Issue Management

Forest Communicators Network
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Issue Management Framework

Strategic issue management is the responsibility of the entire organization. That responsibility crosses all units, and all reporting lines. It is the external component of strategic management.

This issue management framework involves three functions:
*   gathering/monitoring intelligence and information
*   analyzing the information and classifying the issue
*   taking action and evaluating the results

Defining & Sorting Issues

Issue Definition

Issues are events that occur outside the control of an organization; that affect at some level the strategic direction, core business or mandate of the organization; and that may require the organization to take action.

A strategic issue affects the organization's mandates, missions and values, service level, clients, stakeholders and proponents, financing, management or organizational design.*

Issue Sorting

For effective strategic management, issues need to be classified and ranked. Classification

I. Classification determines whether the problem is internal or external and routes it accordingly:

> • *Internal problems* - go through internal management processes; strategic responses do not automatically require or incorporate the need to interact with external people.

> • *External issues* - are identified by issue management staff and action is determined at the appropriate level of the organization; strategic responses automatically incorporate the need to interact with external people and organizations.

Issues are events that occur outside the control of an organization; that affect at some level the strategic direction, core business or mandate of the organization; and that may require the organization to take action.

* Adapted from: Mastering the Public Opinion Challenge by Sherry Devereaux Ferguson, (New York, New York: Irwin Professional Publishing, 1994), pp51-79.

Ranking

II. Ranking determines the priority order for dealing with and expending resources on an issue.

Establishing Priorities

A: High-priority: relates directly to an organization's mission and mandate; has wide-spread interest; reflects directly on the values of the organization and its partners; can easily attract opposition stakeholders and critics with power; and could influence the organization's potential to function effectively.

> **Ranking considers Variables, including:**
>
> • influence on the organization's survival,
> • the relationship of the issue to the organization's strategic direction,
> • stakeholder and opposition stakeholder positions,
> • key corporate and stakeholder values,
> • credibility, resources, and power of those bringing the issue to public attention,
> • public interest in the issue,
> • media and public agendas,
> • the credibility of the organization under scrutiny.

ACTION: *One to five hour response time, as circumstances dictate.*

B: Medium-priority: relates to an organization's mandate and mission. It has potential for wide-spread interest; touches on some of the values and concerns of the organization and its partners; and has specific supporters with the ability to rally other groups. It has the potential to move quickly to high priority; requires immediate detailed monitoring and briefing; and requires an alert to people on 'immediate action' list.

ACTION: *Within 48 hours, as circumstances dictate. Issue Briefing Note may be required; may have been preceded by an Issue Alert.*

C: Non-critical: questions or problems that relate to the organization but are not critical to its survival. It is presented by people without influence and without the involvement of the mass media. However, if these questions become part of a pattern, are co-opted by more powerful organizations or non-supportive stakeholders, they have the potential to become issues.
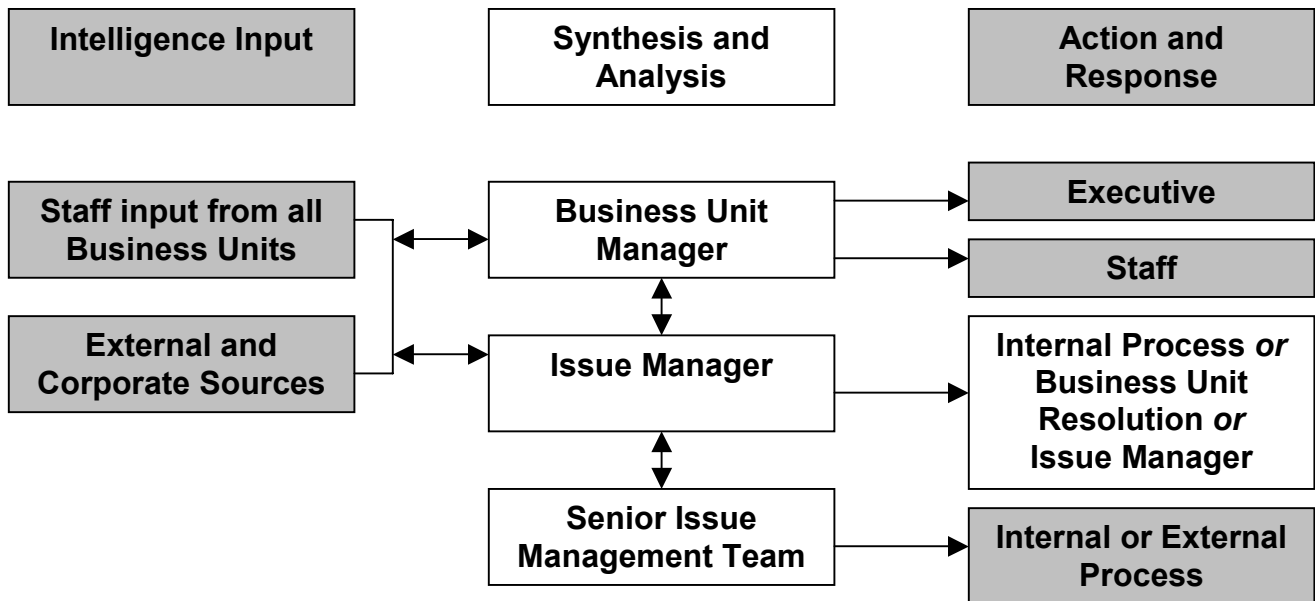
ACTION: *Log and monitor for increased frequency, pattern, and interest level. An Issue Alert or Issue Briefing Note may be required.*

