

# Strategic Communications for Law Enforcement Executives

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# Letter from the Director of the COPS Office

Colleagues:

Communication is a foundational part of the job of a law enforcement professional. Public safety in our communities relies on a wide network of stakeholders, and law enforcement needs to be able to connect with all of them. Timely, transparent, and authentic communications can be one of our most important tools to build trust and legitimacy with the communities we serve. Especially in crisis situations, good communications can make the difference in how events effect an agency's community relations. Making detailed plans ahead of time can help ensure that, in a fast-moving situation, your statements align with your agency's values.

The Major Cities Chiefs Association has prepared this guide to creating a multi-layered strategic communications plan. It sets out the opportunities and pitfalls of different media and leads agency leadership and communications staff through crafting four kinds of communication plan: strategic plans for long-term shaping of your public image, tactical plans for communication during large events, crisis plans for responding to tense situations, and interview plans to help ensure that your agency stays on-message.

It is our hope that this guide will help agencies better navigate today's changing media landscape and to craft messaging that underscores their commitment to public safety and strengthens community ties.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Hugh T. Clements, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hugh T. Clements, Jr.

Director

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

# About this Guide

**S**trong communication is foundational to everything we do as law enforcement professionals, from writing incident reports and investigating major crimes to community engagement and media relations. It also plays an important role in developing the trust, legitimacy, and transparency that both we and our communities want and deserve. Good communication is effective at connecting law enforcement with the communities and key stakeholders they serve.

Most major city agencies employ a strategic communications advisor or a team of public information officers (PIOs) to help create and implement communication strategies and tactics. True strategic communication, however, is not simply about issuing news releases, conducting community meetings, or posting to social media. Rather, the goal of an integrated communication strategy is to help create an informed community of public safety advocates. Police cannot create and sustain safe communities without the help of myriad stakeholders. A strategic communications approach can help create what former Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey called a “blue thread” that weaves its way through a community, as opposed to a “thin blue line” that divides it.

The goal of an integrated communication strategy is to help create a community of public safety advocates.

A successful communication strategy takes into consideration an agency’s history while defining the truths of the present and the aspirations for the future. It engages internal and external partners to develop those key elements that define the mission of a law enforcement agency: professionalism, ethics, honesty, trustworthiness, caring, and constitutionality. It proactively makes these core values distinct, believable, and relevant, so that they can be embraced by various audiences. Most importantly, a communication strategy—whether short-term messaging or a long-term plan—reflects the good work the department does every day. There is no way a department can communicate its way out of a crisis or negative impression if employees are acting against the core values and brand of the organization.



The objective of this second-edition toolkit is to help law enforcement agency leaders and strategic communications advisors develop the necessary knowledge and skill to create strategic communications plans. This guide is a revision and expansion of the *Strategic Communications Practices Toolkit* published by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) and the Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) in 2012 and prepared by Darrel Stephens, Julia Hill, and Sheldon Greenberg.

It expands upon the tenets of best practice communications planning to provide law enforcement executives guidance and assistance in the creation of four distinct communication planning tools: (1) the strategic communications plan, (2) the tactical communications plan, (3) the crisis communications plan, and (4) the interview plan. Templates and samples are included at the end to help with implementation.

Special acknowledgement to MCCA Executive Director Laura Cooper for recognizing the need to prepare an updated guide and for spearheading efforts to move the project forward.

# I. Why Strategic Communications and Why Now?

One of the many skills required of law enforcement leaders today is the ability to communicate well. Law enforcement leaders must be able to inform and engage many audiences and stakeholders who may be overwhelmed by what social media, traditional media, advocacy groups, subject matter experts, civilian journalists, and elected officials (whether well or ill informed) are saying about law enforcement in general, your agency, or the crisis you may be managing. As well, they must be able to make their story heard above rumor, misinformation, and potential disinformation campaigns launched by malicious actors. So, they need a well-thought-out overall communications plan, messaging strategies, and crisis guides.

Many issues law enforcement professionals contend with today result in public debate, which can become highly charged and politicized. Thanks to social media, every critic has a voice. In this environment, it is important for an agency to develop trusted bonds before a crisis occurs with what one could call a four-legged stool: (1) employees, (2) the community, (3) elected officials, and (4) the media. Any one of those stakeholders can amplify, diminish, or outright destroy an agency's messaging. Ignoring or antagonizing any leg of that stool may cause a crisis within a crisis.

Strong communication will nurture strong relationships that will help keep a community and its officers safe.

**Figure 1. Transparency in law enforcement over the years****1829**

Sir Robert Peel establishes the London Metropolitan Police Force and authors nine policing principles, of which four focus on relationships required with the public to maintain public order.

"General Instructions" to members of the Metropolitan Police, 1829, as codified by Charles Reith, *A New Study of Police History* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1956).

**1931**

The Wickersham Commission Report outlines a professional model of policing that includes a focus on efficiency and strong public relations.

United States. *Report on the Enforcement of Prohibition Laws of the United States (Wickersham Commission Report)* National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, 1931.

**2012**

Academics Lee & McGovern write, "With image and perception being equally important to police success as arrest rates, police media departments play a vital part in fostering public consent, confidence, and trust . . ."

Murray Lee and Alyce McGovern, *Policing and Media: Public Relations Simulations and Communications* (London: Routledge, 2013).

**2015**

The President's Task Force Report on 21st Century Policing identifies building relationships as a core function to public safety.

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. 2015. *Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

**2016**

A report from the Police Executive Research Forum concludes communicating can produce results that help build trust.

*Advice from Police Chiefs and Community Leaders on Building Trust: "Ask for Help, Work Together, and Show Respect,"* Critical Issues in Policing, (Washington, DC: Police Forum, 2016) <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/policecommunitytrust.pdf>.

**2020**

A PERF survey conducted in November of 2020 identifies increasing public trust as the number one issue facing police leaders in 2021.

Police Executive Research Forum, survey results homepage, accessed March 5, 2023, <https://www.policeforum.org/criticalissuesdec34>.

**2022**

Police1 survey indicates communication, both internal and external, is key to improving morale.

"Digital Edition: What Cops Want in 2022," *Police 1*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.police1.com/police-products/body-cameras/articles/digital-edition-what-cops-want-in-2022-CkFK0jUZrpFOUjeR>.

**To communicate effectively and build the reputation every law enforcement agency strives to achieve, an organization must provide proactive, truthful, easily understandable, and timely messaging; admit error when it exists; and be open to public or organizational scrutiny.**

Some aspects of policing still maintain the paramilitary structure inherited from the field's beginnings, but communications should not. Stakeholders today want procedural justice: an understanding of why an agency has taken the action it has and an awareness of an agency's goals and objectives. As public servants, it's important for law enforcement agencies to ensure that their goals and objectives mesh with their communities' values and needs and that the agency itself focuses more on outcomes rather than simple outputs.

This focus means that agencies must view their actions holistically. If an agency stops 100 people searching for illegal firearms, the output measure might be the number of such firearms found or the number of arrests. However, these measures ignore the longer-term results of the 100 stops, which might include loss of community trust, an increase in drug possession arrests, and police attention and resources being withdrawn from other efforts. Outcome measures ask whether all these outcomes together advanced the ultimate goal of increased public safety.

In every city, county, or jurisdictional area, there are numerous entities that require distinct and unique communication. Each group has different perspectives and sees law enforcement through its own prism of experience, understanding, and knowledge. **A strong communication strategy will take into consideration the point of view or perspective of all stakeholders.** For example, a use of force incident by an officer may be lawful, but if from your community's perspective your agency has been unfair or brutal in the past, a statement that the use of force was lawful will not end the crisis.

In fact, it may exacerbate it. As always, actions speak louder than words, so the actions of employees across an agency are truly the foundation from which a communications plan, and brand image, is built.

## Trust and credibility

Legitimacy and trust are the cornerstones of strong public safety—but to build a firm foundation on those stones requires mortar. That mortar is communications. Trust starts with the community's awareness and appreciation of public safety issues and concerns and the acknowledgment that they deserve consideration. Only with this shared understanding in place can a community take actions to advance and advocate for public safety.

**“Police organizations need not only be granted legitimacy by the citizens they police . . . but also [by] the media with which they engage, and by members of the agency itself.”**

— Murray Lee and Alyce McGovern  
*Policing and Media: Public Relations  
Simulations and Communications*  
(London: Routledge, 2013)

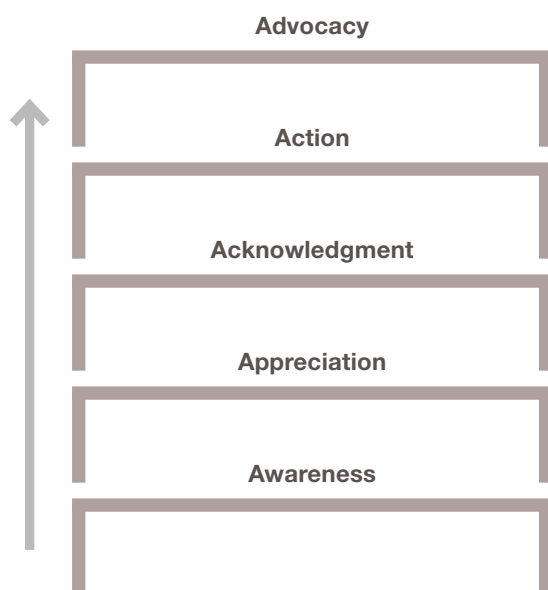
**To reach this shared vision, your community needs to know you well enough to trust you and advocate for you—and you need to understand them.**

Understanding a community is knowing its values, morals, and expectations; who people are; what brings them together—or tears them apart. Our diverse communities provide unique opportunities for us all to learn how others see us. Dr. Carl Botan, a communications professor from George Mason University, believes “the material, social, and symbolic circumstances of a

social group shape what members of that group experience, as well as how they think, act, and feel.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, people’s life experience affects their perceptions of the world—and of the police. Communication strategy begins with understanding the experience of your audience.

Communication within the agency is just as critical as communication between the agency and its community. Employees today want to be valued, to have a voice, and to have some control over their working environment. To build internal trust with employees, the autocratic, paramilitary style many agencies have used in the past is less effective than two-way, inclusive communication.

**Figure 2. Stages of community engagement**



Reproduced with Permission: T. Flynn and D. Scholz, *The Science of Trust and Empathy and Relationship Building*. Presentation to Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Strategic Communications Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, October 22, 2019.

## The communications landscape

The media’s hunger for scandal and divisiveness is well established. Some media outlets seek to sell their products with scandal, conflict, corruption, and titillation. Anger, fear, divisiveness, and humor earn more hits and go viral more readily than pleasant stories.

But while the media industry’s tendency to sensationalize is not new, the speed and reach of today’s media are. In the past, police leaders were primarily concerned with their own communities’ feelings about their agencies. Today, social media can spread and amplify a story so that readers from far outside the community can stir up a firestorm in the blink of an eye.

This change makes it harder for people in your community to know whom to trust. **With so much conflicting information available through multiple channels, a big part of your communications plan must be working toward becoming and remaining the trusted source for information about your agency and crime and public safety in your community.** This is only possible when an agency proactively and willingly communicates all information—good, bad, and ugly—before any other media organ or personality.

## Traditional news media

Traditional news media—television, radio, newspapers, and magazines—have historically had a close, if fraught, relationship with law enforcement. Commercial media outlets are profit driven, and police reporting often contains elements that sell well: crime, corruption, crisis, conflict, or “closers” (i.e., human-interest stories). Crime, along with weather, traffic, and local sports, remains one of the principal elements attracting consumers to local news; people are interested in anything that may affect their lives or the lives of their loved ones.

1. Colin May, “Strategic Communications: A Multidimensional, Multicultural Perspective,” *Police Chief* (April 2022), <https://www.policchiefmagazine.org/strategic-communications/>.



Today, however, audiences have other sources for this information, and competition with social media and the internet has led to the closing of many media outlets and the shrinking of newsrooms across the country. But although they are no longer the only media with which law enforcement must communicate, traditional media relations remain a fundamental part of an agency's communication plan.

### Traditional media relations remains a fundamental part of an agency's communications plan.

Reporters sometimes believe that law enforcement is not fully transparent. Just as cops have been told for decades not to talk to reporters, reporters have been told that cops won't provide the information they need. When two groups have this sort of historic distrust, strong efforts from both sides are needed to ensure clear communication—the communication necessary to give our communities the information they need and want. The challenge is finding the balance between a community's right to know and law enforcement's responsibility to ensure fair prosecution of a case and protect victims' rights.

It's important to note, however, that according to Pew Research Center figures from February 2022, the public has a greater level of trust in police than in the news media.<sup>2</sup> In a 2021 survey, 69 percent of respondents had trust in police, while just 46 percent trusted journalists. Both numbers have been trending downward since 2018.

### Hollywood “reality”

We would like Hollywood depictions of police work to be credible and true to life—or, failing that, we might hope that watching unrealistic depictions would not affect people's perceptions of real law enforcement. But academia and culture writers agree: Fictional police dramas do affect the way the community sees police as well as how police see themselves.<sup>3</sup>

This media view tends to sensationalize policing—for understandable reasons: An officer waiting outside a courtroom for hours would not be compelling television. Fictional depictions of policing eschew routine police work in favor of shootouts, high-speed chases, and futuristic technology. Clean-cut and heroic images of police exist alongside portrayals of cops as antiheroes and antagonists.

“Cops perceive—and more important, they perceive others perceive—that the narrative [set by Hollywood] must be carried by them.”

—David Perlmutter

*Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perception of Law Enforcement* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000)

Researcher David Perlmutter, in his 2002 book *Policing the Media*, wrote, “Cops perceive—and more important, they perceive others perceive—that the narrative [set by Hollywood] must be carried by them.”<sup>4</sup> In other

2. Brian Kennedy, Alec Tyson, and Cary Funk, “American's Trust in Scientists, Other Groups Declines,” Pew Research, February 15, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2022/02/15/americans-trust-in-scientists-other-groups-declines/>.

3. D. Rarick and D. Boyd, “Adolescent Perceptions of Police: Actual and as Depicted in TV Drama,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1973), 438–446, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769907305000304>; A. Sargent, “Police in Television,” in *The Social History of Crime and Punishment in America*, edited by W. R. Miller (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 1767–1774; Peter Hartlaub, “Back in the Day, Police Were Portrayed as Good Guys. Not Anymore,” *SFGate*, January 11, 2007, <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/Back-in-the-day-police-were-portrayed-as-good-2624585.php>.

4. David D. Perlmutter, *Policing the Media: Street Cops and Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002).

words, officers believe that they should behave in the way that the public expect them to—and those expectations are based on entertainment media. Officers may feel a tension between these expectations and what their leaders need them to be.

Reality television further blurs the lines between real life and fiction. Some departments have chosen to participate in law enforcement-themed reality shows, but the primary objective of these programs is to make money for a media corporation—not to showcase the work an agency does for the community. Great thought and care should go into the decision to participate in reality programming. Is there public value in serving up footage of a community member's worst day for entertainment?

## New media

New media is a collective term for the various mass communication methods that use digital technologies such as the internet.<sup>5</sup> The advent of digital and social media has made massive amounts of information available to anyone, anywhere—and has allowed community journalists, photographers, videographers, bloggers, and web sleuths to achieve a reach comparable to, and in some cases greater than, traditional news media. With this new ability to share information has come new challenges in judging the credibility of information and its sources. While trained journalists are expected to adhere to a code of ethics—to seek truth, act independently, and be accountable for their statements—the average person with a smartphone passing on a story has no such training. Social media makes it easier than ever for people to share experiences in their own words and pictures—and to spread potential misinformation.

It also offers agencies a way to manage or correct a perception, brand, or false narrative of an incident. **The draw of social media—and the key to using it**

## “Police use of social media can help achieve community policing goals.”

— C.B. Williams and J. Fedorowicz

“Does Social Media Promote the Public's Perception of the Police: Survey Results on Trust Cultivation,” presented at the 52nd Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences, January 8, 2019, Mānoa, Hawai'i.

**effectively—is authenticity.** Word of mouth is the most trusted form of communication: People are inclined to listen to their friends, family, and colleagues more readily than to politicians or TV reporters. Social media can blur the line between authority and peer, fostering a sense of connection.

It can be a tool for building relationships between law enforcement and communities, establishing authenticity, credibility, and trust. While it should never be the only channel through which an agency disseminates news or engages with its community, police should be using social media to communicate with stakeholders through local news and announcements, showing the humanity behind the badge.

**Building an authentic presence on social media can be an agency's first step in cultivating more trusting and open relationships with its community.** This doesn't mean expecting one post to go viral and get the world on the agency's side, but rather a slow process that takes planning, time, effort, and care. Being consistent in one's messaging on social media is the best way to build credibility, but correcting negative perceptions can take months or even years.

Social media must also be interactive—an effective account should respond directly to comments, engage with others' posts, and acknowledge followers. Greater

5. “new media, n.” OED Online. December 2022. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/255819?redirectedFrom=new+media> (accessed February 21, 2023).

engagement fosters a sense of familiarity among followers, which can ultimately develop into meaningful and trusting connections.

It's important to remember that social media is at least a two-way communication platform. Simply posting information is not using the platform to full advantage; in fact, algorithms on some platforms will mute feeds that do not interact with followers. It is better to view social media as an ongoing dialogue with the community—an electronic town hall meeting that requires attention, strategy, and consistent messaging.

Different social media platforms have different personalities. Agencies should carefully consider which platforms to use to highlight accomplishments, address and acknowledge incidents and issues, share stories of officers and the communities they serve, or insert a bit of humanity into their brand image.

## Misinformation, digital consumption, and brand positioning

*Misinformation* is false information, or genuine facts in misleading context, that is spread in good faith. *Disinformation* is false or decontextualized information disseminated in a deliberate attempt at deception. Social media allows both misinformation and disinformation to spread widely and quickly.

“We are drawn to leaders and organizations that are good at communicating what they believe. Their ability to make us feel like we belong, to make us feel special, safe, and not alone is part of what gives them the ability to inspire us.”

— Simon Sinek

*Start With Why*

(London: Penguin Books, 2011).

This presents unique and urgent challenges for leaders in law enforcement. **With so many types of information sources available today, it has become increasingly difficult to be a trusted voice amid the noise.** Disinformation and misinformation can have real impact on officer safety,<sup>6</sup> funding, morale, and well-being. Disinformation and misinformation can lead to false allegations, which an agency is duty-bound to investigate, or even to the doxing of officers or threats against them and their families. Video clips can be edited or taken out of context and used to further narratives on social media without the fact checking that traditional media might have employed. When this is combined with a nonstop news cycle, law enforcement agencies are placed in the unenviable position of needing to counter these narratives every second of every day.

6. Diana Rieger, Lena Frischlich, and Gary Bente, *Propaganda 2.0: Psychological Effects of Right-Wing and Islamic Internet Videos*, Terrorism/Extremism Research Unit of the German Federal Criminal Police Office (Cologne, Germany: Luchterhand Verlag, 2013), [https://eucpn.org/sites/default/files/document/files/39.\\_propaganda\\_2.0\\_-\\_psychological\\_effects\\_of\\_right-wing\\_and\\_islamic\\_extremist\\_internet\\_videos.pdf](https://eucpn.org/sites/default/files/document/files/39._propaganda_2.0_-_psychological_effects_of_right-wing_and_islamic_extremist_internet_videos.pdf); Galen Lamphere-Englund and Jessica White, “The Buffalo Attack and the Gamification of Violence,” Royal United Services Institute, May 16, 2022, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/buffalo-attack-and-gamification-violence>; Andrew Meleagrou-Hitchens, Blyth Crawford, and Valentin Wutke, *Rise of the Reactionaries: Comparing the Ideologies of Salafi-Jihadism and White Supremacist Extremism* (Washington, DC: The George Washington University Program on Extremism, 2021), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Rise%20of%20the%20Reactionaries.pdf>.

Diminished traditional media combines with public fear and anxiety to create a perfect environment for both misinformation and disinformation to thrive; with more opportunities for false information to enter the public discourse, law enforcement must be prepared to address both real and perceived injustices.

To counter disinformation and futureproof against inevitable new communication media and trends, law enforcement leaders should adopt consistent communication and strong branding that are in line with the organizational values demonstrated through the agency's actions.

Our community members have high expectations for police transparency, accountability, and quality of service. While most people in our communities will not come into regular contact with police, when they

do, they expect services to be on par with those that would be provided by the brand image the agency has conveyed.

The communication strategist of today sees that it is not enough to prepare news releases, manage media briefings, and issue statements; they must also incorporate specialist skills from experts in communication strategy, politics, societal challenges, psychology, and the complicated landscape of law enforcement.

The goal of strategic communications planning is to move an agency from a reactive mode to a proactive model of communication. This guide provides foundational information, strategies, and templates to build a strategic communications plan, messaging, and crisis guides that help leaders create a community of advocates and partners to advance the goal of a safe community.

## II. Considerations

Every time an agency communicates, numerous stakeholders are listening and applying distinct perspectives and perceptions to the message—hence the importance of strong leadership, knowledgeable communications strategists, and an understanding of a department’s many target audiences. Colin May, a professor of forensics at Stevenson University, extols the importance of what he calls “the three M’s:” (1) medium, (2) message, and (3) messenger.<sup>7</sup> A qualified and experienced communication strategist builds a holistic communication strategy around these pillars.

In this section, we examine the traits and qualifications of a best-practice communication team and the key audiences to keep in mind in all communications.

### Hiring a strategic communications advisor

**The chief executive sets the tone for organizational communication.** Agency leadership must not only believe in the value of communication in the abstract, but also actively and visibly support and advocate for the agency’s strategic communications advisor. This means ensuring this person has the suitable title and position within an organization and that their contributions are given appropriate weight in meetings, planning sessions, and executive decision-making.

It also means a budget line for communications efforts. That budget must include not just staffing but also resources to support graphic design, video production, and social media management. In a survey of major city police chiefs conducted for this project in April 2022, slightly more than half of respondents did not have a specific line item for their strategic communication efforts.

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7. C. May, “Strategic Communications: A Multidimensional, Multicultural Perspective,” *Police Chief* (April 2022).



Lastly, support means choosing a strategic communications advisor who is credible, well-educated, experienced, and passionate in their role and empowering them with the position, access, and information to provide accurate and actionable counsel. The strategic communications advisor should be a member of the inner circle, reporting directly to agency leadership. This role is one of the most important staffing selections leadership will make. As noted in the recent survey of major cities' chiefs, finding qualified individuals for the position is no easy task.

Law enforcement culture sometimes insists that a sworn officer can be an expert at anything, just because they wear a badge. Not too long ago, sworn members headed our IT departments, human resources, and finance. Today, we have learned that certain skill sets are education- and experience-based—better served by experts than by sworn members thrust into the position to learn along the way. The same is true for your communication strategist—or, in most agencies, the director of public information, public affairs, or communications.

As in corporations throughout the United States, law enforcement culture takes notice of physical proximity to power. Who attends the executive command briefings? Where do people sit? Who sits in the leader's office at the end of the day, versus in the formal command staff meetings? The positioning—both metaphorical and literal—of your communications strategist will reflect their perceived influence and importance to the organization.

### The role of the strategic communications advisor

The strategic communications lead of any agency must be publicly oriented, politically astute, a trend-watcher, and a media consumer; they must understand new media, have strong internal and external networks,

“Before making a decision, a CEO shouldn't be simply looking for both sides, they should be looking for a Rubik's cube of input.”

—Former NYPD Commissioner and LAPD Chief William J. Bratton

Personal communication with the authors, June 2020

and provide relevant strategic communications advice succinctly and honestly in a way that makes sense to leadership, whether that means providing at-a-glance data visualizations or the raw data itself. The communications advisor can also provide insights as to how decisions such as policy changes, promotions, and recruitment campaigns will be perceived by important stakeholders.

They must also be able to speak truth to power—to tell agency leaders, in the privacy of an office, that a decision they made is misguided, or an action they are about to undertake will have unwanted or negative consequences. For this reason, your communications advisor should report directly to the chief executive.

It is also important that they be at hand to act quickly in a fast-moving situation. With the speed of information dissemination today, communications should not have to slowly proceed through the chain of command for approval.

And finally, while most direct reports have the chief executive's best interest at heart, blunt messages are often softened by intermediaries for various reasons. **Communication counsel is not an area where ambiguity is helpful. The communications advisor should communicate clearly and directly.**

## Characteristics of a strategic communications advisor

A strategic communications advisor works closely with leadership to help build strong ties across the community. Their job is to provide counsel and actions that

- contribute to reputation management;
- identify opportunities and risks to the agency's reputation and brand;
- help identify and target stakeholders and audiences;
- cultivate and measure relationships with various audiences;
- influence management's behavior;
- identify reputational measures and align them with the agency's goals.

A strong advisor works to increase trust within a community, helps an agency demonstrate transparency, enhances all relevant stakeholders' (including employees') satisfaction, and provides avenues for community involvement.

Many police leaders lean toward choosing former members of the media to lead their communications teams. At first glance, that appears to be a smart move. Former reporters know how to convey information and understand the local media market. Broadcast journalists (unlike many police officials) are comfortable on camera and often have knowledge of the inner workings of the city and department.

