Understand Context and Conflict

Workbook 1

This workbook is a component of *Defusing Hate: A Strategic Communication Guide to Counteract Dangerous Speech*, by Rachel Hilary Brown.

In this section you will gather insights about the environment you are working in and predict the situations you are trying to prevent. The knowledge you gain from this section will help you design your intervention. These exercises are designed so that they can be conducted in workshops or with small groups of people.

Phase 1
Understand Context and Conflict
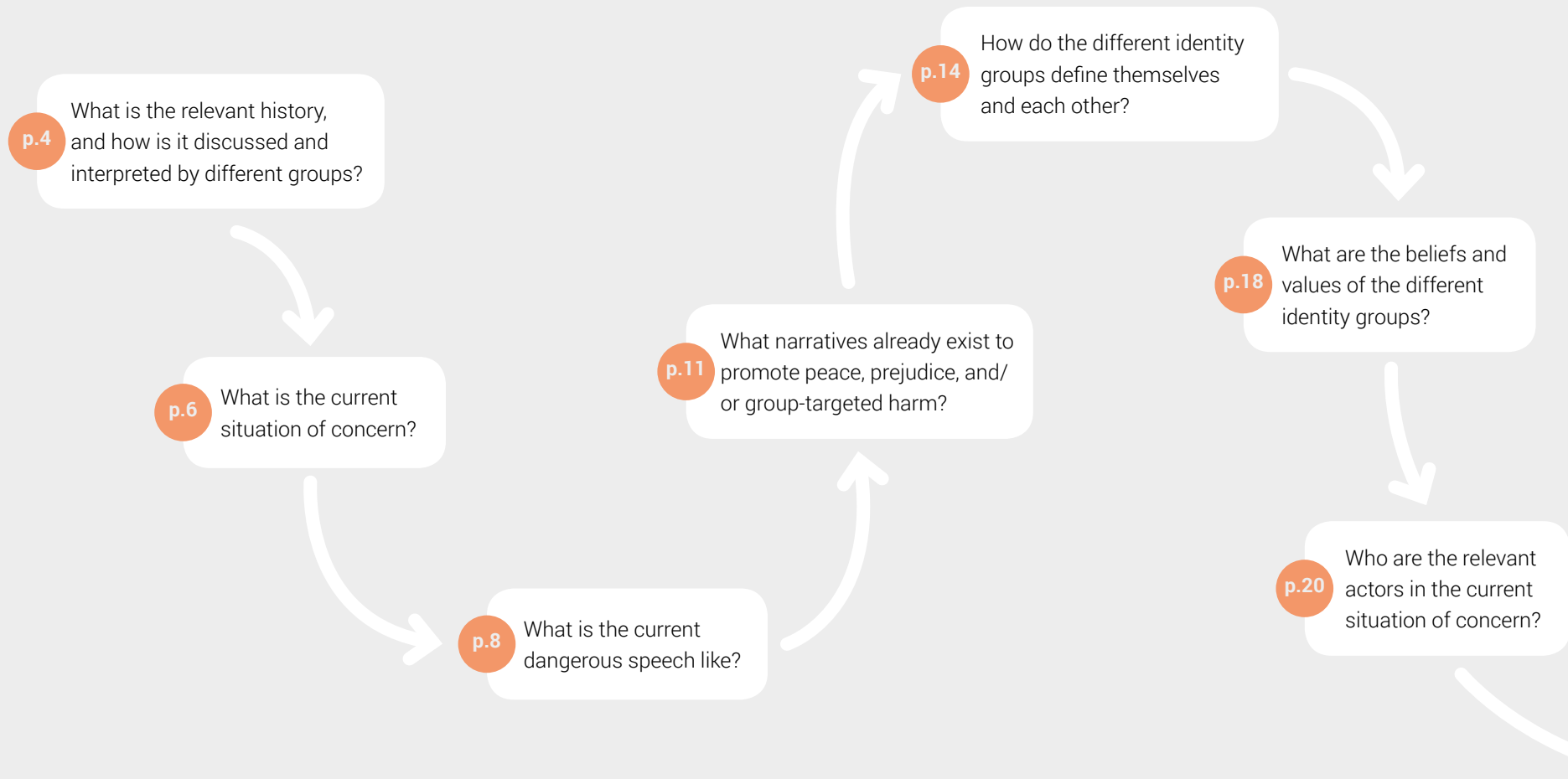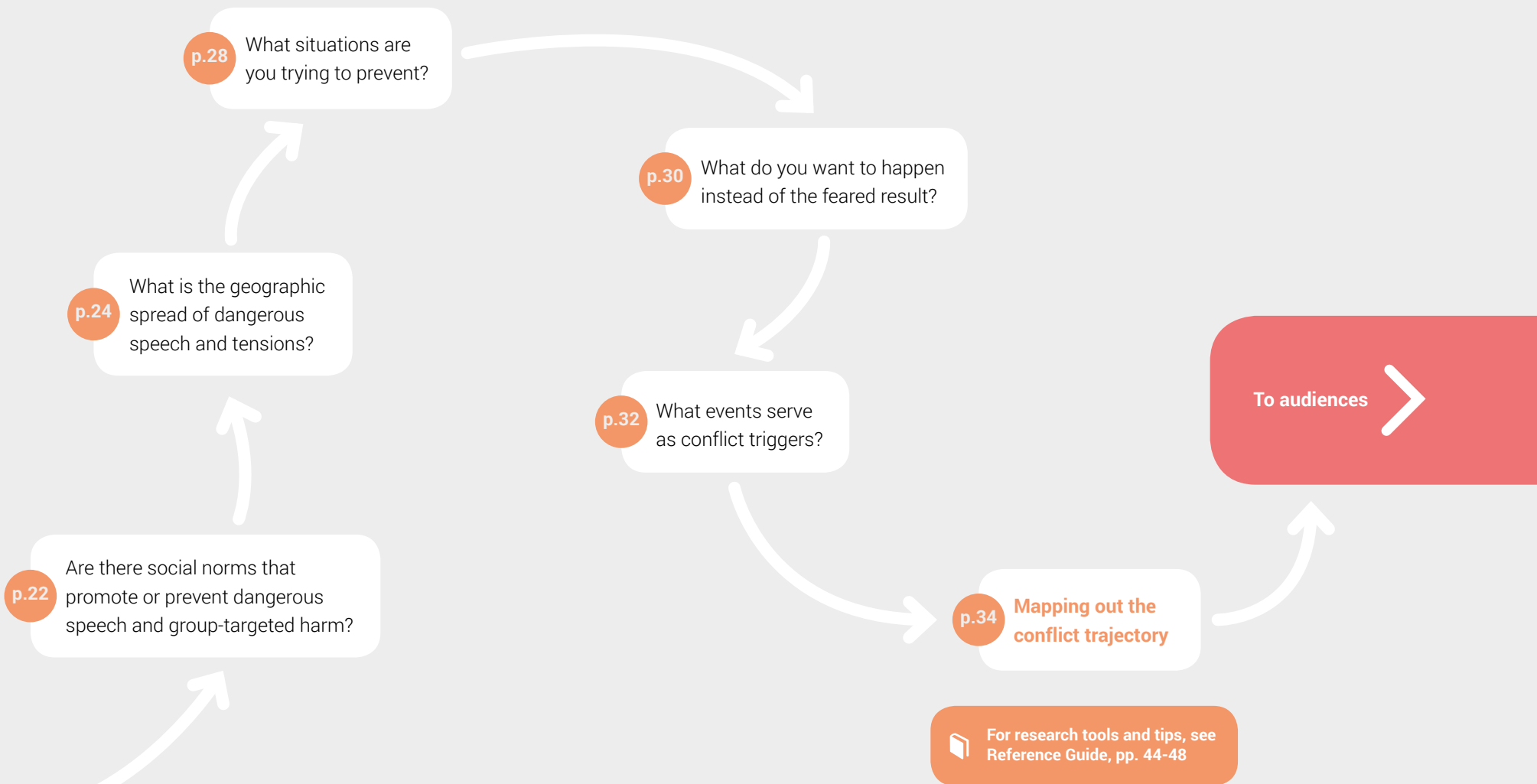
Phase 2
Select and Analyze Audiences

Phase 3
Select and Design Mediums, Speakers & Message Content

The journey ahead

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For research tools and tips, see Reference Guide, pp. 44-48

What is the relevant history, and how is it discussed and interpreted by different groups?

