ICMA

BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES DURING DISRUPTIVE CHANGE

PART 1: Crisis Communications

CONTENTS

Introduction

Content included in this ebook has been collected from PM magazine and other ICMA blogs.

Introduction

What do you get when a crisis quickly hits your organization and threatens to harm people or property, seriously interrupts operations, damages your reputation, or negatively impacts your organization? The answer is chaos.

This is why a solid, planned out crisis communication plan is key for your organization. Advance preparation permits a local government to be proactive instead of reactive and allows you to employ customized methods and strategies during those chaotic times.

To assist leaders during times of disruptive change, ICMA has launched icma.org/DisruptiveChange: **an area with centralized resources that focus on planning and preparedness for disruptive challenges.**

In part one of icma.org/DisruptiveChange, we're looking at ways to develop sound crisis communication practices to help citizens and local government personnel understand and deal with dangerous situations in a timely and prudent manner.

In the following months we'll explore successful strategies to keep residents safe and improve community relations and build upon or expand your skills of community engagement during times of disruptive change.

Managing the Unthinkable

By Aden Hogan

I was recently asked to speak to city staff in my neighboring community of Ft. Collins, Colorado, on the lessons learned from my experience during the Oklahoma City bombing response in 1995. I thought about what message I'd try to convey in my pending presentation. I began to think about which things have really stuck with me from what we went through during those 17 spring days more than 15 years ago.

My first thought was: How would I be able to accurately articulate the horror of the event on April 19, 1995, something that was so far off the chart from what we had ever imagined? Then I realized that this in itself was a key lesson. The city of Oklahoma City was extremely effective in using the knowledge and information we had already gained in dealing with what we knew might happen.

We had a plan, we had processes, and we had protocols. Our challenge was to apply these elements to something we didn't expect to happen.

THE PLAN

Planning for the expected is what we do every day. Being ready to deal with the unexpected is what emergency preparedness is all about. A mass casualty incident like the bombing brings with it challenges that simply aren't a part of our normal emergency planning processes. They are incidents we don't like to think about, but they are very real threats.

I think the first hard lesson for all of us in OKC was the realization that it can happen here! And for us, it meant ramping up our response to catch up with the incident. While our staff members set new paradigms in emergency response, there were things that went wrong. There always are. I believe the key for us was that we never gave up. There was always one more thing we could try, and try we did. We didn't let what we didn't know degrade our response, and we learned what we needed as we went.

Learning while you respond often doesn't turn out well. To have success doing this requires a strong underlying foundation of planning, processes, and preparation. Without this, your response will likely turn out badly. Although we did a great job of emergency planning in Oklahoma City, the scenario of someone setting off a bomb in our downtown wasn't really in the scope of our planning.

Just nine months earlier, we had attended a week-long "all-hazards" course at FEMA's National Emergency Management Institute in Emmitsburg, Maryland. That course is now broken into two programs: preparation and response, and recovery and mitigation. What we

learned at EMI paid huge dividends in the days following the bombing.

One of the most important takeaways was the relationships we built with each other. That experience reinforced with me the importance of planning, training, and, most important, capacity building with the people you will rely on to deliver your emergency response. I highly recommend this institute experience for managers.

Being a part of the response to what was at that time the worst terrorist attack in the history of the United States was a life-changing event for many of us. During the actual response, however, we were really too busy to think about what was happening, and we certainly weren't thinking about any lessons learned. It was only afterward that the importance of what, how, when, and who became apparent. It's my hope that this article can offer you some ideas and approaches to making sure your community is prepared if the worst happens.

First, let me say that I believe that planning is the key to success in everything we do. But it is absolutely critical in disaster preparedness. Planning allows you to anticipate, rather than react. It will help you identify what might happen, how you'll need to respond to it, and whom you will call on to make that response.

Planning for disasters allows you to build in funding to sustain emergency plans into the future. It improves organizational knowledge and capacity and encourages creative thinking and problem solving. Planning minimizes surprises in an emergency response and reduces your dependence on luck to succeed.

Think about this. How much effort would you put into your disaster plan if you knew lives would depend on it? Believe me, they will. The emergency planning process creates a culture of preparedness in your organization. There simply is no good excuse for not planning.

We found in OKC that decisions we made in the first few minutes and hours of the incident proved to have the greatest impact on the outcomes. This will, however, also be the most difficult time to make good decisions as the surroundings will be chaotic, information will be limited, and many resources may not yet be in place. This is where a plan with predetermined critical decisions and actions will be most useful.