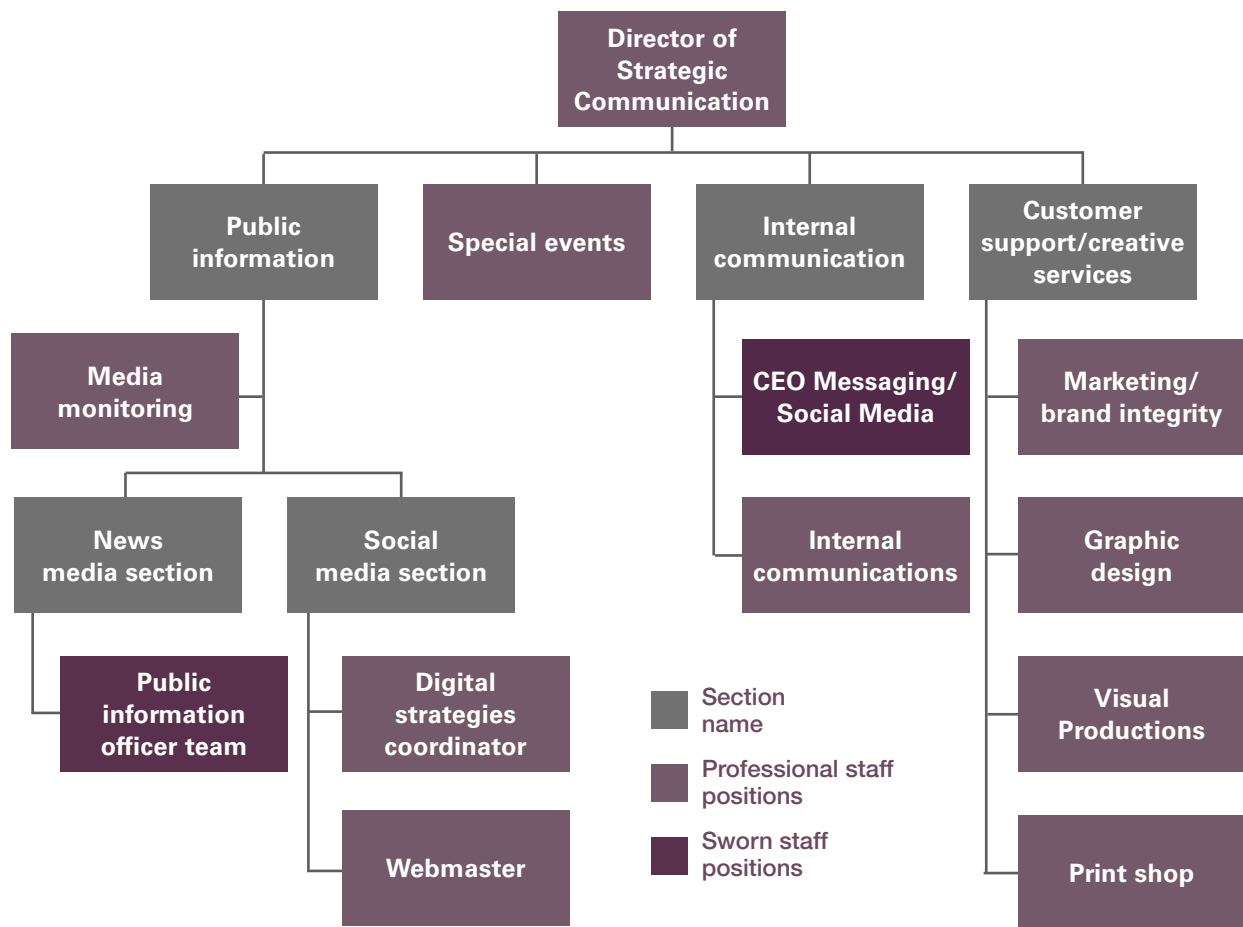
However, expanding the search to include corporate communications professionals is a wise path. Consider applicants with degrees in public relations (PR), communications, or marketing. Look for at least five years' experience—or 10 for a major city—in brand manage-

ment, strategic communications planning, and interacting with senior leadership. PR people are used to examining markets, identifying stakeholders and audiences, and deciding how best to achieve true two-way communication, engagement, and advocacy. They have the skills and knowledge to create and maintain a brand strategy along with building and sustaining advocacy for your agency. Incorporate recruiting through the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) into your search.

Your strategic communications advisor should have clear key performance indicators (KPI) in mind when they create your communications plan. These KPIs must be primarily oriented to outcome, not output: These outcomes should focus on improving and sustaining community trust and transparency, meeting your community's expectations, and providing not merely a voice for your community but also a true way to influence how your agency serves. Outcomes can be measured through clearance rates, the perception of safety among people in your jurisdiction, how the media reflects your reputation, the depth of community engagement and advocacy, and your bottom-line budgets and resourcing. These are meaningful KPIs not only to you but also to the entire community.

## The strategic communications/public information officer team

Strategic communication has come a long way from its beginnings with the public information officer (PIO), whose primary job was to manage an agency's media relations. Some larger agencies had teams of PIOs with a lead sergeant or lieutenant to manage media and internal requests.

**Figure 3.** Sample Strategic Communications Office hierarchy

In today's world, the PIO's responsibilities have expanded exponentially, and communications functions have become quite specialized. Full-time equivalent (FTE) positions on agencies' strategic communications teams now may include social media managers, audiovisual experts, and internal communications coordinators.

Agency heads will want to consider which of these positions need to be filled, taking into account the size of the department and what functions fall within the unit's purview. Take care in not making the communications unit the dumping ground for non-communications job titles that don't fit elsewhere, such as mailroom attendants or car stripping personnel.

A potential staffing chart for a well-staffed public information office may look something like figure 3.

The larger the department, the more FTEs required to adequately manage their areas of responsibility. Some departments may also want to include an external agencies communications liaison to share departmental messaging with elected officials and other partners; a communications-specific support staff and legal advisor; or a coordinator for precinct-, zone-, or division-level social media.

Even smaller agencies with just one full-time PIO should consider training backups and watch commanders or supervisors to provide information coverage 24/7. There is no downtime for the flow of information. One person cannot be expected to manage both traditional and social media as well as internal communications 365 days a year; it's unsustainable.

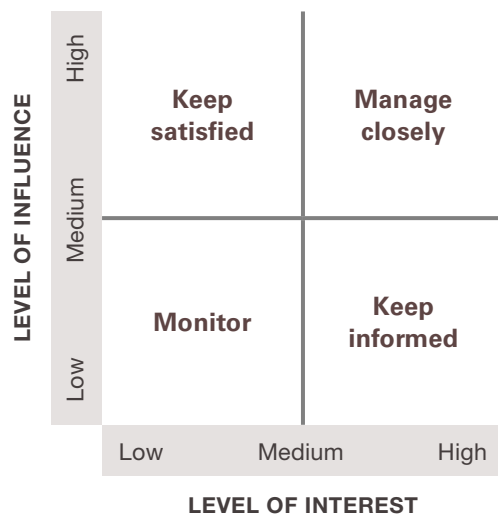
Think carefully about how the communications unit will be staffed and by whom. A mix of professional staff and sworn/certified members is a best practice. Sworn staff provide the police point of view, while a professional staff member with a communications background can translate that point of view (and jargon) into words and strategies your community can understand and embrace. In the recent survey of major cities' chiefs, most departments had a combination of sworn and professional (civilian) staff. Bringing on additional professional staff is often not easy for a police agency. The days may be gone when sworn officers could simply refuse to report to a civilian manager, but cultural divisions remain. Chiefs must convey to the department the advantages of the unique skill sets the professional staff bring to bear, but the head of communications

should also be a strong manager and leader in their own right—a trained communicator, not simply someone who has been thrust into the position because they are good with people.

The most important takeaway is this: To be serious about communications, an agency must not only dedicate the budget to staff the team fully but also commit to ensuring the right people are in those positions.

## Community stakeholders and audiences

Once the commitment is made to staffing and resources, leadership can turn their attention to the key stakeholders and audiences they should always keep in mind when communicating. It is vital to take time to understand your audiences by closely examining the community you serve—not only its demographics but also the influencers in your community and the issues and concerns your constituents are passionate about. You may think you know your key audiences, but is this belief based on assumptions or true research? Solid research into your audiences will help you manage your narrative and ensure that you do not waste resources on well-meaning yet ill-informed campaigns. Understanding whom you are communicating with will help you know how to communicate.



**Figure 4.** Stakeholder map template

Stakeholder maps are typically divided into four quadrants, with the x-axis measuring the stakeholder's level of influence or power and the y-axis measuring their level of interest in the initiative.

Once the stakeholder map is created, an agency can then prioritize each group and plan how best to communicate with them.

One way to gain this understanding is by stakeholder mapping. This involves identifying key stakeholders such as influential politicians, media personalities, online influencers, civic organizations, and informal opinion leaders and prioritizing obtaining their buy-in for any new communications effort.

Stakeholder maps, as seen in figure 4 on page 15, are typically divided into four quadrants, with the x-axis measuring the stakeholder's level of influence or power and the y-axis measuring their level of interest in the initiative.

Once the stakeholder map is created, an agency can then prioritize each group and plan how best to communicate with them. Those who have a high level of influence but are not too interested in a project should be kept satisfied, which usually means providing them with regular updates. Stakeholders with both high influence and high interest in a topic must be managed carefully, meaning involving them closely with the project and taking any feedback to heart. Most members of your community will fall into the lower two quadrants. Those who have interest but less influence need to be given truthful information, but these updates do not need to be as detailed or regular as for the two upper groups. Lastly, those who have little influence or interest in the topic at hand should be monitored but generally require only top-level communication.

Next, it's helpful to know where your key audiences go for information. Is it freely available Internet information? Local or national news media? Twitter? Friends and relatives? Community surveys can help identify these sources, as can simply asking the people employees interact with on a regular basis, such as community leaders, advisory groups, and elected officials.

Stakeholder mapping can help you determine who in your community is a trusted source for news, who will amplify your messaging, and who may speak out against it.

**Your goal is to be the most trusted source of information about your agency and public safety in your jurisdiction—the place the community, elected officials, and the media get their information.** Keep in mind that this means reporting on everything your agency does: No one will trust you if you only run with stories about your successes or simply use your digital platforms as a crime blotter. Being honest and forthright, even in the toughest of circumstances, is true path to building trust.

There are four broad key audiences with whom a chief executive must continually build trust and foster relationships: (1) employees, (2) elected officials and local governance, (3) community members, and (4) the news media. Each of these groups is as important as the others; neglecting any one can result in the downfall of a chief and a stain on an agency's reputation. The rest of this section examines each audience in depth.

## Employees

Today, while many agencies are battling to recruit and retain employees, internal communication—which is a significant contributor to morale—is wanting.

A recent Police1 survey found more than 66 percent of police employees found their agency's internal communications lacking.<sup>8</sup> In the analysis, Terry Cherry and Anthony Gibson, both from the City of Charleston (South Carolina) Police Department, noted “poor communication and leadership from the

8. T. Cherry and A. Gibson, “What Cops Want in 2022,” *Police1*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.police1.com/police-products/body-cameras/articles/digital-edition-what-cops-want-in-2022-CkFK0jUZrpFOUjeR/>.



“The frontline workforce is not sprinkled with a handful of cynics. It’s cynical through and through. . . . [F]rontline supervisors—not managers—are the opinion leaders in your organization.”

— T. J. Larkin and Sandar Larkin  
 “Reaching and Changing Frontline Employees,” *Harvard Business Review*, May-June, 1996)

command level” affected the morale of a department. This perceived or actual lack of communication is likely due in part to a lack of direct interaction between executive leadership and the front line, but with the tools available to a chief executive today, better lines of communication can be cultivated.

Police audiences, like those in any workplace, can be skeptical of management. This means that **internal communication must be well-thought out, strategic, and developed with the knowledge that some employees will attribute the worst possible motives to leadership communication.** Policy decisions that have not been well vetted through a wide cross-section of an organization have a chance of significant backlash. In addition, the paramilitary police practices of the past have begun to give way to more collaborative ideals: Employees want a say in how they do their jobs and want to know the reasons for decisions.

Morale concerns are not the only consequences of poor internal communications. Employees have numerous methods of showing their dissatisfaction with

decisions they see as failing to support them or their actions, such as leaking information to the media or elected officials, fabricating social media personalities to express concerns, having family and friends take up a cause, or speaking out on their own without department approval.

**Ensure efforts are made to communicate internally before releasing information to your community or the media, especially in times of organizational change, crisis, or intense scrutiny.** Many agencies do not disseminate news releases internally. Leaving this informational void means employees will fill that space with possibly incorrect or damaging information. Providing them the same information given to the public ensures they have the full story—not the abbreviated, and sometimes decontextualized, version they might eventually encounter through word of mouth or the media.

In return for clear and timely communication, employees will feel respected; they will be less apt to initiate rumors and more inclined to dispel them. After the May 2019 mass shooting at a Virginia Beach municipal building that resulted in the death of 12 people, then-Chief Jim Cervera not only made a point of communicating quickly and often to the community but also took the time to convey his thanks to the people in his department. In a video to employees, he extolled the “virtues of being a cop.” His sentiments were exactly what officers needed to hear at a time when news media and others were dissecting the actions of the department. By expressing his heartfelt feelings, he not only maintained the support of his employees but also drew praise from others for standing by his officers when they most needed to hear from leadership.<sup>9</sup>

9. “Police Officers Healing after Virginia Beach Mass Shooting,” WAVY TV 10, June 13, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KroN1jg5dVY>.

### Internal Communications from the Chief Executive

When the Seattle (Washington) Police Department was rocked by weeks of protests in the spring and summer of 2020, Chief Carmen Best appeared in a video shared with all employees to convey her support and recognition of their efforts.

*“SPD family—I say that because that is what you are. You are my family. And family is honest with each other and family has tough times, but in the end, we always remain family. We are all going through one of the toughest times ever in the history of the Seattle Police Department. I know how incredibly difficult these past two weeks have been for you and your families. To say thank you will never be enough, but thank you. This department cares about you; I care about you. And although it may not seem true at this moment, your community cares about you. . . . [I]n closing I mostly just wanted to share how I feel. I am very thankful and very grateful for each and every one of you every single day. you are doing such incredible work and I know you feel underappreciated. However, I do believe that most people in Seattle support the police department and its officers. . . . [T]hey and I will continue to have your backs, to support you and appreciate all you are doing in the name of public safety.”*

Source: “Chief Best Address to Officers,” Seattle Police Department, June 11, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iH0BwJdw28I>.

Employees need to hear from executive leadership on a regular basis and in different ways. Senior leaders may want face-to-face meetings with the chief executive; mid-level employees may prefer emails and memoranda; front-line workers may simply want a text, infographic, or verbal direction from their sergeant or direct supervisor. It’s important for leadership to think about not only the message of employee communications but also the medium and who will deliver the message most effectively. Again, a strategic communications plan will outline these efforts in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

As a final note, it’s important to understand that employees are always part of the audience, even if the message is not directly meant for them. Missives to elected officials, television interviews, and community meetings will all be heard by employees, so consistent messaging is important. The opposite is also true: Never forget that any message conveyed to employees will in all likelihood find its way to the public sphere. Consistency across all communications is critical.

### Elected officials and local governance

Whether your local government functions in a strong-mayor or council-manager format, policing can be political. The clearer agency leadership can keep their lines of dialogue with elected officials, the better. A communications plan will put in place tactics to keep elected officials informed—local council members, state authorities, or federal representatives lobbying for public safety efforts. While some departments may have government affairs liaison positions, this work often falls to the chief or sheriff and their communications strategist.

Agency leadership’s relationship with elected officials is often governed by agency policies or civic ordinances. In addition to understanding any such legal and policy

“When trying to redirect an organization that has drifted from its purpose, leadership communication . . . should be frequent, interactive, and personified by compelling stories of progress.”

— Jack Modzelewski

*Talk is Chief: Communication and Credibility in a High-Stakes World* (New York: Rosetta, 2019)

guidelines, a chief executive must have a clear understanding of the methods, modes, and media they use to communicate with officials; their personalities; and the political environment within which they operate.

Some officials will want direct daily conversations, while others will take a more hands-off approach. Many chiefs must now also report to civilian boards on issues ranging from use of force incidents to policy changes.

**Make every effort to keep officials informed ahead of their constituents and respond to requests from elected officials efficiently.** This may be as easy as a regular email sent biweekly to local officials with information about the agency or quarterly one-on-one meetings to address their specific concerns.

The news media *will* approach elected officials and civilian boards for insights and opinions on decisions made by your agency. It’s much better that those boards and officials be informed and able to speak intelligently about your agency than that they be left to fill in blanks with suppositions and inaccurate perceptions.

And remember, elected officials are swayed by public opinion—and rightly so, as they represent the people. Voices that are amplified—whether organically or artificially—make it appear to elected officials that their communities demand action on certain issues.

It is up to the chief or sheriff or their communications advisor to establish communication methods for both external and internal audiences. While it would be easier to choose a single medium for all external communication, we must tailor our media (and messengers) to the receiving audiences. Persuasive communicators know not only their audiences but also how those audiences want to be communicated with.

## Community stakeholders and audiences

Law enforcement’s stakeholders can be segmented in many ways. Community demographics using age, gender, race, education, and socioeconomics are only one way of segmenting stakeholders, and in many cases this segmentation is not particularly useful. Stakeholder mapping mentioned in the previous section is helpful, but there are other ways to look at important audiences as well.

“[T]he police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.”

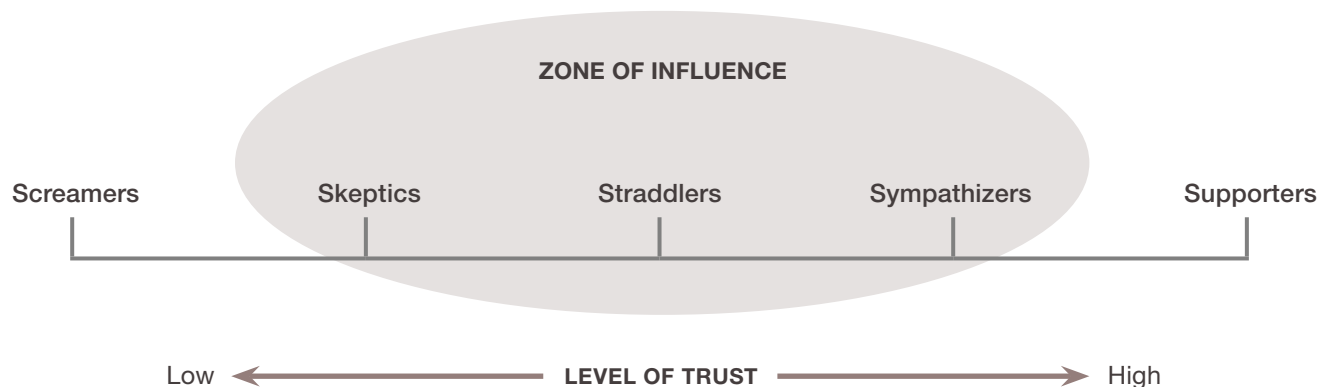
— “General Instructions” to members of the Metropolitan Police, 1829, as codified by Charles Reith  
*A New Study of Police History*  
(London: Oliver and Boyd, 1956)

University of Maryland professor James Grunig proposed that stakeholders could be segmented by their level of engagement with an issue.<sup>10</sup> Some people are interested and engaged in all aspects of public safety (all-issues publics); others are not engaged at all (apathetic publics). Still other groups are particularly passionate about a single issue (single-issue publics), while others care deeply about the “issue of the day” (hot-topic publics). This form of segmentation can be particularly helpful when further divided into segments we are familiar with, such as community influencers, neighborhood leaders, public interest/advocacy groups, or faith-based organizations. Each of these groups represents a segment of our communities, and some have louder voices than others, depending on the issue.

Another way to segment stakeholders is by their level of trust.<sup>11</sup> Figure 5 shows a spectrum of five trust categories: from least trusting to most, screamers, skeptics, straddlers, sympathizers, and supporters. While agencies enjoy catering to their supporters through events and projects such as Coffee with a Cop, concerted communications efforts should be focused on the “Zone of Influence”—skeptics, straddlers, and sympathizers of public safety issues.

While the “screamers” group—who have the lowest level of trust in your agency—may be the loudest, your ability to influence their perception is low. However, conversion theory<sup>12</sup> suggests that if skeptics are given an audience and provided relevant facts, they can be converted to supporters.

**Figure 5.** Communicators’ zone of influence



Reproduced with permission: T. Flynn and D. Scholz, *The Science of Trust and Empathy and Relationship Building*. Presentation to Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Strategic Communications Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada October 22, 2019.

10. James E. Grunig, “A Situational Theory of Publics: Conceptual History, Recent Challenges and New Research,” in *Public Relations Research: An International Perspective*, eds. D. Moss, T. MacManus, and D. Vercic (London: International Thomson Business Press, 1997) 3–48.

11. T. Flynn and D. Scholz, “The Science of Trust and Empathy and Relationship Building,” presentation to Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police Strategic Communications Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, October 22, 2019.

12. Flynn and Scholz, “The Science of Trust and Empathy” (see note 13).

**Understanding each of these groups, their passions, and their perceptions of police and public safety is paramount to communicating better with them.** Community advisory councils are a great means for a chief executive to learn the best way to communicate with each group and what issues are most pressing to each: For a neighborhood association, this may be quality-of-life issues, while groups representing racial, ethnic, or sexual minorities may be concerned with issues of fair treatment and access to justice. Agency leaders are familiar with the need to prioritize all these concerns without seeming dismissive of any.

One of the most significant strengths a police chief can have today is the ability to bring together culturally diverse groups of people—including marginalized groups that have historically have little voice in public safety. Departments across the country are seeking ways to better engage with racial and ethnic minority communities that may be reluctant to trust police. In-person dialogue is often the best option for such engagement.

If you have multilingual officers, use opportunities such as citizenship ceremonies to introduce them and your department to new Americans. Showing a true interest in other cultures and ways of thinking goes a long way toward establishing a trusting dialogue—which, in turn, helps your agency recruit to reflect your community and to better understand its needs.

By engaging and learning how to communicate better with the people you serve, you create a community of advocates who maybe better messengers for your agency than you are. In 2008, when the Savannah (Georgia) Police Department (then known as the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department) began employing electronic control weapons (ECW, of which the most common brand is the TASER), then-Chief Michael Berkow set up meetings with faith leaders. He knew that after the first deployment of an ECW the

community might be upset, and the media would have questions. By meeting with these leaders in advance to talk about this additional force option and allowing for questions and challenges, he ensured that when an ECW was deployed, there would be others in the community to whom he could direct the media. He also knew that statement about the incident would be heard differently coming from a faith leader than from police.

### Traditional news media

**“Mediated news about policing is attractive in the viewer society—as a source of information, risk management, and entertainment.”**

— Murray Lee and Alyce McGovern  
*Policing and Media: Public Relations Simulations and Communications*  
(London: Routledge, 2013)

The media is both an audience agencies must communicate with and a valuable conduit to other audiences in our communities. The media can be a tool to help convey our messages, shape our image, and amplify important information.

For this reason, agency leadership should meet with local media leaders on a regular basis: not only traditional media leaders, such as station managers and editors, but also influential bloggers and “citizen journalists”—members of the community without formal press credentials who often cover police events. These meetings can be in a group setting a few times a year or one-on-one when concerns arise. Leadership should also participate in editorial boards and any other opportunities to get to know the people who are in part

responsible for creating perceptions of your agency. This type of relationship-building is helpful in setting and understanding mutual expectations. In addition, it gives media leaders an opportunity to express their opinions about how your agency interacts with the media. While not every gripe requires a response, media leaders will appreciate having their voices heard.

Communications efforts with traditional news media should be continual and cordial but must keep in mind that it is a profit-oriented business and is not responsible for reporting news the way your agency wants it to. Police executives must respect the role of the news media as a watchdog and witness to police action—both a potential advocate and a potential adversary.

# III. The Multi-Layered Communication Strategy

Policing is often a reactive profession, and many agencies reflect this in their communications efforts. Your goal should be to frame the narrative proactively, not merely to react to it.

In the service of this goal, all of your agency's actions should be reviewed and analyzed with an eye toward communications planning. This planning should focus on four specific types of communications: (1) strategic communication, (2) tactical communications, (3) crisis communications, and (4) interviews.

## Strategic communications plans (SCP)

Strategic communications plans (SCP) are the guardrails of communication efforts for your agency. These plans provide guidance on the desired outcomes—not outputs—of agency communication and prioritize what needs to be done to achieve those outcomes. Outcomes should be tied to the chief executive's broader goals and objectives.

While tactical communications plans (TCP) focus on tools, media, and methods, a strategic framework focuses first on what the agency wants to accomplish and who the audiences and important stakeholders are. An in-depth environmental scan, which is part of the SCP process, may uncover additional issues that must be considered before moving ahead with strategies and tactics.

“Whoever speaks first has power over the message and the receiving audience, effectively casting the ‘opposition’ or responding agency to a marginal status.”

— John P. McHale, Joseph P. Zompetti, and Mary Anne Moffitt

“A Hegemonic Model of Crisis Communication,” *Journal of Business Communications*, Illinois State University (2007)



Every SCP must include a detailed core messaging strategy and brand/style guide (more on this in section IV). **This core messaging will help formulate the brand image you want for your agency, while the style guide will ensure your visuals and graphics consistently match your desired brand.**

When should you create an SCP? For sheriffs, SCPs should be updated upon taking office and again in every election cycle. For police chiefs and commissioners, an SCP should be created or updated whenever the agency undergoes a change of leadership or circumstances: after the chief has created overall goals and objectives for the agency; when a new chief takes over with a different vision for the department; when a consent decree or other oversight has been newly implemented; or simply when leadership decides to start a new year with a renewed focus on community priorities, direction from an elected leader, or input from a community advisory board.

Once an initial plan is completed, subsequent plans (especially if the same leaders are at the helm) are easier to update and carry out.

Creating an SCP involves research, input, thought, and—most importantly—time. **Time is the biggest gift you can give your strategic communications advisor**—time away from the reactive day-to-day work of the average PIO. SCPs help communications staff focus their time strategizing, planning, and acting as a counsel to leadership and less time replying to media requests, reacting to the news of the day, and responding to the latest viral video challenge. SCPs also serve as guideposts to messaging, media, and messengers: Do we really need to do a lip-sync video? And if we do, what brand image will it convey? An SCP might have helped some agencies that have created some embarrassing videos stay closer to the image they wanted to convey to their communities.

## Tactical communications plans (TCP)

A simple rule of thumb: If you have an operations plan for an event, you should have a tactical communications plan (TCP). Departments create operations plans for large-scale events such as concerts, festivals, celebrations, and protests. Each of these events carries its own set of challenges for personnel allocation, traffic, people management, etc. They also bring a unique set of communications concerns before and during the event. What should people (and the media) know about safety before the event? What should they be aware of during the event? Having prepared messaging ready to go will help an agency get ahead of important safety messaging.

You may also want a TCP when planning events of your own. Kathryn Johnston was killed in 2006 by Atlanta (Georgia) police officers executing an illegal no-knock search warrant. A year later, in an effort to move the community forward, Chief Richard Pennington agreed to a TCP that included a news conference a week before the first anniversary of her death, several one-on-one interviews with local media to discuss his feelings about the event itself, and an ecumenical healing service at her church on the anniversary of the killing. (This TCP is included in appendix B of this guide.)

The goal of Chief Pennington's TCP was to alter the narrative from a continued debate about the past (the officers had been indicted and incarcerated) to healing. The community rallied around the event and took steps to revive the neighborhood, all in Ms. Johnston's name. Even 10 years after her death, memorials continued. Communities don't forget tragedies like this, nor does the media. The best an agency can do is work in partnership with its community to heal and put in place a plan to help move everyone forward.

