
REPUTATIONAL RISK ASSESSMENT FOR ANIMAL SANCTUARIES & CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING WORKBOOK



This Reputational Risk Assessment for Animal Sanctuaries & Crisis Communications Planning Workbook was developed by senior crisis communications and issues management advisors at Public Communications Incorporated (PCI) through funding provided by the Arcus Foundation as part of a collaboration between Lincoln Park Zoo's Project ChimpCARE and Chimp Haven.



ABOUT PCI:

PCI is a national communications agency headquartered in Chicago. PCI's senior counselors work with sanctuaries, zoos, aquariums, nature and wildlife conservation organizations across the U.S. sharing insights from more than 20 years of experience in issues management and crisis communications in the animal care sector. Learn more at www.pcipr.com



ABOUT CHIMP HAVEN:

Chimp Haven, the national chimpanzee sanctuary, is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that serves as a refuge for chimpanzees, most of whom were retired from biomedical research. Located on 200 acres of rich forested land near Shreveport, Louisiana, the sanctuary is home to more than 300 chimpanzees who are able to live out the rest of their lives in comfortable retirement. Learn more at www.chimphaven.org



ABOUT ARCUS FOUNDATION:

Founded in 2000 by Jon Stryker, the Arcus Foundation strives to achieve social justice inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity, and race; and to ensure the conservation of, and respect for, the world's great apes and gibbons. The Foundation works globally, and has offices in New York City and Cambridge, UK. Learn more at www.arcusfoundation.org



ABOUT PROJECT CHIMPCARE:

Project ChimpCARE is a non-partisan group committed to improving the wellbeing of chimpanzees, regardless of current circumstances, and opening the lines of communication between disparate groups to achieve this singular goal. Our objectives are based on the approach that accurate information is the basis for effective change. Learn more at www.chimpcare.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4** Reputation Matters
- 4** Understanding Reputational Risk
- 5** Why Reputational Risk Assessments are Important
- 5** How to Use this Workbook
- 6** Reputational Risk Categories
 - 7** Protecting the Sanctuary's Public Image
 - 8** Emergency Preparedness and Response
 - 11** Strategic Planning
 - 12** Organizational Culture, Leadership Development and Succession Planning
 - 14** Governance
 - 14** Ineffective Boards
 - 14** Grievance/Whistleblower Policies
 - 15** Conflict of Interest Policy
 - 16** Third-Party Validators
 - 18** Financial Health
 - 19** Standards of Care and Animal Welfare
- 22** Crisis Communications Plan Template

REPUTATION MATTERS

Trust is essential for non-profits to succeed and for an animal sanctuary to thrive. Donors must trust that the sanctuary is fiscally responsible and providing high-quality care to the animals it rescues; employees must trust that the organization is serious about their safety and wellbeing, and that of the animals; the local community must trust that the community's safety is assured and that the animals living in the sanctuary are securely enclosed, without risk of habitat breaches that could put the public in danger.

Reputation is about perceptions. Good organizational reputation is a key factor in talent retention and recruitment; donor recruitment and retention; and attracting partnerships that help the sanctuary achieve its mission objectives. Effective marketing and brand packaging can help shape perceptions, but if the underlying reality at the sanctuary is less polished than the image projected externally, the gap between perception and reality increases the sanctuary's risk of reputational damage. Conversely, a sanctuary might meet the expectations of stakeholders, but if it is attacked by individuals, special interest groups or media, even unfairly, its reputation could be compromised.

It can take years to build a strong, positive reputation, but that reputation can be severely damaged in a matter of days. Once damage occurs, it may require years to rebuild. For this reason, conducting a risk assessment for the sanctuary, proactively identifying reputational risk factors and working to minimize them before a crisis, is advised.

WHAT IS REPUTATIONAL RISK?

Reputational risk is something that changes the perceptions of key stakeholders of the animal sanctuary. These can include donors, board members, employees or volunteers, NGOs, corporate or government partners or regulators, and the community where it operates.

Quantifying reputational risk is notoriously difficult, but reputational risk factors can impact a sanctuary's ability to retain and recruit talent, donors and its ability to succeed financially. Not all reputational risk events will result in the same level of loss to a sanctuary. By understanding the categories of risk, leaders can assign a level of risk for their sanctuary and put measures in place to reduce it before their reputation is compromised by a crisis event.

Drivers of Reputational Risk:

OPERATIONAL

Treatment of staff or volunteers;
Inadequate safety procedures or equipment; outdated or substandard animal care practices; inadequate governance

FINANCIAL

Inappropriate financial decisions, insufficient funding for operations, lack of diversified funding sources, malfeasance or criminal fiduciary activity

OTHER

Founder's reputation; succession plan

WHY REPUTATIONAL RISK ASSESSMENTS ARE IMPORTANT

Social media has made reputational risk assessment even more imperative for companies and organizations because just a couple of negative social media posts about an organization can chip away at public trust. Unlike traditional media, which has editorial gatekeepers that society once depended upon to carefully vet and verify information before it was widely shared, social media platforms provide a venue for anyone to share their stories, criticisms, concerns, or reviews of a sanctuary with the touch of a button.

Reputation is a critical risk factor for organizations to consider, but few have a strategic approach to reputational risk management. Many animal care organizations consider reputational risk only as it applies to crisis management – usually following a reputation-damaging event. While not all crises will result in severe reputational damage, many crisis situations can be avoided by proactively and regularly assessing risk factors and working to minimize them.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is designed to help animal sanctuary leaders assess and identify potential risk factors that could lead to crisis or reputation-damaging events. Each section includes a category of reputational risk, as well as a set of questions to support an assessment of the sanctuary's level of risk in that category. Review each section and answer the questions honestly. Based upon the answers, you will rate the category as potentially high, medium, or low risk for the sanctuary.

Resources and links are included in each section to provide more information, tools and information for leaders to support efforts to minimize reputational risk if you determine your sanctuary may be at medium or high risk in a given category.

Ranking as “low” risk in a category does not mean that there is no risk. Risk can never be completely eliminated, only minimized, but a low risk assessment suggests the sanctuary is putting appropriate measures in place to minimize its risk of reputational damage in that category.

A crisis communications management response plan template is also included in this workbook. This crisis communications plan should be customized to your sanctuary in advance of a crisis to increase the likelihood that crisis communications will be conducted effectively during an event. Effective crisis communications can minimize reputational damage.



This workbook is not intended to include every possible reputational risk factor for every sanctuary. Rather, it's a framework for identifying a range of common reputational risk categories for animal care facilities.

REPUTATIONAL RISK CATEGORIES IN THIS ASSESSMENT

Standards of
Care and Animal
Welfare

p19

Protecting the
Sanctuary's Public
Image

p7

Financial
Health

p18

Emergency
Preparedness
and Response

p8

Governance

p14

Strategic
Planning

p11

Organizational
Culture,
Leadership
Development
and Succession
Planning

p12

PROTECTING THE SANCTUARY'S PUBLIC IMAGE

Having a clearly defined brand is an important part of reputation building and management. The public's impression and perception of a sanctuary are often shaped almost entirely by marketing and media communications. How the sanctuary presents itself publicly, and protects its public image, is a big part of reputation building and risk management.

Brands should be authentic and consistent with reality, articulating the sanctuary's purpose and values, its voice and tone, character, and persona. Establishing a clearly defined brand will guide all aspects of how the sanctuary engages with its audiences and shares its stories visually, verbally and in written form. Presenting a consistent personality is important to build public support and trust.

Reputational risk emerges when a sanctuary's personality is inconsistent. For example, consider a sanctuary whose tone is playful, positive, and caring. They bring their brand personality to life through positive storytelling focused on the animal's life in sanctuary. Their audiences might be jarred if that same sanctuary suddenly started sharing negative images, used aggressive language, and focused storytelling on the animal's tragic past. Inconsistency can compromise stakeholder's trust. Audiences form relationships with organizations based on their brand personality, and in general, they don't want surprises.

Additionally, sanctuaries are encouraged to be thoughtful about what they say or publish publicly about other organizations or individuals. Unless the organization's brand is built on a personality trait of aggression and activism (consider organizations like PETA), criticizing others publicly can present significant risk of retaliatory attacks and criticism of the sanctuary. Public feuding often will erode public trust and increase legal risks to the organization.

Ways sanctuaries can protect their public image include:

- Have a clearly defined brand that is consistent throughout all marketing and communications channels.
- Train staff and volunteers on the brand attributes and how to effectively share sanctuary stories with the public that align with the tone and personality of the brand.
- Create a social media policy for staff and volunteers that clearly defines what is acceptable and unacceptable for staff and volunteers to share about the sanctuary (or any of its partners/sponsors/supporters) on their personal social media channels.



PROTECTING THE SANCTUARY'S PUBLIC IMAGE (CONT.)

Consider the following:

Question	Yes (✓)	No (1)
Does your sanctuary have clearly defined brand guidelines?		
Is your sanctuary consistent in tone and style of communications?		
Are staff and volunteers familiar with the brand and how to communicate it?		
Do you have a social media policy for staff and volunteers?		

Low Risk = 0 Medium Risk = 1-2 High Risk = 3 or more

The below resources may be helpful for sanctuaries that rate medium to high risk in this category:

<https://nonprofitmarcommunity.com/12-elements-include-nonprofits-brand-guidelines/>

<https://donorbox.org/nonprofit-blog/building-a-strong-nonprofit-brand/>

Example social media policy: <https://www.ncnonprofits.org/resources/nonprofit-social-media-policies-toolkit>

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Extreme weather events fueled by a changing climate continue to increase operational risk factors for many animal care organizations located in regions facing more frequent intense storm activity, temperature extremes, prolonged drought and/or flooding events. As wildfires increasingly ravage the Western states, many large-animal rescue organizations are being overwhelmed by requests to take in livestock as wells dry up and pastures become parched. Access to food sources, like hay, can be compromised, and prices can climb. From heatwaves climbing further north to freezing winter storms dipping further south and hurricane season growing longer and stronger, animal sanctuaries must ensure that their disaster response plan and infrastructure are up to date, and everyone is trained and ready to act in an emergency.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE (CONT.)

