

THE CRISIS IS OVER ... NOW WHAT?

As surely as a crisis is going to occur in your city, it will end. It may last hours or days, but a resolution will be reached and the matter that invoked your city's crisis communications plan will finally end. But your city's response to the crisis is far from over.

Your crisis communications team will shift from a response role to an assessment mode, so that it can evaluate the effectiveness of your city's crisis plan. What worked, and what didn't? How can you make your plan better?

Even as your city reviews how the crisis plan and crisis team performed, it will also need to conduct an evaluation of the crisis itself. Why did it happen, and could the city have done anything to prevent or minimize it? What effect did it have on your constituents? What can your city do to prevent it from happening again?

ASSESSING THE RESPONSE

As they did during the crisis, the media and the public will have questions about what happened. Their city government must show a commitment to providing them the answers. Your crisis communications team should conduct an analysis of your city's response.

Depending on the nature of the crisis, a review could involve a meeting or a series of meetings. Invite key players to attend and give their views concerning the city's response.

Ask other outside groups for their views. You might reach out to neighborhood associations, law enforcement agencies, or any other groups that had a stake in the crisis you just experienced. You need to show a willingness to listen and accept constructive criticism, and to make changes to how the city responds to a crisis the next time. It's what your constituents expect and will show them that their government is listening and open to making changes based on their input.

Be sure your review takes a close look at each component of your crisis communications plan and its effectiveness. Were the key messages you drafted before and during the crisis useful? Did you use news conferences effectively? Were you in control of the flow of information surrounding the crisis?

Assess the roles of your key team members. How effective was your spokesperson in dealing with the media and handling their questions? Was the person able to win the trust of the public?

Use the crisis to learn and strengthen your crisis communications response plan so your city is better prepared for the next crisis. It's not a matter of if, but when the next one will happen.

ASSESSING THE CRISIS

In addition to assessing your city's response to the crisis, you might want to conduct a public review of the crisis itself, especially if it involved an event that threatened public safety. Appoint an assessment team to look at the specific details of the event. Again, be proactive. Show your stakeholders that you are willing to listen and change policies to avoid another incident of this nature in the future. Find out what caused the problem and determine what can be done to prevent it from happening again.

ASSESSING THE BRAND

Once the crisis ends, you will need to determine what damage has occurred to your city's reputation. You might need to interview key stakeholders to get their perspective or survey your constituents. It's important to know the extent of the damage to your city's brand so you can begin rebuilding the trust among those you serve. If the crisis received national media coverage, you might consider a larger survey to determine Americans' opinions of your city. This is particularly important if your city depends on tourism.

A review of media coverage during and after the crisis is essential for helping to improve the city's image. Identify the perceptions among the media that need to be addressed and work on changing those perceptions. It might take a call or visit to a newsroom to express the city's concerns. You might not get immediate results, but you've laid the groundwork for better communications that could help down the road.

MOVING FORWARD

Despite any negative backlash that might occur as the result of a crisis, you have the ability to influence how the public views its local government. Find ways to promote the ongoing good work the city performs for its residents. Adopt a positive approach. Following the crisis, tell your constituents what is being done to prevent it from happening again. It might take time and hard work, but promote the positive aspects of your city government – not just those involving the crisis, but all of the positive stories that come from city government. Give your stakeholders an opportunity to look beyond one event and see all of the good work the city performs. Don't let one event dictate people's perceptions of its local government.