



Crisis Communication and Rapid Response



W.K.
KELLOGG
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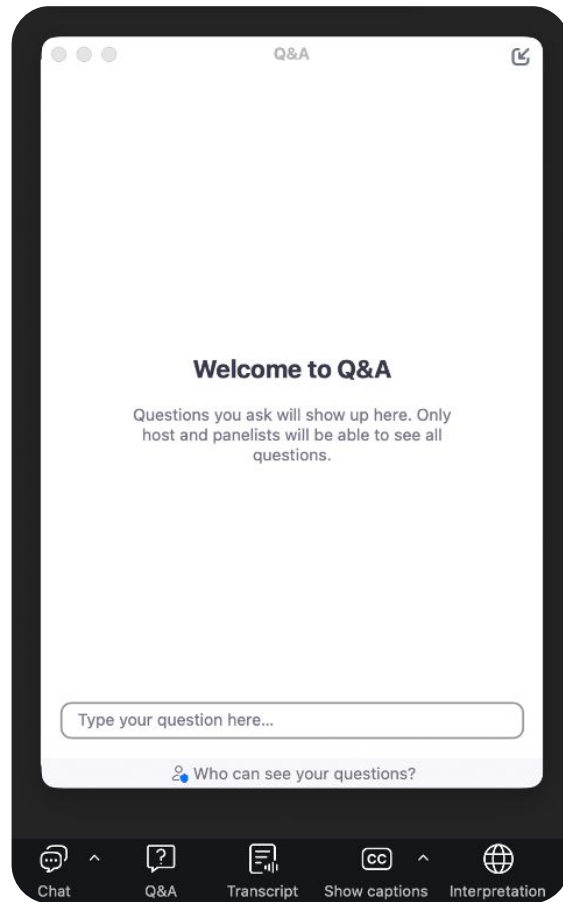


INTRODUCTIONS

Introduce yourself in the Zoom chat:

- Name
- Organization
- Where you are based
- Something you would like to learn today

Webinar Instructions: Submitting Questions



Webinar Instructions:

Finding the Translations



Listen in:

✓ Original audio (interpretation off)

English

Spanish

Haitian Creole

Mute original audio



Chat



Q&A



Transcript



Show captions



Interpretation



Introductions



Paul Hernandez

Chief Strategy Officer
FENTON COMMUNICATIONS
(pronouns: he/him)



Shakirah Hill Taylor

Chief Digital Officer
FENTON COMMUNICATIONS
(pronouns: she/her)



Introductions

Johnathan S. Hill

THE HB GROUP
(pronouns: he/him)

Catalina Zuleta

SPANISH INTERPRETER
(pronouns: she/her)

Edlens Ulysse

HAITIAN CREOLE INTERPRETER
(pronouns: he/him)





UPCOMING TRAINING SESSIONS

This is the first in a series of virtual trainings on using communication to meet the moment.

The next two trainings to be held in 2026 are:

- Values-Based Messaging
- Addressing Mis/Disinformation

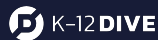


Does your organization have a crisis communications protocol *OR* a rapid response protocol?

- ☐ We have only a crisis protocol
- ☐ We have only a rapid response protocol
- ☐ We have both
- ☐ We have neither

Our Current Environment

Across the country, nonprofits and communities are feeling the impacts of unprecedented, unpredictable and unrelenting shifts in policies, practices and funding.



Immigration enforcement causing trauma and school avoidance, educators and advocates say



What the shutdown means for Medicare, Medicaid and other health programs



How federal funding cuts have hit nonprofits and the communities they serve

What We Have Seen & Heard From Grantees



“Our very own existence
[as nonprofits] is being
called into question. That is
**a major fundamental
difference in this
moment of our history.**”

A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing an orange top and a beaded necklace, is speaking into a green microphone. She is seated at a table with other people. A man with a beard is to her left, and a woman with glasses is behind her. The background is slightly blurred, showing an indoor setting with stone walls.

“We know that there’s going to be fire after fire that impacts our community... and knowing **when and how to respond is a big need.**”

Defining Crisis Communications vs. Rapid Response Communications



WHAT IS CRISIS COMMUNICATION?

A crisis is an event that potentially threatens the organization's reputation or its employees and their well-being.

Crises happen quickly and almost always require you to respond quickly.

Sometimes the only way to keep up is by creating a plan before a crisis even takes place.



**How federal funding cuts
have hit nonprofits and the
communities they serve**



WHAT IS RAPID RESPONSE COMMUNICATION?

Rapid response communication is **necessary for organizations to become adept at responding quickly** to events or breaking news (either positive or negative) related to their work, and communicating quickly to key audiences.