Help will come, but it's at the very beginning when you'll have the chance to make the most positive difference, and as first responders you'll be on your own. In

major incidents, there is never a second chance to get it right. I encourage local governments to plan for the first eight hours of a disaster. That's the timeframe in which you can make the most positive difference.

One of the things that has stuck with me over the years was how important communication was for us in OKC—not just the technical aspect (the phones, pagers, and radios), but the interpersonal kind. In a crisis, it's often not so much what we know, but how well we know each other that determines how successful we will be.

I believe that communication can be the fatal flaw in nearly all we do. It is even more important in a crisis. Practice communication, anticipate existing communication methods to fail, and have a backup. Plan as a team; train together. Extend your training to include cross-departmental groups and the people who will be helping you in mutual aid.

The more you learn about each other, the more effective your emergency operations plans will become—in both what you do every day and most certainly in an emergency response.

Symbolic chairs represent bombing victims at the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, memorial.

THE PROCESSES

The next most important element is having a process to manage the incident. We are now required by federal law to use the Incident Command System (ICS) in our emergency and disaster plans and our response. ICS should be the organizational foundation component of your planning. One of my heroes is the former fire chief of OKC, Gary Marrs. As incident commander (IC), Chief Marrs was responsible for oversight of the entire response. What an overwhelming challenge!

But Chief Marrs, working cooperatively with Police Chief Sam Gonzales and others, used ICS to delegate operations, administrative support, logistics, planning, and other specific actions so he could maintain his focus on the big picture. He was the consummate leader throughout the event.

He held us together. Having one person in charge is critical to maintaining operational control of a large incident. Your plan should be geared to support the IC in accomplishing this. In OKC, ICS was a key tool in allowing Chief Marrs to do a great job as our IC.

ICS doesn't dictate tactics; it brings coordination, communication, and cooperation to the folks who will be managing a response. ICS is flexible and scalable and

is absolutely the best system I've ever used to manage and direct responses to an incident or special event. I'd use it even if it wasn't the law. ICS helps create successful responses. It is a key management tool.

During the first few days of the response everyone wanted to help at the building. That was, however, the job of our search and rescue teams. It took several people in support to keep one searcher in the building and active around the clock. This impressed on me the importance of "doing your job" and sticking to the script. It's critical, and it can save lives.

The emergency operations plan (EOP) is an interesting document. It can contain the seeds for either your future success or your failure. Keeping your plan small and focused is important. You want to be able to initialize your response and management elements quickly, activate critical actions on the ground (including search and rescue, emergency medical, security, and evacuation), marshal resources, and make sure individual people are responsible for specific critical tasks.

You'll need to assure that you can continue to maintain normal critical services apart from the incident response. And you'll want to be able to track and assign resources and mutual aid.

Wherever you can, reduce critical tasks to checklists. Keep your EOP as small as possible because on the day of the disaster you won't have time to read a large book. The amount of effort you put into developing and maintaining the EOP correlates directly with how well it will work when you need it.

THE PROTOCOLS

In summary, managers need to remember that in a major incident flexibility equals success. We can't allow ourselves to lock into only one approach. The incident will change, and we must be able to change with it. Our plan should support initiative, clear away the barriers to operations, and set the protocols for making decisions.

I believe these are the critical keys to success:

- Planning, planning, planning. Critical steps are build, test, modify, and monitor. Fortune favors the prepared.
- Communication. Lack of communication is the fatal flaw internally and externally. Have a plan. Have a backup.
- Problem solving. Fix current problems among the staff. You can't respond effectively if you have issues with daily operations.

- Checklists. Develop checklists for critical actions, and assign specific people to them.
- Management process. Learn the incident command system. Then practice it.
- Protection and support. A key priority is to protect your responders and support staff. No one can do this without appropriate staff to assist.
- First eight hours. Plan well for this because this is the most critical decision-making period.
- Collaboration. Develop mutual aid agreements before you need them.
- On task. Do the job assigned to you. It takes many people in support to keep the responders going. We can't all be rescuers.
- Focus and attitude. Focus on positive action and progress, not the mistakes you will make.
- Confidence. When in doubt, do the right thing.

There is hardly a day that goes by that I don't think about my experience in OKC. I remember the terror, the pain, the frustration, and the grinding days when Oklahoma City staff members were doing our jobs. But most of all, I remember the people.

I remember the employees of OKC who successfully met and solved an unbelievable challenge, the heroes—both known and unknown—throughout the 17 days, and the residents who came together in a way I'd never witnessed before to make sure that this disaster didn't destroy our community but made it stronger than before.

