# Hope Institute for College, Community, and Justice Crisis Communications Plan

# Introduction

## Why is this necessary?

Our response to a crisis (or bad publicity) can affect our reputation. Crisis management is always evolving, but we can plan and prepare for a crisis so when the worst happens, we're ready. With a solid plan in place, we'll be prepared for whatever comes.

In speaking with the public during a crisis, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice ("Hope Center") will provide accurate information and messages beneficial to our employees, Temple University stakeholders, our funders, and other audiences. Where necessary, we will provide the media with information that helps them do their jobs and positions the Hope Center as a thought leader and trusted resource for education-related research and resources.

This plan is meant to manage crisis related communications; it isn't a crisis management plan.

This plan will:
- Prepare Hope Center staff to effectively and nimbly manage crisis communications;
- Help staff respond in a unified, professional manner that reinforces leadership and creates loyalty;
- Strategically enhance our brand/role, and the public understanding of the value provided by our work;
- Manage the distribution of critical, often sensitive, information to the media and public; and,
- Inform members of the Hope Center's position to help shape a consistent response.

This crisis communications plan should be used by the Director of Communications, the Managing Director, the Director of Operations, and other designated stakeholders to prepare for, oversee and evaluate the handling of communications around a crisis situation both internally and externally as appropriate.

## What constitutes a crisis?

Let's define the terms. A **crisis** can have a long-lasting negative effect on our organization's reputation or mission. It's a significant and unexpected event that creates uncertainty and may dramatically impact our ability to operate normally if not handled appropriately. An example of a crisis might be a scandal with leadership or with a funder.

An **issue** is something that can be resolved relatively quickly and easily. It's still negative for the Hope Center but it's not long-lasting. A few negative comments on our social channels don't

constitute a crisis. While a proper response is important, it's only a small part of a crisis response plan.

## What is a crisis communication plan?

A crisis communications plan allows us to more easily apply strategies to deal with sudden and significant negative events. A thorough crisis communication plan facilitates speedy communication to ensure the overall safety of our internal and external stakeholders.

## The importance of a crisis communication plan

An organization must be able to respond promptly, accurately and confidently during an emergency and in the hours and days that follow. Different audiences must be reached with information specific to their interests and needs. Hope Center's image can be positively or negatively impacted by the public and community's perception of how we handle incidents.

## Crisis Plan Objectives

We'll want to addressing the following areas:
- Forming a crisis communication team
- Developing a process to communicate with employees, board members and other stakeholders for safety and wellbeing
- Informing stakeholders of decisions and expectations
- Developing a process to ensure all external stakeholders and constituents are aware of decisions and expectations
- Managing donor, community and key vendor communications
- Preparing a media communications and interview plan
- Shortening the news cycle
- Ensuring a tactical communication system exists to address all audiences and
- stakeholders through various channels

## Crisis Communications Policy

1. All crises should be reported to the Director of Communications and the Managing Director.
2. Only the Director of Communications and, where necessary, other designated spokespeople are authorized to release information to the media and public. All other staff and board members should be professional and helpful to the media by connecting them with the spokespeople, but will neither speak to the media nor provide any information.
3. The Managing Director is the designated crisis management lead person, directing and coordinating all aspects of the organization's response including managing the messages and media. There should also be one designated spokesperson who actually interacts

with the media and other inquirers. In some cases, particularly in the event of a "small crisis," the two may be the same person. In others, the jobs may be divided to facilitate efficient handling of the situation. Most likely, but not necessarily, the two roles will be filled by the Director of Communications and the Managing Director, respectively.

4. All comments should be guided by professionalism and transparency, and serve to mitigate the crisis while reinforcing the leadership role of the Hope Center.
5. "No comment" is never an acceptable response. If an answer is unknown or cannot be immediately answered, make note of the question, tell the inquirer you will get back with him/her, and do so. If the question cannot be answered due to a policy (such as sharing personnel information, etc.) let the inquirer know.
6. Personnel matters are to remain confidential.
7. When possible, responses should be proactive, responsive, and action-oriented.
8. The Hope Center recognizes the importance of media relations to public trust. In times of crisis, maintaining effective media relationships will be critical in bolstering public confidence in the Hope Center.

## Preparedness
### Risk assessment/plan for the worst case scenario

When developing a crisis plan, it's important to consider worst case scenarios. What are Hope Center's worst case scenarios and potential responses?