Understanding the historical context will help you:

- Understand how audience members interpret new information based on past events
- Identify stories, events, and metaphors that might be used in dangerous speech and to counteract it
- Avoid motivated reasoning*
- Understand how violence may be framed as morally right
- Understand historical grievances and narratives of blame

* When people hear new information that threatens or contradicts what they already believe, especially if it is about their group or identity, they are likely to reject that information and even to hold more strongly to their current beliefs. This is called motivated reasoning. For example, if an audience that believes its group has been historically victimized by another group hears someone say the other group has historically been peaceful, it likely will not believe that new information, will reject the speaker as not credible, and may become even more convinced of its victimization. Knowing how people interpret new information can help you avoid motivated reasoning.

What are the main historical events that are relevant to the current dangerous speech and/or conflict/tensions?

How are these historical events told and taught by each identity group? What stories surround them?

Is there a history of intergroup violence? If so, describe it.

How have the groups historically interacted over time? When have they been more moderate or extreme?

If you have any thoughts about the intervention design, note them and mark with a highlighter.

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What is the current situation of concern?

Understanding the current situation can help you:

- Identify situations your intervention will seek to prevent
- Create goals for your intervention
- Understand current challenges to your intervention

Are there events of particular concern?

Is there currently prejudice? How is it shown?

Are any groups currently targeted for economic, social, or physical harm or harassment?

What role do rumors play in how people get information?

If you have any thoughts about the intervention design, note them and mark with a highlighter.

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What is the current dangerous speech context?

Understanding the dangerous speech context will help you:

- Understand how dangerous speech is being spread and use this to inform your intervention strategy
- Identify influential mediums and speakers
- Understand what you're up against (e.g. what do people already believe?)
- Find potential partners
- Understand risks of counteracting dangerous speech

What is the general content of dangerous speech?

How frequent and widespread is dangerous speech?

How is the audience reacting (e.g., are people repeating dangerous speech)?

Who are the main speakers?

How is dangerous speech being spread (through which mediums)?

Are there any efforts to counter dangerous speech? By whom, and what is the response?

If you have any thoughts about the intervention design, note them and mark with a highlighter.

Narratives

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What narratives already exist to promote peace, prejudice, and/or group-targeted harm?

Understanding narratives will help you identify:

- Successful narratives you can build on to counteract dangerous speech
- Narratives that will be hard to counter
- Rebuttals that may be used against your intervention

What narratives already exist to promote prejudice and/or group-targeted harm?

Are these narratives effective? For whom?

What justification do these narratives give for group-targeted harm?

What is the content of these narratives (e.g., do they use dehumanizing language and/or stereotypes? frame the target group as a threat? what logical reasoning do they use)?

Who spreads these narratives?

What stories/myths/metaphors do they use?

Do these narratives say anything about moderates within the group that's speaking?

What narratives already exist to promote inclusiveness, tolerance, peace, and/or non-violence?

Are these narratives effective? For whom?

Who is spreading these narratives?

What arguments, examples, metaphors, stories, myths, facts, are used?

What arguments are being used to discredit or rebut these narratives? Are they effective and for whom?

If you have any thoughts about the intervention design, note them and mark with a highlighter.

How do the different identity groups define themselves and each other?

Understanding identities can help you:

- Understand references to groups based on stereotypes or characteristics
- Understand how groups see themselves (so you can build on their self image and avoid countering their beliefs)
- Understand how groups talk about each other
- Identify non-conflict-related identities that you can build on for your intervention

What are the main identities of the groups targeted as the audience for dangerous speech? How are they identified (e.g., by language, physical characteristics)?

How do they talk about their own group (e.g. what words do they use/what characteristics do they talk about)?

How do they talk about the group that's targeted for harm (e.g., what words, characteristics, etc. do they use? do they say the group is a threat)?

What are the main identities of the groups targeted for harm by dangerous speech? How are they identified?

