BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

Shenandoah Area Council, BSA
Issues and Crisis Communications Plan
Council Edition

Prepared by
Council Risk Management Committee
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1. Introduction

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) creates programs to help build the character and integrity of America's youth. Its Scout Oath teaches a dedication of duty to God, country, others, and self. The Scout Law describes how to live lives of honor by being trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. The BSA prepares young Americans to become exceptional adults by cultivating in them a sense of community, family, ambition, leadership, and priority so that they will make the world a better place.

As such, the Shenandoah Area Council must be prepared to communicate effectively with its members, employees, community partners, and the media at all times, especially when its brand and reputation could be threatened.

It is essential that in the event of a local crisis, the Shenandoah Area Council has in place a course of action to follow that will enable it to respond with a strong, unified voice and ensure effective communication to its key audiences and stakeholders.

The initial 24 to 48 hours of a crisis are the most critical. It is during those hours that the scrutiny of the Shenandoah Area Council will be at its peak, and communication will be particularly important. Positive communication is necessary to ensure that the credibility of the organization is not questioned. This period is when the council must demonstrate that it is acting responsibly and decisively to resolve the situation.

Statement of purpose

There are two general scenarios that would require the response of the Shenandoah Area Council—local market issues and national issues that affect the council.

The goal of this plan is to define the BSA's crisis communications policies and procedures, help improve the BSA's response to situations that could lead to external scrutiny, and assist it in identifying and marshalling appropriate resources so the Shenandoah Area Council can focus on its mission.

This manual is meant to coordinate with *Communicating Scouting's Values and Standards,* which provides the BSA's general position and key messages on the most frequently encountered issues and crises. (*Communicating Scouting's Values and Standards* is available on www.mybsa.org under the "Scout Executives Only" tab.)

The BSA National Crises team will conduct a periodic review of this document to help ensure and maintain the effective implementation of these policies and procedures. If you find information that is out of date or inaccurate, please notify:

Crisis communications plan contacts

Stuart Williams – Scout Executive	540-622-2551
Michael Williams – Board Chair	540-550-7087
Charles Bennett – Council Commissioner	304-267-4181
Mark Pennington – Asst. Scout Executive	540-622-2551
Chris Rucker– VP Risk Management	540-303-3942

2. Understanding crisis communications

The following section examines the concepts, organization, and methodology behind crisis communications—the internal and external sharing of information during and after a crisis. This section addresses the BSA's crisis terminology, philosophy, and goals.

Crisis communications terminology

For the purpose of this manual, it is important to recognize a standard and accepted set of operating terms and descriptions. The following are key terms:

- **Brand:** A brand is a collection of experiences that people have with an organization. It is not just a logo, a tagline, or an advertisement. Built over time, a brand is ultimately what people expect from an organization.

- **Reputation:** The public's overall perception of the BSA's brand and organization.

- **Incident:** A discrete, isolated event that impacts one or more councils, members, employees, or the community and has the potential to attract the attention of the media.

- **Issue:** Any unresolved point of conflict between the BSA and one or more of its key constituencies that, if not properly addressed, has the potential to escalate into a crisis.

- **Lingering issue**: An issue that has been addressed to some extent but is still being debated among the BSA's key audiences and stakeholders.

- **Smoldering issue:** An issue that was not previously recognized either within or outside of the BSA but suddenly surfaces, threatening to escalate into a crisis that could damage the organization's reputation, performance, and/or credibility.

- **Issues management:** The process of continually scanning the environment in order to identify and take control of a potentially damaging situation before the damage occurs and escalates into a crisis that captures widespread attention.

- **Crisis:** Any sudden and unpredictable large-scale event that invites external scrutiny and has the potential to impact the BSA, its members, its employees, or the community—the BSA's relationship with supporting organizations or its reputation in general.

- **Crisis management:** The process of responding to adverse situations that have already occurred and taking a definitive course of action to neutralize them or minimize their short- or long-term impact.

