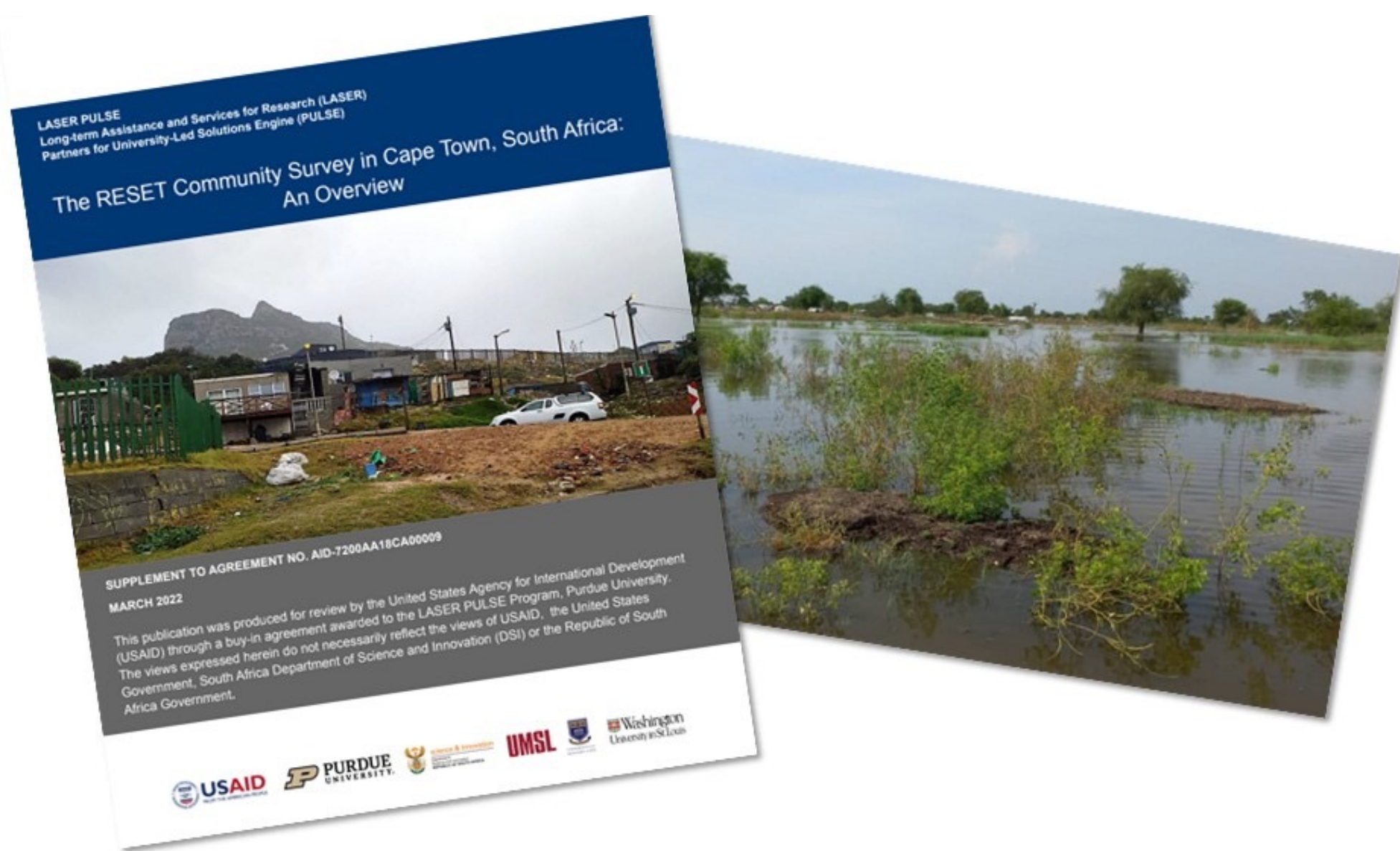# PURDUE
APPLIED RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Healthy Projects Plan for Risk