Crisis

• places immediate threat on the organization's mandate and mission and on the organization's ability to function.

ACTION: *Implement crisis management plan.*

Issue Management Flow Chart

Intelligence Input	Synthesis and Analysis	Action and Response
Staff input from all Business Units	**Business Unit Manager**	**Executive**
		Staff
External and Corporate Sources	**Issue Manager**	**Internal Process *or* Business Unit Resolution *or* Issue Manager**
	Senior Issue Management Team	**Internal or External Process**

Roles and Responsibilities

Intelligence Input

Function:

Collect and provide intelligence and information about problems and issues that relate to the organization's mandate and strategic priorities.

Responsibility:

All staff are to supply information through issue management templates. Destinations for these are on the templates. The communications staff retrieve information from stakeholder contacts, media reports and other appropriate external sources and from corporate projects that generate feedback on corporate activities.

This information can be captured in an Issue Assessment template.

Synthesis and Analysis

Function:

• assess information received from all sources
• classify and rank issue
• recommend action
• provide feedback to staff

Responsibility:

Organization managers; issue management team;* communications staff

• Classify information based on the organization's priorities.
• Develop a clear picture of the basic information as it relates to the strategic
   priorities of the organization.
• Review and evaluate the list of previous issues.
• Classify and rank the issue.
• Recommend action.

  This process might require more detailed issue documents be developed.

Action and Response

Function:

• Finalize ranking the issues.
• Take strategic action based on the classification of the issue and its ranking.
• Develop communications strategies, tactics & tools.
• Bring together required members of the organization and partners to deliver a
  strategic response.

*Depending on how the issue is handled, this stage might yield an All Staff Issue
Bulletin and a communications strategy.*

*Communications staff are responsible for ensuring the All Staff Issue Bulletin is
completed and distributed.*

Responsibility:

Organization managers; issue manager**

• final priority ranking of issues
• initiating appropriate action

*Issue management team

(as required, comprised of staff able to make decisions on behalf of the organization, knowledgeable about an issue and experienced in working with external partners)

• Gather and assess additional intelligence.
• Ensure critical information is available for developing resolutions and action.
• Work with external partners.

This process might yield an All Staff Issue Bulletin and, depending on the nature of the issue, could require involvement of the Senior Issue Management Team.

**Issue Manager

Role:

The issue manager links line and corporate staff with the issue management process and intelligence obtained from outside the organization. This person is responsible for implementing and maintaining the issue management role and function within the corporation and is responsible also for providing audience-analysis intelligence to the management committee and the crisis communications team.

Specific tasks:

•   Gathers intelligence from outside the corporation and provides in summary form to staff
•   Facilitates input from key staff and stakeholders
•   Ensures liaison with staff and external audiences regarding content of Issue Alert/Issue Briefing Note
•   Provides advice to staff about the capture and communication of critical I information
•   Works with staff to refine issue intelligence before it is sent to the Issue Management Team, Communications staff
•   Ensures feedback related to Issue Alert or Issue Briefing Note sent to designated staff
•   Co-ordinates development of key communications tools, including All Staff Issue Bulletins and Qs & As
•   Produces an Issue Assessment monthly for the management committee
•   Analyzes Issue Log and reports to the executive
•   Works with Information Technology staff to build and maintain information-sharing structure for corporate issue management
•   Evaluates effectiveness of issue management based on pre-determined criteria

Senior Issue (or Crisis) Management Team

• under the direction of the most senior manager at the CEO level
• small team with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities-the organization's most senior manager, its most senior corporate communications person and senior corporate staff at the VP level

Operations and Policy Quick Response Team

Purpose: to address specific problems related to programs that are either in development or have been launched. If the program has been launched and operational problems exist there is a high likelihood that the public will become aware of the concerns. If the program is still in the development phase, resolution of concerns is an internal management problem.

