



Researcher Safety Planning

March 2026

The goal of this document is to provide safety planning practices for academics and scholars focusing on immigration policy. This resource by the [Im/migrant Well-Being Scholar Collaborative](https://iwbcollab.org) (“The Collaborative”) is informed by a “Researcher Safety Training” workshop hosted with Katie Blankenship, Esq., Co-Founder and Managing Partner of [Sanctuary of the South](https://sanctuaryofthesouth.org) on March 6, 2026. The information contained in this document is provided for informational purposes and should not be construed as legal advice.

The Collaborative supports academics who conduct multidisciplinary, empirical research on immigration. To learn more about the Collaborative, visit: iwbcollab.org. **Working in coalition and building relationships are key to a robust safety plan.** Please feel free to connect with The Collaborative and engage with our community as a resource. For any questions or concerns, please contact us at admin@iwbcollab.org.

WHY SAFETY PLANNING FOR RESEARCHERS MATTERS NOW

- The United States has seen sweeping changes to immigration policies, ramping up enforcement in immigrant communities.
- In recent years, there has been a proliferation of government policies and lawsuits with direct implications for academic freedom and research.
- Academics and college campuses have been directly targeted by immigration enforcement and educational gag orders.

CONDUCT A MULTI-TIERED RISK ASSESSMENT TO BUILD YOUR SAFETY PLAN

- In the context of the current immigration policy landscape, having a comprehensive understanding of your potential personal and professional risks is crucial for ensuring safety should a worst-case scenario occur. The most effective risk plans are co-created with and communicated to your family, colleagues, and support networks.
- Engage in a multi-tiered risk assessment on at least an annual basis:
 - **Personal risk assessments** include yourself, your home, your family, and your community. Specific issues to consider include:
 - **Personal vulnerabilities**
 - How can I best protect my loved ones?
 - Consider how visa status or the immigration status of people in your household might be targeted in response to your research.
 - **Digital footprints and online discoverability**
 - Is there anything online that might be used against me?
 - Consider social media activity and records of past digital publications.
 - **Professional risk assessments** are related to your work, as well as understanding vulnerabilities in your program, unit, department, and/or university. Examples of issues include:



- **Research area**
 - Does my research expertise put me at a heightened risk of exposure to enforcement by immigration authorities or government entities?
 - Consider what issues such as immigration detention, surveillance, and policy reform might be an increased risk of being targeted by enforcement practices.
- **Level of public engagement**
 - Will engaging in public fora put me at greater risk for immigration enforcement or doxxing?
 - Consider how exposed you and those around you are, and take additional precaution when writing or appearing in media, public testimony and/or op-eds.
- **Institutional protections**
 - Can I count on my institution to protect me?
 - Do I know who I need to reach out when I need counsel?
 - Consider how and whether additional protections such as tenure, union membership, or access to legal protection you may have access to at your institution.

CORE PRACTICES TO REDUCE RISK

- **Reinforce Data Protections:** Assess and strengthen your [data protection practices](#).
- **Take Extra Precautions to Protect Research Participants:** Consider potential vulnerabilities beyond typical IRB protocols, such as how and if you should record data like immigration status, when creating participation guidelines and waivers.
- **Establish Agreements around Safety within your Program or Department:** Set guidelines for your research team, program or department to adhere to in the case of interactions with immigration enforcement. Practice them.
- **Engage in Coalition-Building and Community Support:** Connect with professional organizations like the [American Association of University Professors](#) or The Collaborative, beyond your university. Also consider legal resources, such as your state's [ACLU affiliate](#).
- **Discuss and Plan for Safety Scenarios around Publishing:** Prior to publication, perform a safety audit and execute a safety plan with all team members: consider whose names will be on the publication and any preferences for pen names, ensure interviewees' identifying and immigration information is protected, and discuss what actions your team will take should there be any immigration repercussions.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR NON-U.S. CITIZENS

- **IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS AND RENEWAL TIMELINES**
 - Ensure you have originals of all immigration documents securely stored in a secure place where someone you trust can access them should they need to.
 - Keep copies of all immigration documents, including a version at your workplace.
 - Carefully monitor dates related to immigration paperwork renewal and ensure you file renewals 6 months in advance of their expiration dates.



- **“TRUSTED PERSON” PLANNING (PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL)**
 - Identify a trusted person in your personal and professional life that can be contacted in case of an emergency and who has access to your important documents.
 - This can be a family member, friend, colleague or someone else trusted who can be contacted to provide assistance, information, or make decisions on behalf of the individual during an emergency situation, including interactions with immigration enforcement and law enforcement.
 - Consider executing specific estate documents like a general and healthcare power of attorney.
- **TRAVEL PRECAUTIONS**
 - If you plan to travel internationally, carry your immigration documents with you.
 - It is advisable to avoid unnecessary international travel during heightened times of immigration enforcement.
- **ENCOUNTERS WITH IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT**
 - Immigration authorities must have probable cause and a judicial warrant.
 - Unless there is a judicial warrant presented to you, politely decline and walk away. Do not hand over any information about your immigration status.
- **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**
 - Consider any restrictions on your visa and your employment authorization and consider participating in a KYR training so you can be aware of your rights.
- **WHEN TO CONSULT WITH AN IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY**
 - When possible, contact an immigration attorney for a consultation on your immigration status or case, should you feel vulnerable to potential targeting.
 - Include anybody in your family who may be directly or indirectly at risk, as well. Transgender/Non-binary & Binary Gender Non-Conforming, BIPOC, and those with prior legal issues such as open warrants or criminal justice cases are particularly vulnerable to heightened profiling and discrimination by law enforcement.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, [“Campus Preparedness Toolkit: Immigration Enforcement,”](#) January 2026
- Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, [“Staying Safe: Protecting You and Your Research,”](#) October 2025
- Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, [“Travel Emergency Preparedness Plan for Individuals Traveling within the U.S.,”](#) March 2025
- National Immigration Law Center, [“Protecting Immigrant Students & Employees: Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions,”](#) February 2025
- Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, [“Checklist for Supporting Non-Citizen Campus Members,”](#) March 2025
- National Immigration Law Center, [“Warrants and Subpoenas: What to Look Out for and How to Respond,”](#) January 2025
- National Academics, [“Resources for Researchers and Scholars Under Threat in the United States,”](#) n.d.
- American Association of University Professors, [“Resources on Academic Freedom,”](#) n.d.