MEETING THIS MOMENT

Rapid Response & Reactive Crisis Communications

Island Foundation Cohort - May 2025
Presentation One

FULL COURT PRESS COMMUNICATIONS

ABOUT
FULL COURT PRESS COMMUNICATIONS

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- Strategic communications for social change
- Public relations, crisis communications, communications strategy development, social media
- Bay Area, California, and throughout the United States
- Foundations, non-profits, public sector, advocacy organizations
- Team of seven based in Oakland

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OUR PHILOSOPHY

Our communications philosophy rests on the reality that the current media landscape is ever-evolving.

People find their news in many different places – from the local paper, on the TV or radio, through blogs and social media, or from a friend or family member.

In this environment, the key to success is to identify a target audience, develop tactics to reach them, and surround them consistently with effective messaging.

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MEETING THIS MOMENT

- This is an unprecedented moment.
- This is hard.
- This is necessary.
- There’s no magic wand.
- Our hope today is to provide some tools, some questions and some new ways of thinking about this moment to chart a path forward.

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YOU CAN MEET THIS MOMENT

- You CAN use rapid response techniques
- You CAN collaborate with philanthropic organizations
- You CAN engage community stakeholders effectively
- You CAN utilize digital platforms for outreach
- You CAN empower your board, staff, and allies to be your communications team

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RAPID RESPONSE: REALITY

- **“Most organizations were unprepared for the scale of recent crises”**
- **Small Nonprofits are Uniquely Vulnerable**
  - Limited resources & Direct Community Impact
- **…But Uniquely Powerful Locally**
  - Deep Community Trust, Agility, Responsive & Networked
- Shared desire for additional resources and help to meet this moment – legal, PR, Crisis, HR, finance, funding

A TEMPERATURE CHECK

1. How do you feel about serving as an ambassador for your organization at this moment?
2. What is one crisis that you fear the most?

UNDERSTANDING
CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS & RAPID RESPONSE

DEFINING YOUR CRISIS

- Can you NAME the crisis?
- Shifting reality where you work in a new public environment (new opposition and headwinds)
- Budget cuts impacting local services
- Increased pressure on immigrant communities
- Reductions in crucial housing subsidies
- New opposition
- Direct threats to clients or staff
- Hostile media & social media impacting operations and services

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WHAT DO YOU NEED?

- Can you specify the challenge?
- Can you define success?
- Can you identify the resources you need to get there?
- Can you track the impact of the crisis on service delivery?

CRISIS LEADERSHIP

- Setting the tone and direction
- Ensuring clear and consistent messaging
- Serving as primary voice and advocate
- Building confidence internally and externally
- Navigating the personal and organizational
    - “They published my salary”
- You can be the calm in the storm

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RAPID RESPONSE IS A TEAM GAME

- You do NOT need to go it alone
- Outline roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority
- Establish decision-making authority and workflow
- Emphasize who will be the “voice” of the organization
- Use pre-approved messaging templates at every level of communication (Media, staff, public-facing, board)

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IT ALL STARTS WITH MESSAGING

- Clear, consistent and empathetic messaging in response to the crisis will guide EVERYTHING you do
- Focus on a few easily understandable statements (aim for 3) that tell a story to your target audience.
- Key Messages should be brief, emotional, relevant, unique, and repeatable
- Key messages help move people to take action.
- Use this messaging as the “anchor” in all public materials

