UNITED WAY
OF RACINE COUNTY
CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

LIVE UNITED

United Way

December 2014

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN?

This plan is designed to ensure the proper communications practices in dealing with an agency crisis. Its purpose is to maintain the positive public reputation of United Way of Racine County (UWRC) and guarantee the successful resolution of any public relations emergencies. Its purpose is to help manage *communications* around a crisis, but does not suffice for an overall crisis management plan that would also include other organizational considerations. The objectives of this crisis communications plan are as follows:

- Prepare UWRC staff to effectively and nimbly manage crisis communications;
- Help staff respond in a unified, professional manner that reinforces leadership and creates loyalty;
- Strategically enhance the organization's brand/role, and the public understanding of the value provided within the nonprofit community;
- Manage the distribution of critical, often sensitive, information to the media, donors, and public;
- Inform donors and partners of the organization's position to help shape a consistent response.

The goal of United Way of Racine County's Crisis Communications Plan is to release the most accurate information possible and present a confident public image without breaching agency confidentiality. This plan is to be used internally as suggested procedure only and is not designed to establish any standard enforceable by third parties. This plan should be reviewed with all new employees and board members and thereafter should be reviewed regularly. **This document can be found in T:\Templates.**

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This document has been adapted from the Colorado Nonprofit Association's Crisis Communication Plan Nonprofit Toolkit available at www.ColoradoNonprofits.org

WHAT IS A CRISIS?

A crisis is herein defined as any public situation, direct or indirect, that may result in a negative image of United Way of Racine County. This situation could call into question the credibility of the agency and damage the positive public reputation the organization has garnished throughout the years.

WHAT TYPES OF CRISIS COULD AFFECT UNITED WAY OF RACINE COUNTY?

Community Investment

- Funding is cut to an agency according to agency audit guidelines. An agency publicly criticizes United Way.
- A funded agency leader is accused of fraud within their agency.
- An agency allegedly violates core values of United Way (i.e. Boy Scouts/Discrimination).
- A crisis occurs with a coalition of which United Way is a partner.
- Community member is upset with services unavailable to them due to lack of funding from United Way.

Community Engagement; Volunteers and Events

Note: Volunteers include office volunteers, investment committee members, campaign cabinet members, ACTION committee members, board members, initiative volunteers, and event volunteers.

- Public event mishap, for example a volunteer in a LIVE UNITED shirt makes a public nuisance following a United Way event.
- A volunteer is arrested for DWI following an event.

Investor Relations; Campaign

- A breech of confidentiality occurs, in which donor information is released. A donor publicly criticizes United Way.
- A donor's funds are not utilized according to donor intent.
- Questionable solicitation tactics are implied on a volunteer: pressure, unethical asks.

Financial

- A member of United Way staff, board or volunteer leader is accused of fraud related activity involving their workplace or United Way.
- Confidential information is accessed via electronic breach (i.e. computer system is hacked).

Personnel

- A complicated personnel issue resulting in the firing or resignation and a volunteer or employee taking the story to the media.
- A member of the United Way board or staff is implicated in criminal activity or "scandalous" personal behavior inappropriate for a United Way member.
- Pending lawsuit against United Way by former employee, volunteer, client or other.
- A board or staff member is accused of moral, ethical or legal malfeasance. Sexual harassment occurs within staff, board, campaign cabinet, etc. Unusual or concerning social media post by staff, volunteer, board member directly linked to United Way.

Environmental (fire, flood, etc.) and Other

- A community leader publicly criticizes United Way.
- A staff member or volunteer is injured while participating in United Way work.
- A catastrophic event damages the United Way workspace.
- A major community disaster occurs and United Way is questioned for a position (i.e. fire, flood, etc).
- Another United Way scandal proliferates in the press.

INFORMATION AND PROCESS

It is not only very important to quickly identify any potential public relations crisis, but it is also advantageous to recognize the potential for these situations ahead of time. Although some circumstances may be out of United Way's control, proper planning and delicate handling of the situation will ensure not only a successful outcome, but hopefully prevent potential situations from becoming a reality.

Identifying the problem is the first step in repairing it. All crises should be reported to a department head who will then notify the president immediately. If an event is unforeseen, it is vital to quickly recognize it and begin activating the crisis communications plan.

