

PR R_x Toolkit Section II: The Press

Introduction

No public relations program is complete without a plan for and understanding of dealing with the press. In some ways, the press is the same as the public. What you tell the press, you tell the public if your message posted, printed, or broadcast by the media. Of course, working with the media involves a specific set of skills and tools. This section of the PR RX Toolkit is designed to give you a review and action checklist that will help you master the many tools available to you to get your library message out through the media.

This section will cover some media essentials, such as writing interesting press releases, submitting letters to the editor, writing guest newspaper columns, attaining editorial board visits and supportive editorials, creating media lists, cultivating relationships with the media, interviewing techniques, and issues management and crisis communications. In short, this section provides a comprehensive series of how-to guidelines that will make even the most seemingly difficult aspects of media relations attainable.

News Releases

Considerations

Be sure to communicate the uniqueness of your story. What sets your event apart from others in your community? Give the media an angle to interest them in your news.

Is your story timely? Be certain there is some aspect of your news that makes it of interest now, whether it's an event, a new initiative, or a change in your board of directors.

Is your story visual? Describe any local color, decorations, children, or animals that will be part of your program. This “flavor” will help your news or event appeal to photographers and television stations. For radio, highlight special speakers, authors reading, or background music.

Be aware of deadlines. Magazine deadlines can be as much as three months before the publication date, television three weeks, weekly publications two to four weeks and daily papers one to two weeks for feature stories or calendar listings.

Consider the news value of your story idea. Will a general audience care about the news you're announcing? Will the media outlet see it as an appropriate story for their readers or viewers? Remember, you have to get through the reporter's and editor's “filters.”

Determine your audience. Are you trying to reach the local community? Or, a smaller segment, such as your neighborhood, or families with young children? Consider all of the publications in your community as targets for your news, not just the daily paper and television stations.

Consider translating your media materials in Spanish as well as English if your program will be presented in a bilingual format. In most cases, English materials are accepted by Spanish-language media outlets.

The following elements should always be included in a news release:

- Contact information—make sure you include a name, phone numbers (office and mobile, if possible), and an email address for the media to contact with questions. (This is different from the phone number provided within the body of the release to be published for the public.)
- Who—include the name of your library, executive directors, quoted sources, sponsors, speakers, etc.

- What—the name of the event, a description of the announcement, what your news is about
- When—day of the week, dates, and times (if applicable to your news)
- Where—include the physical address and directions
- Why—describe the need for the new program or fundraising campaign
- How—this may include the cost for the public to attend, and how to get tickets if it is an event
- Headline—the title of the release
- Date—the date you are sending the news release
- Boilerplate—a paragraph at the end of the news release that describes your organization and its mission, possibly ongoing initiatives, and includes the name, location, website, and phone number

SAMPLE RELEASE



For more information, contact: Gloria Meraz
512-328-1518 office; 512-695-XXXX mobile
gloriam@txla.org

September 9, 2005

Texas libraries collect cash, books for colleagues and libraries in devastated areas

AUSTIN, TX — The Texas library community is rallying to rebuild hope and the future for victims of Hurricane Katrina. While libraries throughout Texas are addressing the immediate needs of evacuees by providing computers, storytimes, books, and temporary library cards, the Texas Library Association is coordinating a broad campaign to help libraries rebuild collections and is working in concert with the state library agencies in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

“While the most pressing need is to ensure that everyone is safe and cared for, we also want to begin working to help communities rebuild,” said Gretchen McCord Hoffmann, president of the Texas Library Association. “We understand that rebuilding will take months; perhaps years. Libraries, so many of which were completely demolished by the storm and subsequent flooding, are and will continue to be at the heart of their communities.”

TLA has created Texas Library Two Step, a project designed to offer two levels of support for libraries. The first step involves collecting monetary donations. The Association’s Disaster Relief Fund has been expanded to collect funds for libraries in the Gulf Coast area as well as for libraries which are providing support for the evacuees. One hundred percent of all donated money will be sent to the state library agency or library association in the state of the donor’s choice.

Donations should be made payable to the Texas Library Association at 3355 Bee Cave Road, Suite 401, Austin, TX 78746. Donors should designate the selected state. Donations can also be made online at www.txla.org.

The second phase of the Texas Library Two Step involves helping affected libraries prepare to re-open for business. TLA is accepting books and reference materials to help libraries fill their shelves.

State library officials in the Gulf Coast report that many libraries have been completely demolished. Those facilities will have to be completely rebuilt and re-equipped. The items most needed include new or very lightly used children’s books, adult fiction and nonfiction, reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, almanacs), and Gulf Coast-area collections. They ask that materials have recent publication dates.

Since it will likely be a few months before libraries are able to take these collections, TLA has partnered with the Texas Mini Storage Association (TMSA) to collect the books and store them in climate-controlled facilities.

