



Local Council Issues Communications Plan

A Field Guide to Crises and Issues Management

INTRODUCTION

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is dedicated to building the character and integrity of America's youth. Local councils are essential to this mission and, as such, must be prepared to communicate effectively with their respective members, employees, community partners, and both local and national media at all times, especially when the BSA brand and the council's reputation are being called into question.

This external scrutiny often occurs in a crisis, or a sudden and unpredictable large-scale event that has the potential to impact the BSA, its members, its employees or the community, the BSA's relationship with supporting organizations, or its reputation in general. A crisis can be anything from a policy challenge or decision in the organization to a natural disaster in your community.

It is the first minutes and hours of a crisis that are the most critical, as it is during this timeframe that public and media scrutiny will be at its peak and communication will be particularly important. This period is when local council leadership must demonstrate that they are acting responsibly and decisively to resolve the situation.

The purpose of this plan is to provide a clear course of action that will enable local council leadership to better handle a broad range of issues and crises and ensure effective communication occurs with all of the council's key audiences and stakeholders.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The goal of this plan is to define the BSA's crisis communications policies and procedures for local councils, help councils improve their internal and external response systems to situations, and assist local councils with identifying the appropriate resources so the organization can continue to carry out our mission of serving America's youth.

This plan explores a range of scenarios that may impact local councils, providing a recommended response, action, or resource. It is important to bear in mind that some, if not most, of these issues should be elevated to National Council to discuss strategy or to discuss if a national response or spokesperson is best suited to handle the situation. These issues are typically local market matters that require assistance from the National Council team and national issues that may affect the organization as a whole.

CUSTOMIZING THIS PLAN

This plan is a guide that should be customized for your council's needs, inserting relevant information and contacts specific to your local council. The recommendations included in this plan are provided by the National Council, but judgment is deferred to the Scout Executive of each local council.

UPDATING THIS PLAN

The BSA will conduct a periodic review of this document to help ensure and maintain the effective implementation of these policies and procedures. It is also recommended that you review and update your customized plan regularly. If you find information from the National Council that is out of date or inaccurate, please notify:

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UNDERSTANDING CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

The following section examines the concepts, organization, and methodology behind crisis communications – the internal and external sharing of information during and after a crisis. This section addresses the BSA’s crisis terminology, philosophy, and goals.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TERMINOLOGY

For the purpose of this guide, it is important to recognize a standard and accepted set of operating terms and descriptions. The following are key terms:

- **Brand:** A brand is how a company or organization portrays its image—from their logo and tag line, to advertisements and key messages. Built over time, a brand conveys the personality of a company and its promise to customers.
- **Reputation:** The public’s overall perception of the BSA’s brand and organization. These perceptions can result from personal experiences with the brand and the organization, messaging and advertisements that people see and hear, and the third-party conversations that they are exposed to.
- **Incident:** A discrete, isolated event that impacts one or more councils, members, adult volunteer leaders, employees, or the community, and has the potential to attract the attention of the media.
- **Issue:** Any unresolved point of conflict between the BSA and one or more of its key constituencies that, if not properly addressed, has the potential to escalate into a crisis.
- **Issues management:** The process of continually scanning the environment in order to identify and take control of a potentially damaging situation before the damage occurs and escalates into a crisis that captures widespread attention.
- **Crisis:** Any sudden and unpredictable large-scale event that invites external scrutiny and has the potential to impact the BSA, its members, its employees or the community, the BSA’s relationship with supporting organizations, or its reputation in general.
- **Crisis management:** The process of responding to adverse situations that have already occurred and taking a definitive course of action to neutralize them or minimize their short- or long-term impact.
- **Stakeholder:** A person or group that has an investment, share, or interest in something, as a business, organization, or industry. Audiences that you should consider during issues or crisis management include members of the media, youth members, Scouting parents, adult volunteer leaders, employees, business partners, and the community.

- **Advocate:** An individual or an organization who speaks on behalf of another person or group.
- **Activist:** An individual or an organization who makes an intentional action to bring about social or political change.
- **Online community member:** A person or a group of people who discuss the BSA using digital media such as blogs, social networks, mobile devices, etc., and that often use these media as supplemental forms of communication with people they know in real life.

