

Basic City Communications

Utah Association for Government Communications



Introductions

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- Maridene Hancock – Draper City
- Trina Duerksen – Sandy City
- Nicole Martin – Herriman City
- Chip Dawson – South Jordan City



Utah Association for Government Communications

- All levels of government welcome
- Established in 2008
- Focus on helping each city/group find real-world solutions to their communications issues
- Meet every other month



Basic City Communications

- Listen
- Have a Person and a Plan
- Know Your Audience
- Your Message Matters
- Bringing it All Together – Draper Flooding & Landslides



Listen

- Communication is a verb.
- Listen as well as speak.
- Perception is everything.
- Those “ity” bitty things make a BIG difference:
 - Credibility
 - Dependability
 - Accessibility
 - Confidentiality
 - Flexibility



Listen

- Ask your residents how they want you to communicate with them:
 - Online surveys – fast and cheap
 - Focus groups – costly, data rich
 - Telephone surveys – fast, costly, data rich
 - Informal surveys with neighbors
 - How do other community groups (PTA, Little League, church groups) communicate?
 - Remember to think outside the box. Would “you” listen to “you?”
- Latest technology = free
 - Blogs, Facebook, Twitter
 - Great way to monitor what the public is truly “saying”

Listen



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phone: 216.371.8600 / email: ft@funnytimes.com



Listen

- Communication with your media partners is two-way
- Find out the best way to “cater” to their world:
 - Deadlines
 - Formats
 - “Feature” stories
 - Communication is internal too! No duplication or absence of messages.



A Person

- Find a Communications *Champion* in your city.
- Devote time and resources to your communications program.



A Person



**"BUGS'
BONNETS"**

- May have other responsibilities that blend into communications.

The Plan: Evaluate



- Brutally honest assessment of your city's communications.



The Plan: Evaluate

- Identify assets

- Website

- Press release

- Reader boards

- Social media

- Networking

- Newsletter

- Utility bill inserts

- Video equipment

- Email



The Plan: Audience

“Residents don’t always agree with the position that a city takes on issues, but more than anything they want access to the information and as much transparency as possible.”

- Start with small steps knowing residents will appreciate the effort!



The Plan: Written

- Develop a simple written plan to improve three areas of your communications.
 - Goals
 - Target Audience
 - Research
 - Message
 - Spokespeople
 - News hooks
 - Communications Channels
 - Deliverables
 - Track and Evaluate



The Plan: Tips

- Don't get lost in metrics right away
- Be patient! Some communications strategies take a while to develop – months, years to see results.
- Take baby steps. Identify three areas of improvement.
- Develop short and long term goals



The Plan: Support

- Obtain Buy-In for your plan:
 - Elected officials
 - Other departments
 - Residents
- Tell your story with consistency and variety.



Know Your Audience

- "Customers"
 - Residents
 - Businesses
- Media



Know Your Audience

- Know your residents and businesses
 - What are your community's values?
 - What are the big stories or issues in your community that your "customers" need or want to know about?
 - How do your residents and businesses communicate?
 - Use appropriate tools to reach different groups
 - What is the demographic breakdown of your community?
 - Age, ethnicity, etc. will all affect the way you communicate with your "customers"



Know Your Audience

- Know your media
 - Biggest question communications people get asked – How do I build a relationship with local media?
 - Realize first that it IS a relationship – and it needs time and nurturing.
 - The media secretly wants to help you – they believe in transparency and sunshine more than government.



Know Your Audience

- Visit newsrooms and studios
- Build relationships with reporters
 - Lunch meetings
 - Regular communications
- Meet with editors
 - Ask how you can help them do their job better.
- With recent media staffing changes , they will be looking more and more for content your city can help develop.



Know Your Audience

- Let the past be the past.
 - The media makes mistakes. So do cities. Let it go.
- Avoid divisive policies
 - “I don’t speak to KWLD anymore” or “You must submit all questions via email” is a way to get nobody to talk to you.
- Invite media to all of your events and meetings. They may not come at first, but they will come.