Disaster scenarios can be wide-ranging. They are not only weather or climate-related, but could include situations such as equipment failure that threatens life or safety, disease outbreaks that impact staff and/or animals, and animals escaping their habitats. These are just a few emergency events that sanctuaries are encouraged to prepare and regularly train for in advance of an actual emergency.

Animal sanctuaries that are well-positioned to handle emergencies have written operational procedures that all staff have access to, and they plan for a variety of emergency scenarios, conducting training and emergency drills multiple times per year. They keep supplies on hand, from generators, fuel, and water in case of power outages or disruption to water supply to bedding, food and other provisions in case staff must stay overnight.

Animal sanctuaries that care for large carnivores or other potentially dangerous animals may have specific procedures, training, and certified tactical teams onsite with access to darts and firearms for use in life-threatening situations. Sanctuaries are encouraged to develop and train on procedures in the event public safety officers must be called in if human life is at risk.

It's valuable for sanctuaries to develop trusted working relationships with their local fire and law enforcement agencies in advance of any emergency event, to familiarize them with their operations and the layout of their facilities as well as the sanctuary's response procedures. Some animal care facilities occasionally conduct collaborative tabletop exercises or drills to practice cooperation with agencies during a crisis. These collaborative partnerships between the sanctuary's animal behavior experts and public safety officers better position the sanctuary, in the event of a crisis, to not only protect people who may be in harm's way but protect the animals in their care as well.

Depending upon the nature of the emergency – especially if it involves death or injury to people or catastrophic loss – having immediate access to legal counsel is strongly advised. Establishing a relationship with reliable legal counsel well in advance of a crisis is recommended.

Additionally, it's important to consider that disaster and emergency events can be traumatic for those involved. If any people or animals are injured or die during such an event, staff and/or volunteers will be impacted emotionally and psychologically. The sanctuary should be prepared with resources to support their teams, and managers should be trained on how to handle emotional situations.

How well-prepared a sanctuary is in advance and how staff handle themselves in an emergency can significantly influence its reputation and continued public trust.

Additionally, how a sanctuary communicates internally following a disaster or emergency event also impacts reputational risk. Team members may have varying opinions, and emotions, related to why something occurred, how it was handled, and ways it could have been prevented. Providing time and space for internal discussion and evaluation following emergency events to address staff feelings, opinions and perspectives and clearly communicate action steps moving forward can help maintain employee trust.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE (CONT.)

Consider the following:

Question	Yes (✓)	No (1)
Do you have a disaster response plan that has been updated in the past 3 years?		
Does your disaster response plan include a crisis communications plan for internal and external audiences?		
Do you conduct emergency response drills a minimum of twice per year that cover a range of potential emergency response scenarios?		
Are staff routinely cross-trained to work in multiple areas to ensure all animals are provided appropriate care and management in an emergency?		
Are animals routinely desensitized to crates and/or trained to shift in and out of enclosures when asked so they can be moved with minimal stress?		
Do you have adequate number of transfer crates and/or temporary housing options for all sanctuary residents?		
Do you have secure shelter for all animals that includes access to supplemental off-grid heating/cooling and water options if needed?		
Do you have an established evacuation site and coordinated transportation options to move animals if needed?		
Do you have provisions available for staff if they must stay overnight?		
Do you have round-the-clock veterinary care available during an emergency?		
Have you developed a trusted working relationship with local fire and police agencies to ensure effective collaboration in the event of an emergency at the sanctuary?		
Do you have access to reliable legal counsel?		
Are managers trained in how to handle emotional situations with their teams?		
Can the sanctuary easily access counseling resources if needed?		

Low Risk = 0-3
Medium Risk = 4-7
High Risk = 8 or more



Sanctuaries that rate their disaster readiness as medium to high risk are advised to evaluate the animal sanctuary's disaster response plan, and areas of specific vulnerability to ensure the sanctuary team is adequately prepared in case of disaster.

Resources available to guide disaster preparedness for animal care facilities:

Zoo and Aquarium All Hazards Partnership – Contingency Planning Modules: <https://zahp.org/all-hazards/>
American Humane – Disaster Response Plan: <https://www.americanhumane.org/fact-sheet/disaster-preparedness-for-shelters/>

OPERATING FROM A STRATEGIC PLAN

A sanctuary may or may not have been started with a formalized strategic plan, but it is best practice to develop and routinely update a plan every few years to articulate the vision for the sanctuary and guide operating decisions to ensure a sustainable future. Operating without a strategic plan can subject the sanctuary to increased risk factors.

A strategic operating plan includes measurable goals and objectives, and an action plan for achieving them over a three- to five-year time frame. Important considerations within a strategic plan include leadership development, recruitment and retention, animal care needs, facility capacity and infrastructure plans and financial strategies. Each category should include key performance indicators. Leaders are encouraged to conduct periodic check-ins across each strategic category at least twice per year to ensure achievements are being reached. During these check-ins, any roadblocks to achievement will be identified and efforts can be made to address them.

Running a sanctuary is hard work, and it's not uncommon for some leaders to find themselves trapped in a cycle where daily management of the sanctuary gets prioritized over longer-term strategic planning and advancement of that plan. However, managing day-to-day without a strategic operating plan can indicate a sanctuary may be at higher risk of facing challenges or crises across a number of categories that could have otherwise been foreseen and avoided.

If you do not currently have an organizational strategic plan that has been updated within the past five years, and/or if the strategic plan is not being periodically reviewed and evaluated to ensure achievements are being made across strategic operational categories, the sanctuary's reputational risk category is elevated.

Some of the specific reputational risk categories that a strategic plan serves to help sanctuaries mitigate are included in this assessment.

Below are some resources to help develop a strategic plan:

[The National Council of Nonprofits – Strategic Planning for Nonprofits](#)

[Washington Nonprofits – Strategic Planning in Nonprofits \(SPiN\) step-by-step guide](#)

[Open Sanctuary Project: Creating a Business Plan for Your Sanctuary](#)

[Humane Society of the United States – Sample Business Plan](#)

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Animal sanctuaries often have a similar origin story. They were started by an individual or partners driven by compassion for animals and a desire to give them a better life. The passion, drive and entrepreneurial spirit of founders is critical to the success of a sanctuary during its foundational years. As the sanctuary grows and matures, so too must the organizational structure to ensure long-term viability. Successful sanctuaries attract and retain talented people. They offer professional growth opportunities and incentives for employees to stay. Future leaders are groomed, trained, and provided with opportunities to lead.

Investing in company culture, staff training, recognition and appreciation contributes to the sanctuary's reputational risk. If a sanctuary struggles to retain talented staff, its risk increases due to high turnover which is costly to an organization and increases vulnerability to things going wrong due to potential periods of short staffing, lack of training or experience as new staff onboard.

Nobody lives forever, and not all founders want to lead forever. If the sanctuary's reputation is tied too directly to the founder or director, this poses risk to its long-term success. The challenge of evolving an organization that was founded by the vision and passion of an individual into an organization that is led by others is so complicated – and common – that the term “Founder's Syndrome” was coined.

Sanctuaries that are well positioned for future success make concerted efforts to ensure that the sanctuary's reputation, and key relationships vital to its success, aren't tied too directly to just one individual. Animal care facilities with low reputational risk factors tend to have a strong management team able to operate effectively in the absence of a director or founder. They have written job descriptions for all roles in the sanctuary – including the founder – and performance reviews are regularly performed for all. They also have written Standard Operating Procedures that are available to everyone.

Decisions about the sanctuary should be made by a management team and not autocratically by an individual. Key leaders and managers should have access to critical resources needed to run the sanctuary and there should be programs in place for staff to continually train and grow professionally.

Over-reliance on an individual leader, rather than a high-functioning management team with access to the tools, resources and relationships needed to ensure success, increases the sanctuary's reputational risk.

Sanctuaries also should have a decision-maker tree defined in case of crisis events. Examples of this are included in the [Crisis Communications Plan](#) Template later in this workbook.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, AND SUCCESSION PLANNING (CONT.)

To assess your risk level in this category, consider the following questions:

Question	Yes (✓)	No (1)
Does your sanctuary have a documented succession plan?		
Is there a written job description for the founder and/or executive director?		
Does the executive director engage a management team in key decision-making?		
Could management team leaders lead the sanctuary in the absence of the executive director?		
Is there a clearly defined and understood strategic process for decision-making among a leadership team?		
Do multiple people at the sanctuary share in relationship management of key external stakeholders, like donors and board members?		
Are staff development and training programs in place to develop skills and experience needed to lead the sanctuary in the future?		
Does your sanctuary clearly stress safety in all areas – human and animal?		
Are staff cross-trained in multiple areas on how to care for the animals appropriately and safely?		
Does your sanctuary routinely recognize and show appreciation for staff?		
Does your sanctuary conduct employee satisfaction surveys at least annually?		

Low Risk = 0-2 Medium Risk = 3-6 High Risk = 7 or more

Sanctuaries rated as medium to high risk can consider the following strategies to mitigate these risks:

- Create or clarify roles and responsibilities of the board and staff to ensure checks and balances and reduce autocratic decision-making at the sanctuary.
- Create a contingency succession plan that immediately identifies who has decision-making authority if the sanctuary's leader is "hit by a bus." Then work toward longer-term succession plan building that involves purposeful planning and development of future leadership.
- Create a professional development plan for staff to skill-build and ensure that they are on a pathway to future leadership opportunities. This could include internal courses, external courses, job shadowing, coaching and mentoring, attending conferences and professional meetings with peer organizations.
- Create an employee appreciation program that incentivizes staff to stay and grow with the sanctuary.

