



Standards for Employing Formers in P/CVE

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International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism

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Counter-Terrorism

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Abstract

The active involvement or employment of former extremists (Formers) in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has been a feature of the P/CVE landscape for over a decade. While divisive, a consensus is emerging that what is considered productive involvement of Formers is dependent on several factors related to the individual, the programme type, and the geographical and political context of the P/CVE intervention. For years, leaders in the P/CVE field have argued that standards are needed to delineate these factors and to guide P/CVE programmes that choose to include Formers. The *Involving Formers* project entailed extensive dialogue and consensus-building efforts between international practitioners (including Formers) and academics working with Formers, manifesting through a series of international conferences, an edited book, and a Delphi study utilising interviews and surveys. This policy brief presents the international expert consensus on the standards that programmes involving Formers in P/CVE should adopt to safeguard programmes, service users, and staff. The standards cover areas such as hiring and screening practices, compensation and professional support, and programme structures. We recommend that P/CVE programmes, practitioners, and funders working in this space should: a) publicly promote the standards to facilitate their recognition as third-party voluntary standards; b) develop reasonable plans to implement and provide feedback on the standards in their own practices; and c) support the establishment of a body to locate and support the wider development of standards in P/CVE for all practitioners.

Introduction

International standards serve to ensure consistency in programme delivery, safeguard service users and staff, and nurture collaboration and knowledge transfer between programmes.¹ They are the minimum practices that any organisation or campaign should adhere to. They differ from guidelines or best practices, which identify the ceiling for P/CVE organisations to reach. Standards establish the floor of minimum requirements for safely administering programmes and should be considered non-negotiable. Various professionals working in P/CVE already adhere to standards set forth by their profession (e.g. social workers' code of ethics).² However, these vary from country to country, are not enforced outside of that profession, and are rarely adopted by other exit workers and practitioners.

This ICCT Policy Brief presents the consensus-building process and results of the project *Developing International Standards for Involving/Employing Formers in Countering/Preventing Violent Extremism*.³ In this brief we focus on standards for P/CVE programmes involving Formers in its programmatic efforts. We present the rationale for creating standards, the consensus-building process with experienced international practitioners, Formers, and other stakeholders, and the resulting standards that were identified. We include a longer list of guidelines that were identified in the project but did not reach expert consensus for inclusion as an international standard. Both will be useful for guiding P/CVE programmes when employing Formers and fostering a wider adoption of standards in the field of P/CVE – which currently has little oversight, but is ready for professionalisation, collaboration, and shared baseline values.

1 See, as an example: International standards for social work education and training. <https://www.ifsw.org/global-standards-for-social-work-education-and-training/>

2 For instance, Life After Hate adheres to the United States Social Workers Code.

3 For project details, see <https://css.leeds.ac.uk/developing-global-norms-standards-for-involving-former-extremists-in-pcve/>

Background – Why are Standards Needed?

From 2011 onwards, the employment of former extremists (Formers) has become a common feature of programmes that aim to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE).⁴ This ‘demand’ for Formers is arguably bipartisan and culturally engrained (either through their personal knowledge of radicalisation, involvement, and disengagement, the resonance of their narratives of redemption or simply the curiosity to see Formers speak publicly). While many programmes do not specifically involve Formers, others rely on them for P/CVE, supporting exit work and violence prevention, peer mentoring, public outreach, research, consulting, intelligence, peacebuilding, or conflict transformation.⁵ Many exit organisations integrate Formers into their team because they believe they provide an added value.⁶ At the same time, involving Formers in violence prevention work has been one of the most contentious issues in the P/CVE field.⁷ Regardless of one’s position on the role of Formers in P/CVE, there is a need to introduce minimum standards based on shared values to best support and protect clients, programmes, and Formers themselves when they are included.

The initial motivation for involving former extremists in P/CVE was the assumption that they have intrinsic credibility which makes them more effective messengers or mentors.⁸ A series of high-profile cases and emerging research has underlined a more nuanced and critical understanding of the potential role Formers can have in P/CVE.⁹ Not all Formers are intrinsically credible or suitable for a role in P/CVE, as each role requires specific knowledge, skills, or attributes. In some cases, involving Formers can even have unintended consequences, be counter-productive to achieving programme objectives, or cause reputational damage to P/CVE organisations and the ‘industry’ more broadly.¹⁰ Furthermore, Formers themselves have experienced harm through the exploitation of their story by the media or their employer or re-traumatisation – potentially stalling their own recovery and reintegration process.¹¹ While there are many legitimate concerns about the involvement of Formers in P/CVE, simply opposing or ignoring their involvement is not a