Ginny Sutton, executive director of the TMSA, said: “We are thrilled to help in any way we can. We want to let our Gulf Coast neighbors know that we are here for them. We want library officials to know that our member facilities, led by XX Storage in Austin, are very happy to help in this noble effort to replenish the libraries in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.”

TLA will ship the donated materials to Gulf Coast states as soon as libraries are ready to receive the materials. To make a book donation, ship materials to XX Storage Company. Materials can also be dropped off at this location.

Additional information, including information about local relief programs in the affected states, can be found at www.txla.org.

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About the Texas Library Association

TLA is the largest state library association in the United States with more than 7,000 members who work in public, school, academic and special libraries, plus library vendors and citizens who support libraries. TLA offers a wide range of services, including an annual conference that attracts more than 7,000 librarians and exhibitors, a leadership development program, legislative advocacy, and publications.

NOTE: THE TLA BOOK DRIVE IS OVER. TLA IS NO LONGER ACCEPTING BOOK DONATIONS.

Letters to the Editor

Considerations

A letter to the editor can be a very effective way to advocate for an issue, give your library's perspective on a current hot topic, or even thank community partners or sponsors.

All newspapers prefer short letters (about 100 words—no more than 150 words) that express a firm opinion about a topical issue, using local examples clearly and concisely. Most daily newspapers accept letters online or through their website. Other newspapers receive letters by fax.

It's very important to include your name, address, telephone number(s), and email address for verification—you can ask that the newspaper not print your contact information. However, they must be able to use your name; newspapers will not print anonymous letters.

SAMPLE LETTERS

Dear Editor,

As our state legislature considers whether to restore some of the funding libraries lost in 2002, I ask that they consider this: without the TexShare databases, the people in (insert town here) will no longer be able to find detailed medical information, family history, and thousands of periodicals they've come to depend on through this invaluable digital library resource reference system. It's no exaggeration to say that (our town) will be set back 10 years if this small amount of funding for TexShare is not restored.

Sincerely,
Librarian or Library Supporter

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for the wonderful editorial that appeared in Monday's *Statesman* on school libraries and the 65% proposal. The comments addressed perfectly the problems of leaving school librarians out of any state definition of direct instruction. School librarians teach students research skills, reading, information literacy, and countless other skills that are fundamental to meeting curriculum requirements. Clearly, libraries are a vital part of the learning infrastructure, and Texas children deserve that these incredible "classrooms" be recognized as such at all levels of state and local policies. Monday's editorial will, I hope, encourage readers and decision makers to look at the issue more closely and ensure that libraries, which are integral to a student's learning experience, are not left out of the school equation.

Sincerely,
Librarian or Library Supporter

Guest Columns/Editorials

Considerations

A guest column is a longer (about 500-word) advocacy piece. Because newspapers have different policies and amounts of space for guest columns, it is best to check with your newspaper before drafting a column.

Depending on the topic you wish to write about, consider who might be the best messenger. You might want to ask your top library volunteer to pen the guest column, rather than a staff librarian.

SAMPLE EDITORIAL OUTLINE

Topic: Funding for libraries must be restored

Lead (the facts)

In 2004, libraries in Texas received \$30 million less in state funds than they did in 2002.

Thesis (the stand the editorial is taking)

The loss of this amount of funding has devastated the state's public, school, and academic libraries, resulting in loss of access to information, missed economic development opportunities, and damage to quality of life. Funding must be restored to ensure that libraries can continue to fulfill their important roles in their communities and the lives of Texans.

Concede (the strongest argument being used by the opposition)

Texas legislators are being called upon to restore or increase funding for a large number of critical issues, including health care, public education, and social services. Some say these issues should take precedence when it comes to restoring funding in this legislative session.

Counter (strong argument in favor of your stand)

Libraries are central to education and communities. They are diverse and dynamic, reflecting and serving their communities and stakeholders; and, they offer access to information and opportunity for all.

Convince (stronger argument in favor of your stand; facts and examples)

Libraries are an important tool for educational success and economic development.

(Need facts, examples, anecdotes)

Clinch (strongest argument)

Public opinion polls have found that two-thirds of Texans (need real data) believe having access to a community public library is very valuable and would support increasing taxes for public library services in their community. *Or*, study after study has shown that students in schools with strong school library programs do better on standardized tests than students without strong libraries.

Restate thesis

Some funding for libraries must be restored in this year's legislative session.

Closing—vision of future, call to action

In the past two years, as many libraries have been forced to reduce hours and programming and some have closed altogether, there has been an outcry from the public. There is no doubt that Texans treasure their libraries. Now is the time to contact your legislator and ask that they include support for libraries on their agendas.

SAMPLE GUEST EDITORIAL

Making 65 Percent Work

By Michael Gorman and Jana Knezek

Published in the *San Antonio Express*

The state of Texas is about to declare playing football more essential to a child's education than improving reading and writing skills and performing accurate research. Sounds like a joke? If only it were.

