

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College Crisis Communication Plan

I. Purpose

A crisis communication plan provides procedures for the coordination of communication within the college, and between the college, the media, and the public, in the event of an emergency or controversial issue. Emergencies may include fires, bomb threats, natural disasters, or major crimes. Controversial issues may include police investigations, protests, or other situations that demand a public response. The plan is not intended to change the way emergencies are initially reported. All emergencies on campus should be reported immediately to the Department of Police at 523-5911.

This plan not only addresses media relations and communication issues, but also includes procedures for the rapid identification of potentially harmful situations and the methods for responding to these situations quickly and effectively.

It is the goal of this crisis communication plan to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations, and to ensure that campus officials and communicators are familiar with those procedures, and their roles in the event of a crisis. The plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the normal decision-making hierarchy of the college and does not supplant that decision-making process.

II. Objectives of the Plan

1. To be able to factually assess situations and determine whether communications responses are warranted.
2. To assemble a Crisis Communications Team that will make recommendations on appropriate responses.
3. To implement immediate actions to:
 - o identify constituencies that should be informed about the situation.
 - o communicate facts about the crisis with one voice.
 - o minimize rumors.
 - o restore order and/or confidence.

III. Procedures

Assessment – The individual who encounters the potential crisis should gather accurate information from the appropriate sources. A potential crisis is defined as an event or situation that could affect or has affected the health, safety, or welfare of students, faculty, staff, or campus visitors. After fact-gathering, the appropriate individual should determine whether an immediate response is necessary, and if so, should consult the Department of Police who will immediately inform the vice president of finance and administration, or designee and will determine whether or not to convene the Crisis Communications Team.

Pandemic - Should any disease rise to the level of a possible pandemic state, the College will monitor the situation by communicating with local and state health officials, review information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC), the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) and media sources in order to provide appropriate information to the College community.

Emergency Notification – When a significant event occurs that immediately endangers the safety and welfare of students, faculty, staff, or campus visitors, an emergency notification will be sent to all affected campuses and college community members. An emergency notification does not require any filtering of messages through the Crisis Communications Team. The emergency notification can be authorized by the Department of Police, Office of Communications, or Executive Cabinet members. The emergency notification can be distributed through various methods, to include, but not limited to: Reynolds Alert, Alertus Beacons, email, local media outlets, Reynolds Website, and bulletin/LCD displays.

Timely Warning – A timely warning will be issued in instances involving specific crimes mandated by the Clery Act. Timely warnings will be coordinated with the Department of Police, the vice president of finance and administration, and the Office of Communications. The timely warning can be distributed through various methods, to include, but not limited to: Reynolds Alert, Alertus Beacons, email, local media outlets, Reynolds Website, and bulletin/LCD displays.

Assembling the Crisis Communications Team – The Crisis Communications Team will formulate a response based on the nature of the crisis. Composition of the core team will include at minimum:

- college president
- vice president of finance and administration
- director of communications/public information officer (PIO) and special assistant to the president
- vice president of institutional advancement and strategic partnerships
- vice president of academic and student affairs
- dean of enrollment
- associate vice president of strategic planning, institutional effectiveness, and technology
- associate vice president of human resources
- director of facilities management and planning
- chief of police

Depending on the nature of the crisis situation, other individuals may be added to the Crisis Communications Team.

Plan of Action – The Crisis Communications Team, after assessing the nature and scope of the situation, should develop a plan of action including some, or all, of the following:

1. Designate a spokesperson – In cases of a significant crisis, the president or the highest ranking college official must take the lead in conveying the administration's response to the crisis, showing that the college has control

of the situation, addressing public concern, and setting an example for the entire campus.

2. Draft a fact sheet and key messages – The fact sheet should contain a summary statement of the situation including all known details to be released to the media. This information should be prepared by the director of communications and made available to the president and appropriate vice presidents. This fact sheet should be analyzed with respect to the public's right to know and concerns for privacy and security.
3. Notify key constituencies – Determine key constituencies that should be informed of the crisis.
 - administration, faculty, and staff
 - College Board
 - college Information Center
 - Foundation Board of Directors
 - general public
 - law enforcement agencies
 - Virginia Department of Emergency Management
 - mass media
 - parents of students
 - students
 - Virginia Community College System
4. Assign member of the Crisis Communications Team to communicate facts of the situation (contained in the fact sheet) and the college's intended response. Among those that may be notified, depending on the situation, are:
 - law enforcement agencies – should be notified by a campus Police Department representative.
 - college Information Center – should be notified by a representative of the Office of Communications.
 - administrators, faculty, and staff – Information to administrators other than those selected to serve on the Crisis Communications Team, faculty and staff can be provided through text message, electronic mail, voice mail, college external website, college intranet, and/or mass meetings. This should be handled by the Office of Communications.
 - students – Notices to students can be submitted to the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (523-5908) for posting on Canvas, Office of Marketing (523-5227) for posting on the Web, or the Office of Communications (523-5230) for posting on official Reynolds social media accounts or via email. Mass meetings can be coordinated by Student Affairs, if needed.