Emergency preparedness is job number one for the public administrator. Don't fall into the trap of putting it on the back burner or thinking it will never happen in your community. It can, and it will. Managers must be prepared to respond to it.

Aden Hogan, Jr., ICMA-CM, is city manager of Evans, Colorado (ahogan@ci.evans.co.us).

Communicating Emergency Information on a Budget

Expand capabilities with no- or low-cost alternatives

By Joshua Kelly and Shahrzad Rizvi

O ver the past few years, there has been an incredible amount of new software options available to local emergency managers. For a price, options like automated warning systems, preformatted social media updating applications, and integrated database management programs can greatly expand the capabilities of local emergency managers.

Faced with limited budgets, it is not uncommon for local officials in such high-hazard communities as those in Tornado Alley—primarily the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska—to have to decide between building or maintaining a traditional siren network or purchasing an expensive, privately operated, automated call system.

There really is no choice to be made. If you know where to look, there are a host of state-of-the-art software systems available at little or no cost. Local officials should seriously explore the options before committing any resources to expensive prepackaged communication programs that may or may not be as effective.

WHAT'S OUT THERE

Here are some of the options to consider:

Low-cost alert systems. Such new "cloud telephony" providers as Tropo and Twilio allow you to directly broadcast phone and text messages to your community. The same technology that allows broadcasting messages also allows managers to collect reports of incidents via voice calls, short message service (SMS) messages, or websites.

You can have a reliable alert system for a much lower cost than those currently available by using one of these providers in conjunction with free open-source software that has been customized through a "civic software event." Often called hackathons, these events bring together software developers who are ready, willing, and able to commit their technical expertise to civic endeavors for free.

Open source software is just as secure and effective as proprietary software offered by contracted vendors.

The wildly popular Mozilla Firefox web browser and the Android mobile software are two common examples of open source software that is both functional and secure.

Social media. Social media platforms have evolved into much more than just personal sharing mechanisms. Their strengths are now in aggregating conversations about community events.

To increase an emergency team's situational awareness, various social media aggregators,[1] which are services that collect content from such multiple social networks as Facebook and Twitter, are available to quickly make sense of the information that funnels into an emergency operations center during a crisis. Managers will increasingly need to include the new media information sources, along with traditional media sources like the local television news.

Twitter responded to this need by launching Twitter Alerts[2] in September 2013. Twitter launched this notification feature in order to "help users get important and accurate information from credible organizations during emergencies, natural disasters, or moments when other communications services aren't accessible."[3] Services like Twitter Alerts are not intended to replace emergency notification services but to serve as a concurrent and complementary method of conveying urgent messages.

Over the next few years, adding a digital media dashboard next to traditional media sources in an emergency operations center may very well become a necessity. Also, by bringing these "digital volunteers" into the fold, emergency managers can more effectively spread useful, accurate, and timely messages to residents through real-time social media monitoring while primary staff members are tied up in an event.

Freeware mapping. The potential for the use of freeware mapping in public safety situations became clear following 20 inches of snow in Washington, D.C., in February 2010. Frustrated with the perceived lack of action from first responders, residents created a website (http://www.snowmageddoncleanup.com) where anyone could post a need—a snowed-in driveway, for example—and connect with local volunteers looking to help.

Since 2010, development of such freeware mapping platforms as the one used during Snowmageddon have multiplied exponentially (i.e., Google Crisis[4] Map, Google Maps Lite,[5] Ushahidi,[6] and others). Emergency managers should embrace this kind of software to do things like disseminate shelter locations before an event, connect with resident needs during an emergency, and more effectively communicate real-time recovery progress following a disaster.[7, 8]

Collaborations. "During a disaster is not the time to exchange business cards" is a quote repeated in public safety circles. The same principle applies to preparedness capabilities. Why spend staff time, resources, and know-how on duplicating a service that is already being offered at a higher level than can be achieved with a start-up project.

Federal, regional, and even private sector partners are increasingly providing no-to-low cost customizable severe weather warnings, real-time information distribution networks, and free mapping services. To reap the benefits of these highly capable organizations, however, you need to know how to quickly communicate your data and where to look before a disaster strikes.

GOING FORWARD

Technology will continue to drive innovation in the way local governments communicate public safety issues to their residents. While these advances are transforming the way we are able to convey things like weather warnings, recovery services, and even the location of displaced friends and family members, they should not be considered pay-to-play benefits.

So when developing your next public safety budget, keep in mind that even the smallest communities, with a little creative planning, can communicate with their residents, in new ways, at little to no cost.