CRISIS AND ISSUES COMMUNICATIONS PHILOSOPHY

Our crisis and issues communications management philosophy is based on the following core principles:

- **Follow the Scout Oath and the Scout Law.** It is important to communicate to key audiences and stakeholders that the BSA will uphold the Scout Oath and the Scout Law in its words and actions at all times.
- **Manage issues and crises.** Local councils should work to identify vulnerabilities and put strategic plans in place in order to effectively *manage* issues before they become public crises, as opposed to simply reacting to the issue at hand.
- **Speak with one voice.** Councils should coordinate messaging with all involved parties to unify internal and external communications.
- **Position the BSA management front and center.** Local councils should use their effective professional and volunteer leadership to tell their story, whether through an on-camera interview or a letter sent to Scouting parents.
- **Engage stakeholders.** Councils should consider which channels make sense for each communication (e.g., digital, traditional media, social media, in-person meeting, etc.). Also, local councils should always consider engaging stakeholders directly, whenever possible, and not rely on communications through the media.
- **Consider your network.** Each local council already has great relationships with many businesses, organizations, and individuals in their community. Don't forget to consider tapping their support in the event of a crisis, as credible third-party voices can be used to help tell the BSA's story.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GOALS

There are five primary goals in every contact with the media during a crisis:

1. Position the BSA as the nation's foremost youth program of character development and values-based leadership, and position Scouting as an organization that provides unique, life-changing experiences that youth can't get anywhere else.
2. Reinforce the values and integrity of the BSA and its brand.
3. Engage in accurate, non-inflammatory discussion of any situation that might occur, and do not allow others to tell the Scouting story for the organization.
4. Balance the dialogue by contributing to the issues-related discussion and correcting misperceptions or defining and deflecting the elements of the discussion.
5. Minimize the amount and length of negative discussion during an issue or crisis.

CRISIS AND PREPAREDNESS

A thorough examination of local council crisis communications over the past several years revealed 14 issue and crisis categories that most frequently affect a council's reputation. These include:

- Council merger
- Defunding
- Duty to God
- Executive compensation
- Financial
- Health and safety
- Learning for Life and Exploring
- Membership and leadership standards
- Membership numbers
- Property and land management
- School access
- Scout, participant, or employee misconduct
- Youth protection
- Other (partnerships, natural disasters, etc.)

It is important to note that each of the categories require a unique set of messages tailored to a specific set of audiences.

LEVELS OF PREPAREDNESS PLANNING

Within each of the aforementioned categories there is a spectrum of incidents that range from minor—those that generate little to no attention—to severe, that may threaten the council's reputation and ability to achieve its business and youth service goals. There are four basic levels of preparedness planning that affect both local councils and the National Council, each of which has the potential to significantly impact the brand and reputation of the organization.

The following outline includes the levels of preparedness and the general actions required of the local and national communications teams.

Levels of Preparedness Planning			
Level	Situation	Suggested Local Council Response	Suggested National Council Response
Level 1 Warning	The BSA's brand and reputation are positioned against an event that may impact or require the local council to take action <i>Ex. A local volunteer is arrested on youth protection charges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform the National Council crisis communications team of the situation and any media inquiries they received Discuss strategy with National Council crisis communications team Inform key management of the issue or crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the situation Discuss and provide strategic recommendations Draft materials for use by local council, as need
Level 2 Caution	The BSA's brand and reputation are put at risk by potential events that fall outside of the council's immediate control <i>Ex. Several Scouts at a camp are isolated for cases of whooping cough</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide report to the National Council, and request strategic counsel and reactive media materials Scout Executive or other key member of local council leadership to serve as spokesperson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide strategic counsel and reactive materials Brief executive, legal, and/or risk management teams
Level 3 Hazard	The BSA's brand and reputation are under intense scrutiny by organization members, employees, and/or members of the media <i>Ex. A national media wire service launches a prolonged investigative report on the BSA's land management practices, profiling a local council's misuse of resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide regular updates to the National Council and request ongoing strategic counsel and reactive media materials Scout Executive or other key member of local council leadership to serve as spokesperson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide ongoing strategic counsel and reactive media materials Provide regular updates to the executive and legal teams
Level 4 Severe	The BSA's brand and reputation are directly challenged and the organization's ability to achieve its mission is hampered <i>Ex. A tornado strikes a Scout reservation killing four Scouts; or, four adult volunteer leaders are killed at the national jamboree while conducting an activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide updates to the National Council crisis communications team Execute aggressive media relations through support of the National Council Request spokesperson/on-site assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct strategy Develop media relations materials Work directly with the executive and legal teams May provide spokesperson/on-site assistance, and engage additional resources as necessary Continue engagement as appropriate

