

# What to Do When a Crisis Happens

Every organization should have a crisis communications process to help prevent, respond to and resolve a crisis. Being proactive rather than reactive will help you address the situation more quickly and effectively.

The following is a checklist of 10 considerations to help you build a crisis communications process for your organization.

## I. BE AWARE OF WARNING SIGNS

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- Set up Google News alerts for your organization and relevant keywords.
- Be aware of local news and issues that may impact your organization or that local media may call you for comment on.
- Direct employees and volunteers to share any phone calls, social media posts or messages, website comments or other communications touch points that may signal a concern.

## II. IDENTIFY AND ALERT STAKEHOLDERS

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- Determine what staff and internal stakeholders, such as board members, need to be alerted and what needs to be communicated to them immediately.

## III. ASSESS THE SITUATION

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- What is the issue?
- Who is affected?
- How did it happen?
- What additional information do you need to fully understand the situation?
- Who may need to be alerted?
- What is the media interest?

## IV. DETERMINE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND TEAM

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- Define the issue and determine the strategy for addressing the issue and communicating with external audiences.
- Determine crisis communications team and each individual's roles and responsibilities.
  - Who will take and log media inquiries?
  - Who will serve as primary spokesperson with external audiences?
  - Who will update stakeholders?
  - Who will monitor social media channels and media coverage?

## V. DEVELOP MESSAGING

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- Determine what information can be shared and with whom (such as staff and the media).
- Create holding statements and/or key messages specific to each audience.

## VI. DEVELOP PROTOCOLS

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- Provide appropriate staff members with protocol and messaging for answering phone calls.
- Notify all staff members to direct media questions to the specified person taking media requests. This individual should log all media requests but not provide any comment, as this request will be vetted by the crisis team for appropriate response.

## VII. REATE SOCIAL MEDIA PROCESS

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- Develop holding statement and/or key messages for response on social media channels.
- Determine protocol for responding to comments and posts on social media channels.
- Determine what messaging needs to be added or updated on digital media platforms, including website and social media channels.

## VIII. COMMUNICATE WITH THE MEDIA

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- Determine if a statement needs to be proactively released to the media.
- Ensure spokesperson is well-versed on key messages that can be shared surrounding this issue,
- including message on partner family confidentiality.
- Never speak with the media “off the record” – consider anything you share with the media to be on the record.
- Never respond with “no comment.”
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, say so. Don’t speculate. Promise to find the answer/appropriate person and follow up as soon as possible.

## IX. REGROUP

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- Monitor media, blogs, social media channels and other public communications platforms for
- ongoing coverage and conversations surrounding the issue.
- Determine strategy for ongoing updates to internal audiences.
- Evaluate strategy for ongoing status updates with the media and other external audiences through social media channels and website.
- Evaluate opportunities to strengthen organizational policies and procedures, including communications efforts, moving forward.

## X. EVALUATE HOW THE CRISIS WAS HANDLED

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- It is important to evaluate how the crisis situation was handled. Knowing what was done well and what could have been done better will only help refine your crisis communication process and make it more effective in the future.
- Assess media coverage, review the crisis communication protocol and actions taken with the crisis
- communication team, and evaluate each action taken.