

10 Tips for Improving Your Protection Working Group

By Major Cale W. Farquhar

The contents of this article do not represent the official views of, nor are they endorsed by, the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense (DOD), or the U.S. government.

This article was edited with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Final review and editing were conducted by authorized DOD personnel to ensure accuracy, clarity, and compliance with DOD policies and guidance.

The Protection Working Group (PWG) is one of the most critical battle rhythm events for the protection staff, yet many units struggle to make it effective. Misaligned priorities, unclear processes, and a lack of shared understanding often hinder the ability of the PWG to synchronize protection efforts with operations.

Recommendations from the PWG frequently fail to resonate with commanders, and the process for turning these recommendations into actionable decisions is often unclear. Risk—the language of commanders—is not always communicated effectively, leaving gaps in understanding and visualization. Additionally, the PWG may lack the right participants or inputs, such as representatives from the assistant chief of staff, intelligence (G-2) and the assistant chief of staff, operations (G-3), leading to flawed assumptions and decisions.

These challenges can marginalize the PWG and reduce its relevance to busy commanders. However, with deliberate effort and a focus on preparation and communication, protection leaders can transform their PWG into a powerful tool for integrating protection into operations. Following are ten proven tips to help you improve your PWG and better synchronize the protection enterprise:

1. Leave Your Warfighting Function Card at the Door

According to Army doctrine publication 3-0, *Operations*, warfighting functions are “a group of tasks and systems united by a common purpose that commanders use to accomplish missions and training objectives.”¹ Protection is not the sole responsibility of a single staff section or cell. Importantly, warfighting functions are not branch-specific.

Dogmatically aligning all responsibility for protection with a single staff section creates unnecessary stovepipes and fosters an “it’s somebody else’s problem” mentality. Instead, protection should be viewed as a shared responsibility across the entire staff. Participation in the PWG and other

battle rhythm events should be based on inputs and outputs, not on staff organization or affiliation.

2. Frame Protection Through A Risk Lens

Risk is the language of commanders, and framing protection activities in terms of risk provides a common vocabulary that builds shared understanding. By describing protection as risk, staff can tie priorities and effects to clear, measurable outcomes.

This approach moves protection away from being seen as a collection of disconnected tasks and toward integration into the operations process. It also helps planners identify activities where residual risk exceeds the commander’s tolerance, enabling the PWG to generate more meaningful recommendations.

3. Own Risk—and Clearly Communicate Tolerance

Commanders are responsible for defining risk tolerance and providing clear guidance to their staff. According to Army techniques publication 5-19, *Risk Management*, commanders must “provide appropriate guidance and ensure adherence to risk tolerance at all levels within the command.”²

Clear protection guidance from the commander should serve as the foundation for protection planning. Without this guidance, the staff risks diverging from the commander’s intent, leading to misaligned priorities and ineffective protection measures.

4. Drive the Protection Priority List Through Activities

To ensure that protection efforts are aligned with operational priorities, the PWG should use the designated main and supporting efforts to group capabilities, areas, and information into activities.

This activity-based approach avoids the tendency to focus on low-density systems and instead emphasizes

comprehensive protection of critical assets and operations. By aligning protection to operational priorities, the PWG can better support mission success.

5. Organize for Battle—Weighting Planning vs. Dynamic Execution

Effective protection planning requires experienced and respected staff members who can shape the overall planning effort. By dedicating skilled protection planners to the process, units can deeply integrate protection effects into operational orders.

This allows subject matter experts in the PWG to focus on changes to the red and blue situation and terrain, resulting in quicker and more efficient meetings. Additionally, the PWG must include representatives from all relevant staff sections, particularly G-2 and G-3. G-2 provides critical insights into emerging threats, while G-3 discusses mission priorities and changes.

6. Treat the Army as a People Business

For protection leaders to influence decision making, they must be physically present where decisions are made. Protection leaders who are disconnected from the planning process risk becoming faceless and irrelevant, relying on others to carry their message.

Instant access to decision makers is critical for conveying risk and building trust. Protection leaders must position themselves where they can directly influence the commander's decisions.

7. Nominate at the Right Echelon

The nomination process is often overlooked during early iterations of the PWG. Units must establish clear procedures for elevating requests for protection effects to higher headquarters and for receiving nominations from subordinate units.

Understanding timelines, information requirements, and risk tolerance ensures that no risks fall through the cracks. Nominations should not be limited to traditional protection measures but should also include targeting nominations to deny and degrade the enemy's ability to threaten friendly operations.

8. Focus on Options That Enable Decision Making

The PWG should focus on providing commanders options for decision making. While commanders often prioritize the order of assets on the Protection Prioritization List (PPL), this approach has limited impact on outcomes.

Instead, the PWG should frame decisions in terms of risk. For example, the PWG might categorize decisions into tiers by residual risk: the commanding general (CG) retains final decision authority on all risk assessed as high or extreme. The deputy commanding general—maneuver (DCG-M) holds decision authority for moderate risk, while the chief of protection is responsible for decisions on low risk. This approach allows the PWG to recommend mitigation measures at the

appropriate level while clearly communicating residual risk and the implications of changes.

9. Understand How You Get There

Understanding how a decision is made can sometimes be as difficult as making the decision. Units should clearly articulate the decision-making process, including timelines and venues for decisions.

Some units combine protection and sustainment decisions under the deputy commanding general—sustainment (DCG-S), but this can detach risk from operations and obscure it from the CG. Presenting protection decisions to the CG in an existing venue ensures better feedback and guidance.

10. Integrate Protection Before Line of Departure

Protection planning should not begin on the first day of execution. Starting the PWG during execution forces the group to play catch-up with battlefield events and the targeting process.

Instead, protection analysis should begin before the targeting cycle, allowing the PWG to bring target nominations for execution on day one. Proactive protection planning gives units the best chance to integrate protection effects into fires and achieve operational objectives.

Conclusion

The PWG cannot be treated as a pickup game. Protection professionals must invest time upfront to build a structured agenda focused on generating options and recommendations framed through risk. The PWG should include the right people and inputs, be physically present where decisions are made, and provide timely feedback to the commander. By implementing these recommendations, units can enhance their protection planning, better integrate protection into overall operations, and more effectively communicate risk to commanders.



Endnotes:

¹U.S. Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, March 21, 2025).

²U.S. Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-19, *Risk Management* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, November 9, 2021).

Major Farquhar is an Observer, Coach/Trainer for the Mission Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and a master's degree in engineering management from the Missouri University of Science and Technology, Rolla.