ASSEMBLE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

It is suggested that the Crisis Communications Team (CCT) consists of a predetermined group of agency administrators and staff. Each team will be dependent on which department is affected by the crisis, however the following people should be included on every team, no matter what the circumstance:

- Chair of the board of directors
- United Way leadership team
- United Way communications manager

Also consider:

- United Way of Wisconsin
- United Way Worldwide is available for consult, particularly when the United Way Brand could be effected.
- Legal counsel (if necessary)

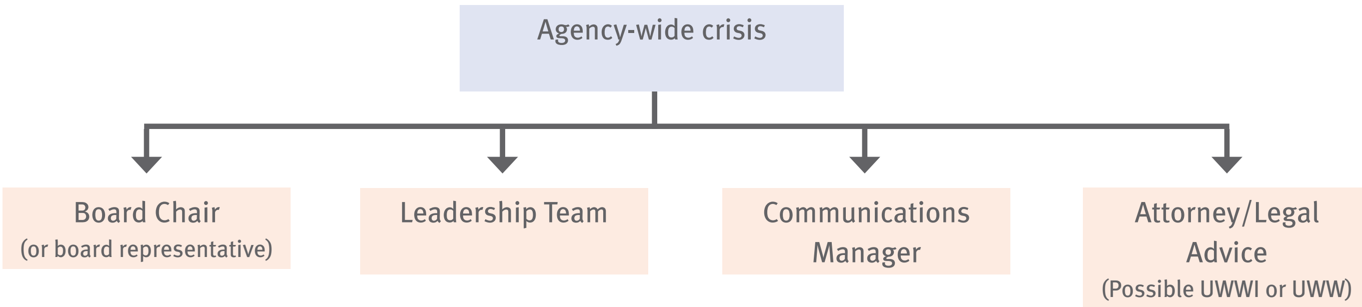
For other departments, the United Way coordinator of that program and a representative from appropriate partners will be invited on the team. If the representative is not available to physically meet, an attempt to verbally consult will be made.

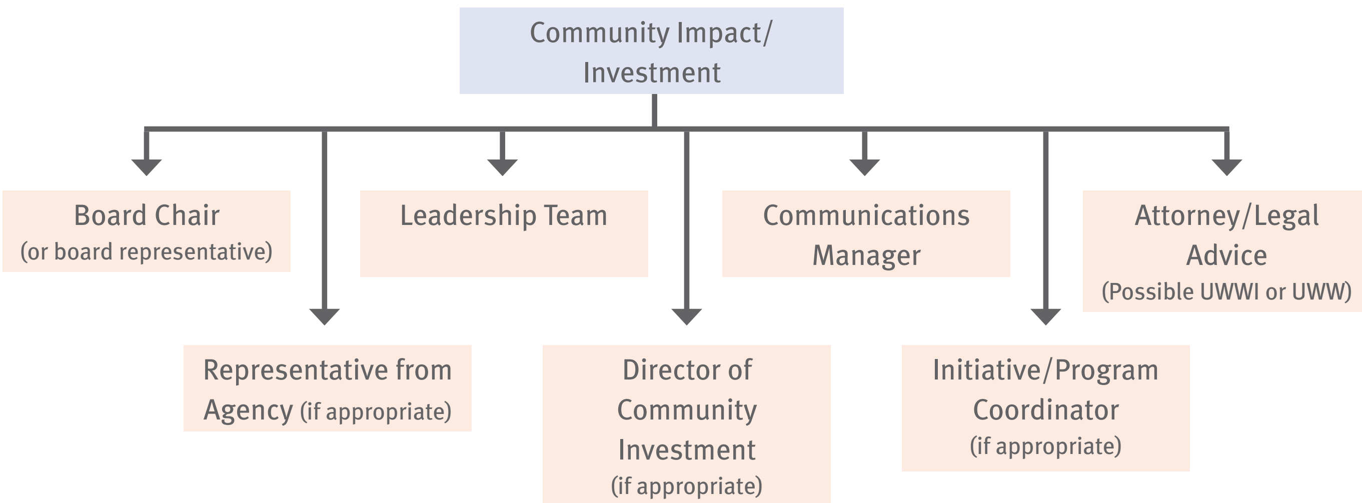
The purpose of the Crisis Communications Team is to assess the situation, thus determining the best possible course of action. This is also who will determine what details will be released and how the message to the public should be worded. See the following diagram for details.

