

CASA KANE COUNTY

Crisis Communication Plan



This crisis communication plan provides policies and procedures for the coordination of communication in the event of an emergency, crisis or other unusual event effecting CASA Kane County, its members, affiliates, and National CASA. The plan addresses media relations and communication issues, procedures for the rapid identification of potentially harmful situations and methods for responding to these situations quickly and effectively. It is the goal of this Crisis Communication Plan to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations, and to ensure that CASA Kane County staff members, national and state programs, Board of Directors, Chairman's Advisory Panel, and volunteers are familiar with those procedures and their roles in the event of a crisis. The plan is designed to be used in coordination with the normal decision-making hierarchy of CASA Kane County.

I. Objectives of the Plan

To fully assess the situation and determine whether a communication response is warranted. If warranted, the following actions will be implemented:

- Identify constituencies that should be informed about the situation;
- Communicate facts and distribution of critical information to the media, members and general public about the crisis;
- Restore order and/or confidence.

II. Procedures

Incident Evaluation: A crisis is defined as an unstable or crucial time. An emergency, crisis or unusual event is an imminent or recent occurrence that results in unfavorable publicity to the organization. Any such event that occurs in relationship to CASA Kane County will be promptly reported by the person aware of such event to the Executive Director of CASA Kane County and the Board Chairman of CASA Kane County and/or Board President of the Illinois CASA program. The office will then gather accurate information from appropriate sources.

Upon notification, the Executive Director and Board Chairperson of CASA Kane County will consult with the following to determine the appropriate response:

- Board of Directors' Executive Committee
- Board of Directors
- Illinois CASA
- National CASA
- Appropriate Kane County personnel (e.g. County Board Chairman, Court Administrator, Facility Manager, Juvenile Court Judge, GAL Volunteer etc.)

Response to Crisis Situation and the Media: Only the (1) Executive Director, (2) Board Chairperson (3) specifically designated Board Member or (4) attorney representing CASA Kane County are authorized to communicate with the media.

If a volunteer, employee, affiliate or Board Member is contacted by the media, he or she is to be courteous and professional. Never answer with – no comment. **Advise the media you are not the person they need to speak with and** direct the media to the Executive Director. Provide the media with the Executive Director’s name and phone number and immediately notify the Executive Director.

In the event of a crisis, emergency or unusual event, individuals identified by CASA Kane County will determine the key constituencies that should be informed of the crisis. CASA Kane County will also determine the appropriate representative (Executive Director, Board Chairperson, designated Board member or attorney representing CASA Kane County) to communicate with the key constituencies. Effective communication will help quell rumors, maintain morale, and ensure continued orderly operations. Among the groups that should be considered for communication in a crisis situation are (in this order):

- 1) Board Members
- 2) CASA Staff Members
- 3) Illinois CASA
- 4) National CASA
- 5) Law enforcement agencies
- 6) Appropriate government agencies
- 7) Advocates
- 8) Local Programs
- 9) General public
- 10) Mass media

III. Aftermath Component

Following any crisis, appropriate action will take place to ensure that CASA Kane County, and others as required, receive the necessary information and assistance to help resolve the crisis and effects of the event. Attention also should be placed on identifying and implementing measures to improve the action plan used during the crisis.

Immediately following a crisis, it is imperative that CASA Kane County be sensitive to the needs of staff members and volunteers who may have been personally affected by the crisis. There may be a need to assist with obtaining information and/or a referral to available resources. An example might be to refer a volunteer to a grief counselor.

The Board of Director’s Executive Committee shall meet within 48 hours following a crisis and review all actions taken as a result of the crisis to determine effectiveness and efficiency of operations.

Crisis Communication Checklist Overview

This is a brief overview of crisis management steps.

- Safety** – Ensure safety of all staff and site. Call 911 if needed.
- Notification** – Notify the executive director and board of directors chairman immediately.
- Crisis Communication Team** – Key staff and, if needed, the chairs of the Board of Directors, Compliance and Finance and Legal Committees will convene to strategically review the situation and manage the communication surrounding the issue. Note: In some cases, a larger Crisis Management Team may be needed when action surrounding the crisis involves more than just handling communication. In those cases, the Crisis Communication Team would be a part of the larger team, though the guidelines in this manual only outline the steps to take in the communication needs surrounding a crisis.
- Before Going Public**
 - Determine a crisis communication lead person who is responsible for ensuring all tasks are completed (most likely the executive director).
 - Determine the crisis communication spokesperson who will answer all media and other inquiries (most likely the executive director or chairman of the board of director's).
 - Assess the situation to determine the facts.
 - Determine the appropriate response/action.
 - Create a plan of action for internal and external communication.
 - Develop factual, detailed messages that reflect the status of the crisis, CASA Kane County's response, and proactive steps to resolve the situation.
 - Prepare talking points and provide a script for the staff receiving incoming calls.
 - Determine if a press release, web and/or voicemail updates are necessary.
 - Assess what resources are necessary to manage the crisis (i.e. cell phone availability, press conference needs, on location resources – signs, lectern, visuals, etc.)

Appoint Executive Director or other Staff to:

- Serve as the official spokesperson and manage media
- Keep the chairman of the board of directors informed
- Contact partners, allies, members, etc. and assist with sector-wide talking points, if appropriate.
- Record crisis details, actions taken, external responses and resolution.

Going Public

- Begin placing telephone calls to critical internal audiences, including staff, board of directors and/or legislators, etc.
- Begin media and other external audience outreach, use press release, if appropriate.
- Update website and organization phone mail, if needed.
- Evaluate message effectiveness as the situation progresses.
- Implement methods for updating key audiences with ongoing information.
- Distribute post-crisis communication.
- Evaluate crisis communication efforts.

Media Relations Reminders

(Specifically for designated individuals within the organization)

- Always return media calls. The more cooperative you appear, the better.
- Communicate with the media. Talk to them as well as listen to them. During crisis time, you may learn a great deal from the media that can be useful to you in further dealing with the crisis.
- Remember and enforce your confidentiality requirements.
- Avoid antagonizing the media. A short one at a press conference, during a phone call or elsewhere can affect your future relationship with an individual or other media who may hear the conversation.
- Consider establishing a dedicated call-in phone line that will offer information to media or others. Information on news conferences and newly acquired information can be placed on a tape that can be updated. This is particularly useful when regular phone lines are tied up with calls.
- Consider how information you release to media may affect other agencies, businesses or individuals. If you say things that may result in media calling other agencies, call those agencies first to notify them of impending calls.
- When talking to the media, be sure to give credit to other agencies, groups or individuals working on the crisis, including your own staff.