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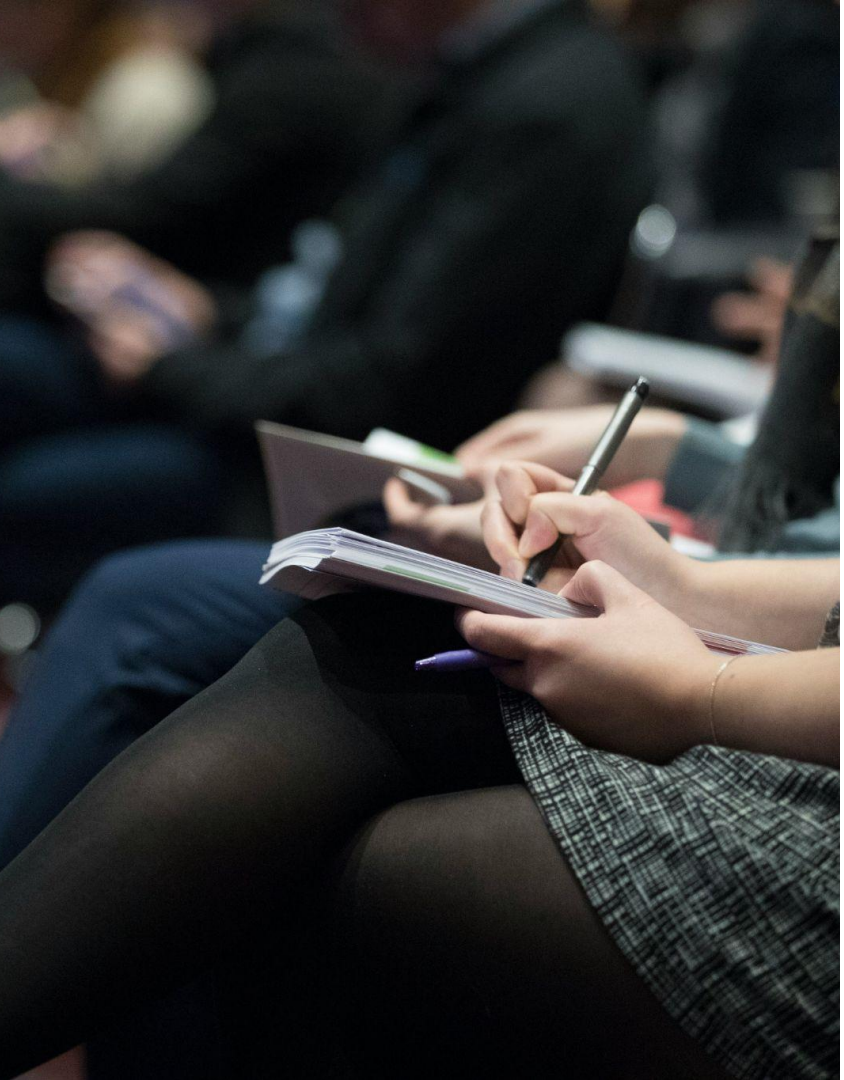
Your key messages may need to be different.

- What is your “only we”?
- What do your audiences need to hear from you in this moment?
- Silence is a message.
- You may make mistakes. It’s ok. Acknowledge them, learn from them, and move forward.

RAPID RESPONSE: ENGAGING STRATEGICALLY & SWIFTLY



LOCAL MEDIA

- “The local media know us. We can work with them. We can tell good stories.”
- Focus on the 5W’s and avoid hypotheticals
- Tell real stories, put a local face on the national or regional issue
- Work with your “friends”
- Understand that YOUR messaging rules
- Always respond professionally

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CHALLENGE: We get news and information in more and more dispersed ways.

Old Paradigm:

- Limited TV channels and the daily newspaper

Current Paradigm:

- Tons of TV channels
- Online news sources
- Local SE Massachusetts media
- Social media & social media apps
- Direct communication like text message
- The Phone Rules (!) for most audiences

SOLUTION: Go to where your audience is!

- How do they consume news and information?
- How can you reach your audience through personal communications?
- How can you reach them through mass communication?

If you don’t know the answers to these questions – ask, research and interview to find out.

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RAPID RESPONSE: SOCIAL MEDIA

- Understand the power of NOW
- Provide timely updates
- Correct misinformation
- Monitor public sentiment & address concerns
- Control your narrative in real-time using YOUR platforms

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RAPID RESPONSE: LOCAL ELECTEDS

- “They call US for information.”
- Hyper-responsive to local interests
- Amplify key messages - especially among different / new audiences
- Never want to be “out of the loop”
- Keep them on speed-dial, especially when there is a specific “ask”

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RAPID RESPONSE: COALITIONS

- “Networks are critical and establish a level of trust. We can put that to work for us in a crisis.”
- Coalition communications can rise above the noise
- Empower other to help you
- Find your communications friends willing to leverage time, energy, resources to help.

