

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

What is Crisis Communications?

Crisis communications is an essential part of public relations. Special Olympics has the potential to encounter many situations which may be damaging to the reputation of the global movement. Potential crisis situations can range from cancelled events to the death of a participant.

A crisis situation can happen at any time, yet, despite their unpredictable nature, they can be planned for and communicated professionally.

Introduction

This Crisis Communications Plan is a detailed guide to managing internal and external communications during a crisis situation related to Special Olympics. The plan provides the steps and worksheets involved in managing a crisis communications process, including:

- roles and responsibilities of the Crisis Communications Team;
- internal reporting procedures;
- messaging and dealing with the media and public; and
- communications flow for Special Olympics key staff or volunteers, constituents and the news media.

Strict adherence to this plan's structures, policies and procedures will enable Special Olympics to respond to crisis situations in an efficient and timely manner, thus helping to minimize their potential impact.

This plan is designed solely to *communicate* internally and externally about a crisis situation. This plan is *NOT* designed to manage a crisis.

The Crisis Communications Team needs to be integrated into your Program's overall crisis management plan.

Communications Principles

In a crisis situation, a Special Olympics Program's Crisis Communications Team and appropriate key personnel should:

- make every effort to gather the pertinent facts, quickly assess the situation and respond to key audiences in an open and honest manner;
- enact the necessary measures to swiftly address the situation without jeopardizing the integrity and safety of Special Olympics Program's staff, volunteers and constituents; and
- strive to uphold Special Olympics' reputation and mission statement.

Global Situation

If a situation of global or regional impact should occur, Special Olympics headquarters and/or regional offices will provide statements and materials.

It is the Special Olympics regional offices' responsibility to provide copies of statements and materials to Special Olympics Programs and work with the Programs when necessary.

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Crisis Communications Response Flow

Procedures and Responsibilities

This section is a step-by-step outline of crisis response procedures and responsibilities for those Special Olympics Program staff and/or volunteers most likely to be involved in handling a crisis situation. A crisis alert may come from different levels:

ACTION ITEM 1: *Identify the Crisis*

- Using the Potential Crisis Situation list, determine the level of the situation.
- Collect information and prepare the crisis fact sheet.
- Request assistance from the Crisis Communications Team via the Crisis Communications Administrator.
- In the absence of the Crisis Communications Administrator, the Deputy Crisis Communications Administrator should be contacted. If both parties are unreachable, sequential calling of the Crisis Communications Team members should begin.
- Coordinate with the crisis management team.

ACTION ITEM 2: *Assess and Review Crisis*

Once the Crisis Communications Administrator has been contacted, he/she will:

- gather and record all pertinent facts on the crisis sheet;
- assess the scope and nature of the crisis, including damage or potential damage; and
- contact the Crisis Communications Team.

The Crisis Communications Administrator then:

- alerts the appropriate members of the Crisis Communications Team;
- determines timing and format of the Crisis Communications Team meeting, whether in person or by conference call;
- contacts additional parties (appropriate staff, volunteers and/or external individuals) to secure their involvement; and
- disseminates crisis fact sheets and other relevant information to Crisis Communications Team members.

ACTION ITEM 3: *Meeting of Crisis Communications Team*

The Crisis Communications Team meeting will involve:

- the appointment of a Crisis Communications Manager, based on the nature and level of the crisis;
- a crisis debriefing, including new developments/updates, by the Crisis Communications Administrator; and
- contacting of appropriate Special Olympics Offices – National/State, Regional, and/or Special Olympics headquarters.

See Crisis Communications Team Meeting Agenda.

ACTION ITEM 4: *Planning Crisis Communications Response*

Once assembled, the Crisis Communications Team, under the leadership of the Crisis Manager, is immediately responsible for:

- planning a crisis communications response and ensuring execution;
- establishing communications strategies to address the crisis situation (e.g., selecting an appropriate spokesperson);

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- creating key messages and public statements;
- allocating responsibilities to the Crisis Communications Team members;
- identifying crisis situation response tactics to be implemented by others (employees/or external individuals); and
- monitoring the media via the public relations team (see media relations section).

Crisis Communications Team Meeting Agenda

When the Crisis Administrator or Deputy Crisis Communications Administrator has assembled the Crisis Communications Team, the following specific agenda items should be covered or decided by the Team:

1. Appoint the Crisis Communications Manager
2. Declare type/level of crisis situation
3. Situation Report:
 - What appears to have happened?
 - Confirm facts (distribution and review of crisis fact sheet)
 - Scope of proposed situation
4. Initial Response Status
 - What is being done, why, by whom?
 - Likely implementation time and hoped-for results
5. Initial Communications Status
 - Who knows, who needs to know immediately and who can be briefed later
 - Alert switchboard/receptionist/Main press center/Main operations center
6. Short-term Response Requirements
 - Assign Crisis Communications Team responsibilities
 - Determine what must be done in the next several hours and how
 - Determine what human and material resources are available or needed
7. Short-term Communications Process
 - Constituents and media
8. Duration of Crisis Communications Team Meeting
 - Continue meeting? Who needs to attend? Back-ups?
 - Next meeting time
9. Coordination with Crisis Management Team

