

Crisis Communications Plan | Part 1

Definition of crises

The crisis communications plan is followed when there is a:

- **Crisis event.** This occurs with no forewarning. Quick action and response by the organization are critical to communications.
Examples might be discovery of fraud or cheating at a 4-H livestock event, a tragic accident or fatality, food poisoning from a 4-H food stand, etc.
- **Crisis situation.** This frequently involves some advance warning and may last for several days to several months.
Examples might be local environmental controversies; charges of racism, discrimination, or sexual harassment; firing of a volunteer; embezzlement of funds, etc.
- **Social media attack.** An attack is a change from the norm that could damage the organization's reputation or misrepresent the organization's values. Often an attack may originate in a single county or program area, but may be widely reported as an issue reflecting the entire organization.
An attack is not a few negative comments or mentions, a negative review, or an inappropriate comment. For assistance handling such issues, contact an advancement specialist.

Action steps at time of crisis

- Immediately notify your supervisor who will notify the regional director or program director, director of Advancement, and assistant vice president for County Services. The program director should also determine if the respective college should be informed.
- A crisis management team (CMT) will be assembled immediately in accordance with directives from the Office of the Vice President. The crisis management team will include, but not be limited to, the county staff involved, supervisor, regional director/program director, director of Advancement, and assistant vice president for County Services.
- Until the CMT is assembled, respond to inquiries from the public, media, staff, etc. with, "We are currently gathering the details about the situation and will share information as it becomes available."
- CMT first steps¹ of action:
 - A primary media contact person will be designated to provide updates to news media representatives and reports as deemed necessary by the CMT.
 - Inquiries made to county staff, council members and volunteers should be referred to the primary media contact.
 - As deemed necessary, talking points and background information prepared by the CMT will be shared with local team members for distribution.

¹For additional CMT steps, see *Crisis Communications Plan – Part 2*.

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Extension and Outreach

Crisis Communications Plan | Part 2

Crisis Management Team Action Steps

Members of the Crisis Management Team (CMT) will be determined specific to the crisis at hand and will be assembled in accordance with the directives from the Office of the Vice President. The team will act in compliance with the Crisis Communications Plan – Part 1 and this document, the Crisis Communications Plan – Part 2.

During a crisis situation

- Once administration – regional director/program director, assistant vice president for County Services, director of Advancement, and vice president, ISU Extension and Outreach – is informed of the situation; HR, University Counsel, News Service, and ISU officials are informed as appropriate.
- Determine the primary spokesperson. The organizational spokesperson on specific issues will be appointed by the vice president, ISU Extension and Outreach.
- ISU Extension and Outreach staff members who will or may be impacted should be notified of the crisis situation, that a CMT has been formed, and the name of the organizational spokesperson. All media contacts and inquiries should be directed to the spokesperson.
- Communicate openly and cooperate with the news media, while still protecting the rights of the individuals involved and as far as legally allowed by the organization.
- Honest, straightforward information will be released by the CMT as deemed appropriate.
- A CMT member will be designated as the social media liaison and will determine the need for updates on social media platforms to acknowledge the crisis.
- The CMT will keep a detailed record of the crisis and all actions taken, sharing all notes and actions with all members of the team.

When the crisis response is completed

The CMT will conduct an analysis of the situation and the effects on ISU Extension and Outreach (and Iowa State University). Include all offices directly involved with the situation and if appropriate, campus individuals who may be able to provide important observations and insight into the management of the situation.

- Retain copies of communication materials, including social media.
- Determine if responses to media were made promptly and honestly.
- Determine if staff were informed and kept in the loop; and complied by referring contacts to the spokesperson.
- The director of Advancement, as a member of all CMTs, is holder of incident analysis summaries for ISU Extension and Outreach administration.

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