THE CRISIS TEAM

During a crisis it is important to have identified and engaged a response team before the incident escalates. At the local level, this should include the board president, marketing or communications manager, Scout Executive, and other key players identified before a crisis occurs. It is recommended to keep the crisis communications team to fewer than five members in order to keep roles and approvals streamlined.

ROLES OF THE LOCAL COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

In general, the local council team will work to:

- Establish a point-of-contact either within the local council or with the National Council crisis communications team
- Review and assess the situation to identify any existing or potential problems
- Update senior management and support team members
- Recommend action or engage with National Council
- Consider legal, operational, and reputational implications
- Determine the message, audience, and channel(s) of distribution
- Manage the distribution of the message
- Serve as the BSA spokesperson on behalf of the local council, or engage National Council spokesperson

Local Council Communications Team			
Name	Contact	Role	Responsibility
Rob Lavoie	937-325-6449 937-925-2001 Rob.lavoie@scouting.org	Scout Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinates messaging • Serves as local council spokesperson to all stakeholders, audiences • Primary contact for media • Determines if issue warrants National Council involvement, and if so, updates National Council on matter
Mike Taylor	937-325-6449 937-371-0978 Mike.taylor@scouting.org	Senior District Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary point of contact for media or coordination with National Council • Assists Scout Executive with coordination of messaging • May serve as the primary contact for media
Jim Kreckman	937-408-8089 James.kreckman@parknationalbank.com	Board Chairman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists Scout Executive with communication to various stakeholders, namely the board • May assist with messaging and strategy
Orrin Stanforth	419-681-0808 Orrin.stanforth@gmail.com	Council Commissioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any individual within the local council organization who may need to respond to media or member inquiries • Assists Scout Executive with tracking media or member inquiries

DETERMINING IF NATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORT IS NEEDED

When the local council is made aware of an issue or a crisis, the council must first confirm that the situation is related to their specific council, and then determine if it is an issue that pertains solely to the local council, several area councils, or if it is a National Council issue.

If an issue is determined to require National Council assistance, the Scout Executive is responsible for reaching out to the National Council media support team for assistance. To determine if an issue should be elevated to National Council, consider:

- Will this issue have a national impact on the organization?
- Is national media involved? Or, could they become involved?
- Is this an issue involving one of the 14 crisis categories (listed above)?

If the local council determines that the National Council should be informed of an issue, the following representatives will serve as point of contact.

National Council Communications Team			
Name	Contact	Role	Responsibility
Effie Delimarkos	(972) 580-7848 Office (646) 498-9371 Mobile effie.delimarkos@scouting.org	Director of Communications, National Council	Manages the day-to-day activities of the core team; serves as point of contact for local councils and liaison to the National Council; approves strategy and messages distributed on behalf of the BSA; obtains internal approval on all messages; updates the executive team
FleishmanHillard Public Relations Crisis/Media Support	PR@scouting.org	Point of Contact for National Council Media Support Team	External-facing email account for which to refer media or general inquiries; also serves as a single point of contact for Effie and the FleishmanHillard team
Rebecca Rausch	(314) 982-9139 Office (217) 299-1667 Mobile rebecca.rausch@fleishman.com	Senior Vice President and Partner, FleishmanHillard	Crisis communications team lead with partner agency; responsible for strategic counsel and coordination of message development with National Council communications team
Spencer Girouard	(314) 982-8783 Office (636) 399-5342 Mobile spencer.girouard@fleishman.com	Public Affairs, FleishmanHillard	Crisis communications team member with partner agency; responsible for media inquiries, council issues, materials development, and strategic counsel
Tom Green	(314) 982-7684 Office (614) 769-4200 Mobile Thomas.Green@fleishman.com	Account Executive, FleishmanHillard	Crisis communications team member with partner agency; assist with media inquiries, materials development, and strategic counsel

In extreme cases, local councils will face crises that require on-site assistance from the National Council communications team. In order to initiate this action, the local council must ask for

assistance or, if not asked for, accept the offer from National Council if that team believes on-ground support is essential. The decision to offer on-site assistance will be made by Stephen Medicott, based on the recommendation of Effie Delimarkos, in coordination with the appropriate regional director and the executive team.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS POLICIES

The following crisis communications policies are meant to set a general standard for a wide range of issues and crises the BSA will face at the local and national levels. It is important to note that the implementation of these standards will occasionally require flexibility.