1. Scenario A
    a. Response A
2. Scenario B
    a. Response B
3. Scenario C
    a. Response C

## The crisis communication team

The Director of Communications should be the first responder (where possible) during a crisis communications event. All associated inquiries should, where possible, be directed to the Director of Communications.

| Crisis Event | Contact | Office Phone | Mobile Phone | Email |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

## General communications guidelines

Typically, the Director of Communications, the Managing Director, and (role name(s)) will write, approve, and share related updates.

Audiences include:
- Donors
- Board Members
- News and Social Media audiences
- Community
- Temple University management, leadership and directors
- Elected officials
- Vendors

## Response
### Situational Assessment/Action Items

The Crisis Communications Team will assess the situation, determine facts, and begin delegation. Questions to help devise appropriate crisis communications response, include, but are not limited to:
A. What is the situation? What will happen next?
B. Who on staff needs to be involved?
C. What immediate steps need to be taken?
D. What is known and who already knows it?
E. Is there potential public interest?
F. Does the issue have traction?
G. Who will be affected?

H. What are people feeling – what emotions need to be considered?
I. What information is needed and who beyond organizational staff need to get it? When will it be available?
J. What should the organization do about it? Proactive vs. reactive? Contact or refer to another organization?
K. What CAN and CAN'T be said?
L. Is legal or PR counsel needed?
M. Who will communicate the response as spokesperson?
N. How will the response be communicated?
O. Should a resource list be compiled of additional stakeholders?
P. What media will be contacted?
Q. Do we need to contact legislators? Donors?

☐ Notification – Notify the Director of Communications and Managing Director immediately

☐ Crisis Communications Team – Key staff and other stakeholders will convene to strategically review the situation and manage the communications surrounding the issue.

Note: In some cases, a larger Crisis Management Team may be needed when action surrounding the crisis involves more than just handling communications. In those cases, the Crisis Communication Team would be a part of the larger team, though the guidelines in this manual only outline the steps to take in the communication needs surrounding a crisis.

**Fact-Gathering Phase**

☐ Before Going Public

◯ Determine crisis communications lead person who is responsible for ensuring all tasks are completed (Director of Communications).

◯ Determine the crisis communication spokesperson who will answer all media and other inquiries (Managing Director).

◯ Assess the situation to determine the facts (see Detailed Crisis Communication Plan on page )

◯ Determine appropriate response/action

◯ Create plan of action for internal and external communications.

○ Assess what resources are necessary to manage the crisis (i.e. mobile phone or device availability, press conference needs, on-location resources – signs, lectern, visuals, etc).

**Crisis Command Center**

☐ Going Public

○ Place telephone calls to critical internal audiences, including the board, legislators, etc.

○ Begin media and other external audience outreach. Use press release if appropriate.

○ Update website and other channels as needed.

○ Evaluate message effectiveness as the situation progresses.

○ Implement methods for updating key audiences with ongoing information.

○ Distribute post-crisis communications.

○ Evaluate crisis communications efforts by documenting all critical conversations.

| Communications Team Timeline |
| --- |

| Dial-in number: |
| --- |

| Task # | Task Description | Task Lead |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Crisis-specific key messages and updates | |
| 2 | Crisis response center set-up and management | |
| 3 | Spokesperson prep | |
| 4 | Media, email, phone monitoring and response | |
| 5 | Media communications | |

| 6 | Board communications | |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | Employee communications | |
| 8 | Donor communications | |
| 9 | Vendor communications | |

### Crafting a response statement

- ⚪ Develop factual, detailed messages that reflect the status of the crisis, the Center's response, and, if possible, proactive steps to resolve the situation.
- ⚪ Prepare talking points and provide a script for those receiving incoming calls.

- ⚪ Determine if a press release, web, and social media updates updates are necessary.

