



Developing a Crisis Communications Plan

Communications planning is critical, as with all fundamental business practices for nonprofit and for-profit organizations. The following focuses on some important steps and key considerations to address prior to finalizing a crisis communications plans for your organization.

1. Crisis communications plans should be prepared in advance
 - a. Use a thoughtful process
 - b. Engage stakeholders
 - c. Identify needs, expectations, audiences, responses, messages, distribution channels and protocol
 - d. A plan includes Internal Communications and External communications
 - i. Internal communications, e.g., key stakeholders and constituents - board, staff, members, partners, suppliers, vendors, sponsors and funders, bank and infrastructure services
 - ii. External communications, e.g., customers, community, media
 - iii. In crisis mode and without a crisis communications plan, you will become reactive and tactical in your response, rather than strategic and proactive
 - e. What is the purpose of your communications approach, e.g., Messages are about:
 - i. Product or service
 - ii. Business communications to staff, board, stakeholders, partners, sponsors and funders, etc.
 - iii. General reporting to the media about state of business and/or services
 - iv. Crisis communications
 - f. Identify all audiences
 - g. What information does each audience type need, and expect, to know?
 - h. Pre-determine messages
 - i. Determine how you intend to deliver different messages
 - j. Communications must be ongoing and be two-way (anyone can initiate)
2. Ongoing internal communications plan and process
 - a. Define expectations – audiences, information,
 - b. Define who and how – audiences and channels
 - c. Define frequency of communications
 - d. Define what is to be communicated regularly

Crisis communication is often considered a sub-focus of an organization's public relations function that is designed to protect and defend the company, organization, officers or staff facing a public challenge to its reputation, serious interruption of business, or negatively impacting organizational value. It is a part of larger process referred to as crisis management, though it may well be the major tool of handling a crisis situation in an organization or business.

Crisis Communications Plan

Ten Steps for preparing a Crisis Communications Plan

1. Identify the Crisis Communications Team
2. Identify spokespersons
3. Train spokespersons
4. Establish notification system and priorities
5. Identify and know your internal stakeholders and external audiences
6. Anticipate potential crises
 - a. What constitutes a crisis in your organization
 - b. What triggers a Crisis Plan into action
7. Develop holding statements for immediate release, e.g., positive value statement, investigating the situation, etc.
8. Assess the crisis situation
9. Identify key messages, including what to share and what not to share
10. Ride out the storm
 - a. Not everything will go as planned in the ways messages will be received
 - b. Do an objective assessment and decide if subsequent messages will improve or worsen the situation
 - c. Readjust as necessary
 - d. Follow-up when crisis is over

Create crisis communication protocol (approved by board and/or executive leadership)

1. Levels of approval
2. Who needs to know what?
3. What can be shared and what can not?
4. What are levels of priority?
5. When, and how quickly, do various stakeholders need to know?
6. Who is authorized to provide messages and communications from organization?
7. Who delivers what and who communicates to whom, e.g.,
 - a. Executive Director communicates to board chair and executive committee
 - b. Director of communications or CEO communicates with media
 - c. Who communicates to full board – CEO/ED or Chair?
 - d. Who communicates to staff, partners, funders, etc.?
8. Who can be interviewed?
9. Who to contact and reach for questions and response, including contact information
10. Fact sheets or messages to be delivered quickly, providing consistent and approved information
11. Timetable for deployment
12. After crisis evaluation, report and adjustment to plan and protocol as necessary
13. Follow-up media plan, as necessary, to repair image and any damage