

MITIGATING RISK

As an advisor of a student organization, you are the university's representative regarding the organization's activities. As such, you are expected to give reasonable and sound advice to your organization about such things as programs, use of facilities and operational procedures. If you have reason to question an action taken by the organization, express your concern directly to the organization in person, and follow up in writing, including the date, a suggested alternative to the questionable action, a warning, etc.

It is important to remember that, in general, while we need to be concerned about liability, we can seriously damage the educational process by being paranoid about it. Just as there is no specific statement that explains faculty liability for every possible classroom incident, there is none that covers all the possible situations student organizations might encounter. If you have concerns about a situation unique to your organization or to a specific event sponsored by the organization you advise, please contact the Center for Student Involvement.

Although there is no way to completely eliminate risk and legal liability associated with a program or event, there are ways to reduce risk and provide a safer environment for program participants. Here are a few things that your organization can do to identify and reduce risk:

- Complete a Pre-Event Planning Form to clarify the needs and expectations of participants.
- Identify specific risks involved in the event. These could include physical risks (such as an event with physical activity) and liability risks (such as events involving alcohol, minors, or travel).
- Identify options for reducing risks by including, but not limited to:
 - Hiring a third party vendor or contractor
 - Purchasing additional liability insurance
 - Preparing liability waivers, if necessary.
 - Providing advanced training
 - Assuming a 'worst case scenario' and preparing for it in order to reduce the likelihood of it occurring
 - Utilizing waivers that outline the specific nature and risk associated with the event.
 - Canceling the event if the conditions are dangerous or the group is not prepared to assume full responsibility for the risk involved
- Assess the capability of the group to manage risk.
- Identify the challenges in managing risk, as well as resources to assist in your planning.
- Develop a plan of action in reducing risk.
- Communicate with everyone involved (officers, members, advisors, participants, facilities, and staff)