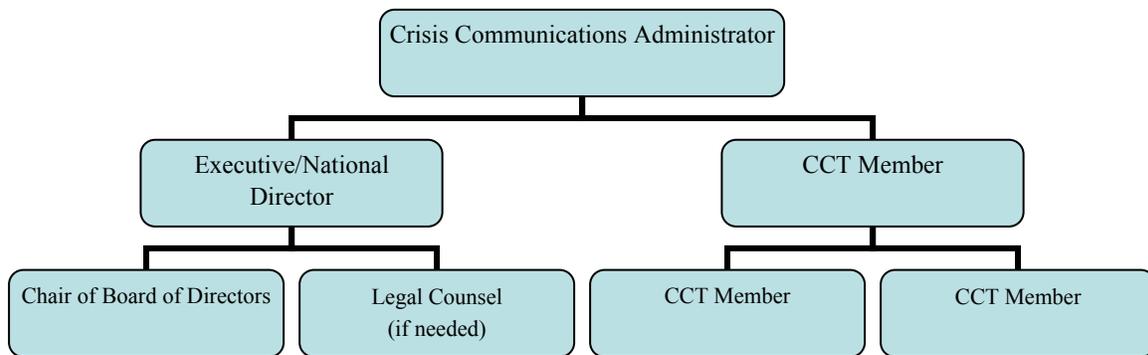
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Phone Trees

To maximize the use of time in the event of a situation, it is suggested that phone trees be created prior to events to disseminate information.

Sample Phone Tree:



CCT Member: Crisis Communications Team member

Phone trees may vary depending on the size of the Crisis Communications Team.

Action Phone Tree:

Once the Crisis Communications Team has assessed the situation, more key publics may need to be contacted. Using the above model phone tree, create channels of communications. Contacts to consider may include:

- Special Olympics regional office
- Telemarketing contact
- Direct mail contact

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Guidelines and Tips to Responding to the Media during a Crisis Situation

Special Olympics Staff and Key Volunteers

- All staff members and key volunteers should direct all media calls and inquiries to the Crisis Administrator.

Crisis Administrator

- All media calls and inquiries received should be entered on a media log sheet. This will ensure that calls are returned and track dissemination of information.
- Provide the media *ONLY* with information that has been officially released or is consistent with the key messages and statements approved by the Crisis Communications Team.
- Return media calls and inquiries in a manner that gets the most information to the greatest number of media in the shortest period of time. A typical priority list might be: wire services, radio stations, television stations, newspapers, Internet.

Special Olympics Spokesperson

- Never respond with “no comment.” Instead answer, “We are assessing the situation and will furnish information when it is available.”
- If asked a question to which you do not have a factual official answer, do not speculate. Tell the reporter you will get an answer and will get back to him/her as quickly as possible.
- You have no obligation to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Be courteous, be calm and be firm. Remember, “I don’t know at this time” is a perfectly acceptable answer.
- Never tell the media anything that you are not prepared to see printed or broadcast. *There is no such thing as “off the record.”*
- Do not provide damage estimates, discuss responsibility for the incident or discuss legal liability in any way.

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What the Media Will Ask

Following is potential information the media may want to know (most likely in the event of a level 3 crisis situation.)

Casualties

- Number killed or injured or who escaped injury (use caution with initial numbers).
- Nature of injuries received.
- Care given to the injured.
- Cause of death (Use caution and avoid assigning responsibility or blame).
- Disposition of the dead.
- Prominence of anyone who was killed, injured or who escaped.

Property Damage

- Estimated value of loss.
- Description of property.
- Importance of property.
- Other property threatened.
- Insurance protection (Do not discuss amounts of coverage).
- Previous emergencies in the area.

Causes

- Statements by participants.
- Statements by witnesses.
- Statements by key responders – the venue emergency response team, police, fire, etc.
- How emergency was discovered.
- Who sounded the alarm.
- Who summoned aid.
- Previous indication of danger.

Rescue and Relief

- The number of people engaged in rescue and relief operation.
- Any prominent person in relief crew.
- Equipment used.
- Physically disabled persons rescued.
- Care of destitute and homeless.
- How the emergency was prevented from spreading.
- How property was saved.
- Acts of heroism.

Description of the Crisis or Disaster

- Extent of crisis situation.
- Blasts and explosions.
- Crimes of violence.
- Attempts at escape or rescue.
- Duration.
- Collapse of structures.
- Extent of spill.

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What the Media Will Ask - Continued

Accompanying Incidents

- Number of spectators and spectator attitudes.
- Unusual happenings.
- Anxiety, stress of families, survivors, etc.

Legal Actions

- Investigations, coroner's reports.
- Police follow-up.
- Insurance company actions.
- Professional negligence or inaction.
- Potential suits stemming from the incident.

Media also will ask what steps are being taken to prevent a repeat occurrence.