4 We use the term Formers to refer to people who had lived experience in violent extremism, which they have now exited. Using the term Former is unpopular and divisive in PCVE. While for some the term Former can be stigmatising and lock people in their old identity, for others it is an important part of their identity. We use the term Former to refer broadly to category but we refrain from referring to individuals as Formers. We did not ask participants to reveal whether or not they are a Former. It is up to the individual whether they wish to identify themselves as a Former and organisations should otherwise refrain from labelling individuals as Formers. In the Standards we refer to ‘employing Formers’ to reduce confusion – the Standards are focused on active involvement of Formers in delivering PCVE, not solely their involvement as clients. In some cases Formers can be actively involved or ‘employed’ to deliver PCVE and also be formally or informally involved as clients, however the focus of the Standards is on active involvement and the term ‘employ’ better captures this focus. By ‘employing Formers’, we refer to formal and informal, full-time, part-time, paid or voluntary involvement of Formers within the work of a PCVE organisation. Formers can be mentors in a secondary or tertiary programme, they can provide consultation, information and advice, and they can engage the public either through participation in talks, interviews or online. Formers may be ‘employed’ by a distinct organisation, in some cases these organisations can be run by Formers also, or they can effectively ‘employ’ themselves either as the heads of an organisation or as individuals. We use the term ‘employed’ loosely but this better clarifies our focus than ‘involvement’.

5 Marina Tapley, and Gordon Clubb, “The role of formers in countering violent extremism”, *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, 2019. <https://www.icct.nl/publication/role-formers-countering-violent-extremism>

6 Robert Orell and Katharina Meredith ‘Transitioning from Former Violent Extremist to Exit Peer Specialist’ and Winegar Budge ‘Former extremists as peer mentors in PCVE’ in Gordon Clubb, Ryan Scrivens and Md Didarul Islam ‘*Former Extremists*’, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 2024.

7 Katerina Papatheodorou, “Policy Paper: The Ethics of Using Formers to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism.” *Journal for Deradicalization* 35 (2023): 208-235.; Daniel Koehler, ‘Understanding the effectiveness of formers’ in Gordon Clubb, Ryan Scrivens and Md Didarul Islam ‘*Former Extremists*’, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 2024; Daniel Koehler. “Involvement of formers in countering violent extremism: A critical perspective on commonly held assumptions.” in *Frühere Extremisten in der schulischen Präventionsarbeit* (2020): 15-22; Joan Braune, Nicole Nguyen, and Megan Kelly, “Ethical Concerns Regarding Use of Formers in “Countering Extremism”, *International Conference on Hate Studies*. (2023) 35; Maria Walsh and Antje Gansewig. “Long-Term experience means professionalization—Or does it? An in-depth look on the involvement of former extremists in German prevention and education.” *Journal for Deradicalization* 27 (2021): 108-145.

8 Tapley and Clubb, “The role of formers”.

9 Daniel Koehler, Gordon Clubb, Jocelyn J. Bélanger, Michael H. Becker, and Michael J. Williams, “Don’t kill the messenger: Perceived credibility of far-right former extremists and police officers in P/CVE communication.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2023): 1-20.

10 David Parker and Lasse Lindekilde. “Preventing extremism with extremists: A double-edged sword? An analysis of the impact of using former extremists in Danish schools.” *Education Sciences* 10, no. 4 (2020): 111.

11 Brad Galloway, ‘Life after Hate’ in in Gordon Clubb, Ryan Scrivens and Md Didarul Islam ‘*Former Extremists*’, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 2024

viable option. Many P/CVE programmes will include them regardless, and this perpetuates a ‘do-it-yourself’ approach to P/CVE, potentially resulting in the exact negative consequences that critics have identified.¹²

Years of practical experience have produced a series of best practices that outline how to sensibly involve Formers in violence prevention work.¹³ However, since these best practices are often context-specific and not widely distributed, new and old P/CVE programmes involving Formers risk missing out on years of accumulated experience. In addition, much P/CVE work is conducted by civil society organisations operating in a competitive funding environment with no oversight and relatively few barriers to entry. As a consequence, practices vary and there is limited oversight. Best practices also have limitations – they represent what programmes could be doing, not all of which may be viable across different settings (e.g. conflict zones). Instead, by setting forth standards, we focus on what programmes, at a minimum, *should* be doing.

Standards are well established in other fields and can have the same benefits for P/CVE work. Foremost they are intended to reduce risks and harms, as well as increase transparency, oversight, and accountability, thus providing confidence in P/CVE programmes and adding to the integrity of the field. Standards can reduce the steep learning curve for new organisations, streamline processes such as hiring and supervision, and provide criteria for funders to minimise risk and identify the most appropriate programmes.¹⁴

The *Involving Formers* project was launched as an international collaboration with the intention of developing standards in one area of P/CVE work, with a view to laying the groundwork for developing standards across all aspects of P/CVE. Through the project, experienced P/CVE practitioners (including Formers) and academics worked to identify and build consensus on which best practices should be considered standards. Over the course of the six-month project, 72 participants with expertise in involving Formers in P/CVE were engaged through meetings, interviews, a series of surveys that built on each other, and an in-person workshop. The project also draws upon years of research and reports on the topic, including contributions from the edited book *Former Extremists*.¹⁵ Nearly a hundred distinct best practices were identified, discussed, and ranked to develop emerging standards for Involving Formers in P/CVE.