- **Online community member:** A person or a group of people who discuss the BSA using digital media such as blogs, social networks, mobile devices, etc., and that often use these media as supplemental forms of communication with people they know in real life.

Crisis and issues communications philosophy

The BSA's crisis and issues communications management will be based on the following core principles:

- **Follow the Scout Oath and Scout Law.** It is important to communicate to key audiences and stakeholders that the BSA will uphold the Scout Oath and Scout Law in its words and actions.

- **Demonstrate concern.** Without admitting liability, the BSA will always show concern and empathy for the Scouting family and those involved in a crisis situation.

- **Manage issues, not crises.** The BSA will work to identify vulnerabilities and put strategic plans in place in order to effectively manage issues before they become public crises.

- **Position BSA management front and center.** The BSA will use its effective professional and volunteer leadership to tell its story.

- **Talk to all stakeholders directly, not just through the media.** The BSA will be innovative in its communication and speak via traditional and digital media.

- **Speak with one voice.** The BSA will coordinate the organization's messages with all involved parties to unify internal and external communications.

- **Make friends before we need them.** In many cases, the BSA's first encounter with members of the public will be during a crisis. With particular attention to the online world, the BSA needs to ensure that it is consistently reaching out to online communities such that those communities can tell the BSA's story in a time of crisis.

- **Develop third-party support.** In the event of a crisis, Scouting will identify credible third-party alliances. These relationships will be used to tell the BSA's story.

Crisis communications goals

There are five primary goals in every media contact:

- **Position** the BSA brand as a credible, leading expert on the subject of youth development.

- **Reinforce** the values and integrity of the BSA and its brand.

- **Obtain an** accurate, non-inflammatory discussion of any situation that might occur and do not allow others to tell the Scouting story for the organization.

- **Balance** the dialogue by contributing to the issues-related discussion and correcting misperceptions or defining and deflecting the elements of the discussion.

Minimize the amount and length of negative discussion during an issue or crisis.

3. The crisis team

During a crisis, it is important to have identified and engaged the response team before the incident affects the BSA. There are two parts of the BSA crisis team: the core team and the support team.

Core and support teams contact information

The following is a full listing of the core and support teams who will receive copies of this plan.

Core team			
Name	Contact	Role	Responsibility
Michael Williams	540-550-7087	Council President, Spokesperson	Communicate with Exec. Board, strategy, recommend action
Stuart Williams	540-622-2551	Scout Executive, BSA - Spokesperson	Work with Spokesperson on plan of action
Charles Bennett	304-267-4181	Part of Key 3	Work w/Scout Executive on PoA

Support team			
Name	Contact	Role	Responsibility
Mark Pennington	540-622-2551	Assistant Scout Executive	Provide support to & be on-call for Spokesperson
Chris Rucker	540-303-3942	VP – Risk Mgmt.	Provide subject matter support/strategy
Mark Smith	540-662-2551	VP - Properties	Support & strategy
Richard Holder	540-860-1889	Camp Director	Support/strategy Camp Director

Roles of the core and support teams

In general, the core team will work to:

- Serve as the first point-of-contact
- Identify a real or potential problem
- Review and assess the situation
- Update senior management and support team members
- Recommend action
- Consider legal, operational, and reputational implications
- Determine the message, audience, and channel(s) of distribution
- Manage the distribution of the message
- Serve as the BSA spokesperson

In routine situations, the support team will:

- Provide subject matter expertise
- Assist in the key decision-making process

4. Crisis communications policies

The following crisis communications policies are meant to set a general standard for a wide range of issues and crises the BSA will face at the local level. While the Shenandoah Area Council's core and support teams should try to adhere to these policies as closely as possible, the implementation of these standards will occasionally require flexibility.

Proactive vs. reactive media relations

From time to time, the National Council will need to decide if it should proactively reach out to the media to inform them of an issue or crisis. Generally speaking, the team will follow the five goals of crisis communications and only notify media in a proactive manner if it helps achieve those goals, or involves a situation that jeopardizes the health and safety of members.