## Crisis communications plans (CCP)

A crisis communications plan (CCP) is a must in today's world, where rapid dissemination of traditional and social media immediately frames the narrative of events. The narratives for many incidents involving law enforcement today are set not by police but by witnesses, witness video, victims, and advocate groups—whoever speaks first. A CCP allows you to frame the narrative quickly by using prepared (and approved) holding statements during the early stages of a crisis. These plans are instrumental to establishing your agency as the source of credible information and providing guidance and messaging in the informational void when not a lot is yet known about an incident.

Corporations have been using holding statements for decades. Their importance has risen in recent years because of the rise of mis- and disinformation. The quicker we can provide something to the masses, the better our chances of being heard and not drowned out by others who may know little about our incident, our city, or our actions.

As with SCPs and TCPs, developing the templates of a CCP takes time. However, this document, once created, can be updated annually—and should be, because the incidents you expect and prepare for will change.

The beauty of a CCP is that the words, sentiments, phraseology, and audiences for each template are determined outside the fog of crisis; strategic thought can be put into the messaging with a clear mind to long-term outcomes, rather than to the preoccupations of the moment. Each template can be tweaked before release to make it relevant to the situation at hand.

## Interview plans

You may have heard “Never do an interview cold.” It's good advice and will help maintain a consistent image for your agency. Once your PIO team gets familiar with the process, interview plans can be prepared in a very short amount of time. The precise effort varies: A messaging plan for a three-car crash on the highway can be written in minutes, while a messaging plan for a friendly-fire training incident should be drafted more carefully.

Written interview plans can be shared across your agency, with elected officials, and with other key stakeholders to ensure the entire department is conveying the same message. No ranking officer wants to be caught in a media ambush. By preparing interview plans in anticipation of media or public interest your agency can provide a coordinated, concise, and clear message.

Interview plans are meant to help pilot an interview. They contain the messages you have decided are the most important and want to convey, whether during a light conversation to get to know the new chief or a serious, hard-hitting interview about the rise of homicides in your jurisdiction. A bit of planning in advance as to the key messages you want to express will go a long way in helping manage the narrative of the overall interview.

While media will often seek out the leader of a police agency to comment on an issue or incident, they will also seek others, especially those who have an opposing opinion, to provide a wider range of views if not explicitly to create controversy. **Having a strategic messaging strategy on hand allows you to keep the focus where you want it** and avoid being dragged off-topic to more click-worthy subjects.

The interview plan also allows you to weave in the core messaging strategy from your SCP. For example, if you have decided your agency requires four million dollars to upgrade laptops in patrol vehicles, that messaging can be part of many interviews. An interview about school or traffic safety can include key messaging about the importance of being able to convey information to

patrol officers quickly. An interview about a wanted individual can include a message about how officers could better locate the individual if they had access to better data while in the field. The repetition of your core messaging strategy is what makes it successful, and interview plans support your overall strategic communications plan.

# IV. Media

“The medium is the message.”

— Marshall McLuhan

*Understanding Media:*

*The Extensions of Man* (Toronto: Signet, 1964)

There are as many ways to communicate as there are audiences in your community. They range from the intimacy of one-on-one conversations and formal meetings to e-mail blasts and social media posts. **It’s important to decide strategically whether you want to escalate or de-escalate a narrative before deciding which medium or media to use.** For example, a news conference with the chief executive is a definitive escalation of a story, while a simple written statement is a de-escalation tactic.

Let’s look at some of the communication tools available to police today.

## News releases

News releases remain one of the most common ways for police to release information and one often done incorrectly. Many agencies fall into the trap of writing them like incident reports, using police jargon and in straight chronological order.

A correctly written release uses a specific format. News media use Associated Press (AP) style, which has a particular cadence. The first sentence of any news release should be written using active verbs and in present tense—essentially, what is happening right now? Four of the five W’s should be addressed in the first paragraph: who, what, where and when. The final W, why, is often unknown and should only be addressed if there is factual support for the reasons given for why something happened. A chronology of events can follow, along with any quotes, and the release can end with a call to action. (Sample news releases are included in appendix E.)

News releases should be issued not only to news media, but also to homeowners' associations, schools, faith-based groups, etc., as well as to elected officials and internally. All news releases should also be posted to your social media feeds as PDFs; the post itself should use the more informal tone social media demands, such as "We just issued this news release about last night's armed robbery; you can read the details below."

Finally, it's important to remember news releases should only be used when there is actually something new to release. Don't issue a news release merely to say you have no new information—however, to reassure the public that the issue hasn't been forgotten, it can be helpful to put out a release about your actions: "Detectives continue to work on the case."

## Written statements

Written statements are **not** news releases. They are a statement made by the leader of the agency or the agency itself about a specific incident or event, but they do not use the AP style format. Typically, a statement will start with a sentence that expresses the author's feelings about the subject of the statement. It then describes the action being taken, or what the community can do or think about right now. It ends with a sentence or two to put the issue into perspective or to sum up what people should remember about this incident three days from now. (More on writing statements can be found under Interview plans in section IV.)

Written statements are often posted word-for-word on social media feeds and are often captioned on television. They can be used to de-escalate situations and are issued when the decision is made to not have agency representatives speak on camera because of legal or other concerns. Written statements can be issued by the department as a whole or by the chief executive directly. (A sample statement is included in appendix F.)

## Video statements

Video statements are created exactly the same as written statements, but instead of simply being released in print, they are read by an appropriate member of the agency in a video that is posted to social media or disseminated to news media. This adds a face to the statement and can go a long way toward showing compassion, empathy, or the seriousness of an issue in ways that the written word cannot convey.

## News conferences

News conferences should be used sparingly and should follow a formal format including time to take questions. Most news conferences are held to announce significant information or bring an ongoing incident to a close. They may feature more than one speaker. Great care must be used in deciding where a news conference is held. If the news conference takes place in a public place, anyone—including advocates, community journalists, and protesters—has a legal right to attend. It's also important to set the room up correctly, with a separate access for the speakers to allow them to come and go without having to pass by the reporters. This is particularly important if the news conference could turn hostile.

News conferences should be carefully prepared, with news releases, speaking notes, and a clear understanding of who—the PIO or the chief or sheriff—is managing the event. The event should be fenced, meaning the PIO or chief must clearly establish the content parameters before beginning the news conference to avoid answering questions about anything other than the topic at hand. In addition, adequate time must be allowed for questions to be taken.

Today, a best practice is livestreaming your news conference to your social media platforms, from opening remarks through to the end of questions. Keep in mind

that live microphones will also stream any chatter or video before and after the conference, so be sure to always convey a professional demeanor.

## Media briefings

Media briefings often take place during an ongoing situation or incident. They are less formal than a news conference and usually much shorter. Typically, these briefings provide media on a scene with updates about a continuing event. Often your PIO will manage these briefings and may bring in others to provide content-specific updates to the media. During longstanding, active situations, media briefings may take place as often as every 20 minutes to provide the most current information and maintain your framing of the narrative.

## Media statements

A chief executive making a media statement is very different from a news conference; it simply means that the chief or other spokesperson will appear before the media and issue a statement. In these situations, no questions are fielded. Media statements give an agency the opportunity to provide visuals to television media.

## Media availability sessions

A media availability session is an informal meeting with members of the media where they can ask questions. This can be done in a relaxed, seated setting if desired. These sessions can be on the record or off, but which one must be communicated before the session begins. These sessions are often used to discuss a recent use of force incident, talk about policy changes, or provide context to a complex situation.

## Exclusive interviews

Conducting a one-on-one interview with a single media outlet should be a strategic decision based on viewer demographics, audience numbers, and station personalities. While doing an exclusive interview with one outlet can result in a longer, more in-depth story, care must be taken to ensure other stations also have opportunities for this type of access. Constantly providing one outlet with exclusive access to the chief will only result in more negative stories appearing across other media sources.

## Editorial boards

Every police leader should make a point of asking for and attending editorial board meetings with their local newspaper or other media outlets on a regular basis or when there is a particularly pressing issue or initiative. These typically off-the-record conversations often occur “on background” and can lead to a better understanding of each side’s perspectives. They allow a chief to understand the personality or slant of a media outlet. Getting to know the heads of media outlets outside the fog of crisis is helpful, especially if a call from your office is necessary to set the record straight on an issue that may be reported incorrectly.

## PIO/media meetings

The PIO should meet with media monthly, quarterly, or annually; agency leadership should make every effort to attend these meetings at least occasionally. These meetings are another way to talk about issues, concerns, policy changes, and human interest stories outside the bustle of the regular news cycle. It’s also helpful for the chief executive to ask for a few minutes alone with media representatives to ask them for an honest assessment of the PIO team.

## Op-eds

It is often helpful to respond to news or editorials in the media when further clarification is needed or the department's perspective was not conveyed. You must remember that editorials are opinion pieces. Chiefs can take good advantage of this tool to convey information that your community may not be aware of, or to sway public opinion about an issue. Brevity is key when writing an op-ed, as most are limited to between 500 and 750 words.

## Radio/television talk shows

There are hundreds of hours of radio and television talk shows and podcasts available in most media markets every day. They provide an excellent opportunity to reach a specific target audience. Often, this is an opportunity to discuss an issue with an influencer (the program host) who perhaps has more sway with the audience than the police. It's important to think carefully about which shows you choose to appear on. The program host and their point of view are particularly important when deciding whether or not to participate—these programs are a good way to reach an audience that might not attend town hall meetings or Coffee with a Cop. It's important to not shy away from reaching audiences that agencies may not traditionally reach.

## Creating your own programming

While in the past, law enforcement agencies wishing to air their own audio or video programming had to ask for airtime on local radio or community cable, today many agencies are also streaming their own programming on departmental YouTube channels or podcasts.

This is a good way to reach a niche audience, but the reach can be minimal, particularly considering the effort and time it takes to create the program. Again, it's important to be strategic. Without a full-time staff dedicated to audio and video programming, it's difficult to maintain the regular schedule that is key to a successful endeavor. The look and feel of a program must also reflect the professional brand of your agency. The media-savvy public has high expectations.

## Critical incident videos

One area where agencies have been successful in creating programming is in the delivery of critical incident videos hosted on YouTube. Best practice videos clearly define situations and should include largely unedited body camera footage (faces and addresses may be redacted) along with explanations of what took place. Some of these videos may be extremely long, but their point is to provide all the information legally releasable at the time about a critical incident from every angle available. The goal of these videos is not to defend the action of the officer but to define the incident itself.

Posting this sort of incident footage is a best practice; however, every chief executive must consider whether they are able to post these videos quickly, fully, and with the blessing of legal counsel and their prosecutorial arm. If they cannot fulfill these three conditions, they might do better not to post the videos at all. Todd Spitzer, the District Attorney of Orange County, California, made a point of saying after an officer-involved shooting in Fullerton in 2019 that releasing body-worn camera footage could help calm a community, especially when inflammatory rhetoric was building. But more recently, Spitzer found that option isn't always possible; sometimes, he



claimed, video must be withheld to ensure a fair investigation.<sup>13</sup> Releasing one video sets a precedent: After that, you cannot choose to release only the ones that exonerate officers. For the sake of transparency and trust-building, you must be prepared to release the good, the bad, and the ugly.

## Community meetings

In-person meetings remain a positive (albeit time-consuming) way to engage with the stakeholders who are most invested in your community. However, keep in mind that not everyone in your community has time to attend in-person meetings. Fortunately, there are many alternatives—the past few years have seen a vast increase in virtual meetings, interviews, and Q&As on multiple platforms such as Zoom and Facebook Live. Any opportunity, in-person or virtual, is worth examining for potential use in building community trust.

Because agency leadership cannot attend every community meeting, you must be able to trust your staff, both command and rank-and-file, to be your representatives and carry your message to stakeholders. Interview plans and your overall communications plan will be helpful to ensure everyone in the organization is conveying the same message.

## Community group speeches

If you are a police leader who is comfortable in front of groups, speaking at Chamber of Commerce luncheons, Rotary Club meetings, and other similar events is a great way to develop lasting relationships with influential leaders in your community. However, if you are not an effective public speaker, appearing before these groups simply to read a speech is not a great option. People want to see passion. They want to see leaders

speaking from the heart. Some people have this ability innately, but it can be learned through practice—and leadership should put in the practice to learn it. Public speaking is a big part of being a law enforcement leader.

## Flyers, posters, and brochures

Most agencies still produce many hard copy materials, especially about safety information. Consider posting all this information online in PDF format so people can download materials at their leisure.

One strong caveat, especially for larger agencies: Without a formal branding style guide, your printed materials will be as varied as the people producing them. There is no replacement for a dedicated graphics person on staff or a contract with a professional graphic design company to maintain a consistent, professional, and coordinated graphic brand image for your department.

As an aside, if you have a recognizable logo, as most major city police departments do, talk to legal counsel about trademarking your brand. It will help protect your agency from outside entities using the brand without your approval.

## Website

Practically every police agency has a website; make yours a repository for all information about your department. While many agencies use platforms like Facebook to communicate with their communities, not everyone uses social media, and not everyone uses every platform. Community members should not have to make an account on any service to read basic information about public safety in their area. A well-designed and -maintained website is still the go-to spot for people wanting information.

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13. “DA Persuades Southern California Police to Not Release Video from Last Month’s Mass Shooting,” *The Mercury News*, April 22, 2021, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2021/04/22/da-persuades-orange-police-to-not-release-video-from-last-months-mass-shooting/>.

It is important that your agency have some control of the website content. Some agencies' sites are administered by city IT departments that may not be very responsive or swift to make changes when needed.

Your website should include an archive for all your news releases, links to the department's social media, a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page, and hidden pages that can be linked to during a crisis with critical community information, such as tornado or hurricane safety, evacuation routes, and rumor control. You should also include your standard operating procedures (SOP), policies, contact lists, and the agency's strategic plan and the plan's benchmarks and successes.

Make your site easy to navigate. A great way to test this is to have a young person and an older adult navigate through your site to find certain information. If it takes them more than a few clicks to find what they need, the site needs clarification and a better layout. And don't forget accessibility requirements—you can find the requirements of local government under the Americans with Disabilities Act at <https://www.ada.gov/websites2.htm>.

## Transparency dashboards/reports

More and more, agencies are creating transparency dashboards on their websites. These are pages that aggregate data and display it graphically—for example, as maps, timelines, or charts—in response to user queries. They can be repositories for much of the information often requested by your community and the news media, such as statistics related to professional standards and internal affairs, crime statistics, times and locations of officer-involved shootings or uses of force. Don't forget to include your plan for the agency along with its successes to date. The Colorado Springs (Colorado) Police Department maintains an excellent data hub at <https://policedata.coloradosprings.gov/?mlid=49781>. The COPS Office

has also published a three-part series on creating LEA data dashboards, available for download at (1) <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter?item=cops-w1011>, (2) <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter?item=cops-w1012>, and (3) <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter?item=cops-w1013>.

## Periodic reports

Very few departments have the budgets (or motivation) to create written annual reports. Unfortunately, by the time they are completed, it's usually three months into the new year, and they are no longer relevant. Instead, think about posting reports that show your community your commitment to your organizational goals and objectives. If, for example, you are a proponent of the 30X30 initiative (which aims to have 30 percent of police across the country identify as female by the year 2030), maintain a current chart of your agency's demographics from recruit to leadership on your website.

## Personal blogs, vlogs, and social media feeds

Some police leaders choose to maintain a personal blog, vlog, or social media feed alongside the departmental feeds. In some cases, the leaders themselves maintain it, while in others, staff run the feed. Each department needs to make decisions about the value of these feeds. It makes sense for an elected sheriff to have a personal feed—they are free to make certain statements and take stances that appointed chiefs cannot. Chiefs often use their personal feeds to amplify their work in the community, highlight their officers' good deeds, and repost information from the departmental site. The decision to use one's personal social media this way should not be taken lightly. Leaders may want to consult legal and city/county officials before starting a personal feed. Social media demands constant attention, responses, and monitoring; the benefits can be great, but the costs include time and effort.

## Social media

Social media is an excellent tool. It allows for constant engagement—an ongoing electronic town hall meeting. Departments that simply post messages with no engagement are not using social media to its full potential. **Social media is about community-building, not one-way communication.**

The most important consideration in using social media platforms is incorporating social media into your overall communications strategy. Make strategic decisions about which platforms to use and why. Messaging must be consistent and coordinated and maintain the continuity of an agency's brand image. The haphazard use of social media—such as jumping on trends like lip-syncing videos—waters down an agency's brand at best. At worst, it may prompt community members to wonder why their tax dollars are paying for law enforcement to goof off.

The first question in crafting a social media strategy is what platforms to use. Your agency needs to determine not what platforms the country as a whole is using, but what your community is using.

Aside from determining who is following what platform, agencies must decide if a platform is appropriate for law enforcement. Snapchat causes numerous challenges because of its “disappearing” messages. Federal

and state freedom of information laws require governments to keep track of public information; hence, departments using Snapchat often take screenshots of their posts to that platform to remain in compliance with local sunshine laws.

Social media has the legitimacy and power of traditional news media but also its drawbacks: It thrives on fear, anger, and divisiveness and uses humor to get clicks and make money. **An agency's strategic communications plan should leverage social media to amplify the rest of its communications efforts.**

Consider social media's uses for ongoing community engagement, image development, and crisis communication. Also consider how it can interact with traditional media—whether driving traditional news media to cover the good stories about your department, holding news media accountable for their reporting, or bypassing traditional media entirely

A final word on social media: If you are not continually monitoring social media, not just for intelligence purposes but for community engagement purposes, you are at a significant risk. Malicious actors use social media to seed disinformation campaigns; plant false narratives; and stoke fear, anger, and divisiveness in your community. Staying engaged online, while time consuming, will pay dividends in helping understand your community and conveying important information.



# V. Creating the Plans

Creating strategic plans takes energy, dedication, research, creative thinking, and especially time.

Most leaders and strategic communications advisors think they are too busy moving from crisis to crisis or from incident to incident to take time away and plan. However, taking this time will pay rewarding dividends: namely, the development of a brand image and communications framework that support one's goals and objectives and help build community trust in your agency.

“Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now.”

— Alan Lakein

*How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life* (New York: Signet 1973)

## The strategic communications plan (SCP)

Once you have developed your organizational goals and objectives, your strategic communications advisor can begin the process of creating the SCP to support them. Take the time, care, and attention to develop a detailed plan focusing on outcomes rather than outputs. A good SCP can help you reaching your vision for your department quickly and with strong buy-in from your stakeholders.

**Figure 6.** Process for creating a strategic communications plan



Building the plan can be broken down into an eight-stage process, as shown in figure 6 on page 35. Although it looks simple, each stage requires work, research, and creativity to effectively implement.

### SCP | Step 1. Environmental scan

The first step in developing an SCP is to assess the current state of the organization. This is by far the most arduous and time-consuming phase of an SCP. This analysis provides the groundwork on which the rest of the plan—goals, objectives, brand messaging, strategies, and tactics—is based. The goal of the scan is to develop a complete and honest assessment of both the organization and its environment. The environmental scan should be written as if a third party, who knows nothing about your jurisdiction or department, is going to implement the plan.

The process starts with a dialogue across stakeholder groups—employees, elected officials, advocacy groups, and your entire community—to determine if your goals are the right ones for your community. Some chiefs may focus more on numbers they will be held accountable for, which can lead to prioritizing easily measured goals, such as decreasing traffic accidents, over goals that are harder to quantify such as helping people experiencing homelessness. Consulting one's community will help determine both the goals that matter to stakeholders and the benchmarks one can use to measure progress toward them. Once you have finalized your vision and goals for the organization, the strategic communications planning process can begin.

Seek input from employees using focus groups or internal surveys; have one-on-one sessions with elected officials and city management; set up listening sessions with your community advisory committees, local influencers, and community groups; and reach out to your local media and ask them for their perceptions of your agency, your brand image, and media coverage from the past. In addition, review the agency's previous plans, annual reports, and external reports. Have

things changed? Have they remained the same? Were recommendations made in the past that were or were not implemented? If so, why?

This step will take the most time, but it's worth the effort. Building a plan on misleading or misguided information will lead to a plan that does not support your mission. An environmental scan is part organizational history, part SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, and part reputational assessment. Taken together, these elements present a picture of the organization that allows your communications strategy team to pinpoint specific areas that need to be addressed.

The outline of your environmental scan can look something like the one seen in figure 7.

**Figure 7. Environmental scan**

#### YOUR JURISDICTION

- History and demographics
- Crime history and trends
- Current community climate

#### YOUR AGENCY

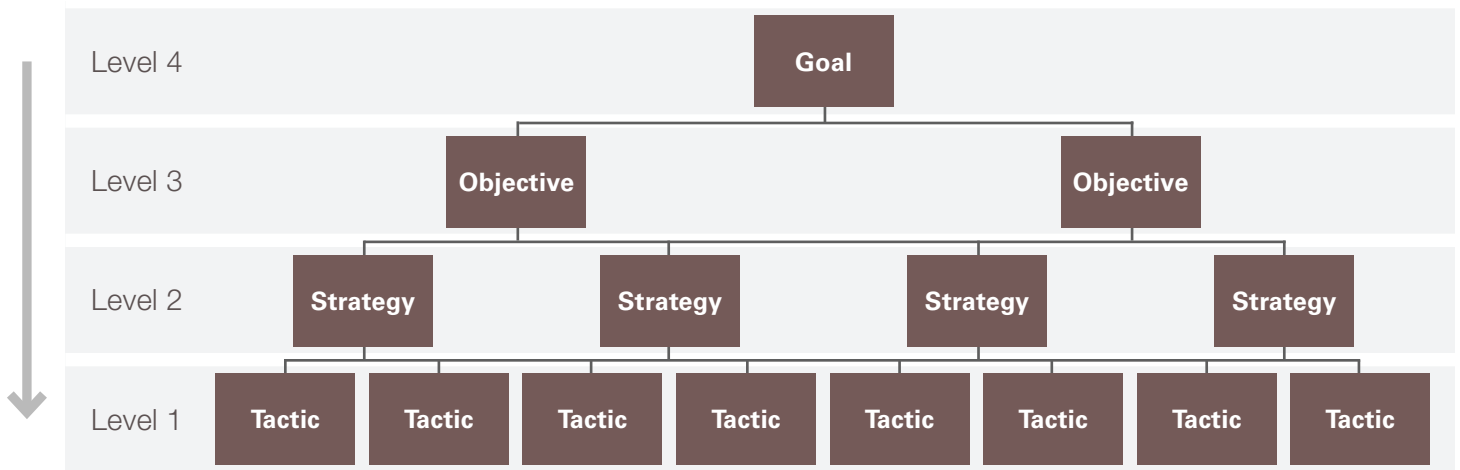
- Current perceptions of agency and CEO
- Internal snapshot - funding, morale, challenges
- External snapshot - perceptions, priorities
- Current state of the PIO - staffing, plans, policies, priorities

#### LOCAL MEDIA

- Influencers and relationships
- Social media and engagement strategies
- Traditional news media

#### SWOT ANALYSIS

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

**Figure 8.** Levels of a strategic communications plan

### SCP | Step 2. Goal

Once the environmental analysis is complete, it's time to set a goal. Your SCP's goal must dovetail closely with the vision of the leader of the organization; it should focus on supporting the department's mission and vision while assisting in achieving its operational goals and objectives. It may be helpful to outline the agency's mission statement, vision, and values to help ground planning at this point.

Communications goals and objectives are framed in much the same way as an agency's operating or business plan goals: They should be overarching, aspirational, and designed to describe a desired end.

### SCP | Step 3. Objectives

Your communications plan should have four levels, which can be visualized as the view from higher and lower perspectives (figure 8). If your goal is the perspective from level 4, objectives are what help move you from the level 4 to the level 3. Objectives are specific and measurable statements that define what work needs to be done to reach the goal. Goals are the endpoint; objectives are the path to follow to get there.

### Sample Goals

Sample goals for your SCP might include the following:

- To create positive perception of [Agency], both internally and externally, by relaying information in a timely fashion to the correct audiences using appropriate and effective tools to build understanding, support, and positive community relationships.
- To relay information to target publics using multiple media to maintain and build partnerships and advocates among [Agency] and its residents, businesses, and visitors.
- To support the [Agency] mission by creating a consistent, positive, and progressive image of [Agency], through sharing accurate information to internal and external audiences using suitable, effective tools and cohesive, proactive, and strategic messaging to inform, engage, and empower our employees and community to enhance the safety of all who live, work, and play in [jurisdiction].



As in lesson plans, objectives in your SCP should always include action verbs such as build, develop, create, or improve.

### Sample Objectives

Sample objectives for your SCP might include the following:

- Build and maintain positive public awareness of [Agency] and its ongoing efforts to reduce fear, prevent and solve crimes, and empower the community to help make [jurisdiction] the safest [small/medium/large jurisdiction] in the country.
- Help uphold the confidence of constituents and elected officials in [Agency]'s fiscal responsibility.
- Maintain sustainable, innovative, ethical, and visionary planning to improve the quality of life in [agency jurisdiction].
- Entrench the belief internally and externally that [Agency] is a first-rate and desirable employer to enhance customer service and attract superior candidates to the agency.

## SCP | Step 4. Stakeholders and audiences

Various internal and external stakeholders and audiences will play key roles in an agency's success. Not every stakeholder, however, is necessarily a target public for the purposes of the SCP. Identifying and separating stakeholders from audiences helps you see strategies from different perspectives.

A stakeholder is someone who has a concern or feels they are directly impacted by an issue; the issue could be community safety, constitutional policing, or finding ways to better work with people who are experiencing mental crisis. These people are fully engaged with the

issue and will take action. Audiences are simply people who will receive the messages conveyed by the agency. Members of an audience may become more engaged and become stakeholders if a particular issue affects them or interests them.

A successful SCP will segment both stakeholders and audiences. How will each group perceive and comprehend your communication? Think of audiences in relation to demographics, issue publics, and level-of-trust groups. Using the stakeholder mapping discussed in section II will be helpful here. Once you have mapped out different groups, prioritize them into primary, secondary, or tertiary audiences.

For example, if an agency plans to implement a new plan to reduce speeds in school zones, primary audiences may include schools, PTAs, and neighborhood associations; secondary audiences may include elected officials and businesses close to school zones; and tertiary audiences may include the media and business associations.

This is an all-important step, especially in multicultural communities. **A one-size-fits-all communication plan will not be as effective as a plan that considers differences of specific audiences**, whether in cultural origin or other demographic variables such as age, income level, geographic locations, and religion.