ENDNOTES

1 https://hootsuite.com/ or https://about.twitter.com/products/tweetdeck
2 https://about.twitter.com/products/alerts
3 https://blog.twitter.com/2013/twitter-alerts-critical-information-when-you-need-it-most
4 http://google.org/crisismap
5 https://mapsengine.google.com/map
6 http://www.ushahidi.com
7 http://maps.redcross.org/Crossmap
8 http://arc-nhq-gis.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html

Joshua Kelly, Management analyst, Mesquite, Texas
Shahrzad Rizvi, Management analyst, Dallas, Texas

Don't Wait for a Crisis

By Gerald Newfarmer, President & CEO, Management Partners, Inc.

There are two primary ways that local governments get better. The first is a crisis – financial calamity, or a natural disaster, or a crime committed within the organization – that forces self-examination and provides the opportunity for changes that might not be possible in better times.

The other source of change in local government is its leaders – in other words, you.

There's a natural bias in public organizations to never change. There is no competition spurring us to get better. There are no shareholders demanding that we find new ways to increase profits. Our culture is collaborative, which means that decision-making slows as we satisfy every objection before the group agrees to act.

There are also big risks inherent in changing local government – failure is rarely rewarded in public service, even when it provides valuable lessons, and it can bring unwanted attention from the media and constituents. And public servants –including many leaders – are often attracted to the field because it promises certainty, job security and predictability.

But leading change in local government is worth the risk. Indeed, your job as a leader is to take the risks necessary to improve the organization you lead.

Let's start with the premise that every local government can work better than it does. Even the ones that win all the awards and are constantly looking for ways to improve can become more effective and efficient. And while we as leaders want to encourage the people we work with, we must also constantly look for opportunities to improve. Every manager must strive to balance acknowledging employees' good work and challenging them to be ever better.

A good leader juggles a host of concerns simultaneously – including governance, community engagement and relationships with elected officials – but getting the basics of management right is an important first step toward improvement. I often counsel local-government leaders to map their management system as a first step and engage their managers in making it better.

Your management system includes all the systems, formal and informal, used to plan and manage the organization's work and the people who carry it out. When describing a management system, a leader must look at:

- How strategic planning and work planning occur;
- How the budget is developed, along with any additional financial planning;
- How the government communicates with the governing board, employees and the public;

- How Council policy is supported;
- How performance is measured;
- How employee performance is evaluated;
- How employees are recognized; and
- How organizational development occurs, especially training and succession planning.

Reviewing a local government's management system is a straightforward process that nearly always uncovers multiple opportunities for improvement. As an added benefit, it gives the local-government leader and the rest of the management team a baseline knowledge of where the organization stands and a way of charting progress. After completing a management system review, leaders can use it to prioritize changes. Those changes can include:

- Clarifying who is accountable for results;
- Improving the discipline of work planning by better defining initiatives and projects, specifying completion details and following up;

- Measuring performance intelligently;
- And providing personal leadership by engaging talented people in your organization.

Most city and county managers enter public service because they want to serve the public. They rise to positions of leadership because they see it as a way to have an even greater impact on their communities. The easiest route for a leader is usually to lie low and not rock the boat. But seeing a path to improvement and leading people down it is more rewarding and almost always worth the risks – and it sure beats waiting for disaster to strike!

Jerry Newfarmer, former city manager of Cincinnati, Ohio, and San Jose, calif., is president and CEO of the government-consulting firm Management Partners. He also served as city manager of Fresno, Calif., and assistant city manager of Oakland, calif. Newfarmer, a national leader in local government performance management, has been active in icma throughout his career.

Mobilize Your Crisis Plan For Improved Emergency Response

By Emma Finch, Market Manager, *FacilityDude*

One of the principal responsibilities of any government's administration is to provide for the safety and security of those in its care. Leaders assume an inherent duty to those for whom they serve. Emergencies can happen when least expected and even the most detailed response plans need to be accessible to everyone. Preparation can indeed save lives, but it is timely and accurate execution that is required to be successful.

All of us know the importance of being prepared for a crisis situation, but what exactly does that entail? While lists of protocols, instructions and evacuation routes are critical pillars of any crisis response operation, it is the ability to communicate and disseminate that information in real-time to all involved that will ultimately lead to the safest outcome. What's more, the ability to review and adjust your plans both during and after an event allows for an organization to continuously evolve and improve internal emergency management processes. The key is to marry these plans to a distribution model that makes them accessible.

