose of building acceptance?	

approach to communities, local leaders, and other stakeholders direct, indirect, or through intermediaries? • What cultural considerations does your organization make in developing relationships with communities, local leaders, and other stakeholders? • How does your staff earn and show respect in the local context? • How does your organization develop relationships with communities, local leaders, and other stakeholders? • How does this affect access to vulnerable populations and staff security? • From whom does your organization need acceptance? *How do your organization's relationships with communities, local leaders, and other stakeholders affect the security of your staff?* • What formal or informal networks does the organization use to engage stakeholders and	and meetings			

gather information? Does this include security-related information? • Do staff carry a letter of endorsement or other documents (from local leaders, officials, or others) to 'verify' having gained acceptance? • What mechanisms does your organization provide for beneficiary and non-beneficiary feedback? Does your organization report back about actions taken in response to the feedback?				

Tool 8: Assessing the Degree of Acceptance

Attempts to assess or monitor whether an organization is accepted are dependent on first identifying from *whom* the organization needs acceptance. At a minimum, acceptance must include 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, and the community at large. These key actors can be further broken down into sub-groups. Local leaders can include local government officials, religious authorities, and traditional leaders. In countries where the host state does not embrace an organization or its activities, the organization could face additional difficulties or be incapable of securing access to certain populations. Without permission from the host state to operate, an organization lacks legal standing.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Degree of Acceptance *How has acceptance, or a lack of acceptance, affected your organization's access to program areas and populations?* *Have community members, local leaders, or other stakeholders shared security-related information with your organization?*	• Context analysis • Stakeholder/actor mapping • Key interviews • Focus group discussions • Minutes/reports of meetings with stakeholders • Grant agreements with local implementing partners • NGO security forums or local security networks and meetings	• Levels of participation in organizational events (e.g., atmosphere during meetings, whether local leaders are willingly involved, community contributions to projects) • Staff feel at ease in the community • NGO's ability to carry out its work (e.g., continued access to program areas, community leaders guarantee security or accompany/escort project staff, community wishes to extend a project) • Other communities seek to join projects, or a community approaches and negotiates with an organization to continue a project • The community is willing to broker or mediate a conflict between NGO and other actors • Community members publicly commit to accept responsibility for staff safety • Any incidents of access to program areas being hindered as well as any examples where access has improved • Evidence of local communities or other stakeholders volunteering safety and security information • Feedback from host and beneficiary communities informing the organization's acceptance approach	After completing the assessment, are you able to understand and confidently describe the degree of acceptance in your given context?	

Tool 9: Effectiveness of Acceptance

Many NGO staff not only assume they are accepted but often take for granted that acceptance is effective; meaning, that it is working to reduce risks to staff and programs. It is important to recognize that there may be environments that limit an organization's ability to gain acceptance from key stakeholders and/or that limited acceptance will translate into improved security. In some contexts, high levels of gang violence or disorganized rebel groups may threaten staff security and make it difficult or impossible to gain sufficient acceptance from all necessary stakeholders. But even in cases of limited acceptance, stakeholders who do accept the organization may share critical information about the context. In other words, while acceptance may not prove to be "effective" in a criminalized environment, it may still offer important security benefits.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Indicators	Assessment	Action Items
Effectiveness of Acceptance *How do you determine the effectiveness of acceptance?* • Does your organization have specific indicators to determine the effectiveness? *How does acceptance affect your access to program areas?* • Has your access been hindered? By whom? Why do you think it was hindered? *How has acceptance, or a lack of it, affected your organization's access to program areas and populations?* *Have community members, local leaders, or other stakeholders shared security-*	• Focus group discussions • Context analysis reports • Safety and security analysis reports, including risk assessments • Safety and security incident reports (internal and from other NGOs) • Audit, monitoring, and evaluation reports • Key interviews with regional and country directors • Staff survey	• Evidence of community-based safety and security interventions or responses on behalf of your organization • Documented contextualised indicators to measure safety and security management performance, with specific inclusion of acceptance-related indicators • Lack of incidents affecting an NGO • Ability to access to program areas and beneficiary populations • Community publicly commits to accepting responsibility for staff safety • Community members or other stakeholders share accurate security-related information with organization • Community advocating on an organization's behalf • Organization staff and vehicles have freedom of movement (e.g., staff passed through a potentially hostile checkpoint because someone recognized the organization and/or advocated on their behalf) • An actor advocated on behalf of an organization to a party posing a threat, in order to resolve or mitigate the threat	After completing the assessment, are you able to understand and confidently describe how effective acceptance is as a security management approach in a given context?	