SITUATION EVALUATION

Once the local council becomes aware of a potential crisis or issue, it is advised that the Scout Executive and local council communications team take these steps to effectively manage communications. First, an evaluation of the crisis should be conducted by the local team to assess the facts at hand and examine the scope of the situation. If needed, sources outside the team should be asked to provide pertinent information, but the crisis evaluation should take stock of only the information relevant to the BSA. The following are general questions that may be used to help inform this process:

- What do we know about the situation? What has the BSA done to date?
- Is this a local issue, or is National Council input needed?
- What key stakeholders will be impacted? How should the BSA speak to them?
- Is the BSA responsible? What corrective or remedial actions might be appropriate?
- Has the BSA previously faced a similar issue? When did it face the issues, and what were the circumstances and outcome?
- Do we need a statement, talking points, or potential Q&A? What messaging exists on this matter?
- Who should serve as the spokesperson?
- Is our approach member-centric and being communicated in plain language?
- Does the marketing team need to be informed so that current or upcoming campaigns can be adjusted or curtailed as needed?

MEDIA INQUIRY RESPONSE PROCEDURE

Local councils can refer to the following guidelines for communicating with media and the public for both positive media encounters and in crisis situations:

Media Inquiry Procedure*			
Situation	Affiliation	Nature of question	Action
Incoming call	The person is not with the media but is a youth member, adult volunteer leader, Scouting parent, or concerned citizen	A general, non-issues oriented question	Direct the call to the appropriate department at the local council
Incoming call	The person is with a traditional or digital media outlet	A general, non-issues oriented question	The Scout Executive or communications manager vets the inquiry and replies to the outlet as needed
Incoming call	The person is with a traditional or digital media outlet	An issue or crisis-oriented question	The Scout Executive or communications manager vets the inquiry and replies to the outlet as needed; if needed, the council can tap the national media support team through PR@scouting.org
Incoming call	The person will not disclose their affiliation	A question of any kind (treat this individual as if they are a member of the media)	The Scout Executive or communications manager vets the inquiry and replies to the outlet as needed; if needed, the council can tap the national media support team through PR@scouting.org
On-site visit	The person is with traditional or digital media	An inquiry of any kind	Employees should inform the media that they are not the appropriate spokesperson and take down the information included in the inquiry log below; the Scout Executive or communications manager vets the inquiry and replies to the outlet as needed; if needed, the council can tap the national media support team to provide counsel through PR@scouting.org

[*Note: Engagement with online community members, such as bloggers, is addressed in the Digital Communications section of this plan.]

MEDIA INQUIRY LOG

In the event of a media inquiry, those answering phones should use the following template for capturing information on potential issues so that it is readily available should the issue suddenly begin to escalate.

BSA Media Inquiry Log	
Date and time of call	
Name of contact	
Name and type of media outlet	
Phone number and email address	
Nature of inquiry	
Received by	
Referred to	
Deadline	
Call return date and time	

MEDIA INQUIRY LANGUAGE FOR EMPLOYEES

It is important to communicate the media policy to council employees and staff members. Following are talking points that can be used with all professional staff:

- In order to ensure that our council responds to all media inquiries accurately, consistently, and with the most appropriate information, I would like to remind you of our policy about speaking with the traditional and digital news media.
- Only designated local or National Council spokespersons are authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the organization.
- As a reminder, we have media inquiry guidelines for all types of media inquiries and encounters.
 - For incoming calls, ask if the individual is with the media. If not, direct the person to the appropriate department.
 - If the individual is with the media and asks a general BSA or non-issues-related question, take down their information using the media inquiry log and provide it to the Scout Executive.
 - If the individual is with the media and asks about an issue or a crisis situation, take down their information using the media inquiry log and provide it to the Scout Executive urgently. Depending on the issue, we may engage the National Council to support us with the matter.
 - Anyone who is inquiring about issues or a crisis and will not reveal the nature of their call should be handled as if they are a member of the media.
 - If a member of the media appears on-site, inform him/her that you are not the appropriate spokesperson and that you will take down their information and provide it to the contact soon. Then, urgently notify the Scout Executive who can handle the inquiry and engage National as needed.