THE MANY FACES OF DISASTER

Crisis can take on any number of forms, and dependent on your government and location, are most likely unique to your situation. They vary from natural disasters and weather phenomena to medical emergencies and criminal activity. What they all have in common, however, is that they require firmly established action plans. While major events can are often considered to be isolated incidents, the fact is that first aid situations and utility outages happen on a regular basis and require steps and procedures that need to be followed in order to reduce further harm or risk.

According to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters in Belgium, the U.S. is among the five countries most affected by natural disasters. In 2011 alone, CRED reported a total of $366.1 billion in disaster-related damages, making the year the most expensive for disaster recovery yet. Just as a facility manager is responsible for daily and ongoing operation and maintenance of buildings and equipment, admin-

istrators are responsible for maintaining an organization's financial and material stability, not to mention the physical safety of those within. Thus, effective emergency response plans require administrators to communicate and collaborate with all departments – on the ground and "in the trenches"–to devise a plan that maximizes safety and minimizes financial loss.

THE STATE OF EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

All governments have emergency response measures in place as a matter of basic compliance. However, in many cases, the creation and distribution of these plans has not adapted to meet the changing and diverse nature of potential threats, nor are they typically made widely available to any personnel who may need them. A building fire is a different kind of situation than a bomb threat, and therefore requires a unique course of action. Harvard Business School study noted, modularity is becoming an essential component of safety plans, stating, "This [Modularity] is important because real crises rarely match planning scenarios directly. If response options aren't flexible and modularized, novel events or combinations of events can yield ineffective or "brittle" responses."

Ultimately it comes down to accessibility. The standard hardcopy method of plan management may seem sufficient, but it compromises many facets of effective emergency planning. Narrow distribution channels, the inability to update relevant information and gaps in communication can greatly reduce the effectiveness of even the most diligent planning.

Binders, clipboards, maps and other paper-based filing and storage solutions are a commonly used method of storing and reviewing safety plans. While this method may technically be compliant, it's neither efficient nor recommended, for a variety of reasons:

→ **ACCESSIBILITY:** Perhaps the biggest downfall of a pure paper format is that it is nearly impossible to share information throughout a large group, particularly in an emergency situation. Crisis response in both large and small governments requires the coordination between disparate departments and multiple - a nearly impossible task if you are working from a paper plan. To combat this, plans need to be adapted to work with existing technological solutions that are inherently more accessible. For example, smartphones and other mobile technology are becoming ever more ubiquitous,

and serve as a proven platform in not only voice communication, but often information sharing and emergency notification.

→ **COST:** A paper-based emergency response plan may be appealing due to its low initial cost. However, a paper format is inflexible so it can actually create more costs down the road. Because paper is static, any changes made to the plan require materials to be reprinted either in full or in part. Of course, these are simply upstream costs. The true cost of crisis is found in the aftermath. Increased liability, law suits, loss of vital records control, physical damage and lagging security soon become a piece of the cost puzzle.

MOBILIZING FOR A BETTER SOLUTION

As the type and frequency of emergency situations change not only from year to year, but often day to day, so have the tools and technology available to plan for, respond to and recover from them. Smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices put the tools to organize and communicate effective crisis management into the hands of whomever an organization decides.

The Pew Research Center reported that as of January 2014, 58 percent of U.S. adults own a smartphone, and 67 percent of those check their phones regularly - even when they haven't received a message or alert. Smartphones already serve as the anchor of attention for many, and administrators can leverage that relationship by migrating already-existing emergency response plans to that platform.

Efficiency is the other major benefit of a mobile emergency response plan. Digital data allows for hundreds or even thousands of pages of data to be stored in one place, providing personnel and building occupants with a one-stop mobile safety solution that can be kept in-pocket and accessible at all times. These solutions can be updated easily and as often as needed by those responsible for maintaining the plan content. Not only can steps and procedures, maps and diagrams be shared with users, but important contact information, incident reporting or even real-time notification are also available, making Crisis Plan an essential part of the emergency planning process and an important tool for timely response and recovery as well.

Ethics Matter! Crisis Mode

When a crisis tests our values, how will we do?

By Martha Perego, ICMA-CM, ICMA Ethics Director, Washington, D.C.

Crisis of the 9/11 magnitude test decision-making skills and principles—essentials of good leaders. The chaos and disruption that accompany a crisis test our personal character and judgment as well.

GROUND ZERO

The Municipal Credit Union in New York City, headquartered across from the World Trade Center site, had a decision to make in the days after 9/11: keep the network of ATMs open to serve its members or take it down because the firewall that prevented excessive withdrawals was not functioning. The credit union placed a higher value on customer service and trust than on security.