What the shutdown means for Medicare, Medicaid and other health programs



POP QUIZ

CRISIS OR
RAPID RESPONSE?

“A proposed state law that will significantly cut early childhood education begins gaining traction this legislative session.”

- ☐ Crisis
- ☐ Rapid Response



Crisis Communications

Crisis Communication: What Not to Do



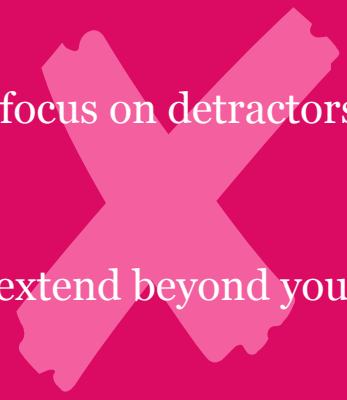


What type of crises has your organization faced a crisis in 2025?
(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Reduced funding
- ☐ Public targeting/shaming
- ☐ Personnel issue
- ☐ Legal or financial inquiry/investigation
- ☐ Other

Dos and Don'ts

- ✓ **DO** plan ahead and respond quickly
 - ✓ **DO** prioritize your internal audiences
 - ✓ **DO** prioritize your supporters
 - ✓ **DO** be realistic about what you can and cannot control
- 

- ✗ **DON'T** just hope it will go away
 - ✗ **DON'T** leave your staff ill-equipped to communicate
 - ✗ **DON'T** only focus on detractors
 - ✗ **DON'T** overextend beyond your capacity.
- 

Creating a Crisis Communication Protocol

1. Decide your internal risk committee.
2. Create a crisis identification rubric.
3. Scenario plan. For predictable events, think through audiences, tactics and messaging.
4. Map your key audiences and how to reach them.
5. Develop messaging that you can use with each key audience for each scenario.
6. Monitor the crisis.



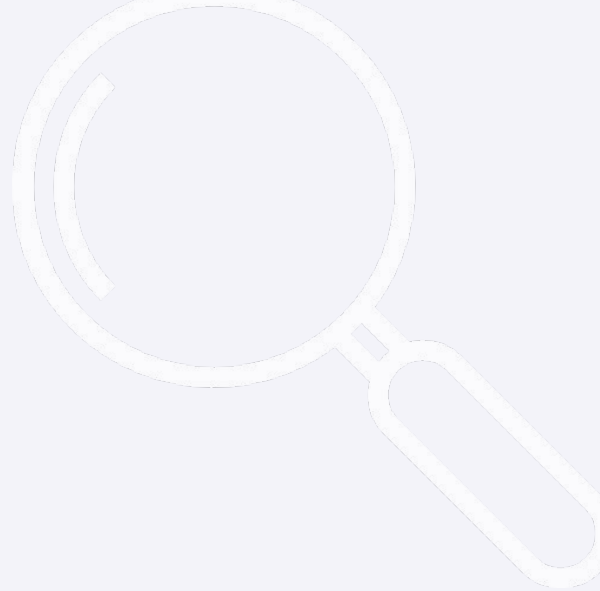
Risk Committee and Crisis Identification

Who is on your risk committee?

- Keep the group limited to 4-5 people
- Determine how regularly you should consult with legal counsel

What is the threshold for a crisis?

- Not everything is a crisis
- You can start preparation or outreach before a crisis develops



Scenario Planning: Getting Ahead of Crises



EXAMPLE SCENARIO

You've heard that a Congressional inquiry about your organization, the work that you do and your 501(c)(3) status is imminent.

What are the likely possible outcomes?

For example:

- Other donors hear about this and consider pulling grants
- Inquiry ultimately finds no concern
- Inquiry ultimately finds concern and could lead to a legal battle

Audience Mapping: Who Do You Need to Reach?

- Who are **the key audiences** you need to communicate with first and in what priority?
 - Whose support are you most afraid to lose?
 - Who are the groups and individuals you need to fulfill your mission?
 - Who will be upset if they learn about issues from someone other than you?
- Who is **the best messenger** for each audience?
Do you need to line up external validators?



Audience Mapping: Who Do You Need to Reach?



EXAMPLE SCENARIO

You've heard that a Congressional inquiry about your organization, the work that you do and your 501(c)(3) status is imminent.

