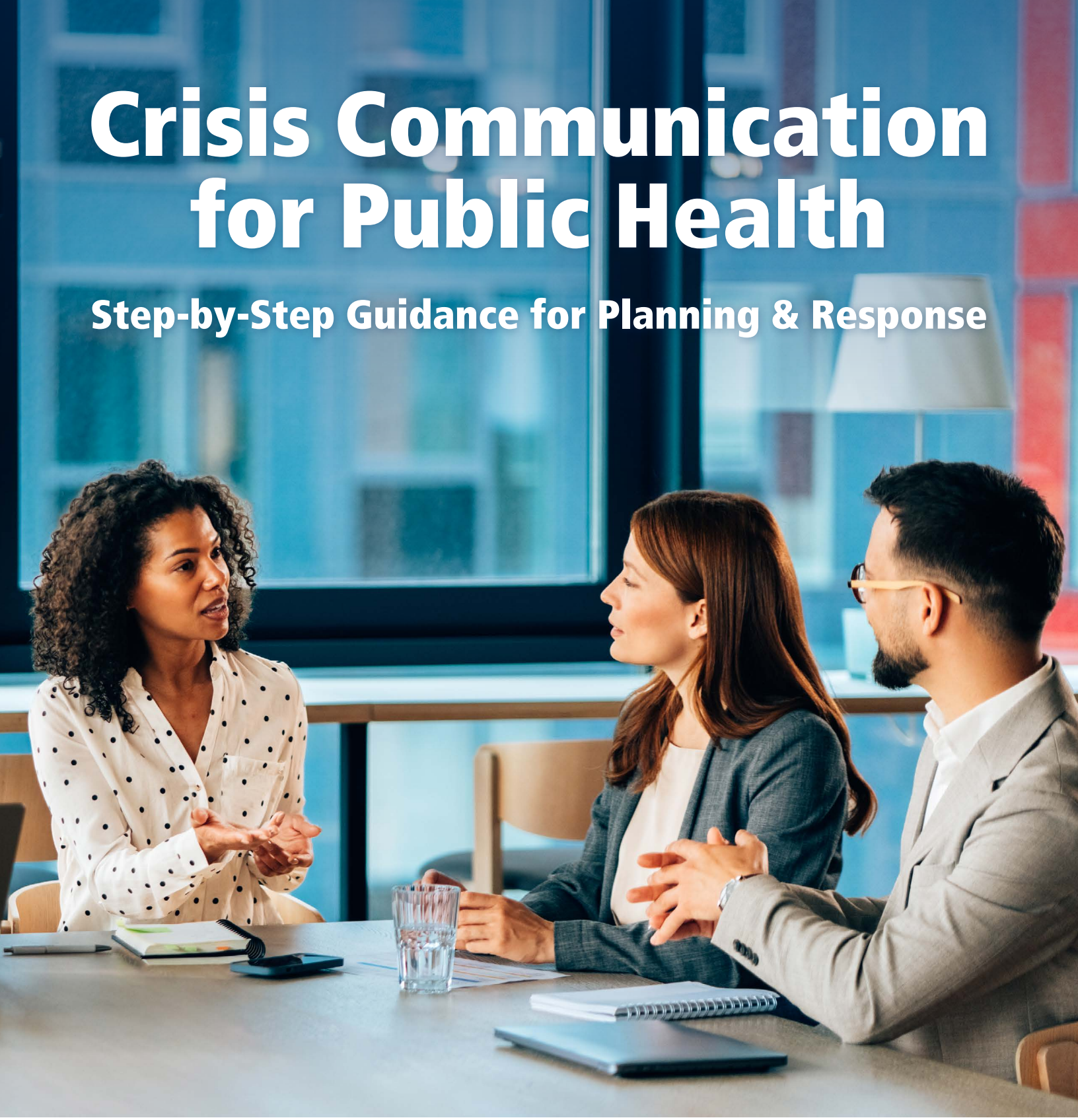
Crisis Communication for Public Health

Step-by-Step Guidance for Planning & Response



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APHA
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION
For science. For action. For health.

Introduction

Responding to public health crises: The what, when and why

What is a public health crisis?

A public health crisis is an event or situation that has the potential to put many people's health at risk, physically or emotionally.

When and why do they happen?