12 Papatheodorou, Katerina. “Policy Paper: The Ethics”.

13 Radicalisation Awareness Network, ‘EX POST PAPER: Dos and Don’ts of involving formers in PCVE/CVE work’ 2017, Bordeaux, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/78328af8-00b8-4eff-a025-3109eca40ac8_en?filename=dos_and_donts_involving_formers_in_pve_cve_work_bordeaux_27_06_2017_en.pdf; Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, *Ethical Guidelines for Working on P/CVE in Mental Health Care*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021; Hedayah, ‘Mapping the Experiences of Formers’, 2017, <https://hedayah.com/resources/mapping-the-experiences-of-formers-to-streamline-the-process-of-engaging-in-cve/>; Ulrike Krause, Bernd Wagner and Fabian Wichmann, “The Message – Formers in PCVE Standards by EXIT-Germany”, May 2023, *Journal Exit-Deutschland*; Brad Galloway, ‘The Ethics of Engaging Former Extremists to Counter Violent Extremism Online’, September 2019, *Moonshot*; Radicalisation Awareness Network, ‘Preventive campaigning using biographical experiences from victims, survivors and former extremists’, June 2023, Berlin; Radicalisation Awareness Network, *Involving formers in exit work*, November 2021.

14 British Standards International, “What are the benefits of using standards?” July 2021, <https://knowledge.bsigroup.com/articles/the-benefits-of-using-standards>; International Standards Organization, “How standards can lead to better lives”, September 2019, <https://www.iso.org/news/ref2427.html>

15 Gordon Clubb, Ryan Scrivens and Md Didarul Islam, *Former Extremists*, Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 2024.

Building Consensus on Standards – the Delphi Method

The type of standards most appropriate in the P/CVE ‘industry’ are third-party standards. Third-party standards referenced in policy documents are technically voluntary and rely on stakeholder buy-in to be implemented at the organisational level. Hence, the following standards were developed through cooperation and consensus-building with the intentional inclusion of multiple experts and stakeholders across the international community.¹⁶ This process included Formers themselves, as part of the advisory board, interviews, survey takers, and workshop participants. Thus, the standards and guidelines presented reflect the informed views of a larger community of experts on what *should* be implemented. This expectation of an adoption of standards encourages their institutionalisation and, as such, distinguishes them from guidelines or best practices.¹⁷

To build consensus on standards for involving Formers, we utilised the Delphi method, a technique developed for obtaining reliable consensus from experts, achieved through a series of questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback to translate professional experience into informed judgment and support decision-making.¹⁸ We first collated best-practice reports in P/CVE to identify items for potential standards, complemented by interviews with eight key experts in the field.¹⁹ The interview guide, based on the literature, included questions regarding how to involve formers (e.g. screening and vetting, supervision, compensation, media engagement) and foreseeable challenges of implementing standards. The resulting list of potential standards was further reviewed for clarity by members of our practitioner advisory board.²⁰ As organisations start implementing standards, more experts from across the world will hopefully provide input to ensure that any established standards have been sufficiently reviewed and efforts are made to adopt standards internationally.

Figure 1. Consensus-building Process



¹⁶ International Standards Organisation, ‘Standards’, n.d., <https://www.iso.org/standards.html>, [Accessed 22/08/2024]; British Standards Institute, ‘How are standards made?’, n.d.,

<https://www.bsigroup.com/en-IN/Standards-and-Publications/Information-about-standards/How-are-standards-made/> [Accessed 22/08/2024]

¹⁷ Jesse-Lee Wrensche, “The difference between a policy, procedure, standard and guideline”, July 2024, Michalsons, <https://www.michalsons.com/blog/the-difference-between-a-policy-procedure-standard-and-a-guideline/42265>.

¹⁸ Rustem Makhmutov, “The Delphi method at a glance.” *Pflege* 34, no. 4 (2021): 221; Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer. “An experimental application of the Delphi method to the use of experts.” *Management science* 9, no. 3 (1963): 458-467; Ralitsa B. Akins, *Critical processes and performance measures for patient safety systems in healthcare institutions: A Delphi study*. Texas A&M University, 2004; Michel HC Bleijlevens, Laura M. Wagner, Elizabeth Capezuti, Jan PH Hamers, and International Physical Restraint Workgroup. “Physical restraints: consensus of a research definition using a modified delphi technique.” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 64, no. 11 (2016): 2307-2310.

¹⁹ Daniel Beiderbeck, Nicolas Frevel, Heiko A. von der Gracht, Sascha L. Schmidt, and Vera M. Schweitzer, “Preparing, conducting, and analyzing Delphi surveys: Cross-disciplinary practices, new directions, and advancements.” *MethodsX* 8 (2021); Ian Belton, Alice MacDonald, George Wright, and Iain Hamlin, “Improving the practical application of the Delphi method in group-based judgment: A six-step prescription for a well-founded and defensible process.” *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 147 (2019): 72-82.

