WORLD SCOUTING

Crisis Communications Planning for NSOs



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Introduction to Crisis Communications

Crisis communications refers to the process of managing communications during a crisis or emergency situation. The basic principle of crisis communications is to provide timely and accurate information to stakeholders, such as staff, volunteers, partners, donors, the media, and the general public. During a crisis, effective coordination is required between various stakeholders involved.

Some key elements of crisis communications include:

- **Preparation:** It is important to have a crisis communications plan in place before a crisis occurs. This should include a plan for communicating with stakeholders, mapping out potential risks, and identifying the key messages that should be conveyed during a crisis. It is also important to have the right team with relevant experience in place to help manage the crisis as it unfolds.
- **Speed:** During a crisis, it is important to communicate information as quickly as possible, but with some degree of caution so as not to overlook important details. A timely and speedy approach helps to prevent misinformation from spreading and ensures that stakeholders have the most up-to-date information.
- **Transparency:** It is important to be open and transparent during a crisis. This helps to build trust with stakeholders and demonstrates a commitment to honesty and accountability.
- **Empathy:** Crisis situations can be difficult and emotional for those involved. It is important to show empathy and compassion towards those affected by the crisis.

By following these principles, organisations can effectively manage communication during a crisis and mitigate any negative impacts.

How to Use this Resource

The purpose of this Crisis Communications Planning resource is to support National Scout Organizations (NSOs) and their leadership to be prepared to respond to an emergency issue or crisis situation in a timely and effective manner.

This resource provides guidance about why NSOs need a crisis communications plan, different types and levels of crisis scenarios, standard operating procedures and checklists for managing a crisis, and provides details about how to build a crisis response team and develop an action plan to respond to a crisis. This resource also provides guidance for managing media relations and social media during a crisis and provides sample statements for the media that can be adapted for use in a crisis situation.

NSO leadership can use this resource to develop their own crisis communications plan and put in place a crisis response team and standard operating procedures to mitigate the risks associated with a crisis, while protecting the reputation of your NSO and Scouting in your country and beyond.



Why a Crisis Communications Plan Matters

In today's fast-paced, digital world, a crisis can spread quickly having both an impact on Scouting in your country and putting your NSO's reputation at risk. A crisis can also impact the global Scouting community and brand. As a result, it is important to be prepared. Here are a few reasons why crisis situations in today's environment can happen more regularly and accelerate faster:

- **Shift in public perception of non-profit organisations:** Non-profit organisations today experience greater scrutiny from the media, partners and general public. Non-profit organisations used to benefit from the value of their mission to "do good" in the world, but this is no longer enough. There has been a considerable shift in how non-profit organisations are perceived and trusted. This shift can greatly affect how your NSO's messages and responses in a crisis are received by young people, parents, volunteers, partners, media, and other key stakeholders.
- **Speed of news**: With the rise social and digital media, there is now a 24/7 news cycle that has no physical boundaries. This means that a story relevant to one market can quickly break into another market across the world through both traditional and social media. The speed of news can impact how fast a crisis can spread beyond your NSO's control, and make it more challenging to manage the reputation risks associated with the crisis.
- **Fake news and misinformation:** The sharable nature of social media platforms can allow fake news and misinformation to spread quickly, and widely. Unlike most traditional media outlets, information shared online is not always fact-checked and often contains controversial, polarising or "clickbait" stories to generate interest. This means that even false or outlandish stories about your NSO or Scouting in your country can drive interest, spread quickly, and create long-lasting damage to your organisation's reputation.



- **Cancel culture:** Today the general public is less patient and less accepting of individuals, businesses, and organisations who make - or are perceived to make - a mistake or misstep. These errors can sometimes lead to a public outcry for people to "cancel" their support for a person, business, or organisation. The speed at which cancel culture is happening to organisations, especially those with a long history and legacy, has increased rapidly over the past several years.
- **Identity politics:** Identity politics means that people of a certain race, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social background, or other aspect of identity develop political agendas to defend and uphold their identity, and often cannot be swayed by rationale or arguments to change their opinion. Identity politics can affect your NSO when influential people who might have a particular political agenda, take a specific position, and mobilise their supporters against your organisation or Scouting in your country. This is especially problematic when that political agenda may not be grounded in truth or fact.
- **Accountability and transparency:** Considering these other factors, the general public demand a greater level of transparency and accountability from non-profit organisations. This means that your NSO needs to be willing to address what has gone wrong, be accountable for the situation, and own the response. Organisations that are suspected of covering up or holding back information can be at risk of causing far greater damage to their reputation.