How do they talk about their own group (e.g., what words do they use/what characteristics do they talk about)?

Are there non-conflict related identities (e.g. based on religion, professions, ethnicity, geographic origin) or groups? How strong are these identities?

How often and in what situations do the groups currently interact with each other? What are these interactions like? Are the groups connected to each other in other ways?

Are there differences in power, status, or resources between the groups?

What are the beliefs and values of the different identity groups?

Understanding beliefs and values can help you:

- Build on existing values in your message content
- Promote speakers who embody accepted values
- Avoid framing messages and positive goals with values that groups reject
- Avoid triggering motivated reasoning
- Use values to frame and discuss current events

Which values does each group prioritize and find important? What explanations do they give?

Which values does each group reject or look down upon? What explanations do they give?

What beliefs and values are used to justify or encourage prejudice? To reject inclusiveness and/or peace?

What beliefs and values are used to encourage inclusiveness and/or peace?

How does each group view violence, and what beliefs and values are associated with violence?

Who are the relevant actors in the current situation of concern?

Understanding the relevant actors can help you:

- Identify people whose speech you want to monitor
- Identify people who might pose a threat to your intervention
- Identify risks
- Identify potential partners

Who are the leaders in promoting dangerous speech and organizing discrimination or violence?

What is their capacity? What motivates them?

Who is offering support to these people, and what support are they offering?

What is the leadership structure of each identity group (e.g., religious, traditional, governmental)? What role are leaders playing in relation to dangerous speech?

Are there people who speak out against dangerous speech?

What is their capacity?

Are they facing any consequences for their actions?

What motivates them?

If you have any thoughts about the intervention design, note them and mark with a highlighter.

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Are there social norms that promote or prevent dangerous speech and group-targeted harm?

Understanding social norms will help you:

- Understand and compete with the social pressures people face
- Monitor whether norms are changing positively or negatively
- Figure out how to maintain and build on existing positive norms
- Develop strategies to change negative norms

* Social norms are informal rules that people believe about how people do or should think or behave. They can be understood as what people within a group think is socially acceptable and unacceptable (or normal and abnormal) in terms of behaviors and attitudes. Social norms exert social or peer pressure on people to behave in line with a set of unwritten rules.

Are there norms that promote, encourage, or normalize dangerous speech, prejudice, and/or group targeted harm? What are they and who feels pressured by them?

How are these norms promoted and enforced, and by whom?

Are there norms that promote inclusiveness and tolerance or discourage dangerous speech, prejudice, or group-targeted harm? What are they and who feels pressured by them?

How are these norms promoted and enforced, and by whom?

If you have any thoughts about the intervention design, note them and mark with a highlighter.

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What is the geographic spread of dangerous speech and tensions?

Understanding the geographic spread will help you:

- Define the overall scope of your intervention and the area you want to monitor or operate in
- Identify places to prioritize for monitoring and intervention
- Identify areas that are less violence-prone where you can operate with stability over the longest possible time period

What areas are likely to be hot spots (have a high level of group-targeted violence)?

Which places are likely to be bases for violent actors?

Where (which places) is group-targeted harm and violence likely to start first? What are the characteristics of these places?

Where is group-targeted harm likely to spread to second?

Are there places that are likely to remain stable?

Are there places that might become bases for defensive tactics by the targeted group, or where members of the targeted group might relocate?

If you have any thoughts about the intervention design, note them and mark with a highlighter.

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Key observations and insights

Capture any observations or ideas about each of the types of context that you want to remember moving forward.

Current context

Historical context

Dangerous speech context

Narrative context

Identity context

Beliefs & values context

Actors context

Social norms context

Geographical context

How will you stay aware of how the context is changing?

What situations are you trying to prevent?

In order to set clear, realistic, and targeted goals, it is important to first understand what situations you are trying to prevent. Because the focus of Dangerous Speech Interventions (DSI) is to prevent speech from increasing the likelihood of group-targeted harm, this means mapping out all the possible ways speech connects to group-targeted harm and collective violence.

This is a predictive exercise that will give you a full range of scenarios you want to prevent.