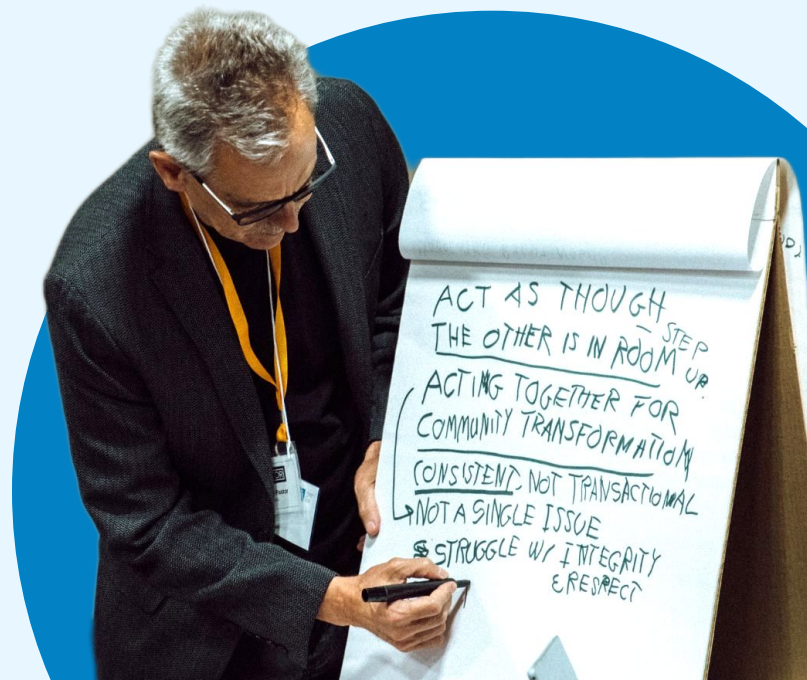
- Let donors/funders know how this impacts your financial situation.
- Reach out to partners to determine if others are affected and need for alignment on strategy.
- Assess how this will show up in the news cycle; be prepared to reach out or respond to any reporters who may cover this story.
- Let your communities know how this will impact the way you are able to support them.
- Advocate with policymakers who have influence over this inquiry.

Messaging: Pre-draft Messaging for Different Scenarios

Remember, the naysayers are likely not your highest priority audience — **your stakeholders are**. You must develop messaging that both shapes discourse and reminds them why they support the organization.

Consider developing:

- An overarching narrative, which can be modified into:
 - A holding statement for press
 - Emails for stakeholders
 - Staff or board meetings
- Talking points for any public-facing staff or external validators who may be asked questions.



Messaging: Pre-draft Messaging for Different Scenarios



EXAMPLE SCENARIO

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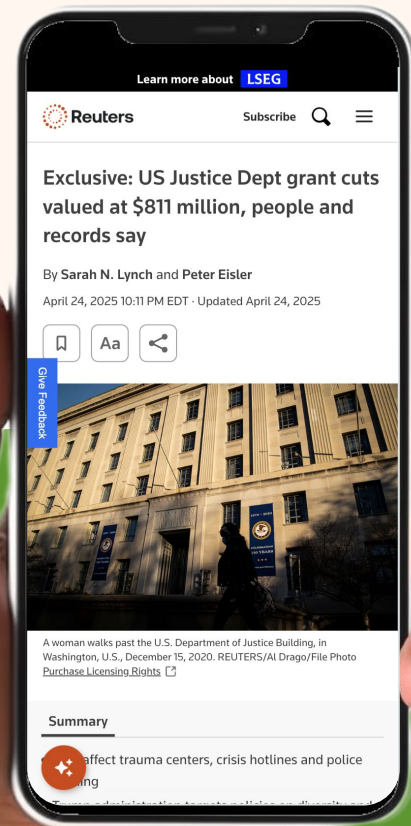
Example Message:

“We are committed to showing up for our communities and at present there will be no interruption of services. But please let your representative know that this inquiry has the potential to halt some of the services you rely on us for in the future.”

Tactics: How to reach your audiences

Pair each audience with the appropriate communication tactic:

- Direct engagement
(email, call, meeting, etc.)
- Earned media
- Social media
- Engaging validators





Case Study



Let's Chat

Monitoring: Setting up Ongoing Crisis Management

Staying ahead of the conversation — and shaping it — is not possible without strategic media and social media monitoring.

- Consider setting up a monitoring system that searches news and social media for a list of keywords for both the organization and its leaders, as well as for each of the identified issues that the organization may face.
 - Use words and phrases you would use for typical searches
 - Be specific to the issues that you want monitored



Monitoring: Create a Boolean Structure

Develop a list of keywords for both the organization and its leaders, as well as for each of the identified issues that the organization may face.