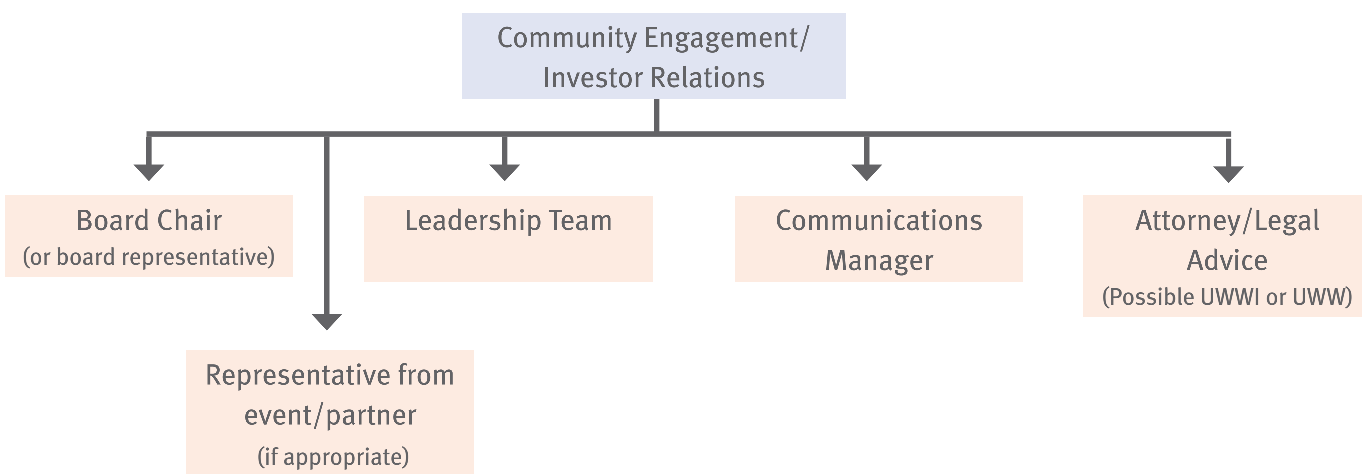
UNDERSTANDING

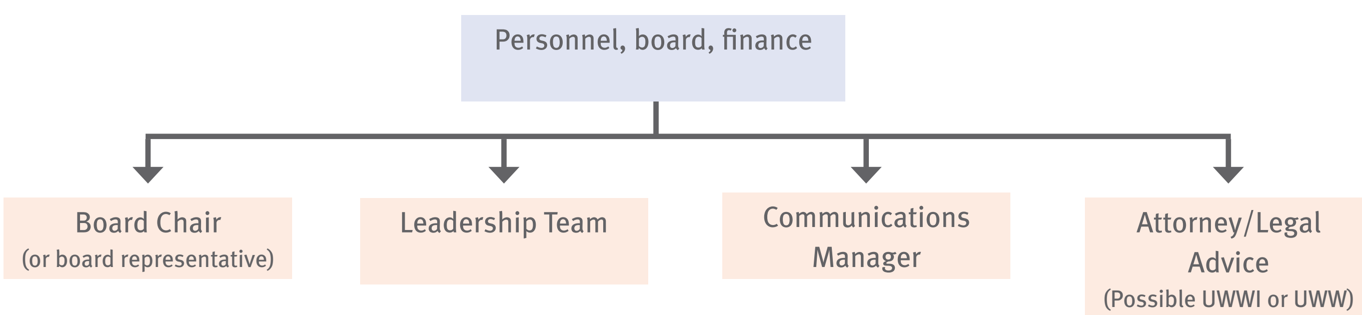
At this point, depending on the circumstances, it may be beneficial to discuss the crisis with a diverse cross section of people. These people could include volunteers and the general public. Determining how the situation may be perceived by different people will help you understand not only how to present the information to the community, but it may also be helpful in finding a true solution to the problem. Be sure that this group truly represents the community, otherwise your findings will be misleading. Also, this step is purely optional and if it holds up the resolution of the problem and the dissemination of information – skip it.

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAMS









DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

Once the message is determined, if appropriate, the process of informing the public begins. However, it is important to note that not all situations warrant public attention. The circumstances may not have reached the status of full-blown crisis. This is a consideration for the CCT.

Informing individuals should be done in a progression away from the agency, beginning with the top administrators (board of directors) and trickling out until it finally reaches the public.

It is extremely important to begin with those close to the agency (staff, volunteers, clients and funders) to ensure that they are equipped with full and accurate information. This group ought to act as ambassadors, helping to spread the factual information and debunk the rumors and half-truths that will inevitably circulate.