A strong crisis communications plan can help your NSO mitigate the risks associated with these factors, and enable you to respond quickly and effectively to a crisis or emerging issue that may impact Scouting in your country or Region.

A good crisis communications plan will further enable your NSO to manage a crisis as it unfolds, and communicate clear and consistent messages that are in line with your mission and values (for example: service, preparedness, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect, trust). Ideally, your NSO's crisis communications plan should also adhere to your organisation's Code of Conduct and Safe from Harm policies.

Crisis Communications Principles

In all crisis situations, there are some common communications principles that your NSO can follow when developing an action plan and key messages for response:

Clear and consistent messages: Sharing clear and consistent messages from credible leadership in your NSO is vital to building trust and managing a crisis situation. When there are inconsistencies or inaccuracies in your messaging, this can erode trust and confidence in how your organisation is handling the crisis. When audiences hear the same message from multiple leaders in your organisation, the more likely they are to feel it is genuine and authentic. When audiences receive unclear, confusing, or conflicting messages from different leaders in your organisation, this can prolong a crisis and dramatically impact your NSO's reputation and credibility.

The best place to get started with your messaging is your organisation's values - not communicating them, but acting on them. Your values will inform how you behave, what you say, and how quickly you recover from the crisis.

- **Accountability and transparency:** Today, we are operating in an environment that is increasingly critical and suspicious of messages that are not perceived to be authentic and transparent. To establish credibility, your NSO must be willing to acknowledge its wrongdoings and challenges, as well as celebrate its successes and achievements. This can be extremely difficult but often any negative impact of being accountable and transparent in the short-term can lead to an increase in trust and credibility for your organisation in the long-term.

  However difficult the circumstances may be, tell the truth, and tell it often so that people come to you for facts. Remember that if you don't communicate, someone else will – and they may not have your best interests at heart.

- **Focus on impact and action:** It is very common for non-profit organisations to rely on their vision and mission when delivering crisis messaging. However, often your audience wants to hear "less talk and more action". The public today is generally critical of statements that signal your organisation's intentions and will more likely judge your NSO on the specific actions that it is taking to resolve or mitigate a crisis, as well as the impact that these actions will have on the people and communities involved.

  Don't forget that addressing a crisis requires action more than just communications. Put right what's gone wrong, and tell people (or even better, show them) what you are doing to make things right

- **Share internally first:** In the event of a crisis, it is important that key internal stakeholders, such as staff, board members, parents, and volunteers, receive internal communications about a crisis and potentially damaging stories before they are published or shared externally. Sharing information internally first can include sending an email a few minutes before a public announcement or flagging a negative media article before it is published. By doing this, your NSO will have better control over the narrative and be able to emphasise the crisis response messages you want others to hear, which may or may not be communicated in the story. Sharing information internally can also be an opportunity to remind staff and board members of the procedures for managing a crisis and responding to media.

  As you do this, also ensure that your designated spokesperson(s) is/are adequately briefed and be ready to offer them the necessary support throughout the crisis period.

Types of Crisis and Levels of Alert

A crisis is any issue that represents a threat to the strategic objectives, reputation, or existence of an organisation. A crisis can be an emergency that demands urgent attention, or it can also be an issue that may seem small at first, but which can be associated with an ongoing pattern or lead to longer-term issues.

There are many types of crises and no two crisis situations are exactly the same. Various types of crisis may include:

- **Financial** - financial mismanagement, fraud, bankruptcy, bribery, corruption
- **Operational** - restructuring, poor succession planning, data privacy breach, litigation
- **Wrongdoing** - scandal, indiscretions, cover-ups, harassment, abuse
- **Physical** - accident, fatality, natural disaster, humanitarian crisis, wars or civil unrest, health emergencies
- **External** - government regulations, fundraising, partnerships
- **Communication** - organisational position, staff or volunteer opinions, fake news, misinformation



The level of a crisis situation may range from one that may have a limited impact on your NSO or Scouting in your country, to one that will may have a severe impact. Each crisis situation requires a different level of preparedness, response, communications, and action by an NSO's leadership and members of the crisis response team.

