Crisis Communication Toolkit
Introduction

No fair or exposition ever initiates a crisis event. Therefore, it’s difficult to proactively manage your organization’s reputation in the hearts and minds of stakeholders when the unexpected occurs. Crises are unplanned; so, when they happen, communication is reactive. However, your team can lay the groundwork with a proactive crisis communication plan. Then, when the unexpected does happen, you’re ready to respond and regain control of the message expeditiously and effectively.

The materials herein cover general best practices related to crisis communications, as well as how to: assemble a crisis management and response team; address stakeholders and their needs; develop effective key messages; and plan for common crisis scenarios.

Designed exclusively for fairs and expositions as a guide to planning for crisis scenarios, the IAFE’s Crisis Communication Toolkit offers resources that help fairs and expositions prepare, respond and recover from crisis events.

Best Practices – Crisis Communication

► Develop a plan. “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” – Benjamin Franklin

Address “what ifs” in a pre-written plan. Anticipate what could happen and create a framework that, at a minimum, outlines who will make decisions and who will respond, as well as what stakeholders need to be communicated to, what communication tools you’ll use to reach them, and what you might need them to know. Rely on this plan and keep it current. You will likely be asked by media, government officials and the public about the importance of your crisis communication plan, how often you need to activate it and how often it’s updated. Be sure you can answer those questions.

► Determine who’s on your crisis team.

Identify a year-round crisis management team that can convene quickly to manage the various layers of a crisis situation. At a minimum, representatives from the fair’s top leadership, its communications team, and safety and security staff should have a seat at the table.

For each potential crisis scenario, you outline in your pre-written anticipatory plan, also identify additional field experts you might pull in to support your team with key information and help solidify public understanding of the incident. (These experts could include health department representatives, ride safety inspectors, veterinarians, medical doctors and local authorities.)

► Identify key stakeholders.

Pinpoint the stakeholder groups who really need to hear from you and where you’ll reach them most effectively.

Ask and answer: Who are the stakeholders and groups impacted by the crisis? (Are they guests, concessionaires, staff, exhibitors, volunteers, attraction operators, entertainers, etc.?)
Then, articulate where you can reach each of those groups most effectively. (Is it via public address system, text alert, social media, email, on-grounds signage, etc.?)

When a crisis happens, it seems as if the whole world is watching and listening. No matter how far-reaching news of the crisis travels, and how many people hear about it, your fair’s key stakeholders need to be the priority. Key stakeholders have the power to be your fair’s strongest allies or toughest adversaries because they are most-impacted and closest to the action. Therefore, it’s important to be sure your messages speak directly to them through the communication channels they rely on most for news and information.

See the Stakeholder Identification & Interests Worksheet included with this Crisis Communication Toolkit for more guidance.

► Take control immediately.

When a crisis occurs, it’s imperative to communicate as quickly as possible. Swift communication solidifies that the fair is the authority on the situation and allows you to take control of the narrative. Even if you have few details, let your stakeholders and the media know just that. Acknowledge that an incident has occurred, and explain that fair leadership and authorities are gathering details. State that you will be in touch again as soon as there is concrete information.

► Prioritize information with key messaging.

Create 2-3 key messages that address the most important things you want stakeholders and the media to know about the incident. This helps cut through the clutter and chaos with concise clarity. Note that preliminary key messages can be outlined in your pre-written anticipatory plan to save time in the event of a real crisis. Revisit, update and use 2-3 clear key messages with every release of new information about the incident.

► Leverage the power of credible messengers.

If complex issues need clarity or additional explanation, ask the field experts on your crisis management team to support you in adding perspective in interviews, news conferences, and via video or other communication channels. These expert supporters of your fair can help build trust as counterparts to your fair spokespeople.

► Tell the truth, and never guess.

Truth is non-negotiable. Lying and/or dissemination of false information will create a crisis within a crisis when the truth comes out, damaging your event’s reputation further and requiring exponentially more efforts to rebuild trust.

Speculating or hypothesizing is off-limits too. If the guesswork is incorrect, your fair loses credibility and will have more heavy lifting on the back end to correct the misinformation.

Stick to the facts at hand. If you don’t know, don’t guess. It is completely within your rights to tell the media and your key stakeholders if you don’t know the answer to a question. Assure them you’ll look into the facts around their inquiry and get back to them.

► Counter inaccurate and misleading information quickly.

Crisis managers need to respond with facts as soon as possible after a crisis occurs to ensure that rumors and storytellers without all the facts don’t take control of the narrative. A timely response builds trust by showing the media and key stakeholders they can rely on your team for regular updates about the situation unfolding. If inaccurate or misleading information does come to light, provide clarification with facts as soon as possible.

► Communicate with empathy and reassurance.

Be sure those communicating on behalf of your organization can establish credibility to rebuild trust with media and stakeholder groups by communicating with sincere understanding and reassurance that the fair or exposition is working toward a resolution.

► Make change post-crisis.