OVERVIEW

Purdue's LASER Pulse program (housed within Purdue Applied Research Institute) manages research projects overseas for the US Government, including USAID. The research teams are often dispersed and multicultural. They also work remotely from different countries. After two such teams suffered unforeseen setbacks, the Purdue project manager realized they need a simplified risk management tool to help newly-formed teams to communicate, plan, and make decisions about risk, while delivering project results.
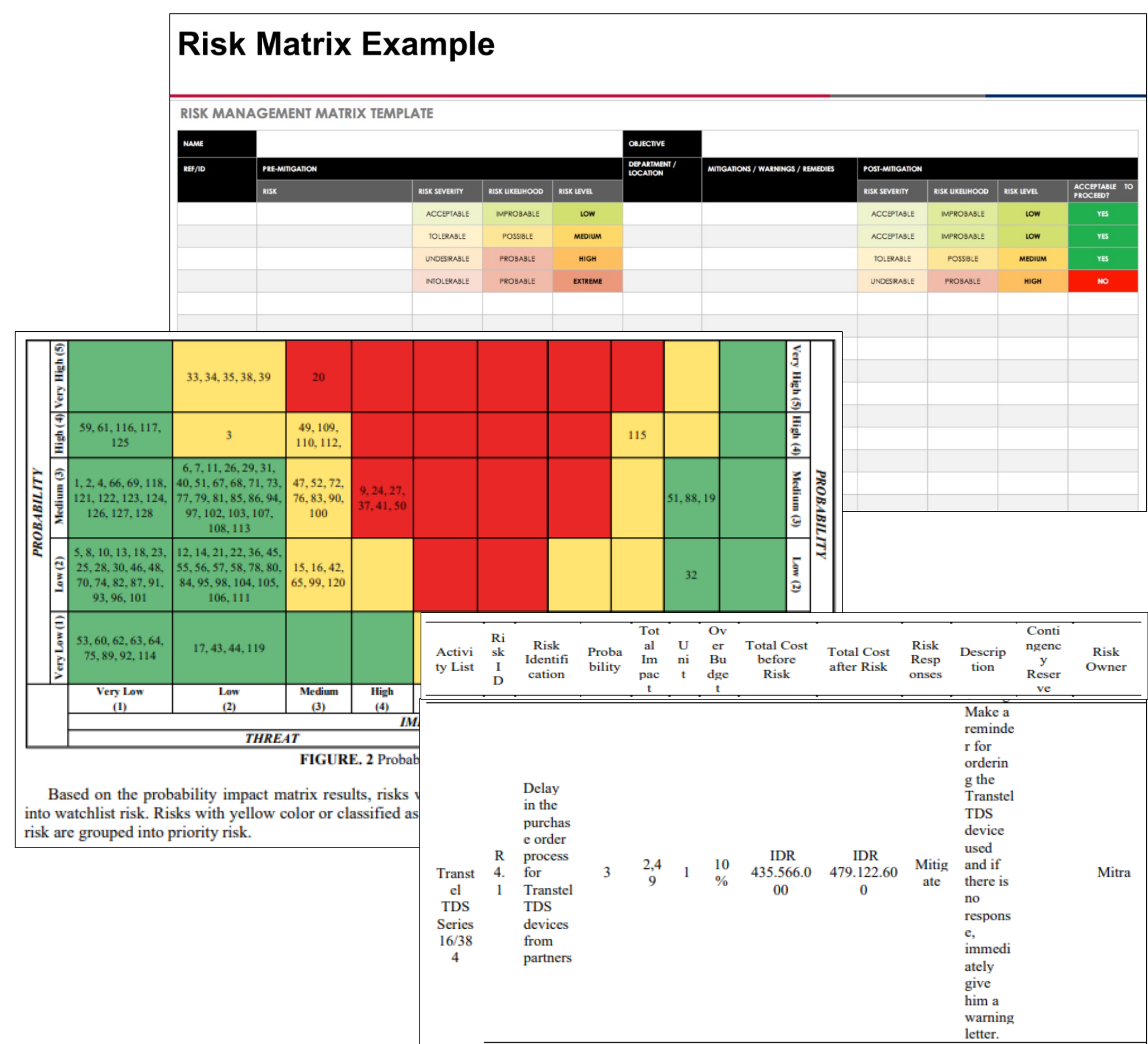
PROBLEMS

When a pandemic hit my organization's research in South Africa and when flooding in South Sudan jumbled our study's control group and intervention groups, it took intense effort to keep our projects on track. We had a unique long-term management challenge: How could our different research teams better plan for the uncertainties inherent in research?

METHODOLOGY

Searches through academic journals and online content provided some resources. The Project Management Institute also had materials, though few were suited to managing research projects. The three below were too detailed, too complicated, and too academic, and none helped newly assembled teams to gel.

During the search for resources, Purdue's Office of Risk Management came through with the best resource of all, via a contact at urmia.org. Most helpful was the risk domain lists at left. See inset

WHAT THE TEAMS NEED

Since the LASER Pulse team works through though Principal Investigators and research teams that are often working together for the first time, we need a risk management tool that would build team cohesiveness.