The structure should:

- Be developed using words and phrases you would use for typical searches
- Be specific to the issues that you want monitored
- Include the names of individuals and other organizations, as well as nicknames



Monitoring: Setting up Ongoing Crisis Management

Platforms



Google Alerts



sproutsocial



Hootsuite



Meta

Communities & Resources



nten



Nonprofit
Tech for Good

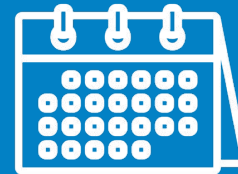


NGO-ISAC
BETTER TOGETHER



techsoup

Crisis Timeline



First hour

- Gather crisis team and set regular check-ins
- Start monitoring all conversation
- Assign spokespeople
- Determine key audiences

First 24 Hours

- Respond quickly, prioritizing staff
- Draft holding statements
- Respond to reporter requests within 1-2 hours

First Week

- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation with the crisis team
- Continue providing updates
- Share feedback

A large, light green lightning bolt graphic is positioned in the background, centered vertically and horizontally behind the title text.

Rapid Response Communication

Rapid Response Communication: What Not to Do



What are some rapid response situations?



Your state legislature is considering a work requirements verification procedure that is projected to result in **thousands of people in your area losing their health coverage.**



A new policy related to your issue area has emerged as a hot button issue and you are getting requests from peers and/or reporters to comment.



Funding cuts to your city are threatening to discontinue the main transit line that connects your community to the local hospital.



A natural disaster has caused flooding that has made it hard for children to get to school.

Dos and Don'ts

- ✓ **DO** respond if your audiences would expect you to respond
 - ✓ **DO** prioritize communicating for impact
 - ✓ **DO** use rapid response to help shape narratives
- 

- ✗ **DON'T** be radio silent on a situation that directly impacts your issue area
 - ✗ **DON'T** stretch yourself too thin if the potential impact is minimal
 - ✗ **DON'T** delay responding until the moment has passed
- 



**Does your organization
have a rapid response
protocol in place?**

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

Creating a Rapid Response Protocol

- 1. Choose a rapid response team**
- 2. Identify predictable/anticipated events**
- 3. Evaluate a rapid response moment**
- 4. Map your key audiences and how to reach them**
- 5. Develop a messaging framework for key issues that staff can easily pull from**
- 6. Determine which tactics to use**



Identify Predictable/Anticipated Events

What are examples of **typical rapid response events**?

- Major incidents where you have power to mobilize support or share information in a way that aligns with your goals.
- Events that generate significant local or national attention and/or relate to your goals or calls to action.
- Introduction or key development in local, state or federal policy relevant to your policy goals/recommendations.

Evaluating a Rapid Response Moment

Questions to ask yourself:

Opportunity

- Has the issue risen to a level that justifies rapid response?
- Do you already have a track record on the issue?
- Is there a call-to-action for your key audiences in this moment?
- Is there a perspective missing from the conversation that your organization can offer?
- What are the pros/cons of responding to this situation?



EXAMPLE SCENARIO

Federal Medicaid policy now requires work requirements. Your state legislature is considering a verification procedure that is projected to result in thousands of people in your area losing their health coverage.

Map Your Audiences

Questions to ask yourself:

Stakeholders

- How does the situation impact your community?
- Who needs to know about it?
- Do your audiences expect you to respond?
- What do you want your audiences to do?



EXAMPLE SCENARIO

Federal Medicaid policy now requires work requirements. Your state legislature is considering a verification procedure that is projected to result in thousands of people in your area losing their health coverage.

Develop a Messaging Framework

Questions to ask yourself:

Messages

- What information do your audiences need? In the short, medium and long term?
- Who is the best messenger for your audiences?
- Where do your audiences get information?
- How can you quickly get the word out to all key audiences?



EXAMPLE SCENARIO

Federal Medicaid policy now requires work requirements. Your state legislature is considering a verification procedure that is projected to result in thousands of people in your area losing their health coverage.

Types of Response Tactics



NEWS STORY

Medicaid funding shortfall
shutters statewide program
helping moms and babies



OP-ED

Rural America is hungry.
Is Congress about to make
that worse?

PRESS RELEASE



Proposed Cuts to HHS
Services Would Devastate
Families, Children, Workers
and the Economy

SOCIAL MEDIA

If you can't get formula because WIC
and SNAP run out, here are some
helpful resources.

Locate food banks by zip code on
[FeedingAmerica.org](https://www.feedingamerica.org)

Find local nonprofits that are
collecting donated infant formula

Call your pediatrician or local
hospital for formula samples

Please remember →





Let's Chat



SURVEY

Please take 5 minutes to complete our post-training survey. Your feedback shapes future topics and sessions.





CLOSING

- We know that questions will come up as you play with these strategies and tactics. If you have questions and need support, reach out to us at wkkfcapacitybuilding@fenton.com
- For additional resources, check out our communications resource hub at StrategicCommunicationTools.com
- Stay tuned for details about early 2026 trainings covering **values-based messaging** and **addressing mis- & disinformation**



Thank You



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