The public, the media, and most importantly, your stakeholders, are watching how you’ll respond and what actions you’ll take in the long-term. Rebuild trust and credibility by making a commitment to address the root cause of the crisis. Investigate, update and change procedures, practices and policies to mitigate the risk of it happening again.
Assembling a Crisis Management & Response Team

Long before a crisis even occurs, a critical first step is determining who will come to the table to support a resolution when the unexpected does happen. Your Crisis Management & Response Team should be made up of leaders in your organization, as well as community partners. The makeup of your team may change a bit depending on the type of crisis. Consider involving individuals with a leadership role and/or specific expertise about your event, such as:

- Executive leadership team members
- Safety and security staff
- Law enforcement
- Fire and rescue officials
- Medical aid and first responders
- Department of health officials (food safety, animal disease, infectious disease)
- Veterinarians and/or livestock experts
- Ride safety inspectors
- Meteorologists

Build relationships and communicate year-round with the team you’ve built. Keep team members in the loop and arm them with information about your procedures, practices and organization, so they have those basic elements dialed in when they are called on to support your fair in a crisis.

Know how to quickly bring the team together. Keep team members’ contact information up-to-date (especially cell phone numbers). Set up phone trees, text and email groups ahead of time. Know and provide directions to a few possible team meeting locations. (Note that you should select one or two off-grounds meeting locations in case the crisis prevents grounds entry.)

Map a chain of command that articulates:

- Crisis Management & Response Team Member roles and responsibilities
- The leaders responsible for making key decisions
- The spokesperson who will communicate information and updates to the media and public
- Who notifies others and receives communication when a crisis occurs, and in what order

Ultimately, your anticipatory plan should identify: who is on your Crisis Management & Response Team; how to expeditiously reach team members in a crisis; possible meeting locations; and a clear chain of command. That way, when the unexpected happens, you can rely on your plan to help swiftly circle the wagons and get those key people working together toward resolution.
Identifying Stakeholders & Their Needs

Stakeholders are key groups who are directly impacted by your fair and/or have the ability to impact your fair’s success (financially or from a reputation/sentiment standpoint).

Identifying the key stakeholders in a crisis situation is critical to determining who needs to be communicated to, what they will most want to know, and where they can best be reached. Each group will look and listen for information about how the crisis and its resolution impact them specifically.

For each crisis scenario in your anticipatory plan, identify key stakeholder groups that would be impacted by the incident or have an impact on the overall success of your fair in light of the incident. Here are some examples to consider:

- Guests/visitors
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Board members
- Residents in the surrounding neighborhoods
- Concessionaires
- Ride & attraction operators
- Livestock exhibitors
- Media
- Sponsors
- Entertainers
- Suppliers/purveyors
- Government officials
- Law enforcement and local safety and security officials
- Online communities

Knowing who the key stakeholder groups are ahead of time allows you to zero in on who it’s most important to reach, and to think through what those groups would need to know, as well as how and where they need to be communicated to. For example, livestock exhibitors would be most impacted by a power outage in your barns. Knowing that at the outset of the power outage helps your Crisis Management & Response Team quickly think through what those exhibitors need to know and how they should be reached (e.g., perhaps it’s via public address system in the barns or through a text group your ag and livestock staff have set-up).

See the Stakeholder Identification & Interests Worksheet included with this Crisis Communication toolkit for more guidance.
Developing Effective Key Messages

What are key messages?

Key messages (or key talking points as they’re often called) are the most critical pieces of information you want your key stakeholders to hear and remember about the incident.

Why are they useful in crisis?

Developing key messages ensures that your fair can prioritize the information stakeholder groups need to know while keeping communications clear, controlled and consistent in times of crisis.

How to compose effective key messages:

- Identify the 2 to 3 most important points you want people to know and remember about the unfolding incident.
- Draft a 1 to 2 sentence statement that concisely addresses your fair’s message around each of the 2 to 3 points.
- When drafting your key messages, keep your key stakeholders in mind:
  - What do they need to hear from your organization?
  - What can you tell them that will help strengthen their trust or loyalty to your fair?
- After drafting, review and refine by asking, are the key messages:
  - believable?
  - able to be supported by evidence, examples or anecdotes to back up their validity?
  - concise, clear and sound-bite-like?
  - aligned with your organization’s values?
  - working to manage your fair’s reputation and rebuild trust?
  - addressing answers to questions the target audience would actually ask?
  - free of jargon?
  - written the way that people actually speak?

If you answer “no” to any of these questions in reviewing your key messages, you should go back and make edits until you’re able to say “yes” to all the questions.

Rolling out key messages in interviews and communications:

- Communicate the key messages them in order of importance. It’s psychologically proven that people most-remember the first thing they hear, so work in order of most- to least-important.
- In interviews, think of every question as an opportunity to work in one of your key messages and/or information that supports them.
- Remember that in the end, these key messages are really meant for the impacted stakeholder groups, so even if it seems that all you’re doing is talking to reporters, know that the messages you develop should be directed specifically at speaking to your pre-determined stakeholder groups for this particular type of crisis. Ultimately, the reporters you’re talking to will serve the story and your key messages up to those stakeholder groups.

See the *Key Message Composition Worksheet* included with this Crisis Communication Toolkit for more guidance.
Ride Incident

**Common Media & Public Questions:**

- Did the ride malfunction? Or, what caused the incident to happen?
- On what ride did the incident take place?
- Are there injuries or casualties? To what extent?
- Can you identify any of the individuals injured or killed?
- Do you know the extent of the injuries?
- What are your ride safety plans and regulations?
- Have there been any ride accidents or safety issues here in the past?
- What precautions are you taking to ensure this doesn’t happen again?
- What ride did this occur on?
- Where is the ride located?
- Do you plan to reopen the ride?