After all, their core members were public employees, including the very firefighters and police officers who had suffered such catastrophic losses among their ranks and were still on the job. Giving members convenient access now to their assets was also an effort to restore calm to the panicked city.

In the next weeks, more than 500 members made withdrawals from their accounts that exceeded their balances by more than $5,000 each. When the firewall was functioning again, some 2 percent of the membership had taken $15 million that didn't belong to them.

The credit union leadership sought restitution. The district attorney prosecuted those who did not repay the funds. Was their faith in the membership misplaced? Was this a failure of leadership to place a higher value on service than security?

THE PENTAGON SCENE ON 9/11

A contingent of responders from multiple local governments worked with agencies across the federal government to rescue those critically injured at the Pentagon. Containing the fire before it reached key Defense Department communications and security areas of the building came next.

As the post-incident report would note, the effort was not perfect. But the management and integration of mutual-aid assets and the coordination and cooperation of agencies at all government echelons were outstanding. The training and professionalism of the responders and prior joint mutual-aid training exercises implemented specifically to address potential terrorist threats helped. The effort leaders put into forging

strong working relationships with their peers in different agencies beforehand, which helped all to set aside egos and not be territorial during the crisis, proved to be the critical ingredient.

The report also noted several incidents of "misappropriation" of equipment that belonged to other jurisdictions operating at the incident site. Some of it was high end stuff. Yes, while the majority of people on the ground were focused on the crisis at hand, some responders were stealing equipment. The report diplomatically noted that a certain amount of equipment exchange is expected during multijurisdictional operations and is routinely sorted afterward, but this went well beyond normal. What professional standard were these individuals relying on? Imagine what the work ethic and culture must be like in their organization if they thought this was okay.

THE D.C. SNIPER

Fast forward to the next fall in Washington, D.C., when a new crisis hit. During a three-week period, a sniper killed 10 people and critically injured three others in random attacks across a wide area of the region. Once again, local jurisdictions in the region and federal agencies were working together on a joint task force to capture the sniper.

But it was the police chief in the jurisdiction where the sniper struck first who was catapulted into the national limelight. In a tense and trying time, the chief became the public face of the task force. Highly visible at the frequent press briefings, he calmly answered questions. When a child was a victim, the chief readily displayed the emotion that the public felt.

The sniper and accomplice were eventually captured. In the period following the capture, the police chief went from one of the task force members to the hero of the case, at least in the media's telling of the story. The chief signed a six-figure offer to write a book about the incident and was in discussions about a possible made-for-TV movie. All this before the suspects had been tried and the necessary approvals for outside employment were obtained from his employer.

His conduct raised ethical allegations that he was leveraging his office for personal gain. As leaders within the organization and community took sides, morale within the department suffered. What about all the other officers who duly sought permission as required before engaging in outside activities? Can credit for solving the case, which was a team effort, really be attributed to one person? Is that the mark of a good leader to take the credit and the reward?

The controversy did nothing to change the chief's mind. He continued to defend his book deal and eventually left the organization.

THE TAKEAWAYS

Preparation matters. History tells us that it's too late in the midst of a battle to develop your plan of attack. Waiting until a crisis to define your personal and leadership values or instill a good work ethic in your organization is similarly a recipe for disaster. No doubt that both the plan and your values will be put to the test but better to have given this some consideration in advance.

Public service is a serious commitment that requires a deep sense of social responsibility. The official who is thoughtful and bold enough to consider the possibilities and then plan for that potentially devastating scenario that may never happen demonstrates that commitment.

Never become dismayed. In a culture where some lack the values and game the system, those operating from a clear set of values can make a difference and move the conduct of others to the higher level.

Working with Elected Officials During a Crisis

By Mark Deven, City Manager, Arvada, CO

In 2012, two communities in the Denver Metro area were shocked in response to tragic acts of violence. First, on July 20, a mass shooting occurred inside of a movie theater in Aurora during a midnight screening of the film The Dark Knight Rises. The gunman dressed in tactical clothing, set off tear gas grenades and shot into the audience with multiple firearms, killing 12 people and injuring 58 others. The second tragedy occurred in October, when 10-year old Jessica Ridgeway was kidnapped from her neighborhood in Westminster and murdered with parts of her dismembered body found in an open space area in the neighboring city of Arvada.