Members: business unit manager and staff who can intelligently describe the problem and help develop solutions. Depending on the public status of this problem, the issue management team might become involved.

Stages of Issue development*

Emerging
• public expectation is different from corporate performance
• some of the public is discontent with how the corporation is performing
• people discuss this gap, some government departments show an interest

Organizational
• activist groups and/or interest groups have absorbed the issue as part of their value system and these groups want to 'the system' to change
• may have some media

Legislative
• negotiations begin between the various parties
• political groups begin to get involved and to partly co-opt the issue
• the issue becomes part of the public policy agenda
• phase of legislative involvement and possible change begins
• media

Mature
• new rules or policies are put in place
• potential for adversarial positions to become a significant focus for media
• potential spin-off issues begin to materialize
• intense media examination will occur if decisions around this issue are of broad public interest or impact

(Organization's name) - Issue Log

Week Of:

DATE	ISSUE	PRIORITY	LOCATION	ACTION

Destination: Issue Manager

Responsibility:
Issue management staff and business unit designate are responsible for:
- completing and updating the Issue Log monthly, and
- sending it to the issue manager.

Issue Manager is responsible for:
- assessing the log information and providing a synopsis to executive and senior management.

Frequency: monthly

Objective: to track and enumerate nature and frequency of issues the organization has faced and handled.

(Organization's Name) - Issue Alert

Topic:
Date:
Date Revised:
Note #:

State the problem/issue clearly.

To which corporate objective does this problem relate?

Who could be affected if this problem becomes an issue?

How could these groups be affected by this problem?

Where could this problem become an issue?

When is this problem likely to become an issue?

How has this problem been handled so far?

Other Information:
    ☐   No further information
    ☐   Issue Briefing Note to follow

Originator:
Phone:
Reviewed by:

Destination: Issue Manager

Feedback to originator:

Date:
- ☐   Information to follow by [insert date]
- ☐   No follow-up information
- ☐   All Staff Issue Bulletin to follow by [insert date]

Responsibility:
All staff are responsible for bringing issues forward and preparing Issue Alert.
Managers are responsible for reviewing Issue Alert.

Issue Manager is responsible for:
- reviewing notes, clarifying details, adding additional intelligence,
- requesting more formal detail through a Briefing Note,
- if necessary forwarding this material to: Head of Communications and the appropriate Executive
- communicating back to originator,
- communicating to other staff if necessary through All Staff Issue Bulletin

Head of Communications; Issue Management Team
and Executive where needed, responsible for:
- reviewing information to add value, and
- developing strategic action with Issue Manager

Frequency: continuous

Objective: to succinctly capture information about internal and external events, comments or behaviours that have the potential to create issues for the organization.

(Organization's name) - Issue Briefing Note

Topic:
Date:
Date Revised:
Note #   :

Issue:
Provide a concise statement of the problem that is gaining public attention

Background:
Provide detail about individuals and/or groups involved in presenting this issue publicly. Provide detail on how the issue has developed, responses or actions that have been taken to manage this issue. Information should be factual and in chronological order.

Media Involvement:
as the media approached you or your office on this issue? If so, which media, when, what were they looking for? Has the media addressed this issue without direct mention of the organization? Which media, when, what were they looking for? How have other groups or individuals begun to involve the media in this issue? Has the organization actively engaged the media about this issue? How, when, response?

Recommended Action:
What do you think should be done to strategically manage this issue?
Recommended Corporate Responses - Optional:
What do you think should be said about this issue?

Issue Note Originator:

Phone:

Fax:

E-mail address:

Other Information -
    ☐   See Issue Alert
    ☐   See related Issue Briefing Note(s)

Communications Contact:

Phone:

Final Version returned to -
☐   Originator:
☐   Manager:

Date:

Destination: Issue Manager, Manager, CEO

Responsibility:
All staff are responsible for bringing issues forward and preparing Issue Briefing Notes Managers are responsible for reviewing and approving Issue Briefing Notes

Issue Manager with communications staff are responsible for:
•   reviewing notes, clarifying details, adding additional intelligence
•   forwarding material to executive/CEO
•   communicating back to originator
•   communicating to other staff through All Staff Issue Bulletin

Senior Issue Management Team and CEO are responsible for:
•   reviewing information and adding value
•   developing strategic action with Issue Manager

Frequency: continuous

Objective: to provide detailed facts about behaviors or events that are becoming issues for the corporation and to provide insight and intelligence about the specific issue. At the date and time when issued the Issue Briefing Note is to be viewed as the FINAL communiqué outlining an issue. Actions and strategies will be based on this communiqué and intelligence gained from individuals and external sources.