**Possible key messages:**

- Our highest priority is the safety of our visitors and everyone at the fair.
- The fair’s ride operators are required to (detail ride safety standards and regulations your ride operators are held to).
- The fair’s rides are inspected (briefly describe inspection procedures and safety checks).
- We are reviewing our plans and procedures and working with ride safety experts to determine the cause of the incident.
- **(If no injuries):** No one was injured in today’s event.
- **(If injuries):** First responders (are working/ worked) to (detail how they are treating/ caring for) the injured.
- **(If injuries or fatalities):** Our hearts go out to those affected by today’s events.

**Communications Tools to Consider Leveraging in a Ride Incident Scenario:**

- Watch social media channels for posts pertaining to the incident and prepare to respond.
- Media statements sent to local media via email or text
- News release/s when details are known
- Media alert with notice of news conference
- Messaging for carnival, information booth and phone staff to respond appropriately.
Active Assailant

**Common Media & Public Questions:**
- Is the assailant/s still active/is this still an active scene?
- If the assailant/s are still active, what’s being done to protect people?
- How many victims are there?
- Who are the victims?
- What are the victims’ conditions?
- Is there a suspect/s and can you share their identity/ies?
- Is there a suspect/s in custody?
- Was there a motive for the attack?
- What has the fair done to prevent active assailant incidents to this point?
- What is the fair doing to mitigate being the risk of an active assailant situation in the future?
- Where on the fairgrounds and what time did the attack occur?
- Does the suspect/s have a criminal background?

**Possible key messages:**
- The safety and security of our guests and everyone involved with the fair is our highest priority.
- **(If scene is still unfolding):** Law enforcement and fair officials are working as quickly as possible to notify those in potential danger and to move people to safety.
- **(Once area is secure):** We are *(doing what?)* to re-establish a safe environment and restore the fairgrounds to full, normal operations.
- Currently, the fair *(is/is not)* open.
- **(If injuries):** *(Insert first-responder and law enforcement groups) (are working/worked) to (details on care being provided)* the injured.

**Communications Tools to Consider Leveraging in an Active Assailant Scenario:**
- **Critical Tools:** Public address systems, emergency text message notification services, two-way radios and programmable signage boards that reach those within a critical radius. The stakeholders needing the first and immediate communication in an active assailant event are people on the fairgrounds. The next priority group is those who live, work or are traveling near the fairgrounds, as they could end up encountering the assailant if they leave the fairgrounds or attempt to escape apprehension.
- Social media channels
- Website
- Media statements sent to local media via email or text
- News release/s when details are known
- Media alert with notice of news conference
- Email to fair list subscribers, employees, volunteers, etc.
- **(If injuries):** Our hearts go out to those impacted by today’s events.
- **(If fatalities):** We extend our deepest sympathies to the family/ies and friends of the deceased.
Common Crisis Scenarios for Fairs

Weather-Related Crisis – Proactive (Preparing for an Approaching or Potential Weather Event)

Common Media & Public Questions:

- Who is responsible for monitoring weather?
- What technology and information do you use to track severe weather?
- If you are using an outside service to monitor weather (NWS or contractor) do you have a contract with a defined scope of work that spells out roles/responsibilities? How do you contact this contractor? Are they on-site or remote?
- Who makes the call on closing, delaying, sheltering, evacuating, etc.?
- Do you have a written weather response plan?
- What “triggers” activate your weather plan?
  - Lightning within so many miles
  - Sustained winds above XX MPH
  - Severe weather watches/warnings
- Do you have a specific plan for communicating with your carnival operator – related to shutting down rides? Does your carnival operator have a weather plan? How does it align with your plan?
- How will you alert people if severe weather is threatening the fairgrounds?
- How do you communicate with staff, partners, vendors etc. (you’re not just notifying the public)?
- Is there a plan to move people to shelter in the event of severe weather?
- Do you have enough room to accommodate everyone who needs to seek shelter?
- Does the fair remain open in severe weather?
- Will Grandstand shows, racing or other events be cancelled or postponed in the event of severe weather?
- Where can people get updates about weather and its impact on the fair?

Possible Key Messages:

- The safety of visitors and everyone involved with the fair is our top priority.
- We have a plan for keeping guests safe in the event of severe weather. *(Offer some of the key points from the plan that people need to know about safety when severe weather impacts the fair.)*
- We can also employ our severe weather evacuation plans to move people from *(fill in campgrounds, outdoor entertainment areas, Grandstand – areas where large crowds need to evacuate to shelter quickly).*
- Everyone at the fair can get updates about weather and safety by *(detail where and how to get this information (i.e., by signing up for text alerts at...; by checking our Facebook page; by visiting our website at...)).*

Communications Tools to Consider Leveraging in a Weather Safety Event (Preparing for an Approaching or Potential Weather Event):

- **Critical Tools:** Public address systems, emergency text message notification services, two-way radios and programmable signage boards that reach those within a critical radius. The stakeholders needing the first and immediate communication in a severe weather event are people on the fairgrounds.
- Social media channels
- Website
- Media statements sent to local media via email or text
Weather-Related Crisis – Reactive (Responding to Weather Event Impacting the Fairgrounds)

Common Media & Public Questions:
- What type of severe weather are you experiencing on the fairgrounds right now?
- Who is responsible for monitoring weather?
- What technology and information do you use to track severe weather?
- Do you have a weather safety plan that’s being used?
- How are you notifying people that they need to seek shelter due to severe weather?
- Have you been able to move people to safety effectively?
- Is the fair still open? Will it be open after the weather passes?
- Is there storm damage to the fairgrounds?
- Are there injuries?