Therefore, this group should not only be provided with the full and accurate information, but they should also be briefed on how to answer questions they may run into. They will also be provided with the name and contact number for the person who may be able to answer any questions they cannot. NOTE: They shall never speak on behalf of the agency to the media. This duty should be left to the spokesperson alone. This practice will eliminate the possibility for mixed or conflicting messages.

WHO REPRESENTS UNITED WAY OF RACINE COUNTY IN TIMES OF CRISIS?

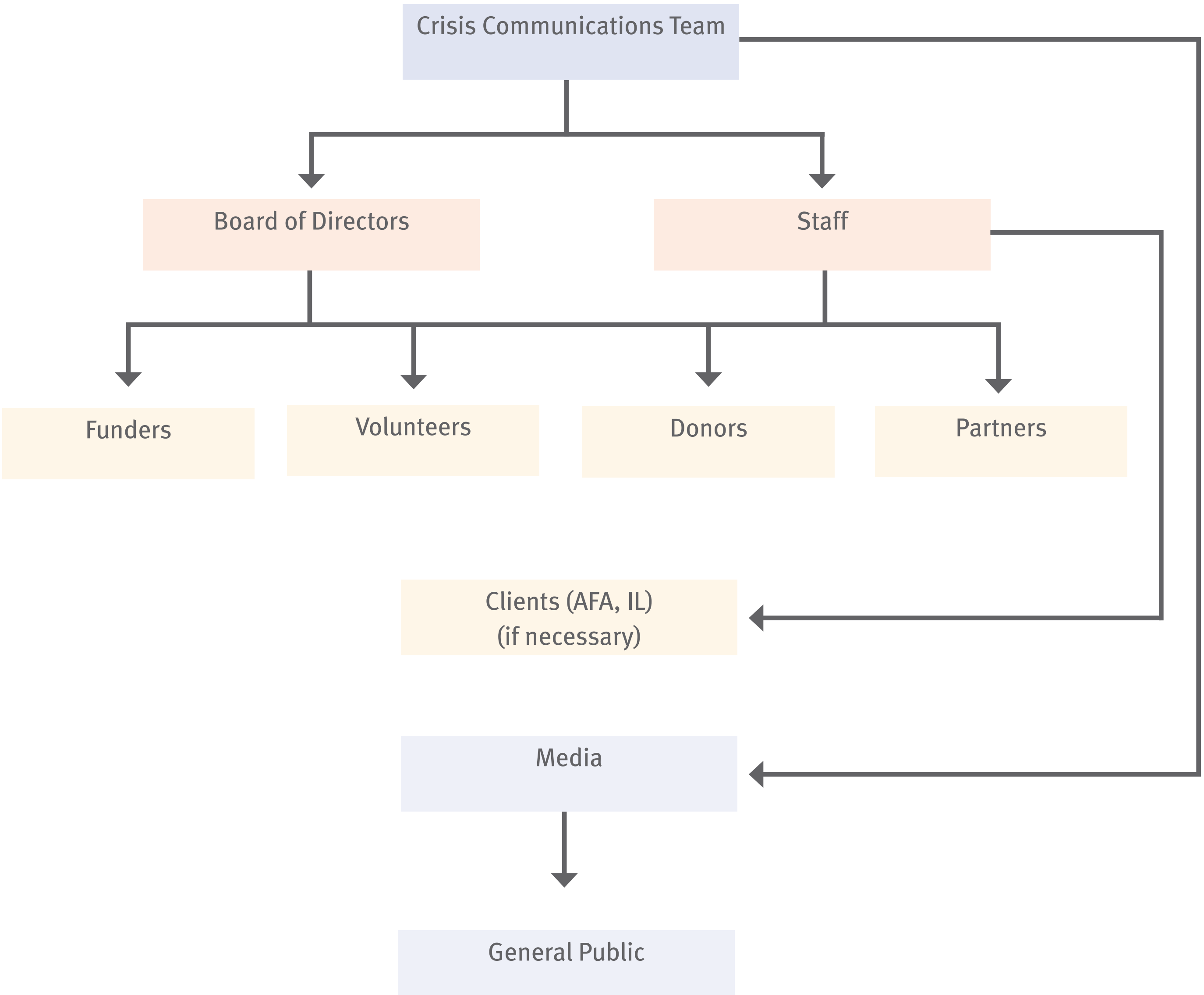
When a crisis arises, it is important to portray strong agency leadership coupled with a clear message. The spokesperson(s) should be the only points of contact for the media. Furthermore, no other board member, staff or volunteers will give statements to the media. In the event anyone but the spokesperson is contacted by the media, they shall act in a respectful and helpful manner by putting them in contact with the spokesperson immediately. Every effort should be made to contact the spokesperson as soon as possible.

