

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS WITH YOUR BOARD

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INTRODUCTIONS AND OVERVIEW



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THREE-STEP FRAMEWORK FOR BOARD CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Clarify

Clarify the current state.

Consider

Consider the scenarios.

Sequence

Sequence the critical decisions.

1. CLARIFY THE CURRENT STATE

First and foundationally, the entire board must understand the organization's current state, both programmatically and financially. This includes:

- What work has been suspended, decreased or increased?
- What impact is that having on the people we serve?
- How much cash is accessible, and what is the weekly/monthly burn rate?
- What is the status of our employees?

THE UPDATING PROCESS

- Weekly one-page ‘dashboard’ updates:
 - Cash on hand, program status, number of employees, variances from last week, legislative or bailout news, incoming donations compared to this week last year, etc.
- Ask the board what information they want to see.
- Talk with your board chair about what information comes from you and what comes from her/him. Now is the time to be excruciating clear on what is the CEO’s job relative to the board, and what is the chair’s.

2. CONSIDER THE SCENARIOS

After fully understanding the current state, the board can consider staff-created scenarios, such as:

- How long will cash on hand last under various scenarios of layoffs, emergency donations, reopening, etc.?
- Which programs can be restarted and which cannot, depending on how long they're shuttered?

2B. CONSIDER THE SCENARIOS

The key here is managing:

- the *number* of scenarios the board must consider (not enough to overwhelm);
- the *confidence* you have in the likelihood of the scenarios (having your arms around all possibilities);
- the *timing* of when scenarios are presented to the board (resisting the temptation to share them when confidence is low and the number of potential scenarios is high).

USEFUL SCENARIO-RELATED PHRASES

- *‘The most effective process will be for staff to vet scenarios and bring the three or four most likely to the board.’*
- *‘We don’t know enough about the timeline of the crisis to do that kind of scenario planning right now.’*
- *‘We don’t know enough about how this will change our audience (or clients, or funders, etc.) to plan scenarios around community demand.’*
- *‘Of these four potential scenarios, the professional staff’s recommendation would be one of these two.’*

3. SEQUENCE THE CRITICAL DECISIONS

Partner with the board chair to create a clear written timeline of what organizational decisions must be made when. Those decisions may include reducing or halting operations; furloughing or laying off staff; modifying upkeep on physical assets; or launching an emergency funding appeal.

- *How are critical decisions intertwined, and which decisions must happen first?*
- *How good are we at asking, 'Is that really the decision we need to, make now?'*

CRITICAL TAKEAWAYS

- Knowing where the board is in the process is even more important than where, specifically, it is.
- You may work through all three stages multiple times, so feel free to think of it as a loop.
- Giving the board the comfort and confidence of a framework, of something that feels somewhat like a 'map,' is essential.
- Integrate the three stages into every board call or meeting; call them out.
- Consider adapting the framework for staff, with a focus on frequent 'Clarify the current state' updates.
- Consider using it to manage your own thinking, especially if you've given to catastrophizing.



GROUP WISDOM

CLARIFYING CURRENT STATE

What have you found to be effective so far in clarifying your current state for your board?

What challenges are you having with communicating your current reality to board members?

CONSIDERING SCENARIOS

What scenarios are you running now?

SEQUENCING DECISIONS

Are there any premature decisions your board is trying to make now?

Are there any decisions they're avoiding?



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