Resources to guide succession planning:

Northwestern University Kellogg School of Business – Five Succession Planning Steps to Overcome Founder's Syndrome: https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/news_articles/2017/02222017-founders-syndrome.aspx

National Council of Nonprofits – Succession Planning for Nonprofits – Managing Leadership Transitions: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/succession-planning-nonprofits-managing-leadership-transitions>

A Founder's Guide to Organizational Change at Animal Sanctuaries: <https://opensanctuary.org/article/a-founders-guide-to-organizational-change/>

APPROPRIATE GOVERNANCE

Every animal care facility is required to adhere to certain operating standards required by law, including keeping current licenses and permits. Any infraction in that regard could cause reputational harm. Other governance considerations that factor into reputational risk management include maintaining a well-functioning board; having and adhering to internal procedures related to grievance and whistleblower policies and conflict of interest, code of conduct and ethics policies; and being credentialed by reputable third-party validators that inspect the facility and uphold high standards for credentialing.

The Importance of a Well-Functioning Board

Boards of Directors or Trustees serve a critical role in governance. The duties and size of the board will vary based upon the state requirements for nonprofits and the articles of incorporation and bylaws for individual organizations.

Boards serve a very important role. Ineffective boards put sanctuaries at risk, while an effective, well-functioning board will reduce a sanctuary's risk level across several reputational risk categories.

Boards are governing bodies that serve legal, ethical and practical functions for the organization. The board should serve the role of financial oversight and support fundraising, policy development and strategic planning, as well as oversee and evaluate annually the performance of the executive director.

In some situations and depending on state laws, the founder or director may serve as a board member. This can be advantageous to ensure the board is kept well apprised of daily operations, needs and challenges of running the sanctuary, but can also become problematic and put the sanctuary at risk if the founder or executive director is serving in a voting capacity or has too much influence over the board's decisions. It is ill-advised for a founder or executive director to serve as chair of the board, as this compromises accountability and diminishes trust in the sanctuary by potential funders and partners. It is equally bad practice to have a board whose comprised of friends and family of the founder/executive director.

An effective board provides strategic oversight and guidance that can mitigate potential organizational risks. It is the role of the board to step in and provide correction if the sanctuary is heading in the wrong direction or being mismanaged.

An effective board not only evaluates the performance of the sanctuary's executive director, ensuring they have the skills and experience needed and are effectively leading the sanctuary, but the board should also periodically evaluate itself to ensure it is comprised of the right people, bringing the right skills and expertise to advance the sanctuary. Term limits also should be in place for board members.

Grievance Policy/Whistleblower Policy

It's important for animal sanctuaries to have a formal, clearly defined and communicated grievance procedure so employees/volunteers know how to express complaints or concerns in the workplace in a constructive way. This allows issues to be resolved as quickly as possible. The policy should include a defined time frame in which employees can expect a response to their filed grievance(s).

If no such policy exists, if it is not enforced, or if issues raised are rarely resolved, the sanctuary's risk for reputational harm increases. If employees express concerns that they feel are not being appropriately

APPROPRIATE GOVERNANCE (CONT.)

addressed and rectified, the chances increase they may take those concerns external – expressing them through social media, tipping the media, or going to a special interest group that could put unfavorable attention onto the sanctuary.

The types of grievances can vary, but sanctuaries should consider grievance procedures in the following categories:

- Workplace harassment and discrimination
- Health and safety
- Animal welfare
- Supervisor behavior
- Adverse changes in working conditions

While legitimate complaints in any of these categories that go unresolved can pose a risk to the organization, charges of poor animal welfare or potentially harmful or dangerous working environments can quickly escalate in the public, especially if the sanctuary houses exotic animals. The complaints pose particularly high risk for reputational damage, because of the foundational trust the public puts on a sanctuary to provide animals with a safe environment and exceptional care.

In addition to having a formal grievance procedure in place, animal sanctuaries should have a whistleblower protection policy so employees/volunteers feel they are encouraged to express concerns internally without fear of retaliation or harm. Whistleblower actions are protected under various state and federal law, so legal guidance is recommended when developing such policies.

The Importance of Conflict of Interest Policies and Management

All nonprofits are required by U.S. federal law and some state laws to have a conflict-of-interest policy for their boards. These policies help prevent board directors from benefiting financially or in other ways from board service. Such conflicts compromise the reputation and public trust in an organization, and nonprofits that allow conflicts of interest may also be subject to penalties.

Compliant boards typically discuss conflict of interest regularly, routinely adding the topic to meeting agendas, and have board members fill out an annual questionnaire to identify current known or perceived conflicts of interest. Such conflicts can then be openly discussed, examined and resolved. Discussions about conflicts, and how the issue was managed, should be captured in written meeting minutes.

Additionally, many animal care facilities require all employees to review and sign a conflict-of-interest policy. These policies are designed to ensure that nobody is personally profiting from the nonprofit organization, and that decisions made are always in the best interest of the organization.

The Importance of Third-Party Validators and Credentialing

Sanctuaries that seek credentialing by becoming verified or accredited by respected external agencies can help advance the sanctuary and reduce risk of reputational damage if a crisis occurs. Such agencies require the sanctuary to meet high standards of animal care, organizational management and record keeping.

APPROPRIATE GOVERNANCE (CONT.)

When a crisis strikes, funders, prospective supporters, media and external agencies will evaluate the governance of the sanctuary and perceptions will be shaped about the sanctuary's leadership and operation.

Having good governance of the sanctuary not only reduces the risk of certain crisis events from occurring, but also reduces reputational damage if a crisis happens.

Evaluate risk factors related to governance at your sanctuary:

Question	Yes (✓)	No (1)
Well-functioning board:		
Does your sanctuary have a board of directors or trustees?		
If the director or founder serves on the board, do they only serve in a non-voting capacity?		
Does the founder or executive director undergo performance evaluations by the board at least once per year?		
Does the board meet regularly and have clear roles and responsibilities?		
Grievance/Whistleblower policies:		
Does your sanctuary have grievance procedures?		
Have employees/volunteers been reminded of grievance procedures – what they are/ where to find them annually?		
Is your leadership familiar with federal and state whistleblower policies?		
Does your sanctuary have a whistleblower protection policy?		
Is it accurate to state that over the past few years, no employees or volunteers have taken grievances to external parties including media, social media, or special interest groups?		
Conflict of interest policy:		
Does your sanctuary have a conflict of interest policy for its board of directors/trustees?		
Does the board review and sign the conflict of interest policy annually?		
Do employees review and sign a conflict of interest policy?		
Third-party credentialing:		
Is your sanctuary currently verified by a recognized sanctuary accrediting agency that requires specific requirements and standards related to animal care and management?		
If your sanctuary is, or has been accredited by external agencies, is it accurate to state that it has not lost accreditation for any reason over the past five years?		
Low Risk = 0-2	Medium Risk = 3-4	High Risk = 5 or more

APPROPRIATE GOVERNANCE (CONT.)

Resources to address and minimize reputational risk in the Governance category:

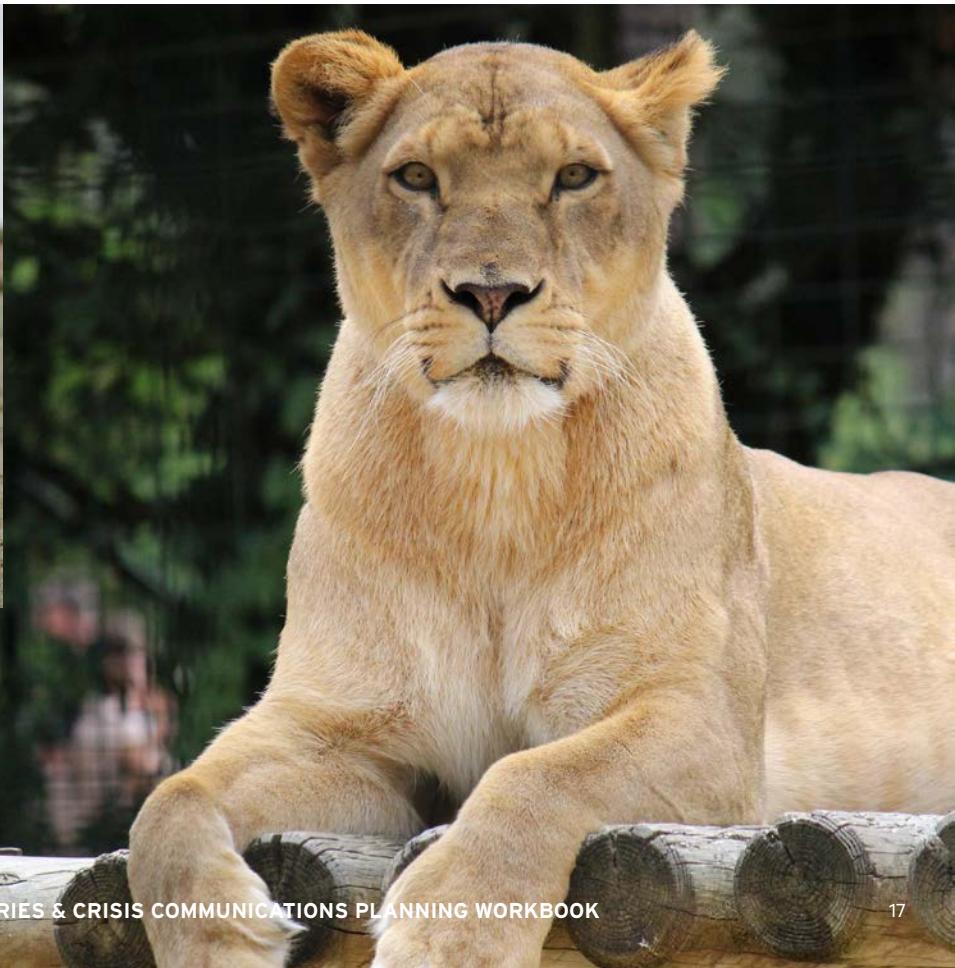
Society for Human Resource management – Grievance Policy: <https://nonprofitrisk.org/resources/articles/grievance-procedures-and-internal-dispute-resolution/>

National Council of NonProfits – Sample Whistleblower Protection Policy: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/sites/default/files/Sample%20WhistleblowerPolicy%202.2010.pdf>

Compass Point freely provides several key governance documents including Conflict of Interest policy, Whistleblower policy, Code of Ethics and much more: <https://www.compasspoint.org/tools-and-resources/boards-and-governance#GovernanceDocuments>

Dealing with difficult board members: <https://communitiesincontrol.com.au/help-sheets/dealing-with-difficult-board-members>

Stanford Social Innovation Review. Spotting and Fixing Dysfunctional NonProfit Boards: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/spotting_and_fixing_dysfunctional_nonprofit_boards



FINANCIAL HEALTH

The reputation of an animal sanctuary is connected in fundamental ways to financial health. Sanctuaries need sustained financial resources to provide animals with appropriate food, housing and care. Strained financial resources will restrict the sanctuary's ability to provide these fundamental needs, and the repercussions of that include reputational risk and violation of trust in the organization from staff, donors, media and prospective supporters.