²⁰ Details of our advisory board can be found here:

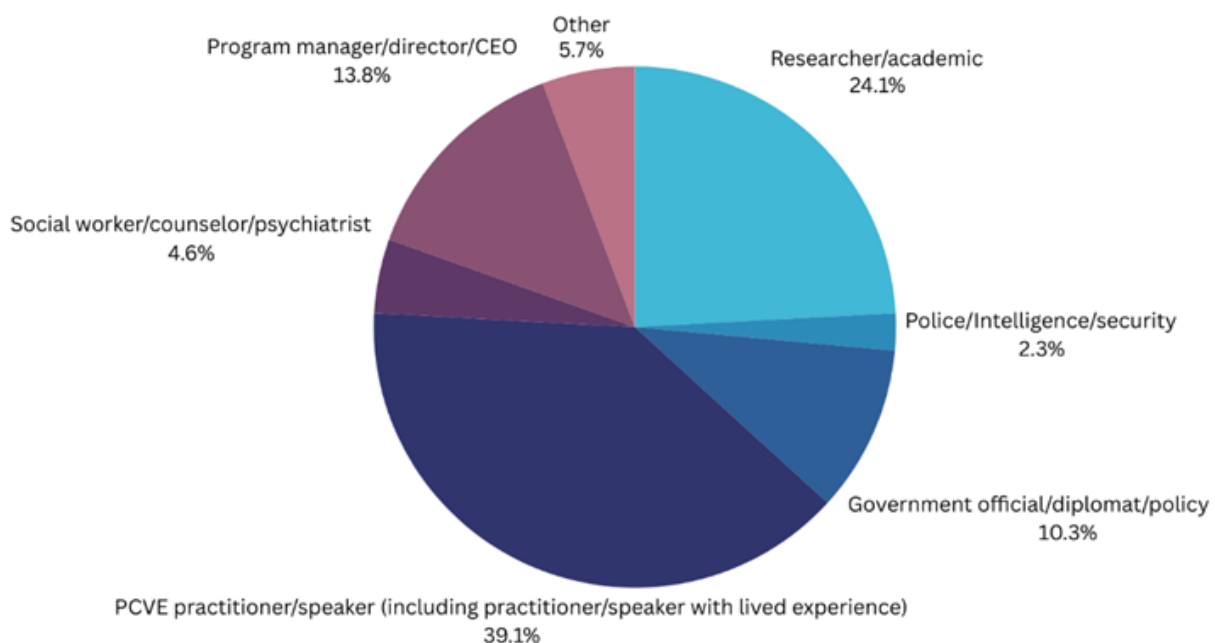
<https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/directory-record/1262/involving-former-extremists-as-practitioners-in-counteracting-preventing-violent-extremism>.

Figure 1 outlines the consensus-building process used to identify standards. For round one of the Delphi study, a survey was created with ninety potential standards that respondents had to rank on a four-point scale and an open-ended question at the end of each section, which allowed for controlled feedback.²¹ The four point-scale, without a neutral, included the following:

1. *Omit* - P/CVE initiatives should NOT follow this standard/best practice (it could hurt the field/organisation/staff/clients)
2. *Not a priority* - P/CVE initiatives might or might not follow this standard/best practice (there are no serious consequences either way)
3. *Desirable* - It is recommended that P/CVE initiatives mostly follow this standard/best practice
4. *Essential* - It is essential that P/CVE initiatives consistently follow this standard/best practice to prevent harm to the field/organisation/staff/clients.²²

The first round of the survey was completed by 46 respondents from a variety of professional backgrounds and geographical regions. Panel sizes for Delphi studies vary greatly, but usually range from fifteen to twenty people.²³ Reliable results can be reached even with a small number of experts if they are recruited through strict inclusion criteria.²⁴ Participants needed to have a minimum of three years' experience working in or with P/CVE programmes that involved Formers.²⁵ Figure 2 presents the distribution of respondents by role for round one of our survey.

Figure 2. Percentage of Participant Occupations/Roles



21 Tammy C Hoffmann, et al., "Better reporting of interventions: template for intervention description and replication (TIDieR) checklist and guide." *British Medical Journal*, 348 (2014); Ellen Taylor, "We agree, don't we? The Delphi method for health environments research." *HERD: Health Environments Research & Design Journal* 13, no. 1 (2020): 11-23.

22 Mhairi Campbell, Srinivasa Vittal Katikireddi, Amanda Sowden, Joanne E. McKenzie, and Hilary Thomson, "Improving Conduct and Reporting of Narrative Synthesis of Quantitative Data (ICONS-Quant): protocol for a mixed methods study to develop a reporting guideline." *BMJ open* 8, no. 2 (2018).

