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**DRAFT Crisis Communications Plan**

**Last updated: March 2019**

**KEY INFO AT A GLANCE**

The Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS) Crisis Communications plan outlines the roles, responsibilities and procedures of key staff and leadership to guide the organization in quickly and accurately sharing information during a crisis.

In this plan, **a crisis is defined as a significant event or incident that disrupts, or has the potential to disrupt, normal GPLS operations.** **A crisis could also damage our reputation, financial performance or harm the wellbeing of patrons, employees, the surrounding communities or the environment**.

The Crisis Communications Team includes individuals with a critical role in responding and supporting the response to a crisis at GPLS.

Key audiences in this plan include GPLS staff, public library directors, Board of Regents, Georgia legislators, the general public, partners, other state libraries and the media.

The Crisis Communications Plan is comprised of **communications strategies**,which are messages that we want the public to hear or see:

* Actions we are taking
* Key facts
* The story we want people to remember about GPLS (What we’ve stood for all these years, we will recover, etc)
* Reassurance (We are doing what we can to solve this problem; we will reopen stronger than ever, etc)

And **communications tactics**, which are the tools used to disseminate strategies:

* News media
* Social media
* Interpersonal media
* GPLS organizational media (our website, email, and social media)

**OBJECTIVES OF THIS PLAN**

* To prepare GPLS to manage communications to our key audiences in a crisis.
* To be able to respond in a unified, professional manner.
* To manage the distribution of timely, sensitive information.
* To strategically enhance understanding of the value provided by our organization/libraries.

**What is a crisis at GPLS?**

As an agency, we monitor what's happening in public libraries around the state to understand how their situation(s) make ALL of us look, particularly any implication that we as public libraries don't use funds correctly or wisely.

**A crisis at a public library becomes a crisis for GPLS when a legislator or Regent gets involved, as well as any time that public library funding is at risk.** Newspaper reporters often call the state librarian if the word "library" is mentioned in a local crisis, so it’s important for our agency to hear from library directors in advance whenever possible. The state librarian and GPLS can offer support to guide public libraries through a crisis. For these reasons, we encourage public library directors to brief GPLS any time they feel a crisis may be forthcoming

A crisis for GPLS also includes anything that would reflect badly on the Board of Regents and the University System of Georgia, including ethical violations. Our agency errs on the side of caution and careful following of rules, always.

**CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM**

The guiding principle of the Crisis Communications Team is to communicate incident facts accurately and quickly, updating information as circumstances change to ensure safety, transparency and continued operations.

In a crisis, the team will immediately meet to factually assess the situation and determine whether crisis notification communications are warranted.

Additionally, the team will:

* Define immediate actions needed to inform key audiences about the situation.
* Communicate in an accurate and timely manner about the situation.
* Meet regularly to reassess the situation.
* Monitor all media coverage and manage rumors.
* Restore a sense of confidence and/or order.

The Crisis Communications Team will review and update this plan as needed.

Crisis Communications Team members:

* State Librarian
* Assistant State Librarian(s) as determined by State Librarian
* Communications Director
* USG Legal Department, if needed
* Other representatives from GPLS, as determined by situation

**CRISIS RESPONSE**

The Crisis Communications Team will consider the following questions as they assess the situation:

* What is known and who already knows it?
* Who on staff needs to be involved?
* Is there public interest?
* What immediate steps need to be taken?
* What are people feeling - what emotions need to be considered?
* What can and CAN’T be said?
* Is legal counsel needed?
* What channels will be used to communicate a response?
* Who are the key audiences that need to be contacted, by whom and when?

**CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

1. All crises should be immediately reported to a manager and the state librarian.
2. Only the state librarian, assistant state librarians and communications director are authorized to release information to the media and to the public. All other staff can be helpful by connecting media and other stakeholders to those authorized on behalf of GPLS.
3. To reaffirm: All media inquiries should be referred to communications director to manage for state librarian.
4. If an answer is unknown or can’t be immediately answered, take note of the question and contact information, tell the journalist we will get back with him or her, and do so. “No comment” is not an acceptable response. If the question can’t be answered because of a policy, such as sharing personnel information, let the journalist know so.
5. Responses should be proactive and action-oriented, whenever possible.
6. Maintaining effective media relationships are important to bolstering public confidence in libraries as a whole.

**CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST**

*These are the steps to manage a crisis.*

1. (If an emergency) Ensure safety of all staff and site. Call 911 if necessary.
2. Notify state librarian.
3. Crisis Communications Team assesses situation.
4. Before communicating publicly,
   1. Determine lead person to ensure all tasks are complete – likely director of communications.
   2. Determine key spokesperson to answer all media and other inquiries – likely state librarian.
   3. Assess situation to determine facts.
   4. Determine appropriate response.
   5. Create plan of action for internal and external communications.
   6. Develop factual, detailed messages (see page 4) that reflect the status of the crisis, GPLS response, and if possible, steps to resolve the situation.
   7. Prepare talking points and provide a script for person responsible for answering general phone line.
   8. Determine if a press release, web and/or voicemail updates are necessary.
   9. Assess what resources are necessary to manage the crisis (press conference, cell phone availability, etc)
   10. Appoint staff to contact key audiences as necessary:
       1. GPLS staff
       2. Public library directors
       3. Board of Regents
       4. Georgia legislators
       5. General public
       6. Partners
       7. Other state libraries
       8. Media
5. When going public:
   1. Call critical internal audiences first – BOR, legislators, etc
      1. State librarian contacts BOR, legislators, public library directors and staff
   2. Begin media and other external audience outreach
   3. Update website and organizational voicemail
      1. Administrative staff to monitor GPLS voicemail and refer to director of communications as needed.
   4. Evaluate effectiveness of message as situation progresses
   5. Monitor the media and social media and respond as necessary
      1. Communications manager to monitor social media and post updates/responses in coordination with Crisis Communications Team.
      2. Communications manager to update website as needed, in coordination with Crisis Communications Team.
      3. Communications director to monitor media and respond as needed, in coordination with Crisis Communications Team.
   6. Determine means to update key audiences with ongoing information
   7. Distribute post-crisis communications
6. Evaluate crisis communications efforts
   1. Crisis Communications Team will meet to discuss lessons learned, messages that worked well, what we need to update.

**EMERGENCY CONTACT INFO**

List staff list and contact info here.

**KEY MESSAGES**

The Crisis Communications Team will develop factual, responsive messages and a script for the staff person who answers organizational phone number and voicemail. These messages should be prepared for media inquiries, updates and proactive outreach to critical audiences.

Messages should be clear, consistent, timely, concise and authentic. They should reinforce the positive and be action/solution-oriented as possible. Messages should also reflect GPLS’s overall key messages, including:

* Georgia Public Library Service empowers libraries to improve the lives of all Georgians.
* Libraries are a smart investment.
* Libraries transform lives and communities.
* Libraries are innovative places that help people achieve their goals at any stage of life.

Additional considerations for media:

* All media inquiries should be referred to communications director to manage for state librarian.
* Consider what media know about the situation and what their potential interest is/will be in reporting.
* Ensure messages are factually accurate before sharing.
* Consider tough questions, and all potential questions, to prepare answers for them.
* Consider what else may be useful to prepare/share, such as
  + Web page
  + Fact sheet
  + FAW
* If necessary, consult with public library directors to ensure consistent messages.

**COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS**

* About GPLS postcard: <https://georgialibraries.org/marketing_files/about-GPLS-2019.pdf>
* Public library impact by the numbers: <https://georgialibraries.org/marketing_files/impact-by-the-numbers.pdf>
* What can you do with a library card? <https://georgialibraries.org/marketing_files/do-more-with-GA-library-card.pdf>
* GPLS news page: <https://georgialibraries.org/news-stories/>
* Strategic plan: <https://georgialibraries.org/strategic-plan/>
* Holding statement
* Template web page