

CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT PLAN TEMPLATE

Purpose

State the purpose of this document and under what circumstances and types of events should it be leveraged (e.g., natural disaster, active shooter, pandemic, cyberattack).

Escalation Framework

All emergencies are not created equal. Develop a tiered response plan that offers an appropriate response level based on the scope threat using the chart below as a framework. In the *Scope* column, explain what circumstances would trigger the associated level response. In the *Stakeholders* column, identify departments that will be stakeholders in the community's response.

Level	Scope	Stakeholders
Level 1	Level one is the highest level of crisis escalation and reflects the broadest risk of citizen and operational disruption. Examples may include a severe natural disaster, pandemic, or a cyberattack that cripples operations	
Level 2	Level two represents a moderate potential risk to citizens or an impact on government delivery. Examples may include a mild natural disaster, active shooter event, infrastructure damage (e.g., collapsed bridge), or a local business crisis (e.g., factory fire)	
Level 3	Level three represents a situation that requires a coordinated municipal response, but that is unlikely to pose a health risk to citizens or severely disrupt operations. Examples may include a political controversy or a scandal that involves a highly visible public figure	

Incident Response Team

The Incident Response Team should include those individuals who need to be informed first when a crisis occurs. Such stakeholders may consist of your elected officials, human resources director, department of public works director, director of information technology, public safety officials, and director of communications. Outline the purpose of your incident response team and include a list of its members, including titles and contact information.

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Roles and Responsibilities

Regardless of threat level, identify what each department’s priorities should be during a crisis. Adjust the chart below to fit the needs of your municipal structure.

Department	Stakeholder(s)	Roles and Responsibilities
Elected Officials		
Administration		
Public Communications		
Police		
Fire		
Human Resources		
Information Technology		
Public Works		
Finance		
Utilities		
Clerk		
Parks		
Development		

Library		
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Response Management Workflow

Phase 1: Alert Incidence Response Team

Outline the steps that you need to take to notify your internal Incidence Response Team about the situation. Indicate who can issue the alert, in what timeframe it should ideally be released, and what communication channel(s) you will leverage.

Phase 2: Risk Assessment

Explain that the incidence response team will collaborate on establishing the threat level from the escalation framework on page two and establish immediate priorities. The conversation should aim to answer the following questions:

- What happened?
- Where?
- Who was affected?
- When did we learn about the incident?
- What future risk is there to citizen safety?
- What government service delivery operations, if any, will be affected, and for how long?
- Develop an emergency response and if necessary a business continuity plan

Phase 3: Plan Execution

Inform impacted stakeholders about the events, communicate the emergency response and business continuity plan, and execute the plans. Include who the next-level stakeholders are and what communication channels should (or should not) be used to communicate the events and response. Outline likely action items and responsible parties below based on the given examples.

Action Items	Responsible Party
Execute emergency communication plan	Communications department
Deploy emergency response teams	Public safety
Establish road barriers	Department of public works and public safety

Phase 4: Assess and Adjust

Provide recommendations for how the incident response team will continue to monitor and assess the situation and the municipality's coordinated response. These steps should proceed through the disaster recovery process. Outline likely action items and responsible parties below based on the given examples.

Action Items	Responsible Party
Consistent communication and updates to staff and citizens	Communications department
Monitoring IT infrastructure, security systems, and monitoring threat assessments	IT
Adjusting personnel staffing	Human Resources

Part 5: Post-Mortem

When the crisis has ended, citizens are not in danger, and government operations have resumed to normal, meet with your Incident Response Team to hold a post-mortem debriefing. Your conversation should aim to answer the following questions:

- What went well?
- What could we have improved?
- What changes should we make to this Crisis Management and Communication Plan?
- Was there any damage to our reputation or citizen trust levels due to the events? If so, how can we repair the damage?

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Website

In this section, list the page or pages of your website used for emergency communication, the individuals who have access to post content on those pages, and any special instructions for access.

- [INSERT URL OF AGENCY WEBSITE]
- [PAGE OWNER – INDIVIDUAL OR DEPARTMENT NAME]
- [SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]

Social Media

In this section, list the social media pages/platforms your agency uses to share emergency communication, the individuals who have access to post content on those pages, and any special instructions for access.

- [NAME OF SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE (e.g. Twitter - @AgencyName)]
 - [PAGE OWNER – INDIVIDUAL OR DEPARTMENT NAME]
 - [ACCESS INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]
- [NAME OF SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE (e.g. Twitter - @AgencyName)]
 - [PAGE OWNER – INDIVIDUAL OR DEPARTMENT NAME]
 - [ACCESS INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]
- [NAME OF SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE (e.g. Twitter - @AgencyName)]
 - [PAGE OWNER – INDIVIDUAL OR DEPARTMENT NAME]
 - [ACCESS INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]

Reverse 911/Mass Notification

In this section, list the platform(s) your agency or 911 center uses for reverse 911 or mass notification, the individuals who have access to send notifications, and any special instructions for access.