Possible Key Messages:
- The safety of everyone at the fair is our top priority.
- With the weather impacting the fairgrounds, we are (detail what’s being done) to keep everyone safe.
- Our severe weather safety (and/or evacuation) plans have been employed to move people to safety.
- People on the fairgrounds should (fill in directives) to move to safety.
- We will provide updates and/or an all-clear when the weather threat has passed by (fill in ways they’ll receive notification).

Communications Tools to Consider Leveraging in a Weather Safety Event (Responding to Weather Event Impacting the Fairgrounds):
- Critical Tools: Public address systems, emergency text message notification services, two-way radios and programmable signage boards that reach those within a critical radius. The stakeholders needing the first and immediate communication in a severe weather event are people on the fairgrounds.
- Social media channels
- Website
- Media statements sent to local media via email or text
- Email to fair list subscribers, employees, volunteers, media, etc.
- Provide talking points and key information to information booth staff, entrance gate staff and phone operators to appropriately address inquiries

Note: Recordings of NOAA weather safety workshops and NOAA lightning safety information are available in the IAFE Member Library.
**Accident (Golf Cart, Wheel Flying off Race Car, Electrocution)**

**Common Media & Public Questions:**
- What happened?
- Are there injuries? Fatalities?
- How many people were involved?
- What caused the accident?
- When did this happen?
- Where on the fairgrounds did the accident occur?
- Are there plans or precautions in place to prevent this from happening?
- Has this type of accident happened at the fair in the past?

**Possible Key Messages:**
- The safety and security of everyone involved with the fair is our top priority.
- We are working with (insert which experts and officials) to determine the cause of the accident.
- (Detail any existing regulations, safeguards or plans around this type of accident that were followed or employed.)
- (If injuries): (Insert first-responder and law enforcement groups) (are working/worked) to (details on care being provided) the injured.
- (If injuries or fatalities): Our hearts go out to those impacted by today’s events.

**Communications Tools to Consider Leveraging in the Event of an Accident:**
- **Critical Tools:** Public address systems, emergency text message notification services, two-way radios and programmable signage boards that reach those within a critical radius of the accident will aid in keeping people away from the incident area.
- Statements sent to local media via email or text
- Statement to be used on social media (if necessary)
- News release when details are known (if necessary)
- Provide talking points and key information to information booth staff, entrance gate staff (to use before they need to seek shelter) and phone staff to appropriately address inquiries.
Fire

Common Media & Public Questions:
- Where is/was the fire?
- When did the fire start?
- Do you know what caused the fire?
- What damage did/has the fire caused?
- Is anyone injured? To what extent?
- Which emergency teams responded? How quickly did they arrive?
- Do you suspect arson?
- What precautions are being taken to prevent fires on the fairgrounds in the future?
- Have there been fires at the fair in the past?

Possible Initial Key Messages:
- The safety of everyone at the fair is our highest priority.
- Emergency officials are working to (contain/have contained) the fire.
- We are working with (insert applicable agencies and fire safety experts) to determine the cause of the fire.
- We have many safeguards in place to prevent fires, including (detail fire safety and suppression safeguards, i.e., sprinkler systems, fire and smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, partnerships with local fire departments and State Fire Marshalls, regular code inspections, etc.).
- (If no injuries): There were not any injuries.
- (If injuries): First responders (are working/worked) to (detail how they treat/care for) the injured.
- (If damage/injuries/fatalities): Our hearts go out to those affected by today’s events.

Communications Tools to Consider Leveraging in a Fire Safety Situation:
- Critical Tools: Public address systems, emergency text message notification services, two-way radios and programmable signage boards that reach those within a critical radius of the fire will aid in keeping people away from the area.
- Statements sent to local media via email or text
- Statement to be used on social media (if necessary)
- News release when details are known (if necessary)
- Provide messaging to information booth staff, entrance gate staff (to use before they need to seek shelter) and phone staff to appropriately address inquiries
Internal Crisis – (Embezzlement, DUI, etc.)

Common Media & Public Questions:
- Who is responsible and/or involved?
- What was the crime or offense?
- What is their role in the fair organization?
- When did this happen?
- Are authorities involved?
- What (if anything) has occurred as a result of this incident?
- Does this person have a criminal history?
- Will you terminate this person?

Possible Key Messages:
- *(Insert who or what agency)* is conducting an independent investigation into the *(insert misconduct, charges, allegations, etc.)*.
- *(If applicable)*: The individual will be given an opportunity to explain the alleged conduct.
- *(If applicable)*: The individual has been put on leave pending results of the investigation.

Communications Tools to Consider Leveraging in the Event of an Internal Crisis:
- Email memo to applicable stakeholder groups (i.e., board of directors, other employees).
- Media statement
- Watch social media for posts pertaining to the incident and respond with statement about pending investigation.
News releases are created to deliver the outline of a news story to media by answering the who, what, where, when, why and how of the incident or event. They should be composed with information prioritized from most- to least-important, with most-important information appearing at the beginning of the release. Details get less and less important as the reader moves toward the end of the document. News releases must stick to the facts and be free of subjective or opinion-based information. Brevity is key. Media use news releases to determine the newsworthiness of a story, and as a starting framework for their own stories. News releases are an effective tool for announcing information when the who, what, where, when, why and how details of a situation are known.

