



# BOARD OF TRUSTEES POLICY CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### ***What is a communication crisis?***

A crisis is any situation that threatens the integrity or reputation of this library, usually brought on by adverse or negative media attention. These situations can be any kind of legal dispute, theft, accident, fire, flood or manmade disaster that could be attributed to the library. It can also be a situation where in the eyes of the media or general public our library did not react to one of the above situations in the appropriate manner. This definition is not all encompassing but rather is designed to give you an idea for the types of situations where you may need to follow this plan.

One thing to remember that it is crucial to ***tell it all, tell it fast and tell the truth***. If you do this you have done all you can to minimize the situation.

When a situation arises that may be a crisis the first thing you should do is contact the Library Director and/or the Marketing & Communications Manager.

## II. CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

This team is essential to identify what actions should be taken. The team should be comprised of the individuals who are key to the situation. They include:

- **Library Director**
- **Library Board of Trustees President**
- **Marketing & Communications Manager**
- **Fiscal Officer**

Other possible team members:

- Lawyers
- Senior Managers from department that may have been involved in the “crisis”
- Police/Fire/Emergency Responders
- Other staff who may have witnessed the “crisis”

The job of this team is to come up with a plan of action and decide who the spokesperson should be.

As soon as possible a prepared statement should be issued, if warranted. This statement should be something such as ***“Facts are still being gathered and there will be a press conference at 4:00 p.m.”***

The crisis communication team should:

- Determine the appropriate positioning or message to address the emergency
- “Tell it all, tell it fast and tell the truth.” It is always best when a mistake has been made to admit it upfront, and begin doing whatever is possible to re-establish credibility and confidence with internal and external audiences.
- Never try to lie, deny or hide involvement
- Don’t ignore the situation.

### **III. POSITIONING**

To decide on a position, it is important for staff to put themselves in the situation of whom ever was involved in the crisis or try to view the crisis from the eye of the public.

Examples of categories to consider for positioning are:

- Human error
- Clerical error
- Unauthorized procedures
- Inadequate supervision
- Inadequate quality control
- Misuse of confidential information
- Errors of judgment
- Inadequate standard operating procedures

As you are considering the position it is important to consider the wide range of consequences (e.g., legal, financial, public relations, effects on administration and effects on operations).

Keep in mind that people tend to remember what they hear first and last.

#### **IV. DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSON**

- One individual should be designated as the primary spokesperson to represent the Euclid Public Library, make an official statement and answer media questions throughout the crisis.
- If the communication team is not on site, a back-up to the designated spokesperson should also be identified to fill the position in the event that the primary spokesperson is unavailable.
- Criteria for the spokesperson, backup spokesperson and crisis communication expert is:
- Comfortable in front of a TV camera and with reporters. Skilled in handling media, skilled in directing responses to another topic, skilled in identifying key points, able to speak without using jargon, respectful of the role of the reporter, knowledgeable about the organization and the crisis at hand. Able to establish credibility with the media, able to project confidence to the audience, suitable in regard to diction, appearance and charisma, sincere, straightforward and believable, accessible to the media and to the internal communications personnel who will facilitate media interviews, able to remain calm in stressful situations.
- In addition to the designated spokesperson and backup, it can be anticipated that other parties involved in the crisis; police, fire department, health official, etc. will also have a spokesperson. It is important to obtain the identity of that individual as early as possible so all statements and contacts with the media can be coordinated between the two individuals and their organizations/interests whenever possible.

## V. MEDIA PROCEDURES

- Select a place to be used as a media center
- Locations for interviews and press briefings will be decided by the crisis communication team
- Stick to rules already established for the media. (i.e if the media are currently required to be escorted, then during a crisis they should be required to be escorted). If they are not required to be escorted now, then don't require them to be escorted in a crisis. If there are special circumstances that would require them to be escorted such as a safety hazard, they should be advised of this up front.
- Controlling the interview process is key to managing the crisis. Reporters may ask to speak to staff at the library who are involved with or have been affected by the crisis. It is best to restrict all interviews to the primary spokesperson, back-up spokesperson or technical expert.
- However, remember that reporters have the right to interview anyone they want to and if they do not get the answers they want from you they will get them from somewhere.
- All media should be treated equally. What is given to one (such as access to an area effected by the crisis) should be available to all media.