These tragedies generated many emotions, including fear, helplessness, anger and sadness among all community members. This included city council members who are often in the position of hearing these sentiments expressed from their constituents while they attend to their personal tasks, such as picking children up from school, going to the grocery store, attending church and working. During these times of crisis many community members feel the need to express their concerns at times when our elected officials are experiencing their own doubts as to whether or not they live in a truly safe community.

While not directly associated with these tragedies, many community leaders in the Denver Metro area were certainly affected by the events in Aurora and Westminster. Many communities provided law enforcement resources to support the investigation of the incidents which generated many conversations throughout the Metro area. The widespread local news coverage seemed never-ending as the personal stories of the victims were told and re-told many times. The environment created a pall of sadness that seemed to affect nearly everyone.

In Arvada, where Jessica's body was found, the community was devastated by the reports. In addition, there were prior incidents of attempted child abductions that had occurred within a month of the tragedy that had the community on edge and City Council members grappling for answers. The fundamental

question that many Council members had, in response to what they heard from their constituents, was "can we protect our children?"

In these circumstances, the answer that can and must be provided is "YES!" This answer must be provided with confidence, additional information, constructive steps and, if necessary, one on one communication that may even resemble a "pep talk" in order to help the elected officials maintain their ability to act as leaders. While not directly impacted by the tragedies, Arvada Council members and the entire community received the following response to the fundamental question of "can we protect our children?"

PROVIDE THE FACTS

While there was no disputing that Jessica's dismembered body was found in Arvada, there was also no evidence that suggested that the crime had occurred in Arvada or was associated with a member of the Arvada community. These facts were expressed to Council members and then to the community in order to reduce the potential for hysteria and overreaction.

In addition, the previous reports of child abductions included circumstances which suggested that the incidents were not related. For example, suspect descriptions were much different and the timing did not match any behavior pattern that was suspected in the Jessica Ridgeway case. In one case, a child abduction that occurred at about the same time in the neighboring state of Wyoming was believed to be related to the Jessica Ridgeway case. The Police Department released information that reviewed the Wyoming case in detail to assure the City Council and the public that the cases were unrelated. Similar steps were taken with other reported attempted child abductions that occurred within the weeks before and after Jessica's abduction.

PROVIDE CONTINUOUS INFORMATION

To the extent possible, City Council members need to be updated on a continuous basis. This can be difficult since some information, while perhaps helpful for the Council to know, could compromise the investigation. City and County managers will need to rely on their public safety chiefs to determine what can be released and what needs to remain with investigators. Nonetheless, providing a stream of continuous information could help elected officials to address rumors and gen-

erate a sense of confidence that would be expressed to members of the community. This will likely include phone calls several times a day and even after hours to make sure the elected officials receive timely and accurate information.

INCLUDE ACTIONS AND SAFETY TIPS IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Statements to Council members should include actions they can take and encourage their constituents to take in order to address their concerns. For example, the Jessica Ridgeway tragedy generated information such as child and personal safety tips. These tips focused on the need to be aware of surroundings, report suspicious persons, actions to defend yourself if attacked and being extra aware of your child's schedule. Information that can be transmitted through email, social media and similar means would be ideal since many elected officials would appreciate the ability to provide the information to their constituents in a personal manner.

HIGHLIGHT PUBLIC SAFETY ACTIONS

Following the Jessica Ridgeway abduction, the Arvada Police Department implemented additional patrols around elementary schools and statione d school resource officers at very visible locations. The Arvada Fire Protection District sent engine companies out of their fire stations and parked their trucks and firefighters in front of schools. These steps provided the City Council with higher sense of confidence and offered them good news that they could pass on to their constituents. Many called it a show of force to protect the community's children.

APPEAL TO THE COUNCIL'S SENSE OF LEADERSHIP

Finally, it is sometimes the role of the city and county manager to express the importance of the elected officials to put aside their own personal fears and anxieties and display the leadership behaviors that helped them to be elected. The message needs to clearly state that all of us as community leaders must be ready to speak to people about what is really going on and reduce the hysteria that is occurring in some circles. Instead of buying into or fueling panic, the elected officials need to assert their leadership capacity by stating with

supreme confidence that the police are following up on all leads and are working around the clock to identify the person(s) responsible for the crimes. Exhibiting a calm and collected composure will help people in the community to deal with a difficult situation. If the elected officials become wrapped up in the community concerns associated with the crisis, it is the role of the city and county manager to remind elected officials of their obligations as community leaders. This may be awkward; however, it is absolutely necessary.

Visit Arvada's website to learn more about the community: arvada.org.

CRISOLUTION

Ready for Anything

By Kevin Knutson, Regional Vice President, Management Partners, Inc.

