



CONNECTED TO THE ISSUES

[When the Going Gets Tough,  
Make Sure Your Organization is Tougher!](#)

[News Travels Fast!](#)

[Don't Know Where to Start? ACS Can Help!](#)

[Planning Today Can Pay Off Tomorrow](#)

# Mastering Crisis Communication

## When the Going Gets Tough, Make Sure Your Organization is Tougher!

Crises are inevitable for any organization. But how you respond can mean the difference between recovery and reputational damage.

Being prepared for a crisis is not just a “nice to have;” it’s a necessity. Whether facing a natural disaster, a data breach, or any unexpected event, an effective crisis communication plan provides a clear roadmap to navigate turbulent times, helping your organization emerge stronger and more unified—and safeguarding its reputation and ensuring swift recovery.

A crisis won’t wait for you to be ready. By working through the six phases of crisis communication planning—Pre-Crisis, Initial, Maintenance, Resolution, Evaluation, and Post-Crisis—your organization can prepare now and stay resilient to get you through the tough times!

## News Travels Fast!

A crisis can strike any organization at any time, disrupting operations and threatening its reputation. And, unfortunately, news travels fast and public perception can shift in an instant. Think about the last time a crisis hit the news; within minutes, social media pages were most likely flooded with gossip and half-truths. Many organizations have witnessed in their own crises that the first report, rumor, or reference to it is often the story that sticks.

### Why Organizations Often Find Themselves Unprepared for a Crisis

In a perfect world, every organization would have a robust crisis communication plan ready to go at a moment's notice. The reality, however, is that many organizations find themselves unprepared when a crisis hits. In fact, [this article by Forbes](#) found that most CEOs don't think their organizations are ready for a crisis; less than half (49 percent) said they are ready for a pandemic or global health crisis; only 41 percent are prepared for cybersecurity crises; and only 39 percent have planned for financial instability.

## The ACS Fund for Women & Girls

### Support, Power, and Hope for Young Women and Girls



Celebrating the 20th anniversary of their dynamic, all-women, minority-owned firm, ACS co-founders Lori McClung and Scarlett Boudier have launched an inspiring new initiative: the ACS Fund for Women & Girls, aimed at empowering young women and girls in Cleveland and Ohio, especially those from low-income backgrounds and communities of color. This fund will provide critical support in accessing reproductive services, building public service careers, and affording higher education.

With ACS' national reach and expertise, the fund, housed at the Cleveland Foundation, is set to fuel transformative change. McClung and Boudier's vision, inspired by the resilience and creativity of young women and girls, promises to create lasting impact and a brighter future for all.

[Watch the ACS Fund Video here.](#)

[Read more about the Fund for Women & Girls here.](#)

To contribute today, visit the [Cleveland Foundation donations page.](#)

Empower young women. Shape future leaders. [Donate](#) to the ACS Fund for Women & Girls today!

The article [The top five reasons companies aren't ready for a cyber crisis when it hits](#) identifies why companies are unprepared. ACS enhances this top five list by providing a practical addition of "Why does this matter?" to better understand everyday implications.

### 1. Cost

Crisis management training is perceived as expensive, leading many, especially smaller firms, to avoid investing in it. They underestimate the true costs of being unprepared and the benefits of investing in a risk management strategy now to avoid severe future consequences.

*Why does this matter?* Crisis communication consultants can cost upwards of \$300 per hour, and your leadership will be pulled off task, costing the organization time and money.

### 2. Overconfidence

Some leaders think crises won't impact their business or believe their team can handle anything. This overconfidence leads to complacency and underestimating the long-term damage a crisis can cause, making it harder for the company to recover.

*Why does this matter?* When organizations rely solely on the abilities of their staff during a crisis, they delay expert involvement from the Crisis Communication Team, who have a plan in place for when a crisis hits. This can lead to rapid spread of misinformation and loss of stakeholder confidence.

### 3. Other Priorities

Organizations are focusing on their financial and operational performance, often due to capacity issues or other factors that take precedence over crisis planning.