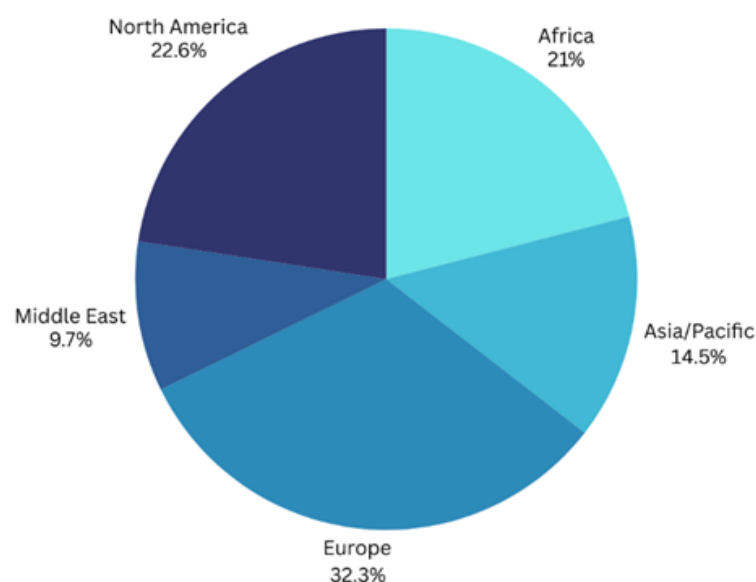
23 Chia-Chien Hsu, and Brian A. Sandford. "The Delphi technique: making sense of consensus." *Practical assessment, research, and evaluation* 12, no. 1 (2007).

24 Ibid.; Makhmutov, "The Delphi method"; Akins, *Critical processes*.

25 This included practitioners with lived experiences in disengaging from violent extremism.

Through our survey, we sought to gather expertise from a range of international contexts via purposive and snowball sampling. Since the majority of programmes employing Formers are based in North America and Europe, we took great care to include practitioners from other regions that met the eligibility criteria. To the best of our knowledge, we included participants from the majority of programmes that employ Formers outside the Global North (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Location of P/CVE Work by Participants of Round 1 Survey



The results of the first round of our survey showed surprisingly high agreement by respondents regarding which items should qualify as an established standard. Of the ninety items, 69 (or 76.7 percent of) items reached expert consensus, which was defined as 85 percent or more survey takers rating the items desirable or essential.²⁶ Seven (or 7.8 percent of) items were removed because they did not even meet moderate rankings of at least 65 percent across “essential or desirable.”²⁷ Fourteen (15.6 percent of) items were close to reaching consensus. The items were rephrased based on the qualitative feedback, where applicable, and then sent out for round two.²⁸

In round two, all items that had achieved expert consensus were sent to participants from round one. Of the 46 respondents from round one, 29 of them finished round two. They were instructed to only respond to this list of items if they strongly objected to them. Four participants voiced a concern regarding three of the items. However, because of overall support, these three items remained. The fourteen items identified as close to reaching consensus, along with their ranking scores, and summaries of the qualitative feedback from round one were also included in round two. The summary of feedback anonymously highlighted the pros and cons participants had voiced in round one. Out of fourteen items, eight increased and six decreased in ranking. Four standards that had previously not achieved consensus, now reached the necessary benchmark and were therefore moved along to the workshop for consideration as standards.

²⁶ Hoffmann et al. “Better reporting”.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

The last part of the study was administered during an in-person workshop in New York, with forty experts from across the world, following a two-day discussion on various aspects of involving formers in P/CVE, and developing and implementing standards. One aim of this workshop was to differentiate between context-specific guidelines (for specific geographical regions, post-conflict settings, and for programme size) versus universal standards (standards applicable in any context). Participants were asked to reply with yes/no to each of the 72 standards²⁹ on whether they consider it a universal standard. Of the forty workshop participants, 27 filled out the workshop survey. Forty-seven standards, 65.7 percent, were deemed universal (≥ 75 percent of participants marked 'yes') and the other 25 were deemed guidelines instead. Workshop participants from the Global South mentioned concerns regarding representation, hence the responses of survey takers who identified as working in the global South were compared to those that did not. Very little difference was found regarding agreement on global standards.

²⁹ One standard was removed due to similar wording with another standard.

Standards for Involving Formers in P/CVE

The following standards were identified through expert consensus as ‘universal’ across contexts where Formers are involved in P/CVE, making them foundational standards for any organisation or programme. Organisations that do not presently uphold these standards should prioritise implementing them. In addition, guidelines that were deemed as desirable or essential, but did not get the same agreement on their universal application, are added for each section.

Standards in any field serve the purpose of providing guard rails and Formers involved in this project expressed great interest in holding the entire field to their own standards. While this project focused specifically on Formers, most of the standards below apply to any practitioner working in P/CVE. It is assumed that most Formers working in the P/CVE space already embrace many of the values reflected in the standards, and that translation of the standard must lie with each individual organisation. We acknowledge that not all standards can be implemented equally in all countries. Therefore, questions regarding how to demonstrate adherence must be answered from the ground up as organisations begin implementation and provide feedback. A standard that sounds good in theory might prove problematic to implement in practice. It will be essential to track these efforts and any unintended negative consequences. For this reason, we recommend that the standards are revalidated in the near future and we call for establishing an organisation that can develop the feedback-loop and other mechanisms that would be necessary for a field such as P/CVE.