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Do's and Don'ts When Dealing with the Media During a Crisis Situation

During a crisis situation, *DO*:

- ✓ Release only verified information and have a clear idea of what can and cannot be released.
- ✓ Promptly alert media of relief and recovery operations.
- ✓ Escort the media at all times while on the emergency site. Avoid off-limits areas as defined by public safety officials.
- ✓ Have a designated Special Olympics Spokesperson.
- ✓ Keep accurate records and logs of all inquiries and news coverage.
- ✓ Determine media deadlines and try to meet them.
- ✓ Provide equal opportunities and appropriate facilities for print and electronic media.
- ✓ Carefully coordinate planning and implementation of public relations activities with other aspects in a comprehensive emergency plan.
- ✓ Coordinate with the public safety agency that has jurisdictional authority over the incident – particularly in cases of medical and security emergencies.
- ✓ Consult with an attorney prior to making public statements, especially if there is a death, serious injury, loss of property or allegations of wrongdoing by the Program.

During a crisis situation, *DON'T*:

- × Speculate on the causes of the emergency.
- × Speculate on the resumption of normal operation.
- × Speculate on the outside effects of the emergency.
- × Speculate on the monetary value of losses.
- × Interfere with the legitimate duties of media, such as covering the story or interviewing spectators.
- × Permit unauthorized spokesperson(s) to comment to media.
- × Attempt to cover up or purposely mislead the media.
- × Place blame for the crisis situation.
- × Accept responsibility for the crisis situation.

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Crisis Fact Sheet

When your Special Olympics Program is alerted to a crisis situation, the Crisis Communications Administrator should complete this sheet and speak to the appropriate parties to find out the most complete answers possible.

These forms should be kept confidential and not released to the media or by any party involved in the incident.

From where is the person reporting the situation? _____

Who is the person reporting the situation (name and contact information) and how is the person involved with Special Olympics?

What numbers (office extension, home, mobile phone and pager) can the person reporting the situation be reached at if more information is needed?

What happened? _____

Where did it happen? _____

When did it happen (include date and time)? _____

Was there any damage, injuries or fatalities? Explain in detail. _____

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Crisis Fact Sheet Continued:

Who else was involved or present (names and contact information)?

What actions have already been taken? _____

Was Special Olympics headquarters or regional office notified? If so, who was contacted?

Has there been any media attention? If so, what outlet(s) (e.g., television, radio, newspaper, magazine, Internet)? Cite specific media alerted.

Other comments? _____

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Media Log Sheet

Crisis Situation _____

Date _____ Special Olympics Event _____

Message for _____

Date/time of call _____

Caller _____

Phone number(s) _____

Media outlet/Name _____

Return call by/Deadline _____

Summary of inquiry _____

Who responded to the inquiry? _____

Date/Time _____

Summary of response _____

Further action needed? _____

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Post-Crisis Review Sheet

Confidential Form – Do not distribute.

What areas of the crisis response process do you think were handled extremely well?

What areas of the crisis response process could have been handled better?

What adjustments need to be made to Special Olympics policy and procedures to avert future crisis situations?

Other thoughts or comments? _____

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Post-Crisis Review Sheet – Page 2

Crisis Response Process

What action steps were taken to resolve the crisis situation? _____

Was the crisis response timely? Why or why not? _____

Was the spokesperson effective? _____

Was the press release or statement used by the media? _____

How do you think the crisis response process was handled? _____

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Review of Crisis Communications Response

The Crisis Communications Manager must regularly monitor and review the crisis situation, keeping a close eye on factors that could escalate. If such signs are apparent, an adjustment to the crisis response may be required. At such time, the Crisis Communications Manager must consult with the Crisis Communications Team to determine an alternate course of action.

If possible, broadcast news stories should be taped and printed stories should be clipped and saved.

Post-Crisis Review

Once a crisis has been resolved, the Crisis Communications Team, led by the Crisis Communications Administrator, should compile a crisis summary report. The report will detail key learnings, including:

- cause of the crisis;
- extent and tone of media coverage;
- improvements in the crisis response process and how to implement those improvements; and
- possible alterations to Special Olympics policy and procedures.

Conclusion

It is important, not only for your Special Olympics Program, but for the global Special Olympics movement, that all crisis situations are communicated accurately and with integrity.

Through the activities and steps outlined in this plan, your Special Olympics Program and Crisis Communications Team should be prepared to communicate any potential crisis situation to key publics including the media.

