

**PROCEDURES MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** MCC Staff

**FROM:** Office of the President

**SUBJECT:** Crisis Communication Plan for News Media and Other Audiences

**DATE:** November 4, 2010

**PURPOSE:** To establish general procedures for communicating crises/emergencies to news media and other interested audiences, both internal and external.

**SCOPE:** This Procedures Memorandum (PM) applies to all College employees (full-time, part-time, regular, temporary).

1. General principles

This plan offers policies and procedures for the coordination of crisis communication to internal and external audiences, including the news media. This document should be a flexible blueprint to use to communicate during a crisis.

THIS PLAN DOES NOT CHANGE THE WAY EMERGENCIES ARE INITIALLY REPORTED. ALL EMERGENCIES SHOULD BE CALLED TO 911. The processes for handling various emergencies are covered in **Procedures Memorandum X-7** and the **Emergency Procedures Handbook**, which can be accessed online under the Faculty and Staff Resource Center on the College web site.

2. Definition

A crisis is any situation that threatens the security, safety, integrity or reputation of Metropolitan Community College (MCC). Examples include: legal disputes, crimes, and natural or human disasters. Poor or ineffective communication during a crisis diminishes good will and damages the College's reputation.

A crisis communication plan provides direction and organization for communication actions during a crisis.

3. How to Determine if Crisis Communication is Needed

When a MCC employee identifies a crisis, s/he first must determine whether emergency services need to be called. These services should be called first. The person then should

call MCC's Police Department. The Police Department will notify the office of the President and the President or his/her designate who then makes the decision to activate the **crisis communications team**.

Generally, if the incident involves external emergency services (law, medical, fire), those agencies handle media relations about their involvement in the incident. The Executive Director of Public Affairs should establish relationships with news media public information officers or at least maintain an updated directory of the Public Information Officers in our four-county area.

#### 4. The Crisis Communication Team

The team identifies what communication actions should be taken, and should come up with a plan of action to deal with crisis communication needs. The team is comprised of key people who are empowered to quickly make decisions for the College. Since the plan is action oriented, the team is small and will confer with others in the College as needed. The team generally includes the following :

- A. The President
- B. The Executive Vice President
- C. The Executive Director of Public Affairs
- D. Others as designated or needed

In the event the President or Executive Vice President are unavailable, the Vice President with primary responsibility for the affected area will direct the team and has the authority to call on any College resources as necessary.

#### 5. Initial Response

The team should gather information, identify constituencies that need to be informed, and identify key information to communicate. The crisis communication team should develop a plan of action that includes some of the following:

- A. Designate a spokesperson – Depending on the type of crisis, this could be the Executive Vice President, the Executive Director of Public Affairs, the President or designate the person who possesses the most knowledge of the incident. For example, the Chief of Police may respond best on a crime incident, the President may be best to restore public confidence and the Executive Vice President may handle day-to-day media questions.
- B. Draft a fact sheet – This should be a summary statement that includes all known details to be released to the media. The fact sheet should be balanced between the public's right to know and concerns for student privacy and security.

- C. Identify and notify key constituencies – Effective communications stop rumors, restore morale and help maintain continued orderly operation of the college. Key constituencies could be:
    - 1) MCC students and employees
    - 2) Families of MCC students and employees
    - 3) Board of Governors
    - 4) News media
    - 5) General public
    - 6) Vendors
    - 7) Accreditation agencies
  
  - D. Identify methods of communication based on the constituencies – Different crises warrant different methods of communication to key constituencies. Some methods to consider include:
    - 1) Small group or individual meetings with employees and students
    - 2) Email groups
    - 3) Voice mail messages
    - 4) Information on the web site
    - 5) Phone bank
    - 6) Newsletters
    - 7) Phone calls to important external constituents, such as board members
    - 8) Alertus Beacons
    - 9) Emergency outdoor sirens
    - 10) Text messaging
    - 11) Press release
  
  - E. Determine if the situation requires establishing a **crisis communications center**.
  
  - F. Develop a **media plan** if needed.
6. Crisis Communication Center (CCC) Facility Needs

If the crisis is of sufficient magnitude to require setting up a media briefing area, the following describes the system/facility needs:

- A. Cell and land phone lines and audio/visual and Internet capability and space for up to 50 people. Rooms that can serve this purpose are Board Meeting room, Building 22, Fort Omaha Campus; and the Industrial Training Center, South Omaha Campus. Consideration should be given to placement of the Crisis Communication Center facility in an area away from the affected area.
  
- B. Power and communication ability should also be a consideration. If power is not available in FOC Building 22, the CCC could occupy the FOC Building 2 conference room. If the FOC area is not available because of damage or inaccessibility, portable generators will be arranged through Facilities Management at the designated College location.

- C. A dedicated phone line to respond to media inquiries. Useful when other phone lines are tied up due to the crisis.
- D. A list of the crisis communication team and the crisis support team, maintained by the Chief of Police. The list includes cell phone numbers, beeper numbers, home phone, work number and email addresses both at home and work. The list is distributed annually to campus directors, public safety officers, deans and other key personnel.
- E. A current list of Public Information Officers representing law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, health organizations and governmental entities in the four-county service area along with necessary state and federal bodies. The Executive Director of Public Affairs maintains this list.

## 7. Media Plan

The elements of a media plan include:

- A. Alert key media if they haven't already called – Determine whether a news conference or news release is more appropriate in relaying information to employees, students, the news media and general public.
- B. Determine news conference logistics of when, where and how the media will be contacted and which media will be contacted. A crisis in Omaha may not warrant notifying media in Fremont. Determine who should accompany the media.
- C. Issue a **prepared statement** for news conference – Be ready to issue the statement and other materials as handouts.
- D. Decide news conference format in advance – Know who should introduce speakers, when questions and answers end and other details.
- E. Try to restrict all interviews to the primary spokesperson. Controlling the interview process is key to managing the crisis. Reporters may ask to speak to staff or students who are involved with or have been affected by the crisis.
- F. Be aware that reporters have the right to interview anyone they want to and if they don't get the answers they want from you they will get them somewhere. They all want a different angle than the reporter standing next to them.
- G. Treat all media equally. What is given to one (such as access to an area affected by the crisis) should be available to all media.

## 8. Prepared Statement

A prepared statement can be used to make an initial general response to the media when knowledge about the crisis first becomes known on a widespread basis or by reporters. The Executive Director of Public Affairs will prepare the statements in collaboration with the crisis communication team.

As the crisis progresses and new information and facts become available, it is also advisable to develop prepared statements to be made by the spokesperson at the onset of any media interview, briefing or news conference.

These prepared statements also can be read over the telephone to reporters who call to request information but are not represented at news conferences or briefings.

#### 9. Follow-up Communication

Evaluation is the key to effectively communicating a crisis. Current and future efforts can be helped by:

- A. Keeping a chronology of the event – Assign video or photographers, if needed, to help document the crisis. Track news and video clippings. Set up information files, including clippings, statements, letters, memos and other documents. Take notes and monitor the situation.
- B. Plan to update staff of affected location.–
- C. Following-up on crisis – The crisis communications team should meet within two weeks of the crisis to review the actions taken to determine effectiveness and efficiency of the response. Information should be incorporated into updates of this plan. The President will designate an appropriate person to complete a written after-action report.

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