Know Your Audience

- Help your Communications Champion to know that they are to be a resource, not a roadblock for media.
- Ask media for their feedback
 - “What do you think our city does well? What could we improve on? What do you hear from residents?”
- Recognize when the media help you out. Thank them.



Your Message Matters

- “Accurate information” is telling information in a way that is:
 - Understandable by residents.
 - Relatable to lives of residents.
 - Demonstrates the impact of city/town projects in residents lives.
- Translation: Your message has to be all about your residents.



A Story About a Mountain of Dirt

Once upon a time in a far away land called "South Jordan" there was a massive 100 foot high pile of dirt that was dug up in a neighborhood...



A Story About a Mountain of Dirt



7.5 Million Gallon Water Storage Tank and Oquirrh Park Improvements

EXPECTED COMPLETION: Fall 2010

CONTACT: Engineering 801-254-3742

Elected and Appointed Officials:

Mayor W. Kent Money
Council Member Brian Butters
Council Member Kathie Johnson
Council Member Larry Short
Council Member Aleta Taylor
Council Member Leona Winger
City Manager John Geilmann





What Does This Sign Tell Residents?

- What's the message?
- There's a 7.5 Million Gallon water tank going in.
- Something about a park.
- Expected completion season.
- How to contact engineering.
- Who to blame, i.e., City Council and Mayor.



What's Missing In the Message?

- Why would the city build such a tank?
- What does this tank do for residents?
- How is going to be paid for?
- What if I have questions, who should I call?
- What kind of water will it store?
- When is the dirt going away?
- Which month in Fall of 2010 will it be finished?
- Who does the city think they are?

MAKING *Life*
BETTER

Underground Water Tank Project

About the Project:

- Increases the ability to store drinking water for emergencies protecting your family in a disaster.
- Provides adequate pressure for fire hydrants in an emergency.
- Allows South Jordan to buy water at off-peak rates, thus saving residents money.
- When the water tank is completed, the area above ground will be turned into a park.

Completion Date: August 2010

Project 90 % complete

Want to know how many million gallons of water this tank will hold?

Visit

www.sjc.utah.gov
for the answer.



SOUTH JORDAN
U T A H





What Does This Message Say?

- Tells you the month and year project will finish.
- Tells you how far along the project has progressed.
- Tells residents that this will keep the cost of culinary water low.
- Tells residents we can store water for emergencies and fire fighting.
- The tank will be totally hidden from view and covered by a brand new park.



What Does This Message Not Say?

- Doesn't talk about how this project was viewed favorably by entities that rate water bonds.
- Doesn't talk about how this is a unique non circular tank design.
- Doesn't talk cost.



Your Messages Matter

- What's the moral of the story?
- In planning your messages and information you put out to residents – the focus has to be on how things affect their lives.
- In your communications plan look at your regular messages and ask how the message can be improved to reflect this concept.

Sample Messages

- “Road Closed – Construction – Seven Days”
- Instead: “We’re making a better road for you in a week”.
- “Your Tax Dollars at Work”
- Instead: “We’re making some improvements for our residents”.





Crisis Communications

- Or as we call it in the communications business –
- “When the fertilizer hits the spinning blade”
- Your crisis will come. Trust us.
- You need to have a plan in place before it happens.



Crisis Communications

- What could possibly go wrong?
 - **Facilities Crisis** – damage to public facilities, businesses or homes by explosion, fire, flood, debris flow, gas leak, earthquake or other natural disaster.
 - **Community Crisis** – adverse condition created by the organization or outside organizations hostile to the agency or its mission.
 - **Elected Official or Employee Crisis** – loss of life, embarrassing situation, legal action, sexual misconduct, contentious political campaigns.



Crisis Communications

- What could possibly go wrong?
 - Consumer Crisis – defective city service, environmental concern, contracts that cannot be met or an allegation against your agency.
 - Image Crisis – how others outside the community perceive the community.