A couple of stakeholders noted that the tone used for the standards could potentially be misconstrued and the language could be improved upon. The depth and breadth of the following standards demonstrate the complexity any P/CVE practitioner and organisation are faced with on a daily basis. Rather than viewing these as constraints or suggesting deficits, we intend these standards to build on the shared values expressed by Formers and other stakeholders and inspire further professionalisation of the field.

STANDARDS

Hiring, Vetting and Screening

What should the hiring/vetting process look like?

1. Before involving formers in P/CVE programmes, there should be a clear rationale of why their personal experiences are relevant to the outcomes and goals.
2. Formers should be hired on a trial basis first (whether voluntary or paid).
3. Organisations have a responsibility to explain the challenges and risks of a given role, how it has affected other Formers working in this role, and what support the organisation provides to their staff.
4. Screening/vetting and risk assessment should be carried out before involving a Former in P/CVE work.
5. Vetting should be a process conducted over a longer period (not just one meeting).
6. It should be clearly communicated that security/authorities might be informed if information about continued or new involvement in criminal acts emerges.

What should you find out in the hiring/vetting process to assess readiness?

7. The Former's motivation for becoming involved in P/CVE needs to be stated clearly by them.
8. If the individual expresses struggles with addictions and/or mental health and requires ongoing support, an effort should be made to connect them to relevant services without stigmatising them.
9. Formers should have relevant insight into their own journey and be able to articulate how and why they joined and left extremism.
10. Formers should demonstrate critical reflection of their own role and function within the movement they were a part of.
11. Formers need to have distance from previous harmful ideologies (including conspiracy theories) they believed in.
12. Formers must show contrition (remorse) over their involvement and any harm they have done.
13. Formers must have taken responsibility for actions during and after involvement (whether this translated into direct peacebuilding/reconciliation efforts or not)
14. Formers must be comfortable with differing views and opinions held by others.
15. Formers must demonstrate a commitment to not harming others.
16. Formers must demonstrate signs of personal growth, self-reflection, and self-development (e.g. therapy, new social roles).
17. The Former must demonstrate self-care, self-regulation, and positive coping skills, and have a support network they are currently relying on and will rely on when tough situations arise.

What are necessary personal development skills to identify in vetting?

18. A commitment to a 'team approach' – the Former needs to strive to be a good employee and team member.
19. The Former must have the will to continue their professional development according to the job and the requirements (including self-study).
20. The Former should demonstrate empathy, critical thinking, active listening, and the ability to be respectful.
21. The Former must have the ability to communicate respectfully with clients and team members and constructively resolve conflict.

What are possible warning-signs to look out for?

22. There should be no signs of overzealousness and obsessiveness regarding their role (e.g. having to “save” someone, having to “atone,” lack of boundaries).
23. There should be no signs of attention-seeking behaviour or narcissistic/egocentric tendencies.
24. There should be no signs of status or monetary gain being their main motivator.
25. There should be no signs of attempts to self-market extremist past to build up a brand or sell merchandise.

Employment, Organisational Support and Professional Development*How should organisations be set up?*

26. P/CVE organisations led by Formers should have a mixed team including non-Formers.
27. P/CVE organisations should involve Formers in the planning of programs/initiatives, not just their implementation.
28. Teams should be comprised of a mix of people with professional and lived knowledge.

How should organisations employ and compensate Formers?

29. Formers should be treated equally and held to the same standards as other staff.
30. Organisations involving formers in P/CVE should avoid labelling them as ‘former extremists’ alone and use their new job title when appropriate.
31. Organisations must be transparent with Formers about how much compensation they will be provided for each activity/role.
32. Formers working in P/CVE should be paid according to their role (as compared to other industries).

What should organisations consider as a part of on-going evaluation once someone is employed/involved?

33. Being a Former should not serve as a career path or a new main identity in itself; careers must be based on new knowledge and skills acquired.
34. Formers working in exit work or peer mentors must not disclose details about individual cases or clients with people outside their organisation and outside of what the client has agreed to in writing.
35. Formers must acknowledge the limitations of their roles and commit to deferring to other people in the team when they are more qualified.

What support mechanisms do organisations need to have in place?

36. P/CVE organisations should provide a space to discuss work and cases internally on a regular basis (e.g. weekly team meetings).
37. Organisations should have a supervisory and oversight mechanism to ensure the involvement of a former in exit work is not causing harm to clients.
38. Organisations should have a supervisory and oversight mechanism to ensure the involvement of a Former in exit work is of benefit to the client.
39. Regarding any role or activity, organisations need to consider the risk of (re-)traumatisation to the Former.
40. It is the P/CVE organisation’s responsibility to continually assess the readiness, capabilities, and professionalism of a former for any given role they are assigned.
41. It is the P/CVE organisation’s responsibility to continually assess the safety and potential of harm to the Former, clients, staff, and the organisation.
42. Policies/expectations for each role, and professional behaviour should be stated in writing – staff should know what standards they are being assessed by.