The spokesperson should be the agency's president. However, in the event of an organization-wide crisis, the chair of the board of directors should always be prepared to act as a spokesperson, both in lieu of and supplemental to the president. As needed, especially during a specific situational crisis, the department heads should also be prepared to be spokespersons.

The board of directors is the governing body of the agency. Seeing that the board is knowledgeable about the agency instills confidence that there is proper oversight. In short, the board chair is the overall boss. With that said, the nature of terms causes there to be a higher rate of board of directors turnover. Due to this fact, it is also important to have the president ready to act on behalf of the agency.

The president and board members should all be extremely knowledgeable about the agency. This group should be able to answer any and all questions on the spot regarding the agency (from history to program services to governing policies). They should be well-spoken and well-practiced on speaking about the agency. This means they should regularly speak on behalf of United Way to the media as coordinated through the communications manager.

ORDER OF DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION



Please note: There should be a maximum of a 24-48 hour turnaround time.

COMPONENTS OF THE MESSAGE

The message should be clear. It will need to be determined if the message should be proactive (preemptively releasing information to the media) or reactive (response to public already having the information regarding the situation). See diagram on the following page to help with deciding on an approach. The message should also briefly describe how circumstances came to be.

Once you have an understanding of the crisis and its origin, it is time to create the message you will be sending in response. This message should reflect the overall mission of United Way of Racine County. It is important that the message contains the following components:

Acknowledge the origin of the crisis. If the problem started with wrong-doing on the organization's end – fess up. Admitting a mistake has been made isn't as bad as it seems. The public will understand. What they will not understand is misleading answers and finger-pointing. NOTE: It may be wise to consult legal advice to determine how this statement should be worded to avoid legal ramifications. For the times when the agency is not the origin of the problem, explain that the circumstances were out of the organization's control.

If the crisis is an inherited one, that is, not something that the agency had control of, be honest about that, too. But be careful; once again, finger-pointing will not be respected.

Explain what is being done to rectify the situation. Tell the public how you are addressing the circumstances, as well as an estimated amount of time in which it will take for things to be resolved. If you aren't sure how long this could take: be honest about that. Things aren't always simple to solve and the right answer isn't always obvious. Most people understand this. Yes, you will take some criticism, but that is to be expected. Try and turn that negative into a positive. If that isn't possible–shrug it off and move on.

Outline what will be done in the future to avoid the situation again. You live, you learn, and you keep on working. Using a negative situation as a learning experience is the best way to keep improving your organization. Share how you will do this with the public. This shows you have a plan and are taking positive action.