It's also important to consider the rapid rate of both migration and immigration. Many cities are seeing dramatic changes in population, both in numbers and in demographic makeup. According to a 2020 report by Upwork, 14 to 23 million Americans are planning to relocate to a new U.S. city or region, in part because of the growing acceptance of remote work.<sup>14</sup> This will undoubtedly have an impact on many agencies.

14. "Upwork Report Finds Up to 23 Million Americans Plan to Relocate Amid Rising Remote Work Trends," Upwork, October 29, 2020, <https://www.upwork.com/press/releases/upwork-report-finds-up-to-23-million-americans-plan-to-relocate-amid-rising-remote-work-trends>.

Within most stakeholder groups there are opinion leaders with whom strong relationships will pay dividends. Formal opinion leaders are those who are in positions of influence because of their recognized standing or power—elected officials, corporate executives, and clergy, for example. Informal opinion leaders may be people with particular experiences, such as family members of crime victims; leaders of neighborhood associations, clubs, and civic organizations; or people who are put forward as the spokesperson of a subcommunity or minority group. Both formal and informal leaders can exert considerable influence on public opinion and behavior; as such, police are wise to invest time and energy identifying and developing relationships with them.

Assessing the relative health of the agency's relationships with its various target publics is useful: Is the relationship supportive or adversarial? Is there a history of working together, or is this an emerging or new group of people the agency hasn't worked with before? The more detailed the list and description of target publics, the more precise the rest of your strategy will be.

## SCP | Step 5. Brand and core messaging development

No part of an SCP is more important than clearly articulating the brand and core messaging that will help shape the reputation of your agency. These are not messages specific to an incident; they are the overall messages that your agency wants to convey in all of its communications.

### *The brand*

A brand is not a logo. It is not a department's badge or the wrap package on patrol cars. These symbols of the organization can be very powerful in reinforcing a brand image in the minds of stakeholders, but they do not constitute the brand itself. The "golden arches" are not McDonald's brand; the promise of consistent food

## Sample Stakeholders and Audiences

Stakeholders and audiences for your SCP may include the following:

- Activist groups (specify)
- Agency employees and their unions/associations
- Business community
- Civic and social groups
- Commuters
- Cultural groups
- Elected officials
- Faith-based community
- Media
- Neighborhood associations
- Nonprofit entities
- Schools and education groups
- Social media influencers
- Tourists
- Victims of crime

quality and taste, fast service, and affordable prices is. Apple's brand is not its logo but its promise of performance, reliability, and innovation.

At the center of any corporate brand is a promise of what an organization delivers and how people should experience it. Think of a brand as what people think of when they see your officers, patrol cars, social media sites. Hosting focus groups with employees and your advisory committee can help bring into focus what your current brand is and your vision for the future.

An important caveat: **The best branding cannot overcome ineffective policing, community disconnect, or a poor record on officer integrity.** The best branding cannot make an organization into something it is not. If a brand is a promise, you either deliver on it or you don't. There is no faking it.

Branding provides a beacon around which everything else revolves—every decision, every action. Any police department that has dealt with widespread corruption within its ranks, uses of excessive force, or incidents of racial profiling has been faced with the monumental task of rebuilding its brand. Agency leadership must respond with real organizational and operational changes to rebuild the relationships damaged by a breach of trust, not simply rebrand their agency with superficial changes.

While an SCP is helpful in building or rebuilding a brand, no amount of brand image and messaging strategy will supersede the relationships and contacts your employees are making every hour of every day. As illustrated in figure 9, while leadership's communications efforts can have a wide reach, what truly makes a difference in the way people feel about an agency is their everyday contacts. This is why it is imperative to remind employees on a regular basis that they are the brand.

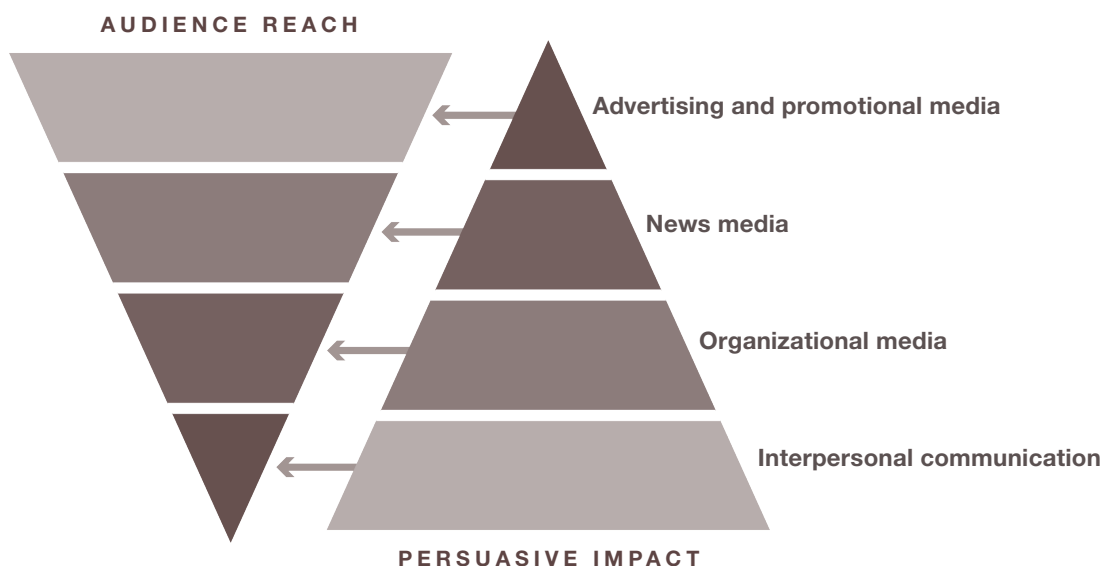
### Core messaging

Strategic core messaging is not simply the clever arrangements of words or catchphrases; it's about aligning words with actions. A messaging strategy is created to amplify and solidify the brand employees convey each day by their actions. Key messages reflect the essential idea or behavior a department is looking to create, reinforce, or change. Core messaging that does not align with your agency's actions will be seen by many as simply copaganda.

An agency's core messaging must be realistic and free of hyperbole. It speaks to what the agency is or believes, not what it intends to do, and it will only be successful if it is clear, consistent, and constant:

- **Clear.** Develop your messaging strategy from your brand words—what words do you want to come to people's mind when they engage with, see, or hear of your agency? These must be words or phrases that resonate the same way with myriad and diverse audiences.

**Figure 9.** Leadership's communications efforts effect on the brand



Source: Smith, R. 2009, *Strategic Communication for Public Relations*, New York, Routledge.

- **Consistent.** Consistency means doing something the same way repeatedly. Your messaging should be broad enough to apply to various situations, but it should also be recognizable. For example, when the NYPD adopted “Public Safety is a Shared Responsibility,” they then were able to use that in various ways such as “School Safety is a Shared Responsibility” and “Neighborhood Safety is a Shared Responsibility.”
- **Constant.** Repetition is key to brand development. Key words or phrases should always be repeated across your agency’s messaging and media to be effective.

Developing core messaging is not a simple process. It is more challenging and time consuming to develop a one-sentence core message than a lengthy discourse on the department’s mission and activities.

**Core messaging should stand alone. It should not require lengthy explanation or support documentation.** If the people in your community, employees, elected officials, and media representatives do not understand and commit to it quickly, it is the wrong core message.

Core messaging changes. Most SCPs are 12–24 months in length, the length of a business plan (with the exception of those in sheriffs’ offices, which are the length of an election cycle, usually four years).

### *Graphics standards guidelines*

Once core messaging is established, it’s wise to create a branding or style guide. These guides serve as graphics policy for all things visual for your agency. Many agencies do not have a centralized graphics department and video production facility, which means different districts, divisions, or units within the agency are producing visuals that may not be consistent or in line with the agency’s brand. This is especially true of crime prevention materials and social media sites.

Your agency’s logo is the basis for any style guide. Consistency must be maintained across all uses of the logo, wordmark, and logotype. The Pantone, CMYK, hex, or RGB color scheme should be identified and maintained across all graphic uses of your logo.

In addition to the logo, a style guide should cover every aspect of the graphics and visuals your department produces, from signature blocks on emails through PowerPoint templates and typography. Style guides should include what your videos will look like and the tone of social media. Some guides go as far as covering grammar, use of emojis, and hashtags. This is all done to maintain a consistent, cohesive, and coordinated brand image with a high recognition factor.

Corporations take great care in graphic brand development. Adherence to strict graphics standards is the foundation for any recognizable brand. You want people

### Sample Core Messages

Sample core messages for your SCP may use the following words, phrases, and sentences:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Words               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Professional</li> <li>– Trusted</li> <li>– Transparent</li> <li>– Ethical</li> <li>– Caring</li> <li>– Compassionate</li> <li>– Respectful</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Phrases               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Protect and serve</li> <li>– Constitutional policing</li> <li>– Connecting and protecting</li> <li>– Be the difference</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Mottos               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Public safety is a shared responsibility</li> <li>– Our family serving yours for 150 years</li> <li>– Together we are more</li> <li>– Ensuring people are safe and feel safe</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|--|--|

to know when something is coming from, sanctioned by, or promoting an event hosted by your agency. You also want to ensure malicious actors are not imitating your brand or posing as your agency. A cohesive graphics style guide can help strengthen your brand against bad actors.

In addition, it is important to set graphics standards for employees. Some employees are eager to personalize their email signatures with leadership quotes, Bible verses, or inspirational notes. These signature blocks may not reflect your agency's brand and could even offend those receiving the email.

Your IT department can easily add a boilerplate signature block to every email from your agency (much like the legal disclaimers that appear on many emails), as well as default to the font you want all correspondence from your agency to use. You can standardize letterhead and templates for memos, reports, and presentations. All of this, of course, should be codified in policy.

## SCP | Step 6. Strategies

Now that you have established a full understanding of audiences, your overarching goal, and the objectives of your organization and established your core messaging, it's time to focus on strategy. Strategy brings your strategic communications planning to the 10,000-foot level. Strategies should be comprehensive and use words that

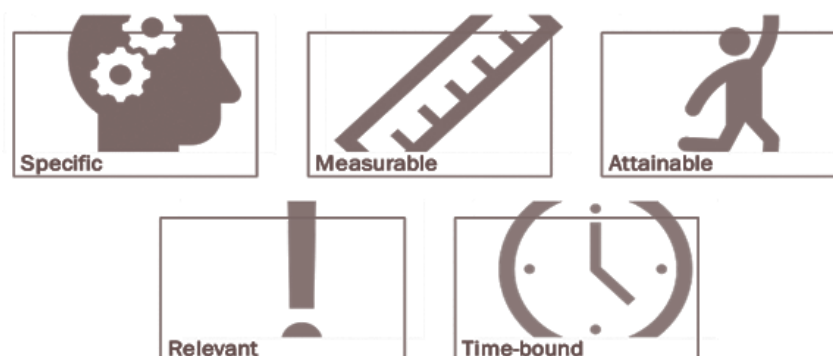
imply a measurable outcome, such as *engage*, *create*, *ensure*, or *develop*. Strategies do not necessarily have to be tied to specific objectives but taken together should allow your agency to reach those objectives.

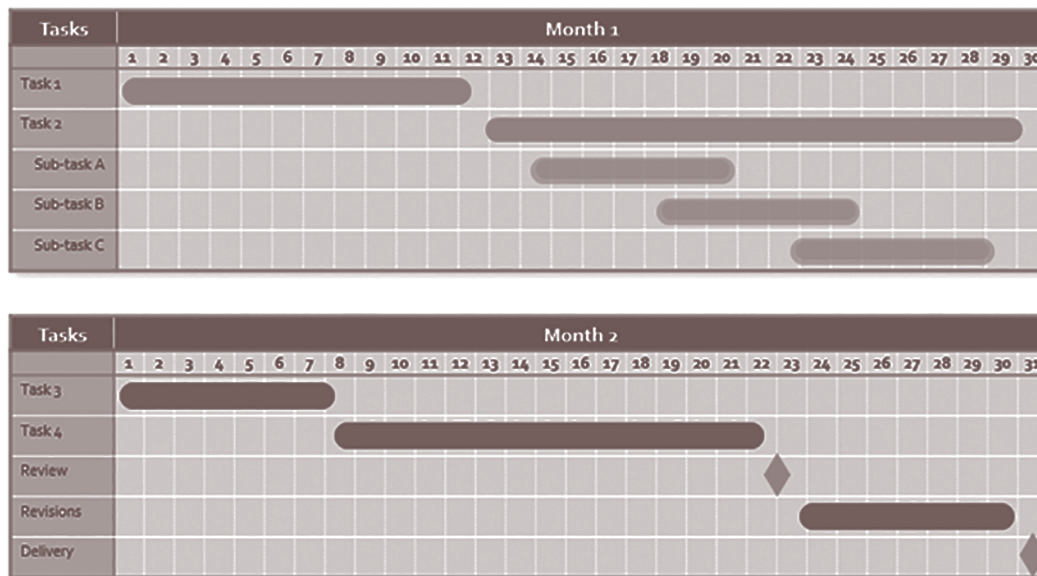
Determining your agency's key performance indicators can help identify strategies for your agency, such as increasing trust across your community, demonstrating transparency, strengthening the commitment of various audiences to contribute to community safety, enhancing your community's satisfaction, and providing a true voice to your community. Each of these strategies then becomes a launching point for more detailed (and grassroots) tactics.

Just as with objectives, consider using the SMART method (shown in figure 10) for your strategies:

- **Specific.** Do your strategies clearly indicate, in detail, what you will do?
- **Measurable.** Can you measure success either qualitatively (outcomes) or quantitatively (outputs)?
- **Achievable.** Do you have the staffing, budget, and support to complete each strategy?
- **Realistic/Relevant.** Does this strategy support the overall goal, and can it be realistically attained?
- **Time-bound.** Is there a due date associated with each strategy to help your organization stay on track?

**Figure 10.** SMART objectives



**Figure 11.** Sample Gantt chart from a Microsoft PowerPoint template

### Sample Strategies

The following are examples of strategies your SCP may include:

- Create policy to provide guidance and consistency for [agency] communications efforts.
- Develop coordinated strategic public outreach efforts to support [agency] mission, vision, and values across all internal and external partner agencies.
- Nurture professional and productive relationships with traditional news media.
- Create and carry out a comprehensive internal communications plan to help inform and engage staff and maintain a high level of employee satisfaction.

### SCP | Step 7. Tactics

Tactics are simply the steps to the successful implementation of a strategy. They bring your planning to grassroots level, with actionable activities to check off as completed. For tacticians, this part of the planning process may be the easiest and most satisfying; many people will have a strong urge to start here. Don't. Without a full understanding of the environment and clear goals and objectives, your tactics and strategies will be focused more on outputs than outcomes.

Each tactic must outline what is to be done, when, and by whom. It's important to get into detail and identify resources, staffing, materials, and budget figures to include with each tactic, along with timelines and due dates in the form of Gantt charts (illustrated in figure 11) or calendars.

This will help your communications team maintain focus when everyday issues get in the way of executing the plan. It's up to the person creating the SCP how deeply to detail each tactic; the sample in the sidebar on page 44 illustrate two possible levels of depth.



**Figure 12.** Sample weekly messaging calendar

## Sample Tactics

Tactics may be detailed lightly (Level I) or more thoroughly (Level II).

### LEVEL I

- Create style guide to ensure all visuals across the [agency] are consistent.
  - Resources: PIO
  - Budget: None if in house or offered pro bono by local marketing company | \$80K if contracted
  - Due date: January 20XX
- Conduct due diligence in monitoring community and professional trends on social media.
  - Resources: PIO or social media coordinator (requested)
  - Budget: Grade 14 employee (civilian)
  - Due date: March 20XX

### LEVEL II

- Create style guide to ensure all visuals across the [agency] are consistent.
  - Identify marketing or public relations company to work with (pro bono)
  - Obtain approvals from city staff and legal on graphics
  - Create draft of standards guide with input from PIO and city marketing department
  - Submit guide for approval by chief
  - Due date for draft: February 20XX
  - Due date for final: June 20XX
  - Budget: Nil if using pro bono company
  - Budget: \$20,000 if employing marketing/PR company



Your messaging calendar also coordinates your messaging across all media, social and traditional, and helps answer the question from reporters, “You got anything for us today?” The answer to that question should always be “yes”—and can be, with a well-thought out plan.

### SCP | Step 8. Metrics

Every communications plan must have metrics in place to measure both outcomes and outputs. The desired outcomes of a communication plan are reflected by the overall goal and objectives. Critically analyzing whether those goals and objectives were met will help determine whether the plan was successful or should be altered going forward.

Outputs are a more common way of analyzing the effects of a plan. Outputs typically include numbers, such as “increasing the department’s Facebook audience by 20 percent,” and can be easily measured. Outcomes are more intangible and require an honest assessment that can be best supported by annual surveys of various target audiences. These types of measurement tools can be incorporated into the overall plan.

Measure the success of your SCP through a combination of outputs and outcomes. Most chief executives won’t care how many likes a post has, how many followers the agency has on Twitter, or the number of news releases issued in a year—instead, they want a strong SCP that changes or strengthens the way people feel about the agency. However, putting these basic output measures in place is still important because it helps staff focus on small goals and results.

With that in mind, your SCP should **establish metrics that mean something**—have we built beneficial and sustainable relationships? have we improved our reputation and brand image? does our community see our value? have we been able to increase our resources, funding, staffing?

For example, while improving media relations may be a desired objective, simply counting the number of stories generated through the proactive work of your communications team will not provide a true accounting of success. Even if the number of stories has risen (output), the sentiment of those stories may be negative, which is not the desired outcome. Attaching a simple 1–10 scale to indicate how much a story reflects the desired brand image of your department will determine if the tactic is truly successful.

Establish two sets of metrics—one for internal objectives and the other for external. Consider evaluating community perceptions annually using a police satisfaction index survey that asks the same questions each year. The same can be done with internal surveys.

Keep in mind that your SCP aims to create an informed community that is engaged and empowered to advocate for you on certain issues. That means ensuring your communication strategy maintains a strong focus on communities that may not have the most positive opinion of your agency. While Coffee with a Cop events are a great idea, they typically draw people who are already supportive of your agency. What tactics can your agency employ to reach, inform, educate, and empower those who are not?

## The tactical communications plan (TCP)

TCPs are similar to SCPs but focus on a single event. This may be a large concert, public event, protest, agency announcement, or anniversary date—any event for which you make an operations plan. The steps to creating a TCP are very similar to those for an SCP, but more concise and with a tighter focus on the messages and desired outcome. Planning communications in advance allows you to think about how messaging will be perceived by your audiences and stakeholders and agree on the messages, media, and messengers that will be most effective.

### TCP | Step 1. Conduct an environmental scan

Begin by briefly describing the issue or event and conducting a SWOT analysis. This step is the same as the first step of an SCP but considerably quicker and more concise.

### TCP | Step 2. Goals and objectives

For example, straightforward public safety may be the goal of a large concert. To mark the anniversary of a tragic event, the goal might be to help members in your community heal.

### TCP | Step 3. Stakeholders and audiences

This step is very similar to step 4 of the SCP. Who will attend the event? Are your audiences within your community, or will you have visitors from outside your jurisdiction? (This question will help determine the media and reach you will need.) Are you trying to reach survivors of an incident and their families? Advocacy groups?

Take time to identify as many stakeholders and audiences as possible; this knowledge will be instrumental when crafting your messaging.

### TCP | Step 4. Strategies

Look at the goals developed in step 2. What does a successful event—one that meets those goals—look like? What communications strategies will support your goals?

### TCP | Step 5. Messaging

Messaging plans should be created not only for the overall event but also for possible events taking place within it. For example, an overarching messaging plan for a large outdoor concert may focus on public safety at the event, traffic patterns, and what people can and can't bring to the venue; contingency plans might create messaging to be used in the event of an active shooter, an explosion, hurricane-force winds, etc. Having messaging prepared in advance for any eventuality not only saves time but also saves your agency from making messaging mistakes when in the fog of the crisis.

### TCP | Step 6. Tactics

This is similar to step 7 of the SCP, with detailed tasks associated with staffing, timelines, and budgets if necessary. Pay particular attention to staffing: Large-scale events may require more than one communications person available.

### TCP | Step 7. Metrics

Evaluation criteria for a TCP should be closely related to the goals and objectives of the plan. What will a successful event achieve? What is the desired outcome—a safe event? Helping a community heal after a trauma?

### First Anniversary of the Harvest Music Festival Shooting

One year after the Harvest Music Festival shooting that took the lives of 58 people, the Las Vegas (Nevada) Metropolitan Police Department spearheaded a sunrise remembrance ceremony that brought hundreds of survivors, families, and first responders together. Their PIO coined the hashtag #VegasStronger and worked with the city on various ways to recognize the painful anniversary, including the Strip going dark and the names of the victims being read at the Community Healing Garden in downtown Las Vegas. The goal of events such as these is to move the narrative forward from tragedy to a story of community healing and survival.

## The crisis communications plan (CCP)

To deal effectively with crisis, an organization must provide proactive, truthful, easily understandable, and timely messaging; admit error if it exists; and be open to public or organizational review afterwards. The best course of action is to have nothing to hide—transparency from the start is easier than corrections or cover-ups.

In every instance of crisis, there are many target audiences and stakeholders that require different levels and types of communication. In addition, each of these groups has its own audiences to cater to. For instance, if you are dealing with a significant public disturbance, local media will want to focus on how it will affect commuters and what people in the local area should be doing (e.g., lockdowns or evacuation plans). National media, on the other hand, will likely focus on the cause of the disturbance and its broader implications.

A CCP acts as a prophylactic against disinformation, rumor, and information voids. The plan clearly lays out a simple messaging strategy template for potential

crises that may affect your agency—whether external, such as a natural disaster, or internal, such as alleged or confirmed misconduct. Preparing for potential issues in advance, away from the pressures for immediate responses, will allow you to deal with any situation proactively. Following the plan lets you effectively manage the media narrative. It also allows your agency to make important decisions quickly and decisively, instead of wasting valuable time debating what to say in the moment. Quite simply, **a CCP allows your organization to escape the short-term focus problems that often plague an agency in crisis.**

A CCP is a living template; it must be reviewed and updated periodically and should serve only as a base working document from which to build messaging tailored to the elements of the crisis. The final messaging must still be adapted to suit the event, environment, audiences, political and social climate, and current events; failure to do so will almost always result in less than positive results.

It's important to remain constantly vigilant for warning signs of a crisis. Once it hits and your agency has been established as the lead, whoever oversees communications must begin to manage the messaging and communications immediately; however, this does not mean rushing out a statement prematurely. It means confirming facts, determining what's important for one's community to know, and what needs to be done. It is imperative to act quickly and proactively, and in some cases seek legal counsel, as soon as possible. Once facts are established, PIOs can work with the incident commander or chief executive to **get ahead of the message to frame the narrative** to ensure messaging provides the correct guidance and information to the community.

Giving people information they need and want will help your agency move through a crisis more smoothly: People can't know how to respond appropriately to a situation unless they know what the situation is. Beyond that, they need to know why they should listen. You need to show you care about what is happening; explain

what both you and your audiences need to do to remedy the issue; and finally put the entire incident into perspective before the media or your critics do so. **During a crisis, when people are emotional, data and statistics on their own will not affect public opinion.**

If a community's perceptions conflict with the facts of an incident, as can happen with a use of force incident, you could face negative publicity and backlash. Your responses must be mindful of the perspective of all your stakeholders. It may be fact that the use of force by an employee was lawful; however, if your community perceives your agency to have been unfair or brutal in the past, or that the type of force used was inappropriate or should not be allowed, merely stating that the use of force was lawful will not end the crisis. Actions speak louder than words, so explain the actions you are taking to ensure improvements are made. Show empathy—and if necessary, apologize.

Most crises today result in issue debates, which can become highly charged and political. Thanks to social media, every proponent and every critic has a voice. Foundational to a CCP is the work an agency does beforehand to develop trusted working relationships with the four-legged stool: (1) employees, (2) the community, (3) elected officials, and (4) the media. You will need buy-in from all of these stakeholders, and any one of them can either amplify or diminish (or outright destroy) messaging.

Those relationships must be in place before a crisis—positive connections nurtured during good times can help overcome barriers and ensure your agency's messaging is heard during a crisis. A strong reputation for open, honest, and timely communication is key for your relationship with local media,<sup>15</sup> while your relationships with local media will inform any national and

international media that may arrive in your jurisdiction in times of crisis and influence the way your incident is covered.

A CCP helps your agency do five crucial things:

1. Ensure accurate, consistent, and timely communication during a crisis.
2. Establish the organization as the official source of information.
3. Eliminate or minimize confusion and rumor inside and outside of the department.
4. Maintain credible relationships with the community, officials, and the media.
5. Support rebuilding efforts once a crisis has passed.

The CCP also allows for the all-important vetting and approval process to take place *before* a crisis. The approval process for many government agencies is *not* created for immediate decision-making. A CCP allows your agency to draft your messaging—including variant versions tailored to different situations—and have it preapproved by legal counsel, command staff, city and county staff, and whoever else is in the chain of command. This single reason should be enough reason for every agency to create a CPP.

## Considerations for communicating in crisis

Let's start with a definition of best-practice crisis communication: active, responsible, targeted, and ethical messaging that moves the narrative forward, defuses fear, engages your community, and helps victims become survivors. You can define it in simple terms as actionable intelligence to help safely move past the crisis stage to healing—or, simpler still, as four C's: clear, consistent, and constant communication.

15. L. Austin and Y. Jin, "Approaching Ethical Crisis Communication," *Public Relations Journal* 9, No. 1 (Spring 2015): 144-149.

In a crisis, an agency must always focus first on the safety of people and living things before addressing economic considerations (figure 13).

For example, after the Surfside condominium collapse in Florida in 2021, public safety PIOs, from the mayors' and emergency managers' offices to fire and police, focused communication on the loss of life and effects on survivors. By a few days after the collapse, many media outlets were asking about the cost of the cleanup, what it would mean to taxpayers, and if other buildings were at risk; all officials, however, rightly stayed the course with messaging about the search for survivors and kept that at the forefront of all their messaging until the incident was over. Keeping this sort of message discipline is difficult if an agency has not developed and practiced a plan.

Stress manifests when people feel as if there are high demands being made of them or their community, yet they have little control over what is happening. For instance, in a flood, people must determine when and if to evacuate, what to take with them, and how to keep their loved ones and pets safe; they have little control over when and how they can do this, how much damage the flood may do to their homes, and when they can come back. The best thing a public safety agency can do in this case is to help people understand what they *can* control. This lowers stress and allows people to accept and understand more information.