Many factors go into ensuring financial health, including strategic planning (setting and adhering to animal sanctuary capacity limits), strategies for diversifying revenue sources, expanding donor base and developing partnerships that can increase revenue. Every sanctuary should have a well-established operating budget based on realistic expenses and anticipated revenue, and have a reserve fund in place to sustain the sanctuary, in case of crisis, for a few months.

A well-functioning board will provide governance and oversight on the sanctuary's financials, assist in fundraising, and help ensure the sanctuary stays solvent and in good financial health.

Risk factors for sanctuaries in this category include having a single donor or small number of donors providing most of the revenue; taking in more animals than the sanctuary can sustainability afford to feed, care for and maintain; poor record-keeping; or poor management of budgets.

Consider the following questions to assess risk in this category:

Question	Yes (✓)	No (1)
Does your sanctuary have a diversified donor base?		
Do you develop an annual operating budget?		
Does revenue to expenses stay balanced annually?		
Does the board have a financial committee that oversees the budget?		
Does the board review and approve the budget?		
Does the sanctuary undergo an annual audit of financials by an external auditing firm?		
Does your sanctuary maintain an emergency fund reserve of at least a few months?		

Low Risk = 0-1

Medium Risk = 2-3

High Risk = 4 or more

STANDARDS OF CARE AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Sanctuaries, first and foremost, are entrusted by the public to provide distressed or displaced animals a safe, comfortable home. Providing excellent animal care and wellbeing is the foundational expectation of sanctuaries, and therefore any incident or credible accusation that the sanctuary may be failing in that category compromises public trust and can be deeply damaging to the sanctuary's reputation.

Sanctuaries are expected to provide animals with expert veterinary care, nutritional foods in appropriate amounts, and enriching habitats that are safe and healthy for them mentally, physically and socially. Living up to those expectations takes considerable effort and investment of time and resources.

Prioritizing animal welfare

Societal norms related to the human-animal relationship are evolving quickly. Research suggests a significant cultural shift in American public views about animals from one of human domination to a more species-transcending empathetic position. Animal sanctuaries have been well-positioned in this dynamic for their role in rescuing animals from undesirable situations with the goal of giving them a better life. For many years, sanctuaries were applauded for those intentions with minimal scrutiny on outcomes, while institutions like research facilities, circuses, entertainment venues with animals, farms and zoos felt increasing public pressure related to animal wellbeing.

Sanctuaries are increasingly finding themselves on the receiving end of inquiry, accusation, and investigations related to animal wellbeing. This type of scrutiny can be expected to intensify as scientific and public understanding of animal welfare develops further and social media facilitates information sharing and discussion.

As many animal care organizations evolve care practices, there are an increasing number of animal welfare assessment applications and tools available, and animal sanctuaries are expected to be deploying animal welfare assessments as part of daily care regime.

Many operational factors play into a sanctuary's ability to live up to the expectation of exceptional animal care and wellbeing.

Sanctuaries are particularly vulnerable to reputational damage in the following situations:

- An employee or former employee(s) accuse the sanctuary of poor animal care and welfare standards or mismanagement
- Accusations that caregivers or managers do not have the expertise or qualifications required for the roles they serve at the sanctuary
- An animal is injured or dies from unnatural causes
- A caregiver is injured by an animal
- An animal escapes from its habitat/enclosure
- A sanctuary doesn't have an appropriately sized, skilled or resourced veterinary and animal care team

Sanctuaries that are accredited or verified by a reputable third-party organization can help with reputation management in the case of a crisis event. While being accredited may not prevent a sanctuary from facing a compromising situation that questions management and animal care decisions and activities, it gives supporters, regulators, media and the public some assurances that the sanctuary has been acting in good faith and is committed to providing its animals with the highest standards of care. Lack of accreditation, especially following a crisis event, can make recovery of trust and confidence more difficult.

STANDARDS OF CARE AND ANIMAL WELFARE (CONT.)

Consider these questions as you assess your sanctuary's level of reputational risk:

Question	Yes (✓)	No (1)
Does the sanctuary have up-to-date written animal care policies and procedures that staff have access to and know where to locate and reference?		
Does staff regularly seek updated information and research on best animal care practices for the species cared for at the sanctuary?		
Does the sanctuary have written animal feeding/nutrition policy and procedures that are reviewed and updated regularly?		
Do animals receive food in a way that encourages natural behaviors?		
Does the sanctuary have an animal enrichment policy that is reviewed and updated regularly?		
Are individual animals housed in species-appropriate social settings?		
Does the sanctuary have an animal welfare assessment process that is used regularly?		
Do animal enclosures provide for a range of species-specific behaviors?		
Do animals have choice and access to varied climates (shade, rain protection, heating, etc)		
Do animals receive routine preventative veterinary care?		
Is there an appropriately sized and resourced veterinary and animal care team?		
Is the sanctuary accredited by a reputable third-party agency, such as Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries or another similar accrediting agency?		
Does the sanctuary have a solid safety record, with minimal injuries to people caused by animals?		
Does the sanctuary have a solid track record of safely containing animals with no escapes?		
Does the staff engage in regular animal escape drills at least twice per year?		
Are leadership and staff familiar with the provisions of the U.S. Animal Welfare Act and regulations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other federal and state oversight agencies?		
Does the sanctuary have a solid record of good USDA and accreditation inspection reports?		



Sanctuaries that rank medium to high risk in this category should consider developing relationships with and/or reaching out to peer organizations who can be a valuable source for advice, information and support. These peers can share insights and examples of animal care programs, policies, staff development programs that work well for them and might help minimize the sanctuary's level of risk in this category.

Low Risk = 0-3

Medium Risk = 4-6

High Risk = 7 or more

STANDARDS OF CARE AND ANIMAL WELFARE (CONT.)

Valuable resources related to animal care and welfare are available:

Animal Welfare Assessment Tools and Models:

[The Five Domains Model](#)

[Project ChimpCARE](#)

[An Animal Welfare Risk Assessment Process for Zoos](#)

[ZooMonitor](#)

[WelfareTrak](#)

Animal Care Manuals:

- For primate caregivers, the Pan African Sanctuary Alliance offers free manuals including operating manuals, primate veterinary care and more <https://pasa.org/reports-manuals/>
 - Primate Care manuals are available here: <https://pasa.org/primate-care-training-material/>
- Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries offers standards for care for several species:
 - <https://www.sanctuaryfederation.org/accreditation/standards/>
- The Association of Zoos and Aquariums also provides freely accessible animal care manuals for many species:
<https://www.aza.org/animal-care-manuals>

Animal Welfare Act and Regulations:

USDA Animal Care: Animal Welfare Act and Animal Welfare Regulations: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/downloads/bluebook-ac-awa.pdf

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Template for Animal Sanctuaries to
Customize and Make Their Own



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sections

- 24** Introduction
- 25** Risk Assessment
- 26** Guidelines for Crisis Communications
- 27** Key Audiences
- 28** Crisis Management Team Responsibilities
- 29** Crisis Communications Action Plan
- 33** Social Media Communications
- 34** Sample Crisis Scenarios, Statements and Messaging Templates
 - 34** Crisis Standby Statement (General)
 - 34** Statements of Admission and Social Media (Internal for Staff)
 - 35** Death or Injury of a Sanctuary Staff Member or Guest
 - 36** Unnatural Death or Injury of an Animal
 - 37** Animal Escape
 - 38** USDA Citations or Loss of Accreditation
 - 39** Financial Issues
 - 40** Whistleblower Action
 - 40** Severe Weather Event
 - 41** Inclusion and Cultural Sensitivity
 - 42** Community Relations/Neighbor Issues
 - 42** Active Shooter or Threat of Violence
 - 43** Cybersecurity Breach
 - 43** Critics and Protests

Appendices

- 44** Crisis Management Team Directory
- 45** Key Partners/Community Contact List
- 46** Key Media Contact List
- 47** Employee Contact List
- 48** Board of Directors Contact List
- 49** Situation Room Checklist
- 50** Incident Telephone Information Form Template
- 51** Fact Gathering Forms
- 53** Example Crisis Communications Grid

INTRODUCTION

All animal rescue and care organizations may face issues that can evolve into negative incidents, or even crises. Some negative situations might be deemed newsworthy by media.