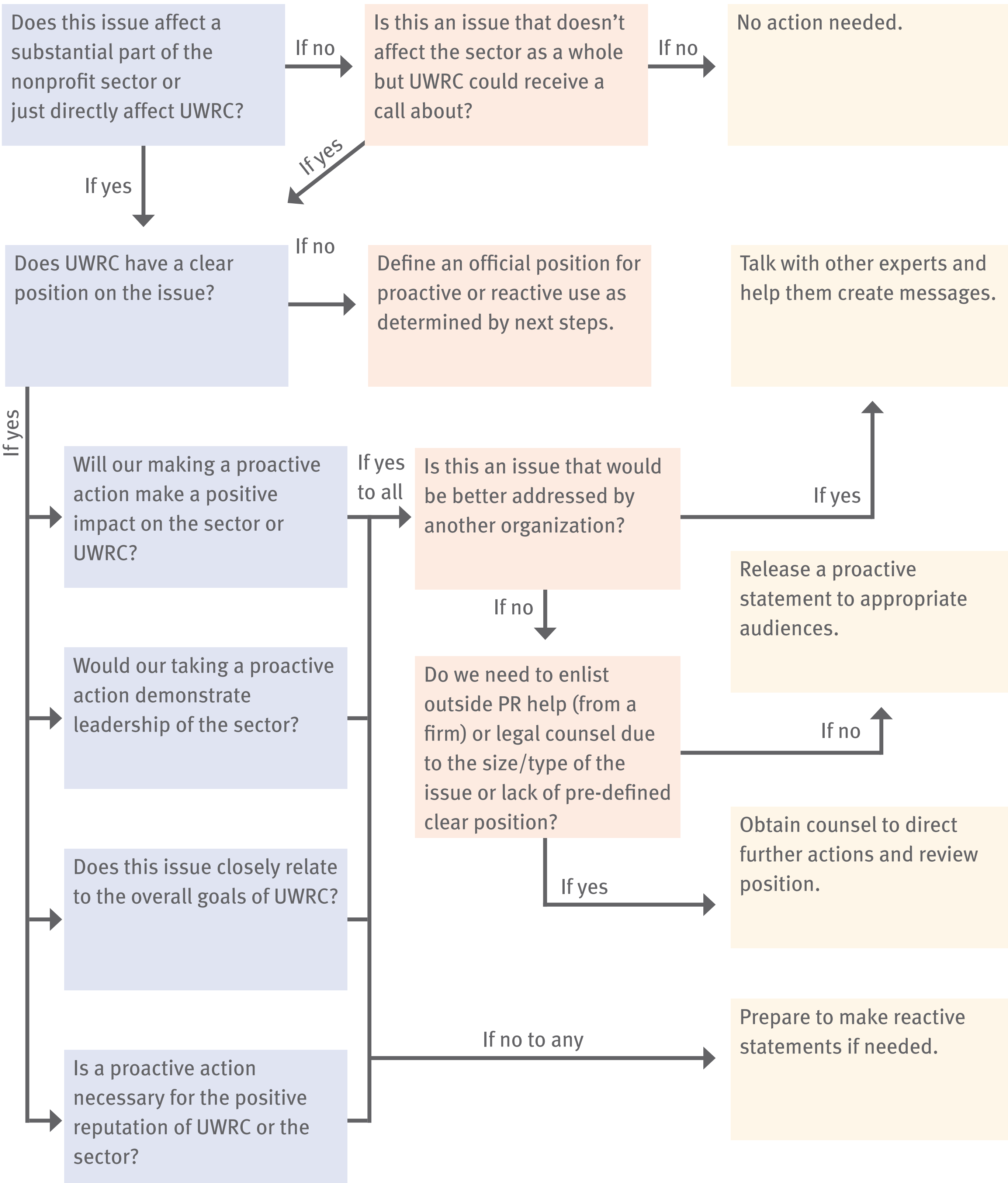
If appropriate, give the public a chance to ask questions. Make public appearances, write a letter to the editor, or team up with local media to have a Q&A session. If necessary, host a press conference where reporters and/or the public can ask their questions directly. Also, include in any press releases or correspondence on the matter, a contact name and number where people can direct their questions and/or concerns. Public releases to be posted simultaneously on website and/or social media outlets when/if appropriate. By being open to dialogue it shows that there is nothing to hide. Additional topics concerning how to deal with the media are contained in the following sections.

Determine appropriate timeline for follow up and review. Decide how long to wait before revisiting an issue to determine if action/inaction was appropriate and effective. Review actions taken or not taken and how/why those decisions were made.

This message should be constantly reevaluated throughout the crisis and edited as necessary.

Although this message shall be delivered to the media by the agency spokesperson only (see "Who represents the agency" for more information about the spokesperson), all staff, volunteers and other representatives of United Way should understand the message as they will be responsible for explaining and answering volunteers' questions. Anyone who answers the phone shall be given a script on how to answer questions.

DECISION TREE TO DETERMINE RESPONSE TYPE



HOW TO DEAL WITH AGENCY CONTACTS

Funders (in the case of grants)

It is extremely important that funders maintain confidence in United Way of Racine County's abilities and services. Should a crisis arise, funders will be notified immediately upon the creation of a clear and accurate message. Funders will be informed personally by the president and/or board chair before hearing anything in the media.

All steps will be taken to preserve trust in United Way. These steps vary depending on the circumstances, but some examples could include making the agency available for unscheduled site visits, scheduling face-to-face meetings or conference calls with top funding officials, making appropriate documents available, etc.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of United Way of Racine County. These people are some of the organization's most loyal and avid supporters; therefore they deserve the agency's complete honesty. They also deserve to be notified quickly and personally, preferably by a phone call by a staff or board member.

United Way will answer volunteers' questions to the best of the agency's abilities–as appropriate and always maintaining confidentiality. As volunteers will inevitably encounter questions about the situation, they should be briefed on how to field inquiries, who the appropriate United Way spokesperson is and how to contact them.