Media inquiry response guidelines

Generally speaking, it will be the BSA's policy to address local issues that have little chance of spreading beyond the local council at the local level. It is the BSA's policy that the National Council will provide resources and supports (including on-site support, in some cases) to councils regarding local issues or crises and will refer inquiries regarding local issues to the appropriate council(s). This will ensure issues and crises are addressed at the appropriate level with the team best equipped to address the situation without unnecessarily escalating the incident to a national issue.

When the Shenandoah Area Council receives an issue or crisis-oriented media inquiry, it must first be determined if the situation is related to the organization and if engaging the media will accomplish the BSA's crisis goals. Second, it is important to determine if it is a National Council or local council issue. The following diagram will serve as the Shenandoah Area Council's media inquiries response protocol in making that determination.

Spokespersons

The role of a spokesperson in a crisis situation is to effectively deliver the BSA's core messages with the ultimate goal of resolving the situation fairly and compassionately while preserving integrity and reputation. This applies to communication with all stakeholders, including media members, employees, business partners, and the community.

Generally speaking, the Scout Executive or Board President will speak on behalf of the Shenandoah Area Council, but there may be either a professional or volunteer spokesperson as well. Also, a member of the core team may be engaged to speak with the media as a subject matter expert. As the Shenandoah Area Council prepares to address its stakeholders, it is important to identify and answer the concerns that are specific to each audience.

Spokespersons should be chosen based on their levels of previous experience with the media, knowledge of the issues, expertise, levels of authority within management, and availability. This determination will be made by the core response team and approved by the Scout Executive.

Potential key executives and volunteer leader spokespersons

From time to time, depending on the issue or crisis, it might be in the organization's best interest to enlist a key executive or volunteer leader as the Shenandoah Area Council's spokesperson. All spokespeople should be

formally media trained, and in most situations, will receive additional coaching for specific messaging in the event of a major crisis-related announcement.

Press conferences

In certain crises, it might be necessary to tell Scouting's story to multiple members of the media simultaneously. One effective way to do this is by calling a press conference. Generally a press conference should be used if you have more than four media outlets asking for information at the same time. When considering whether or not to hold a press conference, it is important to re-examine the BSA's five issues and crisis communications goals, and if it is an appropriate strategy, to develop media materials and a press conference script.

Reaching out to volunteers and families

In the event of a crisis that affects the health, safety, or well-being of a youth or adult member, the core team may recommend that a Shenandoah Area Council representative reach out to the family of those involved to convey sympathy and offer assistance while being careful not to admit liability. This action should be coordinated by the Scout executive and the volunteer leadership.

Establishing a communications command center: Shenandoah Area Council, 107 Youth Development Court, Winchester 22601   540-622-2551

Infrequently, the BSA will face situations that require a communications command center. This approach will allow the team to efficiently assess the situation, develop strategy and messages, receive approval, and communicate the BSA's story. The decision to set up a communications command center will be made collectively by the members of the core team.

Establishing and maintaining relationships with local authorities

During a crisis, the Shenandoah Area Council will need to ensure key stakeholders that it is working directly with local authorities to respond and remedy the situation. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is to develop a relationship with local authorities before a crisis situation. The following are the key contacts at various agencies that may prove beneficial to the Shenandoah Area Council.

Local authorities contact information			
Name	Agency	Contact	Role and responsibility
Major Robert Eckman	Frederick County Sheriff's Office	540-662-6168	Assist primarily with issues occurring at CRE
Corinne Geller	Virginia State Police	804-674-2789	State Public Relations Mgr.
Sgt Michael M.T. Baylous	West Virginia State Police	304-746-2100	Public Relations Officer

5. Media relations

One of the most important aspects of communicating during issues or crises is how the Shenandoah Area Council will deal with and interact with the media. Following are the BSA's policies and procedures for communicating with the traditional media.