- If you come into contact with a member of the media, you may choose to respond. We have developed some language that may be helpful.
 - For instance, if you are contacted by phone, you could say: “Thanks for calling, but I’m not the appropriate person to answer your call. Let me take a message and direct you to someone who will be able to assist you.”
 - Or, if you are approached in person, you could say: “I’m sorry. I am not the appropriate person to comment on this issue. Please have a seat and let me find the appropriate person to help you.”
- Additionally, if you notice any member of the media who is not accompanied by a council staff member, please immediately notify the Scout Executive.
- I will also share some of these points with you in an email.

MEDIA INQUIRY RESPONSE GUIDELINES

Generally speaking, it is the BSA’s policy to address community issues that have little chance of spreading beyond the council at the local level. While National Council is always available to provide resources and support (including on-site support, in some cases) to councils regarding local issues or crises, any inquiries regarding local issues will be referred to the appropriate local council representative. This will ensure that issues and crises are addressed at the appropriate level with the team best equipped to address the situation, without unnecessarily escalating the incident to national media.

As the local council engages in issues and crisis communications or public discussions, the following policies should be kept in mind:

- The BSA does not comment on issues that are not directly related to its programs or its membership, such as political or social debates.
- Due to member confidentiality, the BSA will not provide personal information about minors or adults, except to confirm an individual’s name after it has been released by local, state, or federal authorities. This confirmation will only take place if that individual has an official relationship with the BSA, including youth members, adult volunteer leaders, and personnel.
- The BSA’s public statements typically follow a similar pattern to ensure message consistency.
 - First, demonstrate concern and compassion for the people involved. Always provide reassurance that the health and safety of members, volunteers, and professionals is the council’s top priority, in addition to exhibiting the Scout Oath and the Scout Law and serving the mission of the organization.
 - Second, address relevant facts associated with the crisis, with due consideration to privacy and legal issues. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? The BSA will not speculate or engage in a discussion of any hypothetical situation.
 - Third, address what the BSA is doing to resolve the situation and to ensure an expeditious return to normal operations. The organization will not initially attempt to attribute responsibility for an incident.

MEDIA MONITORING

It is generally best to begin media monitoring as soon as you become aware of a crisis situation, even if you have not yet received a query from a reporter. The communications manager or someone else should handle this assignment, keeping an eye out for any coverage of the event on local media broadcasts, websites, and social media. This will help your team to know when to expect inquiries from media or other stakeholders and gain a feel for the tone of the stories being told, as well as who is already speaking about the event. Additionally, read all of the coverage to ensure accuracy and determine if it is necessary to reach out with a correction. Be sure to include all media coverage pertaining to the crisis into a document so you will have it archived and all in one report to share with council leadership as appropriate.

SPOKESPERSONS

The role of a spokesperson in a crisis situation is to effectively deliver the BSA's core messages with the ultimate goal of resolving the situation fairly and compassionately while preserving integrity and reputation. This applies to communication with all stakeholders, including media, youth members, Scouting parents, adult volunteer leaders, employees, business partners, and the community.

Spokespersons should be chosen based on their levels of previous experience with the media, knowledge of the issues, expertise, level of authority within management, and availability. This determination will be made by the local council.

Council spokespersons in need of an overview of media training or assistance in preparing to deliver communications in a crisis should connect with a national level communications counselor.

From time to time, depending on the issue or crisis, it might be in the organization's best interest to enlist a key executive or volunteer leader as the spokesperson.

KEY STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

In a crisis situation, it is important to simultaneously engage various stakeholders, including key volunteers, professionals, and the media to keep them informed of the impact the crisis might have or has had on the organization and the actions that are currently being taken to minimize any potential damage.

The following are the BSA’s key stakeholders as well as recommended modes, tools, and protocols for reaching each audience.

