



Photo Extraordinary Bodies – Waldos Circus of Magic and Terror.
PreDress © credit Steve Tanner

INFORMATION SHEET

Practitioners' guide to identifying and managing risk

For creative and cultural practitioners and freelancers

Published: August 2023



**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

[artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

What's inside

This information sheet relates to Arts Council England's funding programmes. It can be used alongside guidance for applicants to support you to make your application.

See our [website](#) for information about our funds.

In this information sheet, we will talk about the following:

What is risk management?	3
Why should I identify and manage risk?	3
What is a risk register?	3
What are the different types of risk?	4
How do I use a risk register?	4
Examples of risks and mitigations	4
Seeking advice and support	6
Contact us	7

This information is also available in audio, BSL, Easy Read and large print formats. If you require it in an alternative format, like Braille, please [get in touch](#).

What is risk management?

Risk management is when you identify things which may negatively affect your work or your business and doing what you can to address these risks.

Thinking through what might go wrong will help you to plan, and while you can't control everything that might arise, you can be prepared and ready.

Why should I identify and manage risk?

Thinking ahead will allow you to consider what you would do if something negative happened and put in place any helpful actions now. It is better to spend a small amount of time planning in this way, than to have to react in the moment, when anxieties are heightened and time to respond is limited.

What is a risk register?

A risk register is a table that sets out:

- Each risk
- How likely it is to happen
- How great an impact it would have if it occurred
- What steps you can take to reduce the chances of it happening and the impact if it does (mitigations)

It can be useful to think about which are the most critical risks – those most likely to happen and which would have the most impact if they did – and to focus on these.

There are many different [tools and approaches](#) available online for identifying and managing risk.

When identifying risks, it can be helpful to involve others and ask for their perspective. You could consider asking peers and collaborators for feedback and advice.

What are the different types of risk?

Some key types of risk include:

- Financial – risks which impact your financial security or the viability of the project
- Reputational – risks relating to the perception of you/your work
- Operational – risks affecting how you work on a day-to-day basis
- Strategic – risks relating to the wider context in which you work
- Artistic risk – risks relating to your creative work.

How do I use a risk register?

Your risk register is one of the tools that can help you to plan your work, so keep it updated and review the actions regularly. Ask yourself if the risks are still relevant and accurate, and whether there are any new risks you need to add or out of date ones to remove.

Examples of risks and mitigations

Financial risk

Financial risk is the most immediate and obvious risk for any individual and good financial planning is key to managing this. If you are self-employed then financial planning for your work and for your personal life may be interlinked. However, planning for your work separately is important for good financial management.

Make a budget and use [online tools](#) to map your spending. It is often helpful to budget for best case, worse case and middle ground financial scenarios, especially when you are reliant on funding decisions that you do not yet know the outcome of.

Reputational risk

A negative response to your work can be high-profile and can include protests, negative social media campaigns and damaging press. Possible consequences could be the cancellation of work, loss of income, loss of partnerships and employment opportunities, and mental health impacts.

It might be helpful to use tools such as the Six Thinking Hats to consider different perspectives. Bringing in friends and peers can also be useful in looking at your work from different perspectives. Engaging with your community and others can help increase understanding and build positive relationships.

Identifying risk is not about shying away from producing challenging, creative work. The identification of a risk will not usually result in a decision to change course entirely. If you are concerned about reputational risk, discuss it with any funders and other partners. Think about how you would respond to a negative reaction and ensure you have a support structure around you.

Operational risk

Operational risks are things within your own business as a practitioner. That could include people that work for you (if any) and any systems or processes (such as your computer or your method of transport). Operational risks would usually have financial risks associated with them, for example, if your car broke down and was unavailable so you were not able to get to work. Or if you were ill and had to cancel work.

To identify operational risks, think about the people and things within your work that you rely on. If there was a problem with one of these things, how would it affect you and what could you do to plan for these?

Strategic risk

Strategic risks relate to the wider context in which you work – things that are largely outside of your control, but which may directly affect you. Partners you work with, funders with whom you have a relationship and venues you use could all fall into this category.

If you had to change your plans regarding these people and places, how would that affect your work and your finances? Are there any measures you could consider taking to address these risks?

Artistic risk

Artistic risk is more complex and harder to define than other risks. It means trying something new in terms of your artistic exploration or expression, despite the unknowns and associated financial and reputational risks. Taking an artistic risk might mean not knowing whether you will make any money from the work, whether there will be a vocal negative reaction, or whether the work will not turn out to be feasible from a more practical perspective.

Artistic risk is vital because it means that art and creativity is always growing and evolving. As an individual practitioner, it is important to recognise the risks and the potential financial and reputational implications. These can often be planned for and mitigated. Recognising the risks, rather than shying away from them, is key.

Seeking advice and support

One of the key challenges when you work on your own is a lack of support and feedback. Joining or starting a network of peers can be very valuable for providing this.

If you are having a difficult time, reach out to those around you for support. You can find links to a range of mental health resources [here](#).

Contact us

We want to make sure that all individuals working in the creative and cultural sector are able to share their thoughts with us if they want to.

You can contact us directly with suggestions for how we can support individuals, share examples of good practice in the sector, and give us feedback on how we're doing so far, including on this information sheet.

[Get in touch >](#)

You can also reach us at the details below:

Telephone: 0161 934 4317
Email: enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk
Website: artscouncil.org.uk
Post: Arts Council England
The Hive, 49 Lever Street
Manchester
M1 1FN

You can also Livechat with our Customer Services team by clicking the icon on the Contact Us page on our website:: artscouncil.org.uk