

Orange Coast College

CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN



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Purpose

This Crisis Communication Plan for a proposed Crisis Response Team (CRT) will outline a generic, basic crisis communication plan for incidents related to the Colleges and District. A communication crisis is any situation that threatens the integrity or reputation of any one of our colleges and district, usually brought on by adverse or negative media or community attention. These situations can be any kind of legal dispute, theft, accident, fire, flood or manmade disaster that could be attributed to the Coast Community College District.

The following steps should be considered when reacting to a communication crisis within the Coast Community College District:

Assessment

- Incident is identified (The timing in which administration became aware of the incident is taken into consideration)
- CRT is assembled (Must be activated by the CEO or President)
- Public Information Officers (PIOs) develop scenarios and degrees of response to the CRT, then crafts messages accordingly

Plan/Strategy

- CRT agrees on basic messaging and designates leadership roles
- Designated leaders in CRT develop strategy to disseminate message
- Designated leaders of CRT stay on message and defuse internal rumors
- All media requests are fielded through PIOs for external messaging control
- CRT meets regularly for updates and developments in the incident

Analyze/Respond

- PIOs monitor changes in incident reporting
- New responses are developed by PIOs and confirmed by CRT
- PIOs develop SEO and Editorial for positive exposure to combat negative or aggressive media attention
- CRT develops internal messaging to combat lowered moral or conflicting sentiments, as needed
- CRT meets regularly as needed if incident evolves and continues to change
- CEO diffuses the CRT

Things To Remember For Best Results

Check egos at the door

One designated spokesperson may be selected from the incident response team, but that does not always mean that someone else is not equipped to do the job (perhaps the person that seems most suitable to do the job). It simply means that one central person should funnel communication to the media and other stakeholders as often as possible. The spokesperson should also be a person that the public has the least emotional connection to (negative/positive) in order to neutralize the message.

No response is not a response

It's important that some level of acknowledgement of a serious issue must occur in order to gain control of the message early. Simply ignoring a situation and assuming that it will quickly "blow over" is not best practices. However, an initial response must come at the preliminary knowledge of the situation. If too much time lingers, a "no response" response could be the only option to defuse tension.

Messages include best assumptions

Responses by the PIOs or support staff are develop based on provided facts and best assumptions of outcomes. Based on experience, best assumptions of predicted outcomes can be determined, but there is no guarantee that unforeseen variables will not impact the situation and therefore, require a different approach/response/message.

Resources are available

In order for an Incident Response Team to effectively disperse key messaging, executives/managers must take the time to meet as often as needed and also empower staff to handle day-to-day responsibilities while executives and managers address the crises at hand.

PIOs disseminate information but doesn't make policy decisions

The role of the Public Information Officer (PIO) is to communicate the decisions of the administration, disseminate the results of investigations and provide information to the media and the community. A PIO provides public opinion scenarios to potential conclusions to decision makers.

Crisis Response Team

Members

- President
- Director of Student Life
- Dean of Students
- VPSS
- Dean of appropriate area of crisis
- VPI
- Director of Human Resources
- VPA
- Director of Public Safety
- Director of Institutional Advancement
- Director of Marketing and Communications

Others as needed

- Chancellor
- Legal Counsel
- District Information Officer
- VCHR
- District IT
- District Chief of Police
- Crisis Communications Consultant brought in to help with messaging

Crisis Communication Plan