The tool also needs to have a strong decision element and it needs to help multicultural teams to think broadly through different project domains. They need to identify risk, decide on first steps, assign ownership, and decide on long-term steps.
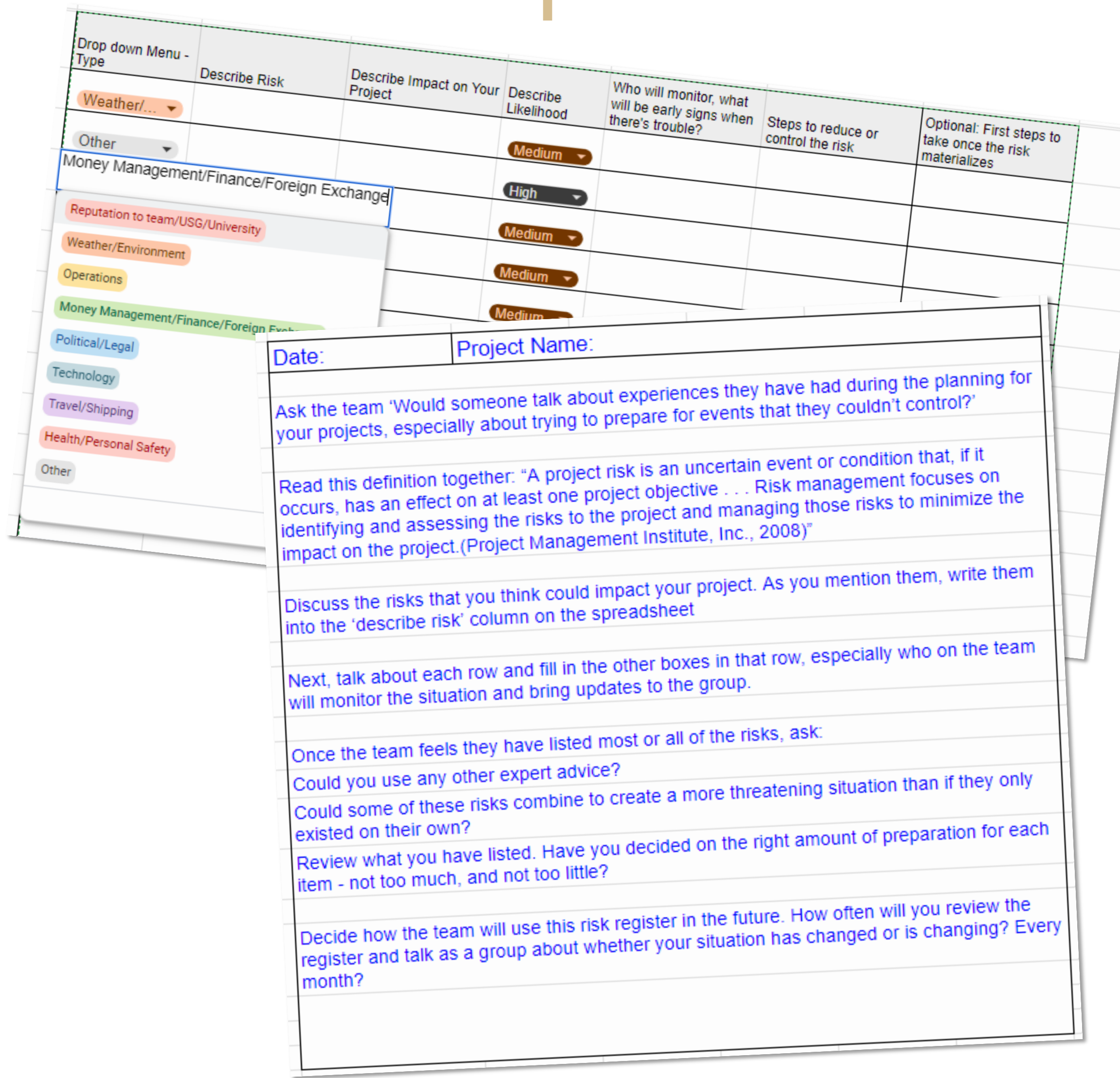
Finally, a successful tool would spark conversations that help them revisit and update their outlook throughout the full life of the project.

CONCLUSIONS

Research teams need a project management risk tool, and this one will be shared with other research teams across LASER/PARI-GDI and further refined.

Both trial teams have reported that they appreciated the tool as it led to helpful discussions and augmented their management of the research project. Trials haven't yet concluded, and they'll inform the next iteration of the tool. The chart categories will be adjusted with experience, and discussion steps will be fine-tuned.

AUTHOR: Ross Meyers **THANKS TO:** Purdue Libraries, Purdue Office of Risk Management

PROJECT RESULT

Building on the research, I designed a two-part risk management tool. It gathered key elements from other tools and added a drop-down menu listing different risk domains. Paired with this tool is a facilitation guide to help teams start conversations and set a shared risk definitions. It removes the focus on ranking the risk and puts the focus on preparation and team communication.

IMPLEMENTATION

The PARI GDI team has trialed the tool with a multi-country Mental Health project and with a Tech-related project in the Dominican Republic.

The first team realized they needed to address two understaffed research locations. They also discovered that a researcher on a Green Card needed to revise his travel plans. The second project says the tool has helped them and hope to develop a similar one to use with their office's finance team.

Download the Tool