Key Stakeholder Outreach				
Audience	Mode	Tool	When	How
Executive board and key volunteers	Proactive	A phone call or email from the executive team, or an emergency meeting if needed	The BSA’s brand and reputation are put at risk and are directly challenged, hampering the ability to operate	On a case-by-case basis, the executive team will provide updates to volunteer leadership
Media	Reactive/proactive	Media statement or an interview from a designated spokesperson	Reactively, when there is a media inquiry regarding a crisis, issue, or incident; proactively, to prevent an issue or incident from becoming a crisis	For reactive use until the story is covered by top-tier media; local councils should use a prepared statement and key messages to guide the discussion
Strategic partners, donors, and corporate sponsors	Reactive/proactive	Talking points or a letter/email to these groups and individuals; for direct communications from the executive team work with Effie Delimarkos	The BSA’s brand and reputation are directly challenged and its ability to achieve its mission is hampered	For distribution immediately prior to media coverage of issue
Youth members, Scouting parents, adult volunteer leaders, and the general public	Reactive/proactive	Digital media (Scouting.org, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube); parent letters, as needed	Reactively, with a media inquiry or in the event of a health or safety issue; proactively, to prevent an issue from becoming a crisis	Determine stakeholder outreach on a case-by-case basis

REACHING OUT TO VOLUNTEERS AND FAMILIES

In the event of a crisis that affects the health, safety, or well-being of a youth member or adult volunteer leader, it may be advised that a local council or a National Council representative reach out to the family of those involved to convey sympathy and offer assistance, while being careful not to admit liability. At the local level, this action should be coordinated by the Scout Executive and the council's legal counsel.

PROACTIVE VS. REACTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS IN A CRISIS

In crisis situations, reactive media responses are typically required from the local council. From time to time a local council will need to decide if it should proactively reach out to local media to inform them of an issue or crisis. Generally speaking, the team will follow the five goals of crisis communications and only notify media in a proactive manner if it helps achieve those goals or involves a situation that jeopardizes the health and safety of the council's youth members, adult volunteer leaders, or employees. It is advised that the local council consult National Council on these matters before proactively publicizing an issue.

MEDIA LIST

As mentioned above, there may be times during a crisis in which it is appropriate to proactively reach out to the local media. For example, if there is a health or safety issue that could impact the community. If you do not already, we recommend building and maintaining a media list that includes all local newspapers, television news stations, and relevant radio stations with contact names, phone numbers, and email addresses for each. Be sure to check these regularly to make sure they are up to date so you can quickly share information with media.

APPROVAL PROTOCOL

To ensure consistent messaging and a clear understanding of all tactics executed during a crisis, proper approval protocol should be followed for all communications and materials. The following suggestions apply during a crisis situation, although professional judgment and consideration of situational urgency should be used at all times.

- All official BSA messages created for external use on behalf of National Council must be approved by the National Council communications team. Messages created on behalf of the local council may include National Council input, but do not necessarily need to be approved.
- Previously approved language may be distributed by the local council communications team. Official BSA messages on behalf of National Council using new language—not previously approved—should be reviewed by the BSA's legal team.

PROVIDING RECOMMENDATIONS ON OPERATIONAL MATTERS

From time to time, local councils may ask the National Council communications team to provide recommendations on operational matters (e.g., health and safety, risk management, registration). In these cases, National Council or the National Media Team will offer counsel on how the council's potential actions could affect crisis communications and the BSA brand and reputation. However, as a general rule, these questions will be referred to the Scout Executive and/or the appropriate department at the National Council.

USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO COMMUNICATE IN A CRISIS

The following section is not meant to serve as the BSA's positive digital communications plan, but rather to better define how the BSA will use social media in times of crisis and respond to online discussion about the organization.

SOCIAL MEDIA ISSUES MANAGEMENT

During a crisis, online community members may post comments to the council or council-owned property (e.g., camps) social media pages, and the council will have to make a decision on whether or not to engage the individual, and, in certain cases, whether to delete the post.

The following summarizes the BSA's social contract to assist in some of these decisions:

This digital Scouting community is governed by the Scout Oath and Scout Law. We will reserve the right to delete any comment that we believe does not reflect the Scout Oath and Scout Law, uses profanity or is offensive in nature, or any other content that violates our community guidelines. Such users posting these comments may be banned from commenting on this site. Also, from time to time, certain comments will be investigated if they are deemed to affect the health and well-being of our current and former Scouts, adult volunteers, or employees.