Level of Alert	Crisis Conditions
 **Low**	• Minimal reputation risk to your NSO and Scouting in your country • Confined to a specific individual, Scout group, or community • Key audiences and stakeholders not widely aware of the situation • No media coverage or interest externally • Other NSOs not necessarily aware of the issue • Situation may be managed reactively
 **Medium**	• Moderate reputation risk to your NSO and Scouting in your country • Affecting more than one Scout group or community • Key audiences and stakeholders aware of the situation, but are not reacting yet • Issue may be a sensitive topic or part of a pattern that can escalate further if not managed • Some other NSOs may be aware of the crisis and its impact on them • Likely to gain some media coverage or interest • Some coverage or posts on social media referencing the issue • Crisis response team to meet and determine a response • Situation may need to be managed either proactively or reactively
 **High**	• Severe reputation risk to your NSO, Scouting in your country and the Scout Movement • Affecting many communities nationally, regionally, or globally • Key audiences and stakeholders aware of the situation and contacting your NSO for response • Issue may be a sensitive topic or have significant impact on your organisation's operations, funding, legal status, etc. • Majority of other NSOs aware of the crisis and its impact on them • Significant media coverage and interest that requires an immediate response • Story spreading quickly and widely on social media • Crisis response team to meet urgently and determine a response • Situation will need to be managed both proactively and reactively

Building a Crisis Response Team

A crisis response team is comprised of key staff and volunteers within an NSO that are integral in responding to a crisis or emerging issue. A crisis response team is responsible for implementing a NSO's crisis communications plan, working together to respond to the crisis, and evaluating the impact and results of the response after the event and recommending post-crisis corrective measures.

A good crisis communications plan should identify the key staff and volunteers who are part of the crisis response team, highlight the roles and responsibilities for each member, and identify other key stakeholders that may need to be informed or engaged in the event of a crisis. The following roles within your NSO may be good candidates to join as members of a crisis response team:

Role	Responsibility
International Commissioner or Chief Scout	Responsible for the overall interests, reputation and management of the organisation
Chairperson or member of an NSO's Board of Directors	Responsible for representing the interests and advice of the Board of Directors
Person responsible for communications, branding, and marketing	Responsible for convening the crisis response team, maintaining the crisis register, developing key messages, and managing the overall crisis response and communications
Person responsible for media or public relations	Responsible for managing media relations, developing media statements, and preparing spokespeople to talk to the media
Person responsible for social media management	Responsible for managing communications on social media (including publishing and moderating comments or engagements)

Role	Responsibility
Person responsible for human resources	Responsible for providing human resources guidance and advice, and support communication to staff
Person responsible for legal management	Responsible for providing legal guidance and advice
Person responsible for financial management	Responsible for providing financial guidance and advice
Person responsible for education programmes	Responsible for providing education programme guidance and advice
Person responsible for volunteer management	Responsible for providing guidance and advice about communicating with and involving volunteers in the crisis management process
Person responsible for Safe from Harm	Responsible for implementing Safe from Harm policies, and providing guidance and advice about child and youth safeguarding
Person responsible for events	Responsible for managing the operations and logistics of national and district/local events and ensuring crisis communications plans are in place for all events
Person responsible for partnerships and fundraising	Responsible for managing relationships and communications with partners, service providers and donors

In some cases, the same staff or volunteer may fill multiple roles within your NSO. The type and nature of a crisis situation will determine which members of the crisis response team will be involved in responding to a situation.



Responding to a Crisis Situation

Generally, a crisis situation may be broken down into three levels of alert: low, medium, and high. When a crisis is identified, the crisis response team is responsible for coming together to determine the type of crisis and level of alert, as well as developing a plan of action to respond to the crisis.

The crisis response team is also responsible for determining the key partners, donors, volunteers, Committee members or other stakeholders that need to be informed or engaged based on the level and severity of the crisis.

The following outlines the key steps in the standard operating procedure or protocol for the crisis response team to respond to a crisis:

01 Step One: Assess the Crisis Situation

If a crisis situation appears to be a medium or high level of alert, the person responsible for communications, branding, and marketing at an NSO may call for a meeting with members of the crisis response team that need to be involved in responding to a crisis.

The person responsible for convening the crisis response team may first try to determine the answers to the following questions:

- **What is the type of crisis and level of alert?**
- **When and where did the crisis happen?**
- **Who is involved or affected by the crisis?**
- **Which stakeholders are aware that the crisis is happening?**
- **Is the crisis likely to escalate or spread further?**

If the answers to these questions indicate a medium or high level of alert, the person responsible for convening the crisis response team will want to bring other members into the process to validate their assessment, and answer the following additional questions:

- **What actions were already taken (if any) to intervene or stop the crisis from happening?**
- **Has this crisis happened before? If so, where and when did it occur?**
- **What risk(s) does the crisis have on our NSO and Scouting in the country?**
- **Is there any media interest or coverage of the crisis?**