Governor Rick Perry's executive order that 65 percent of school funding be spent on "direct classroom instruction," which is being promoted by the national group First Class Education, sounds like a reasonable request. However, this mandate would leave a vital part of a student's learning experience out of the equation: the school library. Such libraries, staffed by professional librarians, are crucial to ensuring our children's preparedness for success in a rapidly changing world. It is essential that school libraries be included in the category of "direct classroom instruction."

This week, the American Library Association is holding its annual Midwinter Meeting in San Antonio and will address a variety of critical issues facing libraries. One that directly affects this city and state – and many states across the country – is the 65 percent rule.

First Class Education derives definitions used in its 65 percent requirements for "direct classroom instruction" from the National Center for Education Statistics, a branch of the U.S. Department of Education. When classifications were established for statistical collection purposes, NCES included such activities as athletics and field trips under the category of direct classroom instruction but failed to include libraries.

Amazingly and inappropriately, school librarians and libraries were grouped with food, transportation and other non-instructional staff and services. While non-instructional staff members contribute to a child's positive school experience, school librarians and their work with students are an essential part of the *classroom* structure. They have teacher

certification and classroom teaching experience. They directly support the curriculum taught in their schools. In its most recent report, the NCES itself found that classes in 77 percent of public and 81 percent of private schools met weekly in the school library for instructional purposes.

Students visit school libraries almost 1.5 *billion* times each school year. Likewise, school librarians constantly meet the diverse needs of diverse student bodies and are simultaneously teachers, instructional partners, information specialists, and program administrators.

How do school librarians provide direct instruction? They collaborate with their fellow teachers to integrate literature and information skills into the curriculum and to support the curriculum being taught. They help students to develop a lifelong love of reading and learning by providing access to current, high-quality, high interest and extensive collections of books and other materials. They train students to locate, identify, assess and apply information and data to become skilled users of print and electronic media resources. All of this translates directly back to the classroom.

More than a dozen studies since 1990 show a positive correlation between school libraries and student achievement in reading scores, literacy and learning. In Texas, a 2001 study shows that over 10 percent more students in schools with librarians – compared to those without librarians – met minimum Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) expectations in reading. In San Antonio, the Northside Independent School District was the winner of the 2004 American Association of School Libraries Media Program of the Year Award, which recognizes the school for having, among other things, model programs in integrating library instruction and classroom lessons, collaborating with teachers and increasing students' access to technology.

School libraries are the nerve center for classroom information and research. They are even a place for an athlete to research the most effective football pass protection plan.

What is the solution to the 65 percent conundrum? We can start by urging lawmakers to use the definition of “Instructional staff” in No Child Left Behind, which includes librarians and school library media specialists and include libraries as the vital part of direct classroom instruction that they are. Even First Class Education questions why libraries are not included in this category. In Colorado, the group has set its own 65 percent guidelines to include libraries as part of a proposed amendment to the state constitution.

Federal, state and local decision makers must acknowledge the simple truth: that school libraries are classrooms and school librarians are teachers. They are vital to our children's ability to secure a higher education and to succeed in a 21st century world.

Let us ensure the 65 percent rule does not divert library funding and imperil our children's future.

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Michael Gorman is President of the American Library Association (ALA) and Jana Knezek is President-Elect of the Texas Library Association (TLA).

How to Create a Media List

Because media contacts are constantly changing, one of the easiest ways to ensure an accurate media list is to buy one. The *Texas Media Directory* is the most complete listing of all Texas print, radio, and television media outlets, and their contact information. The directory is available online at www.texasmediadirectory.com. Prices range from \$150 for the book to \$475 for a one-year online subscription. Other products include media lists for the major Texas cities.

Some Free Resources

<http://www.usnpl.com/txnews.html>

<http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ref/abouttx/>

Who to Contact

At television stations, the assignments editor should be your first choice. Also, contact morning and noon show producers if you are interested in being or placing a guest on a daytime talk show. Some stations and newspapers may have a reporter assigned to covering the library.

At radio stations, contact the news director and talk show producers or hosts.

At magazines, contact the editor or managing editor. If your news is an event, send to the calendar editor.

At daily newspapers, depending on your news, contact:

- Section editors (metro, lifestyle, business)
- Community/nonprofit reporters
- Photo editor
- Editorial page editor (for advocacy and issues)
- Calendar editors (for events)
- Society columnists (if planning a fundraiser or VIP event)
- Education reporters
- Online content editors

At weekly newspapers, you will usually contact the editor. Most weekly newspapers are small publications with very small staffs.

See “Using Media Relations Tools: How and Why” for ideas on “pitching” your stories or guests.

Editorial Board Meetings

Most daily newspapers and some weeklies schedule meetings between their editorial staff and invited guests to explore an issue and determine whether it is of sufficient importance to the community to justify the newspaper taking a position and supporting it on the editorial page. Meetings do not always result in an editorial. Sometimes, the visitors will be invited to submit a guest editorial or a letter to the editor in lieu of a stand-alone editorial. Even if an editorial does not immediately result, editorial board meetings are an excellent way to bring attention to library issues and to build relationships with newspaper editors and staff.

