

Transportation Outreach Planner

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Public Outreach Strategies

Risk and Crisis Management

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Recommended Target Groups

Education

College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language

Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability

Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income

Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership

Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity

Age

Seniors

Working Age Adults

Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Civic Engagement

Description

Risk and crisis management refer to strategies that organizations can take to address a threat, conflict, or serious problem. Whereas risk management is a proactive process that focuses on forecasting potential problems in order to avoid risk, crisis management is a reactive process used to address problems or conflicts that can seriously affect an organization, a project, or a community. In both cases the goal is to minimize damage. ¹

Special Uses

Risk and crisis management techniques can be used to:

- Deal with negative media
- Mitigate community conflict or potential damage
- Address hostile groups and community concerns

When to Use

Risk management techniques can be integrated into an agency's public outreach strategies. By working closely with community stakeholders and the media, agencies can use risk management strategies on an ongoing basis to identify potential issues that can affect a project or policy, or that can affect how the public perceives the agency. Crisis management is used when an agency is faced with strong public opposition, when the media or the public misinterpret an agency's message, or when there is a serious set-back, error, or accident that can have negative public consequences.

Cost

* Low (up to \$999)

The cost of implementing a risk or crisis management plan can be moderate, depending on the complexity of the issue and the amount of paid media that is used to address public concerns. The primary costs include staff time and media coverage. If an agency is able to obtain free publicity and disseminate its message using the internet, social media, and other low cost sources, it is possible to keep expenses low.

Low (up to \$999)	*
Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)	**
High (\$10,000 to \$50,000)	***
Very High (Above \$50,000)	****

Disclaimer: The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.

Time

*** Multiyear

Risk management is an ongoing process. It requires staff to monitor public sentiment, social trends, and other factors on a regular basis in order to prevent potential issues from escalating. It also calls for agencies to establish policies and procedures for dealing with crisis situations. The aim is to be continuously prepared to avert risk and minimize

crisis.

1 to 3 months
6 months to a year
Multiyear

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* *
* * *

Disclaimer: The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for implementing a risk and crisis management plan:

- **Identify areas of potential risk and develop a risk management plan.** The key to developing a risk management plan is to identify major risk areas. "Major risks are those that have a high likelihood of occurring and, if they occur, would have a major impact on governance, operations, finances, external factors (such as public opinion or relationship with funders), or compliance with laws and regulations." ² The risks should be prioritized based on cost and potential impact. Below is a list of risk factors that should be monitored: ³
 - Conflict due to limited resources, poor communication, and different values, perceptions, goals, or priorities
 - Inability to communicate effectively with a group or key stakeholders
 - Possible misinterpretation of the agency's message or intentions
 - Complaints that the agency is inaccessible, cannot be trusted, or is insensitive to cultural differences
 - Adoption of policies, projects, or programs that have a known opposition
 - Agencies should also monitor the following signs of conflict or hostility: ⁴
 - Key stakeholders or groups are left out of discussions or opt not to participate
 - Cliques or factions form to discuss the problem separately
 - Groups use derogatory terms to refer to the opposing parties
 - Groups are not willing to work or cooperate with each other
- **Develop outreach strategies for managing the risks that are identified.** Once the potential risk areas are identified, it is important to determine how best to deal with the issue. Proactively engaging the parties that are involved through the strategies listed below is one of the most effective methods for managing potential risk. Such strategies can be incorporated into an agency's public outreach efforts. ⁵
 - Identify the key stakeholders and groups that have an interest in the issue, including the media.
 - Conduct an assessment of the various key stakeholders and community groups. Understand their interests, history, affiliations, and demographic makeup.
 - Meet with the key stakeholders and community groups to discuss their interests and needs.
 - Keep key stakeholders and groups informed of the issues through presentations, trainings, tours, etc.
 - Ensure that information related to projects, policies, programs, and plans are easy to access.
 - Empower key stakeholders and groups by keeping them involved and encouraging them to provide input at visioning meetings and other planning events.
- **Assess existing policies and procedures to determine if changes should be made to avoid the potential risk.** Use the feedback obtained from the outreach efforts to determine if changes need to be made to mitigate possible issues. Agencies need to consider the potential consequences if no actions are taken. Below are possible options for action: ⁶
 - Avoidance - No changes are made, and the status quo is maintained (this is a high risk option).
 - Modification - Changes are implemented in order to reduce potential harm or damage.
 - Retention - Agency accepts the potential risk and prepares for the consequences.
 - Share - Agency recruits another organization to help address the issue. The organization can be one that has successfully addressed the problem in the past. It is also possible to partner with an organization that is facing a similar risk in order to share resources in addressing the problem.
- **Designate a management team to oversee all risk and crisis situations.** In addition to identifying potential risks, agencies should create a risk management team to oversee all risk/crisis situations. The team should include a public relations person, someone who is familiar with the organization's operations, and a legal expert. Pre-assigning the team members allows agencies to respond quickly to risk and crisis situations since the team members already know their roles and responsibilities. ⁷
- **Develop a risk/crisis management toolkit.** The toolkit should include basic operating procedures for dealing with risk or crisis situations. It should also include contact lists, templates for news releases and management statements, as well as sample website postings and a plan for disseminating information. ⁸
- **Develop a plan for dealing with crisis situations.** A comprehensive risk management plan should include

strategies for dealing with unexpected crisis situations when it is not possible to avert risk. Whereas risk management seeks to prevent and detect risk, crisis management focuses on controlling incidents that can have negative consequences on an organization if not addressed properly. The following are the basic strategies for addressing a crisis situation:⁹