43. There should be regular check-ins (e.g. quarterly) with all staff to make sure that they are following the organisational guidelines and their job descriptions.
44. Organisations must work to ensure that Formers fully understand the potential consequences/dangers of going public (e.g. losing the power of interpretation over their biography, losing a job).

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED GUIDELINES

Hiring, Vetting and Screening

1. Vetting should be conducted by more than one person (sometimes including external advisors or other Formers).
2. A preliminary interview should aim to gather an understanding of criminal history; previous violent behaviour; and previously adopted extremist ideologies.
3. A preliminary interview/pre-employment screening should aim to gather an understanding of medical conditions and mental health status.
4. The organisation should run criminal background checks.
5. Formers need to be able to disclose relevant past and current struggles (mental health problems, substance abuse, suicide attempts, paranoia, etc.) and demonstrate that they are stable, in treatment, and continually working on their recovery.
6. Formers must have been disengaged (exited) from violent extremism for at least two years, in addition to completing a screening process, before they are eligible to become involved.
7. Formers should have received counselling, peer support, or therapy to understand their own experiences before sharing their experiences publicly.
8. The Former must show the skills, abilities, and professional behaviour necessary for working in the desired role; they cannot be hired for their lived experience alone.

Employment, Organisational Support and Professional Development

9. Exit interventions should not be led solely by Formers, but in connection with supervisors or other professionals (e.g. a multidisciplinary team, clinical supervisor).
10. Formers need to be embedded in a multidisciplinary team and have professional support ready for them.
11. Organisations should support Formers who want to turn involvement in P/CVE into a career path by providing appropriate training to build up new knowledge and skills for a given role (including roles that are not dependent on their lived experience).
12. If Formers wish to withdraw from a P/CVE activity, they should be offered support to try another type of activity or support for stepping away from being involved in P/CVE (e.g. financial incentives or training in relevant skills).
13. P/CVE organisations should have a professional development budget available to team members, including Formers.
14. Where P/CVE organisations cannot provide professional development/training they should provide training through other providers.
15. Formers should have the opportunity to partake in conferences and workshops to continue professional development.
16. For their first public talks, a Former should be accompanied by someone from the organisation.

17. When first starting out in P/CVE work, following an activity (e.g. mentoring, public talk) Formers should meet with coworkers/supervisors to discuss the activity and its potential impact on them. (They should still be given an opportunity to later as well if they desire it).
18. Funders of P/CVE projects should allow healthcare costs for all staff (including the formers in both professional or volunteer capacities).
19. Organisations should have a budget to assist with mental healthcare costs for their staff.
20. P/CVE organisations that involve Formers in work should be able to provide confidential counselling support either in-house or with an external counselling service (or provide financial aid toward it).
21. Organisations should have procedures in place to assess the mental well-being of Formers (ranging from informal check-ins to outside service providers).
22. The duty of care does not end with the end of interventions, campaigns, etc. – aftercare should be provided to mitigate repercussions of being involved in P/CVE activities.
23. Programmes should have a plan and aftercare/practical assistance available for Formers in the event of negative/abusive media coverage.
24. P/CVE organisations involving Formers should have plans for arranging security for public events when deemed necessary.
25. Continued evaluation should be conducted by an interdisciplinary team (sometimes including external advisors or other formers) – not by one individual.
26. Before engaging with any form of public talks or media engagement, Formers should receive media training, public speaking training, and how to handle critical questions or personal questions.
27. Activities in public and media engagement must be prepared, accompanied, followed up and ultimately secured by the organisation.

Implementing Standards: Recommendations and Next Steps

The above standards, developed through a process of engagement and consensus-building with experienced international practitioners and experts, should be considered the minimal expectations for P/CVE organisations and programmes to adhere to when involving Formers. In the following section, we provide recommendations for promoting the implementation of these standards.

To build recognition of the standards, P/CVE and other related organisations, such as funding organisations, need to publicly support them. Next, programmes and funders should adopt the standards within their own practice.³⁰ Further, an organisation must come forward to promote, carry, and revise the standards for the P/CVE sector long-term. This includes continuing to adjust them in consultation with international stakeholders and ensuring compliance by working with organisations on implementation and adherence. Until such an organisation is established, we urge those in the field to publicly recognise and adopt these standards on a voluntary basis, acknowledging that it is in their own best interest, and the best interest of their beneficiaries.

