**Crisis Communication Guidelines for EdTA Chapters**

Volunteer Resource

Goal

The Crisis Communication Plan provides a comprehensive, efficient, coordinated and effective approach to managing communications as related to emergencies that may present a risk to the leaders of state chapters, their program participants, volunteers or guests, or impair chapter operations.

The goal of the Crisis Communication Plan is to effectively guide the timely communication and exchange of accurate information during a crisis.

It is important to recognize that the Crisis Communications plan for Chapters works essentially the same for all crisis situations.

Methodology

This resource document highlights the key elements of a larger, more comprehensive crisis communication management tool.

Definitions and Procedures

1. *Crisis Response Team*

To the extent reasonably possible, the normal organizational chain of command will be maintained in the event of an emergency. The Chapter Director, and each assigned Chapter board members, are designated as participants of the Crisis Response Team (CRT).

CRT members are:

* Chapter Director
* Security Chair (Board Member)
* Add members (3-8) as appropriate to the Chapter

1. *Crisis Communication Team*

The Crisis Communication Team consists of the Chapter Director (CD), [add members (2-3) as appropriate].

Together with the other members of the CRT, these individuals will decide which course of action will be taken during and after a crisis with regard to messaging and communications.

The general priorities of the Crisis Communication Team are as follows:

* Verify which emergency response measures have been taken and who is on scene to ensure the safety and welfare of leaders, program participants, volunteers, and guests, as well as the general public in and around the state sponsored program.
* Develop and coordinate key message points and craft an initial statement as a response to inquiries.
* Determine who will be the key media spokesperson for the incident.
* External communication should be kept to an absolute minimum and should not take place until all information is received and after consulting with the CRT, first responders, or law enforcement where appropriate.
* Contact the leader on scene and provide them with clear and detailed instructions for handling the media until the designated spokesperson can arrive.
* Determine the logistics of how the media will be handled in cooperation/collaboration with law enforcement, if involved.
* Disseminate information to the media in a timely manner and provide updates, if needed.
* Follow up on each crisis internally and externally to ensure that there are no communication-related loose ends.
* After the fact, evaluate each crisis response and incorporate lessons learned into the proactive management of future incidents.
* Throughout the process of managing a crisis or crisis communication, note that it is a good practice to keep in contact leadership at the EdTA national office—contact Diane Carr (513.703.9349) or Julie Theobald (513.977.5520, daytime).

1. *Response to a Crisis*

**If a crisis or situation requires medical or law enforcement professionals, call 911**, and ensure the immediate safety of anyone in immediate danger or distress before considering any other action.

After controlling for the safety of participants and volunteers, the responding volunteer(s) should contact the CRT Leader or a member of the CRT.

The CRT Leader or designated individual should convey the following information to CRT members:

1. Brief description of the problem.
2. Immediate actions to be taken.
3. Whether or not the area can be entered.
4. Location and time the team should meet.
5. Remind all team members to carry photo identification with them at all times and be prepared to show it to law enforcement and other authorities if challenged.
6. **Instruct everyone notified not to make any statements to the media or post any comment or image on Chapter or personal social media. No statement may be made to the media except by the Communications Team Leader or a designee identified by the Communications Team Leader.**

External communication should be kept to an absolute minimum and should not take place until all information is received and after consulting with the CRT, or law enforcement where appropriate.

Any volunteers making calls to notify CRT Members of the situation should make a written note of those calls, noting the time the call was placed and whether the person was contacted. Make a reasonable number of attempts if the phone is busy or there is no answer. Forward the completed list of these calls to the CRT and continue to attempt to contact CRT members.

No statement may be made to the media except by the Communications Team Leader or a designee identified by the Communications Team Leader. No one may post or comment, or post videos or photos on either Chapter or personal social media.