Donors

Like funders, it is extremely important that donors maintain confidence in United Way's abilities and services. Should a crisis arise to a level determined by CCT, donors will be notified immediately upon the creation of a clear and accurate message. The president and/or board chair will inform the Tocqueville donors personally before hearing anything in the media.

All steps will be taken to preserve trust in United Way. These steps vary depending on the circumstances, but some examples could include scheduling face-to-face meetings or conference calls, etc.

Partners

A United Way partner refers to any other agency or business that United Way of Racine County is funding or has a collaboration agreement with. For example, partner providers, Racine Unified School District and Racine County Workforce Development are all considered partners with United Way. United Way must work to maintain the confidence and reputation it has built for itself with its partners. In order to do this, the agency must be informed of the situation (as it pertains to them) and made aware of steps taken to resolve the issue as well as prevent it from happening again in the future.

If this agency is also involved in the crisis, said agency may be invited to have a representative on the Crisis Communications Team, if appropriate.

HOW TO DEAL WITH THE MEDIA

Dealing with the media can be intimidating- but it doesn't have to be. It is important to be preemptive by establishing a working relationship with local media outlets in advance of a crisis.

This relationship should consist mainly of positive agency news, such as fundraising events, upcoming events and initiatives or grants awarded to agencies. These constructive topics will demonstrate to the media outlet and the community the benefits of United Way.

United Way of Racine County maintains contact with the reporters and editors of local media including, but not limited to: the Racine County Eye, WGTD, WRJN/WEZY, Racine Journal Times, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Burlington Standard Press, Southern Lakes Newspapers, FOX6 News, TMJ4 (NBC), WDJT-TV CBS58, WISN 12 (ABC). The pre-established relationships with these outlets will create trust between United Way and local media. Contact may consist of press releases, public appearances, letters to the editor and meetings between administrators, just to name a few.

All media contact should be coordinated through the communications manager. However, the president will be the spokesperson on behalf of United Way for all occasions. See the list of spokepeople on page four of this document.

All media contact should be documented with the name of the media outlet, reporter's name and contact information, as well as the date, time and topic talked about.

WHAT TO SAY AND WHAT NOT TO SAY…THAT IS THE QUESTION.

- **Be honest.** With the availability of information these days, the truth will come out and lying or bending the truth will only make you look bad in the end.
- **Never say "no comment".** This response is not acceptable in any circumstance. It gives the appearance that the agency/person has something to hide and will garnish a negative effect. If you can't respond to the question at that time, explain to the reporter why you can't answer (ex. Personnel matter, confidentiality, etc.). NOTE: Never discuss personnel or client matters with the public. This is a breech of policy.
- **Sometimes we are caught off-guard by a situation we had no prior knowledge of.** If this happens, explain by saying something like, "I'm sorry, X, but this is the first I am hearing of this situation. Would you please give me a few moments to investigate and I'll call right back? When is your deadline?" The key for this approach to work is that you actually have to call back before the reporter's deadline. Otherwise it will be noted in the article that you did not return their phone calls. This is as good as a "no comment".
- **When pertinent, a "professional" in a field related to the crisis topic should be consulted.** This will be a good way to show the agency's proactive approach.
- **Don't finger point.** Accept responsibility when appropriate and openly explain circumstances that may be out of the control of the agency. NOTE: As previously stated, legal advice should be sought to determine how this statement should be worded.
- **Overall, responses to questions should always be proactive and action-oriented.**

KEEP IT UP-TO-DATE

Information will inevitably change throughout the course of the crisis. That is why it is necessary to constantly send out updates to staff, board, volunteers, funders and the media. It is also useful to post up-to-date messages or statements on the agency's websites (this may include social networking sites and email blasts when appropriate).

THE INTERVIEW BILL OF RIGHTS*

The person being interviewed has the right to:

- set the pace of the interview
- request a reporter repeat a question
- ask for more information or clarification on a question
- a two-way conversation conducted with ordinary language
- set the time and location of interviews
- not answer uncomfortable or inappropriate questions
- demand a retraction when inaccurate information is printed
- file a complaint against a reporter
- say "I don't know"

When conducting an interview, the reporter has the right to:

- have phone calls returned
- have deadlines honored
- be treated as an individual
- honest and accurate answers

FOLLOWING UP

After the crisis has been resolved, gather as much feedback about the way the incident has been handled. The Crisis Communications Team will meet and discuss how things worked out (how message was perceived, if media coverage was positive or negative, consistency, etc.) and how they can use this experience to learn how to prevent another similar crisis. Revise the Crisis Communication Plan, if necessary.

