

Communications Guide For Emergencies Like COVID-19

Thank you for the work you do! We are in this together as we adapt to better our communities. This guide is especially made for direct service organizations to help you communicate with your communities - your clients, participants, customers, etc.

Why This Guide

- Organizations have to continually adapt to COVID-19. Each change needs to be communicated to their communities to reduce confusion.
- People are homebound, so traditional communications may not be enough.
- People are getting laid off as companies close during social distancing, so there may be people who have not interacted with you before who need you now.
- This guide is NOT meant to incite fear or panic. On the contrary, it is our roles to be proactive and support our communities through times just like this.

How to Use This Guide

Ideally, bring your team together for one hour to walk through the steps of this guide. There is also a cheat sheet checklist at the end for your team to use quickly.

This guide is not meant to tell you what decisions to make for your organization. It is simply a guide on how you can communicate those decisions. You know your community best, so modify anything to best fit your context. Be sure to do your research so you do not spread misinformation or disinformation.

1. Choose Your Communications Team

Determine your primary communications team and their roles. This team should¹:

- Meet regularly to monitor the situation closely as it continues to evolve
- Be the main source of information about the crisis
- Give regular updates to key constituencies
- Be as transparent as possible. Explain what you know, what you don't know, and your sources of information

Potential roles (people may have more than one role)

- Content Lead - Decides what content to share
- Content Creator - Writes posts, designs graphics, adds pictures
- Distributer - Schedules content to be shared
- Community Engager - Interacts with community (online or in-person); relays what they're hearing back to team

NOTE: It is helpful to cross-train team members in case one person is unable to work for whatever reason.

2. List Your Channels of Distribution (Points of Contact)

Every point of contact you have with your community - website, social media, in-person contacts, plus partners who can share your content.

1. List ALL your channels

- Prioritize 1-3 channels (but you can copy/paste to all your channels if you want)
- If possible, have one place where people can always find up-to-date info
 - e.g., Your website OR link to another organization's website that will have updated information (e.g. food bank that's aggregating food pantry information)

2. List your partners who can share your content

- Create a short list of partners to keep updated
- Prioritize organizations who are aggregating resource lists in your region
- Ask your partners how they plan to share your content

Example - Subsidized Housing Managers. Ask them what channels they have to share your resources with their tenants. Share your messaging with them so they can copy/paste to an email/social media. If they are willing to pass flyers out, consider printing flyers for them (does not have to be fancy, printed on regular paper is fine now)

3. Add People to Your Channels of Distribution

There may be a point in the quarantine where your community can no longer come to you in-person. Use your time now to get their contact information so you can still communicate if a quarantine tightens.

Goals

1. Get community members' contact info
2. Get community members to follow you on social media

Ideas

- Specify this is especially important for communications during COVID-19
- On-site sign-ups for people to add their contact information
- Volunteers ask for contact information on-site or during deliveries

- Signs people see while in line to “like” you on social media
- Sign-up form online; promote it through social media

Notes

- Only ask as many questions as is necessary (e.g., only ask for emails)
- Align these efforts with your organization’s privacy policies
- It is best practice to let them know how you will use their contact information so they can opt-in to receiving communications from you

4. Create Your Messaging

1. Identify your community’s needs and concerns. What issues do they have that need to be addressed (e.g., lack of food, long lines and crowds, staying safe, etc.)

2. Determine actions you are taking to address these concerns

- Ensure you’re here for your community during this tough time
- Make any changes you are making clear (e.g., switching to drive-through only)
- How/when/where can people get food/services from you?
- What are you doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19?
- Ensure translation of your content and services for your (potentially new) clients

3. Be clear when a change is happening so people are not confused

- Date your updates
- Do not update people until you are sure of the changes you’re making and how you want people to respond
- Make sure your website or a partner’s website is always up-to-date and include “Check ____ for most up-to-date information” in your posts

4. Be direct and include a clear call to action

- Put the most important information at the beginning so people know if the rest of the post is relevant to them or not
- How can people reach you?
- **SHARE - With many lay-offs happening, there will be many people who will need your services who may not already be part of your network. Also, since many may be stuck at home, word-of-mouth is crucial. Ask people to share your content.**

5. You can still create content not directly related to COVID-19

- Continue adding value to your community
- Still be sensitive to the situation so it doesn't appear like you're completely ignoring it or making light of it

6. Create a centralized document/folder with your messaging

- Accessible to everyone on the team
- Makes it easier for the person posting to copy/paste content each week

7. Plan when you will repeat this / check in

5. Distribute/Schedule Your Messaging

1. You need to communicate early and regularly

- Do NOT go radio silent; let people know you are still here and there are ways to reach you; even if you have to close temporarily, post something once a week
- How often to post? If it's the same info, space it out at least by a week. If it's different, you can post multiple times a week
 - Example - Post a reminder once a week for all your open times and locations OR post the morning you're open
- Schedule your posts for the next week so you get it done in one sitting

2. Recycle, recycle, recycle

- Share your content on multiple channels (e.g. Facebook, website AND on-site)
- It is OKAY to repeat your content. Say you have 100 followers on Facebook. If you post something, not all 100 people will see it the first time. If you post a reminder next week, more people may see it (you can change the language a little if you'd like to make it a little fresher or to say it's a reminder)

3. Send a special message to your short list of partners and ask them to share

- Create a special email list for these partners if it makes the process smoother

4. Help each other - Share your partners' posts

5. Plan when you will repeat this / check in

6. Extra Tips

Like/follow credible sources such as the CDC, WHO, or your local health department to keep track of any statewide / local updates on COVID-19.

Sources / More Information

1. <https://hbr.org/2020/03/communicating-through-the-coronavirus-crisis>

2. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2020/03/16/the-coronavirus-makes-communication-more-important-than-ever-9-tips-for-communication-that-reassures-and-reengages-people/#1939ac90140c>
3. <https://pushkinpr.com/blog/crisis-communications/how-to-communicate-with-employees-clients-and-stakeholders-about-coronavirus/>

Thank You's

Thank you to people from the following organizations for contributing to this guide:

- Denver Food Rescue
- Denver Immigrant & Refugee Commission

Communications Checklist Cheat Sheet

1. Choose Your Team

Name: _____ Role: _____
 Name: _____ Role: _____
 Name: _____ Role: _____

2. List Your Channels of Distribution (Points of Contacts)

Digital Media Email lists Facebook Instagram Twitter Website
 Virtual meetings (e.g. Zoom)

Partners List specific partners here
 Schools and school districts _____
 Local media or news contacts _____
 Sites you will distribute food at _____
 Other non-profits who can share your content _____
 Partners who are aggregating lists of resources _____
In-Person List specific opportunities here
 On-site _____
 Home deliveries _____

3. Get People’s Contacts and Have Them Follow You on Social Media

In-Person Opportunities to get contact info Online Opportunities to get contact info

4. Create Your Messaging

- ___ Identify any needs/concerns from your community (clients, etc.)
- ___ Central document with content that can be copied/pasted plus posting schedule
- ___ Include clear call to action (e.g. “Share this post”, “join our mailing list for updates”)

5. Distribute/Schedule Your Messaging

- ___ Have one place that people can always easily find up-to-date info
- ___ Schedule content on digital medias
- ___ Partners understand how they can distribute your content
- ___ Bullet point message that team can share out in the field / in online meetings
- ___ Share partners’ content

How often will you revisit your comms plan / check in? _____