### Handling media interviews

- ⚪ Appoint staff to:

  - Serve as the official spokesperson and manage media
  - Keep Board Chair informed (when necessary)
  - Where necessary, contact stakeholder partners and assist with talking points
  - Record crisis details, actions taken, external responses, resolution

# Appendix

## Appendix A: Preparing for a crisis BEFORE it happens

Person responsible for overseeing:_____

Date last completed:_____

1. Phone/E-mail List – Disseminate an emergency list with phone numbers, cell phones, and e-mail addresses for staff and board. To be completed by _____ and updated quarterly or more frequently as needed by staff turnover and contact changes.
2. Perform annual communication audit and Strength Weakness Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis.
3. Media Training – Identify and train organization spokespeople.
    a. Managing Director (main spokesperson)
    b. Founding Director (back-up spokesperson)
    c. Director of Communications (back-up spokesperson)
    d. Subject expert(s): _____
4. Crisis Management Checklist – Update the Crisis Communication Checklist for staff to have with them at work and at home, including crisis procedures, policies regarding media inquiries, communication priorities and best means to reach the crisis manager.
5. Key Audience and Media List – Keep contact information for key audiences updated so they can be easily contacted in a crisis.
    a. Media (Director of Communications)
    b. Public Officials (Founding Director)
    c. Other: _____
6. 7. Key Messages – Spokespeople should be familiar with organization's key messages. During a crisis, relevant messages will be created by the Crisis Communications Team.
7. Emergency Personnel – Maintain contact information for police, fire, hospitals, and other first responders/emergency personnel. Make sure staff know how to access the information.
8. Off-Site Alternatives – Determine a location to convene and/or from which to stage communications if the crisis situation prevents staff from getting to or using the office.
9. Drill Session – At least quarterly, review and practice crisis communications plan.

NOTE: Items should be reviewed and updated as needed, but at least annually.
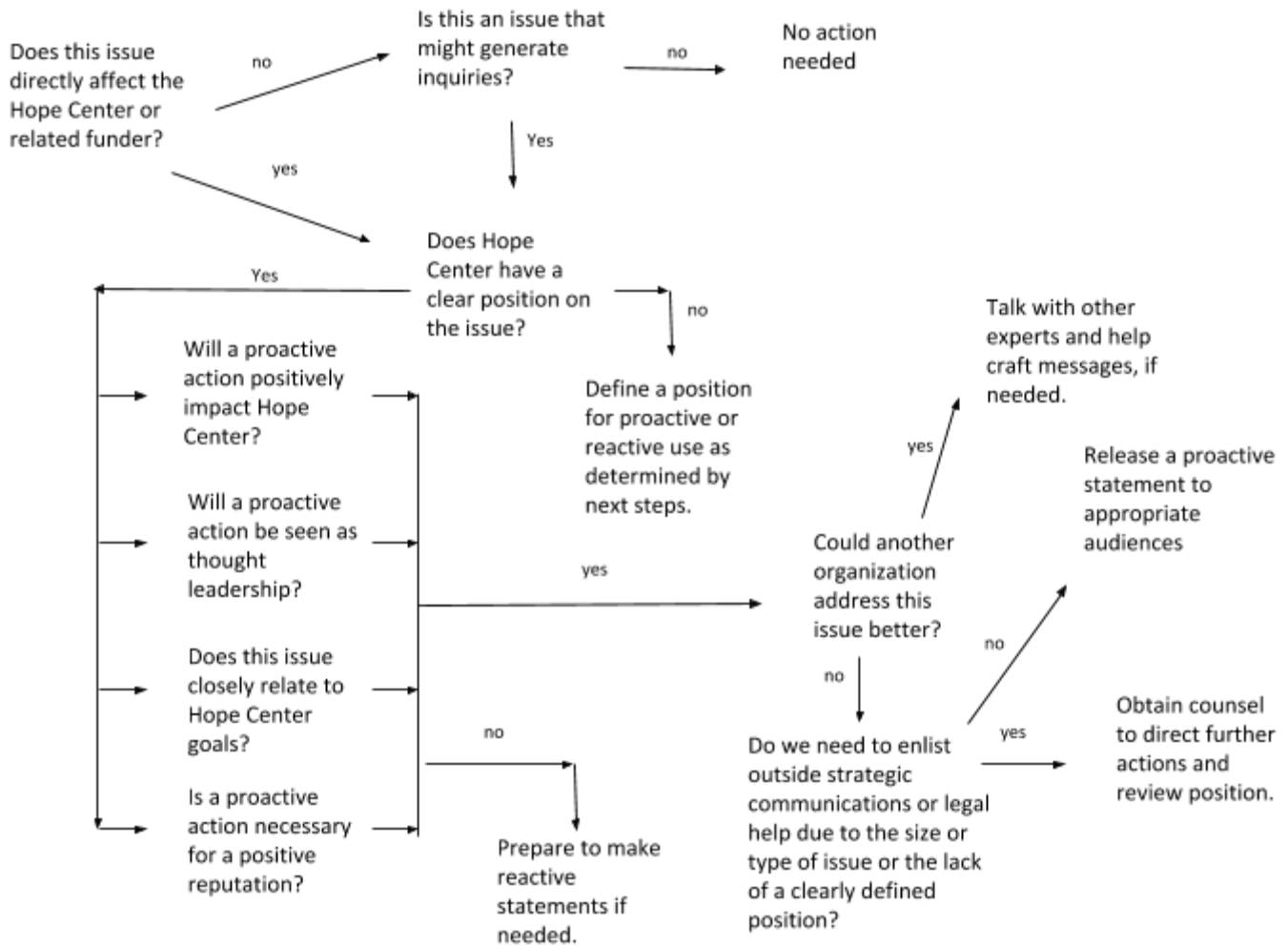
## Appendix B: Positions and Sample Releases for Common Media Q&A