A crisis is defined as any event or situation that could:

- Damage the animal sanctuary's reputation and viability
- Disrupt the operations of the sanctuary
- Affect the health and welfare of an employee, volunteer, guest or vendor
- Receive, or could receive, negative media attention

Examples of a crisis are:

- Natural Disaster (earthquake, tornado, flood or fire)
- Environmental Event (animal habitat structure failure or animal escape, conflict with local wildlife on site, loss of power/heating/cooling that compromises animal wellbeing, water or food-borne disease or contamination, etc.)
- Injury or Death of an employee, volunteer or guest on site
- Workplace Event (disgruntled employee or other personnel issue, personal threats)
- Government Inquiries, investigations or compliance issues
- Fiscal Event (loss of funding or fiscal mismanagement)
- Detractors (on-site protests, digital attack)

The cornerstone of this plan is timely, clear and consistent communications to the right audiences at the right time. The goal is to prepare for the worst, contain the damage and – best case – defuse an issue before it can turn negative. Often an incident only becomes a crisis when an organization fails to react quickly and appropriately.

This plan also is designed to assess the incident and determine what actions should be taken to manage it. Based on the nature and seriousness of the circumstances, the plan enables the animal sanctuary to determine whether to be proactive and outward in its communications or to prepare, empower and assure internal audiences who may be communicating with external audiences on a reactive, standby basis.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The first step in preparing for a crisis is to analyze the potential risk of a situation. Understanding potential risks will allow you to prepare to manage the situation so that the crisis is diffused before drawing negative media or social media attention.

We recommend beginning the process by conducting the reputational risk assessment for your animal sanctuary included in this workbook. By beginning with a risk assessment you will uncover areas that present your sanctuary with the most significant, immediate points of vulnerability. Once identified proactively in advance, mitigation strategies can be developed to reduce the chance of crisis.

Below are some common risks identified across many animal care organizations.

Should a crisis occur, this plan template can guide your animal sanctuary with ways to respond and communicate quickly. Sample statements and proposed messaging, as well as specific questions to ask and information to gather during certain crisis scenarios are included in this plan.

Possible crisis scenarios for animal sanctuaries include:

- 1** Injury or death of an animal caregiver
- 2** Injury or death of an animal due to unnatural causes
- 3** Animal escape
- 4** Citations or loss of accreditation
- 5** Financial issues
- 6** Whistleblower complaints
- 7** Severe weather
- 8** Inclusion and cultural sensitivity
- 9** Community relations/neighbor issues
- 10** Active shooter event
- 11** Cybersecurity breach
- 12** Critics and Protests

GUIDELINES FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Public perceptions of organizations in times of crisis are greatly influenced by their ability to communicate effectively, using credible and knowledgeable spokespersons. Animal sanctuary spokespersons who are authorized to communicate regarding a specific crisis situation should refer to these basic guidelines.

RULES FOR RESPONDING TO A CRISIS

- People (health and safety) come first
- Tell the truth
- Get the best, most complete information available
- Create an inventory of what you don't know
- Decide how you can remedy the situation
- Release any bad news clearly and quickly (engage legal counsel to determine what is appropriate for situations related to current or potential legal action)

AT THE TIME OF DISCLOSURE

- Be compassionate
- Keep it simple
- Show you're in charge; keep your cool
- Show natural emotions
- If you're not sure, say so
- If you can't answer, say so and give a reason why
- Stay in control of the release of information
- Don't speculate or answer hypothetical questions
- Anticipate questions; determine responses
- Contain and control rumors

ACTIONS THAT MAKE A CRISIS WORSE

- Lack of communication (dodging questions, saying "no comment" or being unavailable)
- Delayed action or response
- Incomplete disclosure
- Failure to get the worst news out quickly
- Putting economic interests first
- Being slow to express compassion
- Expressing inappropriate emotions
- Casting blame

KEY AUDIENCES

Identify your critical key audiences (internal and external) in advance of a crisis occurring. In the heat of a crisis an important stakeholder might get missed, making the crisis situation potentially more damaging to the animal sanctuary. Think through and identify below critical stakeholders to the sanctuary who might need to be part of a communications tree when a crisis occurs.

Below is a list to consider – modify as relevant to your sanctuary.

INTERNAL AUDIENCES

- Senior leadership team
- Board of Directors
- Employees
- Volunteers
- Donors
- Corporate partners
- Vendors
- Land/property owner if it is not owned by the sanctuary

EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

- Local elected officials (mayor/alderperson, etc)
- Local community/neighbors
- Media
- Animal advocate community
- Social media audience

CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

Crisis Management Team Leaders:

PRIMARY Team Leader – Typically the Director/ CEO – potentially the attending veterinarian

SECONDARY Team Leader

Identify crisis team leaders who are responsible for contacting members of the team, analyzing the situation, determining how to proceed with immediate actions, and (if appropriate) alerting designated spokesperson. Often at smaller animal sanctuaries, the crisis lead may also be the primary spokesperson.

If the sanctuary has a communications/marketing lead, the crisis management team leader should work closely with that person (and/or crisis PR agency as needed) on key messaging and communications response plan. The Communications Action Plan on the following page should be completed to ensure all of the appropriate actions are taken to fully assess and respond to the situation.

Communications Lead:

Name

Designated Spokespersons:

The following people are designated as spokespeople, depending on their availability and the situation:

Name

Name

Name

In time of crisis, you may consider engaging a crisis communications agency to support in the following ways:

- Assist in determining communication strategies
- Draft messages, statements and other materials for media requests
- Assist with preparing spokesperson(s)
- Distribute information to media as the situation warrants
- Monitor media coverage

[Complete a full contact list on pages 44-48](#)

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN



Immediately following an incident or issue that could develop into a crisis, the animal sanctuary Crisis Management Team Leader should notify the Communications Lead to begin gathering information and assessing the situation.

1. Determine the problem and gather facts: (Use the following checklist)

Who/what was affected, when, where and how did it occur?

Verify the sources of information.

Determine who knows about the situation (Employees only? Volunteers? Guests?)

Are there any safety/security threats to the well-being of people on site?

Are there any safety threats to the well-being of animals on site?

Was a law broken, or could there be legal implications?

Does the event require notification of local, state or federal law or regulatory officials?

What is the probable level of public interest?

What information remains unknown? What is being done to find out?

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN (CONT.)

2. **Convene the crisis management team** to evaluate the information gathered and agree upon immediate actions and begin assembling the appropriate team members to take action.
3. **Develop a standby statement.** Prepare, approve and share internally with those who might be at the receiving end of public questions a short standby statement to be used when responding to public/ external inquiries while the situation is being assessed, and before a formal communications strategy is ready for implementation, such as:

We are in the process of gathering information, and I am unable to share specifics at this time. Please provide your contact information so that the appropriate sanctuary representative can follow up with you.

4. **Provide staff with Incident Telephone Information Forms** ([Appendix G](#)). This will help them document incoming calls so concerns and reactions can be monitored.

Remind staff of the following guidelines when approached by reporters or other third parties:

- If you are questioned by a reporter, or member of the public, direct the person to the:

Contact Name

- It is acceptable to not know the answer to a question. It is okay to say, “I don’t know” and direct the person to the designated spokesperson.
- It is okay to express sympathy for any people or animals injured during an emergency. However, employees should direct any specific questions concerning the emergency to the designated spokesperson.
- Never say “no comment.” The phrase often is interpreted as guilt or something to hide. Instead, you can say:

I don't have that information at this time and would not want to unintentionally provide inaccurate or incomplete answers. You may direct your inquiry to [provide name and number or email of designated spokesperson, or direct the person to the sanctuary's social channels or website if the sanctuary plans to provide up-to-date information about the crisis there]

- Don’t say anything you don’t want to see published.

5. **Never make an “off-the-record” statement.** Any statement made off-the-record can be presented to someone else for confirmation and become front-page news.

6. **Review available materials related to the subject.** If materials exist, they might include message points, position statements, likely questions and answers (Q&As), and boilerplate. Determine if and how they can be used and whether they need revisions or updating.

7. **Determine what materials need to be drafted**, such as statements, news releases, letters and other communications materials as appropriate. Create a comprehensive Q&A, filling in as many answers as possible.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN (CONT.)

8. Develop a succinct list of key facts appropriate to share. Depending on the scope and nature of the situation, there may be communications released to both internal and external audiences and it is important that all audiences receive a consistent message. *Be sensitive to anything you put in writing.* Ideally, all audiences will be contacted simultaneously or within a short period of time. Although the initial contact should be as personal as possible (phone call or in-person meeting), it is important to follow up with a written communication (via email, memo or postings for employees) to ensure that the facts are remembered and understood. In most cases, we advise that you “tell the family first,” ensuring that staff or internal audiences are not surprised by questions from external audiences.

9. Prioritize key potential audiences for outreach. Review the full list of potential internal and external audiences to identify those who will need to be addressed.

10. Social media monitoring. Determine who is monitoring social media for mention of the crisis, and plan to monitor channels closely to remain apprised of the level of public awareness of the incident and the urgency to respond.

11. Determine the spokesperson(s) and rehearse. The Executive Director of the organization is often the primary spokesperson and other individuals with specific areas of expertise are identified as secondary spokespersons, depending on the nature of the crisis. Rehearse for talking with employees, media and, if appropriate, for a news conference.

12. Develop a grid of all audiences and how to communicate with them. See [Appendix I](#) for an example.

Methods of communication may include:

- Telephone/text/email (personal contact)
- Press conference
- News releases
- Broadcast email
- Social media
- Mail
- Group meeting
- Personal meeting
- Posted notices

13. Establish boundaries for media. This may include imposing specific limitations on access to all or part of the animal sanctuary and appointing escorts for media as appropriate. Ensure operations personnel are apprised of designated media area and are practiced at placement of rope stanchions, plastic posts and chains, traffic cones or barricades to direct pedestrian traffic or cordon off areas inside or outside the sanctuary to manage media or public access. Remind staff to conduct crowd control with confidence, clarity and courtesy.