Voluntary adoption of standards by organisations and practitioners

Recognition and Implementation

The implementation of standards is typically operationalised by users a) publicly recognising the standards and b) formally adopting the standards within their own organisations. Adoption of the standards establishes a commitment to implement and uphold standards internally. We understand that many of the standards outlined in this policy brief (or even more thorough ones) may already be carried out by some organisations. Other organisations will need more time to implement certain standards due to legitimate constraints. Individuals who work either as consultants/service providers or as part of organisations (sometimes informally or part-time), particularly those who are Formers, should also adopt and promote the standards in their practice and encourage their organisation to adopt and adhere to the standards. Below we suggest ways in which organisations and programmes can facilitate international adoption of these standards in the P/CVE field:

- Support and promote the standards publicly. Promoting the standards on their websites, social media, and public engagement.
- Decide to adopt standards. Recognise and convey internally that standards should and will be implemented.
- Set a reasonable timeline for implementation. Standards identified as ‘universal’ should be implemented as soon as possible; guidelines at the organisation’s discretion.
- Provide a reasonable explanation if a standard cannot be implemented. If organisations find they cannot implement certain standards (e.g. due to resources) this policy brief can and should be cited in funding applications to justify the necessity of resources to implement these standards and minimise harm. If unsuccessful, organisations should still maintain a commitment to implementing all standards when possible.

The key to implementing third-party standards is public recognition and a demonstration of support for upholding the standards. The policy brief demonstrates that shared expectations are held among the P/CVE community of what practices should be followed – standards exist in part by identifying and communicating the norm. Stakeholders can help to improve the recognition and uptake of the standards by publicly communicating their support. For instance, a social media post

³⁰ In cases where programmes already adhere to the standards, we recommend they promote this internally and externally to solidify the recognition of standards within the field.

could state: “These standards build on the values shared by the P/CVE community and should be adhered to when employing Formers” or “I believe the P/CVE community should use these standards when employing Formers”. Such public statements can communicate the expectation in the ‘industry’ that the standards should be followed or worked toward.

Evaluation

- Organisations should establish a process for providing feedback and evaluation on the implementation and impact of these standards. Having a process in place to evaluate their implementation and impact, and committing to transparency on standards, is essential. This could include regular meetings to review progress and providing opportunities for employees and clients to offer feedback on implementation and impact. The minimum expectation of evaluation is that organisations regularly review the implementation and impact of standards internally, although external and formal evaluation is preferable.
- Feedback loops. Organisations should develop simple mechanisms (e.g. email, surveys) to track progress and consolidate feedback.
- Process evaluation. Organisations should establish a process for regularly evaluating whether standards have been implemented or are continuing to be followed internally.
- Impact evaluation. We also recommend that organisations embed and establish processes for an evaluation of the standards and their impact.

Promotion by funders, IGOs, and government agencies

Funders, IGOs, and government agencies should share the standards with projects that employ Formers. A key driver of implementing standards in P/CVE is through their adoption by organisations that provide funding or exercise convening power. Many such organisations have stated the benefit of having standards, as they ensure recipients are adhering to minimum standards as recognised by the field; minimise harm and provides helps insulate the funder from potential reputational damage; reduce the race to the bottom, where applicants are reluctant to cost in mechanisms to support standards for fear of being undercut by other applicants.

Funders therefore should:

- Share standards with funding applicants and funded organisations/programmes
- Assess funding applications by using the standards as part of a project evaluation tool
- Set expectations that projects adhere to the standards as part of the application/tendering process.

Standard Carrier

An organisation will need to come forward that will carry these standards and others applying to the P/CVE field, continue adjusting them with international stakeholders, and ensure compliance by working with organisations on implementation and adherence. A P/CVE standards organisation would support the continued development of international and regional standards across the full spectrum of P/CVE (primary, secondary, and tertiary) for all practitioners and exit workers in the field.

Ideally, such an organisation would provide capacity to support implementation via training, resource-sharing, information-sharing and capability building. It would dramatically improve the quality of P/CVE organisations, many of which are new, have limited resources, and are based on trial-and-error as opposed to starting with best practices and support. In addition, such an organisation must oversee compliance by encouraging programme-users and others to come forward if standards are violated and instilling agreed-upon and reasonable consequences for non-adherence.

Another integral component of developing sector standards is to review the standards regularly to ensure confidence that standards remain relevant. We recommend that an advisory board of practitioner experts³¹ collect feedback from stakeholders and review the standards regarding implementation two years from the initial publication date (in 2027) and three years after (in 2030) for impact. The advisory board may, at each time, make adjustments and should then publish, if necessary, revised standards. If the advisory board deems significant changes are needed, a new consultation process should be conducted.

- Identify an appropriate network or organisation to host standards as a step to validation.
- Create a representative advisory board to engage stakeholders, guide implementation, adherence, and revision processes.
- Provide training and accreditation so stakeholders can successfully implement standards and benefit from recognition for upholding standards.
- Create procedures and protocols for supporting organisations and to address standard non-adherence.
- Revalidate and update standards periodically, to incorporate feedback loops and emergent practices.

³¹ Where standards relate to the employment of Formers, it is essential that Formers with experience working in PCVE are included in the advisory board and feedback gathering process.

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