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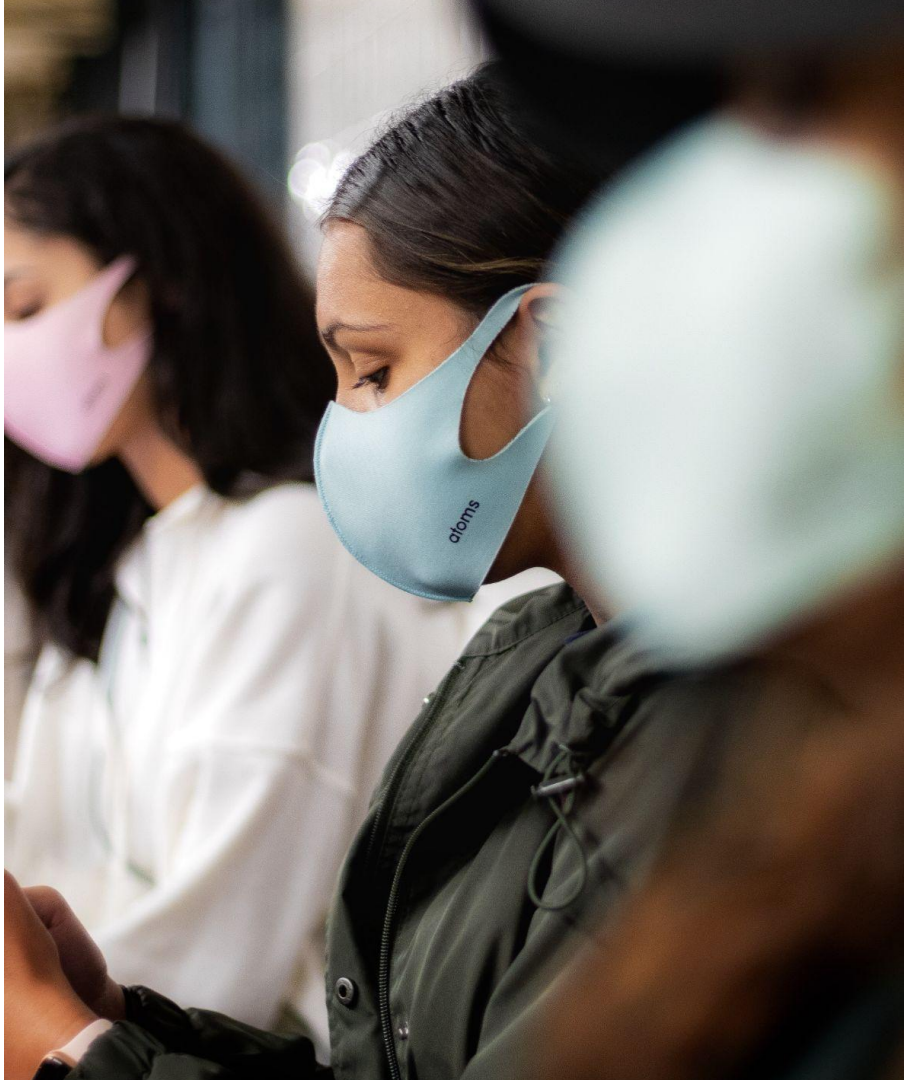
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM PREVIOUS CRISES?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19

- Are you the right messenger?
- Stick to verifiable facts.
- Use the right words for your audience.
- Emphasize your commitment to supporting the community
- Think about ways to make traditional tactics virtual (in a world where it is harder to see each other).
- Can you find your best messengers, train them, and send them out to engage key audiences?



LESSONS FROM COMMUNICATING ABOUT RACIAL JUSTICE

You may be thinking…

- “Is this our lane?”
- “My staff isn’t diverse, so maybe I shouldn’t say anything”
- “We try to be apolitical”

Keep in mind…

- You are not alone. Yes. It may be uncomfortable. Silence is a message.
- Foundations and nonprofits have the power to be present, speak out, and take action.
- Your voice is unique and informed.

FIVE WAYS PEOPLE ARE FIGHTING BACK…RIGHT NOW

- **Lawsuits & Legal Challenges:** The City of Boston sued the administration after nearly $48 million in previously awarded homelessness grants were threatened.
- **Advocacy & Lobbying:** Scientific organizations lobbied Congress to reject proposed research and public health budget cuts.
- **Public Opinion & Collective Statements:** Advocates in Boston organized rallies and public campaigns like the “100 Days of Harm”
- **State & Local Government Action:** California maintained its clean vehicle standards after federal rollbacks.
- **Diversifying Funding & Private Support:** Nonprofits seeking grants from private foundations to offset lost federal funds and build financial resilience.

TODAY'S TAKEAWAYS

- **Crises can happen at any time:** Funding cuts, policy changes, and negative press require immediate, organized response.
- **Leadership is crucial:** Leaders must be visible, calm, and clear in messaging.
- **Preparation enables speed:** Pre-approved messages and a designated crisis team save time and reduce chaos.
- **Local media and partners amplify your voice:** Engaging local journalists, officials, and allies can make your response more effective.
- **Personal stories matter:** Humanizing the impact of federal threats builds empathy and support.

HOMEWORK

1-Page Checklist for Rapid Response

- **Team:** Roles & Responsibilities
- **Key Targets:** Media, Donors & Staff
- **Allies:** Who can I count on?
- **Key Messages for Right Now**

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WHAT'S NEXT?

SECOND WEBINAR: PROACTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS - HOW WE PUSH BACK

- Building organizational resilience
- Understanding our risks
- Drafting a written plan & creating a library
- Building trust year-round
- Practice makes perfect

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THANK YOU!

ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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