1. *Internal Communications*

Internal notification will be made by the Chapter director or his/her designee. Notification will be made in the following order to:

* Crisis Response Team
* Chapter Board
* EdTA national leadership
* Program volunteers
* Program participants and guests

1. *External Communications*

In the event of an emergent situation, 911 should be called first and immediately. Following a call to 911, communication to any/all other external stakeholders should happen as directed by the Chapter Director or his/her designee, in coordination with the Crisis Communication Team. Some external stakeholders to consider are:

* Local law enforcement (at the municipal or county level)
* News media (by Communication Team Leader or alternate, at appropriate time)
* Situational stakeholders (teachers, volunteers, chaperones, family members, etc.)
* Essential vendors
* The general public (if deemed appropriate)

1. *When a Communication Team Member is Not On-site*

In some situations, the media will arrive on the scene of an incident before the Communications Team Leader or any team members. Therefore, one of the Communications Team’s top priorities is to contact an appropriate Chapter representative already on scene, discuss the situation and designate them as the temporary spokesperson. That person will be given detailed instructions on what to say to the media, and charged with the following responsibilities:

1. Inform all Chapter volunteers on scene to refer media inquiries to him/her.
2. Designate a media staging area that is safe and will not interfere with emergency response activities.
3. When appropriate, refer the media to spokespersons from other agencies such as fire, police, etc., who are on scene. Relay the incident information previously discussed with Communications Team members and assure them that more information will be provided as it becomes available.
4. Inform the media that a spokesperson is on their way (if that’s the case) to respond to additional media inquiries.
5. Once a Communications Team member is on scene, direct all media inquiries to him/her.

A staff member confronted with a crisis situation, absent a member of either CRT or the Communications Team, should contact a member of the CRT or the Crisis Communications Team, before speaking with any media member, for the purpose of informing them of the situation and seeking direction. **No Chapter leader or volunteer should make posts on personal or Chapter managed social media without the explicit direction of the Chapter Director.**

1. *Authorized Chapter Spokesperson Will:*
2. Check in with the on-site representative from the CRT, get the latest information and assess his/her communication needs and concerns.
3. Ensure that EdTA national leadership is apprised of the situation. Seek guidance from the EdTA Executive Director if there is any chance that the situation will garner media attention.
4. Identify and greet all media on scene and advise them that you are the official Chapter spokesperson and that you will be providing them with regular information as it becomes available. Assess the current level of media interest from the number of media organizations on the site, and telephone, text, email and social media inquiries.
5. When Communications Team members are not on-site, the on-site representative will seek guidance from the Communications Team members in order to decide whether media should be contacted and to develop a media statement.
6. Connect with the on-scene contacts from law enforcement and other local government agencies.
7. Inform the media when they can expect the next update (if appropriate).
8. Log the names and contact information for all media outlets on-scene.
9. Make a general assessment of the extent of the crisis in terms of its communication impact and negative public reactions regarding the organization and report to the CRT the following information:
10. The likely extent and slant of local and regional media coverage over the next 24 hours.
11. The reactions and public statements of local and regional government officials.
12. The human-interest implications of the crisis in terms of its effect on local residents and businesses.
13. The perceptions of the Chapter’s response thus far based on the news media coverage and reactions of the general public.
14. The availability and likely effectiveness of the CRT and other personnel in discussing the crisis with the news media.

9. At the conclusion of on-site crisis response activity, hold one final media update and give reporters a number or email address where the CRT can be reached for follow-up before leaving the scene.

***No attempt should ever be made by Chapter leaders or volunteers to communicate about or resolve a crisis on one’s own without the involvement of the Crisis Response Team and Communications Team.***

1. *Managing the Message*

The following guidelines should be implemented in order to effectively manage messaging:

1. In all cases, no one other than officially designated leaders may disseminate any information about an identified situation via any channel, including official and personal social media.
2. Mobilize the Communications Team Leader to relay pertinent incident information and media messages for distribution to Chapter leaders and volunteers via telephone or email. This message should include instructions on how to direct any media inquiries that might be received.
3. Immediately identify the need to disseminate crisis information to the media and, if needed, the most efficient way. These logistics include:
   1. Who will be responsible
   2. What messages will be sent
   3. When the messages will be sent
   4. Which media will receive information
   5. How often information will be updated
4. Use the Chapter website, email, and social media to disseminate pertinent information to program participants, volunteers, and the public.
5. In addition to the media and internal leaders, identify other key audiences who will need to be apprised of the situation such as law enforcement or public health/safety officials, board members, etc.
6. Track all media contacts to ensure that all inquiries are addressed and to assist during follow-up procedures.