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It is essential that a Special Olympics Program be properly prepared in the event of a crisis. To be better prepared, follow these steps prior to each Special Olympics event:

ACTIVITIES

- 1) Become familiar with potential crisis situations.
- 2) Create a Crisis Communications Team and use the Crisis Communications Team Contact Worksheet; collect all necessary Crisis Communications Team phone numbers.
- 3) Make sure everyone has read through the Crisis Communications Plan and is familiar with Special Olympics policies.
- 4) Research all possible emergency phone numbers prior to a Special Olympics event. Use the Emergency Contact Worksheet for assistance.
- 5) Make copies of all contact information and distribute to the necessary parties. If possible, create a small card with contact numbers to wear with Games or event credentials.
- 6) Prepare statements, key messages and possible questions and answers for potential crisis situations in advance.
- 7) Identify potential key spokespersons, making sure everyone else knows *not* to speak to the media.
- 8) Determine the location where the Crisis Center will be at an event in case one is needed and make sure you have the appropriate supplies for the Crisis Center.
- 9) Review the crisis communications response plan with volunteers prior to the event or during volunteer training.
- 10) Provide crisis communications media training for potential Special Olympics spokespersons (optional but recommended).
- 11) Hold a mock crisis simulation event with staff and volunteers (optional but recommended).
- 12) Create a Crisis Communications Plan specific to your Special Olympics Program and its Games and events.

Each Special Olympics Program is structured differently and may need to alter these steps according to its size and resources.

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ACTIVITY 1: Potential Crisis Situations

Common Crisis Situations

On a daily basis, situations arise that have the potential to adversely affect Special Olympics' business and reputation. When such situations develop, it is important for the staff or volunteer who first learns of the situation to immediately inform his/her supervisor. It is also important that volunteers are aware of what is considered to be a potential crisis situation.

It is recommended that key volunteers receive the listing of potential crisis situations so they may determine when to contact the appropriate Special Olympics contact.

See the following pages for potential crisis situations.

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ACTIVITY 1: Potential Crisis Situations - Continued

Possible Crisis Situations and Levels of Impact

In the event of a crisis situation at any level, it is critical that the appropriate Special Olympics Program staff or volunteers are contacted.

It is also critical that the Crisis Communications Manager is also contacted to determine how to communicate the appropriate message to key publics and Special Olympics constituents.

Level 1

A minor incident or accident

- Delayed event (but to be held the same day)
- Sick participant not requiring hospitalization
- Injured participant/spectator/volunteer – treated on-site or taken to the emergency room but released
- Minor venue property damage
- Severe weather watch

Level 2

A serious incident, accident or situation

- Canceled event
- Postponed event
- Moved event/change of venue
- Injured or ill participant/spectator/volunteer – requiring hospitalization
- Food poisoning/contamination
- Allegations of wrongdoing by or arrest of a participant
- Allegations of wrongdoing by or arrest of a spectator/volunteer/staff/guest or celebrity (if financial, see level 3)
- Missing participant
- Illegal use of drugs/alcohol
- Major venue property damage
- Transportation accident
- Severe weather warning
- Honored Guest concerns, e.g.: crowds, protection, threats → *Contact Special Olympics Regional Office → Regional Office contacts Special Olympics headquarters*
- Protests/Demonstrations → *Contact Special Olympics Regional Office → Regional Office contacts Special Olympics headquarters*
- Allegations or actions against an organization that impacts Special Olympics (i.e., Paralympics, INAS) → *Contact Special Olympics Regional Office → Regional Office contacts Special Olympics headquarters*
- Attack by the media against Special Olympics or constituents → *Contact Special Olympics Regional Office → Regional Office contacts Special Olympics headquarters*
- Negative campaigning against Special Olympics or Special Olympics-involved party → *Contact Special Olympics Regional Office → Regional Office contacts Special Olympics headquarters*
- Alleged discrimination against Special Olympics participant within or outside of Special Olympics → *Contact Special Olympics Regional Office → Regional Office contacts Special Olympics headquarters*

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SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 1: Potential Crisis Situations - *Continued*

Possible Crisis Situations and Levels of Impact - Continued

Level 3

A critical incident or situation

All situations considered Level 3 should follow these channels of communications:

Special Olympics Program office → *Contact Special Olympics Regional Office* → *Regional Office contacts Special Olympics headquarters*

- National/State or Provincial declared emergency (e.g., natural disaster, power outage, terrorist attack).
- Actual impact of severe weather (e.g., hurricane, tornado)
- Flood (if it shuts down office operations)
- Bomb threat
- Contagious health threat or outbreak
- Missing participant or volunteer under suspicious circumstances
- Death of a participant
- Death of spectator or volunteer
- Fire
- Criminal activity
- Financial fraud or fundraising scandal
- Sexual abuse

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ACTIVITY 2: The Special Olympics Program Crisis Communications Team

The Special Olympics Program's Crisis Communications Team (CCT) is the central element in the Special Olympics Program's Crisis Communication Plan. The Crisis Communications Team is responsible for crisis communication policy and determines and enacts the communications strategies best suited to resolve a specific crisis situation.

A Special Olympics Program should have one core Crisis Communications Team. It may be necessary to have additional Crisis Communications Teams based on the structure of a Special Olympics Program and the array of events a Special Olympics Program may hold.

REQUIREMENTS:

Each member of the Crisis Communications Team must always be reachable, so he/she is required to:

- always carry a mobile phone or a pager and
- have an accessible copy of the Special Olympics Program Crisis Communication Plan and a Special Olympics staff/volunteer contact list (work, mobile and home contact information).

SUGGESTIONS:

Create a job description for each member of the Crisis Communications Team so members are aware of their role in the event of a crisis.