Often, a crisis stems from factors outside of your association's control. Sometimes though, you may have a scenario involving an internal misstep.

Examples of public health crises:

- **Outbreaks:** Flu, measles, exposure to tick-borne diseases, food recalls
- **Misinformation:** Trends on traditional and social media, third parties actively sharing anti-public health rhetoric
- **Emergency alerts and advisories:** Boil water notice after a water main break, severe weather alerts (e.g., heat waves, poor air quality from fires, contaminated water from flooding)
- **Social:** Loneliness epidemic, opioid crisis, other systemic challenges
- **Infrastructure:** Closing down of school health systems or federally qualified community centers, overwhelmed services, internal data breach
- **Media-related:** Quotes taken out of context from an interview, or an interview that's gone sideways
- **Miscommunication between partners** that may exacerbate a situation



Public health crises are inevitable, and managing one is not a matter of ***if***, but ***when***. While you can't predict the details of a crisis, having a communication plan ready beforehand protects your team's capacity, helps you respond with confidence and builds community trust.

The first step in becoming prepared is identifying a core group of response leaders in advance of a crisis. This ensures that when a situation arises, you can quickly and clearly get accurate information out ahead of conjecture and avoid situations that would increase confusion and decrease credibility.

Next, ask yourself, "Do I need to respond to everything?" The short answer is, "No." The longer answer is more complicated, of course, and depends on the scale and severity of active and potential factors. Every crisis is different, and the worksheet on Threat Assessment can help you determine whether to respond.

The response, however, should center these six crisis communication principles, from CDC's Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication guidance. Build a crisis communication plan that allows you to responsibly act on these:

1. Be first
2. Be right
3. Express empathy
4. Promote action
5. Show respect
6. Demonstrate transparency

How to use this guide

This guide was created for the APHA-Affiliated state and regional public health associations in response to the current (2026) public health landscape. However, the guide may be applicable to other public health nonprofit or governmental agencies. It is not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive.

You know your organization, partners and the community you collectively serve best. Use this information to help develop a plan and approach that's right for your association's unique needs, so that you can succeed in the above.

This guide is broken into the following sections:

1. Crisis Response Checklist
2. Preparation: Before a Crisis
3. Action: During a Crisis
4. Evaluation: After a Crisis
5. Additional Resources

Crisis Response Checklist

Before: Prepare your team

Teaming

- ☐ Build your team*
- ☐ Decide if you'll need contractors or external team members
- ☐ Decide on backup team members
- ☐ Articulate expected roles and responsibilities

Assembly

- ☐ Designate who will initiate the crisis communication meeting
- ☐ Assemble your team
  - ☐ Decide how the team will communicate together before, at the start of and during an event
  - ☐ Decide where and how the team will meet (online, in-person, etc.)
  - ☐ Choose a backup meeting location or time
  - ☐ Create an organizational chart showing processes and who will contact whom
  - ☐ Gather and confirm contact information for all team members
  - ☐ Ensure everyone has a dated digital and physical copy of the most current organizational chart and communication plan

During: Taking thoughtful and timely action

Assessing

- ☐ Pull the response team together to decide on action
- ☐ Verify the origin of crisis information
- ☐ Assess the level of threat
- ☐ Collectively agree on next steps, including whether to respond to the crisis or continue observing as the situation unfolds

If responding, develop communication assets

- ☐ Define your communication objective for the crisis, what you want to achieve by responding
- ☐ Develop a call to action that answers your communication objective and guides the audience on what they need to do

**Depending on capacity and size of your team, one person may play multiple roles.*

- ☐ Identify your priority audience
- ☐ Identify your secondary audience, if needed
- ☐ Strive to answer key questions to define your messaging objectives
- ☐ Develop messaging that speaks to your audience's specific needs and concerns
- ☐ Audit current communications for reuse of any relevant material
- ☐ Identify any needed changes to current material so it can be used as supporting information in the crisis

Engaging partners

- ☐ Identify and confirm trusted messengers
- ☐ Update organization stakeholders
- ☐ Practice how the messengers will engage the media

After: Evaluate and update the plan

Assessing

- ☐ Bring the team together to review the crisis communication plan and response
- ☐ Discuss key metrics for communication goals, such as message effectiveness, behavior change, identification and counter of misinformation, public trust and credibility through an evaluation exercise
- ☐ Make updates to the plan as needed

Preparation: Before a crisis

"Failing to plan is planning to fail."
– (not Ben Franklin!)