## VI. TOUGH QUESTIONS

A crisis situation is always difficult when dealing with the media. Therefore, tough questions and **rehearsals** are necessary to help the spokesperson prepare.

It is important, at the onset of the crisis, that the spokesperson, backup and advisors spend some time rehearsing prepared statements and answers to possible "tough" questions that may be asked by reporters. If possible, similar rehearsals should be conducted prior to each media interview, briefing or news conference. It is also important to anticipate and practice new questions as the story evolves.

- Be tough and be prepared.

The Crisis Communication Team and other staff who may be involved in answering questions should prepare questions and answers for the practice sessions. These questions and answers should be for internal use only and not for distribution outside the organization.

- Don't volunteer information unless it is a point the company wants to make and the question hasn't been asked.
- And whatever you do, "**don't talk off the record.**" Nothing is really off record when working with the media.

## **VII. PREPARED STATEMENTS**

Communicate as soon as possible for the greatest opportunity to control events and/or information getting to the media.

If possible, send out a news release. Please see next page for news release template.

- Show concern and/or good will for the public and for your employees in your first press interaction.
- Give facts from reliable sources and confirm.
- Don't over reach and don't speculate.
- You must have a prepared statement on hand that can be used to make an initial general response to the media when knowledge about the crisis first becomes known on a widespread basis or by reporters.
- As the crisis progresses and new information and facts become available, it is also advisable to develop prepared statements to be made by the spokesperson at the onset of any media interview, briefing or news conference.
- These prepared statements also can be read over the telephone to reporters who call to request information but are not represented at news conferences or briefings. The statement can also be sent by FAX or email upon request.



## VIII. SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Incident at the Euclid Public Library

September 24, 2013

Contact: Marketing & Communications Manager

216-261-5300 ext. 107 (Office)

A \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ involving \_\_\_\_\_ occurred today at \_\_\_\_\_ . The incident is under investigation and more information is forthcoming.

### ***For example:***

A gas leak at the Euclid Public Library, 631 East 222<sup>nd</sup> Street, occurred today at 3 p.m. We are currently investigating the incident with the East Ohio Gas Company and more information is forthcoming.

For more information about the Euclid Public Library visit [www.euclidlibrary.org](http://www.euclidlibrary.org) or contact Marketing & Communications Manager at (216) 261-5300 ext. 107.

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- A definitive time for an upcoming news conference or release of information, if known, could be included but is not necessary.
- You could also add information if it is available such as how many casualties there are known up to this point or any other pertinent information available. Once again, this information should be definitive and not speculative; verify everything you say.

## **IX. COLLATERAL MATERIALS**

Information brochures about the library or the area in which the crisis has occurred are helpful in informing the reporters or anyone else seeking information about the library.

In some cases it might be necessary to create materials that explain technical systems or in-house procedures. If we explain how a technical system or in-house procedure works and point out where a breakdown occurred, there is less chance of a reporter interpreting the situation erroneously.

- Always do what you can to make a complicated issue as simple as you can for reporters.
- If the crisis was caused by a piece of equipment consider bringing in a similar piece of equipment to show reporters. At the very least provide a schematic or drawing. If you give them a visual that may keep them from seeking one out themselves.
- Try not to use the actual piece of equipment that failed since that is morbid and allows an opportunity to an overzealous reporter to do some yellow journalism.

## **X. KEY AUDIENCES**

Below is a list of customers served by the Euclid Public Library. These are possible organizations that the Library may need to contact in the event of a crisis. This has been created solely to give guidance during an emergency.

***The Library may communicate with each group that is part of this audience.***

### **Employees:**

Management, Supervisors, hourly/prospective/salaried employees, and families

### **Community:**

City Council, Mayor, Police Chief, Fire Chief, School Superintendent, Neighborhood groups/Community Policing, Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis and Rotary.