- **Identify the problem.** When crisis strikes the crisis team and agency staff needs to determine the nature of the problem so that they can respond appropriately. Below are various types of crisis situations that may arise:
 - Injury, loss of life, or property damage due to accidents, human errors, natural disasters, or criminal action
 - Dissemination of rumors or false information about the organization or projects
 - Claim that the organization is operating in an inappropriate manner
 - Organizational actions that anger agency stakeholders and the public
- **Contact the affected stakeholders or opponents immediately to establish communication and identify their concerns.** This should be done before there is an official media response. The goal is to establish trust and keep the lines of communication open.
- **Release the initial public response quickly and make sure the facts are accurate.** The public response should provide information on how the agency plans to address the situation and where interested parties can get additional information about the situation. If victims are involved, the agency should indicate the actions being taken to assist those that were affected. The response should be disseminated to all internal and external agency stakeholders, media outlets, and affected parties.
- **Maintain a clear and consistent message throughout the crisis, and create an information outlet where the public can obtain information and view agency responses to questions and allegations.** During a crisis it is important to maintain communication and provide a consistent message to the public. Agencies can use a variety of sources to communicate with the public including telephone hotlines, the internet, social media, and paid advertising.
- **Implement risk management plan.** Once the potential risks have been identified and the strategies for mitigating these risks have been developed, the risk management plan should be reviewed by agency officials and formally adopted by the agency. To ensure that the strategies are implemented it is important to ensure that staff and volunteers understand the strategies, as well as their roles and responsibilities in carrying them out.¹⁰
- **Review and revise the plan as needed.** At a minimum, the risk management plan should be reviewed annually to assess progress. In addition, the agency should also monitor complaints and public comments on a regular basis in order to gauge public sentiment related to the risk areas.¹¹

Recommended Target Demographics

Risk and crisis management techniques can be used among all demographic groups. Such techniques are particularly useful in averting or mitigating conflicts among groups that have different interests. These techniques can also be used when facing strong opposition. The most important factor in dealing with risk or crisis situations is to establish communication with all key parties involved. Failure to do so could lead to a stalemate and serious setbacks.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when dealing with a risk or crisis situation:

- **Provide training to staff, agency officials, and volunteers on how to handle conflict or crisis situations.** The training should include a review of techniques on how to deal with conflict, as well a review of the agency's procedure and protocol during crisis situations.¹²
- **Maintain close communication with agency staff and stakeholders whenever there is a crisis or major risk.** It is important that all agency stakeholders are aware of the situation and understand how the agency is planning to deal with the issue, as well as the message the agency is trying to convey. Failure to maintain communication can lead to the dissemination of inaccurate information and rumors.¹³
- **At public meetings dealing with the crisis participants should be given the opportunity to vent their concerns.** Agencies that do not allow the public to express their views and only focus on providing their response are likely to face resistance. One recommendation is allocate time in the agenda for public feedback. After the feedback is provided, agency officials should focus on reiterating the public's concerns to ensure participants that their issues have been heard.¹⁴
- **When addressing the media agency staff should follow the recommendations below:**¹⁵

- Have responses available for different types of questions. Avoid using the phrase "no comment."
- Provide clear and concise information. Technical terms and jargon should be avoided.
- Be aware of the choice of words that are used, as well as the tone of voice, facial expressions, and posture.
- Provide the media with a written statement, a fact sheet, and other information that may be useful to the press.

Case Studies

The I-10 Bridge collapse over Escambia Bay in the State of Florida shows how different agencies were able to work together to address a crisis situation resulting from a natural disaster. In 2004 Hurricane Ivan destroyed I-10 Bridge, which connected Escambia and Santa Rosa counties and served interstate travelers. The case study shows how the Florida Department of Transportation, the Florida Department of Environmental Protections, and other government agencies used crisis management techniques to address environmental, contractual, and coordination issues (http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev/bridge_casestudy.asp#fl).¹⁶

The Federal Highway Administration used risk management techniques to assess major risks in implementing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). The FHWA Risk Management Plan of 2009 identified various risks related to accountability, contract administration, quality assurance, budgetary impact, and other factors. Eight mitigation strategies were developed to respond to the identified risks, and the strategies were used to implement and monitor the program (<http://www.auditforum.org/speaker%20presentations/pacific/pniaf%2009%2009/miller.pdf>).¹⁷

For Further Information

The following provide additional information, as well as useful articles and tips on risk and crisis management techniques:

- **Community Organizer's Toolbox, Conflict Management:** <http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/building/conflict.html>¹⁸
- **Crisis Management and Communications:** <http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/crisis-management-and-communications>¹⁹
- **Meeting Management, Where Does Risk Communication Fit in Public Participation?** <http://www.psandman.com/col/meeting.htm>²⁰
- **Best Practices When Facilitating a Hostile Group:** <http://www.extension.purdue.edu/renewable-energy/docs/IBEWG/Biomass.present2%20for%205.11.pdf>²¹

Sources

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- 3 Community Organizer's Toolbox, "Conflict Management," 5 February 2012, (<http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/building/conflict.html>).
- 4 Rabinowitz, Phil, "Chapter 6, Promoting Interest in Community Issues: Handling Crises in Communication," The Community Tool Box, 5 February 2012, (http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1077.aspx).
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- 15 Coombs, Timothy, "Crisis Management and Communications," 30 October 2007, Institute for Public Relations, 6 February 2012, <http://www.instituteforpr.org/topics/crisis-management-and-communications/>).
- 16 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "Meeting Environmental Requirements After a Bridge Collapse: Florida I-10 Bridge Over Escambia Bay," August 2008, FHWA, 6 February 2012, (http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/projdev/bridge_casestudy.asp#fl).
- 17 FHWA, "Federal Highway Administration Risk Management Plan: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009," 10 April 2009, FHWA, 6 February 2012, (<http://www.auditforum.org/speaker%20presentations/pacific/pniaf%2009%2009/miller.pdf>).
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