The format of an editorial board meeting can vary widely, depending on the issue and on the newspaper itself. Some meetings are relaxed and informal with one or two editorial writers talking with the guests over coffee. Others are large with numerous reporters and editors attending. Newspapers' approaches to these meetings vary greatly, but the purpose is the same — to evaluate the issue and decide if it warrants editorial support, and, if so, what position the newspaper should take. Therefore, it goes without saying that an editorial board meeting is a serious undertaking.

Requesting an Editorial Board Meeting

Begin by emailing the editorial page editor or the editor. Ask for an editorial board meeting to talk about, for example, statewide library funding issues that are currently under discussion in the legislature or in the policy arena and how they impact your local library and community. Both of these points are very important: editors are interested in timely issues and on how their own readers may be affected. Your goals are:

- To garner the support of the newspaper's editorial board as part of the campaign to generate attention to issues related to the state's public, school, and academic libraries
- To communicate the key messages related to your library and/or local, state, or federal policy and legislative issues
- To encourage editorial page support for library issues (specifically, the one for which you scheduled the visit)

Roles and Preparation

The format of an editorial board meeting typically begins with brief introductions, followed by a presentation (10 minutes or so) by the group requesting the meeting. Questions and answers will follow and are usually, but not always, the longer portion of the meeting. Editorial board meetings rarely last more than an hour.

Ideally, have two or three people meet with an editorial board. Consider bringing two librarians with different roles (school and academic, for example). You might also include a key volunteer or local business representative who is a recognized supporter of

your library. Choose one participant to be the leader of the group. It is best to rehearse the meeting and decide who will respond to what kinds of questions ahead of time.

Tips on Participants' Roles:

Leader of the group

- Reviews the reasons for requesting the meeting
- Discusses the big picture of statewide importance of libraries' legislative issues
- Introduces key messages of libraries, such as public education and economic development

Librarian participants

- Should make the issues come alive by providing examples and anecdotes illustrating the importance of libraries and programs/services supported by state funding.
- Develop questions can serve as a guide to developing anecdotes. For instance:
 - How do school librarians help raise student achievement?
 - What would be the effect of the loss of funding?

“Policy Expert”

One person should be designated as the legislative or policy expert and be prepared to answer questions about the current state of policies that most affect libraries.

Note: One person should also be designated to take notes and to follow up on any questions that could not be answered in the meeting and other requests made by the editorial board.

The content of your editorial board meeting should emphasize your key messages!

Following the Meeting

Immediately following the meeting, send a handwritten thank you note to each of the editors and reporters who attended the meeting. If nothing appears in the paper in a week or two, send an email or place a follow-up call to ascertain whether they will be writing an editorial supporting your issue. If not, you can ask why and also whether they will print a guest editorial on the same issues. (Use this toolkit to develop a guest editorial, which should then be signed by a librarian or local leader in your community).

How to Cultivate Relationships with Media

Become Helpful, Friendly, and Accessible!

Respond quickly to questions from the media. Have a designated spokesperson for your library and tell others to notify the spokesperson promptly if reporters call. Reporters are nearly always on deadline and need answers quickly.

Attend media briefings. In larger cities, professional associations and newswire services often host “get to know the media” events. Get on the mailing lists and consider joining organizations such as Texas Public Relations Association www.tpra.org, Association for Women in Communications www.awic.org, or Public Relations Society of America www.prsa.org to get invited to their events.

Gain an understanding for the media you want to encourage to cover your library. Read the newspapers, watch the local television news programming, and listen to the radio stations to which you will be sending information.

From time to time, send an article, news tip, or book suggestion to a reporter that you think they’d be interested in based on their past stories but that doesn’t have anything to do with your library. They will come to view you—and your library—as a resource.

Take a reporter or editor to lunch. Don’t have a particular story in mind but bring background materials on your library and find out what types of stories they are interested in for future use.

Participate in media-sponsored events such as races, food drives, or other causes. If possible, partner with the newspaper to put on one of their events or provide library volunteers to help. It’s a good chance to get to meet the reporters, editors, and producers and to cultivate a relationship.

Always be honest with reporters. It is essential to your credibility.

What NOT to Do

- Don’t send a news release to a number of editors and reporters at the same publication. Often, if reporters don’t want to use the information, they’ll pass it on to others who might be interested.
- Don’t call reporters or editors to ask if they received the release. Most newsrooms get hundreds of releases each day, and they can get very cranky answering phone calls asking “did you get my news release?”
- Don’t bury the most important information in your release—always put it in the first paragraph. Make sure all of the necessary details are in the release.
- Don’t send reporters or editors information not in their purview. For example, don’t send the sports editor information about your children’s reading programs.

Using Media Relations Tools: How and When

In addition to the news release described in detail earlier, there are other media relations tools that come in handy in various situations.