Ongoing actions:

Have regular Crisis Management Team meetings as necessary. In most cases related to an ongoing crisis, this will be daily.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN (CON'T)

Collect media clippings, radio transcripts and TV coverage to check for accuracy. Correct misinformation with a call to the reporter and, if necessary, letters to the editor. Be helpful and cooperative rather than confrontational, even if there are factual errors in a story.

Monitor traditional media and social media conversations.

Issue a final wrap-up news release or statement once the incident has ended, if necessary.

Hold a “morning after” meeting with the Crisis Management Team to evaluate the handling of the incident and determine alternative approaches.

SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

In the age of social media and instant Internet news, online communications must be a part of any crisis communications plan since organizations may not be able to control who gets to the public “first” with information or misinformation. A risk-minimizing measure is to have a social media policy in place to which staff and volunteers adhere. To prevent the proliferation of misinformation: here are some basic steps to take to be prepared for a crisis that goes viral:

- 1. Manage, monitor and report.** Designate two to three key staffers, or PR agency, to manage ongoing (around the clock if necessary) social media monitoring and reporting to the Crisis Management Team so communications can be continually refined, as needed, as the situation evolves. If needed, use social media monitoring services to listen, analyze and respond strategically to conversation in real-time.

PRIMARY Social Media Manager

SECONDARY Social Media Manager

Additional Support Staff

- 2. Prepare messages** for social media platforms that can be deployed, either proactively or reactively, as appropriate.
- 3. Share login codes with support staff** who will be managing the social media channels: (Logins should be kept confidential and only shared with crisis communications team members)

Twitter account: _____

Password: _____

Facebook account: _____

Administrator(s): _____

Instagram account: _____

Website login: _____

>Password: _____

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS

The following template statements, proposed message points, questions and considerations are included to assist the crisis communications team in fact gathering and message creation for a variety of crisis scenarios. Every situation will warrant its own unique communications strategy, timing and approach. In many situations, especially those involving injury of sanctuary staff or visitors, we recommend consulting legal counsel before issuing public statements.

Crisis Standby Statement (General)

[SANCTUARY NAME] has been informed that on [insert date] at approximately [insert time], the following occurred:

(Briefly describe situation)

At this time, we have not had the opportunity to [substantiate/confirm] the specific facts of the event. We are currently investigating this matter in full cooperation with [identify other investigative agencies].

Out of respect for the investigative process and in fairness to the people involved, we are unable to provide further details at this time. However, we are committed to providing additional facts as they are confirmed. In the interim, anyone wishing to provide or request further information should contact [identify spokesperson at phone number or email]. We are also providing updated information on [SANCTUARY NAME]’s website and social channels [identify if/where you will be providing updates].

Statements of Admission and Social Media (Internal for Staff)

To be read or communicated to staff by senior management

When a terrible incident like this one has occurred, it is important to remind everyone of our communications policy. It is critical to the sanctuary’s reputation that all communications be accurate, appropriate and properly attributed. Only those employees who are specifically authorized may speak on behalf of [SANCTUARY NAME]. In this matter, [NAME] has been designated Spokesperson.

All staff members are expected to refer all media inquiries to [NAME]. If someone from the media contacts you, your simple and appropriate response should be: “Please understand that [NAME/TITLE] is [SANCTUARY NAME]’s Spokesperson. Please direct your inquiries to him/her.” You should then end the conversation.

All staff members should be very cautious in discussing the incident with family members, friends, residents and other third parties. Your communication may be inaccurate, misunderstood, misperceived, or result in rumors that can negatively impact the image of [SANCTUARY NAME] and our staff, and compromise our ability to defend potential litigation.

While [SANCTUARY NAME] recognizes and respects the right of staff members to use social media networking, personal websites, texting and other forms of communications, only those staff members officially designated by the sanctuary have the authorization to speak on behalf of [SANCTUARY NAME].

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

It is important to keep in mind that this matter is currently under investigation. Many facts remain unknown, and there is significant information that has yet to be confirmed. Please be careful to avoid disclosing any information that may compromise the investigation, is confidential, or may violate privacy rights or privacy perceptions.

Show proper consideration and respect to coworkers, the victims, our neighbors and community and others.

We strongly recommend you do not use social media to discuss the incident because it is easy to make a mistake that could hurt you or the sanctuary. Your knowledge or perceptions may be incomplete, or your representations may be inaccurate or misunderstood, or you may inadvertently violate attorney/client privilege or privacy rights. These things could later be used against you or the sanctuary.

[SANCTUARY NAME] and its [employee assistance program provider name – if one exists for the organization] are available to you if you should need help coping with the incident. Please see a manager if you have questions about the policy.

Death or Injury of a Sanctuary Staff Member or Guest

1. Injury to a person (staff/volunteer/guest)

Even if a sanctuary is not open to the public, donor tours or other guest visits could occur. As the injury could relate to any number of potential risks, below is some proposed messaging that covers various situations. Statements should show appropriate sympathy and emphasize that the staff take safety seriously.

Proposed Initial Message Points:

- We are shaken by the incident that occurred and send our sincere condolences to the [insert staff member/volunteer/guest] who was injured today.
- [SANCTUARY NAME] has a strong commitment and track record of safety, for people and animals.
- Our team is investigating how this happened to ensure that all steps are taken to prevent it from occurring again.

Proposed statement:

We are deeply grieved to learn that a [insert staff member/volunteer/guest] on the grounds of [SANCTUARY NAME] was injured. We take safety very seriously and are working with officials to understand how this incident occurred.

QUESTIONS/ CONSIDERATIONS related to sanctuary response to injury:

- Does the sanctuary have any safety credentialing (inspections or accreditation by any kind of certifying organization that would give third-party validation that the sanctuary meets high standards of safety)? If so, include this in messaging.
- Did staff witness the incident?

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

- Did staff provide any assistance?
- Was the injury caused by an animal in the sanctuary's care or a wild animal on site?
(If applicable) If it was a snake bite – were staff able to help identify the type of snake involved, which is information that could help with emergency medical treatment?
- How serious an injury was it? Was an ambulance called?
- Was the area closed following the incident?
- How many injuries have been reported to date (per month? per year?)
- Have other people been injured in that same area?
- Is the area going to be closed for any amount of time?
- Is the sanctuary considering modifications to the area as result of the incident?

Unnatural Death or Injury of an Animal

The untimely or unnatural death or injury of an animal in the sanctuary's care can become a flashpoint for critics.

Proposed Initial Message Points:

- The safety of the animals in our care is of utmost importance to our sanctuary staff, who are devastated by this loss.
- We are investigating what happened and will report to the proper official agencies once those reports are complete.
- We will monitor the animals closely, as always, and will identify and implement any necessary changes to enhance animal wellbeing.

Proposed Statement:

[SANCTUARY NAME] today is saddened to report that today at approximately [insert time], [insert specific details about the animal – age, name, male/female, etc.] died. While our staff and veterinary teams continue to look into this tragic loss, it is believed that the cause was [specify, if it's obvious or likely. If not, avoid]. The rest of our residents are healthy, and our team is monitoring them closely. Please keep our devastated team in your thoughts.

QUESTIONS/ CONSIDERATIONS related to an animal injury or death:

- What animals were involved (name, age, species)?
- Is it an illness or disease: Is it contagious? What treatments are underway or planned?
- If it is an injury: How did it occur? Had similar incidents occurred previously? In hindsight could this injury have been avoided if certain actions had been taken prior? If so, what would those have been, and what actions can be/will be taken to prevent a reoccurrence?

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

- If not a death, what is the prognosis for the animal(s)? What type of care is being provided?
- Did staff witness the incident?
- Did staff provide any assistance?
- Are there video cameras or other monitoring tools in place that could provide insight into what happened, or help staff monitor to prevent future incidents?
- Does the sanctuary have inspections or accreditation by any certifying organization that would give third-party validation that the sanctuary meets high standards of animal care? If so, include this in messaging.
- Be prepared to recap the animal's history, and why the sanctuary was a good home for them before this unfortunate incident occurred.

Animal Escape

If the animal is dangerous or could be considered dangerous, and if the public or local community was ever remotely in any kind of danger, treat the situation with the absolute seriousness it deserves. Keep information concise with facts that speak to how the sanctuary ensured public safety (for staff, any guests, or neighbors/ community). If the animal is not dangerous and the situation was quickly resolved, the statement can be a little lighter tone to reduce public concern. Below are two different examples:

Example 1:

[SANCTUARY NAME] reports today that at approximately [insert time], [insert specific details about the animal – age, name, male/female, etc.] was found temporarily outside of his/her enclosure (or other specifics of the situation, such as ‘was witnessed breaching his/her habitat fence/wall.) Try to avoid the word “escape,” though media will use it.

The sanctuary is not open to visitors and the public was never in any danger. The sanctuary immediately initiated emergency response procedures, which include [insert details. Provide details about how the sanctuary immediately acted in a way to ensure animal and public safety].

The animal was safely contained at [insert time], and [provide any specific details the situation warrants].

The sanctuary is thoroughly investigating how and where the animal breached the enclosure, and [insert animal name] will remain in a separate housing area until appropriate modifications and reinforcements are made to secure the habitat.

These kinds of habitat breaches are extremely rare. There hasn't been one at the sanctuary for [insert number of years, if including this brings a sense of comfort – exclude if it isn't beneficial to proactively share]. The sanctuary rescued [insert animal name] from [insert circumstances of where he/she came from] and is providing him/her a wonderful quality of life. The sanctuary takes animal and public safety very seriously and we train and drill multiple times per year so staff are well-prepared to respond immediately and appropriately in these rare situations. We are pleased that the situation was rectified quickly and without injury.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

Example 2 (a little lighter tone for non-injurious animal):

[Insert name and species] is not only extremely playful, but also incredibly curious. Today, [insert date] that sense of curiosity turned to mischief when he/she, squeezed through an [XX-inch-wide] gap in the perimeter/[insert details of what happened] and began [insert details – such as foraging/grazing/playing] on the other side of his/her housing/habitat. A sanctuary team member immediately initiated procedures to recover the animal. The entire incident lasted only [insert time], and at no time was she/he or any caregivers in any danger. Though the habitat meets best practice standards for housing, the sanctuary will be modifying it to ensure this doesn't happen again.