Developing a plan and process

The goal in any crisis scenario is to be responsive, not reactive, by developing a plan and process. This includes building your communication team; creating and maintaining a contact sheet; knowing how to assemble; and designing parameters for initiating a response.

1. Build your crisis communication response team



Assemble a team that is responsible for and accountable to the outcomes of the crisis. Your crisis communication team acts as trusted points of coordination both internally and externally. Not everyone will be communicating with the public, but everyone will be coordinating with the agreed-upon outcomes in mind. Depending on how you typically operate, your response team may comprise association staff and board members, as well as members of partner organizations, members with relevant expertise and community leaders. Some people may play multiple roles.

Also, not everyone on your crisis communication response team may get "called up" for a crisis response. Each event will dictate which members of your team will need to be part of a response.

Keep the size of your response team manageable. General roles[1] are typically divided between:

- Making the decisions and final judgments
- Interacting with the media, engaging on social media, communicating via established methods (i.e., newsletter, website)
- Directing and managing public engagement
- Coordinating partner and stakeholder information activities
- Developing content and material related to the public health emergency

1 Based on CDC CERC Crisis Communication Plans pages 21 and 22.

Consider having trusted subject matter experts on your team who can provide informed third-party expertise, especially on regionally relevant topics. Additionally, if capacity is severely limited, consider committing a trusted communications or public relations contractor who can supplement your crisis communication team as needed. If you don't have those relationships, now is a good time to start developing them.

Third parties, like those above, should be carefully weighed:

- **Potential benefits:** A recognized expert in a relevant field can provide credibility. Sometimes, someone who is not the "official organization" can be a more appropriate messenger for your audience.
- **Potential risks:** Contractors may end up unavailable, have a conflict of interest, or not adhere to protocol.

2. Create and maintain team contacts, roles and responsibilities

All crisis communication team members should have a clear understanding of their expected role (or roles) and responsibilities, the response protocol and team members' contact information. This information should be reviewed, revised and updated regularly.

Note: Make sure to coordinate with partner organizations so they include your response team's contact information in their own communication plans and you have their current contact information as well.

Make communication pathways as accessible as possible:

- Create or update the organizational chart so everyone involved can quickly find key resources. Include it in your crisis communication plan.
- Include telephone numbers and after-hours contact information in the notification list.

3. Know how to assemble

Clearly lay out how the response team will come together in the event of a potential crisis.

- Who will initiate?
- How will team members be notified? This could be by making a phone tree or choosing a specific app for communicating (e.g., WhatsApp, Signal, Slack, Messenger).
- Where will you engage? This could be an in-person meeting, or one held virtually (e.g., via phone, Skype or Zoom).
- Who are the members of the back-up team, and how will they be brought into the team?

4. Design parameters to initiate a response

Identify possible scenarios your organization might face. For example, an organization could be spreading misinformation around vaccine safety.



Next, determine what criteria would require a response. Ask yourself:

- Does the situation directly affect or harm our association, or anyone?
- What do we gain by responding?
- Is there a potential risk to our people, operations, or reputation if we stay silent? If so, what is the nature of that risk?
- Is misinformation spreading something that we are well-positioned to clarify?

More guidance in the Threat Assessment section.

Now that you have prepared for a potential crisis response, you're responsible for maintaining these documents. For instance, if you identify a new potential scenario, add that to the plan, along with the criteria for initiating a response to it.

Worksheets

- Identifying your team
- Assembling your team

Action: During a crisis

Your team has determined to examine whether a public health crisis warrants a response from your organization. You'll want to activate your team and assess the threat.

1. Activate response strategy

Assemble the response team as decided and agreed upon in your Crisis Communication Plan. The team will need to determine whether or how to act.

2. Conduct a threat assessment

The first step to strategic, intentional and responsible communications is assessment. Before anything, audit the situation. Understand where your crisis information is coming from and weigh the risks of responding or not responding —risks for your association, partners, or communities being served.

Verification

Get a clear sense of the origin of the information prompting you to consider activating crisis communications. Ask:[2]

- Is the source credible?
- Is it from a formal or informal channel, and can it be confirmed?

By taking time to source the information, you play an active role in reducing the spread of misinformation.