The Pitch Letter

If you don't have timely, hard news to announce, you may want to consider a pitch letter to generate coverage. These letters (today, they are almost always emails) are designed to sell a story to a specific reporter and give him or her story ideas. The email should be brief and to the point, beginning with your story idea and why you think this reporter and his or her media outlet would be interested. Supply a sentence or two of background on your library. Finally, offer to help the reporter conduct research, coordinate interviews and photo opportunities, and answer any questions he or she might have.

Media Alerts

Media alerts serve as a follow-up or sometimes a replacement for a news release. They are condensed versions of news releases limited to one page that spell out the details of your event or announcement. They are formatted with headings such as "who" "what" "when" "where" and sometimes "why," "visuals," and always "contact." Media alerts are often sent a day or two before an event to serve as a reminder or as a stand-alone piece if an entire release isn't warranted (for example, a simple photo opportunity).

Fact Sheets

These one- to two-page documents provide the media with a quick reference about your organization. Fact sheets are often used to supplement a news release by including statistical information, such as how many employees or volunteers your organization has, when your library was established, how many people you serve, and how many books in your collection.

Biographies

Biographies of key leaders, such as your executive director, head librarian, and possibly the head of your volunteer organization are often needed for speaking engagements and as media background information. Bios should be short, factual pieces, no longer than one page. Biographical information should include areas of expertise, formal education, length of employment with the library or the trade, related experience, and any unique information about community service or outside interests, especially if they might be newsworthy.

Backgrounder

As the word implies, backgrounders are simply documents that provide background information about your organization or a particular issue you are addressing or initiatives

your library is undertaking. You might also include information about your library's history, location, funding, and collections.

FAQs

The Frequently Asked Questions tool has become ubiquitous on websites and is also a handy tool for libraries to have as part of their media materials. The question and answer sheets should include accurate, general information (hours of operation, how to get a library card, who may get a library card) that may be most commonly asked about your library. Think creatively and include questions that provide the opportunity to list answers to common misconceptions or outdated thoughts. Tell your library's story.

SAMPLE

The "Pitch" Letter (Email)

From: Brenda Thompson [mailto:brenda@brendathompson.com]
Sent: Tuesday, August 30, 2005 4:47 PM
To: XXX@statesman.com
Subject: 65 percent--libraries should be included

Hi XXX,

The Texas Library Association wants the state to recognize that school library programs are instructional and should be included in the definition of "classroom instruction." The definition used by the National Center for Education Statistics, which according to your story will be TEA's "starting point," is too limiting, and TLA is advocating for a broader definition.

TLA is the largest state library association in the United States with more than 7,000 members who work in public, school, academic and special libraries, plus library vendors and citizens who support libraries.

For future stories, if you'd like a spokesperson on TLA's position on this issue, please contact me or Gloria Meraz, director of communications, gloriam@txla.org or 328-1518.

Thank you,

Brenda

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Media Training

Media training involves practicing communicating messages effectively when you are the designated spokesperson or when training volunteers to speak on your behalf.

Interview Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- Ask the reporter what will be covered in the interview so you (or the appropriate person) can be prepared.
- Know the points you want to make before your interview. What are your two or three key messages? Make sure you get them across early and often.
- Use the inverted pyramid technique in phrasing your statements and responses—make the most important point first.
- Do your homework. Read stories by the reporter or watch interviewer's technique with other guests (if television) before your interview or appearance.
- Use positive body language. Lean forward, make eye contact, and use your hands to gesture.
- For television in particular, speak in short, quotable phrases—preferably no more than 30 seconds.
- Make sure you understand a question before you answer.
- If you can't answer a question, explain why (briefly). If it's a print interview, find the information and get back to the reporter by their deadline.

Don'ts

- Don't engage in an argument.
- Don't use profanity, professional jargon, or make off-color jokes
- Don't speak off the record. Never say anything you don't want to appear in print or on the air.
- Don't speak from personal opinion—you are the library's spokesperson.
- Never say "no comment."

Interview Question Transitions and Techniques

One of the most effective techniques that interviewees can use to help retain control of an interview is called “bridging.” Verbal bridges allow an interviewee:

1. To steer a reporter back to relevant topics and key messages.
2. To move away from controversial, uncomfortable or unflattering topics and back on to key messages.
3. To end every answer to every question with a prepared, strategic message.

Bridging Techniques

When used appropriately, the following “bridges” can serve as effective tools of verbal control and defense:

- That’s not my area of expertise, but I think your audience would be interested in knowing that . . .
- Let me just add that . . .
- That reminds me . . .
- Let me answer you by saying that . . .
- That’s an important point because . . .
- What that means is . . .
- Another thing to remember is . . .
- If you look at it closely, you’ll find . . .
- I don’t know. But, what I do know is . . .

Flagging Techniques

You can give the reporter verbal clues about important comments so that you can stress key elements in your message.

- The most important point here is ...
- The underlying cause ...
- The ultimate goal is ...
- The real issue is...