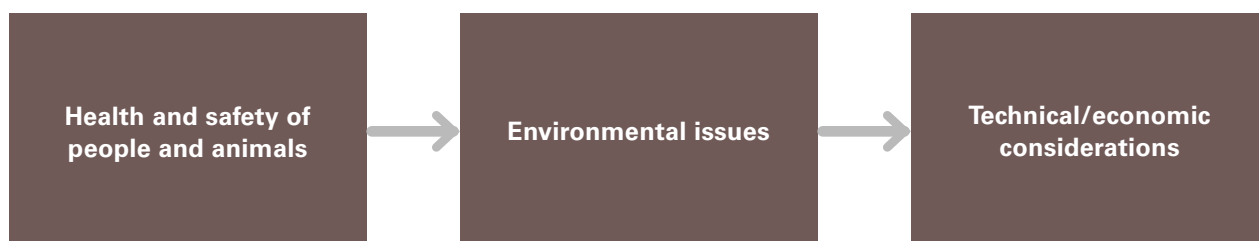
Media may ask questions that have nothing to do with the facts the community needs to know right now. It's your agency's responsibility to communicate those. In most crisis incidents, **your community cares first and foremost if they and their loved ones are safe**. Secondly, they will wonder how this incident could affect them. Third, they will want to know if they should do something—and if so, what. These three questions take precedence over everything else—even the things that first responders are likely to start with, such as a chronology of events or an explanation of their current actions.

So, in the example of the flood, first responders' messaging should first be about what to take, where to go, and what shelters are available; only after getting this information out do you take time to inform the community what first responder organizations are doing. Lists are fantastic for letting people know what to do or take—think of hurricane preparedness kits.

There are six basic rules for communicating in crisis. These rules are best practice for communicating at any time but should be followed all the more closely in critical situations:

1. Identify all relevant audiences or stakeholders, keeping in mind that a jury pool may be one of them.
2. Ascertain the best way to communicate to each of these groups.

**Figure 13.** Community priorities in crisis



3. Take immediate control of communication to frame the narrative—be seen as the source of information.
4. Find out what the public perceives about the situation (whether truth or fiction) and determine what they need to know.
5. Develop action-oriented messaging to convey the information to the target audience.
6. Manage, repeat, monitor, and correct the message.

Your first step should be to acknowledge the event immediately and show empathy for any victims and those close to them. If you express empathy and concern at the outset of a crisis, the public is more open to hearing the rest of your message.

Messaging must be simply worded. Now is not the time to assume your stakeholders and community understand cop-speak. In a major crisis there will be a lot of conflicting information; don't make your audience pick through more than they need to find what is important to their well-being.

Action messages are key: What is your agency is doing, and what should your stakeholders be doing? These messages must be provided quickly and repeated often. Initial messaging should answer the question "Are we okay?"; assure audiences that "We got this"; and finally convey the message "We will go on."

The quicker you can move the narrative from debating the past to taking positive action for the future, the better. Keep your messaging forward-leaning; however, don't do this by withholding necessary information. If people are forced to fill in the blanks about an incident, self-appointed experts will fill any information vacuum. If there are questions that cannot be answered due to lack of facts or legal implications, say why the information is unavailable (or unable to be released) and redirect attention to what is known. At the end of the day, you will be judged on your preparedness and response to the crisis more than on the crisis itself.

### *Positive messaging to 'de-victimize'*

The goal of your messaging should be to take people who feel like *victims* of a crisis and empower them to be *survivors*. By providing members of your community with actionable information, you empower them to do something; taking action, in turn, effectively "de-victimizes" people. The action doesn't have to be complicated: Messages as simple as "shelter in place," "safer at home," "watch local media or follow our social media feeds for further information," or "if you see something, say something" go a long way toward easing a sense of victimization.

These messages must always be phrased positively—they must give people something to do rather than something not to do. For example, if you have an ongoing incident at the corner of Maple and Elm, do not say "Avoid Maple and Elm." That leaves people wondering what is happening there—and they may go there to find out. Not only that, if people are used to driving by Maple and Elm on their way home, they now don't know whether they should take a different route or wait for the situation to resolve itself. Instead, use positive, active messaging and tell people why they should take the action you are suggesting: "Police activity at Maple and Elm. For your safety, please use alternate routes until further notice." Or "Maple and Elm are closed because of a serious accident. Three-hour traffic delay. Use Oak and Pine Streets as alternates until further notice."

Be brief—try to make sure a single thought or instruction can fit in one tweet.

### *The crisis communications team*

The size of your agency's crisis communications team in any incident will vary depending on the size of your organization and the incident itself. It should always consist of a lead PIO—most likely your communications strategist—who will act as the overall communications lead. If staffing is available, traditional, digital, and internal communications coordinators can assist with keeping messaging on track.



Your CCP should identify who can assist with communications and establish what needs to be done and who should do it. As you can see from the sample organizational chart in figure 14, if you are dealing with a large critical incident, there are many communications positions to fill.

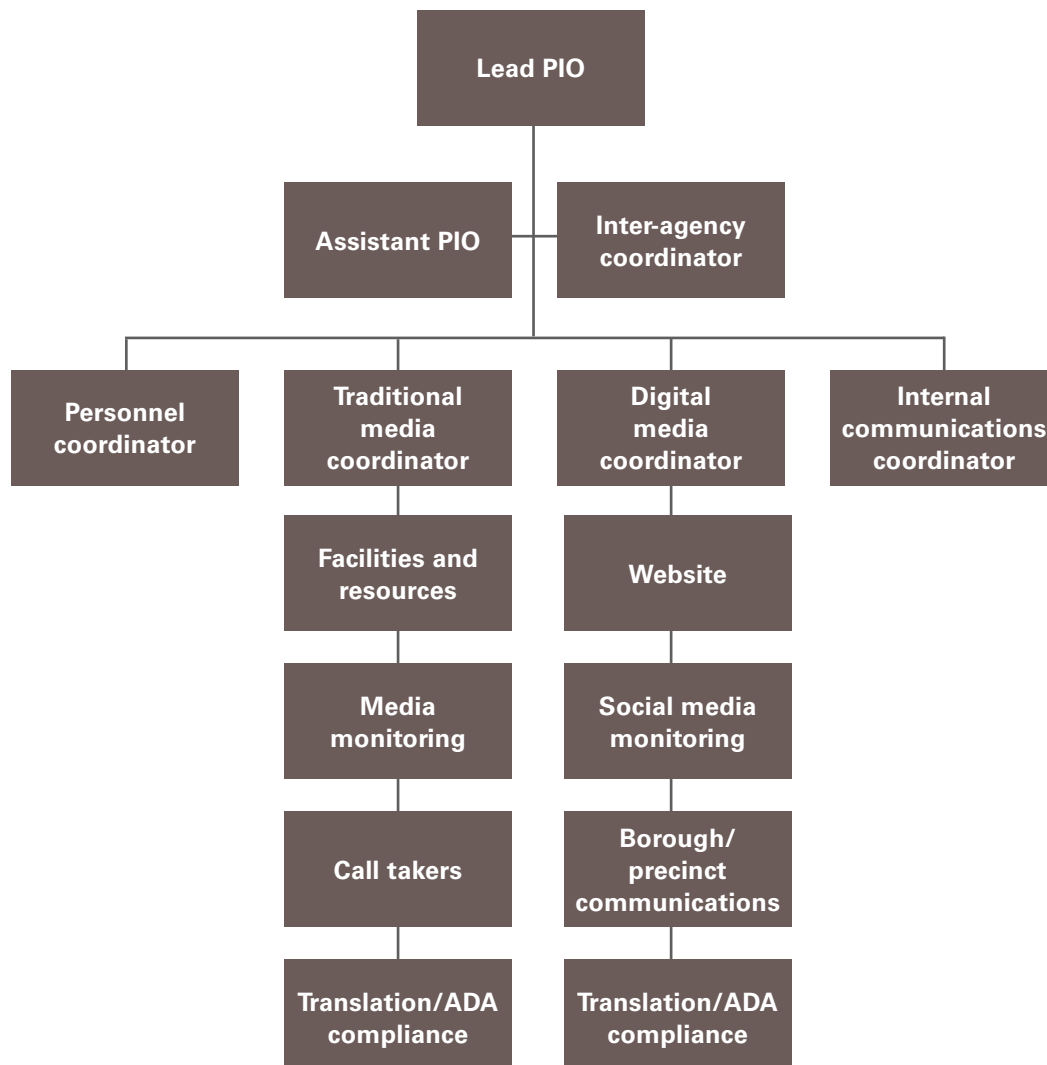
At a smaller agency where staffing is at a premium, all these roles may fall to the PIO and chief executive. This is where networking both locally and nationally will help. Your PIO's network should meet regularly in advance of a crisis to identify subject matter experts (and their backups). Who is great on camera? Who can write messaging quickly? Who is a social media maven?

If you know all this in advance, it will help you put the right people in the right places on your communications team.

If a joint operations center (JOC) has been established, the communications team may not require a personnel coordinator or a facilities and resources coordinator. It still remains the lead PIO's responsibility to ensure staff receive adequate downtime, meals, and resources.

It's also wise to consider providing resources and facilities for media at long-standing events. This includes things like a designated restroom area, even if that means portable toilets with a place to wash up;

**Figure 14.** Large-scale crisis communications team organizational chart





drinking water; tents to protect against sun and rain; a working area; electrical outlets and chargers; etc. These small generosityes will be returned tenfold by the reporters covering an incident.

These are the basic responsibilities of the crisis communications team:

■ **Lead PIO**

The lead PIO is the communications manager of the event, much like an incident commander at an incident scene. This will often be your communications strategist. All information is fed through the coordinators to the lead or assistant PIO. The lead PIO is the liaison to the chief executive or incident commander and may in many instances serve as the department's spokesperson.

■ **Assistant PIO**

This position serves as second in command or executive officer and helps the lead PIO collect and corroborate information, analyze target audiences, oversee message preparation, and prioritize messaging. The assistant PIO also works closely with the personnel coordinator to approve staffing and determine resource requirements.

■ **Interagency coordinator**

This position will work with the lead and assistant PIOs to inform relevant government agencies of your message strategy, including offices of elected officials and city, state, and federal agencies. The interagency coordinator will relay critical information to the lead or assistant PIO. This position may be responsible for obtaining quotes for news releases or asking agencies to repost social media messaging or for providing personnel to participate in news briefings. This position will also provide feedback to the lead or assistant PIO with any questions or concerns from collaborating agencies.

■ **Personnel coordinator**

This position serves as the coordinator of both human capital and resources for agency personnel. This includes scheduling of PIOs (in a long-term incident), identifying and engaging with other support staff (either internally or externally), and ensuring employees have everything necessary for their well-being, including meal breaks (or meals supplied), vehicles, computers, etc.

■ **Traditional media coordinator / facilities and resources**

The traditional media coordinator ensures media staging areas are set up and resourced appropriately. They may handle the coordination of media facilities and resources on their own or assign staff to do this, depending on the size of the incident. This coordination may include standing up a media room and a green room (staging area for speakers/VIPs prior to news conferences) and acting as a liaison to the media working in these designated areas. This person is also responsible for maintaining a list of reporters at any given briefing and working with the digital media coordinator to ensure every briefing is live-fed or posted to social media.

■ **Media monitoring (traditional media)**

Staff in this position are required to watch all relevant traditional media and report coverage to the traditional media coordinator, who will convey any issues, misinformation, or required clarifications to the assistant or lead PIO.

■ **Media call takers (traditional media)**

Staff in this position are assigned to answer media calls and manage incoming interview requests and coordinate them with the traditional media coordinator. This position can be part of the media monitoring position.

#### ■ **Translation / ADA compliance (traditional media)**

In large or long-standing events, this position provides translation services into other languages or for persons with auditory, visual, or other accessibility needs. This position will source translators and ensure ADA compliance for traditional media and news conferences, media availability sessions, and one-on-one interviews if required.

#### ■ **Digital media coordinator**

This position ensures messaging created by the department for dissemination to traditional media is communicated effectively over as many targeted and relevant digital platforms as possible. The digital media coordinator will ensure messages are disseminated quickly, constantly, and consistently to social media and web platforms and coordinate with the ADA compliance and translation person.

#### ■ **Webmaster**

The webmaster will work closely with the digital media coordinator to quickly post relevant and accurate information to the organization's official government website.

#### ■ **District/Division/Borough/Precinct/Zone/Unit communications**

This position will help coordinate and enlist the support of any other units within your agency to ensure messaging is constant, consistent, and correct across all platforms and through all levels and areas within your agency.

#### ■ **Social media monitoring**

This position will monitor discourse on social media and report inaccuracies, trending hashtags, and other relevant information to the digital media coordinator, who will advise the lead or assistant PIO. This position will also respond to and collaborate with users to help spread agreed-upon messaging. Depending on the scale of the event, this may require two or more people.

#### ■ **Translation/ADA compliance (digital platforms)**

This position will source translators and ensure ADA compliance for social media platforms to ensure ADA compliance and translation is made to any other relevant languages. In many cases, the same person will be tasked with both traditional media and digital platform tasks.

#### ■ **Internal communications coordinator**

This position will work closely with the chief executive or designee and the lead PIO to ensure internal messaging is disseminated quickly and effectively. This may include posting messages to any intranet site, sending text messages to employee phones, and sending out group texts or emails.

### *Social media*

Social media and digital platforms play a significant role in crisis communications; much of a communicators' time will be spent conveying messaging, correcting rumor, responding to questions, and monitoring feeds on these platforms.

Rumor is one of the biggest enemies of the truth during crisis. Today, however, social media allows rumor to move even faster. **In many media and forums, speed—the need to break news first—has surpassed the need for truth.** This is a dangerous pattern for first responder agencies to fall into.

We discussed misinformation and disinformation in section I, "Misinformation, digital consumption, and brand positioning." Both are constant threats during a crisis. It is crucial to monitor social media during a crisis and have messaging prepared to counter rumors and false narratives, whether spread innocently or by malicious actors. If no one in your organization is keeping up with what is being said on social media, your agency will be chasing the narrative the entire time.

### *Internal communication*

During crises, your agency should make every effort to communicate to employees while or just before communicating to the public. Employees are an important target audience (especially in crises dealing with internal or personnel issues), as they will convey your agency's valuable messages to a wider audience. It is also important to keep staff as informed as possible to quell rumors and limit grapevine speculation.

There are various ways to communicate internally, from email to internal dashboards to old-fashioned phone trees. While you may not get the information to your people first, making the effort to communicate helps solidify management's commitment to employees and raises employees' morale and trust in management.

During a crisis, your employees' friends and relatives will be asking for inside information. If you haven't taken the time to provide factual and timely messages, at best they will simply repeat what they have heard from traditional or social media or from their partners or work colleagues. At worst, they will make something up so they don't feel foolish or look uninformed. Up-front, factual, and timely communication will help alleviate this issue. It will also help reassure employees who may be questioning the decisions being made.

Stop worrying that employees will leak information you provide them—instead, accept that it will happen. Ensure the information you provide is information that you want the public to know. If, for example, your agency experiences a line-of-duty death, you could simply send out an internal message saying, "Earlier this evening, we lost a member of our XYZ Department family. The 10-year veteran of the department was killed after responding to a call for a domestic disturbance. A news release will go out shortly. More information will be forthcoming after next of kin is notified.

Please refrain from posting anything on social media." Depending on the size of your agency, you can be as specific or unspecific as warranted to protect identities.

One final note on internal communication in crisis: Once the crisis has passed, make a point to conduct a debrief with those who were involved in communications efforts. Bring the group together and review what went right and where improvements could be made. This effort will not only help your agency improve at communicating in crisis but also give employees who were involved an opportunity to unload some of the emotional baggage collected during severe crisis. Don't underestimate the tremendous pressure leaders and PIOs are under from all directions during crisis and the emotional toll this can take on a person.

Consider a similar debriefing with members of the media. They will appreciate the opportunity to be heard, and you will learn how to be better the next time around.

### *Situational updates*

Some crises, especially longer-term events, may require situational updates or debriefs at regular intervals. If this is required, your PIO should set up a media staging area or media room and inform media of briefing times. Regularly scheduled updates will help manage the message being delivered and help maintain a media presence in one area, knowing they will get timely information. However, it is important to never set timelines you cannot guarantee for briefings. Media will prepare for them, and if anything happens that delays or cancels the event, they end up filling the time with speculation and hypothesis.

At the end of a briefing, use terms such as, "We'll have another briefing as soon as we have more information or answers for you" or "We expect we'll have another

briefing within the hour, but that is fluid depending on how the situation progresses.” These statements say that you will be in constant communication without tying you into a specific timeslot you may not be able to keep.

## Preparing the plan

A CCP helps ensure appropriate and timely communication is provided to relevant target audiences through all available media to provide clear, actionable information; minimize the impact of significant incidents; reduce false information; and counteract the perception of victimization. One way the CCP does this is by **allowing you to immediately frame the narrative and issue messaging in the first few minutes of a crisis, when there are still many unknowns**. In the corporate world, these early messages are called holding statements and allow an agency to fill the void of information at the onset of a critical event and frame the incident narrative before anyone else does. An agency will not have many details at this point, but there is messaging one can use to indicate that you are aware of the situation and taking action to put the event into perspective.

Messaging should always focus on two things: (1) what you know now and (2) action for the future. Once your organization can move the narrative from debating the past to positive action in the future, your crisis is well on its way to being over.

Any crisis will eventually end. If your agency is somehow responsible for the crisis (e.g., employee malfeasance or illegal or inappropriate use of force) things will begin to turn around after you express empathy, apologize (if possible), and look to the future. The more you can be proactive in anticipating questions and getting out in front of them, the better. Being responsive and transparent will help move things forward, and that is your goal.

There are seven steps to creating a CCP, and each step takes time and energy. Writing a plan can take several weeks or months. Invest the time up front to make managing a crisis down the road easier.

### 1. Crisis identification

Once you have identified people who may be on the communications team, it's time to start the planning process by identifying potential critical events. Sit with the largest cross-section of supervisors, managers, and commanders across your agency and brainstorm about the crises that could occur involving your organization. Conduct focus groups, meet one-on-one, send out a survey—do everything you can to include representatives from all corners of the agency, including administration, patrol, investigations, internal affairs, special events, specialty units, etc. Examine your organizational chart: Typically, any group that has a manager should have input into this brainstorming process.

Crises tend to fall into six categories: (1) personnel issues, (2) service or product issues, (3) environmental issues, (4) terrorism-related issues, (5) corporate issues, and (6) virtual issues. The sidebar on page 56 shows a sample of incidents you could consider for your CCP. If any of these situations are perceived to be caused by your agency's negligence, they are heightened in importance.

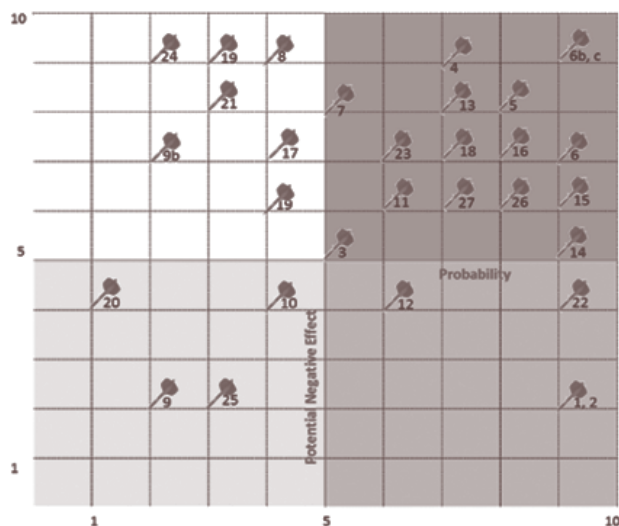
### 2. Crisis prioritization

Creating a crisis probability chart allows an agency to prioritize particular scenarios in the development of the CCP. Once you have compiled an exhaustive list of potential crises, group them into common themes and then plot them on a probability chart: on the X-axis, probability that the event will happen; on the Y-axis, how much the event could negatively affect public confidence in your agency.

## Sample Crisis Types

Crises you may choose to prepare for in your CCP include the following:

- Personnel issues
  - Line-of-duty death or severe injury
  - Workplace violence
  - Criminal action by an employee
  - Conduct unbecoming by an employee
  - Allegations of misconduct by employee (including inappropriate social media posts)
  - Questionable use of force causing severe injury or death (including in-custody deaths)
- Service/Product issues
  - Malfunction of equipment causing injury to citizen (e.g., duty weapon, ECW)
  - Employee nonfeasance of duties
  - Significant building failure (fire/explosion at agency structure) causing injuries/death
  - Technical failure of computer systems
- Environmental issues
  - Natural disaster
  - HazMat situation
  - Pandemic/health issue
- Terrorism-related issues
  - Bombing or bomb threats
  - Suspicious packages
  - Vehicle used as weapon
  - Active shooter
  - Chemical release (airborne, waterborne)
  - Suicide bomber
- Corporate issues
  - Civil disturbance directed at your agency
  - Labor disputes
  - Major allegation/litigation against your agency
  - Significant high-ranking personnel moves (hiring, firing, reallocating)
- Virtual issues
  - Significant whistleblower activity
  - Extortion/fraud/embezzlement
  - Damaging rumors
  - Personal attacks (hostage-taking, kidnapping, murder of relatives, threats) against employees
  - Digital platform attacks/ransomware attack



**Figure 15.** Crisis probability chart

Compile an exhaustive list of potential crises, group them into common themes, and then plot them on a probability chart: on the X-axis, probability that the event will happen; on the Y-axis, how much the event could negatively affect public confidence in your agency.

This exercise results in an itemized and prioritized list of potential crises for which your agency should prepare a communications template.

The crisis probability chart in figure 15 on page 56 shows issues plotted by probability and negative effect on a typical law enforcement agency. As illustrated, 15 issues fall in the “red zone” (upper right quadrant), with another three with a high probability, but less negative effect on public confidence.

This exercise results in an itemized and prioritized list of potential crises for which your agency should prepare a communications template.

### 3. Creating the holding statement

Once your agency has determined its priority list of potential crises, the hard work begins: drafting a holding statement or interview plan for each of the highest-priority crises on your list. Each interview plan in your CCP should lay out template messaging for your organization to use for the first hour or so of such an incident occurring. You will have to tweak each template to fit the actual event, but it will serve as a foundation for your messaging.

Start with identifying your audiences. Keep in mind, a CCP is a **living document**. Audiences change, and CCPs must be updated to anticipate the likely questions and concerns those audiences will have. Thirty years ago—or even 10—public opinion about the shooting of a pet dog or a marijuana arrest was very different from what it is today.

This is also the time to determine if you could potentially have a wider audience. Do you need to consider messaging for a national or international audience? If so, a second set of messages with those audiences in mind may be required.

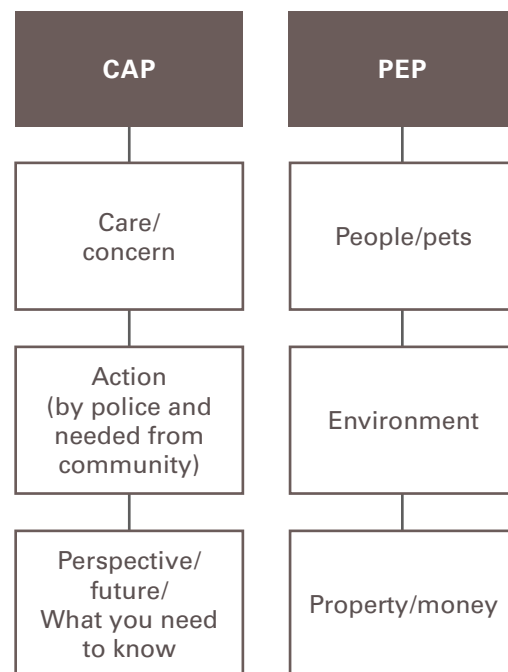
The other thing to keep in mind when it comes to your audiences is the potential that you may be educating a jury pool. Not all major incidents will go to court, but

everything you say can be used down the road in legal proceedings. Even if not, it will create the image of the entire incident in the minds of those not involved.

Use the CAP and PEP principles<sup>16</sup> to create your messaging. CAP stands for care, action, and perspective, and PEP refers to the tenet that one should always focus messaging on People and Pets first, then the Environment, and finally Property or money (see figure 16).

Each of the CAP principles should generate a sentence or sentences in your holding statement draft; the order of statements should follow the PEP principle of focusing on people first, then the environment, and finally property.

**Figure 16.** CAP and PEP principles



16. Judy Pal, *Preparing for Crisis: A First Responder's Guide to Messaging When It Really Matters* (Amazon CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform 2018).



Start with the CAP principles by expressing that you **CARE**. A simple statement such as “This incident concerns us all” or “These are serious allegations” shows you are present and care about what is happening as much as your community and stakeholders. Your care message must resonate with all your audiences.

Second, write up to three **ACTION** messages. Why three? It’s easy to remember things in sets of three, but in some cases, you may only have one or two points to make. Remember, action messages must convey not only what you are doing but also what you want people in your community to do.

Take for example a case several years ago in California. There was an arsonist setting garage fires at night. While it was important for the public to know police and fire officials were investigating and seeking the individual responsible, people in the community feared becoming victims. As part of their messaging, the fire department included a very simple message in their media outreach: They simply asked people to leave their outside lights on at night.<sup>17</sup> Giving people something to do gave them a degree of control.

Action messages are typically brief—think tweet length—and easily understood. Be clear, concise, and timely. Short messages with a pre-determined hashtag (#) for easy searching should be included to facilitate moving your messaging to social media platforms.

The last message should put the incident into **PER-SPECTIVE** by telling your audiences what they need to know or how they should be thinking about this incident. This allows you to set the narrative for the future. For example, if your agency discovers an employee was sexually harassing a colleague, your perspective message could read: “Our department

is committed to equity and inclusion and will do everything possible to maintain a positive and safe work environment for all employees.” That would follow a care message about how concerning this is and action messages about what you are doing.

You can think about care, action, and perspective as a timeline. Show you care about what happened in the past, describe what actions you are taking in the present, and end on what you want people to be talking about three days from now, in the future.

When creating the messaging templates, be acutely aware of the words you use. Carefully consider the negative and positive connotations that go along with words as well as what works in your community. Again, this is a living document. The perception of words and phrases change, some more rapidly than others. For example, using the term ‘thug’ was accepted in the past as a synonym for criminal. Today, that word is perceived as having negative racial connotations. The same goes for phrases. While 20 years ago, the words “Hands up, don’t shoot” had little emotional effect, today the phrase is symbolic. Similarly, not long ago, the term “I can’t breathe” held none of the power or symbolism that it does today. The PIO and leadership should always be cognizant of the current perceived meanings of words and phrases.