2 Based on CDC CERC Crisis Communication Plans pages 33 and 35.

Assessing the threat

If you've confirmed that the information comes from a legitimate and credible source, you will then run a threat assessment. This is a series of questions that help you decide whether your organization needs to activate a crisis communication response protocol. Assessing the threat is key to maintaining intentional communications and minimizing reactivity.

Ask:

- Does the situation directly affect our organization, and the people or communities we serve?
- Does it impede our mission?
- Does it pose danger or threaten to harm anyone? If so, who, and how?
- Do we have a necessary and credible role to play in addressing this situation?
- Do we have a responsibility to address this situation?
- Is there a potential risk to our people, operations, or reputation if we stay silent? If so, what is the nature of that risk?
- Is there misinformation spreading that we are well-positioned to clarify?
- Will our audiences or stakeholders (internal and/or external) expect us to address the situation?
- Do we have accurate, verified information to share?

If you answer YES to two or more of these questions, activate your crisis communication response protocol. If you've answered YES to one of these questions, and there is no immediate danger to the organization or the communities it serves, then consider keeping an eye on the situation. You may feel the need to activate a response team in the future.

There are also scenarios where your organization is not best positioned to respond. Consider asking a partner organization for their help, or offer to support their response efforts.

Once the team determines a response is warranted, you'll need to….

3. Develop Communications

Define communication objectives

The broad goal for any crisis communication is to reduce confusion, correct misinformation, and demonstrate leadership.

With that in mind, your team will need to decide the key goals of the crisis communication effort at hand.

Ask: *What do you want to achieve by responding?* Do you need to set the record straight (misinformation)? Minimize exposure (outbreaks and contamination)? Direct people to resources (extreme weather)?

Audience

Determine your priority audience. Whether it is a specific community, the local media, or association members, remember that your communications will ultimately land in front of the general public. Because time is critical, choose one audience to focus on so you can get that messaging right. Once your priority audience has been addressed, you can move on to others if time and capacity allows.

Call to Action



Your call to action is an important part of your messaging that **states what your audience needs to do in order to reduce risk for themselves and others** and identifies the defined crisis communication objective. More than anything, this is what you want your audience to take away from their interaction with your communications.

Use the *head-heart-hands* approach to determine what you want from your audience, and how it serves the response goal.

- **Head:** Are you trying to establish credibility as a source of information?
- **Heart:** Are you trying to connect/feel at a personal level?
- **Hands:** Are you trying to activate or do something?

Keeping your ask clear and to-the-point will encourage more participation.

Easy to use framework for a call to action (CTA):

1. **The "One-Action" Rule:** Give exactly one primary thing to do per message.
2. **Remove obstacles to act:** Don't make your audience search for the action you want them to take. For example, if you want them to visit a website, provide a direct, clickable link (or a short, easy-to-type URL).
3. **Be specific with time and place:** Instead of saying, "Check back later," say "Our next verified update will be posted here at 4 p.m. EST."

How you message your CTA will be informed by the type of situation at hand. Understanding the action needed, along with who your audience is, will help you develop this in a way that resonates and drives action. Values-based messaging is important here.

Messaging

Get clear on what you need to say. This doesn't necessarily mean what YOU think needs to be said. Rather, consider this question: "What do people need or want to know about what's happened?"

Note: It's okay not to have all the answers upfront. You can always say that you are assessing the situation and gathering information and tell them you will circle back as soon as you can.

Knowing your audience and what motivates them is key here. If you want more information about messaging to specific audiences and emergencies, see page 4 of CERC's primary audience concerns.

Decide how to answer these key questions:

- Why is this a risk, and how serious is it?
  - Who's impacted and how?
- What's the most important thing to know right now? *(This includes how your organization and partners are course-correcting, if an internal misstep is part of the conversation.)*
  - What's being done currently and what happens next?
  - Do people need to do anything?
  - Where can they go to learn more?

Example

The de Beaumont Foundation shares important points about conveying public health information:

- Use plain, everyday language and avoid complex medical terms when you can.
- Use short sentences and start with the most important information.
- Use an active voice so it's clear who is taking action. For example, say, "X organization collected the data," rather than saying, "The data was collected by X."
- Use "you" to speak directly to your audience.

Depending on the situation, take time to consider what opposing messages are also being shared. It's important to address those messages and redirect people with the verified information you have.