Hooking Techniques

You can let reporters know upfront you have several points to make, and you can use this technique to maneuver the discussion where you want. Also, it let’s the listener know you have several elements to cover.

- The first of the three elements involved in this issue...
- There are two primary rationales...
- We really have three important reasons for pursuing...

Issues Management and Crisis Communications

Crisis management, at its best, is crisis avoidance.
Crisis avoidance involves excellent issues management.

Issues Management

Issues management is the wide scope of activities that can help an organization manage issues which, if not properly managed, could become a crisis. Good issues management creates a wall of protection, or a cushion, in times of crisis.

Communications in times of crisis are credible only if you already have a cushion of credibility from quality, believable, and reliable issues management communications prior to the crisis. Your actions must be consistent with your words.

The most fundamental component of issues management is a clear, consistent message.

First, be clear what your message is intended to accomplish.

Effective messages are spoken in the language of the listener; in other words, the message means something to the person with whom you are communicating. Present information in terms of benefits to the listener. Don't just flash tons of features that may or may not click with the listener and only have meaning for you.

Memorable messages must include one or more of the following elements (know your audience when using any of the following):

- Light humor and for issues management only. Be warned, though, what is funny to you may not be funny to someone else. During times of high stress and distress, humor rarely is effective and often compounds the problem. Humor should **not** be used in crisis communications.
- Alliteration
- Play on words (Again, for crisis messages, this is unlikely to be well received. But it is useful in issue management.)
- Emotionally charged words
- Repetition

Memorable and effective messages also should fall under one of the following categories:

- Logic
- Authenticity
- Action-oriented
- Believable
- Measurable

- Strikes a nerve
- Timely
- Visionary

Effective messages are delivered clearly, directly, and empathetically. Never be condescending. Professional assistance with message development and media training is a prudent investment.

People who know the most about an issue often find it the most difficult to create an effective message. Helpful hints:

- Determine what is the most important piece of information
- Ask yourself, who cares?
- Why do they care?
- How does the message fit into your overall branding?

Crisis Management

None of us needs convincing that the unthinkable can—and eventually will—happen. From the horrors of Katrina to the daily specter of violence, tragedy, or crime, we know that no institutions, including libraries, are immune. A growing area of concern in corporate communications and public relations is crisis management. In fact, many universities and community colleges now offer degrees in risk management and emergency management—fields that work hand-in-hand with crisis management.

Be Communicative

The most fundamental component of crisis management is fast, effective communication. The void in communication creates more fear, stress, and outright panic, which compounds the event whatever that adverse event might be. You have the right to remain silent, but if you do, the questioner will fill in the blanks with his/her own answer. “No comment” is tantamount to carrying a sign that says, “I’m guilty” or “I don’t know.”

Keep in mind that personnel and property can be replaced. Credibility is much more difficult to replace, perhaps impossible. You must be honest and accessible. Without credibility, you are even more susceptible to future crises.

Responsibility

Responsibility goes with issues and crisis management. It’s not just the responsibility to reduce lawsuits or to protect elected officials (or your own job for that matter); it is an

10 Commandments of Crisis Communications

1. Thou shalt meet the storm head on.
2. Thou shalt not say “no comment.”
3. Thou shalt not hide from reporters.
4. Thou shalt not speak off the record.
5. Thou shalt not be caught unprepared.
6. Thou shalt not bear false witness.
7. Thou shalt not show anger.
8. Thou shalt honor other people’s emotions.
9. Thou shalt repeat the message until it is heard.
10. Thou shalt show genuine empathy.

overall responsibility to humanity. Crisis management is not just a business, not just a skill or trade. It also is a service to the people affected by our libraries.

What is a crisis?

A crisis is not just a problem. It is a problem breaking out of control. It's not a spring storm; it's a hurricane. How do you define crisis? What would be a crisis for you?

While our focus is on crisis communication, we will also review aspects of crisis management, which provides a useful framework for identifying the best means for preparing for a crisis and then dealing with the situation.

Laying the Groundwork for Crisis Management

Risk Assessment

The first step in crisis management is risk assessment, or vulnerability audit. This evaluation is best conducted with the assistance of professionals who guide you through various "what-if" scenarios, but the assessments can be conducted in-house.

An important contraindication for in-house assessments is participant willingness to speak freely, confidentially, and honestly with the reviewer. This is critical because some of the most destructive crises are not natural disasters or accidents but those that smolder within an organization until they flare up and escape into the public consciousness. These crises can include discrimination or harassment charges, embezzlement and theft, "accepted" breaking of safety rules, labor issues, and nepotism in employment.