It is advised that all councils post their community guidelines or house rules for adding content on the "About" page of a council or camp's Facebook page. Councils should state that they appreciate the thoughts and comments provided by the Scouting community and beyond, but that there are some things that may be removed, at your discretion, to keep the conversation fair and civil.

HOW TO ENGAGE DIGITAL POSTINGS ON SOCIAL CHANNELS

If a council decides to reply or engage with an individual on social media, it should treat the individual in much the same way as it might a reporter, using talking points or a statement to help guide a response. Whenever possible, the council should offer to connect with the individual via phone to take the conversation online.

ENGAGING LEGAL

In the event that someone posts a message to a council social page or digital channel that exposes a potential threat to the health and safety of one of the BSA members, present or past, the team will forward that posting to the legal department for review and it will take appropriate action.

POST-CRISIS

Determining the clear end to a crisis can be difficult, but it is important for local councils to take stock of the situation after the crisis has been resolved and respond accordingly with key stakeholders and audiences in mind.

EVALUATION

Although the crisis may have ended, the local council should review the situation to inform those handling future crisis situations. During this evaluation, the team should consider the following questions as they relate to the post-crisis situation:

- Did the crisis impact key stakeholders?
- How did the crisis impact the brand or reputation of our local council? Did it impact the National Council?
- What was the extent and tone of media coverage surrounding the crisis?
- Are there any apparent misconceptions by the public or media about the organization?
- Are there any lingering concerns?
- How did the team coordinate with National Council? What improvements could be made?

MEDIA FOLLOW UP [IF NECESSARY]

Post-crisis media outreach should focus on providing updates to the media, as necessary, correcting any misconceptions, and addressing any reputational damage, all while meeting the BSA's five goals of crisis communications. A succinct and informative statement, media response, set of talking points, Q&A, press release, or digital posting—together with media spokespeople—should be used to conduct media outreach if determined to be beneficial. Local councils can seek input from National Council on a case-by-case basis.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH [IF NECESSARY]

Similar to media outreach following the crisis, it is important to contact stakeholders to keep them informed of the impact of the crisis and the actions being taken to minimize any potential damages. If needed, follow-up communications to stakeholders should be completed as soon as possible and no later than one week from the date the crisis concludes.

POST-CRISIS REPORT

Following the conclusion of the crisis and post-crisis outreach, the local council should consider preparing a report documenting the crisis, its impact, lessons learned, and any process or organizational changes made as a result of the crisis. The report should be shared with key players in the local council and filed for future internal use.

PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION: A CHECKLIST

In the event of a local or national crisis, it is important to swiftly and efficiently put the principles and policies of this plan into action. To help facilitate this, below please find a response guide checklist and set of questions to ensure that each council is responding in the best interest of Scouting in each situation and level of preparedness planning. Each section below offers a general guide of what should be accomplished at each level. Please note, each level of action items is meant to build on the previous levels' steps (e.g., when executing the steps for Level 3, first accomplish the steps outlined in Levels 1 and 2).

Response Guide Checklist	
Level 1 Warning	<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate the situation, reviewing all relevant information and discuss the issue with the authorities or other relevant stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate media and digital monitoring <input type="checkbox"/> Begin a media inquiry log <input type="checkbox"/> Alert Effie Delimarkos and the national media support team at PR@scouting.org of the situation, any media inquiries that have been received, and discuss strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Alert and involve key volunteer leadership and relevant support team members of the situation <input type="checkbox"/> Develop needed communications materials, including a statement, talking points, or a letter to donors or Scouting parents
Level 2 Caution	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage the legal team to approve all communications materials, as needed <input type="checkbox"/> Work with proper authorities to determine the scope of the situation and to provide ongoing support <input type="checkbox"/> Direct media requests to the pre-approved spokesperson <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate stakeholder outreach, as necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Provide regular updates regarding the situation to the national media support team
Level 3 Hazard	<input type="checkbox"/> Establish a communications command center, as necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Recommend local BSA officials—or national representatives—dispatch family or volunteer support teams, as necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare additional National Council staff to address incoming calls <input type="checkbox"/> Determine if on-site National Council support is needed
Level 4 Severe	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage a phone response team to address member inquiries, as necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor the situation and release additional statements, as necessary

If you have any questions about any of the information include in this plan, please contact:

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