

Public Information



Public Information

- Convey accurate and timely information.
- Call people to action to protect life and property.
- Educate and inform.
- Change behavior and attitudes.
- Create a positive impression of your organization.

Public Information

- The PIO has the best and latest information to advise the public on protective actions.
- If the PIO is not communicating to the press and the public, others will, and misinformation can be harmful.
- It is up to the PIO to be out front and proactive in order to be the main source of information.
- The PIO must also correct misinformation when possible.

Media Relations

- Know your local media.
- Develop relationships with local media BEFORE an incident.
- Media can be an important partner during an emergency.

Personal Readiness

- Equipment
 - Computer, phone, charger, etc.
- Information
 - Media contacts, plans, fact sheets, etc.
- Personal care and comfort
 - Prescriptions, glasses/contacts, snacks, coffee, etc.

News Releases

Written Communication

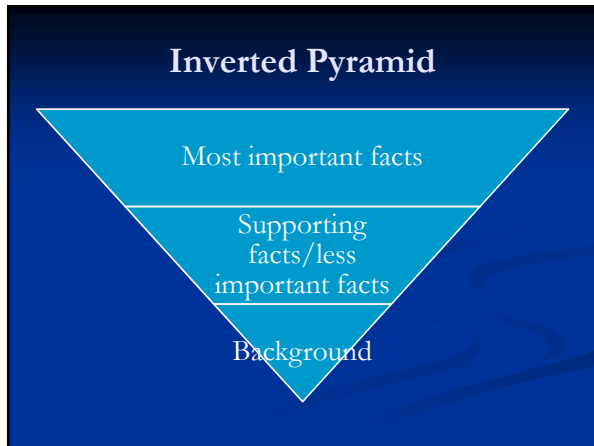
- Is well organized and easy to follow.
- Uses clear, concise language.
- Uses correct grammar.
- Contains no spelling or punctuation errors.
- Uses appropriate formats and style.
- Conveys key messages.

News Release Content

- Accurate, factual information
- Clear, concise, easy-to-understand language
- Simple sentences
- Short paragraphs
- Third person
- Attributed facts
- No jargon or acronyms

Writing the News Release

- Organize the facts – most important up top
- Open with a strong lead
- Answer:
 - Who
 - What
 - When
 - Where
 - Why
 - How



- ### Press Release Distribution
- Press
 - Social Media
 - Vermont Alert
 - Post at the general store
 - Tell the town gossip
 - Any high traffic area or popular means of communication in your community

- ### Talking Points
- Main points you or spokesperson want to hit on.
 - Most important information first.
 - Short, easy to understand statements that reinforce key message.
 - Memorable, quotable statements.
 - Coach spokesperson and re-iterate importance of sticking to points.

Bottom Line: Communicate

In a crisis, getting the right information to the right people at the right time is more important than catching grammatical errors!

Social Media/Electronic

Direct From the Source

- Social media and electronic communication allows your message to reach the public unfiltered.
- More and more people are using social media.
- Email and text messages go directly to constituents no matter where they are.
- No risk of message being lost in translation (press).
- Press will also see posts.

VAlert.gov

- Communicate directly to users' e-mail boxes, cell phones, gaming consoles, etc.
 - Press releases
 - Traffic alerts
 - Emergency notifications (evacuations, areas to avoid, etc.)
- Can be used to make internal notifications.
 - Activation
 - Meetings

Facebook/Twitter

- Allows you to post information about incidents, hazards, and resources – links.
- Post regularly for visibility and exposure (if you have something to say – don't become white noise).
- Assign someone to monitor during events.
 - Allows you to keep up with information and identify/correct rumors and misinformation.

Beware

- Consider everything on agency social media to be public record.
 - Press may quote your agency from social media post.
 - Never express opinion on agency social media sites.
- Your personal social media pages could also have an effect you and your agency.
- Get legal opinion from town for personal and agency pages.
- **WHEN IN DOUBT – DON'T POST IT!**

Sign Up

- Easy to get an account for your agency.
 - Facebook.com
 - Twitter.com
 - Others
- Costs nothing to have it.
- Content can be extremely benign if you are not comfortable with the format.
- When in doubt – DON'T POST IT!

Joint Information System/Joint Information Center

What is the Joint Information System?

- The JIS is a network of PIOs working to deliver accurate, timely information the public needs and wants.
 - As simple as two PIOs talking.
 - A PIO at the EOC talking to an “on-scene” PIO on phone, text, or email.

Why the Joint Information System?

- Sharing information to ensure what is released is accurate, consistent, and timely.
- Sharing resources.
- Proofreading, different knowledge base, etc.

ALL RESPONSE ORGANIZATIONS AND PARTNERS SHOULD BE ACTING AS ONE DURING A SHARED INCIDENT.

Who's in Charge?

- JIS follows the Incident Command System (ICS).
 - Primary responding agency will take the lead.

What is the Joint Information Center?

- Physical location with tools to enhance the flow of public information.
 - Computers, phones, contact lists, etc.
- A central working facility where PIOs can gather.
- Can provide “one-stop shopping” for the media.
- Can be location for media briefings.

JIC Location

- Easily accessible for media, but doesn't create impediment to response.
- Ensure location does not allow press to hear sensitive information.
- If press can't get on site of incident, JIC or other media area should be close enough for pictures and observations, but not close enough to endanger the press.