Proactive vs. reactive media relations

From time to time, the Shenandoah Area Council will need to decide if it should proactively reach out to the local media to inform them of an issue or crisis. Generally speaking, the council will follow the five goals of crisis communications and only notify media in a proactive manner if it helps achieve those goals, or involves a situation that jeopardizes the health and safety of members. The local council core team should contact the National Council crisis communications response team for counsel on these decisions.

Media inquiry policy

In positive and crisis situations, the Shenandoah Area Council must maintain a policy regarding media and public inquiries. The council generally will adhere to the following guidelines:

Media inquiry policy*			
Situation	Affiliation	Nature of question	Action
Incoming call	The person is not with the media but is a member, volunteer, or concerned citizen	A general, nonissues-oriented question	Direct the call to the appropriate department
Incoming call	The person is with the traditional or digital media	A general, nonissues-oriented question	Refer the caller to the Scout executive
Incoming call	The person is with the traditional or digital media	An issue or crisis-oriented question	Refer the caller to the Scout executive or other member of the Key 3.
Incoming call	The person will not disclose her/his affiliation	A question of any kind (treat this person as if she/he is with the media)	Refer the caller to the Scout executive or other member of the Key 3.
On-site visit	The person is with the traditional or digital media	A question of any kind	Employees should tell the people they are not the appropriate spokesperson; notify security and the Scout executive

[*Note: Engagement with online community members, such as bloggers, is addressed in Section 6.]

Media inquiry language for employees

It is important to communicate the BSA's media policy to the Shenandoah Area Council's employees and staff members. Below is a letter that should be provided to all staff:

In order to ensure that the Shenandoah Area Council *responds to all media inquiries accurately, consistently, and with the most appropriate information, we would like to remind you of our policy about speaking with the traditional and digital news media.*

Only designated BSA representatives are authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the organization. Following are our media inquiry guidelines:

- *For incoming calls: Ask if the person is with the media. If not, direct the person to the appropriate staff member.*

- *If the person is with the media and asking a general BSA or nonissues-related question, refer the caller to the Scout Executive.*

- *If the person is with the media and asking about issues or a crisis, refer the person to the Scout Executive or identified council spokesperson.*

- *Anyone who is making inquiries about issues or a crisis and will not reveal the nature of her or his call should be handled as if she or he is a member of the media. Forward those calls to the Scout Executive.*

- *If the media appear on-site, notify the Scout Executive. The Scout Executive will then inform the reporters of the BSA's policy prohibiting photography without approval and notify members of the core team.*

- *If you encounter media on-site, inform them that you are not the appropriate representative, and immediately contact on-site management and the Scout Executive.*

If a staff member should come into contact with a representative of the media, it is suggested they respond to inquiries with the following language:

- *[If contacted by phone] "Thanks for calling, but I'm not the appropriate person to answer your call. Let me direct you to the right person."*

- *[If approached in person] "I'm sorry. I am not the appropriate person to comment on this issue. Please have a seat and let me find the appropriate person to help you."*

Additionally, if you notice any member of the media who is not accompanied by a council representative, immediately notify the Scout Executive or designee in his/her absence. A visitor is not to be left unattended.

Media inquiry log

In the event of a media inquiry, those answering phones should use the following template for capturing information on potential issues so that it is readily available should the issue suddenly begin to escalate.

BSA media inquiry log	
Date and time	
Name of contact	
Name and type of media	
Phone number and e-mail	
Nature of inquiry	
Received by	
Referred to	
Deadline	
Call return date and time	
Status	

Key media contacts

In the event of a crisis, the Shenandoah Area Council will need to quickly and efficiently speak with the media. Following are the top media outreach priorities of the Shenandoah Area Council:

Shenandoah Area Council key media contacts				
Name	Outlet	Contact information	Previous interactions	Notes
	Winchester Star	540-667-3200		
	Northern Virginia Daily	800-296-5137		
	The Journal	304-263-8931		
	The Washington Post	202-334-7300		

The BSA digital response protocol

Posting identified

Phases of BSA digital engagement
- Positive — [green]
- Negative — [red]
- Neutral — [dark blue]

Let it stand — NO ← Does the OCM belong to a currently identified list of online influencers **and/or** appear to have a following that is either large in number or focused on/passionate about the BSA-related topic discussed?