related information with your organization? *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?* *Consider any recent security incidents your organization has experienced. Did your organization's level of acceptance play a role in the occurrence or outcome of these?* *Can you think of any potential incident that was prevented or avoided because of your organization's level of acceptance?*		• Actors or parties posing a threat to the organization have decided not to harm the organization (e.g., release of an abducted staff, etc.) • The organization has maintained consistent access to communities and beneficiaries (especially when others may have been restricted)		
Lack of Effectiveness *How do you determine a lack of effectiveness of acceptance?*		• The organization been hindered from accessing areas where it needs to go for programs (i.e., freedom of access and movement) • The organization's access has been hindered frequently (i.e., an isolated incident v. a developing trend) • The organization has suffered security incidents (major or minor) and/or near misses • Security incidents are perceived to be related to a lack of acceptance • The organization has been asked to close operations • Specific actors have impeded the		

		organization's acceptance in a location		

Tool 9 lists indicators intended to provide a baseline from which to make contextual decisions regarding your organization's acceptance approach to security management. Remember that indicators are an aid to help you describe and \measure levels of acceptance. You should not assume that acceptance is effective simply because some of the indicators are present. When conducting the assessment pay particular attention to the following limitations:

- 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?

4.2 Focus Group Discussion Guides

The focus group discussion guides provided in the pages that follow are tailored to specific groups of people such as community members or local Community-Based Organization (CBO) staff. You can develop your own focus group guides for different groups of people. For example, you may want to hold a focus group with community members who are beneficiaries of your organizations programs as well as communities who are not beneficiaries. The same focus group discussion guide may be used for both groups, but it is beneficial to consider whether specific information, perspectives, or knowledge are more necessary for either group.

Focus Group Tools List

The following tools are designed to help you obtain information about how others understand and perceive NGOs, allowing you to assess how their views may impact your acceptance actions.

Tool 10: Guiding Questions for Focus Group Discussion: Community Members Directly Affected By Programs
a) Knowledge of NGOs
b) Perceptions of NGOs
c) Demonstrating and Earning Respect

Tool 11: Guiding Questions for Focus Group Discussion: Local NGOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)
a) Interactions/relationships between local and international organizations
b) Local organizations' views about international organizations' acceptance by the community

Tool 10: Guiding Questions for Focus Group Discussion: Community Members Directly Affected By Programs

Due to the contextual nature of these questions, Tools 10 and 11 do not contain guiding indicators.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Focus Group Responses	Assessment	Action Items
Focus Group Discussion: Community members directly affected by programs **Knowledge about NGOs in the area** *Which NGOs work in your area?* • Who are they? • What do they do? • How do you interact with these NGOs? • Why do you think NGOs work in your community? • Why do you think NGOs work with the people or groups they work with? *Do some NGOs in your area experience more security problems than others?* • If yes, what do you think explains this? **Perceptions of NGOs** *How would you describe your relationship with NGOs?* • Are these relationships generally positive or negative? Why? • Is your relationship with some NGOs better than with others? Why? • How are your relationships with local NGOs and foreign NGOs different? • Can you give us examples of the ways in which your relationships with NGOs are negative? Are	• Local media reporting • Context analysis • Needs assessments • Specific focus groups– community beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, and other stakeholder groups • Interviews—local government or security officials, local leaders, and other stakeholders			

positive? *How does the behaviour of an NGO's staff members affect your views of that NGO?* • Do you have different expectations for the behaviour of national, regional, or international staff? *How does the type of assistance and programs that an NGO provides affect the way your community views the NGO?* • Does the assistance and programs they offer meet your needs? *How does your community view the international organizations working in this area?* • Is the general opinion positive, negative, or mixed? Why? • Do community members view international organizations differently, or do they view them all as the same? • Do community members distinguish between one international organization and another? If so, in what ways? • Do you think community perceptions of organizations differ according to whether or not an organization works in that specific community? • How do community relations with NGOs affect the NGOs' security? *What is the community's responsibility to keep the NGO staff safe?* • What specifically have you done to keep NGOs and their staff safe? *In your opinion, how do messages about NGOs through the local media affect community views about them? Do*				

these messages affect the NGOs' security? **Demonstrating and Earning Respect** *How does one earn and show respect in this community?* • How do you know if someone is being respectful or disrespectful to you? • Does how people earn or show respect vary among different groups? • Does this depend on where the person is from? On their age, position, gender? *How does being respected or disrespected by NGO staff affect your relationship with that NGO? With other NGOs?* • Can you give us examples of how NGOs and their staff demonstrate respect? • Can you give us examples of how NGOs and their staff are not respectful? • How does whether NGOs earn respect affect their security? • How does whether NGOs show respect affect their security?				

Tool 11: Guiding Questions for Focus Group Discussion:
Local NGOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

Due to the contextual nature of these questions, Tools 10 and 11 do not
contain guiding indicators.