*Why does this matter?* When an organization, busy with expanding its community outreach and programs, doesn't plan for crises because of limited resources, they will be unprepared, causing disorganized efforts and disruption in services. They may struggle to get back on track and face criticism for not being ready, showing the need for crisis planning even when resources are tight.

#### 4. Remote Scheduling

Organizations find it difficult to prepare remote employees to handle crises from a distance. This situation requires developing new approaches and methods to ensure employees are equipped to respond effectively in remote settings.

*Why does this matter?* When organizational staff are not adequately prepared to respond promptly to stakeholder and media inquiries, or bylaws do not allow for remote voting, delayed information and decisions can impact staff and program participants. Because of the holdup, stakeholders—including investors, donors, and the public—may perceive the organization as inefficient and unprepared to respond.

#### 5. Publicity Fears

Some leaders fear that conducting crisis rehearsals might appear unprofessional or weak, so they avoid publicizing their crisis preparedness efforts.

*Why does this matter?* Practice makes perfect, and this applies to crisis rehearsals and plans to support that will help you get there. Stakeholders might feel reassured knowing the company is actively preparing for crises.

So, what's an organization to do?

A well thought out, comprehensive, and **utilized** crisis communication plan is your organization's ticket to a better outcome. Effective crisis communication helps manage the narrative, reassure stakeholders, and mitigate damage. Through a crisis communication plan, organizations can enhance their resilience, protect their reputation, and ensure continuity in operations when faced with unforeseen crises.



### Happy Birthday ACS!

Advocacy & Communication Solutions, LLC, is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2024! Throughout the year, we are looking back at our journey that has gotten us to where we are today, and looking forward to what the future has in store. For 20 years we've helped our clients in nonprofits, for profits, government agencies, and philanthropic organizations successfully share their messages about target issues with key audiences, advocate for policy change, and position themselves as leaders in their respective fields. Just imagine what the next 20 years will bring! [Learn more about ACS here!](#)

## Don't Know Where to Start? ACS Can Help!

ACS has developed a [Crisis Communication Strategy Worksheet](#) to help you create a proactive approach that contributes to your organization's resilience and adaptability in an ever-changing business landscape—walking you through the steps you need to take to get there. BEFORE a crisis happens.

### Key Components of the Crisis Communication Strategy Worksheet

#### Pre-Crisis Phase

##### Proactive Identification of Potential Crises

Identify potential threats by brainstorming scenarios that could affect your organization.

##### Build a Dedicated Crisis Communications Team

A well-prepared crisis communications team is essential.

#### Initial Phase

##### Develop a Comprehensive Response Plan

When a crisis occurs, having a detailed response plan that addresses the following is crucial.

- ▶ **Information Gathering:** Collect accurate and detailed information about the crisis. Understand what happened, when it happened, who is involved, and how it occurred.
- ▶ **Communication Goals:** Define what you aim to achieve with your communication, such as informing stakeholders, reassuring the public, or maintaining trust.
- ▶ **Target Audiences:** Identify all relevant stakeholders, including employees, customers, investors, regulators, and the media. Tailor messages to address their specific concerns.
- ▶ **Key Messages:** Develop clear, concise, and consistent messages to convey during the crisis. These should be adaptable to different channels and audiences.

##### Craft and Deliver Key Messages

Clear and consistent messaging is vital during a crisis. Just as important is how the messages are delivered to target audiences.

##### Establish Monitoring Systems

Monitoring what's being said about your organization on traditional and social media can alert you to negative messages that could foment a crisis.

## Maintenance Phase

### Ongoing assessment of the event and continued allocation of resources

Begins when most or all the direct harm is contained, and the intensity of the crisis begins to subside.

## Resolution Phase

### Return to normal or “new normal”

Transition from crisis response to recovery, which may include rebuilding, reputation management, and long-term communication strategies.

## Evaluation Phase

### Identify key learnings

Conducting a formal analysis. Review what worked, what failed, and what could be improved prior to the next event, and use the results to update the crisis communication plan.