- [INSERT NAME OF MASS NOTIFICATION PLATFORM]
- [PLATFORM OWNER – INDIVIDUAL OR DEPARTMENT CONTACT]
- [INDIVIDUALS APPROVED TO SEND NOTIFICATIONS]
- [SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]

Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA)

In this section, list the [approved IPAWS alerting authority in your area](#) (911, Emergency Management, etc.) and any special instructions for disseminating WEA messages.

- [INSERT NAME OF ALERTING AUTHORITY]
- [CONTACT NAME, CONTACT PHONE NUMBER, CONTACT TITLE AT ALERTING AUTHORITY]
- [ALTERNATE CONTACT NAME, CONTACT PHONE NUMBER, CONTACT TITLE AT ALERTING AUTHORITY]
- INSTRUCTIONS FOR NATURE OF INFORMATION APPROVED FOR WEA (e.g. What qualifies for dissemination via WEA)

Pre-scripted templates or holding statements

In this section, list the type, location, and nature of pre-scripted holding statements or templates for sharing emergency information. These could include news releases, graphics, social media holding statements, printed/hard-copy signage for facilities, etc.

- [TYPE OF PRESCRIPTED MESSAGE (e.g. fill-in-the-blank news releases)]
 - [FILE LOCATION LINK/DESCRIPTION (e.g. I: Drive>Communications>Messaging Templates)]
 - [SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]
- [TYPE OF PRESCRIPTED MESSAGE (e.g. Twitter holding statements)]
 - [FILE LOCATION LINK/DESCRIPTION (e.g. I: Drive>Communications>Messaging Templates>SocialMedia)]
 - [SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]
- [TYPE OF PRESCRIPTED MESSAGE (e.g. printed hard-copy signage for facilities)]
 - [FILE LOCATION LINK/DESCRIPTION (e.g. I: Drive>Communications>Messaging Templates>Signage)]
 - [SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]

Call-center hold statements/messaging

In this section, list the type, location, and nature of statements or messages designed to be used by call-takers or call-center volunteers in the first hours of an emergency..

- [TYPE OF STATEMENT (e.g. holding statement, redirection to website, etc.)]
 - [FILE LOCATION LINK/DESCRIPTION (e.g. I: Drive>Communications>CallTakerInformation)]
 - [SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS IF NEEDED]

Local Government Emergency Communication Best Practices

Local government public safety offices must have a plan in place to keep citizens informed. Follow these emergency preparedness communication best practices.

Encourage Citizens to Sign Up for Emergency Notifications

Utilizing a subscription-based mass notification system will allow your citizens to opt-in to emergency notifications and select their preferred communication channels (e.g., text message/SMS, phone call, email). Throughout the year, encourage citizens to sign up in advance to receive your emergency notifications so that they will have access to safety instructions and information when it matters most.

Communicate Early and Often

For news, updates, alerts, and instructions during a disaster, citizens will turn first to their local government leaders. Keep citizens informed from the start of the event through the recovery efforts. Share relevant and actionable information such as links to evacuation routes and emergency shelters, safety tips, and the latest news and updates on relief programs.

Provide Actionable Instructions

If a natural disaster is expected, your citizens need to know more than its trajectory. They need actionable, life-saving information. When sending communications to citizens, primarily if via text, social media, or email, keep the content brief. Provide concise information and a link to a page on your website where citizens can find more information on:

- The location of local shelters
- Natural disaster preparation tips
- Contact information for local resources, such as utility companies, emergency responders, and local police departments

Maintain a Calm Tone in All Communications.

Your citizens will feel more confident that their local leaders are protecting their community if all your communications utilize a calm, confident, and informative tone. Make sure all news, updates, and information that you distribute have been verified and validated. During an emergency event, when a variety of credible and informal sources are sharing information rapidly, the distribution of inaccurate information may complicate safety efforts.

Use All Available Channels to Distribute Safety Information

Your safety communication channels should include social media, your local government website, text messages, phone, and email alerts. An emergency mass notification system can help expedite multi-channel communications.

Post Photos

Words are meaningful, but images are impactful. Citizens who are frequently impacted by minor weather disruptions may disregard a more severe weather warning as just another routine update, but seeing a photo of the main highway buried under snow or floodwaters will get their attention, enabling them to make alternate, safer travel plans.

Utilize Video

Video has the power to be even more engaging than photos. If possible, keep citizens informed of as-its-happening conditions during and after an event using live and recorded video. Just make sure your staff captures video in the safest manner possible, given the circumstances.

Recovery Communications

Remember to continue to communicate safety information after the disaster event has ended. Even if your community sustains only minimal damage, your citizens will still want to know what aspects of their community and their resources have been impacted, what areas are damaged, what roads are closed, and whom to contact with questions or for immediate assistance.

Maintaining an Effective Response Plan

Review this plan annually to ensure its continued relevance and efficacy. Update the names and information of stakeholders, and apply lessons learned from previous incidents to ensure its effectiveness.