Crisis Preparation Tips



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As we prepare to turn to the final page of the 2011 calendar, the topic of “crisis management” may not be top of mind for most nonprofit leaders. Yet a common element of many crisis events—its appearance with little or no warning—offers a reminder that there is no true “season” for preparation. Effective nonprofit leaders must be vigilant and diligent from the beginning of the year to the end.

As your organization wraps up the planning process for a bright and mission-focused 2012, I invite you to reflect on your preparation to survive a crisis that may threaten your vital mission. The following questions may help you get started:

- **What have we learned** from the last crisis we faced? Have we truly learned from the experience, or simply buried the memories?
- **Who might we need to notify** if a crisis were to “hit”? Do we have easily retrievable lists of key stakeholder groups, including: paid and volunteer leaders, donors, participants, parents of participants, media outlets, vendors, etc.
- **What will we say?** It may be impossible to write a complete and polished press release—before the crisis unfolds—but there is no need to wait getting started on key themes, such as a clear statement of mission, statement expressing your commitment to safety, etc.
- **Who will be in charge?** Who will serve on your crisis response team? Although some adjustments may be necessary due to the nature of an actual crisis, the core members can and should be identified now.
- **Do we have a Plan B?** If a crisis makes it impossible to deliver service X or Y, do you have a backup plan? Can certain services or programs be cut back or suspended in the wake of a crisis impacting financial resources, personnel or facilities?

Answering the questions above won’t produce a fully formed crisis management plan. But doing so will ensure that you’re one step ahead of the nonprofit leaders who decide to simply hope for the best. The topics of Crisis Management and Crisis Communications are featured in the 2012 First Wednesdays Webinar series. Check out the line-up of programs for details on dates and topics.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about any risk management topic, feedback on this article and questions about the Center’s resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at www.https://nonprofitrisk.org/ and offers consulting assistance to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.