Use scrap paper, post its and markers to map out all of the possible trajectories leading from speech to group-targeted harm that you predict could happen. See p.29 for an example.

Out of all the scenarios you identify, pick one you want to focus on for your intervention. This can be a general trajectory that encompasses all of your more detailed trajectories, or a most likely scenario. **On pp. 35-36 you will find a complete Trajectory Map template to fill in according to the situation you decide to focus on.**

Map the key points of that trajectory into the Trajectory Map. The Map corresponds with the Audience Journey in the Audiences Workbook.

Trajectory map

STARTING POINT
What is happening?

EXAMPLE: There is a rumor that a member of Group X committed a violent crime

DEVELOPMENT #1
What is happening?

EXAMPLE: Key leader starts talking to large audiences in communities about Group X being a threat that must be dealt with quickly

DEVELOPMENT #2
What is happening?

EXAMPLE: Community members (information spreaders) start spreading information about Group X being a threat

FEARED RESULT
What is happening?

EXAMPLE: Concerned community members gather to discuss measures against Group X and proceed to commit violence against Group X

...
Add as many developments here as needed

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

What do you want to happen instead of the feared result?

How do you want your intervention to prevent the situation you are trying to prevent? What do you want to happen instead?

You have mapped out the specific trajectory from speech to group-targeted harm that you wish to prevent. If you are able to intervene throughout the timeline, what will change? What is the trajectory you want to happen instead? By being realistic in asking these questions, you can create clear goals for your intervention and a vision of what your intervention should aim to accomplish.

For each point in the trajectory you have decided to focus on, what would you like to happen instead? **On pp. 35-36 you will find a complete Trajectory Map template to fill in according to the situation you decide to focus on. The Map corresponds with the Audience Journey in the Audiences Workbook. Remember to be as realistic as possible.**

Trajectory map

STARTING POINT
What is happening?

EXAMPLE: There is a rumor that a member of Group X committed a violent crime

DEVELOPMENT #1
What is happening?

EXAMPLE: Key leader starts talking to large audiences in communities about Group X being a threat that must be dealt with quickly

DEVELOPMENT #2
What is happening?

EXAMPLE: Community members (information spreaders) start spreading information about Group X being a threat

FEARED RESULT
What is happening?

EXAMPLE: Concerned community members gather to discuss measures against Group X and proceed to commit violence against Group X

...
Add as many developments here as needed

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

EXAMPLE: Communities do not show up to events held by key leaders, and instead go about their daily business

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

EXAMPLE: Information spreaders do not spread (or question) claims that Group X is a threat that must be dealt with quickly

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

EXAMPLE: Few people listen to calls for action against Group X, and those who do are marginalized and unable to perpetrate any harm

What events serve as conflict triggers?

If you want to collect conflict triggers to monitor, you can identify the events on your trajectory that trigger each of the developments, and list them here. You can also gather triggers from the trajectories that you decided not to focus on, so that you will see if they are happening.

For each trigger, note key things you will watch out for in order to identify and respond to the trigger.

Trigger: (EXAMPLE: There is a rumor that a member of Group X committed a violent crime)

Watch out for: (EXAMPLE: what is being discussed at the marketplace)

Trigger:

Watch out for:

Trigger:

Watch out for:

Trigger:

Watch out for:

Trigger:

Watch out for:

Trigger:

Watch out for:

Trigger:

Watch out for:

Trigger:

Watch out for:

Trajectory map

What general scenario do you want to focus on?

STARTING POINT
What is happening?

This map corresponds with the Audience Journey in the next workbook (Select and Analyze Audiences). Copy or refer back to the completed map to use with the Audience Journey as you are filling it out.

DEVELOPMENT #1
What is happening?

DEVELOPMENT #2
What is happening?

DEVELOPMENT #3
What is happening?

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

DEVELOPMENT #4
What is happening?

DEVELOPMENT #5
What is happening?

DEVELOPMENT #6
What is happening?

FEARED RESULT
What is happening?

