

Crisis Communications Checklist

For Housing Organizations



PREPARE

Select your internal crisis communications team. Consider including, at a minimum, HR, communications (including a social media manager), and department heads.

Create a contact list for your crisis communications team, as well as a schedule to update it.

Create or update your emergency contact list. Include third parties, such as vendors and your insurance company.

Establish a formal notification plan for your employees and residents and for their immediate family members in the event people are injured, missing, or killed.

Establish a crisis communications policy for employees and ask your board of directors and/or commissioners to review, approve, and adhere to it. Make sure they know who your company spokespeople are and where to forward media requests.

Consider outlining your expectations regarding employee and board/commissioner interactions with the media and on social media. (You don't want anyone who hasn't had media training or who doesn't have all the facts to speak to reporters or post anything online.)

Integrate new employees into your crisis communications plan.

Interview crisis communications firms. Choose one to have on hand if you need help communicating during a crisis.

Establish remote hosting for your company's website and ensure it has enough bandwidth to handle traffic spikes that may occur during a crisis.

Make sure you can easily post messages on your website.

Create a media kit with basic information about your organization, including contact information for your spokespeople.

Select a crisis management “war room.” Make sure it has secure, 24-hour access and direct phone lines.

Allocate budget dollars to crisis communications. You may want to invest in media training, an outside crisis communications firm (HAI Group policyholders have \$15,000 to put toward this expense if the crisis is the result of a covered peril), and other measures, such as an SMS messaging service that will text your contact list in case of an emergency.

Consider outlining your expectations regarding employee interactions with the media and on social media. (You don’t want an employee or a commissioner who hasn’t had media training or who doesn’t have all the facts to speak to reporters or post anything online.)

PLAN

Identify the top threats to your organization. *Hint:* Past events or industry news are great places to start.

Create a [business continuity plan](#) to help you analyze the business functions that are critical to your operations and the resources needed to protect them. (You may need to communicate these during a crisis.)

Identify and train your spokespeople. Hire an outside firm if your budget allows, or brainstorm difficult questions and practice your responses internally.

Determine which channels you’ll use to communicate (i.e., website, email, text, Twitter).

Develop key messages, talking points, and actions for different scenarios and audiences, and then conduct simulations with your team. Show empathy and make sure you're prepared to communicate early and often. **Make sure you address:**

What went wrong

Where it happened

When you learned about the problem

What steps you are taking to address it

Who is affected

What you're doing to help

EXECUTE

Activate an internal investigation team to gather facts and determine risk.

Stop or minimize further damage if possible.

Notify your insurance carrier.

Monitor the news and social media.

Choose the appropriate spokespeople for the situation. (For example, your IT director might best respond to a data breach, while your ED might be better for a fire or active shooter situation.)

Brief your spokespeople on facts and key messages if they don't already have them.

Communicate the same to your employees. They should know you are aware of the situation and that you're addressing it to minimize speculation in the press or on social media.

Provide the media with 24/7 access to your spokespeople.

Deliver regular updates to stakeholders.

Notify stakeholders about next steps. If you've had a data breach, for example, explain what you're doing to protect victims from identity theft.

ANALYZE

Conduct a post-crisis evaluation with your communications team.

Discuss and implement potential improvements.

Incorporate the scenario into future crisis communications training sessions.

Celebrate what went well.

Update your crisis communications or business continuity plan as necessary.

Interested in working with HAI Group to manage your agency's risk?

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