Assess and assemble assets

Before developing any new material intended to support or supplement your message, audit what you already have available to you. Depending on capacity, this can be listed and kept updated within a crisis communication plan itself. Assess current content and decide if it can help deliver on your particular crisis response objective, either for use as-is, with modifications, or to inform new material.

You may already have topic-related communications such as:

- A position statement
- Content on your website or social media account
- A fact sheet
- A past press release

Use these materials as a launching pad. It will save time drafting while also helping you remain consistent in your position.

Also, consider the format. See if your existing materials can be adapted for specific communication channels so that you don't keep reinventing the wheel (e.g., Can parts of your factsheet be tailored for social media use?).



4. Engaging partners

Messenger

Successfully communicating your crisis response and achieving its communication objectives is just as much about *who* shares the message as it is about the message itself. Your messaging and materials will resonate most effectively if presented by a person or organization that your audience accepts and trusts.

That will not always be the Executive Director or another senior member of your organization. It could be a community and business leader, a partner organization, or someone else, depending on the scenario. Messengers trusted by your audience are especially important to leverage in situations where misinformation is persistent.

Depending on the scenario and relationship, your messenger may help you hone your message to ensure audience acceptance.

Ongoing stakeholder updates

Separate from your audience outreach, someone on your response team will be responsible for keeping your association's stakeholders informed and updated regularly. This could be a Board of Directors, funders, or internal staff.

If you are part of a coalition, make sure that those organizations are also informed about the situation and your decision to respond, and ask for alignment on their part. Sharing conflicting messages during a crisis will exacerbate the crisis.

Staying on message with the media

Being prepared to navigate opposing messages and even opposition is especially important when you are interacting with the media. Have key points ready and practice redirecting questions. Importantly, stay calm, listen and don't rush your response.

Example position statements, from CERC:

- **Flagging:** *"What's important is to remember…"*
- **Bridging:** *"I can't answer that question, but I can tell you…"*
- **Reframing:** *"Let me put that in perspective…"*
- **Closing: "***Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers…"*

By systematically assessing the threat, identifying strategic communication objectives and engaging trusted partners, your organization can execute a response that is intentional, timely and credible. This structured approach helps minimize confusion and upholds public trust.

Worksheets

- Threat assessment
- Defining messaging objectives
- Developing effective messaging
- Media practice

Evaluation: After a crisis

Once the crisis is over, you're done, right? Wrong! The time following a crisis is an opportunity to improve your plans and update potential scenarios and messaging.

1. Evaluate



After responding to a crisis, your team will be exhausted and need time to rest and recover. But the work isn't done after the threat subsides. While the response is still fresh, bring your team together to review the plan and your response efforts. At minimum, evaluate whether your organization:

- Met your communication goals in a timely manner.
- Delivered accurate key messages that reached your intended audience(s).
- Took accountability for any missteps.

A communications director or manager can lead this step. If your team lacks dedicated communications staff, a subject matter expert can step into the lead position. Designating a specific team member to oversee the evaluation helps establish clear accountability.

Evaluation is a critical component to maintaining effective crisis communication plans. Write out the lessons learned from your communication strategies and approach, as well as how to adapt them for future use.

Dig deeper when possible. The Public Health Communications Collaborative details key metrics for communication goals, including:

- **Message effectiveness:** What was the reach? Did people react to your messaging the way you intended?
- **Behavior change:** Did people take action as directed? Did they learn to protect themselves from the risk?
- **Identifying and countering misinformation:** Were you able to track and manage it? Were you able to stop its spread?
- **Public trust and credibility:** Did your communication approaches increase or decrease public trust in your organization?

2. Record real-time observations

An evaluation can help you identify messaging and partner tactics that will benefit you at all times, not just in an emergency[3]:

- Adjust messaging to align more directly with audience values.
- Shift resources to the most effective communication platforms. You can determine effectiveness based on audience engagement.
- Strengthen community partnerships.
- Increase transparency by acknowledging evolving information.

For longer-duration crises, consider pausing for real-time or mid-term monitoring. This helps you determine if your messaging, strategies and goals remain effective or require adjustments.

3. Adapt and improve

This is the time to go back to the plan and update the parts that the evaluation revealed as gaps. Consider the steps you take to improve your plan as an opportunity to be even better prepared the next time an unfortunate event takes place.

