

William B. Ogden Free Library
CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

Purpose

Crisis communication strategies are best planned before a crisis occurs. Preparing ahead of time ensures the Library Director and Board of Trustees are clear on roles and responsibilities in a crisis so they can act quickly, keep staff up to date, and increase the chances of minimizing confusion in the community and potential damage to the library's reputation.

Definition

A Crisis is a significant disruption that stimulates extensive news media coverage and public scrutiny that disrupts the library's normal business activities.

Some common elements of a crisis are that it:

- Occurs suddenly
- Demands a quick response
- Interferes with organizational performance
- Creates uncertainty and stress
- Threatens the reputation of the library
- Escalates in intensity
- Causes outsiders to scrutinize the library
- Permanently alters the library

Types of Crisis

Sudden Crisis: A disruption in the library's business that occurs without warning and is likely to generate news coverage.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Death, serious illness or injury of director, employees, contractors, visitors, etc.
- Interruptions of phone and utility service.
- Any natural disaster that disrupts operations and endangers employees.
- Workplace violence.

Smoldering Crisis: Any serious organizational or business problem that is not generally known within or outside the organization, which may generate negative news coverage if or when it goes public and could result in fines, penalties, legal damage, awards and unbudgeted expenses. A smoldering crisis may start with adverse government accusations, false accusations, indictment of an employee, lawsuit, damaging rumors, computer tampering, special interest group attack, whistle-blower threat or actions, activist demonstrations, terrorism threat, or damaging rumors.

Examples include but are not limited to:

- Indications of an undercover investigation by a news organization or law enforcement.
- Violations of government regulations, which could result in fines or legal action.

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- Action by a disgruntled employee, such as the disclosure of confidential information to government agencies or media.

Procedure

Responding to Bad News (i.e. budget cuts, trimmed hours, hacked computer system, etc.).

- Don't overreact.
- Be strategic.
- Speak with one voice.
- Understand interview topics and formats before accepting interviews.
- Focus on solution.
- Apologize when appropriate.
- Have all of the facts before responding.
- Prepare briefing material.
- Have a lawyer review statements before releasing them.
- Stick to the high road.

Crisis Communication Plan

- Fashion a response with key messages that are consistent with the library's mission.
- If there is going to be a response, choose the appropriate tactic to deliver the message.
- Choose the appropriate communications channel to deliver the message to key audiences.
- Develop a written response and release it through traditional and new media.
- Manage reaction to response.

Crisis Team: The Board of Trustee Officers and Library Director.

- Members of the Crisis Team who are directly involved in the crisis, may be replaced by someone appointed by the remaining members of the team.

Crisis Team Action Plan

- The team will discuss and analyze the crisis.
- Agree on next steps.
- Create a response.
- Review response with legal counsel, if necessary.
- Assign an internal point person from the crisis team to handle calls from media and facilitate contact with spokesperson.
- Inform key decision makers of the crisis implementation plan.
- Implement the response.
- Advise relevant staff about the results.

Reference

Handbook for Library Trustees of New York State
American Library Association

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