

During a  
crisis.



Do you know  
what to do  
first?

# CRISIS PLANNING GUIDE

## How to Write A Crisis Plan



THE CREATIVE  
COMPANY

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## Crisis Planning Guide

A publication of:



The goal in every situation (and the opportunity) is to build trust. During the COVID-19 crisis, the opportunities to do so are exponential, intense and necessary. Having a straightforward crisis plan in place will help you to navigate this crisis and make your organization more resilient for future crises.

### How to Write a Crisis Plan

*“When you’re not at the table, you may be on the menu.”*

A crisis is defined as a major interference with operations. It is a sudden, unexpected event or situation that could affect your stakeholders and your business. It requires immediate attention.

By providing vital information to stakeholders in a timely fashion, you will also display your authority and capabilities while mitigating losses. It’s important to remain both pragmatic and flexible while leaning on your values as you move through a season of crisis.

Right now, it probably feels like you don’t have the time to create a plan, but by taking even one hour with your team to think through these questions and writing a brief plan, you’ll be ahead of 90% of the companies navigating this right now. You’ll also provide your employees, board of directors, customers, and other stakeholders some security.



#### Step 1: Identify Stakeholder Groups

- List and prioritize
  - Examples: employees, customers/clients/patients, media, vendors, association groups, Chambers of Commerce, communities, financial institutions, board of directors, supply chain partners.
  - Who matters? What are their expectations? What do they want to experience and how do they want to experience it? What do you want them to experience?
- Safety, trust, transparency, and expertise will need to be conveyed at every touchpoint.

## Step 2: Define Internal Communication Plan

- Research shows that people don't think well under extreme stress. It's important that you acknowledge the stress people are under by showing empathy and prepare staff by helping them feel more secure and informed. Words and clarity matter now more than ever.
- Review the tools you will be using to navigate this crisis to keep people up to date and informed.
- Establish and maintain communications platforms (e.g. Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc.) with regularly scheduled video calls.
- You may set up text groups for emergency communication or turn to other tools like Slack, WhatsApp, etc.
- Context matters - explain what the news means in your company setting. Share how it will impact your service agreements, product offerings, and so on.
- If you are part of a large organization, you can also survey employees to see how your organization is doing from a communications perspective. Do employees feel they are receiving the right amount of communication? Is technology helping or hindering their ability to do their jobs? Do they feel engaged enough?
- Always remember that those who are closest to you are most important.



### **Step 3. Define External Communication Plan**

#### Timing of Communication to Stakeholders

Here is an example from the Logos Institute for Crisis Management and Executive

Leadership about what to consider:

#### **The Four Question Test:**

1. Will those who matter to us expect us to do or say something now?
2. Will silence be seen as either indifference or as an affirmation of guilt?
3. Are others speaking about us, shaping the perception among those who matter to us?
4. If we wait, will we lose the ability to influence the outcome?

#### **Protocol:**

- What are you responsible for?
- Whom should you notify?
- With whom should you communicate?

**Social Media:** (60% of organizations do not respond to negative posts.) Decide now if you're going to respond and how. Agree on the protocol (length of time to respond, what's reasonable, who is in charge and if you will respond directly to the post publicly or via direct message or other channels.)

**Reporter Contact:** In the event that the media contacts you, do you have a designated spokesperson? If not, who is in charge? Do they have the most current and up-to-date information? **In a crisis, the first 45 minutes is critical.** If you need additional time, it's better to have a placeholder statement in place. Write one now. Make sure ALL staff know that any questions from the media need to be directed to this person and that no one else is allowed to go on the record.

### **Step 4: Identify Potential Issues and Crisis**

Determine what **does** constitute a crisis as well as what **does not** constitute a crisis.

Identify the following:

- What are the factors and or processes to consider in discerning the degree of a crisis?
- What should be done?
- Who should be notified?

### **Step 5: Rank the Threats & Create Specific Response**

List the **top 5 to 10 crisis issues** your organization may encounter, then prioritize them, focusing on safety first.