QUESTIONS/ CONSIDERATIONS related to an animal escape:

- Have you identified how the animal escaped?
- Has this happened before? How often?
- What actions will you take to secure the habitat?
- Is there video of the escape?

USDA Citations or Loss of Accreditation

Receiving a citation or losing accreditation by a third-party credentialing agency can be damaging to the reputation of an animal sanctuary, as it compromises public trust that the animals are being well cared for. Such violations may not be something the sanctuary wants to proactively share; however, it is recommended it be prepared to discuss internally and with external stakeholders as needed and appropriate. Sanctuary critics can use such situations to corrode public trust in the sanctuary.

Proposed Initial Message Points:

- The safety of the animals in our care and our staff is of utmost importance to our sanctuary.
- We take this regulatory/accreditation issue seriously and are examining how we can quickly and effectively work with [insert governmental agency/accrediting bodies] to resolve this issue.

Proposed statement:

[SANCTUARY NAME] is dismayed to learn that a [describe finding: citation/the loss of accreditation] by [insert regulatory body] was issued on [insert date]. [Describe the violation]. We immediately began looking into this finding and will implement corrective action to resolve this as soon as possible and prevent it from happening again.

While this is disappointing, the [SANCTUARY NAME] is committed to maintaining the high standards of [insert regulation/accreditation] and the very best animal care practices. We embrace this opportunity to improve our sanctuary and keep providing a place where the animals in our care live excellent lives.

QUESTIONS/ CONSIDERATIONS related to a citation/accreditation loss:

- What, specifically, was the regulatory finding?
- Which animals did it concern?

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

- Did the finding report that animals or people were at risk?
- What corrective measures are required to resolve the issue, and how quickly?
- What are the next steps for resolution of the issue?

Financial Issues

Financial failure or irregularities can be a serious issue and concern for animal sanctuaries who often depend almost entirely on donations. Funding can be impacted by an economic downturn, which could put the sanctuary in a challenging, but sympathetic position. If financial struggles are related to poor financial management (or perception of such) or more serious issues, such as embezzlement or misuse of funds, the damage can be long-lasting or even permanent.

Proposed standby statement:

[SANCTUARY NAME] is dismayed to report that we are experiencing financial difficulties, as many nonprofits are today. The welfare of the animals in our care remains our priority, and our residents are safe and well-cared for, with their needs met from nutrition to medical care. However, the sanctuary will no longer be accepting any additional animals into our care (if applicable, or rehoming some animals to another sanctuary, if applicable) as we embark on plans to solve these financial issues to ensure that we remain able to care for rescued [insert species] for many years to come. Those plans are in the works now, and we will share them as soon as possible. We appreciate the support of our community and the people worldwide who love [insert species] as much as we do.

Proposed initial message points:

- The [SANCTUARY NAME] leadership team is committed to financial responsibility, with a detailed plan for ensuring the solvency of the sanctuary and our ability to provide for the care of our animals.
- Financial irregularities will be dealt with quickly and decisively.
- If there is no illegal activity suspected or known, but there is concern that donors/the public may suspect it, be sure to correct that notion immediately.

Questions/considerations related to financial issues:

- What, specifically, are causing the financial issues? Low donor support? Higher costs for staff, equipment or supplies? Exceeding animal capacity? Poor record keeping or budgeting?
- Is there potential criminal activity, such as embezzlement or fraud? If so, who is involved, and what investigation is occurring? (We recommend that these discussions be held with the sanctuary's legal counsel.)
- Is the sanctuary at risk of closing? Is there a plan for rehoming the animals?
- What actions are needed to resolve the issue? What steps are already underway?
- Are the animals suffering in any way from this issue?

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

Whistleblower Action

The messaging will vary in a whistleblower action, depending upon the nature of the complaint. The type of complaints that can be most damaging to an animal sanctuary's reputation, and risk external public interest, are related to animal wellbeing and any credible accusations of inadequate care. Suggestions of financial mismanagement or malfeasance also can be quite damaging.

Proposed standby message:

[SANCTUARY NAME] takes any complaints about our operations very seriously. We hold ourselves to the highest standards of conduct and animal care. We are currently investigating the allegations made, and we will work with the proper authorities and the complainant to address these issues. In the meantime, [SANCTUARY NAME] continues to provide excellent care to the animals in our sanctuary.

QUESTIONS/ CONSIDERATIONS related to whistleblower complaint to guide communications strategy and messaging further:

- What is the specific nature of the complaint?
- Is there any truth to the accusations? What is being done to correct issues?
- Are there videos/photos available of any of the accusations, including internal security footage?
- If the accusations are false, what proof points and documentation can refute claims?
- If animal welfare complaint: What animals were involved (name, age, species)?
- Have these complaints/issues arisen internally before? If so, what actions were taken to address them?
- Does the sanctuary have a grievance procedure to address complaints? When was the last time the procedure was communicated with staff to remind them that this procedure is in place?
- What corrective actions (if deemed appropriate) are being taken to address the issues related to the issues in the complaint?

Severe Weather Event

Some weather events will pop up quickly, such as a tornado, while others provide more preparation lead time, such as a hurricane or ice storm. In either case, quick action and advance planning is critical to prevent a crisis situation.

Proposed standby message:

If weather was predicted:

[SANCTUARY NAME] closely monitors weather reports and constantly evaluates any risk to our animals. We prepared in advance for this [describe event: blizzard, hurricane, etc], and all of our animals are safe. Our dedicated staff members remain onsite at the sanctuary to care for our charges during this storm, and we will take whatever actions are needed to ensure the safety of staff and animals.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

If weather was unexpected:

[SANCTUARY NAME] closely monitors weather reports, and our team swung into action immediately today when severe weather broke out. Our animals are safe, and staff members remain onsite at the sanctuary to care for them until our facilities team can inspect the habitats for damage. We will take whatever actions are needed to ensure the safety of staff and animals until operations return to normal.

If animals are injured:

[SANCTUARY NAME] closely monitors weather reports, and our team swung into action immediately today when severe weather broke out. Sadly, despite those efforts, [insert number] of our animals [were injured/died] in the severe weather. Our heartbroken staff members remain onsite at the sanctuary to care for the rest of our animals, while our facilities team is inspecting all habitats for damage. Please keep our team in your thoughts at this difficult time.

QUESTIONS related to severe weather event planning and procedures:

- Does the sanctuary management team closely monitor weather reports? Is there a severe weather warning system?
- When a severe weather warning is issued, what are staff procedures to ensure safety of both animals and staff? Is there an emergency weather activation plan?
- Do staff receive training or special instructions for what to do in the event of severe weather event?
- What actions are taken to protect the animals during a weather emergency? Are they moved indoors, are extra supplies provided for outdoor-only animals, etc.
- What redundancies are in place to ensure an uninterrupted supply of power, heat, air-conditioning and other life-support systems in an extended weather emergency?
- How are animal areas weather-proofed? Are trees removed near fences, and are buildings reinforced, etc.?
- Which buildings at the sanctuary are considered shelter areas for staff in case of severe weather?
- Are evacuation plans in place, should that be required in the event of a hurricane, winter storm, wildfire or other serious and sustained weather event? Has the team practiced such evacuations?
- How are the grounds teams prepared to quickly assess habitat viability after a weather incident?
- If animals are missing afterward, how does the sanctuary plan to find and return them back to the sanctuary?

Inclusion and Cultural Sensitivity

Proposed message point related to inclusion:

[SANCTUARY NAME] is deeply committed to providing a safe, welcoming environment. We ensure that every employee, volunteer and guest is treated fairly and respectfully. Our organization follows policies and procedures that ensures a welcoming environment for all.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

Community Relations / Neighbor Issues

Issues with neighbors could include concerns about animal smells/sounds, fears about an animal escape, etc.

Proposed message point related to community issue:

[SANCTUARY NAME] is committed to being a good neighbor and we take community feedback very seriously. We are evaluating this issue to determine what modifications can be made to rectify the situation while maintaining the highest quality of life for the animals in our care.

Active Shooter or Threat of Violence

In the event of an active shooter situation, or credible threat of violence, public communications should be handled by law enforcement agencies. The animal sanctuary communications team should work closely with law enforcement Public Information Officer while police serve as primary Spokespersons.

Following the event, when police step down as primary communicators and the animal sanctuary steps back in as primary communicators – during the challenging and sensitive time of operation recovery following such a tragic and damaging event – we strongly recommend engaging with a crisis communications agency to develop strategies and tactics designed to rebuild a sense of safety, normalcy and positive affiliation with the sanctuary.

Questions and recommendations to prepare for such an event:

- Establish a relationship with your local law enforcement agencies. Get to know the Public Information Officers to understand their policy and procedures for communications during such an event. We recommend adding those contacts in this plan in [Appendix B](#).
- Develop key messages about what the sanctuary does to prepare for such an event, and what safety measures are in place to mitigate or control such a situation. For instance:
 - Have staff members participated in active shooter training?
 - Are emergency drills conducted? If so, how often?
 - Does the sanctuary conduct collaborative drills with local law enforcement agencies?
 - Does the sanctuary have an emergency alert system in place?
 - What is staff instructed to do when alerted of a shooter or credible threat to protect themselves and help others as feasible?
 - Consider and plan communications related to victims and family members – what, if anything, might the sanctuary plan to do or offer to people who sustained injury, or death, while on property?