There are some crises and media inquiries that could never be foreseen, however there are also those that organizations have received before and know they will receive again, or that they could guess might eventually arise (even if they hope they will not). Such situations might include staff or board malfeasance or issues specific to the organization's mission or population served. In cases like these, crisis management and communications are expedited and potentially less stressful (not to mention possibly better handled) if the organization already has a clear position, agreed on by staff and board regarding the issue.

The following steps outline a process for identifying and preparing for potentially foreseeable crisis.

1. Convene a task force (possibly including PR professionals, staff, board members, communications committee members,* etc.) to brainstorm all possible crisis issues for which the organization may need to respond.
2. Pare down the list of potential issues by identifying those most likely to occur or for which the organization most needs to be prepared.
3. Determine which, if any, the organization would want a prepared full media release to address versus those for which having a clearly defined position ready to repeat to inquiries would be sufficient.
4. Draft media releases and/or official responses the organization's spokespeople could use to answer inquiries on those issues. Creating or obtaining pre-approved quotes from key spokespeople on certain topics may also be a good idea. Be sure to review and possibly update the releases annually (at least) and to alert those quoted when and if the quotes are used so that they are not caught off guard if contacted for follow-up.
5. Depending on the issues at hand and the culture of your organization's board, some or all of the issues and positions developed should be presented to your board to be discussed, possibly amended and approved in order to ensure that they truly represent the organization's point of view, not just that of the person or group drafting the response.
6. Keep the approved statements and releases confidential. Only the organization's spokesperson/spokespeople should have access to the releases or statements unless they are needed for release.

# Appendix C: Potential Actions and Guiding Considerations

Does this issue directly affect the Hope Center or related funder?
→ no → Is this an issue that might generate inquiries?
→ no → No action needed
→ Yes → Does Hope Center have a clear position on the issue?

Does this issue directly affect the Hope Center or related funder? → yes → Yes →

Will a proactive action positively impact Hope Center?

Will a proactive action be seen as thought leadership?

Does this issue closely relate to Hope Center goals?

Is a proactive action necessary for a positive reputation?

Does Hope Center have a clear position on the issue? → no → Define a position for proactive or reactive use as determined by next steps.

(considerations) → yes → Could another organization address this issue better?

(considerations) → no → Prepare to make reactive statements if needed.

Could another organization address this issue better? → yes → Talk with other experts and help craft messages, if needed.

Could another organization address this issue better? → no → Do we need to enlist outside strategic communications or legal help due to the size or type of issue or the lack of a clearly defined position?

Do we need to enlist outside strategic communications or legal help...? → no → Release a proactive statement to appropriate audiences

Do we need to enlist outside strategic communications or legal help...? → yes → Obtain counsel to direct further actions and review position.

**Appendix D: Post-Crisis Review**

1. Secure Loose Ends – Appropriate communications should be made outlining the resolution of the crisis to appropriate audiences. If changed, voice mail and web site should be updated. All media contacts should be double checked for completed interaction, then new names added to the organization's media list.
2. Recognition of Heroes – The Crisis Communications Team will work with staff to determine the best and most appropriate means for recognizing the "heroes" involved in the crisis situation.
3. Crisis Communications Review – Re-convene Crisis Communications Team to evaluate response, actions, what didn't work, what needs to be improved/revised for the future, etc.
4. Media Coverage Assessment – Review coverage. Check for message consistency and saliency. Are there issues that might need further clarification.
5. File and Update – File notes, clips, talking points, communication, etc. into a folder. Revise the crisis communications plan if necessary.