Imagine and formulate the crisis situation, walking through each step, from your internal and your stakeholders' points of view.

Create a Process Map for how you will respond to each crisis.

- What is happening?
- What does it mean to our clients, customers, and staff?
- What do we want? (The desired end state based on the risks.)



## Step 6: Implement a Crisis Communications Strategy

Prepare a crisis statement. The **first hour** is the most crucial in terms of your response time.

Crisis Statements (Frame + Facts = Message)

- Acknowledgment
- Empathy
- Values
- Approach
- Commitment

Ideally, you also should have the following prepared:

- Fact Sheets about the issue
- Talking points
- Potential spokespeople
- Scripts


During a crisis.

Do you know what to do first?

One of the first things people ask us during a crisis is,

**“WHAT SHOULD WE SAY?”**

This is important but identifying **what you want to achieve** and **how you want your stakeholders to think, feel, know,** and **do** must be done before we say anything.





## Step 7: Get the message out/Inform

Does anyone need to know this information before the general public does? Make a list of the chain of information.

Then, send or post to:

- Media Lists
- Clients/Customers
- Email
- Website
- Social Media (use a tool to Streamline and monitor your efforts such as HootSuite)
- Other Channels

Let stakeholders know they will find the most up to date information on these sites.

Consider how the SBA, WEDC and other business organizations are working together now. They need to act quickly and communicate complex details to a large audience. Using that as an example, you can see how they are very quickly moving through these steps.

**Monitor Media Coverage:** Have a designated person in charge of monitoring media stories related to your industry as well as social media. There are many tools available and resources you can also utilize which are generally paid by subscription too. However, you will still need a real person to monitor and respond if any inaccuracies are reported.

Provide regular information updates to media, staff and other stakeholders as needed.