News Release Template

(Fair Logo Here)

NEWS RELEASE

(A concise phrase that captures the most important details of the story. Centered and bold.)

Sub-headline

(Optional. Included if more detail is needed to preview the story, while maintaining brevity in the main headline. Centered in bold italics. Typically, a point size or two smaller than the main headline.)

Media Contact:
First & Last Name
Title
Phone Number
Email Address

(Dateline indicates where and when the news is coming from just before the lead paragraph begins. It is formatted in bold like so: CITY, State (Month Day, Year)— or Salem, Mass. (June 3, 2024)—)

Dateline—Lead paragraph begins right after the dash in the dateline. The lead should offer the most important details of the story by beginning to answer the critical who, what, where, when, why and how questions. Only the most important of those questions need to be answered in the lead to keep it concise. The lead is where you convince the reader that the story is newsworthy and it’s for them to continue reading. Less important details will fall into the body of the news release. Your lead should be no more than 2-4 sentences.

Body paragraphs come next. Here, you will want to deliver additional details, and include statistics, facts, quotations from experts involved in the story that help solidify the reader’s understanding of the situation and support your points.

There are typically two or three body paragraphs in a news release. Compose them with your key stakeholders in mind, as the ultimate goal is to have them receive the information.

About The ABC County Fair:
The boilerplate paragraph acts as a brief “about us” statement to provide background information about the organization issuing the release. It should be a description of what the fair is, what it does and who it serves. The last sentence should include a web link to more information—likely your website’s homepage and begin with “For more information, visit….."

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(This bold and centered symbol indicates to the reader that they’ve reached the end of the news release. It’s especially helpful in the event your release rolls into multiple pages.)
Media Advisory

Media advisories are also known as “media alerts” or “photo opportunities.” They are helpful in response to crisis situations and commonly inquired-about topics, and allow for efficiency in taking care of numerous media interviews at once.

Like the little sister to the news release, media advisories are more concise and formatted somewhat like an invitation to a newsworthy and visually or audibly interesting event. They are used to announce the date, time and details of scheduled news conferences or events where media will have the opportunity to gather sound, photos and/or video.

Media advisories are laid out similarly to news releases in that they include a headline, lead and a boilerplate at the bottom. However, the body of media advisories are made up of quick answers to the who, what, where, when, why and how questions of the event, along with information about interview opportunities, and audio or visual elements of interest.

Media Advisory Template

(Fair Logo Here)

MEDIA ADVISORY

Month Day, Year Date of Media Advisory Issue

Media Contact: (Person assigned to take and respond to media inquiries. This section is often right- or left-justified on the page.)
First & Last Name
Title
Phone Number
Email Address

HEADLINE HERE – (Most Newsworthy Element)

The opening paragraph should provide the basics of the who, what, where, when, why and how of the story, but still entice the media to learn more by attending the event or news conference. Mention any persons of interest, such as fair leaders and elected officials who are key to the event.

What?: Describe the event.

When?: Month Day, Year Date of the Event
Provide the best time for photos, sound and video, if applicable.

Where?: Address and location of event with parking instructions.

Who?: A list of important people who will be speaking or answering questions from the media at your event.

Why?: State the reason for the event and, in brief, what will be covered. Refrain from getting too specific.

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(This bold and centered symbol indicates to the reader that they’ve reached the end of the media advisory.)
Prepared Statement

Prepared statements are most helpful and advantageous to use when: 1) few details are known about the incident; 2) your fair cannot or has been advised by legal counsel not to conduct interviews or answer media questions; and 3) when you want to take control of the message swiftly, but need additional time to gather facts before you can respond effectively at length.

Statements should only include verified facts and be free of any speculative content. Basic details about the situation that could be included are:

- when your fair organization was made aware of the situation; the date, time and location of the incident; a basic and verified account of what happened; actions the fair is taking (that can be made public); and information about how updates will be communicated.

Be cautious about including apologies in your statement if you don't have all the details, as apologies can be seen as an implied admission of guilt. Instead, if appropriate, include an expression of empathy or compassion.

Prepared Statement Template

**Headline (Also becomes the subject line when sending a statement via email.)**

Fair officials were notified at approximately (insert time notified) p.m. on (insert day of week, and calendar date), that (insert basic and verified account of what happened) at (insert location here) occurred today at (insert time of incident).

(If appropriate) Our hearts are with those impacted by this situation.

The incident is being investigated. More information will be made available via (insert communication method) as soon as additional details are known and confirmed.

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Website Content

Including a landing page on your fair website where anyone can access information about a crisis situation is another way your fair can control messaging and guide the narrative. If the crisis is new or evolving, include a link on the website’s home page that jumps to this landing page. Information on this web page should only be verified, factual information that comes from your fair, so anyone looking for information around the situation can retrieve definitive and accurate information directly from the source.

The landing page need not be elaborate — just a place where up-to-date verified information can be shared. Keep the most current information at the top of the page. Include key messages in your updates if it’s appropriate.

Website Landing Page Content Template

*Updates Regarding (Insert Incident Name Here)*

**4:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 8:** Once you reach a point when you’ve shared all the details that can be shared, make a final update to appear at the top of the page that indicates that any further or future updates about the situation will be posted here.

