

Crisis Communications Tip Sheet

Disasters and crises are some of the most challenging times in which philanthropic organizations will have to communicate with their stakeholders. Effective crisis communications around a crisis or disaster will impact an organization's response and the public's perception of them.

Overview

Philanthropic organizations are uniquely positioned to understand and be connected with their communities in ways that other organizations are not. This deep knowledge and connection mean that philanthropic organizations can have an outsized impact on disaster communications by mobilizing their networks to share timely and accurate information.

Recommendations for Blue Sky Times

- Create your Crisis Communications Team and identify each member's specific responsibilities along with timelines for when those responsibilities should be carried out.
- Identify the goals of your crisis communications plan.
- Identify your internal and external audiences.
- Identify the networks in which your organization is already working or has access to, and how those networks can help your crisis communications plan.
- Identify your key messages, including general crisis messaging or disaster-specific messaging.
- Be prepared for mistakes in messaging. If they occur, make sure that your organization is clear about the mistake and what it is doing to correct it.
- Identify which communications methods will work best for specific audiences.
- Establish and approve policies, procedures and guidance about who can communicate with your audience(s) during a crisis or disaster.
- Build relationships with local, regional and national media to help facilitate quick access to known media contacts during a crisis or disaster.
- Build relationships with the Public Information Officer(s) at local emergency management and response agencies.
- Create mechanisms to establish a disaster fund if you don't already have them in place.
- Set aside funds to ensure rapid access to additional resources such as staff time, advertising purchases and other resources that require additional funding.

Recommendations for Times of Disaster

- Be prepared to share information among your networks so that you can amplify timely and accurate messages about needs in affected communities as well as how your organization is responding.

- Assign someone from your Crisis Communications Team to your Incident Management Team to ensure that information is being shared accurately both inside and outside your organization.
- Be prepared for two-way communication and feedback.
 - When your organization receives feedback on a specific message, incorporate that feedback into your review process.
 - Be prepared to adjust your messaging based on feedback.
 - Monitor social media to ensure that the message is being received accurately and direct people to authoritative sources for other information about the crisis or disaster.
- Be prepared to work with the media by quickly and concisely answering their questions and making sure that staff or board members are readily available to them for interviews.

Key Takeaways

By preparing to communicate during times of crisis or disaster, your organization can be more flexible and responsive to communication needs when time is of the essence. Identify and work to understand the messages and methods that will best share information with your audiences. Ensure that you build reasonable budgets and timeframes into your plan and leave space for some flexibility in both. When you receive feedback on your communications, ensure you take the time to understand the feedback and adapt your communications accordingly.

What Donors Are Doing

- The [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#) supported [Oxfam America](#) with a \$250,000 grant to adopt new technology and communications practices to safely access their constituencies during COVID-19. This grant focused on 16 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and four areas in the United States with poor access to health care.
- [Charter Communications, Inc. Contributions Program](#) provided \$1 million in public service announcement air time to assist organizations with fundraising and awareness for Hurricane Florence disaster relief efforts.
- [Conrad N. Hilton Foundation](#) and [MacArthur Foundation](#) funded the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative to support the development of [KoBo Toolbox](#): a suite of tools for field data collection for use in challenging environments. The software, which is free and open-source, is intended to improve communication and coordination between disaster responders.
- [Google Crisis Response Team](#) works to make critical information more accessible in times of disaster. This includes 1) Creating a resource page with emergency information and tools; 2) Launching Google Person Finder to connect people with friends and loved ones; 3) Hosting a Crisis Map with authoritative and crowdsourced geographic information, and 4) Public Alerts – a platform to disseminate relevant emergency alerts to users when and where they are searching for them.

Remember

The Center for Disaster Philanthropy is here to assist you. Reach out to CDP's staff before or after a disaster strikes your community. We are ready to provide thought leadership, advice on establishing disaster funds and connections to colleagues around the world who can support and inform your efforts.