+ YES **-**

Is the posting positive, neutral, or negative?

Does the BSA have reasonable assurance that recognition of this post would be welcome?

YES

Aside from demonstrating recognition, can the BSA add value to this conversation?

YES — NO

Respond to the posting and offer links to material as appropriate, disclose BSA affiliation, and monitor the conversation

Link to the posting and summarize it via existing BSA social media properties as appropriate

Let it stand

NO

Is the OCM asking a question or making a statement that the BSA can easily answer or amplify? — NO

YES

Respond to the posting. Offer links to any relevant material/evidence as appropriate, disclose BSA affiliation, and continue to monitor the conversation

Is the conversation attracting comments, links, retweets, media attention, or any other follow-on activity? — NO

YES

Upon examination, is it likely that the OCM will listen to a reasoned argument and consider evidence rather than post unnecessarily inflammatory material? — NO

YES

Does the issue relate to the Scouting program? — NO

YES

Does the BSA have a position on the issue? — YES

NO

Determine a position with the national council

Let it stand; if the BSA cannot add value to the discussion, it should not participate

Respond to the posting. Offer links to material as appropriate, disclose BSA affiliation, and monitor the conversation

Do not engage, as it may inflame this audience, but consider an alternative response

END

Digital assets engagement roles and responsibilities

The following chart outlines the roles and responsibilities of key team members when the Shenandoah Area Council decides to engage its digital assets during an issue or crisis.

Digital assets engagement roles and responsibilities				
Digital asset	Content managers	Initiation procedure	Manager	Approver
Shenandoah Area Council's Web page	Mark Pennington			Mark Pennington/Stuart Williams
Shenandoah Area Council- Camp Rock Enon Web page	Richard Holder			Mark Pennington
Shenandoah Area Council's Facebook page	Carrie Judson			Mark Pennington
Shenandoah Area Council's Twitter site	Carrie Judson			Mark Pennington
Shenandoah Area Council's You Tube site	Mark Pennington			Mark Pennington/Stuart Williams

9. Putting the plan into action

In the event of a local or national crisis, it is important to swiftly and efficiently put the principles and policies of this plan into action.

Response guide checklist

The following is a response guide checklist and set of questions to ensure the Shenandoah Area Council is responding appropriately to each situation.

This list corresponds with the previously discussed levels of preparedness, and each section offers a general guide of what should be accomplished. Each level of to-do action steps is meant to build on the previous levels' steps (e.g., when executing the steps for Level 3, first accomplish the steps outlined in Levels 1 and 2).

Response guide checklist	
Level 1 Warning	☐ Reach out to the National Council and regional staff ☐ Alert the crisis management core team and relevant support team members via e-mail and provide a copy of correspondence to all team members ☐ Initiate media and digital monitoring ☐ Begin a media inquiry log ☐ Prepare communications materials for possible release to media and key volunteers
Level 2 Caution	☐ Engage the legal team to approve all communications materials ☐ Work with proper authorities to determine the scope of the situation and to provide ongoing support ☐ Update the PR department and engage the digital content editor and video production team, as necessary ☐ Prepare the council's spokesperson ☐ Direct media requests to the council's spokesperson ☐ Initiate stakeholder outreach ☐ Release communications materials to traditional and digital media, and post them on the appropriate Web sites ☐ Provide the team with timely updates regarding the situation
Level 3 **Hazard**	☐ Establish a communications command center, as necessary ☐ Dispatch family or volunteer support teams ☐ Determine if on-site National Council support is needed
Level 4 Severe	☐ Engage a phone response team to address member inquiries, as necessary ☐ Monitor the situation and release additional statements, as necessary