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?
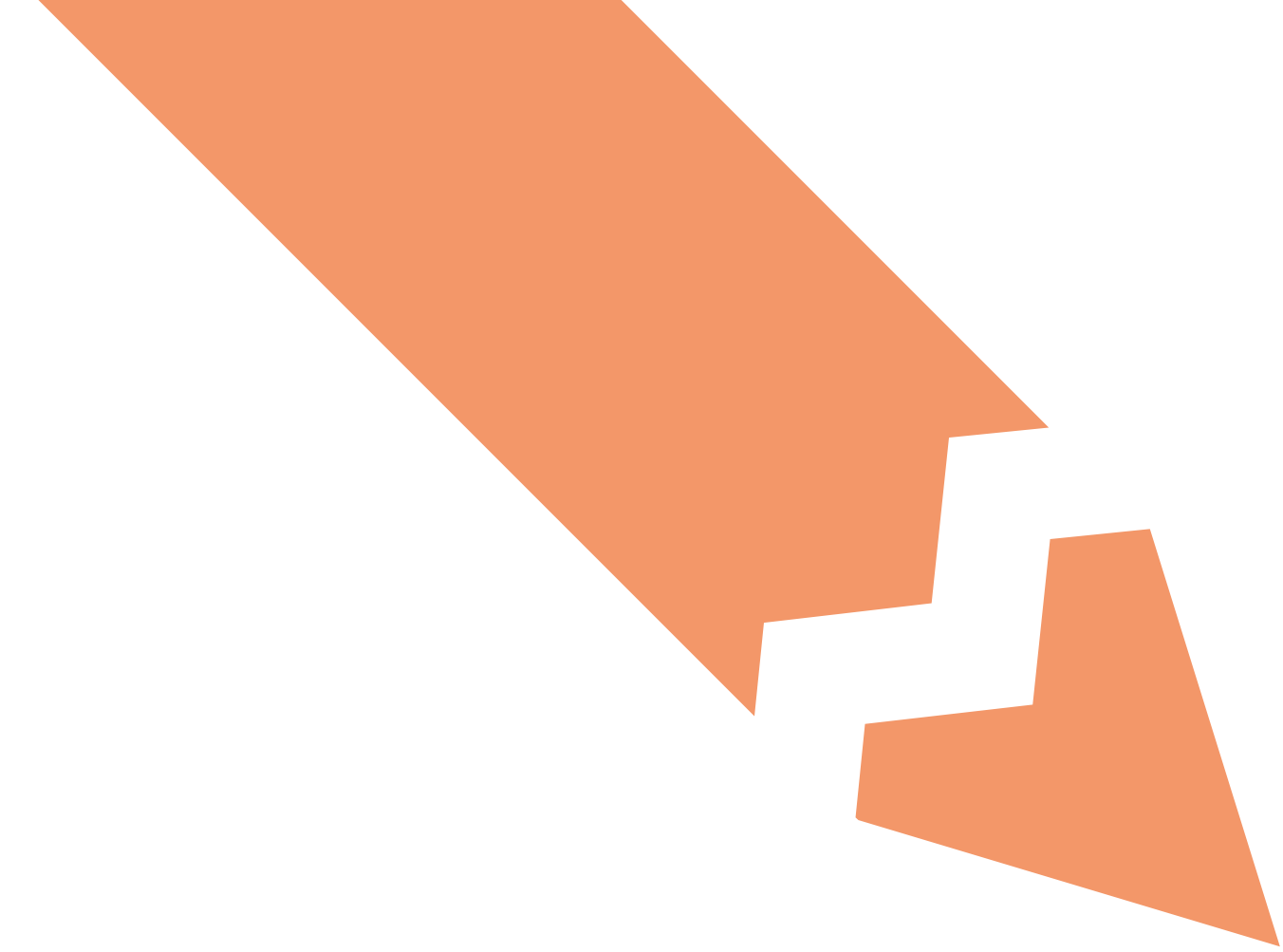
PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

PREFERRED SITUATION
What should happen instead?

By now, you should understand the key contextual factors that influence the impact of dangerous speech on its intended audience, and you should have gathered some information that can help you lessen or prevent that impact.

As you continue to work, keep referencing your previous steps. Iterate as new information or insights emerge.

In the next section you will develop a deeper understanding of the audience for your intervention.