Topic and Guiding Questions	Source of Information and References	Focus Group Responses	Assessment	Action Items
Focus Group Discussion: Local NGOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) **Interactions/relationships between local and international organizations** *How would you describe your organization's relationship with the community where you work?* • How do your organization's relationships with the community affect your organization's security? *How would you describe your relationship with international organizations?* *How do the local and international organizations interact with one another in the areas where you work?* • Can you give examples of times in which local NGOs and international organizations worked well together? • Are there challenges in the relationships between local NGOs and international organizations? If so, what kinds of challenges? • Can you give examples of times in which local NGOs and international organizations did not work well together? • In your opinion, how, if at all, have the actions or inactions of international organizations affected the security of your organization/other	• Local media reporting • Context analysis • Needs assessments • Specific focus groups – community beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, local NGO staff, and other stakeholder groups • Interviews—local government or security officials, local leaders, and other stakeholders			

organizations? **Local organizations' views about international organizations' acceptance by the community** *How would you describe the way the community, local leaders, and others view international organizations working in this area?* • Do community members view international organizations differently from local organizations, or do they view them all in the same way? • Do community members distinguish between one international organization and another? If so, in what ways? • Do you think community perceptions of organizations differ according to whether or not an organization works in that specific community? • How do community relations with an NGO affect that NGO's security?				

5. Analyzing the Data

The purpose of gathering and analyzing information is to determine your organization's acceptance approach to security management and to identify areas for improvement and lessons learned. It is helpful to begin with areas in which the organization has demonstrated success and has shown innovative approaches before presenting a gap analysis and areas for improvement.

Whether presenting your findings at a meeting or writing a report, it is useful to include quotes and examples from the original data in order to illustrate your points. Diagrams can also be helpful for illustrating relationships and can provide a holistic view of your findings. Whatever method you choose to present your findings, it is critical for you to dedicate sufficient time to analyzing the data you have collected, and to sharing your findings.

6. Strengthening Acceptance

Experience indicates that the degree of acceptance follows an acceptance continuum[1] with 'directly targeted' at one end (e.g., "your organization represents something we disagree with and we will not tolerate your activities here") to accepted 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"). Your organization may fall at one or the other end, or anywhere in-between. Acceptance is also context-dependent. While the community in one location may accept your organization, other actors may not accept the organization's presence within the same context.

It is critical for organizations to have tools to verify their level of acceptance and can monitor any changes over time. Determining whether your organization has achieved acceptance in a location requires seeking information from sources inside the organization (such as program staff), as well as sources outside the organization (such as community members and other non-beneficiary stakeholders). Tools and methods to assess and monitor the presence and degree of acceptance are interrelated and should build upon one another. After completing your acceptance assessment, you may notice the importance of how the community perceives your organization and the impact of that upon staff security. As you consider your assessment findings, you may decide to recommend that your organization develop a means to assess community perceptions.

As we have highlighted throughout this Toolkit, the guidance and tools provided here are not blueprints to be adopted exactly as they are presented. Choose the tools relevant to the needs of your organization (identified in the assessment) and adapt them according to the context.

As you progress through the essential steps of assessing acceptance as a security management approach in your organization, gaps will likely be identified and/or specific areas for improvement may be highlighted.

You will need to actively pursue solutions to address these gaps if acceptance is to be effective and help reduce risks to staff and programs. In most cases, the actions required will be specific to the operating context. However, below are listed some universal actions, key to effectively integrating acceptance into the organization's mission objectives.

Key Actions to Strengthen Acceptance

- Work together with program staff to integrate security management into program design, especially where common activities afford easy integration (i.e., assessments, stakeholder analysis, participatory approaches, communications, entry strategies, exit strategies, etc.).
- Assess the current level of acceptance across your organization and among key actors on a routine basis.
- Engage with senior management and other relevant staff to assign responsibilities to address gaps identified by the assessment.
- Engage with program management to assign responsibilities and develop a work plan to implement acceptance in all program areas.
- Seek assistance from communications and media departments to develop internal and external communications plans.
- Identify and create opportunities to engage key actors.
- Develop and maintain key relationships aimed at promoting and supporting acceptance as a safety and security management process.

Notes

[1]Fast, L. & O'Neill, M. (2010). A closer look at acceptance. *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, 47*, 5-6.

[2] Slim, H. (2004, April). *How we look: Hostile perceptions of humanitarian action.* Presentation to the Conference on Humanitarian Coordination. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva, 6.

[3] C. Finucane, Adapted from *Security Risk Management Training Module - Acceptance & Perceptions*, 2009.

[4] Humanitarian Practice Network. (2010). *Operational security management in violent environments.* (Good Practice Review 8). Overseas Development Institute, London, 62-63.

[5] For more on negotiating with armed actors or in a humanitarian context, see: Toole, D. (2003). *Humanitarian negotiation: Observations from recent experience.* Harvard Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Retrieved from http://www.hpcr.org/pdfs/HumanitarianNegotiation_Toole.pdf; Mancini-Griffoli, D. & Picot, A. (2004) *Humanitarian negotiation: A handbook for security access, assistance and protection for civilians in armed conflict.* Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva; Glaser, M. P. (2005). Humanitarian engagement with non-state armed actors: The parameters of negotiated access. Humanitarian Network Paper, 51. Overseas Development Institute, London; and McHugh, G., and M. Bessler (2006) *Humanitarian negotiations with armed groups: A manual for practitioners.* UN OCHA, New York, NY. Retrieved from http://ochaonline.un.org/humanitariannegotiations/Documents/Manual.pdf.