Scenarios to anticipate in the aftermath of such an event:

- Gun policy debate and discussion. Whether the sanctuary allows guns or bans guns, its policy on guns may become a topic of debate and discussion. Develop a basic message about the gun policy and don't participate in the debate.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS - CRISIS SCENARIOS (CONT.)

- Questions / concerns about what **[SANCTUARY NAME]** may be doing to bolster security or otherwise renew a sense of safety in the sanctuary.
- Staff support and counseling – retention and recruitment challenges.

Cybersecurity Breach

In the event of a cyber breach, you'll need to assess the extent of the breach – how many donors may have been compromised and determine which stakeholders need to be informed in compliance with, and in addition to, any regulatory mandated responses.

Proposed messages:

- **[SANCTUARY NAME]** is committed to working beside all affected donors **[and/or guests if applicable]** to meet their needs.
- Our core values at **[SANCTUARY NAME]** are to operate with integrity and responsibility. We are addressing this incident with the same commitment.
- **[SANCTUARY NAME]** is working with authorities to do all we can to help mitigate the effects of this incident for our guests and to do all we can to prevent future incidents.

Critics and Protests

While zoos and aquariums are facing increased pressure from animal-rights and welfare advocates, sanctuaries generally do not face the same level of critique and criticism. However, it does occasionally occur and the attacks can be significantly damaging to a sanctuary's reputation if it occurs.

Activists have, for instance, conducted protests outside of board members' homes, posted anti-sanctuary billboards and conducted social media attacks. These efforts can attract the attention of credible traditional media that can amplify negative attention and deepen the reputational damage. It's important for sanctuaries to monitor social media and other communications for critics' claims regularly, and take swift action if you are notified by an animal welfare group about a complaint or issue. In many of these situations, you may be best served by seeking specialty communications counsel to assist in protecting and defending the sanctuary in the court of public opinion.

Proposed Messaging to Protesters:

*We are aware that people are participating in a demonstration today outside the sanctuary **[insert nature of the protest]**. While respecting their right to an opinion, we strongly disagree with their false claims about the care and welfare of **[SANCTUARY NAME]** living at the sanctuary.*

***[SANCTUARY NAME]** provides exceptional care for these animals that were rescued from **[insert circumstances they came from]**. We are providing them an extraordinary life and their wellbeing is paramount.*

This misguided attack ignores the specialized and devoted care we provide to the animals every day.

APPENDIX A

Crisis Management Team Directory

Populated from page 28

PRIMARY Team Leader	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
SECONDARY Team Leader	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Additional Team Member	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Additional Team Member	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

Crisis PR Support Contacts – Insert agency contacts if you have an external agency

Contact Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Contact Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Contact Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

APPENDIX B

Key Partners/Community Contact List

We recommend filling this in with key contacts, such as community groups that support the sanctuary and donor families whose names are on a specific area of the sanctuary. It's important that they be notified before hearing about it through the media. It is good to have key contact information easy to access in the crisis plan at your fingertips.

Organization		
Contact Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

Organization		
Contact Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

Organization		
Contact Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

Organization		
Contact Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

Organization		
Contact Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

APPENDIX C

Key Media Contact List

Outlet	
Contact Name	Title
Office Number	E-mail

Outlet	
Contact Name	Title
Office Number	E-mail

Outlet	
Contact Name	Title
Office Number	E-mail

Outlet	
Contact Name	Title
Office Number	E-mail

Outlet	
Contact Name	Title
Office Number	E-mail

APPENDIX D

Employee Contact List

Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Employee Name	Title	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

APPENDIX E

Board of Directors Contact List

Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail
Name	Affiliation	
Office Number	Mobile Number	E-mail

APPENDIX F

Situation Room Checklist

In the event of a major crisis requiring round-the-clock monitoring and communications, an organization may need to set up a Crisis Center or Situation Room.

Supplies list:

- Copies of the Crisis Communications Plan for each member of the Crisis Management Team
- Directories of key personnel, vendors
- Landline phones
- Mobile phones
- Laptops with working internet
- Printer
- Copy machine
- Cable/Satellite television
- Radio
- Power strip
- Office supplies - pens, markers, highlighters, post-it notes, etc.
- Paper (letterhead, printing paper and writing tablets)
- Beverages and food, as needed

APPENDIX G

Incident Telephone Information Form

This log should be filled out for every telephone call received by staff related to the issue.

NOTE: If the call is from media, immediately alert the crisis communications lead.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Name of caller: _____

Is this a media call? Yes No

If YES:

Name of news organization/telephone number:

News Organization

Phone Number

Deadline: _____

Briefly, what does the reporter need?

If NO:

Organization/affiliation of caller (if appropriate): _____

Does someone need to return this call or respond?

Yes No

Telephone number: _____

Briefly, what does this person want/need?

Name of person taking the call:

APPENDIX H

Fact Gathering Form (FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY)

The information worksheet below can be used to gather facts about the issue.

What Happened

Date: _____

Time: _____

Brief description of issue/incident:

Who was present?

Areas of the sanctuary where incident occurred:

Description of crisis:

Area closing; if so how long:

Donor/sponsor notified, if appropriate:

Yes No

Sanctuary Staff and Volunteers

Injuries (seriousness/condition):

Casualties:

Was victim(s) family contacted?

Yes No

APPENDIX H (CONT.)

Fact Gathering Form (FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY)

Hospital location/contact information (this information should never be disclosed publicly):

Are employees/guests in immediate danger?

Yes No

What is being done to safeguard staff/volunteers?

Sanctuary Guests (if applicable)

Injuries (seriousness/condition):

Casualties:

Was victim(s) family contacted?

Yes No

Hospital location/contact information (this information should never be disclosed publicly):

Are guests in immediate danger?

Yes No

What is being done to safeguard guests?

APPENDIX I

Example Crisis Communications Grid

This grid is based on the scenario that a sanctuary is breaking the news of a crisis itself, and an announcement can be delayed until all details are known.

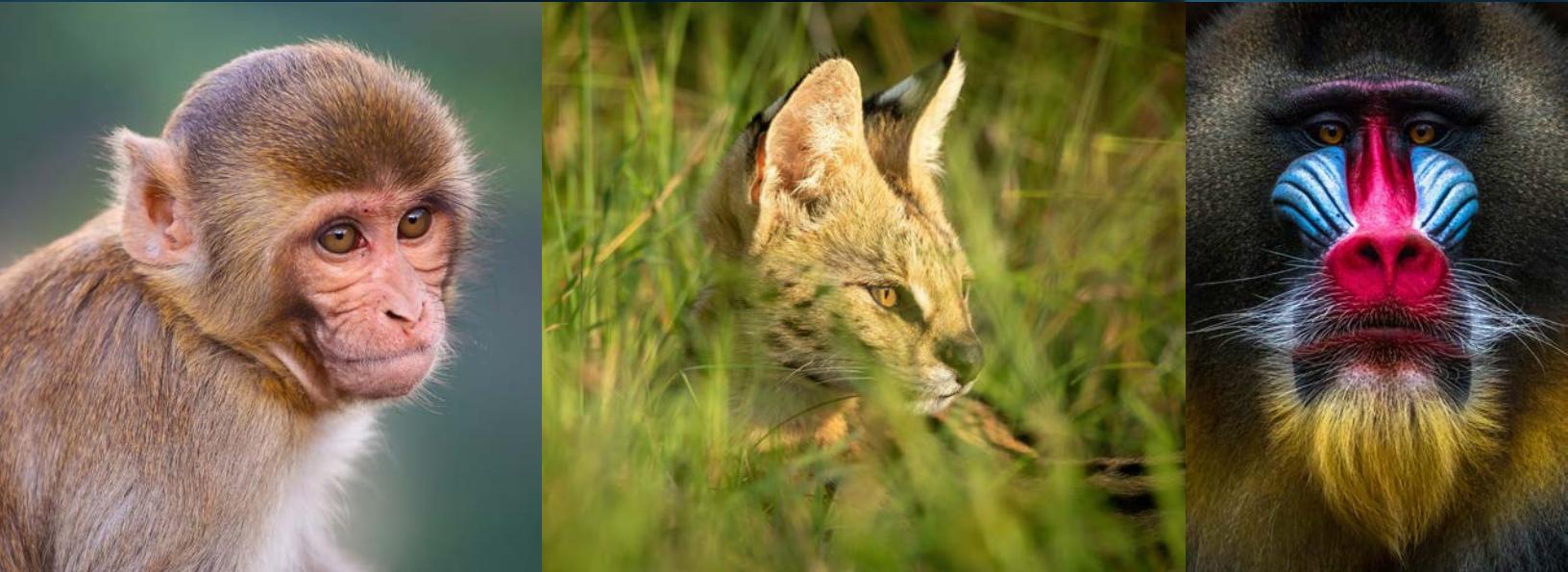
However, it should be customized specific to each crisis. For example, if an issue has gone public and the sanctuary is already fielding questions, a standby statement often will be required before all of the details are in.

If the issue is public, social media can become a channel for a standby statement in the first hour.

Sequence	What	Audience	Objective	Channel
Within 1 hour	Standby statement	Board chair, key leadership, front line staff	In the event they field inquiries from the public or the media before full situation statement or press release are complete	In person meetings, phone, email, potentially social media
Within 2 hours	Standby statement and/or pertinent facts	Board and donors	Communicate regularly to maintain confidence	Phone/email
Within 3 hours	Situation update	Employees and volunteers	Consistent messaging	In person/email
Within 1 day	Press release	Media	Control the message	Email/phone
Timed with press statement	Social media post	General public	Control the message	Website/social
Insert number of hours/day	Insert type of communication	Insert audience	Insert objective	Insert format of communication

“By failing to prepare,
you are preparing to fail.”

– Benjamin Franklin



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Communications
Inc.

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FOUNDATION



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ChimpCARE

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