Worksheet

- Evaluation exercise

3 Adapted from Public Health Communications Collaborative Creating a Plan: Crisis Communications for Public Health.

Additional resources for further learning

- de Beaumont Foundation: Communicating About Public Health Toolkit
- de Beaumont blog: Be First, Be Right, and Be Credible: Translating Lessons from Crisis Communications
- The CDC Crisis and Emergency Response Communication (CERC) Manual
- Public Health Accreditation Board: Risk Communication Template
- The Public Health Communications Collaborative: Creating a Plan—Crisis Communication for Public Health
- Spitfire Strategies' Guide to Crisis Prep & Management
- National Council of Nonprofits Communications Guide
- A Resilience Checklist for Public Health Communicators

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WORKSHEET

Identify Your Team

Directions

1. Collect and write down contact information of the core members of your crisis response team. This could include key decisionmakers, external coordinators, internal coordinators, board liaisons, partner liaisons and others.
2. Ensure both primary and backup contacts are fully briefed on their responsibilities.
3. Use this model to build the team and add team members as needed.

Team and roles

Key decisionmaker (e.g., commander / lead)

Holds ultimate authority to activate the crisis plan, approve major expenditures and make final strategic decisions.

PRIMARY CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Title (internal):

[e.g., CEO / Executive Director]

Phone (Alt 1): _____

Phone (Alt 2): _____

BACKUP CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Internal lead

Manages all aspects of the crisis response.

PRIMARY CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Title (internal):

[e.g., Communication Manager / Director]

Phone (Alt 1): _____

Phone (Alt 2): _____

BACKUP CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

External coordinator

Manages public relations, media inquiries, press releases and public-facing statements.

PRIMARY CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Title (internal):

[e.g., Communications Director]

Phone (Alt 1): _____

Phone (Alt 2): _____

BACKUP CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Staff coordinator

Focuses on employee safety, internal messaging, staff updates and operational continuity.

PRIMARY CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Title (internal):

[e.g., HR Director / COO]

Phone (Alt 1): _____

Phone (Alt 2): _____

BACKUP CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Board liaison

Keeps the Board of Directors or governance entities informed of status updates and high-level liabilities.

PRIMARY CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Title (internal):

[e.g., Corporate Secretary / Board Chair]

Phone (Alt 1): _____

Phone (Alt 2): _____

BACKUP CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Partner liaison

Coordinates with key external stakeholders, critical vendors, partners, or legal counsel.

PRIMARY CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

Title (internal):

[e.g., Partnership Manager / Legal Counsel]

Phone (Alt 1): _____

Phone (Alt 2): _____

BACKUP CONTACT

Name:

Cell: _____

Email: _____

WORKSHEET

Assemble Your Team

Team assembly protocol details and logistical guidelines

Clearly lay out how the response team will come together in the event of a potential crisis. Fill out the operational parameters below.

Initiation authority

Who initiates the response team assembly?
Specify the roles / individuals authorized to declare a potential crisis and trigger team assembly, e.g., Key Decision Maker, Internal Coordinator upon field report, etc.

Notification method

How will team members be notified?
Define the communications method, e.g., phone tree order, specific communications app like Slack/ Teams, mass text alert system, or automated pager.

Engagement location

Where will you engage IN-PERSON?
e.g., Main Office, Conference Room B

Where will you engage VIRTUALLY?
e.g., Dedicated Zoom link, phone bridge line, Microsoft Teams channel

Backup team integration

Who are the members of the backup team?
List backup personnel if they are different from primary contacts.

How will they be brought into the team?
Detail the trigger for integration, e.g., if a primary member cannot be reached within 15 minutes or if the duration of the crisis requires shift rotation.

Activation instructions and immediate next steps

1. **Alert:** Key Decisionmaker notifies team members to convene via the designated emergency channel.
2. **Assess:** Gather initial facts on the incident to determine if the criteria for full crisis activation are met.
3. **Convene:** Hold an immediate briefing to establish the operational cadence and assign initial objectives.

WORKSHEET

Threat Assessment

Directions

1. Read through and answer the questions one-by-one.
2. Write down an explanation in as much detail as possible for the questions you answer "Yes" to.

