TEMPLATE for a Crisis Communications Plan

KEY INFO AT A GLANCE
[YOUR ORGANIZATION'S] Crisis Communications plan outlines key staff and leadership roles, responsibilities, and procedures to guide the organization in quickly and accurately sharing information during a crisis.

In this plan, a crisis is defined as a significant event or incident that disrupts or has the potential to disrupt normal operations. A crisis could also damage our reputation or financial performance or harm the well-being of patrons, employees, the surrounding communities, or the environment.

The Crisis Communications Team includes individuals with a critical role in responding and supporting the response to a crisis.

This plan includes key audiences such as [LIST KEY AUDIENCES INCLUDING STAFF, LEADERSHIP, PARTNERS, MEDIA, PATRONS, etc.].

The Crisis Communications Plan is comprised of communications strategies, which are messages that we want the public to hear or see:
● Actions we are taking
● Key facts
● The story we want people to remember about us (What we've stood for all these years, we will recover, etc)
● Reassurance (We are doing what we can to solve this problem; we will reopen stronger than ever, etc)

And communications tactics, which are the tools used to disseminate strategies:
● News media
● Social media
● Interpersonal media
● Organizational media (our website, email, and social media)

OBJECTIVES OF THIS PLAN
● To prepare our organization to manage communications to our key audiences in a crisis.
● To be able to respond in a unified, professional manner.
● To manage the distribution of timely, sensitive information.
● To strategically enhance understanding of the value provided by our organization/libraries.

What is a crisis at [YOUR ORGANIZATION NAME]?
As an agency, we monitor what's happening in public libraries around the state to understand how their situation(s) make ALL of us look, particularly any implication that we as public libraries don't use funds correctly or wisely. Crisis may include a crime happening at our organization, loss of funding, reports of bad customer service, and more.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM
The guiding principle of the Crisis Communications Team is to communicate incident facts accurately and quickly, updating information as circumstances change to ensure safety, transparency and continued operations.

In a crisis, the team will immediately meet to factually assess the situation and determine whether crisis notification communications are warranted.

Additionally, the team will:
● Define immediate actions needed to inform key audiences about the situation.
● Communicate in an accurate and timely manner about the situation.
● Meet regularly to reassess the situation.
● Monitor all media coverage and manage rumors.
● Restore a sense of confidence and/or order.

The Crisis Communications Team will review and update this plan as needed.

Crisis Communications Team members:
● Organization leader
● Other leadership as determined by crisis
● Communications Director
● Legal Department, if needed
● Other representatives as determined by the situation

CRISIS RESPONSE
The Crisis Communications Team will consider the following questions as they assess the situation:
● What is known, and who already knows it?
● Who on staff needs to be involved?
● Is there public interest?
● What immediate steps need to be taken?
● What are people feeling - what emotions need to be considered?
● What can and CAN'T be said?
● Is legal counsel needed?
● What channels will be used to communicate a response?
● Who are the key audiences that need to be contacted, by whom, and when?

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS POLICY
1. All crises should be immediately reported to a manager and the state librarian.
2. Only the organizational leader and communications director are authorized to release information to the media and to the public. All other staff can be helpful by connecting media and other stakeholders to those authorized on behalf of our organization.
3. To reaffirm: All media inquiries should be referred to the communications director to manage.
4. If an answer is unknown or can't be immediately answered, take note of the question and contact information, tell the journalist we will get back to him or her, and do so. "No comment" is not an acceptable response. If the question can't be answered because of a policy, such as sharing personnel information, let the journalist know.
5. Responses should be proactive and action-oriented whenever possible.
6. Maintaining effective media relationships is important to bolster public confidence in libraries as a whole.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

These are the steps to manage a crisis.

1. (If an emergency) Ensure safety of all staff and site. Call 911 if necessary.
2. Notify organizational leader.
3. The Crisis Communications Team assesses the situation.
4. Before communicating publicly,
a. Determine lead person to ensure all tasks are complete – likely director of communications.
b. Determine a key spokesperson to answer all media and other inquiries.
c. Assess the situation to determine facts.
d. Determine appropriate response.
e. Create a plan of action for internal and external communications.
f. Develop factual, detailed messages (see page 4) that reflect the status of the crisis, organizational response, and if possible, steps to resolve the situation.
g. Prepare talking points and provide a script for the person answering the general phone line.
h. Determine if a press release, web, and/or voicemail updates are necessary.
i. Assess what resources are necessary to manage the crisis (press conference, cell phone availability, etc.)
j. Appoint staff to contact key audiences as necessary: [LIST KEY AUDIENCES.]
5. When going public:
a. Call critical internal audiences first.
b. Begin media and other external audience outreach
c. Update website and organizational voicemail
i. Administrative staff will monitor voicemail and refer to the communications director as needed.
d. Evaluate the effectiveness of the message as the situation progresses
e. Monitor the media and social media and respond as necessary
i. The communications manager will monitor social media and post updates/responses in coordination with the Crisis Communications Team.
ii. Communications manager to update the website as needed, in coordination with Crisis Communications Team.
iii. The communications director will monitor media and respond as needed, coordinating with the Crisis Communications Team.
f. Determine means to update key audiences with ongoing information
g. Distribute post-crisis communications
6. Evaluate crisis communications efforts
a. The Crisis Communications Team will meet to discuss lessons learned, messages that worked well, and what we need to update.

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFO

List staff list and contact info here.

KEY MESSAGES

The Crisis Communications Team will develop factual, responsive messages and a script for the staff person who answers organizational phone number and voicemail. These messages should be prepared for media inquiries, updates and proactive outreach to critical audiences.

Messages should be clear, consistent, timely, concise, and authentic. They should reinforce the positive and be as action/solution-oriented as possible. Messages should also reflect ORGANIZATION'S overall key messages, including:

● [LIST KEY MESSAGES].

Additional considerations for media:

● All media inquiries should be referred to the communications director to manage for state librarian.
● Consider what media know about the situation and what their potential interest is/will be in reporting.
● Ensure messages are factually accurate before sharing.
● Consider tough questions and all potential questions to prepare answers for them.
● Consider what else may be useful to prepare/share, such as
a Web page
o Fact sheet
o FAQ
● If necessary, consult with public library directors to ensure consistent messages.

COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS
● [LIST RESOURCES HERE]
● Strategic plan
● Holding statement
● Template web page