**8 a.m. Tuesday, May 8:** Subsequent updates can be brief, but add additional details that have become known and confirmed about the situation.

**9 p.m. Monday, May 7:** Your first update should look much like a prepared media statement, and include the incident’s date, time, location and any other verified details you can share.
Social Media Content

Social media updates about crisis situations should be very brief and stick to the verified facts. Social media is also a space where you can include your fair's key messages around the incident when it makes sense/is appropriate. Keep visuals tied to your social posts in crisis neutral and professional.

Information travels exponentially faster on social media than it does in the traditional media space, so it's important to be very efficient in responding on your fair's social channels. Additionally, the real-time aspect of social media can be helpful in gauging if the communications you're rolling out around the crisis are effective, and where the narrative and conversation about the situation are headed.

It's also critical to note that all other scheduled or regular communication on social should be halted until the crisis resolves.

Your initial social posts about the situation will look much like a prepared media statement. Because social media platforms are places for conversation as much as they are for updates, show empathy when appropriate, use your fair brand “voice” and let followers know how they can help or support.

Sample Social Media Post

(Insert basic and verified account of what happened) at (insert location here) occurred today at (insert time and date of incident).

(If appropriate) Our hearts go out to those impacted by this (situation/incident).

The incident is being thoroughly investigated. More information will be made available via (insert where to find updates) as soon as additional details are known and confirmed. In the meantime, you can (help/support) (who/what efforts) by (offer concise details about how people can help or support victims/the fair, etc.).
Crisis Communications Tools & Their Uses

Stakeholder Phone, Text & Email Push Notifications

It's imperative to keep key stakeholders in the loop during times of crisis. Concessionaires, exhibitors, attraction operators, entertainers, employees, volunteers and board members are far-reaching voices who are seen as trustworthy sources by those outside of the fair organization due to their closeness to the operation. These stakeholders are one of the largest elements that play into how quickly and successfully a fair can recover from crisis. Providing factual information about the situation to these groups supports crisis resolution efforts by providing them direction, and allowing them to serve as brand ambassadors, ultimately helping quell rumors and misinformation. Additionally, keeping key stakeholders informed makes them feel empowered and builds trust in the organization and its leadership for the long haul.

Communication to these key stakeholders is often pushed via pre-recorded phone message, text or email, which allows the information to reach them quickly. Here again, a swift response is critical, but only provide verified facts about the incident.

See the Stakeholder Identification & Interests Worksheet included with this Crisis Communication toolkit for more guidance.

Stakeholder Phone, Text & Email Push Notification Template

(In the first sentence, start with the most important verified details of what happened—any of the who, what, where, when, why, and how information that's initially known and ok to share.)

(Next, indicate how these stakeholders can support resolution efforts, even if it's simply directing them only to share verified information when asked. You could also direct them to evacuate or stay clear of a certain area of the fairgrounds, let them know where help, donations or supplies are needed, etc.)

(Finally, inform them that you will continue to provide them official updates them about the situation via this same communication tool (phone message, text or email), and that any information received from other sources should be considered un-verified.)
Employee Messaging

Employees are the most far-reaching and powerful voices your fair organization has, especially in a crisis. Visitors, community members and the media will turn to them for information about the incident. Providing them with the information they need to have these discussions empowers them to be ambassadors in the fair’s crisis resolution, ensures they don’t disseminate misinformation, and builds their trust in the organization and its leadership.

Employee messaging can be provided to all employees, but it’s critical that those who are front-facing with customers receive this messaging swiftly: phone operators and receptionists, as well as admission gate, information booth and media room staff.

Employee Messaging Template

We understand that you may be receiving inquiries or being asked questions about the (briefly detail the incident that occurred).

Knowing that you’re being asked to respond as a representative of the fair, here are verified talking points to use in your discussions with visitors or others who inquire about the situation:

- Offer initial who, what, where, when, why and how details that are verified and approved to share.
- In the next two to three bullet points, include the two to three key messages you developed in planning and have subsequently updated to address this specific crisis.
- Remember those key messages should be clear and concise.

We will be back in touch when more accurate information is available. Until then, the information above is the only official and fact-verified information to be shared.
Initial Incident – Fact Gathering Form

1. Initial Notification of Incident
   (Write down what the person informing you has heard about the incident.)

2. Initial Discussion with Crisis Management Team (Fair Leadership, First Responders, Law Enforcement or Elected Officials): (Note the facts provided by these sources.)

3. Initial facts to verify if they haven’t been solidified in #2 above:
   • Time and date of incident:
   • Location of the incident:
   • Who was involved:
   • Number of people involved:
   • Initial verified details of what happened:
   • How the fair is working toward resolution:

4. Media Questions (Write down additional questions from media, so you remember what to verify or ask about at the next crisis management briefing.):
   • Question?:
     Answer:
   • Question?:
     Answer:
   • Question?:
     Answer:
   • Question?:
     Answer:
   • Question?:
     Answer:
   • Question?:
     Answer:
Stakeholder Identification & Interests Worksheet

Stakeholders in a crisis are most concerned about how the situation will specifically impact them. Follow steps 1-4 in this worksheet to understand their perspective and begin addressing their questions and concerns.

1. Potential Stakeholders in Fair/Event Crisis Situations — Check off groups below who have a stake or interest in information surrounding the crisis.