Members of the Crisis Communications Team may be different for each Special Olympics event your Program hosts, but it is essential that all members of a Crisis Communications Team is properly prepared in the event of a crisis situation.

Membership

Level of participation will depend upon the nature and scope of the crisis situation.

Additional members will be called upon when deemed necessary by the core Crisis Communications Team based on an employee's expertise and area of responsibility.

All members must adhere to Special Olympics policies of confidentiality.

ROLES:

Crisis Communications Manager

The *Crisis Communications Manager* will be the key leader and decision maker of the Crisis Communications Team. In the event of a meeting (in person or by conference call) of the Crisis Communications Team, a Crisis Communications Manager will be appointed based on the nature and scope of the crisis situation. The Crisis Communications Manager will be a Crisis Communications Team member or other staff member or volunteer appointed by the Crisis Communications Team and will chair the Team and coordinate crisis response.

This member may be a National or Executive Director, legal counsel or a member of the Board of Directors and will be responsible for coordinating actions of the CCT with the overall CCT.

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ACTIVITY 2: The Special Olympics Program Crisis Communications Team - *Continued*

Crisis Communications Team Roles- Continued

Crisis Communications Administrator

The *Crisis Communications Administrator* will serve as the organizer of the crisis communications team and primary contact when requesting the assistance of the CCT. The Crisis Administrator will also be responsible for disseminating the appropriate materials to the crisis communications team and prepare the Special Olympics Spokesperson. If the Crisis Communications Administrator is unavailable, the Deputy Crisis Communications Administrator will be contacted and will assume the role of Crisis Administrator. The Crisis Communications Administrator may also be called upon to field media calls and answer questions.

This member should be the key Special Olympics Program Public Relations contact.

Special Olympics Spokesperson

The Special Olympics Spokesperson should be an appointed Special Olympics staff or key volunteer, such as a Board Member, who will be the primary spokesperson to the media. The *Special Olympics Spokesperson* will deliver public statements and field questions during a press conference if one is deemed necessary. It is suggested that the Special Olympics Spokesperson go through a media training session. The Crisis Communications Manager and the Special Olympics Spokesperson may be the same person.

There should be a spokesperson appointed for each level of crisis who will be trained and prepared prior to a potential crisis situation.

This member should be the Special Olympics Regional/National/State Director, Chairman of the Board of Directors or Public Relations contact. Appointment of a spokesperson should be dependent upon the level of the crisis situation.

Crisis Communications Team Member

A Crisis Communications Team Member's responsibility will include assistance with decision making, gathering information, assisting in the creation of a public statement and key messages, and assisting the Crisis Administrator as needed.

Note: Create a list of contact information for all members of the Crisis Communications Team using the worksheet.

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ACTIVITY 2: The Special Olympics Program Crisis Communications Team - *Continued*

Crisis Communications Team Contact List

A team of key decision makers should be assembled prior to any event in case of a potential crisis situation. All numbers should be gathered and distributed before the event.

	Mobile/Pager	Work	Home
Crisis Administrator	_____	_____	_____
Crisis Manager	_____	_____	_____
National/State Director	_____	_____	_____
Chairman of Board	_____	_____	_____
Regional Office Contact	_____	_____	_____
Special Olympics HQ Contact	_____	_____	_____
CCT Member	_____	_____	_____
CCT Member	_____	_____	_____
CCT Member	_____	_____	_____
CCT Member	_____	_____	_____
CCT Member	_____	_____	_____

List may need to be altered depending on Special Olympics Program and event.

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ACTIVITY 3: Make Sure the Team Knows the Plan

Provide a copy of this crisis communications plan to Crisis Communications Team members and:

- Special Olympics Program National Director or Executive Director
- Special Olympics Program Board of Directors
- Special Olympics Program Public Relations Contact(s)
- Special Olympics Fundraising Contact
- Special Olympics Program Games and Competition Contact
- Special Olympics Program Legal Counsel
- Special Olympics Program Volunteer Manager/Staff Contact
- Overall Crisis Management Team

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ACTIVITY 4: Emergency Agency Contact List

	Telephone	Contact Name
Local Law Enforcement	_____	_____
Local Medical Facility	_____	_____
Local Fire Department	_____	_____
Venue Main Number	_____	_____
Insurance Company	_____	_____
Legal Counsel	_____	_____

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ACTIVITY 5: Copy and Distribute the Contact Information

It is important that all appropriate parties have copies of the Crisis Communications Team phone numbers and emergency contact numbers.

Information can be provided by:

- A one-page document containing all phone numbers,
- A folder with all appropriate information, or
- A small laminated card that can be easily worn with an event credential or programmed into mobile phones.

SAMPLE:

CONTACT	Mobile/Pager	Work	Home
National Director	555-123-5678	555-321-4321	555-232-4343
PR Contact	555-212-1414	555-321-4321	555-545-3232
Police Department		911	

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SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 6: Developing Your Communications

Communicating With Key Publics

Throughout the crisis, it is imperative that the Crisis Communications Team communicates with Special Olympics' key publics:

- **Staff and Key Volunteers**

Special Olympics staff and key volunteers must be informed about a crisis situation before they hear about it in the news. The Crisis Communications Team must determine the most efficient way to communicate with employees (e.g., staff meetings, Games meeting, phone tree, e-mail.)