(Organization's name) - Issue Assessment

Weeks of:

I.   Environment assessment: reviews the circumstances in which the organization operates for a specified time period.

II.   Priority Issue(s) in descending level of detail

A:
B:
C:

Scope of potential issue(s): one region, the country, beyond

How the potential issue(s) could affect the organization:

Stakeholder positions on the potential issue(s):

Previous known actions of the organization related to these potential issue(s):

From: Issue Manager

Phone:

Fax:

email:

Destination: Head of Communications, executive, CEO

Responsibility: Issue manager is responsible for: analyzing Issue Log and external information (with input from business unit and communications staff)

Frequency: weekly capture and monthly feedback

Objective: to provide broad-based intelligence and analytical information to staff

Environment assessment-variables to consider:
- Social values, priorities and judicial decisions
- Technological advances and changes
- Economic climate, restrictions and opportunities
- Environmental developments and knowledge that will influence priorities and behaviors of key partners
- Political influences and legislative directions

(Organization's name) - Issue Plan

Issue:

Priority based on (the organizations's) strategic objectives:

Trends in issue development:

Events influencing issue:

Opportunities for organization:

Threats to organization:

Action recommended:

Contact:

Phone:

Destination: executive

Responsibility:
Issue Manager, and/or Issue Management Team or Senior Issue Management

Team responsible for:
• developing and ensuring execution of Issue Plan designed to minimize negative impact on the organization and position the organization for future action

Frequency: as required, sequenced with Issue Alert and Issue Briefing Note

Objective: to develop strategic approach to issues facing the corporation and to integrate as much intelligence as possible into the decision making process

(Organization's Name) - Issue Post-mortem

Date: **Issue:**
Team Leader: **Team:**

Was the issue identified clearly?

At what stage of development was the issue identified?

Were the key implications for the corporation identified correctly?

Was action taken as recommended? If not, why not?

What other mitigating factors occurred when action was being taken?

At what stage in the process did the issue involve the media?

What communication tools were used?

How do you know if the tools selected were effective?

What would you do differently?

Sign-off:
Date:

Destination: Head of Communications, executive

Responsibility:

Issue Manager with members of issue team is responsible for:
evaluating the approach/effectiveness of the organization's handling of issues

Frequency: after strategic action has been taken on high priority issues

Objective: to provide a structure for assessing how effectively a given issue was handled—from identification to resolution; a formal communications feedback loop

(Organization's Name) – Long-term Strategic Issue Management

Intelligence Summary
Longer-term structured feedback: to be phased-in over 12 months

Corporate Communications Strategy

Destination: business units, CEO and Board Chair

Responsibility:
Head of communications, with involvement of appropriate staff

Frequency: as required

Objective: to provide strategic communications on corporate initiatives. Priority attention should be given to those projects in which there is a high likelihood for issues to arise

Crisis Communications Plan

Destination: Executive, for distribution and review with business unit staff

Responsibility:
Design: Head of Communications, CEO and Chair
Maintenance: assistants to Chair and CEO

Frequency: quarterly updates and annual review

Objective:
To clearly delineate roles and responsibilities for the organization should a crisis arise that affects not only organization's existence but also the larger community.

(Organization's Name) - All Staff Issue Bulletin

Date: **Issue:**

Area Affected: **Issue identified by:**

Organization's Position:

Action taken to date:

Organization's Statements:

Organization's Spokesperson and Contact numbers:

Other information available:

Key contact(s):

Destination: All staff

Responsibility:

Issue Manager is responsible for:
• completing the template with co-operation/input from issue management team(s)
• communications staff: distributing to all staff

Frequency: In response to an Issue Alert or Issue Briefing Note or a call from staff precipitating corporate action

Objective: To provide staff with time-sensitive and valuable information regarding corporate positions and statements on items of public and organizational importance and interest

Crisis Management—Being Prepared

Background

Being prepared means acting more effectively should a crisis arise. Forward thinking governments and organizations put in place crisis management plans BEFORE things happen.

