

CRISIS PLANNING SCENARIO RESPONSE

Jordan Schupbach

January 18, 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today's media environment requires an almost immediate response to any crisis situation. This environment can lead to a premature response by an organization that only serves to exacerbate a crisis. A thoughtful, comprehensive plan must be deployed to meet the needs for both a rapid yet accurate response.

Appropriate crisis management begins long before a crisis. It involves a proactive approach to anticipating possible issues, building an effective crisis response team and training spokesmen. Being prepared will reduce the chances of a "ready, fire, aim" response and significantly increase the likelihood of a well-managed crisis response.

My post-crisis communication methodology utilizes 7 guiding principles for appropriate crisis response. A crisis response plan should be:

1. Prompt: Discourages rumor and innuendo and confirms that the organization is taking the issue seriously.
2. Compassionate: Demonstrates to those affected that the organization is empathetic to their feelings and understands their position.
3. Honest: Proves that the organization is willing to admit responsibility and builds trust-based relationships with audiences.
4. Informative: Ensures the complete contextual and factual details are being communicated.
5. Interactive: Encourages questions, comments and open dialogue so that the relationship with the public is strengthened.
6. Comprehensive: Utilizes all appropriate communication channels as different audiences may require different communication vehicles.
7. Evaluated: Confirms messages are being received and meeting the needs of those involved.

In my detailed plan below, I incorporate each of these principles to ensure a response that fully addresses all of the complexities of the situation.

DETAILED RESPONSE

Immediate Actions

1. **Respond Now:** The City of Amarillo should have boilerplate statements available for immediate release that assure the community we are aware of a given crisis situation and actively responding to it. Releasing this statement also establishes my position as the official point of contact for the incident. My first response to the media and community would be a statement such as:

“This morning, we became aware of an incident involving the euthanasia of a dog in one of our animal shelters. We are investing all available resources to determine the facts of the situation and will promptly share more information as it becomes available.”

2. **Inform Leadership:** It is vital to confirm that city leadership is aware of the incident so they are not surprised by an unexpected inquiry. I would also reiterate to leadership that any media inquiries should be directed to me with a statement such as:

“I am aware there was an incident. I’m concerned about it, and I know we are actively working to determine what happened. I also know that Jordan Schupbach is taking the lead on gathering the information and is the best point of contact for you. His phone number is...”

Secondary Actions

1. **Determine the Facts:** I would ascertain the complete and accurate details of the incident. This would be accomplished by contacting the Director of the Animal Management and Welfare Department and/or reviewing investigation findings.
2. **Update Early and Often:** I would issue brief follow-up statements to keep the public informed. This can be accomplished via social media messages stating the issue continues to be looked into and remains a serious concern for city leadership.
3. **Finalize Key Messages:** I would create final messaging products and circulate them to all relevant departments for approval. In some cases, this may include consulting with the city’s legal department for guidance on issuing any public statement acknowledging the city’s responsibility.
4. **Deliver the Information:** I would issue an official statement to the media and post it on the city’s website. Social media posts would also be created linking to the website. I would ensure all official messaging is released through the Communications Office to

establish consistency of messages. The attached press release would be issued as the final official piece of communication in this particular incident.

5. Evaluate: I would monitor the media and community response, make certain the correct messaging is being received, respond to any additional inquiries and confirm that media contacts have the information they need.

Attachments

1. Official Statement
2. Draft Press Release
3. Leadership Talking Points

OFFICIAL STATEMENT

(Note: This statement makes assumptions about the incident for the sake of this exercise.)



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On January 6, a dog was detained by the City of Amarillo Animal Management and Welfare Department after attacking a citizen. In accordance with city policy, the dog was placed in the shelter for a 10-day "bite-hold" period. During that hold period, the owner was located and stated she would pick up the dog at the end of the hold. The dog was given an additional 72 hours after the hold expired to give the owner time to pick it up.

Extending hold periods requires an authorization form to be transmitted between departments. Although the form was sent, it did not process through the email server and was not received. Therefore, on Wednesday, January 16, a department employee euthanized the dog.

Upon becoming aware of the incident on Thursday, January 17, city officials immediately ceased all animal procedures at the Animal Management and Welfare Department and launched an investigation. The investigation revealed the error with the email server, and the city immediately took steps to assess and evaluate the equipment. Additionally, the city has implemented the following new policies effective immediately:

1. All animal procedure authorization forms now require a physical signature from all Animal Management and Welfare internal departments for final approval.
2. Owner notification attempts will increase from current policy of 2 attempts to 4 attempts.
3. All department policies and procedures related to animal management are being reviewed to identify areas of improvement.

We are in contact with the pet owner and wish to express our most sincere regret at this unfortunate incident.

Inquiries: Jordan Schupbach, Director of Communications, City of Amarillo
Email Address, Phone Number



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

City of Amarillo Announces Immediate Freeze On Animal Euthanasia

AMARILLO, Texas (January 18, 2019) – Today, the City of Amarillo announced it has placed an extended freeze on all animal euthanasia procedures at city shelters. The freeze comes as a response to the recent accidental euthanasia of an animal held on a “bite-hold”.

“We know there was a breakdown in communication that led to this extremely unfortunate situation,” said Animal Management and Welfare Department Director John Smith. “Our immediate priority was to find out what happened and make sure it didn’t happen again.”

The accidental euthanasia occurred when an employee did not receive the proper forms from the holding department because of an email server issue. The city has replaced the equipment and is currently reviewing all official departmental policies related to form processing, owner notifications, length of animal holds and waiting periods.

The city is also working directly with Jane Doe, the owner of the dog that was euthanized, to develop additional safeguards and procedures that will eliminate the possibility of the situation repeating.

“The city has been very receptive of my ideas,” said Doe, “and I feel like they really want to make sure this never happens again.”

The City of Amarillo (*insert mission and values boilerplate statement here*)...

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Inquiries: Jordan Schupbach, Director of Communications, City of Amarillo
Email Address, Phone Number

LEADERSHIP INCIDENT REPORT

RE: January 16th incident at the city shelter

Background

On January 6, a dog was detained by the Animal Management and Welfare Department after attacking a citizen. By city policy, the dog must be held in the shelter for a 10-day "bite-hold." During the 10-day bite hold, the owner (Jane Doe) was located and stated she would pick up the dog at the end of the holding period. Accordingly, the dog was given an additional 72 hours after the hold expired to give Ms. Doe time to pick it up.

Extending animal holds and delaying euthanasia procedures requires a form be transmitted to the euthanasia department who will then delay the procedure for an additional 72 hours. Although the form was sent, it did not process through the email server and was not received. Therefore, on Wednesday, January 16, a department employee euthanized the dog.

Ms. Doe was informed of the incident when she called to schedule the pickup of the dog. She was understandably upset and contacted local media. We received an inquiry from local media on January 16 at 9am and immediately implemented the crisis communications plan.

Updates will be provided.

Point of Contact

Jordan Schupbach, Communications Director, email, phone

Leadership Talking Points

1. This was an extremely unfortunate event that we deeply regret.
2. Many of us are pet owners and understand the connection owners have with their pets.
3. Upon notification, we immediately stopped all procedures at the Animal Management and Welfare Department and launched an investigation.
4. The investigation identified an issue with an email server which blocked an authorization form from transmitting to the proper department.
5. We have since implemented new policies designed to eliminate this situation including the requirement for physical signatures on all forms related to animal procedures.
6. We are grateful to Ms. Doe and her willingness to partner with us to improve our systems for the citizens of Amarillo.