It is important to keep the “front-line” staff, key volunteers, switchboard/receptionist and incoming call centers updated as to where to direct questions and incoming calls regarding the crisis situation. It is also important for these individuals to know they should not answer questions or provide information except if specifically instructed by the crisis manager.

Depending on the severity of the situation, it may be necessary to contact your Special Olympics Regional Office. The Special Olympics Regional Office will then determine whether to contact Special Olympics headquarters.

In certain crisis situations it may be determined that the Special Olympics Regional Office or headquarters will work with the Special Olympics Program in creating public statements and developing key messages.

- **Constituent Parties**

It is important to keep these parties (e.g., athletes, Board of Directors, families, volunteers, spectators, coaches, donors) “in the loop” on crisis situations or have them play a role in them. The Crisis Communications Team must determine the method and scope of communication. For example, it may be necessary to contact telemarketing or direct mail contacts who are raising funds for the Program to alert them to the situation.

- **Media**

An extremely influential public.

For each of these key publics, separate statements will need to be created and disseminated among team members to maintain consistency of messages.

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ACTIVITY 6: Developing Your Communications - *Continued*

Media Relations

Because a great deal of public perception is gained through the media, a well-planned crisis response must place heavy emphasis on proper management and communications with broadcast and print outlets. Any lack of, or perceived lack of, care or integrity on the part of a Special Olympics Program can produce more harm to Special Olympics' reputation than the actual crisis situation.

The Public Relations contact, together with the public relations team, will monitor the news and provide the Crisis Manager with recommendations on media issues. It is very important that the Crisis Administrator and Special Olympics Spokesperson communicate a consistent message to all publics, including the media.

It is also important that only the individuals tasked with speaking to the media on a particular topic speak to the media. Also, you may identify different individuals to address specific topics. For example, in the event an athlete is severely injured, the Executive Director may address the overall situation, but only medical personnel should ever comment on the athlete's condition.

The specific crisis situation will define the type and degree of media relations response needed. Some key steps include:

1. development of key message points,
2. writing of public statements and press materials,
3. distribution of press materials,
4. appointment of the appropriate spokesperson(s) and
5. coordination of a press conference, if necessary.

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ACTIVITY 6: Developing Your Communications - *Continued*

ACTION ITEM 1: Developing Key Messages

During a crisis, the first few minutes and hours count the most. During this initial period, the media and the public will form lasting impressions of Special Olympics and of how the communications are handled relating to an incident. Therefore, it is important to gather the facts, incorporate key messages and release as much appropriate information as possible as soon as possible.

When developing your key messages and statements, keep in mind the following:

- If something has occurred, acknowledge it (but refer to notes below before doing so.)
- Express sympathy/concern for victims, families and individuals involved.
- Indicate an investigation is in process and identify the individuals conducting it.
- Express confidence in those conducting the investigation and that you are fully cooperating with the investigation.
- Inform the media and audience that you will provide updates when more information becomes available. It is important that you follow through with your update(s). This maintains your credibility with the media.

Depending on the severity of the crisis situation, Special Olympics Regional Offices and headquarters may work together with the Special Olympics Program to create public statements and develop key messages.

Notes:

- Depending on the crisis, contact an attorney and discuss what information you should release. While you want to be forthcoming, you don't want to inadvertently release information that could lead to adverse legal action against the Program.
- Make sure the facts are accurate. A misstatement is difficult to correct later and could be harmful to your Program. It is better to acknowledge that you don't know the answer to a question or that you are still gathering information than to disseminate inaccurate information.
- In the event an internal investigation is needed, confer with legal counsel as to who should conduct it (especially if there is potential for litigation, in which case legal counsel may be used to protect information from being discussed).

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ACTIVITY 6: Developing Your Communications - *Continued*

ACTION ITEM 2: Sample Public Statements and Key Messages

The following pages have examples of public statements that may be used during a crisis situation. Although individual messages for all potential crisis cannot be developed in advance, the following are appropriate statements and positions that apply to possible situations.

These statements are a guideline for Special Olympics Programs to use when developing their own statements.

When appropriate, statements may be developed together between Special Olympics National/State and/or Regional office, or with Special Olympics headquarters.

It is recommended that the Crisis Communications Team create possible statements BEFORE each event so they are ready and available in the event a crisis situation occurs.

It is also recommended that possible questions and answers also are created prior to an event to better prepare the Special Olympics Spokesperson.

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ACTIVITY 6: Developing Your Communications - *Continued*

Level 1 Crisis Situations

Delayed, Moved or Cancelled Venue for Special Olympics Games or Event

“Because of [DESCRIBE INCIDENT], the Special Olympics [NAME OF VENUE OR EVENT] scheduled for [DAY, TIME] has been [CANCELED/MOVED TO _____/OR DELAYED UNTIL_____]. Spectators, athletes, volunteers and staff should [GIVE INSTRUCTIONS]. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. For more information, call [PHONE NUMBER].”