In this way, staff and external stakeholders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Players are able to focus exclusively on the crisis, its management, resolution and follow-up.

Crisis management plans operate outside the normal structure of an organization. The plan is framed around a CORE crisis management team comprised of senior staff able to make decisions and access information and allocate resources effectively.

An EXPANDED crisis management team includes people with key information or resources. The crisis management plan identifies the people and the resources the organization thinks it will need. The expanded team is NOT determined by title or seniority.

Effective crisis management relies on being well prepared and briefed about roles and responsibilities. Once a final version of the crisis management plan is in place, all staff will be briefed about how and where they fit in the overall process.

When managing in a crisis situation, it is important that those roles and responsibilities are executed effectively and that information flows as efficiently as possible. Therefore, once an organization has launched its crisis management plan, normal reporting relationships DO NOT play a role in how information is exchanged.

Crisis Management Tools

- **database:** of critical people and information, updated every two months

- **corporate information kit:** for use by media: to include a succinct explanation of the organization, its priorities, corporate structure and photos of senior staff and board chair

- **crisis management team:** is composed of key staff able to provide information and advice to the CEO; each member of the team has a clearly defined role.

- **team backup and support:** physical needs for ensuring that crisis management operates efficiently

- **operational guidelines:** a clearly understood and agreed-upon process for receiving information, for making decisions and for crafting and releasing statements

- **spokesperson:** a trained communications staff member who can effectively and authoritatively speak for the organization

- **communications systems:** notification system; information flow—internal and external

- **media relations:** integrated media decisions for selecting appropriate communications medium or media and for scheduling, co-ordinating and logging interviews

- **pre-assessed and ranked audiences:** who needs to hear first? what will they want to know? what are the most effective mechanisms for getting that information to them?

Crisis Management—Detailed Elements

Database—information access, entry and update (co-ordinated by Executive Assistant to CEO and Communications Assistant) Key information needs to be updated every two months.

Corporate information kit—(prepared and updated by Issue Manager/Senior Writer) to include:

• corporate description, mandate and mission
• excerpts from most recent business plan re: priorities, directions, past successes
• black & white photos of Chair of Board/CEO
• list of corporate PR videos and document available and their location

Crisis management team: can involve different numbers of people depending on the nature of the crisis; those people designated as part of the team should understand their role, the basic function of the team and crisis communications AND should delegate a substitute. Each location should have its own team with decision-making authority.

Crisis team chairperson: senior manager, strong leader, understands corporate culture; responsible for bringing team together/managing meetings.

CEO (corporate consideration) and Chair (board perspective): must absorb information and make key decisions; may also function as spokesperson depending on the nature of crisis; should concentrate on information rather than managing the meeting.

Senior management: Communications, Comptroller, Policy and Planning, Regional Director(s), Systems— must evaluate information, receive counsel from mangers and make decisions based on what is known about the scope and nature of the crisis.

Staff and line managers as required: provide expertise and advice needed to make decisions.

Team back-up and support:

(coordination required between communications assistant and executive assistants to CEO and Chair)

• designated meeting room with speaker phone PLUS separate line for incoming and outgoing calls [communications assistant + building ops.]

• flip charts, markers, masking tape (communications assistant]

• TV/VCR; radio with AM & FM; tape recorder [communications assistant]

• up-to-date copies of ALL corporate organizational charts [executive assistants/HR]

• copies of site blueprints [building ops.—designate location in all offices]

• names of ALL employees at EVERY regional office [executive assistants + HR]

• fact sheets on each regional office [senior writer and communications counsels]

• contact lists [executive assistant-CEO]

• secretarial support and messengers [executive assistants-Chair & CEO]

• food (communications assistant)

• stand-by access to possible external advisors and key partners (issue manager and executive—contact lists)

Operational guidelines:

[procedures for development, consult with executive assistant CEO, communications and systems]

• call-screening: only calls related to the crisis get through to the crisis management centre

• information validation: information should be verified and passed to CEO; written confirmation should follow by fax

• active involvement versus on call

Spokespeople: predetermined and coordinated by Head of Communications

• look for: articulate, knowledgeable, presentable, clear thinkers, able to 'think-on-

their feet', speak under pressure, command respect

• remember: people want to hear from 'the person in charge'

• make SURE everyone knows who the OFFICIAL spokesperson is

• media performance training

Communications systems: developed by Head of Communications

• coordinator of information flow in-and-out; briefing the spokesperson (Head of Communications)

• direct links from crisis site to crisis management team—people with critical information DO NOT need to follow traditional hierarchical models of communication

• who collects information

• who is the internal spokesperson? who regularly tells staff what is happening and at what frequency? who has high degree of credibility in organization. vis-à-vis staff relations?