When referring to a knife that was used in the commission of a crime, there is a marked difference between, say, a pocketknife and a cleaver or hunting knife. Be clear about details to create the correct impression. Words create mind pictures—not only through their surface meanings, but through subtext. The pictures created by words like “child” or “victim” are more innocent than those created by “juvenile” or “person of interest.”

17. “LA Arson Attack: Police Detain ‘Person of Interest’” *Gulf Times*, January 3, 2012, <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/57645/la-arson-attack-police-detain-person-of-interest>.



#### 4. Statistics, evidence, and analogies

Once the holding statement is drafted, the next step is to compile a list of any statistics, evidence, or analogies that would be helpful to have on hand to put a particular crisis into perspective. For example, when dealing with an employee issue, know how many employees you have; in the sexual harassment example mentioned earlier, know how many complaints of sexual harassment were filed last year and the results. Having these facts on hand during any media briefing or information release will help you answer questions you know will be asked.

Analogies are especially useful when dealing with issues outside of most people's basic realm of understanding. The U.S. Navy does a fantastic job of explaining the size of an aircraft carrier not by saying it's more than 1,000 feet long, but by saying it's just shy of the length of three football fields—an image that's much easier to visualize.

#### 5. Q&As and dos and don'ts

Next, develop a list of at least 10 questions you think could be asked by the media at the outset of the crisis. By preparing answers, you can see how your key messages will work and how you can bridge back to them from any kind of question.

Once you have this part of the messaging plan created, take time to think carefully about dos and don'ts. What have you learned from other agencies that have experienced a similar incident? What do you know about how your local media will cover an issue? What have you learned at conferences, by talking to colleagues, or simply from watching a similar incident unfold that didn't involve your agency? These questions can help give you some basic guidelines to consider right away. Again, during a crisis, many of these tips may be forgotten, so it's good to have them up front as a reminder.

#### 6. Resources

Identify available resources. Who will be part of the team? What requirements will media have? Thinking about this in advance of an incident will serve you well. Just as many agencies in coastal areas prepare for hurricane season by reviewing maps to determine where to stage media in the event of a category 3 or 4 storm, the same preparedness will help you make rapid decisions in other situations when time is of the essence.

#### 7. Review

Once the plan is complete, have others review and critique it. Share it with widely with the commanders who would likely be involved in each type of incident, including specialty teams (e.g., Internal Affairs, Detective Bureau, Force Investigations, special weapons and tactics (SWAT), and your Emergency Operations commander). Lastly, review it with legal counsel. In some cases, public information goals may supersede legal counsel suggestions. Having those discussions before a crisis is crucial to the speedy release of information.

In instances where you have created messaging plans for large-scale incidents where other agencies could be involved, meet with them and review the plans together to ensure all agencies fully understand what they are responsible for in communicating with the media. Reporters will call every organization involved in an incident to get information. Each agency has a role to play, and each must play it for communications to remain seamless and consistent.

If for example, you are dealing with a tornado that resulted in mass casualties, police may be responsible for reporting road closures, traffic updates, and the names of victims; fire for talking about recovery efforts; the local air ambulance about numbers of

people transported; and the hospital for injury discussions and fatality numbers. Elected officials, utilities, gas companies, school districts, and transportation departments will all have their own contributions. You can see how messaging can get very confusing if you're not using a joint information center (JIC) and aren't familiar with each agency's responsibilities.

If needed, present the plan to the various levels of government you would typically need for approvals. Getting these plans preapproved by legal and other authorities allows your agency to be nimble and take the lead in a crisis immediately.

The messaging plan for each crisis could take a week or longer to prepare. Thinking carefully through each statement is exhausting if you are doing it right. Also, don't think you have to sit down and do the entire plan at once. Work your crisis plan like many agencies work on their policies. Once you've created and prioritized your list of potential crises, concentrate on creating or updating one interview plan a week, or two a month. You'll find some of your messaging will be similar across different incidents.

Don't expect to pull a the CCP off the shelf three years after you created it and have it work. To ensure correct messaging in a crisis, you must keep abreast of what is happening and update your plans to reflect changes to the public and political landscape.

It's important to remember that the practicalities of an emergency or crisis may well take you and your staff out of the ordinary day-to-day business of policing. A continuity thread should be included in the CCP detailing how leadership and communications staff can access plans, tools, and guidance under any circumstance—for example, while outside the office or during a power outage. The emergency you are communicating about should not hamper your efforts to manage it!

By taking the time now to prepare for what may happen later, you are setting yourself and your agency on a smoother road. Will you be able to fully control the messaging? Absolutely not. Will you have a better grip on the initial narrative? Definitely.

## The interview plan

The interview plan is a simple document that allows you to keep messaging on track when taking part in an interview. It helps ensure you answer questions with what you and your agency believe are the most important things for your audiences to know.

The interview plan starts with determining the known facts and basic chronology of the incident or issue and deciding what can and can't be released at the time of the interview. After this, identify the audiences who will be listening to the message and how will they perceive it coming from you or your agency.

Once that is done, the strategy starts. Break down your actual messages into the same three key areas that crisis holding statements used: care, action, and perspective.

These interview plans, or CAP statements, can be used in several ways: as part of a statement made at the beginning of a news conference or media briefing, issued as a written or video statement, or as the basis for responding to interviews.

CAP statements can be prepared in grammatically correct sentences if they are to be issued in writing; if you are doing an interview, it will probably be easier to write down a few key words and phrases to keep you focused, as opposed to full sentences. This allows you to sound much more natural and gives you the latitude to speak from the heart—which is what a spokesperson should do.

The beauty of CAP statements is that media will often use them with little to no editing. A statement such as the one issued by Chief Beck in the sidebar has a much better chance of appearing in its entirety than a regurgitated narrative from a police report. People in your community want to know how you feel about an issue, what you are doing about it, and what is important to remember.

However, the creation of a CAP statement isn't the end of the interview preparation process. Take time to rehearse the statement and practice ways to bridge back to your key messages. This is a learned process. You must practice the bridging skill or you will end up sounding insincere or like you are avoiding tough questions. Always do your best to answer the questions posed first, and then bridge back to your key messages. (Templates for an interview plan are included in appendix D.)

### **CAP Statement Used by LAPD then-Chief Charlie Beck at a News Conference after a Use of Force Incident in August of 2012**

**I have serious concerns about this incident [CARE], and I believe the commanding officer was severely deficient in his initial response. Proper steps were not taken, including appropriate notifications and the removal of the officers from the field. Because of these issues, I have removed him from his command and initiated downgrade procedures. [ACTION] Every Los Angeles police officer, regardless of rank, will be held accountable for their actions. [PERSPECTIVE]**

Source: Los Angeles Police Department, "Officer Involved Use of Force During a Traffic Stop in Foothill Area NR12406rl," August 29, 2012, <http://stglapdonline.lapdonline.org/newsroom/officer-involved-use-of-force-during-a-traffic-stop-in-foothill-area-nr12406rl>.

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# VI. Communicating in Special Circumstances

“Whoever speaks first has power over the message and the receiving audiences, effectively casting the ‘opposition’ or responding agency to a ‘marginal status’.”

— John P. McHale, Joseph P. Zompetti, and Mary Anne Moffitt  
“A Hegemonic Model of Crisis Communication: Truthfulness and Repercussions for Free Speech in *Kasky v. Nike*,” *The Journal of Business Communication* 44, No 4 (2007): 374–402

By now, it won’t surprise you to read that communicating to stakeholders is a constant endeavor. Relationships are not built in a day, nor are the trust and legitimacy we so desire for our agencies and our communities. A good rule of thumb is to communicate events or issues when you become aware of them. Of course, there are caveats for investigations, undercover operations, and takedowns, but today it’s rare for a secret to stay within a police department very long.

It’s important for an agency to maintain constant contact with key stakeholders and influencers. The media are hungry for information—as are your community, elected officials, and employees. The more factual information released, the smaller the void for others to fill with misinformation, disinformation, or speculation. However, agency leadership must be mindful of those who expect to be informed before the news media and public. Mayors, city or county managers, and elected officials will most likely want to know about significant issues before they see them in the news or get a call from a reporter looking for a comment. Employees will also want to know about events that affect them before the general public, because they want to be able to answer questions truthfully and with some knowledge.

There are four circumstances that require special considerations—(1) death of an officer by suicide or in the line of duty, (2) use of force as shown in negative body-worn camera or bystander videos, (3) employee misconduct, and (4) protests. Communication efforts in these situations are not only unique but also critically important. It's imperative the audiences involved in these situations be clearly identified and strategically addressed.

## Line of duty death/ suicide of officer

Most departments have established policies and procedures for handling this tragedy; if your agency does not have one, there are numerous best practice examples available depending on the agency's size and staffing. This is the one event where the chief will almost always be the lead spokesperson for the agency. Internal communication is your second priority after notifying the officer's family.

While social media has made it difficult to notify your entire agency before the public, every effort should be made to do so. Even phone trees may be useful here. No employee wants to hear about the death of a colleague through the media or a third party. Involving peer counselors or crisis intervention team (CIT)–trained personnel in communication efforts is helpful. Your crisis guide should have initial messaging for these tragic events.

Your communications team will be front and center managing the many avenues of communications, both internally and externally. They will help prepare speaking notes for leadership and talking points for elected officials and will likely work with your operations team to set up an area to serve as a memorial where members of your community can come to pay their respects.

It's important to be prepared for the unexpected after a tragedy like this. Is your department prepared to receive monetary gifts, gift cards, food, etc.? Often, a police foundation or police union or association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and can be asked to manage such donations. It will also be important to be on the lookout for fake fundraising sites that appear online. Many departments are not allowed to promote fundraisers; think now about revising policy to allow you to direct people to the correct spot to make donations to the family of a fallen officer.

Unfortunately, some media outlets will send reporters and photographers to the homes of the nearest relatives of the fallen officer. Media must be held to a higher-than-usual standard in these circumstances—calls to news directors, along with officers assigned to stand post at homes of the family of the deceased, may be helpful in holding them to it.

Your PIO team can make various small arrangements that are important to the family of the fallen officer—for example, choosing which photo of the officer to provide for media use (ID photos are usually not flattering), supplying notecards to fellow officers to write notes to the surviving spouse or other family members, and setting up a blog or guestbook at the funeral home so community members can leave notes for the family to read. (If a blog, let the funeral home administer it so they can delete inappropriate content.)

Other communications efforts you may want to consider include providing a private venue for officers to come together to grieve, and a month or so after the officer is laid to rest hosting an open house at your headquarters or the officer's command to thank your community for their outpouring of support. While these efforts may not seem communications-related, they truly are ways for police departments to connect with their communities in a human and heartfelt way.

## Use of force or negative body-worn camera or bystander videos

Communicating to frame the narrative after a high-profile use of force is imperative. First and foremost, agencies should have clear guidance on what, if anything, they are allowed to release in the event that a third-party agency takes over these investigations, keeping in mind that the investigating agency will have different priorities than the agency involved.

For example, if there is a questionable use of force and a state agency takes over the investigation, the primary mission of the state agency is to determine if the incident is criminal in nature. The officer in question's agency may also be concerned with civil disobedience stemming from the incident; here providing body-worn camera footage may help quell rumors and unrest.

Many agencies are bypassing traditional news media and issuing their own videos to fully define an incident. This is a best practice. It is also a best practice to release as much information as permissible and practical as soon as possible. With both administrative and criminal investigations probably hindering the information flow, there are things police executives can share about the incident that will calm a community.

In these situations, the relationships built between a department and community advocates can be extraordinarily helpful. Faith-based leaders asking for calm and patience, elected officials explaining the next steps, trusted community influencers appearing with police at community meetings or news conferences—all these strategies may play a role in calming or deflecting negative attention. In these situations, a police spokesperson often cannot be heard over the noise; it is good to be able to strategically “let go” and allow those who will be heard to speak on our behalf.

Thankfully, many state and district attorneys are beginning to understand the importance of releasing information—especially video that may exonerate an officer. While this debate continues across the country, today's chief executive must balance the integrity of an investigation with the safety of their community. Your communications strategist and legal counsel should be involved with these communications plans.

## Misconduct

As with use of force and negative viral videos, agency leadership must be very careful when communicating about actual or alleged misconduct of an officer or group of officers. Careful consideration must be given to the timing, the message, and the medium used to deliver the message both within and outside the department. State law, union agreements, policy, and local practice all influence what information can and should be provided. Misconduct on the part of an employee can contribute to a loss of community confidence if communication is not handled strategically.

Whether the chief or sheriff should make statements personally depends on the seriousness of the misconduct and on whether there has been a spate of incidents within a relatively short time frame. While agency leaders are in a position to take responsibility and apologize (if necessary), great care must be taken to ensure it does not appear the chief executive has made a conclusion of guilt before the formal investigation is complete.

## Protests

Many agencies have been involved in numerous protests of varying size and sentiment over the past few years—some peaceful demonstrations, others outright violent uprisings that significantly affected community safety and security of officers as well.



### Example of a LODD Statement

In 2013, Anthony Batts, police commissioner for the City of Baltimore, faced the horrific aftermath of a training officer accidentally shooting a trainee during a simunition training exercise. At the first media briefing at the Maryland Shock Trauma Center, Commissioner Batts said, “I probably have more questions than you have. . . . It’s going to take time to get answers to those questions. . . . We’re going to take the time to dig to make this better so we don’t have this happen again.” Elected officials echoed those talking points, which were prepared by the Baltimore Police Department’s communications team. Councilman Brandon Scott, who served as vice-chair of the public safety committee, said, “It’s an unspeakable tragedy, but there are a lot of questions that need to be answered. . . . I will do everything in my power that we find out what happened and that something like this never happens again.”

The union president at the time also used similar sentiments, saying, “[This is a] tragedy for the department and everyone involved. The police department will do a very thorough investigation.”

Communication during protests takes on significant importance. So much information, especially in the form of visuals (video and photos), is shared by those involved in the demonstration; police must get better at sharing their point of view. While many agencies are using the best practice of communicating throughout a protest, sometimes live video feeds, short video clips, or photos speak more than words in a tweet or blog post. The message and the medium are equally important, as people believe with their eyes before their ears.

When protests are planned in advance, communication should also begin early on. If possible, meet with protest organizers and the news media to go over restrictions, legalities (for example, when a peaceful protest becomes an illegal gathering), and the methods law enforcement will use; these explanations will help deter misinformation. Communicate to your community about what will be allowed and what information police will convey during the protest (e.g., closed streets, moving groups), as well as your community safety goals. Convey the importance of protecting people’s First Amendment rights and clearly state what happens if people choose to act unlawfully. Communicating those expectations will help your community feel confident that their safety remains a priority. Two 2022 reports, one from the COPS Office and the National Policing Institute<sup>18</sup> and one from the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF),<sup>19</sup> outline the importance of ensuring staff policing a demonstration understand both the objectives and the legalities involved. Employees must understand what is expected of them, and clearly stated “rules of engagement” should be issued and confirmed with staff working such an event.

It’s also prudent to advise elected officials of plans and objectives for a demonstration and contingency plans if things become violent. Some elected officials and even celebrities choose to involve themselves in protests to make a point or draw attention to an issue. It’s important, as chief executive, to be aware of their involvement and have plans in place as to how these high-profile figures will be dealt with if things begin to get tense.

18. National Policing Institute, *21st Century Protest Response: Promoting Democracy and Advancing Community and Officer Safety* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2022), <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/Home.aspx?page=detail&id=COPS-P459>.

19. PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), *Rethinking the Police Response to Mass Demonstrations: Nine Recommendations*, Critical Issues in Policing Series (Washington, DC: PERF, 2022), <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/ResponseMassDemonstrations.pdf>.

Once a protest begins, it's helpful to use social media to convey a constant narrative about the event. Praise those who are behaving lawfully, explain what is happening, ask people to continue acting lawfully, and call out those who are not. Post dispersal orders (using graphics is especially helpful here) and continue to use visuals as much as possible. During protests, it's also possible to hold media accountable for their actions. Be clear in giving direction to members of the media and legal observers.

It is worth considering your policy on how you respond to disinformation in these circumstances. By monitoring what is being said by the media and other groups, it is possible to ensure that anything that misleads the public is dealt with swiftly. Often, incendiary headlines are inaccurate—but they can still divert resources and put officers in danger. Be prepared to counter such information quickly.

Once the protest is finished, it's wise to communicate a formal end to the event. A short video or live feed from where the protest finished can be helpful. At this point, thanking those who attended and had their voices heard peacefully is in order, as is calling out those who were not peaceful and explaining how their actions negatively affected the community, if indeed they did. Instead of talking about police cars that may have been damaged, talk about how any unlawfulness—looting, fires, vandalism—affects the community. Talk about the ice cream shop that won't be open this weekend after soccer practice, or the corner store that must close for a week to clean up. Letting your community know the consequences of violent protests will help create advocates. **Having advocates speak on your behalf is even better in this case than speaking yourself.**



## VII. Conclusions

The objective of this toolkit is to help law enforcement agency leadership and strategic communications advisors develop skills in creating communications plans. There are an enormous number of complex issues that police must communicate to both internal and external audiences. Almost every issue affects people in your community and your organization in different ways.

Planning allows us to think clearly outside the fog of any crisis or critical event and obtain buy-in and approval from critical stakeholders during the planning process. It allows us to strategically examine options for media, messages, and messengers and to take the lead on both creating and communicating the brand image we want for our agencies. It's clear that relying on media to relay those messages has not been wholly successful; but we have the tools today to take a much more active role in our brand image and communication strategies. Our communities demand more information and more answers today than ever before.

As the organization's leader, the chief or sheriff is critical to the success of any new initiative; a sustained commitment to communication is no exception. The development of any of the communications plans in this guide requires leadership's direct involvement because it touches every part of the department. Developing these plans is not complicated but does require time, energy, attention to detail, and a careful examination of the current situation internally and externally. These plans are your guide to better connecting with your community to help them become advocates—or better advocates—for public safety.

Once a plan is developed, leadership's continued support and involvement is necessary for its implementation. Leadership sets the tone for successful communication in how they deal with the news media and use the communications tools at their disposal.

Thinking strategically about messages and communication tools is especially valuable when the inevitable crisis occurs. We have painfully learned that speed often trumps truth during a crisis, and the first frame applied to the narrative usually shapes the entire story.

Just as operational and tactical plans are designed to be living, changing documents, communication plans must be updated regularly. Staying current is part of staying relevant, building trust, and developing the productive relationships that are so critical to public safety. Americans, used to immediate access to information, no longer tolerate an unresponsive agency—instead, they demand information. Police leaders can now set the stage for the growth of their organization by approaching internal and external communications with the same passion they bring to the crime fight.

This document is a comprehensive, inclusive look at the importance of elevating communication efforts to the forefront of police management. As detailed and valuable as this information is, it is only the starting point. Each agency will need to take the information contained herein and customize an approach for its own jurisdiction. How you implement the plans outlined here will influence future generations of policing and the legacy of your agency.

# Appendix A. Strategic Communications Plan Templates

## Addendum A-1 Communications Plan Template



### Communications Plan

DATE

Agency Name  
Template

Addendum A-1 Communications Plan Template *cont'd*

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## Executive Summary

Subtitle – Use your Messaging Strategy Here

This is a one to two-page summary of the entire plan. Think about writing your plan for walkers, runners, and sprinters. If someone is just thumbing through your plan, what are the highlights they can pull? Something reading through it quickly, what are the important points they need to see? The details are for the walkers – who will read the entire plan thoroughly.

***“Use pull-quotes for important points.”***

Write your entire plan as if someone who does not know your agency is reading it. Don't assume a reader knows anything about your jurisdiction, your agency, your challenges, or opportunities.



Addendum A-1 Communications Plan Template *cont'd*

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## Overview

This is where you do an overview of your agency, short history, staffing, leadership team, basic facts.

### Environmental Scan

#### Your Jurisdiction

Outline the demographics and trends of the area, crime history and trends, and the current operational climate.

Include information from elected officials and community here regarding perceptions, goals, and challenges.

#### Your Agency

Include an internal snapshot of the agency – funding, morale, challenges. Include current public perceptions. Include information from employees, elected, the media and your community.

Include a section about the Public Information Office: staffing, plans, policies, and priorities.

#### Local Media

Outline current relationships with traditional media; list all media outlets with some depth of reach and demographics. Identify influencers.

Describe current social media platforms in use, engagement strategies, and reach.

#### SWOT Analysis

Identify the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the department from a communications perspective.

Addendum A-1 Communications Plan Template *cont'd*

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## Goals

**Agency Goals/Mission Statement**

List the agency's goal, mission statement, vision, and values.

**Communications Goal**

Present the goal of the communications plan, which supports the overall agency goal.

## Objectives

List measurable and specific objectives to reach the goal. Use active verbs such as: develop, build, create, improve, maintain.

## Audiences

Identify stakeholders. Describe groups through demographics, issue, and trust level. Include any audience mapping you conducted. Consider listing them as primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences. Don't forget internal audiences!

Explain the rationale behind the rankings.

## Strategies

List strategies to employ that will bring your objectives to fruition. Strategies should be comprehensive and link back to one or more objectives. Again, measurable words should be used such as: engage, create, ensure, nurture, employ, continue.

Addendum A-1 Communications Plan Template *cont'd*

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## Messaging Strategy

Significant thought must go into creating the messaging strategy. What are the key themes that will carry the agency through the communications plan period?

Field-test messaging with stakeholders, command, and the community to ensure your messaging strategy will resonate across all your audiences and cannot be misrepresented.

A messaging strategy can be brand words, phrases, or sentences. It will only work if it is clear, consistent, and constant.

## Tactics

Each strategy should be accompanied by tactics (hard actions) that will achieve the strategy. Tactics can be written in significant detail (especially for larger teams), or basic detail.

Each tactic should identify the resources required to get the tactic done including staffing, materials, and budget. Each tactic should then be assigned a due date or timeline for implementation.

A messaging calendar may be part of your outreach tactics. High-level weekly topics can be included in your communications plan, along with an event/date-specific communications calendar, such as national holidays, and recognized weeks. The daily deep dive is a separate document.

Addendum A-1 Communications Plan Template *cont'd*

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## Evaluation Criteria

The success of a communication plan is measured on both outputs and behavior change.

If you have created SMART objectives and strategies, you may be able to assign metrics to each objective or overall metrics to reaching the goal.

Establish metrics that mean something. Has your recruitment of local college grads increased (output/quantitative)? Has the satisfaction of officers with 1-5 years of service improved (behavior change/qualitative)?

Where is your community on the public engagement scale?

Consider establishing a Police Satisfaction Index to help quantify the success of the communications plan.

## Addendum A-2 Sample Excerpt 2014 Baltimore Police Department Communications Plan

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### **BPD Mission Statement**

*A Safer Baltimore*

#### Vision:

A professional, efficient, constitutionally centered, crime-fighting team, dedicated to providing a safe city for all who visit, work, or live in Baltimore.

Pillars of Engagement for a “A Safer Baltimore”

1. Focus on gangs and guns
2. Community engagement
3. Actionable and timely intelligence
4. Data-sharing with federal, state, and local partners, as well as the community
5. Ethics, integrity, and accountability.

---

### **Communications Goal**

To create a positive perception of the Baltimore Police Department, both internally and externally, by relaying information in a timely fashion to the correct target audiences using appropriate and effective tools to build understanding, support, and positive community partnerships.

---

### **Primary Objectives**

1. Build and maintain positive public awareness of the Baltimore Police Department and its ongoing efforts to prevent and solve crimes, while empowering the community to help make a safer Baltimore.
2. Help develop and uphold the confidence and trust of Baltimore residents, businesses, and visitors that the department is made up of dedicated professionals who do their job with integrity and honor.
3. Entrench the belief, internally and externally, that the Baltimore Police Department is a first-rate and enviable employer, in order to enhance customer service and attract superior candidates to the department.

## Addendum A-2 Sample Excerpt 2014 Baltimore Police Department Communications Plan *cont'd*

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### Target Audiences

All communication done by the Baltimore Police Department must be targeted at the following two groups:

External:

City Business Leaders and Residents  
Local Media  
Potential employees  
Visitors

The external audience is the economic driver of the city. In keeping with the mayor's desire to grow the city by 10,000 families the police department must push a messaging strategy that changes the established perceptions of the BPD. The messaging strategy must inform the community of the tremendous efforts underway, engage the community in new and interactive ways, and empower them to become engaged in the process.

By changing the external view of crime in Baltimore, the Baltimore Police Department is fulfilling one part of its mission to help bring 10,000 families to Baltimore. Additionally, as there is a paradigm switch to a community that embraces the police department, information will flow more freely to the agency further reducing violent crime. This meets the second part of the agency's responsibility towards achieving the mayor's goal.

Internal:

Sworn Personnel  
Professional Staff

Internal messaging is arguably the more important of the two messaging planks. The members of the agency suffer from a variety of morale issues that have led to a decrease in performance by some officers. Their performance has a direct impact on the crime fight. The reasons for the general apathy is long created and will not be fixed over night. One of the leading causes is a general belief that the agency does not care for the individual officer.

Internal messaging must be focused on detailing the positive changes that are occurring in the agency. The deployment of new technology, issuance of Tasers, and a host of other top-down changes that are coming; changes that are focused on improving the quality of the work environment should be highlighted. These changes will improve the overall efficiency of the agency while improving the quality of life for the employees.

The push of information as these changes come online must be timely and directed in a variety of fashions to rapidly and accurately inform the internal audience. Delay in getting the message out, or the wrong messaging drifting through the agency will defeat the wholesale effort to change the department for the better.

## Addendum A-2 Sample Excerpt 2014 Baltimore Police Department Communications Plan *cont'd*

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### Strategies

1. Nurture professional and productive relationships with the media, whose influence spheres include our external and internal audiences.
2. Continue to push the “#ASaferBaltimore” campaign.
3. Develop a strategic public outreach based off of calendar events and BPD generated events.
4. Develop comprehensive internal messaging strategies that address employee concerns while highlighting accomplishments.
5. In cooperation with Baltimore City government, ensure effective crisis communication plans are in place. Ensure that Baltimore City government is kept apprised of current messaging from the Baltimore Police Department.
6. Remain vigilant in protecting the image and brand of the BPD.