JIC Roles

- Lead PIO
 - Manages the direction of media outreach.
 - Attend leadership briefings.
- Deputy PIO
 - Assists Lead and often is the contact with other SSFs.
 - In small events may be social media/release writer.

JIC Roles

- Release/EAS Writer
- Social Media/Web Writer
 - Facebook and Twitter
 - Agency web site
- Clerical
 - Answer phones/documentation
- Media Liaison/Escort
- Others as needed

Media on Scene

News Media's Role in Public Safety

- The news media is one of the organization's links to the public before, during, and after a public safety incident.



Who is the News Media?



What All News Media Want

- Prompt answers to queries – Need you to be available at all times.
- Access to the scene.
- Access to policymakers, responders and victims.
- Fair treatment.
- Respect for deadlines.
- Updates and corrections to information in evolving incidents as fast as possible.

What All News Media Want

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why
- How



Where Does the News Come From

- Anywhere and everywhere!
 - Anyone with a cell phone can be a reporter.
 - Can take video or photos and send instantly to news outlets.

Treat anyone doing this as a reporter

Initial PIO Actions

- Assess the situation.
- Consider your resources.
- Establish contact with other involved agencies' PIOs.
- Keep leadership apprised.

Media Access

- Establish a media staging/briefing area that doesn't hinder operations or compromise safety, but affords the media reasonable, legitimate access.
- Coordinate access to newsmakers and persons in charge.
- Consider a media pool.
 - Don't overuse a pool.
 - Press police their own pool.

Media Interviews

What Makes a Source Credible

- Empathy and/or caring.
- Competence and expertise.
- Honesty and openness.
- Commitment and dedication.



Consider Your Audience

- You are speaking to the public.
 - Keep it simple
 - Not overly technical
 - No jargon/acronyms
 - Relate it to similar incidents in the past



Most Important Information

- What happened?
- What should the public do?
- What is the impact?
- What are we doing?



Preparing for an Interview or Press Briefing

- Identify the best spokesperson.
 - Official
 - Recognizable
- Develop your objectives.
- Consider your audience.
 - What do they think of the spokesperson
 - Speak their language

Preparing for an Interview or Press Briefing

- Develop your message and materials
 - Talking points
 - Include main point three times.
 - Why you are communicating.
 - Who you are trying to reach.
- Get clearance/approval
- Practice or prep spokesperson
 - Spokesperson should look professional and be in control of the briefing.

Preparing for an Interview or Press Briefing

- Anticipate questions and answers.
- Anticipate the difficult questions.
- Do not avoid difficult questions.
- Prepare concise 10-15 second answers to reinforce your message.

During Interview

- Remain calm and in control.
- Respond honestly.
- Work in key messages.
- Prepare an overall statement and re-iterate during interview.
- Choose words carefully – a pause is okay.
- Most important facts first.
 - Avoid chronological order.

During Interview

- Work in key messages at least three times.
- Treat all microphones, cameras, pencils as 'live'.
 - You are always on the record.
- Keep answers clear and concise.
- Use familiar language.
 - No jargon or acronyms.



Press Briefings

- Use when one-on-one interviews are impractical due to the amount of media.
 - Promise of a briefing can hold media at the staging area.
 - Consider logistics
- When scheduling briefing (parking, background, etc.)



Press Briefings

- Open with (maximum) 2-3 minute statement.
- Fewer than four speakers.
- Determine who speaks to what topic.
- Remember all speakers are always visible to cameras.



Improving Your Responses

- DON'T:
 - Speculate, offer opinion, or answer hypothetical questions.
 - Respond for or talk about other agencies.
 - Comment on what others have said.
 - Lose your temper.
 - Lie – EVER.
 - Say anything you don't want read in print, hear on the radio, or see on TV or the Internet.
 - Say anything "off the record."

Improving Your Responses

- DO:
 - Know what you want to say.
 - Stick to one main point.
 - Be positive, yet realistic.
 - Show compassion and empathy.
 - Know when to stop.
 - Say you don't know if you don't know the answer.
 - Offer to get the answer.
 - Summarize.

“No Comment”

- Never say “No comment.” It implies you are:
 - Hiding something
 - Unprepared
 - Uninformed

Alternatives to “No Comment”

1. “The matter is under investigation and that information is not available at this time.”
2. “We will provide updates as more information becomes available.”
3. “Let me put you in contact with someone who is better able to answer that question.”
4. “Those details are covered by the Privacy Act and I cannot discuss them, but I can give you this general information ...”

Transitional Phrases or “Bridging”

- “What is most important is ...”
- “What we should focus on is ...”
- “What the public should know is ...”
- “The point (or goal) is ...”

Common Questions

- A number of questions will be asked in every interview.
- Others might come up. Follow-up questions are developed based on what you say.
 - Be prepared to back-up statements you make.
- Be ready for the questions you do NOT want to hear.

Nonverbal Communication Tips

- Pay attention to:
 - Eye contact
 - Voice
 - Expression
 - Body position
 - Gestures
 - Movement
 - Attire



Dealing With Nervousness

- Prepare.
- Anticipate questions.
- Do something to relax yourself.
- Know it's okay to say you don't know the answer to a question. Offer to get answer.
- Realize the reporter wants you to succeed.
- Know it is okay to pause and gather your thoughts.

Questions?

VEM PIO is always available to offer advice or assistance:

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