

Practical Exercises for Journalists and Newsrooms

Directions

For use by individual journalists or in small groups (e.g., within a newsroom).

1. Legal & Emotional Risk Mapping Exercise

Objective

Understand the intersection of emotional impact and legal vulnerability in immigration coverage.

Participants respond based on an assigned or predetermined scenario (e.g., ICE raid, detention center reporting, immigration court).

- ① Ask each participant to identify:
 - Which aspects of the situation carry the greatest emotional weight?
 - What legal risks are present (e.g., exposing identity, interfering with enforcement, handling sensitive documents)?
 - What physical stress signals might emerge?
 - What ethical tensions arise between documentation and potential harm?
- ② Then create a short “risk map”
 - Before reporting (preparation, legal awareness)
 - During coverage (situational awareness, consent, identification risks)
 - After publication (impact on sources, legal repercussions)

A one-page “Legal & Emotional Risk Plan.”

2. Source Protection & Legal Exposure Plan

Objective

Prepare journalists to report on vulnerable sources while navigating legal constraints.

Identify common risks to sources when covering immigration:

- ① Have participants build a list, for instance:
 - Identifying undocumented individuals
 - Publishing images that might raise risk for individuals
 - Handling sensitive legal or personal documents

Participants create a Source Protection Plan including:

- ➔
 - What information should be anonymized or withheld
 - How consent is obtained under pressure or fear
 - When legal counsel should be consulted
 - What newsroom policies should guide publication decisions

Optional Prompt

What does informed consent look like when a source may not fully understand the legal consequences?

3. Ethical Stress Test: Visibility vs. Harm

Objective

Examine the consequences of making individuals visible in enforcement contexts.

Choose one scenario below (or come up with another germane scenario) and conduct an “ethical stress test.” Identify what you would publish, what you would withhold or modify, and why. Consider both the public interest and the potential consequences for the people being documented.

① Scenario prompts:

- Photographing individuals during an ICE raid
- Naming or showing faces of detainees or asylum seekers
- Reporting from inside or outside a detention facility
- Publishing details that could influence an active enforcement action

② Discussion:

- What are the risks to the subject if published?
- Does visibility serve public interest or increase harm?
- When might documentation be withheld from the public?

Draft a 3-sentence “Harm Minimization Protocol” for publication decisions.

4. Field Safety & Enforcement Interaction Protocol

Objective

Prepare journalists for encounters with federal agents and volatile enforcement environments.

Design a newsroom (or freelancer) protocol that includes:

- ①
 - How to identify yourself as press during ICE or federal operations
 - What to do if detained, questioned, or asked to stop recording
 - Safe positioning during raids or protests
 - Communication plans with editors (or other colleagues if not on assignment) during live enforcement events

Optional

If completing this activity as a group, then teams can role-play journalist–agent interactions.

5. Witnessing Power: Emotional Response Reflection

Objective

Process the emotional complexity of documenting state power and vulnerability.

Writing Prompt

- ①
 - How might it feel to witness a family separation, arrest, or detention?
 - Where do you locate yourself—as observer, witness, or participant?
 - What boundaries are necessary to maintain both empathy and professional clarity?

Optional

Sharing in groups, or as journaling for individuals.

6. Public Pressure, Polarization & Safety

Objective

Address the heightened hostility surrounding immigration reporting.

Discuss:

- ①
 - Risks of being targeted by political groups or online harassment
 - Filming in polarized environments (protests, border zones, in or near courtrooms)
 - Navigating accusations of bias or interference

Reflection Exercise

- ② Identify:
 - What pressures feel most acute (legal, political, physical safety)
 - What boundaries you need in the field or online
 - What institutional protections should exist

A “Field Protection Checklist” including:

- ➔
 - One personal safety boundary
 - One peer-support strategy
 - One newsroom policy recommendation

7. Immigration Coverage Toolkit

Objective

Build a practical, portable guide for fieldwork.

Tasks

Create a “Field Toolkit” including:

- ①
 - 1 strategy for protecting source identity in real time
 - 1 sentence to explain consent and risk to a vulnerable source
 - 1 legal resource or contact (editor, lawyer, organization)
 - 1 personal grounding technique during high-stress enforcement situations