02 Step Two: Develop a Plan of Action

The crisis response team develops a plan of action based on its assessment in step one so that it can monitor the crisis situation as it unfolds and respond in a timely and effective manner. The crisis response ream determines a plan of action by asking the following questions:

- **How should we monitor traditional media and social media to stay informed about the crisis in real time?**
- **Who do we need to inform about the crisis, both internally and externally?**
- **What key messages do we need to communicate about the crisis to each audience?**
- **What organisational policies, procedures, position papers, or other communications can we use to develop our key messages and inform our response?**
- **How do we need to communicate those key messages to each audience? Which communications channels or formats will we need to use?**
- **In which language(s) do we need to communicate our key messages?**
- **When do we need to communicate our key messages to each audience in the next 6, 12, 24, 48 and 72 hours?**
- **Do we need support from WOSM to help manage the crisis?**

As part of developing a plan of action to respond to a crisis, the crisis response team should also take time to specifically discuss their approach to communicating key messages and managing the crisis on social media and with traditional media. Some questions to ask in the process may include:

- **How should our key messages and response to the crisis be adapted for social media?**
- **What content or key messages (if any) need to be shared and on which social media channels?**
- **When does this content or key messages need to be shared on social media in the next 6, 12, 24, 48 or 72 hours?**
- **What social media policies, procedures, or good practices can guide our approach to managing the crisis online?**
- **How should we respond (if at all) to traditional media inquiries?**
- **What key messages do we need to communicate to media?**
- **What format should we use to best to deliver those key messages to media (for example: a holding statement, news release, press conference, interviews, etc.)?**
- **Who is the spokesperson (or spokespeople) best positioned to respond to the crisis?**
- **How can we best prepare the spokesperson (or spokespeople) to speak to media about the crisis?**

After answering these questions and developing a plan of action, the crisis response team should then develop key messages and other supporting communications materials to get the organisation's message across to key audiences. If the crisis situation requires communicating with the media, an appropriate spokesperson or spokespeople should be identified and briefed with the key message to respond.

Ideally, these spokespersons or spokespeople should be part of the crisis response team so they are adequately informed about the crisis situation. Other members of the crisis response team should direct all media inquiries to the person responsible for managing media relations, and not comment directly to media.





Spokespersons should be chosen based on their levels of previous experience with the media, credibility, and knowledge of the crisis issue, and their level of authority. In most cases, a designated member of the crisis response team should serve as a spokesperson, however, in some cases, the spokespersons for a crisis may be different depending on the audience and stakeholders that need to be addressed.

Importantly, not all crisis situations require you to do media relations, and not all media requests for interviews need to be granted. Each crisis situation will require a unique approach.

03 Step Three: Monitor, Evaluate, and Revise the Plan of Action

After assessing the crisis situation and developing a plan of action, step three is to monitor and evaluate the situation in real-time, and revise the plan of action accordingly as the Crisis Response Team is presented with new information. It is important that the plan of action is flexible to adapt to the changing situation as a crisis unfolds.

A designated person from the crisis response team should lead the process to document the event, identify key lessons that can be learned and applied to future crisis situations, and determine any important follow up items that need to be put into action. Questions to guide the process may include:

- **How are we monitoring traditional media and social media to stay informed about the crisis?**
- **How are we keeping key audiences informed and updated on the development of the crisis and our response?**
- **Do we need to change our plan of action to adapt to new information being presented in relation to the crisis?**
- **What lessons did we learn in responding to the crisis that can help inform future responses and organisational changes?**
- **How well did we implement our plan of action and how effective was our response?**

Importantly, the outcomes of a crisis response may go beyond demanding improvement in communications alone, and may also consider improvements in other areas of an organisation. It is critical that these outcomes and recommendations for improvement are also documented and shared with relevant decision-makers for appropriate action.

By following these three steps and answering the guiding questions outlined in this resource, your NSO can be well prepared to respond to a crisis, and manage its impact on your organisation and Scouting in your country and sometimes, beyond your country.

Producing Crisis Communications Statements for the Media

Producing crisis communications statements for the media requires careful consideration and planning. These statements should be clear, concise, and accurate, and should be designed to mitigate the negative impact of the crisis on your organisation's reputation. It is important to have a plan in place for how to handle crisis situations and to have a designated spokesperson who can speak on behalf of the organisation and provide updates, as needed.

Effective crisis communications also involves actively listening to and responding to the concerns of stakeholders, including the media and social media community. It is important to be transparent and to communicate openly and honestly in order to build trust and credibility.

Producing crisis communications statements for the media is an essential aspect of crisis management, and requires careful planning and effective communication strategies in order to effectively navigate and resolve the crisis.



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