- **Visitors/Guests**
  Potential Interests:
  - Safety and security of themselves and those in their group
  - Direction on whether they can stay at the fair or what areas to avoid
  - Being compensated for compressed visits or sub-par experiences

- **Employees**
  Potential Interests:
  - Personal safety and security
  - Direction on how to stay safe or out of harm's way
  - What to communicate to people who inquire about the incident
  - Job security

- **Volunteers**
  Potential Interests:
  - Personal safety and security
  - Direction on how to stay safe or out of harm's way
  - What to communicate to people in the areas where they volunteer

- **Board Members**
  Potential Interests:
  - Personal safety and security
  - Direction on how to stay safe or out of harm's way
  - Financial impact on fair organization
  - Public relations impacts on the organization
  - Partner and sponsor sentiment
  - Impact to the physical plant and grounds
  - Impact on future attendance

- **Suppliers & Purveyors**
  Potential Interests:
  - Personal safety and security
  - Direction on how to stay safe or out of harm's way
  - How to access the grounds for delivery
  - Impact on future orders from fair and/or concessionaires and exhibitors
Government Officials
Potential Interests:
○ Personal safety and security
○ Direction on how to stay safe or out of harm's way
○ Will they be needed for response to the media or public?
○ Impact on fair’s normal operations
○ Financial impact (especially if fair is government-controlled)

Neighbors & Community Members
Potential Interests:
○ Personal safety and security
○ Neighborhood safety
○ Direction on how to stay safe or out of harm's way
○ Impact on homes and local businesses
○ Traffic and access to their regular routes

Law Enforcement
Potential Interests:
○ Safety and security of fair visitors and other stakeholders in vicinity
○ Traffic and transportation impacts
○ Future threats and plans of action
○ Impact on staffing levels
○ Public relations impacts

Concessionaires & Commercial Exhibitors
Potential Interests:
○ Personal safety and security
○ Direction on how to stay safe or out of harm’s way
○ What to communicate to people who inquire about the incident
○ Effect on sales, foot traffic and future business during the fair
○ Impact on their space and property

Livestock & Competitive Exhibitors
Potential Interests:
○ Personal safety and security
○ Direction on how to stay safe or out of harm's way
○ Safety, health and well-being of animals
○ Impact on competitions, shows and length of stay at the fair
2. For each stakeholder group you check off or determine has an interest/stake in this crisis situation, ask: What verified information can we share that helps answer their questions, address their concerns and builds their trust in the fair?

3. Determine which communication tools you'll use to reach the impacted stakeholder groups with this information. Ask: Where is this group most likely to receive and review news and information?

4. Know that it’s unlikely you’ll be able to address all of your key stakeholders’ concerns and questions, but make a concerted effort to reach them with what you know to be true, and you’ll have taken a solid first step in re-building trust.
Key Message Composition Worksheet

Identify Your Key Messages

Prepare two to three concise key messages in advance of any communication or interviews about the crisis situation.

What are three critical pieces of information the fair needs its key stakeholders to hear and remember?

Key Message #1:

Key Message #2:

Key Message #3:

Support the Key Messages

What truthful examples, anecdotes or statistics can be used to support and illustrate each of the key messages?

Support for Key Message #1:

a. 

b. 

c. 

Support for Key Message #2:

a. 

b. 

c. 

Support for Key Message #3:

a. 

b. 

c. 

Include these key messages and appropriate support information in any communication about the crisis coming from your fair, as well as in news conferences and in media interviews.

Revisit these key messages as your fair offers updated communications and new interviews to the media. Create new key messages and support as additional verified information becomes available.
Media Interview & Spokesperson Preparation Worksheet

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Think Ahead About Your Audience
What does the audience already know about the situation or topic you’re addressing? What verified facts and background information do you need to provide?

Identify Your Key Messages
The interview is an opportunity to tell your story — briefly! Prepare three key messages in advance and use every question as an opportunity to talk about them.

What are the three thoughts I want this audience to remember?
1.)
2.)
3.)

What examples or statistics can I use to support and illustrate my key messages?
1.)
2.)
3.)

Select What You’ll Wear

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes to:</th>
<th>No to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logoed fair apparel. Jewel tones.</td>
<td>White, bright orange or red.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understated jewelry that accents.</td>
<td>Clangy, over-sized jewelry that over powers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatever you’d normally wear to work.</td>
<td>Blue jeans. Sleeveless tops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtle makeup.</td>
<td>Over-done or overly bright makeup.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DURING THE INTERVIEW

Make your key message points early on!
Use those three key messages you identified before the interview. Pull them out of your back-pocket toolkit and try to work them in early-on with the most important of the three key messages being the first you use.

Make your point and then . . . STOP!
Silence is golden. It also helps you control the interview by making the reporter move onto the next question — where you can again . . . make your point . . . then STOP!

Speak in sound bites!
Short, complete thoughts are a winner in every interview. By speaking in sound bites, you make yourself quotable. Keep it brief and simple.

Be real. Be genuine. Be you.
Be serious and professional, but speak how you normally speak. People will believe you and find comfort in your relatability and expertise.

If you’re not sure . . .
- **Flag** important points by using phrases like “The important thing to remember is . . .” or “Bottom line . . .” It helps the audience know it’s time to pay attention.
- **Bridge** back to your key messages if things get off track. Use statements like: “I’m not sure about that, but what I do know is . . .” “The point here is . . .”
- **Use lists.** “The three most important things to remember are.”