- College Board – may be reached via telephone or email. The President’s Office (523-5200) should coordinate any correspondence with this body.
 - Foundation Board – may be reached via telephone or email. The Office of Institutional Advancement (523-5181) should coordinate any correspondence with this body.
 - parents of students – Information can be posted on the college website and/or official Reynolds social media accounts. The college Information Center (371-3000) can double as a rumor control hotline.
 - local community – If the situation has an impact on local residents, mass media or official Reynolds social media accounts can be used. If appropriate, meetings can be arranged with leaders of the neighborhood associations near the college.
 - mass media – The Office of Communications may prepare news releases for distribution. All media inquiries should be directed to the Office of Communications (523-5230).
 - government agencies – If government entities (mayor, county administrator, governor’s office, etc.) need to be informed, this should be handled by the president and/or the director of communications.
5. Alert the media – Determine whether a news release and/or news conference is an appropriate means of conveying information to faculty, staff, students, the news media, and the public. The Office of Communications will determine logistics of the news conference including when, where and how the media will be contacted, which media will be contacted, who will supervise the news conference, who will appear, etc.
6. Establish Joint Information Center (JIC) – Determine whether the magnitude of the crisis merits the establishment of a Joint Information Center for police, college officials, and media. The JIC location will be determined based on the incident. Possible locations include:
- Downtown Campus – 700 East Jackson Street, Richmond, VA 23219
 - Community Room
 - Parham Road Campus – 1651 E. Parham Road, Richmond, VA 23228
 - Burnette Hall – Room 103
 - Georgiadis Hall – Conference Room 238
 - Massey Library Technology Center – The Lily Pad
 - Workforce Development and Conference Center, President’s Conference Room
 - Goochland Campus – 1851 Dickinson Road, Goochland, VA 23063

- Community Room

7. Photography – Identify an individual who can take pictures of the scene. This may prove helpful in responding to media inquiries, to possible later litigation, as well as to documenting events. Determine need to supply video footage and photographs from files. Decide whether to provide video footage for immediate distribution. Determine whether it is appropriate to allow location shooting by TV and newspaper photographers. Determine when, where, and who will accompany the media.
8. Radio responses – Discuss need to produce taped response for radio. The director of communications and special assistant to the president will be available for radio sound bites.
9. Other spokespersons – Identify any other individuals who may serve as spokespersons or who may address the news media; assign an Office of Communications staff member to counsel the individual on the appropriate ways to deal with the media.
10. Internal communications – Determine the internal communications strategy to be used if the crisis affects college students and employees, working closely with Human Resources, Student Affairs, and Information Technology.
11. Alternative communications – Discuss alternative or additional means of conveying information, including letters to parents of students or selected constituencies of the college, letters to newspaper editors, and consultation with editorial boards. During a major crisis, the Marketing department will redirect the external college website to an emergency website that provides updates throughout the duration of the crisis. Where appropriate, Reynolds will work with local news media, asking them to offer a “hot link” on their websites to the Reynolds website to provide viewers with additional information regarding a crisis.
12. Information Center – The Information Center (371-3000) should be notified regarding the key facts of the crisis (fact sheet) and where to refer calls pertaining to the crisis.
13. Rumor control – Consider establishing a rumor-control hotline and/or a dedicated call-in line for media use. A web page with a hot link from the college home page can also be used for posting up-to-date information and FAQs.
14. Loss of telephone service – Cellular phones should be used in the event landlines are down. The Office of Communications and Communications Dispatch within the Department of Police will each maintain a list of cellular phone numbers for key college officials. Hand-held public frequency radios can be used for on campus communications in lieu of, or in addition to, cell phones.

Aftermath Component – Following any crisis, appropriate action must take place to ensure that members of the college community, and others as necessary, receive needed information and assistance to help bring closure to the crisis as well as relief from the effects of the event. Attention also should be placed on identifying and implementing measures to improve the action plan used during the crisis.

Post-incident Communications

1. Whenever possible, a public forum should be scheduled and coordinated by the Office of Communications to provide an update of the incident and events to all interested members of the college. The timeliness of this meeting is critical and every effort should be made for the forum to be held within three (3) working days from the end of the crisis. Representatives from the Executive Cabinet, Department of Police, Office of Communications, and if applicable, Student Affairs and/or Human Resources should attend and be prepared to answer questions and share pertinent information. Other departments and/or individuals also may be requested to attend and participate depending upon the nature of the crisis.
2. Immediately following a crisis, it is imperative that the college is sensitive to the needs of faculty, staff, and students who may be personally affected by the crisis. There may be a need to assist the victim(s) by obtaining information and/or a referral to available resources. The associate vice president of human resources will be responsible for notifying appropriate employees and the vice president for academic and student affairs will be responsible for notifying students of available resources.
3. Depending upon the nature of the crisis, services and assistance may have been rendered by agencies, companies and/or individuals from outside the college. The Office of Communications should ensure that applicable follow-up information as well as letters of appreciation, are sent to appropriate persons.
4. The Crisis Communications Team will meet within ten (10) working days following a crisis and review all actions taken as a result of the crisis to determine effectiveness and efficiency of operations and make any needed changes to the Crisis Communications Plan.