---

### Messaging Strategy

The department’s messaging strategy for the next six months is made of three simple words: **trust**, **partnerships**, and **empowerment**. These characteristics will be embedded in all messaging from the department.

These three words will resonate differently with each stakeholder group. For example, empowering a community means providing information to allow them to engage proactively in crime solving and crime prevention. Empowering our employees, means allowing them to make good decisions that help support the mission of the BPD. Partnerships with our community means creating and maintaining positive and meaningful relationships with different target audiences. Partnerships internally also means developing those same strong relationships with state and federal law enforcement partners who will help the BPD in its overall mission to keep the people of Baltimore safe.



Addendum A-2 Sample Excerpt 2014 Baltimore Police  
Department Communications Plan *cont'd*

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### Measurable Tactics

**These are feasible tactics that can be implemented and sustained with current staffing and training. These tactics do not include the daily responsibilities of answering media inquiries.**

1. Nurture Relationships

- a. Media training for all members of Command. Every member of Command should be given basic media training so that they can speak at crime scenes and answer routine command specific inquiries. This basic training would outline how to answer questions consistent with protecting the BPD brand (Obj. 6)
  - a. This objective could be addressed at Command Training
  - b. No budget implications (NBI)
- b. Any time there is a significant event involving the BPD, talking points should be sent to all command, specifically District Commanders and Captains. They interact with the community on a frequent basis so there should be one voice, one message going out to the community regarding significant events.
  - a. This objective can begin immediately
  - b. NBI
- c. Continued monitoring of local news coverage to include social media and blogs is essential to understanding the “pulse” of the city. This is currently ongoing and with the addition of the blog tracking should be continued. Additionally, a monthly media report will be submitted to the Mayor’s Communication Office.
  - a. In progress
  - b. NBI
- d. Positive story pitches are the ongoing goal of the Media Relations Section. Each PIO is tasked with one positive story pitch per week, resulting in 16 positive story pitches per month.
  - a. In progress
  - b. NBI
- e. Network buy-in will be critical to future story pitches. The Media Relations Section must tie stories into network specific television programming. As an example, CBS has multiple C.S.I. shows that can be tied into investigative work done by various units.
  - a. This objective can begin immediately
  - b. NBI
- f. Calendar tie-ins will be used to highlight BPD led initiatives with a comprehensive messaging strategy around specific calendar dates.
  - a. This objective can begin immediately
  - b. NBI

## Addendum A-2 Sample Excerpt 2014 Baltimore Police Department Communications Plan *cont'd*

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### Strategies

1. Nurture professional and productive relationships with the media, whose influence spheres include our external and internal audiences.
2. Continue to push the “#ASaferBaltimore” campaign.
3. Develop a strategic public outreach based off of calendar events and BPD generated events.
4. Develop comprehensive internal messaging strategies that address employee concerns while highlighting accomplishments.
5. In cooperation with Baltimore City government, ensure effective crisis communication plans are in place. Ensure that Baltimore City government is kept apprised of current messaging from the Baltimore Police Department.
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---

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These three words will resonate differently with each stakeholder group. For example, empowering a community means providing information to allow them to engage proactively in crime solving and crime prevention. Empowering our employees, means allowing them to make good decisions that help support the mission of the BPD. Partnerships with our community means creating and maintaining positive and meaningful relationships with different target audiences. Partnerships internally also means developing those same strong relationships with state and federal law enforcement partners who will help the BPD in its overall mission to keep the people of Baltimore safe.

## Addendum A-2 Sample Excerpt 2014 Baltimore Police Department Communications Plan *cont'd*

### 2. #ASaferBaltimore

- a. Created in July of 2013 the “#ASaferBaltimore” campaign is as a social media-based communication tool. In an effort to highlight the good work being done by the men and women in uniform, this hash tag was created to provide a single-stop identifier to social media posts by the department. This branding strategy allows the nearly 40,000 followers on twitter and 14,000 on Facebook to recognize a tweet as positive crime enforcement or community relations-based work by the BPD.
  - a. This objective is ongoing
  - b. NBI
- b. The campaign has been an ongoing success and the hash tag is now used by the Mayor’s office when tweeting crime based positive stories.
  - a. This objective is ongoing
  - b. NBI
- c. The phrase “A Safer Baltimore” must be worked into all prepared remarks and public appearances, to continue to push the brand.
  - a. This objective can begin immediately
  - b. NBI

### 3. Calendar based interest

- a. As referenced previously, calendar event tie-ins are critical to driving public interest in BPD related activities. Currently, standard messaging around major calendar events is based singularly on public safety tips.
  - a. This objective can begin immediately
- b. A more broad based approach to messaging should be enacted. Story pitches along with social media should be used to push a broader view of everything the BPD is doing in relation to events, beyond traffic and crowd control.
  - a. This would be an excellent opportunity to push messaging regarding the Commissioner’s plan to take back open spaces.
  - b. This objective can begin immediately

### 4. Internal Messaging

- a. Internal messaging needs to be fast, accurate, and engaging. Previous attempts to distribute internal messaging have been tracked and the vast majority of patrol officers do not check email on a routine basis. Distribution of timely information needs to utilize various forms of technology to include: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, BPD Broadcast, video messaging in Districts.
  - a. This objective can begin immediately
  - b. NBI

Addendum A-2 Sample Excerpt 2014 Baltimore Police  
Department Communications Plan *cont'd*

- b. Any time there is a significant achievement by an officer, or new goal achieved by Command (Tasers, patrol rifles, etc..) all of the above enumerated communication techniques should be employed to ensure we are reaching the largest possible target audience.
      - a. This objective can begin immediately
      - b. NBI
    - c. The Media Relations Section must do a better job of informing the general membership of its roles and responsibilities. There are a number of misconceptions about how the MRS operates and these need to be dispelled through better internal messaging. This could include “Behind the Scenes” videos. Additionally, allowing officers to spend a few hours with the MRS as part of an “Excellence in Policing” reward would enable officers to go back to the districts and share their in-person observations of exactly what MRS does.
      - a. This objective can begin immediately
      - b. NBI
- 5. Crisis Communication and City Hall
  - a. The MRS must remain in constant contact with the Mayor’s Office of Communication to ensure consistent messaging. The BPD has a very specific brand and image that must be maintained. However, the MOC must be kept apprised of any new messaging coming out of the BPD, seeking both advice and consent. The mayor should never be put into a position where she is unaware of a statement or policy directive initiated by the BPD.
    - a. This objective can begin immediately
    - b. NBI
  - b. Large scale city events require PIO communication and through the resources of the MOC, the BPD must make sure that its messaging is the same as other city agencies. Specific emphasis should be placed on advanced coordination to help drive the BPD’s stated objectives as they relate to calendar messaging and event messaging (Obj.’s 3a, 3b, 4b).
    - a. This objective can begin immediately
    - b. NBI
  - c. Regularly emergency drills should be scheduled with BPD, BCFD, OEM, and MOC communications teams to assess readiness and prepare for emergency communication.
    - a. This objective can begin immediately.
    - b. NBI
- 6. BPD Branding

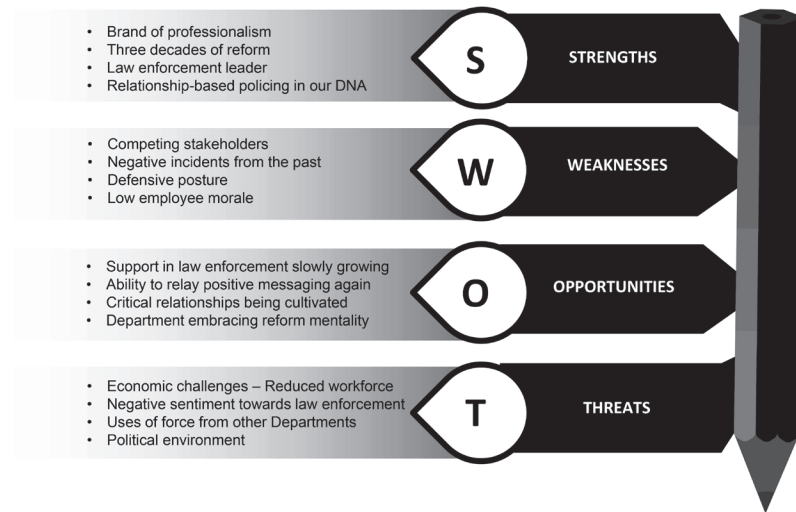
While listed last, this is arguably the most important objective. The look and feel of messaging that is put out will drive and support all of the previous objectives.

## Addendum A-2 Sample Excerpt 2014 Baltimore Police Department Communications Plan *cont'd*

This includes the development of a Standard Operating Procedure manual for the MRS.

- a. The same design seen by citizens on the side of our patrol cars should be used on all graphic imaging, news releases, and photos put out by the MRS.
- b. #ASaferBaltimore should be on all public imaging, news releases, video productions released by the MRS.
- c. The same color, tone, and graphic feel should be used in all photographs, news release, website postings.
- d. Develop a Style Guide by December
  - i. This objective can begin immediately
  - ii. Minimal – if printing Style Guide
- a. Equally as important is protecting the image of the BPD in the various spheres of public influence; from mainstream media to social media the image must be protected.
  - a. Daily monitoring of social and mainstream media.
  - b. Corrections to factual inaccuracies should be published on twitter and the department's website.
  - c. Proactive story pitches should be used to counteract misinformation that may exist in the blogosphere. Posts, blogs, and stories that are published should be retweeted and highlighted by the BPD as a means of pushing third party endorsements.
  - i. This objective can begin immediately
  - ii. Cost of social media listening software (\$100/mo)
- b. Recruitment is the future of this agency. Coordination between the MRS and Recruitment is essential to attracting the right applicant.
  - a. The entire set of recruitment videos and graphics needs to be reworked. At present there are mixed messages on both the website and YouTube site.
    - i. This objective can begin immediately
  - ii. Current staffing is adequate, NBI
    - b. All the videos and graphics should be designed with a consistent theme to attract the type of applicant we want to see applying. Constant coordinating between the two units will be vital to ensuring that the correct strategy is in place.
      - i. This objective can begin immediately
    - ii. NBI / current staffing
  - c. Recruitment efforts to include: two-day processing events, recruitment fairs, and other initiatives undertaken by the recruitment unit should be advertised well in advance and with increasing frequency as the dates draw near. The future of the agency is dependant upon attracting qualified applicants.
    - i. This objective can begin immediately
    - ii. NBI / current staffing

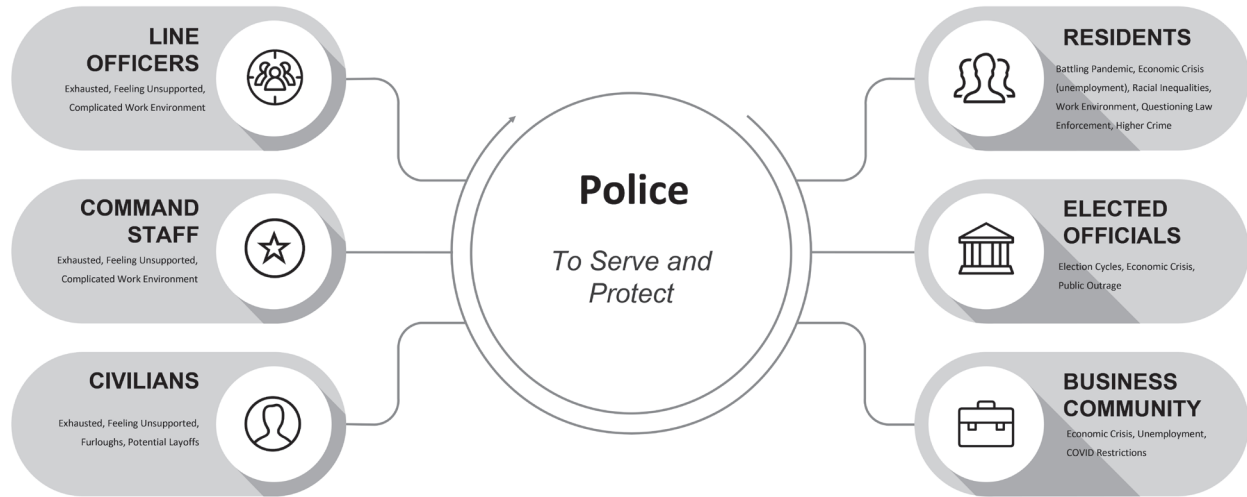
## Addendum A-3 Sample Excerpt 2022 Communications Plan

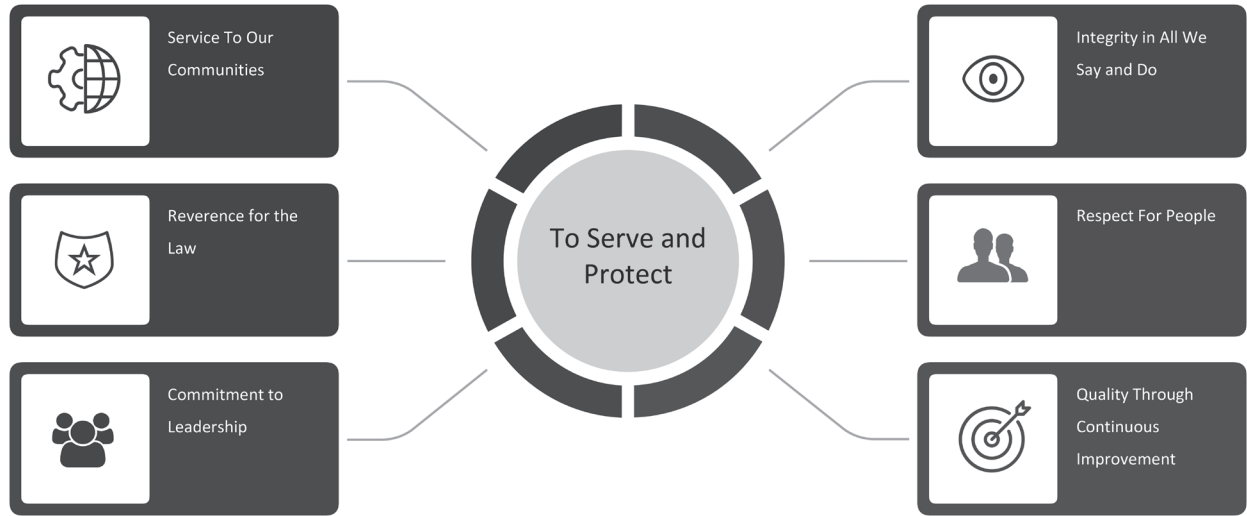
**SWOT ANALYSIS**

Identifying the Path Ahead

Addendum A-3 Sample Excerpt 2022 Communications Plan *cont'd***GOALS**



Addendum A-3 Sample Excerpt 2022 Communications Plan *cont'd***OUR AUDIENCE**

Addendum A-3 Sample Excerpt 2022 Communications Plan *cont'd***OUR MESSAGE**

Addendum A-3 Sample Excerpt 2022 Communications Plan *cont'd***SIX MONTH GOALS**

Addendum A-3 Sample Excerpt 2022 Communications Plan *cont'd***SIX MONTH GOALS**

# Appendix B. Tactical Communications Plan Templates

## Addendum B-1 Tactical Communications Plan Template



### **Tactical Communications Plan**

**DATE**

**Agency Name  
Template**

## Addendum B-1 Tactical Communications Plan Template *cont'd*

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### Overview

This is where you do a quick overview of the event or issue the Tactical Communications Plan (TCP) is being created for. A short history, climate, concerns, and reasons for the plan.

#### SWOT Analysis

Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the event from a communications perspective.

### Objectives

What is the objective of the communications support of the event?

#### Desired Outcomes

What do you hope to achieve?

### Audiences

Stakeholders will typically be much more specific in a TCP. Rank them and explain rationale if necessary.

Addendum B-1 Tactical Communications Plan Template *cont'd*

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## Strategies

List strategies to employ that will bring your objectives to fruition. Be specific with your mediums and timeline.

## Messaging Strategy

Significant thought must go into creating the messaging strategy. What are the key themes that will carry the agency through the event?

Do you need to create potential multiple-outcome strategies?

A messaging strategy can be brand words, phrases, or sentences. It will only work if it is clear, consistent, and constant.

## Tactics

Ground-level actions with dates, times, mediums to be used. In a TCP be as specific as possible (Level III).

## Expectations & Metrics

List expectations for the event and desired outcomes. Try to include quantitative and qualitative measures if possible.



## Addendum B-2 Sample TCP Template Toronto Police Service



**Date**  
*Draft version 1.0*

Corporate Communications  
**COMMUNICATIONS PLAN – [INSERT PROGRAM]**

**Overview**

[Insert]

**Objectives**

[Insert]

**Strategic Considerations**

[Insert]

**Audience**

[Insert]

**Approach**

[Insert]

**Key Messages**

[Insert]

**Statement**

[Insert]

**Scenario**

[Insert]

**Appendix**

[Insert]

## Addendum B-3 Sample TCP Savannah-Chatham (Georgia) Metro Police Department



Savannah-Chatham Metro Police

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# **Tactical Communications Plan**

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Precinct Realignment

Draft 2.0

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## Addendum B-3 Sample TCP Savannah-Chatham (Georgia) Metro Police Department *cont'd*

### Tactical Communications Plan

When the new Savannah-Chatham Police Department (SCMPD) was created, the county areas now to be served by the new department were divided into two precinct areas. At the time, there were no statistics to support the consideration to balancing officer workload, time to calls, or budgets. Maintaining two precincts that share about half the workload of other precinct areas caused concern and are not an efficient use of resources. SCMPD is dedicated to maximizing its resources and ensuring as many officers as possible are patrolling the streets. Merging Islands and Skidaway Precincts achieve various 'smarter not harder' policing goals.

#### Plan Overview

**Name of Campaign:** Maximum Impact: Towards smarter policing  
**Campaign Champions:** Chief Michael Berkow

#### Objective

Create community and political support for the move from six precincts to five by gaining the community's understanding and trust that fewer precincts make sense – both from a public safety and budgetary standpoint.

#### Target Audiences

1. Employees of SCMPD
2. Residents of Skidaway and Islands Precincts
3. Remainder of Chatham County areas served by SCMPD
4. City officials and government officials

## Addendum B-3 Sample TCP Savannah-Chatham (Georgia) Metro Police Department *cont'd*

### Message Summary

Metro Police are exploring and implementing every possible way to maximize its current resources to best serve the citizens of Savannah-Chatham.

Experts in the field – both within and external to the organization – have devised a plan to put more officers on the street without compromising service or costing more money.

Service to the Islands and Skidaway Precinct areas, and pockets of other areas will see no change in their police response or service – or may, in fact, see a slight improvement

Metro Police continue to employ innovative solutions to improve efficiency and services to the people of Savannah and Chatham County.

This is not the 'finish line', SCMPD would like to do more, but that will take additional resources and funding.

### Desired Outcome

- Support of precinct realignment strategy
- Confidence that SCMPD has taken appropriate and effective action
- SCMPD seen as using innovative and sound best practices to improve service to its customers
- Groundwork laid to prepare politicians and community for the "ask" for additional funds in future budget.

### Process

1. Identify one or more community champion(s) to be third-party endorsers
2. Internal communications to employees
3. News conference with Chief held at Islands Precinct
4. Open Town Hall Meeting held to introduce plan to community
5. Town Hall meeting or news conference video taped and played on City and County channels and posted to "You Tube" and promoted to people who cannot attend meeting to learn about the plan 'firsthand'. Explore possibility of going live on city cable or streaming.
6. Strategically placed media stories

Addendum B-3 Sample TCP Savannah-Chatham (Georgia)  
Metro Police Department *cont'd*

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Project Plan

**INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

**CompStat Staff Meeting**

PPT presentation made at CompStat meeting by Chief Berkow. CompStat as opposed to Command Staff because a more diverse cross-section of department attends CompStat.

**PPT TO COMMANDERS**

Short version of PPT provided to Precinct Commanders to show at all roll calls.  
PPT to be uploaded to SARIC website for easy viewing by all staff.

**APB NEWSLETTER**

Further discussion of reasons for re-alignment featured in August edition of APB.

**QUESTION AND ANSWER**

Invite all members to send e-mails to one source with any questions they have to be answered DIRECTLY by the Chief

Addendum B-3 Sample TCP Savannah-Chatham (Georgia)  
Metro Police Department *cont'd*

**EVENTS**

**Date TBD – News Conference**

- Schedule to run at 11:00 a.m. at the Islands Precinct with Chief hosting, accompanied by City and County executives, community champion(s) and ALL Precinct Commanders
- Abbreviated PPT shown and explained to media
- Community champion(s) to speak about support of the plan
- Discuss what changes the department has made to best exploit every resource it has to increase number of officers on the streets
- Invitation to media to Town Hall Meeting that night at location TBD

**That evening – “Maximum Impact” Town Hall Meeting**

- Schedule for 7:00 p.m. at LOCATION TBD (Pastor Marchant offered his church)
- This is to be a 'non-political' meeting, with the Chief, and community champion(s) speaking
- Simplified PPT is presented
- Floor opened (mediated by strong community member) for questions
- The entire Command Staff and as many officers as possible should attend to show SCMPD's commitment to the community
- Media will be invited to attend, but told this is a question-and-answer opportunity for the community, not media
- Event to be videotaped, and played on City and County channels, as well as available for streaming on YouTube

## Addendum B-3 Sample TCP Savannah-Chatham (Georgia) Metro Police Department *cont'd*

### **MEDIA OUTREACH**

#### **WTOC, WSAV, WJCL**

Feature news item on all three networks day of news conference announcing change – interviews and prep can be done beforehand and embargoed until the announcement date, including maps and graphics

Ask WTOC to do editorial comment

#### **Morning Shows**

Next morning, Chief, Asst Chief and Major Tolbert make appearances on all three morning shows to talk about the positive impact of the change.

#### **Savannah Morning News**

Will run a preamble article Sunday, August 17

Tom Barton will do editorial.

SMN has agreed to do a two-page feature on the changes – using our information and PPT graphics and maps.

#### **Adventure Radio Group**

Chief outlines plan on his periodical show which runs Sunday, August 17

#### **City and County Television**

To show Town Hall Meeting or news conference either live or taped.

#### **You Tube**

Because city cannot stream video, upload video to You Tube and provide link to citizens to view meeting at their leisure – unedited and straight from Chief

#### **SCMPD and City Website**

Link to relevant and self-explanatory PPT slides so people can read information at their leisure



## Addendum B-3 Sample TCP Savannah-Chatham (Georgia) Metro Police Department *cont'd*

### Expectations

This is a change to what some residents receiving service from Savannah-Chatham police have come to know. Relationships have been developed between Precinct Commanders and officers in each of the areas.

However, a strong basis has been established that Metro Police are doing new and innovative things to improve policing in the region.

- Expect citizens in the affected areas to show “outrage” at the changes and great emotion for the “loss” of their precinct.
- Expect some community leaders to be very critical of the plan and vociferous in their message; SCMPD shall be respectful of their feelings, but professional and thoughtful in our demeanor and response. It will be important to recognize and put forth a community champion of the plan.
- Expect to spend time over-communicating our key messages.
- Expect some in the community and voices from outside the community to be critical of our actions.
- Expect some criticism from within the department.

By being clear and open with our communications outreach to the community and being honest about the Department making every effort to provide professional, efficient, and effective public safety service to the community, the change may be accepted more quickly. The department will be seen as continuing with innovative practices to improve service to the community.

### Metrics

Measures for the program will include the following:

1. Sentiment of media coverage (positive v negative).
2. Comments/sentiments of community members and electeds.
3. Editorials, letters regarding realignment from community members.
4. Internal conversations with staff.



# Appendix C. Crisis Communications Plan Templates

## Addendum C-1 Crisis Communications Holding Statement Template

### Messaging Plan Template

---

Messaging Plan for: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Target Audiences (Local):

National/International Audiences

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Key Messaging (create for local, national, international if required):

**CARE/CONCERN** (*People don't care what you have to say until they know you care*):

**ACTION** (*What should people do, what are we doing? Present, active tense, positive*):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**PERSPECTIVE** (*What do people need to know about this incident to keep it in perspective? What do you want people talking about 3 days from now?*):

Potential Search Hashtag (#):

Stats/Evidence/Rationale:

Potential Q&As:

Dos and Don'ts:

Addendum C-1 Crisis Communications Holding Statement Template *cont'd*

RESOURCES (for larger incidents):

**INCIDENT COMMANDER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Lead Agency Head:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Lead PIO:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Personnel:**

Name, Agency	Contact Info	Shift/Location

**Locations:**

Activity	Location	Notes
Media Staging Area		
Secondary Media Area		
Joint Information Center		
EOC		
Reunification Center(s)		
Hospital(s)		

**Resources:**

Item	Responsible	Notes
Extra cellphone(s)		
Laptop/tablet		
Batteries/Cords/Power supplies		
Printer		
Paper/pens		
Change of clothes		
Weather gear		
Notebooks		

**Technology:**

Medium	Responsible	Notes
List your digital platforms		
WENS/Alerts		
GETS Card		
Etc.		

**Miscellaneous:**

Item	Responsible	Notes
Water		
Food		
Port-A-Potties		
Charger station		
Etc.		

## Addendum C-2 Sample CCP Excerpt from Concord (North Carolina) PD

### IV. Crisis Identification

---

The following general scenarios have been identified by the CPD Command Staff.

