

THE SAN FRANCISCO FOUNDATION
The Community Foundation of the Bay Area



Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Leaders in a Disaster

Developing Your Voice, Crafting Your Message

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Tuesday, October 5, 2010
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Communications Rules in a Disaster

In a disaster, the rules stay the same.
 The stakes are higher, and so adherence to the rules
 becomes even more important

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Value

- People’s lives and livelihoods are at stake
- Accurate and clear communications can make the difference between recovery or not, between life and death
- Miscommunications can take a long time to correct, time you may not have

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SEVEN TAKEAWAYS

1. Prepare before the Disaster
2. Identify your key audiences
3. Identify your spokesperson - Have a Plan B and Plan C
4. Identify your key messages
5. No Speculating
6. Have a role and a voice in the Command Center
7. Be in the mix from beginning to end

Prepare Before The Disaster Hits

- Identify your key audiences
- Identify and train your spokesperson and back-up
- Draft key message templates
- Prepare web content
- Practice centralizing communications and consistency

Identify Your Key Audiences

In order of priority - who your reach first

- Staff
- Trustees
- Donors
- Supporters
- Media
- Opinion leaders in your field
- Who else?

Draft Your Key Messages

- What is happening
- How it affects your organization
- When you will update your audiences
- What your call-to-action is
 - e.g., Click here to donate
 - Come here to volunteer

Never

- Never never speculate
- When will you be back in service?
- How much damage is there?
- Who is injured?
- How much will it cost to recover?
- Never never speculate

Identify Your Spokesperson

- Knowledge of issue area
- Knowledge of specific event
- Carries credibility with appropriate audiences
- Presents well and appropriately for subject matter
- Access
- Discipline
- Back-up is essential

Presentation

- Credibility
- Sincerity
- Warmth
- Appropriate affect

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Talking Rules

- 100% responsiveness
- Data, facts, substantiation
- There is no such thing as “off the record”
- NO speculation, “what if, then ...”
- Never say, “no comment”
- Self-edited sound-bites:
 - succinct
 - no jargon
 - respond in complete sentences

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Case Study

- Earthquake hits
- Establish Command center
- Assess who and what is able to serve
- Designation of spokesperson and message approval process
- Audiences – clients, donors, board, partners, media
- Vehicles
- Draft messages
- Define when updates will be issued; hourly, then daily, then weekly, then monthly. Immediate vs. long term

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Command Center

- Accuracy and consistency are important
- Being in the Command Center, with a clear and visible function is essential to having accurate and consistent messaging

TALKING TO THE MEDIA

4 Basic Rules in Talking to the Media

- Start from a position of credibility
- Know the facts
- Tell the truth
- (Not always the WHOLE truth)



Draft Statement for the Media

- Tell what happened, who was involved and how it was contained
- Keep it simple and jargon-free

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Responsive Media Relations

- Get the necessary information from the reporter -- What are his/her specific questions?
- Deadline for story
- Publication or air date and time
- To whom has s/he already talked, where did s/he get his/her information?
- HANG UP (nicely)
- Never answer on the spot

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Gather the Facts and Chronology

- What happened
- Who was involved
- How it was managed
- Next steps – NEVER speculate

Talking to Reporters

- A reporter is not your friend
- An interview is not a conversation
- Know the weaknesses in your argument and be prepared to respond
- Consider everything you say to be on the record or do not say it.

Interview Pitfalls

- You don't stay on message
- You say too much
- You stray from your expertise
- You relax too much
- You fill the gap
- You wait to be asked the right question
- You get mad/impatient

Wardrobe

- TV Anchor?
- Healthcare Expert?
- Righteous Activist?

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Maintain Focus on the Topic -- not the look

- No psychedelic ties
- Pastel shirts rather than bright white
- Follow the "French Rule of 5":
 - Big hair counts as 1
 - Earrings (the size of a quarter)
 - scarf
 - necklace
 - brooch
 - rings
 - bracelet

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