Minor Athletic Injuries: No Hospitalization Required

“A Special Olympics athlete was injured [DESCRIBE INCIDENT] at [IDENTIFY THE EVENT] at the [VENUE/OTHER LOCATION] in [CITY] this [MORNING/AFTERNOON/EVENING], according to [TEAM OFFICIAL]. Our on-site emergency medical team responded immediately and the athlete was treated for minor [TYPE OF INJURY]. We all wish the athlete a speedy recovery.”

Level 2 Crisis Situations

Serious Injury

Immediate Statement

“We have just learned that one of our [ATHLETES/VOLUNTEERS/COACHES] has been involved in a [TYPE] accident. We do not yet know if [HE/SHE] was injured. We will provide you with more information as it becomes available.”

When Injuries are Confirmed

“[NUMBER] people were injured during [DESCRIBE INCIDENT] at [IDENTIFY THE EVENT] at [LOCATION] in [CITY] at [TIME]. [MAY NEED TO ADD THAT CAUSE IS UNKNOWN BUT IS BEING INVESTIGATED.]

“The health and well-being [MAY MENTION EXTENT OF INJURY IF KNOWN] of [ATHLETES/VOLUNTEERS/COACHES/ALL INVOLVED] is our primary concern. We are extremely saddened and concerned that this occurred.

“We are in the process of notifying the families and will release names of those injured once their families have been contacted.”

When Families have been Notified

“[NAME, TITLE] was involved in a [TYPE] accident at [IDENTIFY THE EVENT] at [LOCATION] at [TIME]. [HE/SHE] has sustained a [TYPE] injury according to [HOSPITAL OFFICIAL]. [HE/SHE] is under a physician’s care at [HOSPITAL NAME]. We wish [NAME OF INJURED] all the best for a speedy recovery.”

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 6: Developing Your Communications - *Continued*

Level 2 Crisis Situations- Continued

Missing Participant

“In cooperation with the [AUTHORITIES], Special Olympics [PROGRAM] is asking for the public’s assistance in locating an athlete who has been missing since [DATE AND TIME]. [NAME OF ATHLETE] is [DESCRIBE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE, CLOTHING, AGE, ETC.] and was last seen [LOCATION/OTHER DETAILS]. Anyone who has information is asked to call [AUTHORITY] at [PHONE NUMBER]. Special Olympics is extremely concerned and is doing everything possible to find [NAME].”

Level 3 Crisis Situations

Death of a Participant

Never make a public statement before the family has been notified, you have learned their wishes and coordinated with authorities to ensure that information is factual and correct.

Initial Statement

“A [DESCRIBE ACCIDENT] occurred at the [IDENTIFY THE EVENT] at [LOCATION] in [CITY] at [TIME]. Emergency response organizations have been alerted and all efforts are being taken to assess the situation.”

“At this time we know there have been injuries. As soon as more information is available, we will provide it to you.” [ALSO MAY NEED TO INDICATE THAT THE CAUSE IS UNKNOWN BUT UNDER INVESTIGATION.]

When death is confirmed

“[NUMBER] people were killed during [DESCRIBE INCIDENT] at [LOCATION] in [CITY] at [TIME]. [MAY ALSO NEED TO INDICATE THAT CAUSE IS UNKNOWN AND UNDER INVESTIGATION.]

“The health and well-being of [ATHLETES/VOLUNTEERS/STAFF/ALL INVOLVED] is our primary concern. Our deepest sympathies go to the families of those who died. We are doing all we can to help [THOSE WHO WERE INJURED/FAMILIES OF THOSE WHO DIED] in this difficult time.

“We will release the names of those who died once their families have been contacted.”

When families and authorities have been contacted

You may want to consider a joint media briefing with the medical examiner’s office to discuss cause of death. Work with law enforcement officials to determine how this announcement will be made. You may also want to contact an attorney in the event there is a death.

“We join the family and friends of [NAME, TITLE] in mourning [HIS/HER] death. Our deepest sympathies go to [HIS/HER] family and to all who knew [HIS/HER]. [NAME] will be sorely missed. This tragedy is a great loss to the Special Olympics family.”

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 6: Developing Your Communications - *Continued*

Level 3 Crisis Situations - Continued

Criminal Activity

It is strongly recommended that a joint briefing with a law enforcement spokesperson is held. You may also want to contact an attorney prior to issuing a statement.

“We have just learned that a Special Olympics [ATHLETE/STAFF/VOLUNTEER/ALL INVOLVED] has been involved in [DESCRIBE ALLEGED INCIDENT]. We do not know the details of the situation and will not speculate on the matter.”

“Special Olympics is committed to producing a safe, world-class athletic event for Special Olympics athletes. We will cooperate fully with investigating agencies, and we intend to undertake a detailed investigation of our own.”

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 6: Developing Your Communications - Continued

ACTION ITEM 3: Distribution of Press Materials

In the event of a crisis situation, it is essential to provide the media with the necessary materials.