Assessment questions

Note: *If you answer YES to two or more of these questions, activate your crisis communication response protocol.*

1. Does the situation directly affect our organization, the people or communities we serve, or our mission?	Y	N
If YES, explain:		

2. Does it pose danger or threaten to harm anyone? If so, who? And how?	Y	N
If YES, explain:		

3. Do we have a necessary and credible role to play — or a responsibility to address this situation?	Y	N
If YES, explain:		

4. Is there a potential risk to staff, organization members, operations, or reputation if we stay silent? If so, what is the nature of that risk?	Y	N
If YES, explain:		

5. Is misinformation spreading that we are well-positioned to clarify?	Y	N
If YES, explain:		

6. Will our internal and external audiences or stakeholders expect us to address the situation?	Y	N
If YES, explain:		

7. Do we have accurate, verified information to share?	Y	N*
If YES, explain:		

*If NO: Wait to address until verified.

WORKSHEET

Key Questions to Define Objectives

Directions

1. Answer the following key questions.
2. Consider what other questions and answers may be important given the specific situation.

Why is this a risk, and how serious is it?

Who's impacted, and how?

What's the most important thing to know right now?

(This includes how your organization and partners are course-correcting if an internal misstep is part of the conversation.)

What's being done? What happens next?

Do people need to do anything?

Where can they go to learn more?

Other questions/answers specific to your scenario

(Add as needed)

WORKSHEET

Developing Effective Messaging

To build a high-level narrative that is concise, clear and directive, follow the "*What, So What, Now What*" Model, also called the "reflective" model, because it guides the user to think about the next steps.

Directions

Answer the following questions in the most concise way possible.

What?

What issue or opportunity are you addressing?

Name the problem you are trying to solve or the gap you are addressing.

How does it connect to your audience's values?

Link the problem or gap to what your audience cares about.

So What?

What solution do you offer?

Determine clear, actionable recommendations that are practical and achievable for the audience.

Why should this audience care?

What benefits will they get?

Now What?

What do you want this audience to do?

Explain why immediate action is necessary and how their involvement can make a difference.

What specific action are you asking for?

Clearly state what you want your audience to do next.

WORKSHEET

Media Practice

Directions

1. Fill in what a reporter may ask or say.
2. Write out how you might answer. Prompts to help you get started are provided below.
3. Practice the response out loud by role-playing the questions and answers with another person.

Bridging

This is a pivot that can take you from an unwanted topic or question to one that will help you meet your messaging objectives as smoothly as possible.

Media statement or question

Your response
I can't answer that question, but I can tell you…

Reframing

Help your interviewer and audience gain a deeper understanding of the challenge by re-contextualizing the situation and correcting misinformation.

Media statement or question

Your response
Let me put that in perspective… OR That's one possibility, but what we did was (or believe is)…

Flagging

This is an opportunity for you to signal to the reporter and their audience that what you will say next is critical.

Media statement or question

Your response
What's important is to remember…

Closing

A strong closing highlights your key takeaways and ensures your audience walks away with the main message, avoiding unnecessary details or misconceptions.

Media statement or question

Your response
Before I forget, I want to tell your viewers…

WORKSHEET

Evaluation Exercise

Directions

1. After a crisis has abated, come together as a team to reflect on the following questions. Ensure the time after the end of the crisis and the evaluation exercise is a reasonable timeframe, like within a week.
2. A communications director or communications manager can lead this step. If your team lacks dedicated communications staff, a subject matter expert can step into the lead position. Designating a specific team member to oversee the evaluation helps establish clear accountability.
3. Make adjustments to the plan and worksheets as needed.
4. Share findings and adjustments with staff, board members and relevant partners and stakeholders.

There may be an opportunity to conduct an evaluation exercise during the crisis if you find your messaging objectives are not being met. This introspective exercise can help realign efforts before it's too late.

Message effectiveness

What was the reach?

How did people react to your messaging? Was it in the way you intended?

Behavior change

Did people take action as directed?

Did they learn to protect themselves from the risk?

Identifying and countering misinformation

Were you able to track and manage it? Were you able to stop its spread?

Public trust and credibility

Did your communication approaches increase or decrease public trust in your organization?

Potential changes moving forward

What current materials or information — digital and in print — need to be adjusted to align more directly with audience values?

Do you, your members, and/or your partners need to shift resources to more effective communication platforms for future engagement?

What community partnerships can/should be strengthened?

How might you be able to increase transparency moving forward?

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