One tool that many governments could use on a regular basis—but few actually have—is a crisis communications plan. Also known as an issues management plan, the basic idea is to have a process and policies for responding to crises that ensure that you are as effective as possible when time is short and the stress level is through the roof.

These plans tend to be very generic, as the kind of issues you may have to deal with can vary widely from incident to incident. This is also different from an emergency communications plan, which sets rules for responding to incidents that impact public safety. A crisis is an incident that threatens the reputation of your organization, rather than people's welfare, although sometimes it can be both, as in the case of a hazardous materials spill.

Some examples from my past have included the arrest of an elected official, the discovery of employee embezzlement, a union vote of "no confidence" in an individual manager, or a lawsuit involving staff. In each case, the issue arose quickly, usually without warning, and resulted in immediate media and public scrutiny.

Having a plan that helps walk you through the process for each issue can mean the difference between successful resolution and major missteps that impact your organization's reputation. It can help you feel more confident in responding to the crisis as well.

The plan should include sections that walk you through the following elements of crisis response:

- Situational analysis
- Audience identification
- Communications response
- Message development
- Tools

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The first step in your plan should be a template for developing an understanding of the crisis. Find out the facts of what happened. Make sure you understand who the affected parties are. Typically you'll start with a description of what happened—the sequence of events—and then identify the people and organizations who were involved or who are affected by the crisis.

Next, find out what the organization's operational response is going to be to address the situation.

Then you'll want to identify the issues at stake and how the incident impacts the organization's reputation. Think in terms of the consequences of what has hap-

pened. These strategic considerations are very important, as they will guide you in developing your messages.

Lastly, you'll want to identify what you don't know and need to find out.

AUDIENCES

You'll want to determine which audiences you should be talking with to address the incident. Start with the victims, the other people involved or affected, the media, your employees, perhaps the entire community. It will depend on the incident, but be prepared to think through who your key audiences are.

This information will help you decide which tactics and tools to employ.

RESPONSE

One of the most important aspects of crisis communications is the initial response. Be prepared to respond as quickly as you can after determining what happened and be as honest and forthcoming as possible. Share what happened so that people know the full story, then describe what the organization is going to do to remedy the situation and what steps you're going to take to make sure it doesn't occur again. Take responsibility for the things within your organization's control.

Make sure you know who will be talking to the media and is responsible for developing the messages.

MESSAGES

Based on the incident and the operational response, determine what themes you want to get across. These are one or two generic ideas—like "our top priority is public safety"—that you will use whenever talking about the situation.

Next, develop two to five messages about the situation that help explain what happened, its impact, and your organizational response. Keep them simple and direct.

Your plan could include sample holding statements or outlines that will help guide you during the crisis. You can forget even the most basic things when everyone is hounding you for answers. Set yourself up with all the tools you might need.

Also, try to anticipate possible questions and have an answer ready, even if it's something like: "We haven't been able to identify that yet, but we'll let you know as soon as we do."

In evaluating your messages, make sure what you're saying is accurate, credible, truthful, and empathetic. Ask yourself if they reflect the values of your audience.

By planning this way, you'll be able to be more effective in your media relations and public outreach efforts.

TOOLS

In addition to the media, what tools does your organization have at its disposal? What trained staff, communications assets, or partnerships can be used in the response?

You may also want to design a worksheet to keep track of key decisions and actions taken in response to the incident, so you can later go back and analyze how the response unfolded.

During a crisis, people always feel more comfortable seeing a live human talking about what happened and giving firm and credible information about what is going to be done about it. Don't hide behind news releases or web posts. Be prepared to identify experts, leaders, or other credible sources to get your messages across.

CONCLUSION

Be ready for anything by having a crisis communications plan before your next crisis. Remember, no matter what the issue is, it's important to act quickly and with honesty, as attempts to cover up generally extend the news life of the story and worsen the credibility of your organization.

And, as always, after the dust has settled, go back and evaluate how you did. Look at the coverage, length of the crisis, and measure how you did. Then use those lessons to improve your plan.

ABOUT ICMA

ICMA, the International City/County Management Association, advances professional local government worldwide. The organization's mission is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional management to build better communities.

ICMA identifies leading practices to address the needs of local governments and professionals serving communities globally. We provide services, research, publications, data and information, peer and results-oriented assistance, and training and professional development to thousands of city, town, and county leaders and other individuals and organizations throughout the world. The management decisions made by ICMA's members affect millions of people living in thousands of communities, ranging in size from small towns to large metropolitan areas.