1. **Secure Loose Ends** – Appropriate communications should be made outlining the resolution of the crisis to appropriate audiences. If changed, voicemail and website should be updated. All media contacts should be double checked for completed interaction, then new names added to the organization's media list.
2. **Recognition of Heroes** – The Crisis Communications Team will work to determine the best and most appropriate means for recognizing the "heroes" involved in the crisis situation.
3. **Crisis Communications Review** – Re-convene Crisis Communications Team to evaluate response, actions, what didn't work, what needs to be improved/revised for the future, etc.
4. **Media Coverage Assessment** – Review coverage. Check for message consistency and saliency. Are there issues that might need further clarification.
5. **File and Update** – File notes, clips, talking points, communication, etc. into a folder. Revise the crisis communications plan if necessary.

*Source: taken from the Communications Manual for CASA and GAL Programs at casanet.org

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

1. Phone/Email List: Disseminate an emergency list with phone numbers, cell phones, and email addresses for staff and board. To be completed by administrative assistant to the president and updated quarterly or more frequently as needed by staff turnover/contact changes.

2. Perform annual communication audit and Strength Weakness Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis.

3. Media Training: Identify and train organization spokespeople. Spokespeople are all part of the Crisis Communications Team (CCT).

   - ❑ President (main spokesperson)
   - ❑ Board chair (back-up spokesperson)
   - ❑ Vice president of community impact (back-up spokesperson)
   - ❑ Vice president of investor relations (back-up spokesperson)

4. Media Tips: Make sure spokespeople are familiar with how to deal with the media

5. Crisis Communications Plan*: Update the crisis communication plan for staff to have with them at work and at home, including crisis procedures, policies regarding media inquiries, communication priorities and best means to reach the crisis manager. **Ensure that all staff is familiar with the document.**

6. Key Messages*: Spokespeople shall be familiar with United Way's mission. At the time of crisis, relevant messages will be created by the Crisis Communications Team.

7. Pre-approved Statements*: Responses for common media inquiries should be created and approved by the board as necessary.

8. Emergency Personnel*: Maintain contact information for police, fire, hospitals, the health department, utilities and paramedics. Make sure staff know how to access the information.

9. Offsite Alternatives: Determine a location to convene and/or from which to stage communications if the crisis situation prevents staff from getting to or using the office.

10. Equipment: Identify resources necessary prior to a crisis including extra cell phones, computers, etc. Determine how that equipment would be gathered and who would be responsible for operation.

* Items should be reviewed and updated as needed, but in the least annually.

SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROGRESSION

Safety

Ensure safety of all staff and physical location. Call 911 if necessary.

Notification

The president shall be notified immediately of a crisis situation. The president shall notify the board chair and board of the situation.

Crisis Communications Team

The president will notify the appropriate staff. Anyone who answers the phone will also be advised regarding the process to follow. Information shall not be released until the Crisis Communications Team convenes, reviews the situation, and develops a strategy.

Situational Assessment

The Crisis Communications Team will assess the situation, determine facts and begin delegation. Questions to help devise appropriate crisis communications response include, but are not limited to:

a. What is the situation? What will happen next?
b. Who is the crisis communications lead person responsible for ensuring all steps are taken?
c. Who on staff needs to be involved?
d. What immediate steps need to be taken?
e. What is known and who already knows it?
f. Is there potential public interest? Does the issue have traction (will it become anything more than a blip on the evening news)?
g. Who will be affected?
h. What are people feeling – what emotions need to be considered?
i. What information is needed and who beyond organizational staff need to get it? When will it be available?
j. What should the organization do about it? Proactive vs. reactive? Contact or refer to another organization? (See page 11 - Decision Tree)
k. What CAN and CAN'T be said? What are the organization's privacy policies?
l. Is legal or PR counsel needed? If PR counsel is needed, will the AMA suffice or is a firm necessary?
m. How will response be communicated? (Could include: newsletter article – low urgency – also good as a follow up to any major situation; one-on-one meetings – higher urgency, specific audience targeted such as legislators; media release – higher urgency, broad public appeal; media conference – high urgency and big issue; etc.)
n. Should a resource list be compiled of additional nonprofit spokespeople?
o. What media will be contacted? What legislators? What donors, etc.?

CHECKLIST