Potential Crises

- Natural disasters, such as flood, hurricane, tornado, and wildfire
- Disease (employees or patrons with serious communicable disease)
- Bats (yes, bats!)
- Safety plans/procedures (evacuation plans and practice)
- Building maintenance (wet floors, deferred maintenance, backed up sewers, defective/frayed electrical outlets/wiring to computers and copiers, heating and AC, "exploding" fluorescent ballasts)
- Broken furniture that may collapse (the individual's weight is unlikely to carry much weight in court—fix it before it becomes a crisis)
- Picketers (pornography, hiring practices, religion literature, health literature)
- Internet access, or lack thereof.
- Who/what may enter the library (homeless, backpacks, noisy children).
- Funding losses
- Turning down or accepting money or collections from certain sources?
- Subpoenaed data (from local police in a criminal matter, federal authorities on a "fishing expedition," or attorneys in a civil matter)
- Employee or volunteer crimes (embezzlement, pedophilia)
- Hiring collection agency for past-due book fines

- Vehicle accidents by bookmobile drivers or employees on their way from one facility to another while on “pay” status.
- Workplace violence (employee, patron, or volunteer)
- Layoffs

Crisis Communications Team

Identify your crisis communications team (CCT). The CCT does not follow the standard hierarchy of an organization. Instead, team members should include a person from each category listed under “Team Members” below. It’s up to you to put a name on the position or person.

Keep in mind that the team leader and spokesperson may be one and the same but is not necessarily the highest ranking person in the organization. The communications expert—the public relations director—is the most likely choice for team leader and spokesperson.

There are instances when another member of the team, or an outside expert, is the most appropriate spokesperson.

Anyone who will be a spokesperson must be trained in the organization’s messages and in talking to the media.

Team Members

- Library director
- City manager’s office/chancellor’s office/agency director (**Note:** Individuals in these positions often face a Catch 22 situation due to politics. Their first allegiance is to their boss not to the library. If a sacrifice is to be made, it will not be in the political arena.)
- Public relations director/manager
- Attorney responsible for your operation (**Note:** Attorneys are both your best friend and your worst enemy during a crisis. Their training leans toward “no comment” at the very time that you must be in control of the message. They need to remember that at this state of crisis management, the ball is in the court of public opinion not the courthouse.)
- Representative from CPA firm or auditor’s office.
- President/chair of your volunteer organization (**Note:** This person may be your most important ally. S/he can say things you may not be permitted to say and speak to audiences not available to you—again, for political reasons.)

Media Training for Spokespeople

Just knowing an issue doesn’t prepare you for speaking to the media, especially during times of crisis. Although one typically thinks of media training as “TV training,” that is just one part.

Sound bites aren’t just for TV anymore. A sound bite is a memorable message that is timely, on-target, succinct, truthful, and helpful.

Media training requires practice, practice, practice. Good media training discusses not just what to wear, not just what to say, but HOW to say it. There's nothing worse than false empathy. Media training will weed out those who can represent your organization from those who are best behind the scenes.

Beyond the videotaped media training you may take, stay sharp by practicing in front of a mirror, and looking yourself in the eye. It's not as easy as you might think. For a real test, try it in front of an adolescent son or daughter. They don't pull any punches.

Prior to speaking to the media in time of crisis, practice with a fellow team member.

Procedures for the Crisis Communications Team (CCT)

1. The CCT leader should immediately confer with the Emergency Management Team leader to determine what is known at this time and what operational response has taken place or will take place in the near future.
2. Hold a meeting of the CCT, in-person or electronically, involving internal members and external consultants relevant to the situation.
3. Ensure that switchboards/receptionists, management and other employees know the basics of what has happened, what they should say, and how to reach and direct information requests to the CCT.
4. Use the Crisis Contact Log found at end of this Toolkit.
5. If someone other than the CCT spokesperson will act as primary spokespersons, notify those individuals if they are not already on the CCT. They must be media trained.
6. Rapidly adapt the holding statements which follow these procedures to the situation and/or create new statements as required.
7. Convert the statements into formats appropriate for internal and external communication (e.g., press release/statement, Web pages, blogs maintained by library or others, internal email memos).
8. Ensure that any legally required notification is made according to the requirements of any regulatory agencies involved (e.g., OSHA).
9. No messages, beyond holding statements selected or developed from those developed by the CCT, should be made until more is known about the crisis. At that time, the CCT will work with legal and public relations counsel to formulate additional messages and communications tactics.
10. Continue to interact with the Emergency Management Team to gather information necessary for further communication.

Emergency Management Team

The Emergency Management Team are those individuals who handle the "physical" aspects of a crisis, from building security and police to administration. We won't go into their responsibilities, because they know them better than we ever will. In the event of a crime or disaster, adhere to their recommendations!

Create “Placeholder” Statements

A placeholder statement is one or more statements written, reviewed and agreed to by the CCT prior to a crisis. Placeholder statements follow a vulnerability audit or risk assessment. In times of crisis, one cannot rely solely on memory. Keep an indexed crisis communications manual you develop from this tool kit.

Review your list of potential crises and organize them into topics for which you can prepare placeholder statements. An identified individual or multiple individuals must have the responsibility to consistently monitor new events that may affect your organization. This includes print and broadcast media, political newsletters, and blogs.