Materials may include:

- Public Statements
- Press Kit
- Event Fact Sheets
- Executive Biographies

Copies should be distributed at/for the following:

- Press conference
- Faxing for media inquiries
- Event main press center
- Special Olympics Program office
- Special Olympics regional office
- Special Olympics headquarters

Note: Many times a statement of the situation is all that is warranted. Evaluate the situation to determine how to manage the situation. The majority of situations will only require an issued statement for the press. Holding a press conference may heighten a situation.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 7: Appointment of Appropriate Spokesperson

In the event of a crisis situation, the appropriate Special Olympics Spokesperson should be appointed. Spokespersons could be a Special Olympics National/State Director, Special Olympics Program Board Director or Special Olympics Program Public Relations Contact. In certain circumstances, it may be appropriate to include medical or other technical personnel as spokespersons.

The Spokesperson should have the following qualities:

- Prominence within the Special Olympics Program
- Familiarity with overall Special Olympics Program and event
- Training to speak to media

When the appropriate Spokesperson has been selected, he/she should receive the following:

- Public Statement
- Key messages
- A prepared Question & Answer (Q&A) document

Note: An appropriate spokesperson may not be appointed until after the crisis situation has occurred. It is important to prepare all potential Special Olympics spokespersons for all levels of a crisis situation.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 8: Crisis Center

The Crisis Communications Administrator is responsible for determining whether or not the Special Olympics Program's "Crisis Communications Center" will be needed. The Crisis Communications Center should be at a set location at the Special Olympics Program National/State Office or at the Special Olympics Games or Event office where all crisis-related communications will be coordinated.

The Crisis Communications Center must:

- be fully equipped with all necessary materials (e.g., pens, pads, etc.);
- have, or be in close proximity to, office machinery including phones, faxes, computers and photocopiers;
- contain files of information that may be required during a crisis situation, including Special Olympics fact sheets, safety procedures, photos, executive biographies, crisis case studies, etc.;
- have a telephone contact list (Program staff, Board members, Special Olympics headquarters, media, police, hospitals)
- have several copies of the Crisis Communication Plan worksheets;
- have several copies of the Special Olympics Program's Crisis Communications Plan on hand for easy reference; and
- be equipped with a television, radios and VCRs.

Press Conference Needs:

- copies of public statement
- podium
- microphone
- seating for press (optional)

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 9: Reviewing the Crisis Communications Response Plan

It is important that all key Special Olympics staff and volunteers be aware of the Crisis Communications Response Plan and responsibilities.

This does not need to be an in-depth session. During Special Olympics General Orientations or during volunteer briefings before events, make sure to cover:

- potential crisis situations;
- who to contact in the event of a crisis situation and how to contact that person;
- where they should direct all media inquiries; and
- that they should not comment to the media.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 10: Provide Crisis Communications Media Training

All potential Special Olympics Spokespersons should be prepared to answer all questions from the media.

Potential questions are listed in Section 2.

Media training can consist of a practice session of answering simple to difficult questions during a mock interview.

**CRISIS
COMMUNICATIONS**

SECTION 1

ACTIVITY 11: Mock Crisis Situation

To fully prepare staff and volunteers for a potential crisis situation, create a mock crisis and review how the Crisis Communications Team responds.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In the event of a global or regional situation, Special Olympics Programs should refer to the Crisis Communications Plan, phone trees, etc., to disseminate information and utilize appropriate materials supplied by Special Olympics headquarters and regional offices.

How to Use this Crisis Communications Plan

This Special Olympics Crisis Communications Plan is designed to:

- Inform your Special Olympics Program about what and how to communicate to the media and constituents in the event of a crisis situation;
- Guide your Special Olympics Program in developing a Crisis Communications Team;
- Provide worksheets to help organize the Crisis Communications Team prior to and during a situation;
- Provide a flow of communication in the event of a crisis situation so that all necessary entities of the global Special Olympics movement are informed, aware and prepared to protect the reputation of Special Olympics.

This Crisis Communications Plan is divided into two sections.

Section 1 Preparing for a Potential Crisis Communications Situation

- Activities designed to prepare your Special Olympics Program in the event a crisis communications situation should present itself.

Section 2 Materials to Assist with a Crisis Communications Situation

- Materials include potential questions from the media, worksheets to gather information and follow-up reports.

STEPS:

1. Become familiar with this plan, reading it thoroughly, *BEFORE* trying to implement any of the materials provided in this plan.
2. Work through the activities in Section 1 to better prepare yourself and staff in the event a crisis communications situation should occur.
3. Have the materials in Section 2 readily available in the event a crisis situation should present itself.
4. Develop a crisis communications plan for your Special Olympics Program, including Special Olympics Games and events. Each Special Olympics event that your Program may hold most likely will utilize different staff, volunteers, etc. It is critical that the necessary individuals are prepared for a crisis situation.
5. *Remember: It is better to be prepared for a crisis situation that may never happen than to face a crisis situation unprepared.*