## Post-Crisis Analysis and Continuous Improvement

### Review What Worked and What Didn't

Analyze the effectiveness of your communication strategy and identify areas for improvement.

### Update Your Crisis Communication Plan

Use the lessons learned to update and enhance your crisis communication plan.

### Train and Practice

Regularly train your crisis communications team and conduct simulations to ensure ongoing preparedness.

## Planning Today Can Pay Off Tomorrow

Navigating crises demands more than just reacting—it requires proactive planning and effective communication. Many organizations find themselves unprepared when crises strike. As those who have dealt with a crisis within an organization know, the importance of crisis preparedness cannot be overstated.

A well-structured crisis communication plan is not just a safeguard; it's a strategic asset that guides organizations through turmoil, manages narratives, reassures stakeholders, and minimizes damage. By working through the six phases of crisis

communication strategy—Pre-Crisis, Initial, Maintenance, Resolution, Evaluation, and Post-Crisis Analysis—you can equip your organization today to face tomorrow's challenges with confidence and resilience.

Download the [ACS Crisis Communication Strategy Worksheet](#) and take proactive steps towards safeguarding your organization's future!



## WANT MORE?

Want to learn how communication, strategy development, advocacy, or capacity building can move your organization forward? Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?

Contact one of our team members, call toll free at 1-877-372-0166, or visit our website at [advocacyandcommunication.org](http://advocacyandcommunication.org).

[Lori McClung](#), CEO

[Lauren Sogor](#), Vice President

[Allison Marker](#), Senior Strategist

[Scarlett Boudier](#), President

[Jennifer Judkins](#), Senior Communication Manager

[Amber Hill](#), Executive Administrator

## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

**Spring 2024 Newsletter**

Advocacy & Communication SOLUTIONS

CONNECTED TO THE ISSUES

Decoding Political Jargon to Understand What It Might Mean

Public Dog Whistles 101

Decoding Dog Whistles and its Media Counterpart

How You Can Help Silence Public Dog Whistles

**Understanding Political Dog Whistles**

**Decoding Political Jargon to Understand What It Might Mean**

It's a presidential election year, and ACS will be combining some of its greatest hits with new sounds to bring you a "mixed tape" that will guide you through this voting season. Whether new information or proven ideas, every track will offer useful tools to help you navigate what is sure to be an interesting 2024.

**Winter 2024 Newsletter: Part 2**

Advocacy & Communication SOLUTIONS

CONNECTED TO THE ISSUES

Thread 1: The "Women's Right" Movement

Thread 2: School Teachers

From What's March 2024, Part 1

Thread 1: Beliefs about the Endless Learning Struggle

Thread 2: Beliefs to Health Care Access

**What to Watch 2024—Part 2**

**Democracy at a Crossroads: Navigating Threats and Charting the Course for the Future**

Our nation's Founding Fathers maintained that the success of the fragile American democracy would require an educated population with the skills to navigate and fustle with political and social issues to participate in civic life; be informed voters to protect their rights and freedoms, and to resist tyrants and demagogues. This education, formal and informal, must include exposure to a variety of viewpoints and an unfiltered understanding of historical influences on present day policies and realities.

**Winter 2024 Newsletter: Part 1**

Advocacy & Communication SOLUTIONS

CONNECTED TO THE ISSUES

Thread 1: Reduction to Shortened Living Wages

Thread 2: Health System Cost Access

**What to Watch 2024—Part 1**

**Democracy at a Crossroads: Navigating Threats and Charting the Course for the Future**

In What to Watch 2023, Advocacy & Communication Solutions (ACS) walked you through what a healthy democracy looks like—one that builds open, responsive, and accountable institutions and processes that serve the needs and preferences of the public. And, you read about how you can do your part to ensure a healthy democracy.

In 2024, ACS will examine some of those policy trends—in our workforce, health care systems, and schools—through two installments of our What to Watch Newsletter, through which we provide strategic insight into how we can navigate those threats in the coming year while working towards preserving democracy.