#### Personnel Issues

1. Officer Involved Shooting - Human
2. Officer Involved Shooting – Pet
3. Line of Duty Death
4. Employee Misconduct On-Duty
5. Employee Misconduct Off- Duty
6. Human Error
7. In Custody Death
8. Questionable Use of Force
9. Officer Killed Off Duty

#### Service/Product Issues

10. Traffic Pursuit Causing Death (Innocent)
11. K-9 Bite (Innocent)

#### Environmental Issues

12. Transportation Event (Train Derailment/Bus Crash)
13. HAZMAT Event (Chemical Plant)
14. Natural Disaster (Hurricane/Tornado)

#### Public Disorder or Terrorism-Related Issues

15. Active Shooter/Mass Casualty Event – School
16. Active Shooter/Mass Casualty Event – Public Place
17. Ramming Attack
18. Bombing
19. Chemical Attack

#### Corporate Issues

20. Chief Issue
21. Elected Criminal Conduct
22. Workplace Violence
23. Training/Friendly Fire Incident
24. Sexual Harassment Issue

#### Virtual Issues

25. Ransomware
26. Officer Malfeasance Goes Viral

#### Event/Other

27. Speedway Incident
28. Riot/Protest/Flash Mob
29. Human Trafficking

Addendum C-2 Sample CCP Excerpt from Concord (North Carolina) PD *cont'd*

## V. Crisis Scenario Outlines

---

Here, **in order of an aggregate of probability, control and potential negative effect**, are the crises:

1. Officer Involved Shooting – Human
2. Officer Involved Shooting – Pet
3. Sexual Harassment Issues
4. Officer Malfeasance Goes Viral
5. Questionable Use of Force
6. Human Error
7. K-9 Bite (Innocent)
8. Human Trafficking
9. Traffic Pursuit Causing Death
10. Employee Misconduct – On Duty
11. Employee Misconduct – Off Duty
12. Elected Official Criminal Conduct
13. Training/Friendly Fire Incident
14. In Custody Death
15. Riot/Protest/Flash Mob
16. Active Shooter/Mass Casualty Event (Public Place)
17. Active Shooter/Mass Casualty Event (School)
18. Ramming Attack
19. Bombing/Bomb Threat
20. Chemical Attack
21. Chief Issues
22. Workplace Violence
23. Transportation Event (Trail Derailment/Bus Crash)
24. HAZMAT Event (Chemical Plant)
25. Ransomware
26. Speedway Incident
27. Officer Killed Off Duty
28. Natural Disaster (Hurricane, Tornado)
29. Line of Duty Death

Addendum C-2 Sample CCP Excerpt from Concord (North Carolina) PD *cont'd*

## VI. Scenarios



Addendum C-2 Sample CCP Excerpt from Concord (North Carolina) PD *cont'd*

## 1. Interview Plan: Officer Involved Shooting - Person

---

**Primary Target Audiences:**

1. Community
2. Victim's loved ones
3. Employees
4. Advocate community/special interest groups
5. Jury Pool

**Key Messaging:****CARE/CONCERN**

An incident like this affects us all. We value human life.

**ACTION**

1. Concord Police and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation are investigating this incident. Officers and agents are on the scene now.
2. We encourage people to use alternate routes around [area] for the next several hours.
3. We also encourage anyone who witnessed the incident to contact Cabarrus County CrimeStoppers with information, or upload any video to [e.com address].

**PERSPECTIVE**

Concord PD will be as forthcoming as possible and will provide our community with accurate information as soon as possible. Please be patient while we work with the SBI on this investigation.

[Now allow me to take you through the event ...]

**Stats/Evidence/Rationale:**

- Involved officers have been placed on leave/assigned alternate duties
- 

**Hashtag:**

#CPDNC\_News

Addendum C-2 Sample CCP Excerpt from Concord (North Carolina) PD *cont'd*

## Potential Q&amp;As:

**Q: Can you tell us the identity of the officer? Was he/she white/black?**

A: At this point, I can tell you the officer [gender] has been with the department for XX years. Concord PD will be as forthcoming as possible and will provide our community with accurate information as soon as possible. Please be patient while we work with the SBI on this investigation. We also encourage anyone who witnessed the incident to contact Cabarrus County CrimeStoppers with information, or upload any video to [URL].

**Q: How many times was the victim shot?**

A: That's part of our investigation. Concord Police and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation are investigating this incident. Officers and agents are on the scene now. We also encourage anyone who witnessed the incident to contact Cabarrus County CrimeStoppers with information, or upload any video to [URL].

**Q: Couldn't you have just shot him in the leg?**

A: We hold life in the highest regard. Who did what, how, and why is part of what the Concord Police and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation are investigating. We will be as forthcoming as we can and will provide our community with accurate information as soon as possible.

**Q: Any involvement with this individual/victim in the past?**

A: [IF YES] This person is known to police. Concord PD will be as forthcoming as we can and will provide our community with accurate information as soon as possible. Please be patient while we work with the SBI on this investigation. We also encourage anyone who witnessed the incident to contact Cabarrus County CrimeStoppers with information, or upload any video to [e.com address].

**Q: History of the officer?**

A: We'll provide the information allowed by law shortly. What's important right now is that this is an ongoing investigation. We encourage people to use alternate routes around [area] for the next several hours.

**Q: Was the victim armed?**

A: [IF YOU KNOW] The person was/was not armed. Concord Police and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation are investigating this incident. Officers and agents are on the scene now. We also encourage anyone who witnessed the incident to contact Cabarrus County CrimeStoppers with information, or upload any video to [e.com address].

**Q: Can you tell us the identity of the victim?**

A: We'll release the name once next of kin is notified. Concord PD will be as forthcoming as we can and will provide our community with accurate information as soon as possible. Please be patient while we work with the SBI on this investigation.

**Q: How long will it take to finish the investigation?**

A: As long as it takes to get it right. Concord PD will be as forthcoming as possible and will provide our community with accurate information as soon as possible. Please be patient while we work with the SBI on this investigation.

Addendum C-2 Sample CCP Excerpt from Concord (North Carolina) PD *cont'd*

**Q: Was the officer wearing a body camera? Is there BCW footage available?**

**A:** All patrol officers are issued a body camera. It's to be determined if it was worn at the time, and what, if anything, was captured. As you know, the State has certain requirements regarding release and that is something we can work through as this investigation moves forward. Right now, it's important that any witness contact Cabarrus County CrimeStoppers with information, or upload any video to [e.com address].

**Q: Is this a justified shooting? Was it within your policies and procedures?**

**A:** Those questions will be answered by the investigation being conducted by the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation. Concord PD will be as forthcoming as possible and will provide our community with accurate information as soon as possible.

#### HELPFUL TIPS:

- Do you have video or 9-1-1 audio you could release to help define the incident?
- Approach the victim's family as soon as possible to show compassion.
- Reach out to community advocates and religious leaders if necessary.
- Broach the possibility of a joint news conference with family member(s) to show they have faith that you will determine what happened and do everything in your power to ensure it doesn't happen again.
- Consider hosting a local community meeting in a house of worship to answer questions about the incident.
- Be cognizant of current events and the political climate – not just locally, but statewide and nationally as well.
- If it turns out that your agency is liable, consider working with family or local church to spearhead a memorial 'healing service' in the community.
- Don't forget anniversary dates – media keep track of these things – get ahead of them with pre-emptive news conferences announcing the changes implemented since the incident and some type of remembrance on the actual date of the event.

#### BEWARE:

- Of using the word **"VICTIM"**
- Of releasing over-edited video, which will have some thinking you are hiding something. While it is fine to put together an edited concise version of events, make full 9-1-1 audio and/or body worn camera or other video footage available as much as legally possible, keeping in mind freedom of information laws and prosecuting agencies' wishes.
- Of tending to want to immediately 'defend' your employees at all costs. Provide the facts of the case and define the incident clearly to set the tone and narrative. Don't forget, someone that your agency is sworn to protect died – the humanity of the situation cannot be overlooked.
- Of making any comment that would suggest a conclusion as to whether your agency is liable or not for the death; however, expressing empathy to the family for the loss of their loved one is wholly acceptable and encouraged.
- Of legal counsel that indicates that you should never take responsibility or apologize for malfeasance. If there is glaring fault – it is best to accept responsibility and apologize as soon as possible

# Appendix D. Interview Plan Templates

## Addendum D-1 Template Incident Interview Plan

### Interview Plan

---

**SUBJECT/ISSUE:****TARGET AUDIENCES:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Don't forget a potential jury pool! Are there national or international audiences?

**INCIDENT SUMMARY/CHRONOLOGY:**

Addendum D-1 Template Incident Interview Plan *cont'd*Key Messaging:

---

**CARE/CONCERN (1)** *People won't care what you say until they know you care.*

**ACTION (up to 3)** *What are we doing? What should/can the community do? Use present, active tense, positive words.*

1.

2.

3.

**PERSPECTIVE (1)** *What should people know about this? Think about completing the sentence, "It's incidents like these that remind us ..." or "Moving forward ..." Is there a way to move the narrative to the future?*

**STATS/EVIDENCE:**

**POTENTIAL Q&AS:**

## Addendum D-2 Sample Incident Interview Plan

**INTERVIEW PLAN**

**Subject:** Threatening Note re: Bomb at school

**Target Audiences:** Students, Staff, Parents      School Board  
 Surrounding Community      City  
 Perpetrator(s)      Elected Officials

**Incident Chronology:**

- [LOCATION] received information about a note left under the door of a classroom indicating a bomb would go off later in the week. Teacher took the note to the principal. Principal provided it to school security.
- School notified XXX a day later after they did their initial investigation/threat assessment and could not determine if it was credible or not
- [LOCATION] SRO was informed the next day (today) at XX:XX.
- SRO informed Intelligence Unit immediately
- Intelligence and officers well-versed in threat assessments were sent to the school to investigate
- Threat (note) is currently under investigation

**Key Messages:****CARE:**

The safety and security of students, faculty, and our community is our top priority. As soon as we were made aware of the [NOTE THREAT], we began an accelerated threat assessment.

**ACTION:**

We are working diligently to conduct a methodical security assessment of [LOCATION] and will ensure updates are provided in a timely and accurate fashion.

We treat all threats as credible and are working closely with the staff and faculty at [LOCATION] to ensure information is disseminated in a timely manner.

Anyone with information is urged to contact police at XXXX, and to help ensure only correct information is repeated and conveyed to others.

**PERSPECTIVE:**

Serious felony charges are associated with uttering threats. We thoroughly investigate each incident, and in most cases, they are disproved.

**STATS/EVIDENCE/RATIONAL:**

- Number of threats received annually
- Details of how we were made aware of threat
- Any partners assisting?

Addendum D-1 Template Incident Interview Plan *cont'd***POTENTIAL Q&As**

**Q:** *How serious is this threat?*

**A:** In today's society, threats like this are an unfortunate reality. Each is treated seriously and thoroughly investigated. The safety and security of students, faculty, staff, and the community is the top priority of police.

**Q:** *What exactly is the threat? / What does the note say?*

**A:** There is nothing specific within the note that targets a specific person, group of people, timeline or place. This is a general threat that is being carefully assessed and investigated – as all such incidents are.

**Q:** *Why haven't you been proactive in warning the community?*

**A:** Our number one priority is the safety of our community. Police investigate these types of threats on a regular basis, and make decisions on notifications as we deem appropriate. People who write these kinds of threats often get a thrill from the publicity the incident receives and the panic they may create.

**Q:** *When would you warn the community?*

**A:** Police will release information as soon as we deem we have credible information that may help the community stay safe.

**Q:** *What steps are police taking to investigate the threat?*

**A:** Police follow a strict protocol when it comes to threat assessment to determine credibility. Along-side the investigation, security precautions are put in place. Obviously, providing details of those precautions would be counter-productive.

**Q:** *What should students and faculty be looking out for?*

**A:** As all citizens, students, faculty, and staff should always be aware of their surroundings and report suspicious activity to police or their school security. In these types of cases, the perpetrator may have talked to others about what he or she did; so we encourage anyone with information regarding this threat to contact police immediately, or remain anonymous by contacting CrimeStoppers.

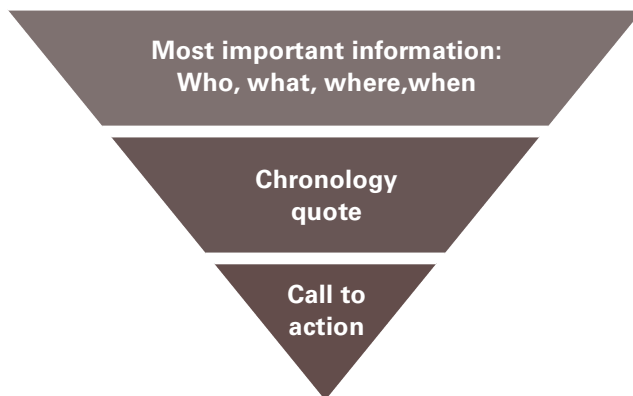


# Appendix E. News Release and Advisory Templates

## Constructing a news release: The inverted pyramid

Police tend to write news releases like incident reports—chronologically. The media leads with the most important information first. Associated Press (AP) style releases start with the most important thing that happened, or “lede”—hence the expression **don’t bury the lede**.

**Figure 17.** The inverted pyramid



The first sentence of a news release should be in **active voice, present tense**. What is happening right now: Are you investigating? Is someone in custody? Is someone dead? The first paragraph needs to include the most important information: who, what, where, and when.

The second and subsequent paragraphs can then go into chronology (and shift into past tense). Stick to the facts. Media will want the “why” and “how,” but if you don’t **know** them, don’t speculate.

The last paragraph is a call to action. Simple things like, “If you have any information about this incident, please contact XYZ department at xxx-xxx-xxxx” will work.

A reader should be able to discern the most important thing that happened (the “news”) from the first paragraph. Test your release by reading the first paragraph alone. If you can still understand what happened when you have only the first paragraph, you’ve mastered the art of the news release.

## AP format news release template

Subject/headline—should be in **bold and underlined**

City, State (Date, Time):

- The first paragraph uses active voice and present tense and includes the who, what, where, and when.
- The body of the release is in paragraph form, using present or past tense as appropriate, and includes the chronology of the incident and any quotes.
- The last paragraph includes a call to action.

Include an editor note at end of release that denotes the end of public information, which can be any of the following:

- 30 -    OR    ###    OR    -- end --

Place any other pertinent information for media only, such as when photos will be uploaded, a scheduled time for a media availability, etc., after the editor note.

The last part of a release is the “For more information” line with contact information for the person whom media should contact with any questions.

**Figure 18.** Template news release

The figure shows a template news release form with the following sections and callouts:

- Header Section:** Includes a "Send" button, "To: News Media;" and "Cc: Command Staff" fields, and a "Subject: NEWS RELEASE: Good Dog! Myrtle Beach K-9 Locates Missing Woman" line. A callout box points to the subject line with the text: "Say what it's about in the subject line".
- Subject Line:** **GOOD DOG! MYRTLE BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT K-9 LOCATES MISSING WOMAN**. A callout box points to this line with the text: "Most important thing should be in present, active tense: who, what, when, where".
- First Paragraph:** "Myrtle Beach, NC (August 13, 2018, 7 p.m.): A 79-year-old woman is home safe tonight after Myrtle Beach Police K-9 Daisy tracked the missing woman to an abandoned lot in the city's west side." A callout box points to this paragraph with the text: "Details".
- Second Paragraph:** "Mary Beth Smith's family reported her missing Sunday morning, when they arrived at her home to take her to church. Her front door was locked and she was nowhere to be found. The Smith family called police and a grid search was immediately started. Police searched the area for hours, expanding the search area hourly. Last night, at about 6 p.m., K-9 Daisy located Ms. Smith approximately four miles from home and took her to a nearby lot. She was taken to the hospital in good condition, where doctors helped rehydrate the woman before she was released to her family."
- Third Paragraph:** "Daisy received extra treats last night, and she and her handler, PFC Shon McClusky were given the rest of their shift off in recognition of their hard work."
- Fourth Paragraph:** "The Myrtle Beach Police Department thanks everyone who helped with the search, and reminds all residents help is available for families and seniors. Contact the Horry County Council on Aging for information and referrals."
- Editor Note:** "- 30 -". A callout box points to this line with the text: "Call to action".
- Contact Information:** "For more information, please contact:  
Cpt. Tom Vest  
Myrtle Beach Police Department  
843-555-0577"

## Sample news release 1. Critical incident

### NEWS RELEASE: FUGITIVE IN CUSTODY AFTER 10-CAR WRECK

Anytown, NY (August 26, 2022, 3:35PM): One man **is** in custody tonight after fleeing from the scene of a traffic wreck involving 10 vehicles on Highway 100 yesterday afternoon. Two people **are** dead, and four others **remain** in the hospital with life-threatening injuries. EDDIE MUNSTER, 24, **is** facing charges of vehicular homicide among numerous other charges in connection to the incident.

#### [MOST IMPORTANT THING USING PRESENT TENSE VERBS]

The Anytown Police Department was called to the scene of the wreck at around 2:00 yesterday afternoon. Witnesses say a male driver purposely rammed a number of vehicles and then veered in and out of traffic causing numerous motorists to swerve and hit one another.

#### [CHRONOLOGY AND QUOTES]

Shortly after allegedly ramming the vehicles, Muster jumped out of the car and ran from the scene. Numerous bystanders took photos of the subject, and others followed him to a home nearby. Police responded to the house, but Munster was not there. Subsequent follow-ups led police to a secondary address, and Munster was taken into custody without incident. “In all my years as chief, I haven’t seen such reckless driving,” said Chief Theo Kojak. “Our thoughts are with those who lost family and friends and to those fighting for their lives right now at the hospital.”

Munster was booked into the Anytown County Jail and will appear before a magistrate tomorrow morning.

Anyone with additional photos or videos of the incident is asked to please contact Det. Super Grover at XXX-XXX-XXXX or upload their videos to [THIS URL].

#### [CALL TO ACTION]

- 30 -

A mugshot of EDDIE MUNSTER is attached.

For more information, please contact:

Deputy Danny Partridge  
Anytown Police Department  
XXX-XXX-XXXX

## Sample news release 2. Internal issues

### NEWS RELEASE: INTERNAL INVESTIGATION, ANYTOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT

Anytown, NY (September 1, 2021): The Anytown Police Department is investigating two members of the Anytown Fire Department after allegations of potential misconduct during the 10-car wreck on Highway 100 in Anytown last week.

#### **[MOST IMPORTANT THING USING ACTIVE PRESENT TENSE VERBS]**

The two veteran firefighters are accused of live-streaming emergency crews' efforts during the rescue of people from wrecked and burning vehicles. A number of people alerted Facebook of the videos, which were extremely graphic in nature. "I simply cannot understand why someone who is sworn to protect life would do something like this," said Fire Chief Bruce Banner. "This investigation will be thorough, and if any of my people are involved, they will be dealt with swiftly."

#### **[CHRONOLOGY AND QUOTES]**

Facebook removed and hashed the videos as soon as the files were brought to their attention. Both men are on paid administrative leave until the investigation is completed.

Anyone with additional information, video, or photos from the incident is asked to contact Detective Super Grover with the Anytown Police Department at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

#### **[CALL TO ACTION]**

- 30 -

For more information, please contact:

Sandy Duncan, PIO

Anytown Police Department

XXX-XXX-XXXX

## Media advisories and photo opportunities

Advising the media of an event or interview or photo opportunity is **not** a news release! Help assignment editors and clearly indicate in your email's subject line what you are communicating. The media will appreciate receiving a consistent template for your various methods of communication.

### Sample media advisory

#### **MEDIA ADVISORY: ACCIDENT INVESTIGATOR BRIEFING**

Following the deadly 10-car wreck that closed Highway 100 for almost 24 hours, the Anytown Police Department's Accident Investigation Team, led by Sgt. Marcia Brady, will brief reporters on the steps that must be taken in such an investigation.

**WHAT:** Anytown Police Department Accident Investigator Briefing

**WHO:** Chief Theo Kojak  
Sgt. Marcia Brady, Accident Investigation Team

**WHEN:** Wednesday, August 27, 2022, at 10:00 AM

**WHERE:** Anytown Police Department, 1414 Main Street, Anytown

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Two people were killed, and four others remain in hospital after a man rammed numerous vehicles and swerved in and out of traffic on Highway 100 yesterday afternoon causing a 10-car pileup. EDDIE MUNSTER, 24, appears in court later today facing numerous charges including vehicular homicide. The highway was closed for almost 24 hours to collect evidence from the incident.

# Appendix F.

## Statement Templates

A statement is another medium for conveying important information. It is different from a news release in that it does not follow the AP style format and is simply a quote to be used publicly. Statements often follow the CAP method described in section V. A strategic decision must be made to determine to whom the statement will be attributed. Usually it is the chief executive, but at times, it can come from the department as a whole.

**Statement issued by Commissioner Anthony Batts, Baltimore Police Department, February 2013, after the indictment of a training officer following a training incident where a trainee was shot.**

(CARE): This indictment moves us one step forward in this painful but necessary process. As Police Officer Trainee Gray and his family continue along the path of healing, so too do the officers and trainees of the Baltimore Police Department.

(ACTION): We continue to cooperate with all outside agencies involved in this extensive investigation. Meanwhile, as we come to grips with this terrible incident, our own comprehensive evaluation of our policies and procedures and internal investigations are ongoing.

(PERSPECTIVE): When we fall short, we will not only hold ourselves accountable; but will take the necessary time, care and caution required to restore the public's confidence in our department.

**Sample Statement: Officer Malfeasance Video Goes Viral**

(CARE): We share our community's concern. There are a number of questions to be answered here.

(ACTION): We have started an internal investigation, and if anyone in the community has additional information or videos, we encourage them to come forward. When our investigation is complete, we will share our results with our community.

(PERSPECTIVE): The [Agency Name] holds each and every employee to a high standard of professionalism and accountability. We know our community does as well.



# About the Authors

## Judy Pal, primary author

With more than 30 years' experience, Judy Pal has served in management positions for police, government, the private sector, and the professional sports and entertainment industry in the United States and beyond.

Prior to embarking on a full-time teaching and consulting career, she served as an assistant commissioner with the New York City Police Department (NYPD), Director of Operations for FBI–Law Enforcement Executive Development Association (LEEDA), and Chief of Staff with the Baltimore City (Maryland) and Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Police Departments and was a member of the command staff of the Atlanta (Georgia), Savannah (Georgia), and Halifax (Nova Scotia) police overseeing communications efforts. She also served as the Public Communications Manager for the City of Irvine, creating and carrying out a branding strategy and full communications plan for California's leading master-planned community.

She served as a public relations consultant for Ogilvy Mather's affiliate in Edmonton, Alberta, counseling numerous corporate and not-for-profit organizations on branding and image development, and was a broadcast journalist in Canada for five years.

She has conducted image and media training for thousands of professionals in her career. She is a regular contributing trainer at FBI Regional Command Colleges across the country; has consulted for international government agencies such as Interpol, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Department of Justice in Chile, and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service; and has taught and spoken at events in North America, Australia, Uruguay, and the Philippines.

Pal is a past president of the National Information Officers Association, holds a master's degree in public relations and earned her Certificate in Police Leadership from Dalhousie University in Halifax. She is now the Chief Executive Officer of 10-8 Communications, LLC.

## Contributors

### Khadijah Carter

Khadijah Carter is an executive director with the NYPD, where she leads the creative services team responsible for producing image-development and branding videos and graphics for digital platforms, body-worn camera video releases, conferences, recruitment campaigns, and community engagement initiatives.

Prior to joining the NYPD in 2015, Carter worked as a producer and writer for ABC News and Ebony.com and as a spokesperson for the Young Survival Coalition, a global nonprofit that addresses critical issues for young breast cancer survivors. She has also worked as a public relations and marketing strategist for numerous projects.

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Khadijah received her BS in organizational management from St. Joseph's College and an MS in journalism from Columbia University and completed the Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education program.



## Eric Kowalczyk

Eric Kowalczyk has dedicated his career to helping leaders and organizations communicate with integrity and impact. He works to identify and execute end-to-end communications and crisis management strategies for a wide range of governments, law firms, municipal agencies, and private companies.

Kowalczyk is a veteran of the Baltimore City (Maryland) Police Department. As the captain in charge of media relations, he helped the agency as well as Baltimore's mayor and other leaders confront and navigate communications issues during the Freddie Gray riots and communicate to hundreds of thousands of constituencies at the local level in the glare of a national spotlight. While simultaneously facilitating local, national, and international media, he focused on transparency and accountability to connect with an already mistrusting public and implemented a crisis communications strategy and plan that was widely praised by media across the county as responsive and understanding of community concerns.

He authored *The Politics of Crisis: An Insider's Perspective to Prevent Public Policy Disasters*. Kowalczyk has a national reputation as a dynamic and engaging public speaker. Specializing in crisis communication and leadership strategies, he draws on his vast experience—in real-world, academic, and training environments—to bring a new modality of communicating to varied professional audiences.

In addition to his role as a public speaker and educator, Kowalczyk works intimately with clients to address their most acute challenges in areas such as critical incident mitigation, strategy development for crisis resolution, crisis communications, public affairs, municipal communications, internal/external communications strategy, and media relations/training.

Kowalczyk holds a master's degree in divinity and is pursuing a doctorate in that field. He also holds a certificate in police executive leadership from the University of Maryland, University College.

## Christine Townsend

Christine Townsend is the founder of PIO Toolkit, [www.piotoolkit.com](http://www.piotoolkit.com), a resource for communication professionals in the emergency services. She is also the U.S. editor for Policing Insight, [www.policinginsight.com](http://www.policinginsight.com), a news source focused on in-depth policing and criminal justice topics including policy, practice, crime, and technology.

Townsend has more than 20 years' experience in crisis and emergency communication as well as shaping the digital policing narrative in the UK. As a member of one of the founding teams to bring social media to the public sector, she has trained emergency services and government agencies across the world in how to engage with the public through digital channels.

With previous experience as a national newspaper journalist and as a decorated operational police officer, Townsend has worked to bridge the gap between public and police through better communication. As Director of Communications for the City of London Police she managed such issues as G20 riots, international financial scandals, the London 2012 Olympics, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and the funeral of former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Townsend is a graduate of the College of Policing, having completed Gold Commanders Major Incident Management training and strategic police media management courses. She is also a Master of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (MCIPR UK) and is currently studying for master's in journalism at New York University in addition to propaganda and media with the University of Texas at Austin.

# About the Major Cities Chiefs Association

The Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) is a professional organization of police executives representing the largest cities in the United States and Canada.

MCCA's mission is to provide a forum for police executives from large population centers to address the challenges and issues of policing, to influence national and international policy that affects police services, to enhance the development of current and future police leaders, and to encourage and sponsor research that advances this mission.

To learn more, visit the MCCA online at <https://www.majorcitieschiefs.com>.

# About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than \$20 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 136,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.
- Almost 800 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.

The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement. COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, <https://cops.usdoj.gov>.





The purpose of this guide, *Strategic Communications for Law Enforcement Executives*, is to help law enforcement agency leaders and strategic communications advisors develop the necessary knowledge and skill to create strategic communications plans to help build and maintain community trust. This guide is a revision and expansion of the *Strategic Communications Practices Toolkit* published by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Major Cities Chiefs Association in 2012.

It expands upon the tenets of best practice communications planning to provide law enforcement executives guidance and assistance in the creation of four distinct communication planning tools: the strategic communications plan, the tactical communications plan, the crisis communications plan, and the interview plan. Templates and samples are included at the end of the toolkit to help with implementation.



**COPS**

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U.S. Department of Justice

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To obtain details about COPS Office programs,  
call the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at [cops.usdoj.gov](https://cops.usdoj.gov).

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