• who is the external spokesperson? who has been pre-designated based on the nature of the crisis at hand? should have more than one at the VP level

• who is in charge of communication facility and hardware needs (communications assistant + executive assistants to CEO and Chair)

Media relations: [assistant head of communications] responsible for making strategic decisions regarding media selection

Pre-assessed and ranked audiences: [issue manager] internal and external communications; sensitivity of stakeholders

Management Committee—for discussion with staff and return to Communications

What kinds of crises can this organization expect to deal with?

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Who should we talk to if there is a crisis?

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Facility Data

General Information

Business name

Regional name

Address, main phone

City, Province, Postal Code

Fax number, email address, Web site

Regional Director:

Home phone, Cell phone

Home Address

City, Province, Postal Code

Assistant Regional Director:

Home Phone, Cell Phone

Home Address

City, Province, Postal Code

Business Information:

Describe principal activity performed in regional office

No. of employees

No. of vehicles, type of vehicle

Size of facility: Property, hectares, building(s), sq. meters

Historical Background

Year office opened: Previous building use:

Major modifications, Year(s)

Past incidents, Month, Year

News Media Lists

Newspapers

Publication _____ phone _____ fax _____

Address _____

City/Town_____ Province _____ Postal Code_____

Managing Editor _____ City Editor_____

Publisher _____Key Reporters_____

Type: ☐daily ☐ weekly ☐ other   if daily ☐ morning ☐ evening

if weekly or other, publication day(s) _____

Circulation _____ Coverage Area _____

Publication _____ phone _____ fax _____

Address _____

City/Town_____ Province _____ Postal Code_____

Managing Editor _____ City Editor_____

Publisher _____Key Reporters_____

Type: ☐daily ☐ weekly ☐ other   if daily ☐ morning ☐ evening

if weekly or other, publication day(s) _____

Circulation _____ Coverage Area _____

News Media Lists

Radio

Station Type ☐ AM ☐ FM

Dial position _____Phone _____Fax _____

Address_____

City/Town_____ Province _____ Postal Code_____

News Director _____ Key Reporters _____

News Broadcast times _____

National/International _____

Station Format _____Signal Strength_____watts

Coverage Area _____

Station Type ☐ AM ☐ FM

Dial position _____Phone _____Fax _____

Address_____

City/Town_____ Province _____ Postal Code_____

News Director _____ Key Reporters _____

News Broadcast times _____

National/International _____

Station Format _____Signal Strength_____watts

Coverage Area _____

News Media Lists

Television

Station_____Network_____

Dial position _____Phone _____Fax _____

Address_____

City/Town_____ Province _____ Postal Code_____

Assignment Director_____ Key Reporters _____

News Broadcast times _____

Coverage Area _____ Live Coverage ☐ YES
☐ NO

Station_____Network_____

Dial position _____Phone _____Fax _____

Address_____

City/Town_____ Province _____ Postal Code_____

Assignment Director_____ Key Reporters _____

News Broadcast times _____

Coverage Area _____ Live Coverage ☐ YES
☐ NO

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS
- National Government, local offices

Ministry	Name/Title	Address	Office Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS
- Provincial/State Government, local offices

Ministry	Name/Title	Address	Office Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS
- Municipal/Local Government

	Name	Address	Office Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone
MAYOR					
Councillor					
Councillor					
Councillor					
Councillor					
Councillor					
Councillor					
Clerk					
Fire Chief					
Deputy Fire Chief					
Police Chief					
Deputy Police Chief					

GOVERNMENT CONTACTS
- Local Administration

	Name	Address	Office Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone
Operations Mgr., Facility					
Manager of Social Services					
Operations Mgr., Infrastructure					
Emergency Co-ordinator					

PARTNER CONTACTS

Affiliation	Name/Title	Address	Office Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone

PERSONNEL DIRECTORY
- Corporate Operations

	Name/Title	Address	Office Phone	Home Phone	Cell Phone
Board Director					
Board Director					
Mgr., Human Resources					
Mgr., Systems					
Mgr., (Other)					
Executive, CEO					
Executive, Chair					
Executive, VP					
Communications					
Comptroller					
Crisis Mgnt. Team					
Affiliates					

* Repeat for each physical/geographical locations