Scrap the jargon.
Every industry has it, but the general public doesn’t understand it . . . and in your brief interview, you don’t have time to explain. Use terms that everyone can comprehend.

Plan ahead for the most difficult questions.
You know what they’ll be. Inevitably, they will be asked. Prepare your answers ahead of time, tying in your key messages, so you’re in control when they come up.

It’s ok to say you don’t know.
You always have an opportunity to follow up instead of guessing, lying or speculating. It’s totally human and totally acceptable to say, “You know. I don’t know the answer to that question. I’ll find out and get back to you.”

When they ask, “Is there anything else I should know?”
Say yes. Seize the opportunity to reiterate your key messages, and let people know how they can get updates.

Notes:
Tip Sheet – Coordinating Successful News Conferences

Set a Date & Time
- Schedule the news conference as soon as you’ll be able to share enough verifiable details for the media to produce a brief story about the situation.
- Newsrooms are fully staffed on weekdays, but run with smaller crews on weekends, so you’re more likely to get coverage Monday through Friday.
- Mid-morning and early afternoon are good times to host news conferences, as reporters do most of their information gathering during those parts of the day.

Select a Location
- Determine a safe location that has visual interest and is recognizably connected to the fair (a gate entrance area, outside administrative offices, at the front of your midway, beside an iconic landmark on the fairgrounds, etc.). If the crisis prevents you from holding the news conference on-grounds, host it as close as you safely can.
- The news conference location should be:
  - Near convenient, available parking (reserve space for media if need be)
  - Accessible to members of the disability community
  - As free of background noise as possible (loud music, road and traffic noise, etc.), which admittedly is tricky at a fairgrounds. Do the best you can to mitigate noise.
  - A place that has ample access to electrical outlets for camera cords and lighting.
  - A location where cameras will not point into the sun.

Notify the Media
- Inform the media of the scheduled news conference via emailed media advisory (see template provided in this toolkit) and any other non-public channels you use to regularly communicate with them.
- Follow-up with a phone call to newsrooms the morning of the news conference to remind and confirm the news conference is on the outlet’s coverage calendar.

Create and Use Key Messages
- Create 2-3 concise key messages that address the most important things you want stakeholders and the media to know about the incident.
- Utilize the Key Message Preparation Worksheet provided with this Crisis Communication Toolkit to develop effective key messages.

Determine Your Participant Team
- The news conference should include one to four speakers with credibility and expertise around the situation. This participant team could include your fair manager, fair board president, designated spokesperson, local law enforcement leadership and/or elected officials. What’s even more powerful is providing a credible expert with firsthand testimony of the chain of events.
- Also select a moderator-coordinator who will greet the media, introduce speakers, moderate questions and conclude the news conference.
Prepare Speakers and Spokespeople

- Arm each speaker and spokesperson with a script that includes verified information and key messages you'd like them to share.
- Be sure that each speaker is able to make their points and conclude in four minutes or less. Brevity is key!
- Utilize the *Media Interview & Spokesperson Preparation Worksheet* and *Key Message Composition Worksheet* provided with this Crisis Communication Toolkit to proactively prepare your news conference participants.

Prepare Documents and Imagery

- Compose any written materials such as news releases or prepared statements that you plan to distribute at the news conference.
- Gather images or video that support the story, but be sure they do not jeopardize any investigation or your fair’s reputation or public sentiment toward it.
- When media arrive, as them to sign in with first and last name, news outlet, email and cell phone number. That way, these written materials, imagery, video, and any follow-up information can be sent to them after the news conference concludes.

During the News Conference

- Begin on time.
- The moderator should welcome attendees, introduce the situation and the speakers, and inform attendees of when the speakers will take questions.
- Keep the content brief. Each speaker should adhere to their script and key messages, and speak for no more than 3-4 minutes.
- After the speaker presentations conclude, the moderator can take a few questions from the media and direct them to the appropriate speaker who can answer with the most expertise.
- Following questions, the moderator should inform attendees that the speakers will not take any additional questions, thank them for coming and indicate approximately when and how they’ll receive updates.

At the Conclusion of the News Conference

- Attempt to avoid participants being hounded by the media with additional questions by allowing them to leave through a private exit or get into a vehicle that can take them to a location away from where the news conference took place.
- Send any supporting materials (see “Prepare Documents & Imagery” above) to media who signed in upon arrival.
- Continue to keep the media who attended this news conference updated with any new information.
Addressing the Tough Questions Worksheet

The difficult questions *WILL* be asked as your fair addresses this crisis situation.

Be proactive, planful and prepared by brainstorming the most difficult questions you anticipate being asked below. Then, for each difficult question, note how you could tie in a key message or offer support for the answer that keeps things as positive as possible, manages your fair’s reputation, and maintains trust in your fair.

**Difficult Question:** __________________________________________________________

Key message to tie in: _________________________________________________________

Support for the answer: ________________________________________________________

**Final Response:** ____________________________________________________________

**Difficult Question:** _________________________________________________________

Key message to tie in: _________________________________________________________

Support for the answer: ________________________________________________________

**Final Response:** ____________________________________________________________

**Difficult Question:** _________________________________________________________

Key message to tie in: _________________________________________________________

Support for the answer: ________________________________________________________

**Final Response:** ____________________________________________________________

Prepare your spokespeople and anyone who responds to media inquiries by reviewing, practicing and role-playing these responses.
Sources