### **Television Media:**

3 WKYC (Gannett)	25 WVIZ (Ideastream)
5 WEWS (E.W. Scripps)	43 WUAB (Raycom Media)
8 WJW (Local TV, LLC)	49 WEAO (Northeastern Ed. Television)
19 WOIO (Raycom Media)	55 WBNX (Winston Broadcasting Network)
23 WVPX (Ion Media Networks)	61 WQHS (Univision Communications)

### **Print & Online Media**

Plain Dealer, Call & Post, News Herald and Cleveland.com

### **Radio:**

89.3 FM WCSB – Variety	850 AM WKNR - Sports
90.3 FM WCPN –Public Radio	1100 AM WTAM - News Talk
91.1 FM WRUW –Variety	1260 AM WWMK - Children’s
93.1 FM WZAK –Urban	1300 AM WJMO - Religious
95.5 FM WFHM- Christian Contemporary	1420 AM WHK - News Talk
98.5 FM WNCX- Classic Rock	1490 AM WERE - Talk
99.5 FM WGAR –Country	1540 AM WWGK - Sports
100.7 FM WMMS –Rock	
102.1 FM WDOK –Adult Contemporary	
103.3 FM WCRF –Religious	
104.1 FM WQAL –Hot AC	
105.7 FM WMJI –Classic Hits	
106.5 FM WHLK –Adult Hits	
107.9 FM WENZ -Urban	

## I. Media/Audience Contact List

This will be updated on an annual basis or as needed if a crisis occurs sooner. The contact log will be available to the Director, Library Board of Trustees President, Marketing & Communications Manager and the Fiscal Officer so no media contacts are missed while reporting a crisis.

This **complete** list is kept on file in the Marketing & Communications Department

Name of Organization	Department	Phone	Email
Plain Dealer	Press Releases, News, Tips & Announcements	216-999-4800	<a href="mailto:metrodesk@plaind.com">metrodesk@plaind.com</a> <a href="mailto:newsdesk@cleveland.com">newsdesk@cleveland.com</a>
News Herald	Main Office	440-951-0000	<a href="mailto:editor@news-herald.com">editor@news-herald.com</a>
Call & Post	Main Office	216-588-6700	<a href="mailto:info@call-post.com">info@call-post.com</a>
Euclid City	Mayor's Office	216-289-2751	<a href="mailto:mayor@cityofeuclid.com">mayor@cityofeuclid.com</a>
Euclid Police Dept.	Police Chief	216-289-8463	<a href="mailto:tbrickman@cityofeuclid.com">tbrickman@cityofeuclid.com</a>
Euclid Fire Dept.	Fire Chief	216-289-8401	<a href="mailto:chaddock@cityofeuclid.com">chaddock@cityofeuclid.com</a>
Euclid City Schools	Superintendent's Office	216-797-2901	<a href="mailto:kbell@euclidschools.org">kbell@euclidschools.org</a>

## I. HANDLING MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Prepare "talking paper" on primary **points** you want to make.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Anticipate questions-prepare responses.  | - Practice answering questions.                      |
| Cover controversial areas ahead of time. | - Know who will be interviewing you, if possible.    |
| Determine how much time is available.    | - Audiences often remember impressions, not facts.   |
| Do use specifics.                        | - Do use analogies.                                  |
| Do use contrasts, comparisons.           | - Do be enthusiastic/animated (if situation merits.) |
| Do be your casual likable self.          | - Do be a listener.                                  |
| Do be correct.                           | - Do be anecdotal.                                   |

***If you don't have the answer or can't answer, do admit it and move on to another topic.***

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|---|-----------------------|
| Don't fall for that "A or B" dilemma.                           | - Don't go off topic. |
| Don't think you have to answer every question.                  | - Smile, be friendly. |
| Don't speak for someone else --beware of the absent-party trap. |                       |

### **How to Respond During a News Interview**

Obtain advanced knowledge of interview topics.

Make sure you are prepared in detail.

Begin the interview by making your major points in statement form.

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| Try to maintain control of the interview. | - Don't let reporter wear you down.         |
| Set a time limit in advance.              | - Avoid jargon or professional expressions. |

Reporter may repeat self in different ways to gain information you may not want to give.

Don't answer inappropriate questions; simply say it is "not an appropriate topic for you to address at this time," or "it's proprietary" for example.

Be prepared for interruptions with questions...it is legitimate for reporters to do that.

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| <b>Do not speak "off the record."</b> | - Remember, the interview lasts as long as a reporter is there. |
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**ADDITIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS QUESTIONS?**

**Marketing & Communications Manager  
Euclid Public Library  
631 East 222<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Euclid, Ohio 44123  
(216) 261-5300 ext. 107**

*Adopted by the Board of Trustees 01-21-14*