Possible Crises

- Serious accident or injury
- Activism, on-site or online
- Accusations of discrimination
- Crime by employees or volunteers
- Disasters, natural or terrorism
- Disease
- Environmental
- Funding loss
- Lawsuits
- Workplace violence

If the list above meets your needs, you must write 10 placeholder statements.

What to do with your placeholders

1. Placeholder statements also should be part of a stealth website that goes live at the time of a crisis.
2. At the time of a crisis, placeholder statements are reviewed the CCT.
3. Modify the statement to fit the specific details of the current crisis.
4. Adapt the placeholder statement to news releases, internal emails, or memos.
5. Have a fact kit about your organization already prepared. It also should be online.
6. Reporters look online before they pick up the phone to call you.
 - Media contact info, 24-7
 - Mission statement
 - Organization chart
 - Key personnel bios
 - Financial statements

- Almost anything with numbers is popular with news media.
7. Policies are particularly important to have in a news kit and online prior to a crisis. It is validation for the statements you will make during the crisis. If you have an employee intranet, having personnel policies posted is helpful for heading off crises and helpful in defending your position when it hits the fan.
 8. Know your audience, whether internal or external. Adjust your placeholder messages accordingly.
 9. Be prepared to repeat statements until they are “heard.” People in crisis do not hear everything at one time. So you must be prepared to repeat the message until it “sticks.”

SAMPLE HOLDING STATEMENT/SERIOUS ACCIDENT OR INJURY

We are shocked and saddened by the loss of life/injuries/damage caused and are doing everything we can to help the victim(s). Our thoughts are with him/her/them and his/her/their family(ies).

We have launched our own internal investigation while also cooperating fully with (name of investigating authorities).

What we know so far is....(give out basic facts , but leave details to the investigating authority).

We try to do everything we can to be in compliance with safety regulations and guidelines, to reduce the chances of accidents to anyone on our property.

We conduct safety training programs as required by (regulatory agency) and try to do everything else we can to be in compliance with safety regulations and guidelines, to reduce the chances of accidents to anyone on our property. (If feasible) For example....(and give examples of safety measures taken relative to the particular situation).

(If questioned about business interruption, then:) Our primary focus is on helping the victims, and we will then resume operation as soon as is reasonable and safe to do so.

(If access by media to accident site is or will be permitted, then:) As soon as the site has been determined to be safe, and if it will not interfere with any official investigations, we will try to arrange controlled access to the area.

(If access by media to accident site is NOT or will NOT be permitted, then:) It is our policy to cooperate with the news media to the maximum extent possible. However, at

this time it is not possible to permit access by the media to the incident site because (whichever is true, or both) the site has not been stabilized and is not safe for non-emergency personnel (and/or) providing access to the site may compromise ongoing investigations.

(If contractor is involved, then:) We ask our contractors to do everything possible, as we do, to be in compliance with safety regulations and guidelines and to reduce the chances of accidents to anyone on our property. (Or, if true, then:) Our contractors are required to follow the same compliance with safety regulations and guidelines as the organization is mandated to follow.

Practice, Practice, Practice

As Katrina so painfully pointed out, practicing emergency management and crisis management is critical to its ultimate success. All crisis plans must be reviewed/practiced at least annually to validate procedures, update messages, and adjust CCT members spokespersons. This practice is only as good as the willingness to follow through and make adjustments when necessary. And, make the changes quickly, not “in the next quarter.”

As discussed under “Media Training,” practice is also key to the spokesperson presenting information. No matter how well one thinks s/he knows the material, s/he must practice the statements until they are delivered in a smooth and natural manner.

Technology

Technology, specifically the Internet and blogs, are essential parts of crisis communications today. In fact, reporters often will turn to your Web site before they call you for a statement. Your placeholder statements must be in place online and ready to go live at a moment’s notice.

- The Internet has no time limits. It’s continuous.
- It is easily updated to fit the situation.
- There is no content limit, beyond good sense.
- Content can include video as well as audio spots.
- It’s critical that you get it right online to preserve credibility.
- Be very careful about your words. The written word lacks the benefit of voice intonation and body language.

Using Human Resources and Legal Counsel

Although a few administrators sometimes consider these two skill sets oppositional, they nonetheless have valuable input to offer regarding employment issues and legal issues.

These interests should be represented on the CCT but should address message accuracy, not the manner in which it is delivered.

Media Contact Worksheet

	Date	Time	Caller's Name	Media Outlet	Phone #	E-mail	Question	Answer	Date/Time Answered
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									

Resources

Media relations toolkit:

www.ala.org/ala/pro/mediarelations/mediarelations.htm

www.ala.org/ala/pio/mediarelationsa/mediarelations.htm

Campaign materials

@yourlibrary materials: www.ala.org/ala/pro/campaign/campaignamericas.thm

65 reasons to love libraries:

TexShare: http://www.texshare.edu/outreach_materials.html

Subsection Credits

“Issues Management and Crisis Communications”: Pamela Baggett-Wallis, Persuasion Communication