## Summary

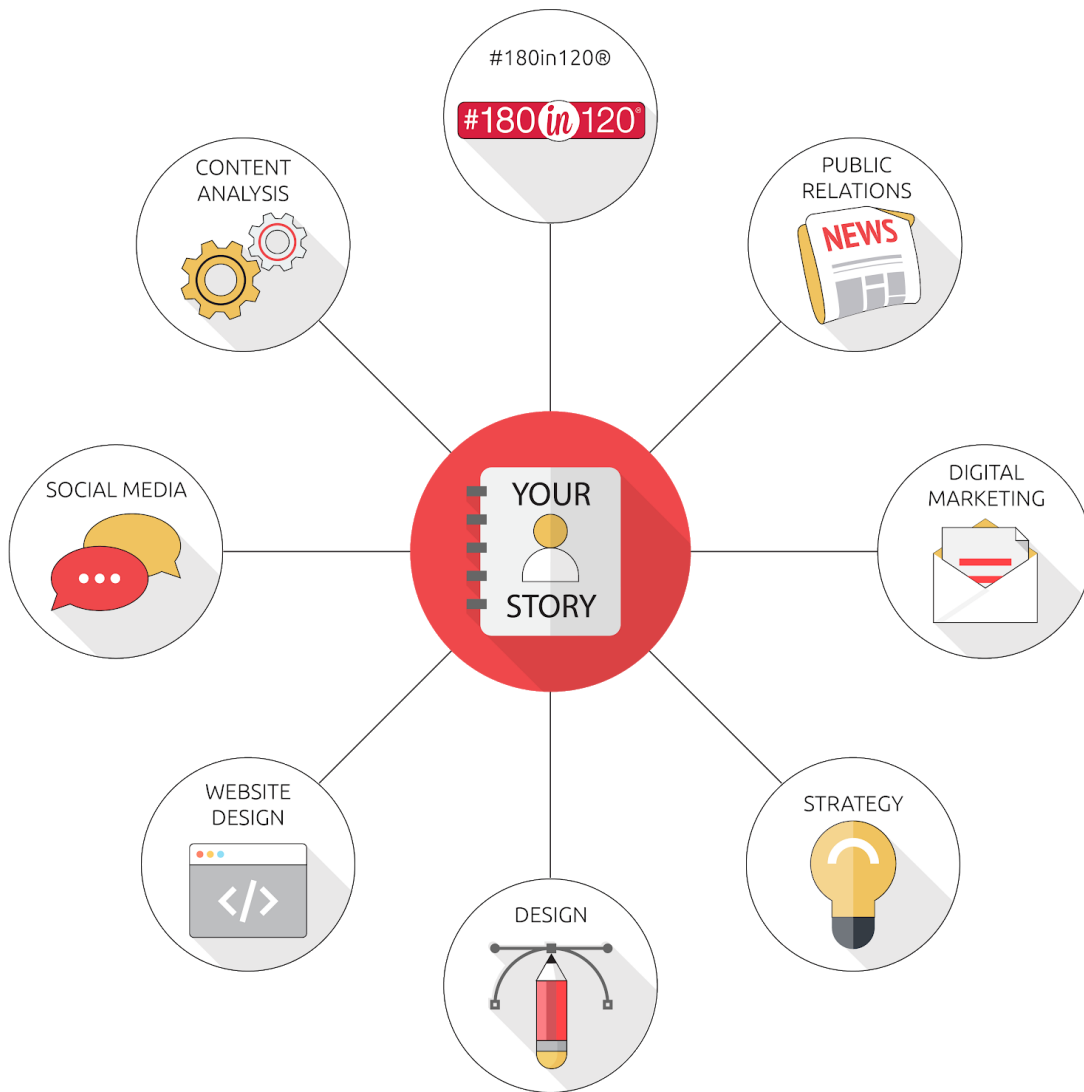
1. Begin with the end in mind. Your goal is to build trust through clear communication. Communicate with transparency and often with everyone in your supply chain about what's happening and your plans related to current events.
2. Start with empathy and keep your values and your commitment to employees and customers front and center.
3. Schedule daily briefings with your team both to check-in and to review the plan for today and tomorrow. Make sure everyone has a chance to talk. It's better to do a live call than email.
4. Keep a running checklist of crisis or potential crisis and rank them daily. Respond accordingly using the guide above.
5. See where you can do good. In the midst of all of this, we are seeing so many companies step into the fray, innovate and create solutions to meet the needs of our community and healthcare workers. Shine a light into the darkness and together, we'll get to the other side stronger and even better than before.

Your customers, staff, and stakeholders will appreciate your efforts and the continuity of your business is far more likely even during times of great change, with a plan and strong communication. If you need assistance, we welcome your questions and the opportunity to work alongside you and your business.

For an inspiring look at how to walk through this leadership challenge, please read [Time to Rise - How to Walk Through the Biggest Leadership Challenge of Your Life](#) by Laura Gallagher, President of The Creative Company.



## About The Creative Company: Our Process



**The Creative Company** is a Public Relations, Web Development, Interactive Digital Media and Marketing Agency located in Madison, Wisconsin. Founded in 1989, The Creative Company is an award-winning team of senior-level branding strategists, designers, artists, digital developers, and PR pros, led by company founder, 2019 SBA Women in Business Champion of the Year, and State of Wisconsin Trailblazer, Laura Gallagher.



We provide our clients with effective counsel and program development across the spectrum of marketing, public relations, reputation and crisis management, online/digital strategy, advertising, SEO and other strategic communications services. We have worked with numerous organizations for the last 30 years including legal issues, operational incidents, conduct issues, market disruptions, and competitive threats. We help non-profit, business and faith organizations take control of the crisis situation and stabilize their organizations.

Clients often engage The Creative Company when the stakes are high: during a brand launch, change in marketing roles, competitive threat or any period of fundamental change or transition. Clients come to us needing communications campaigns built on knowledge, research, and industry insights. Most of all, clients come to us for our proven ability to communicate effectively and our focus on data-driven results and work that inspires people to act.



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