Crisis Communications

- Assemble your crisis communications team
 - City legal counsel
 - City manager
 - Emergency manager
 - Elected officials as warranted
 - Communications champion
 - Appropriate department heads

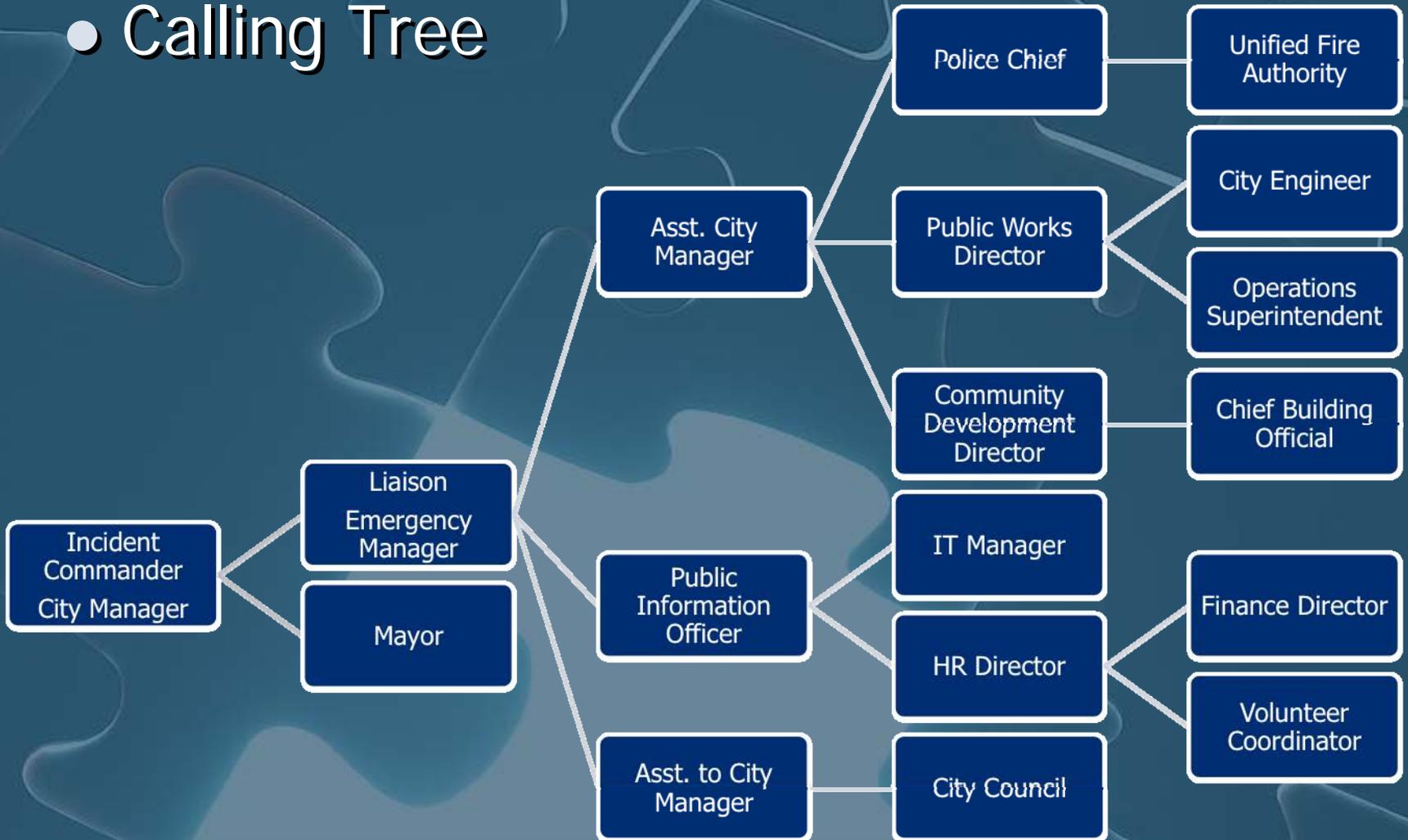


Crisis Communications

- Your Plan Should Include:
 - Designate ONE media contact, assign trained back-up assistance
 - Create a phone tree with contact phone numbers for everyone on team
 - Clear any public information through City Manager and Legal
 - Plan a drill to practice your emergency/crisis plan before the real thing happens (and it could be today!)

Crisis Communications

● Calling Tree



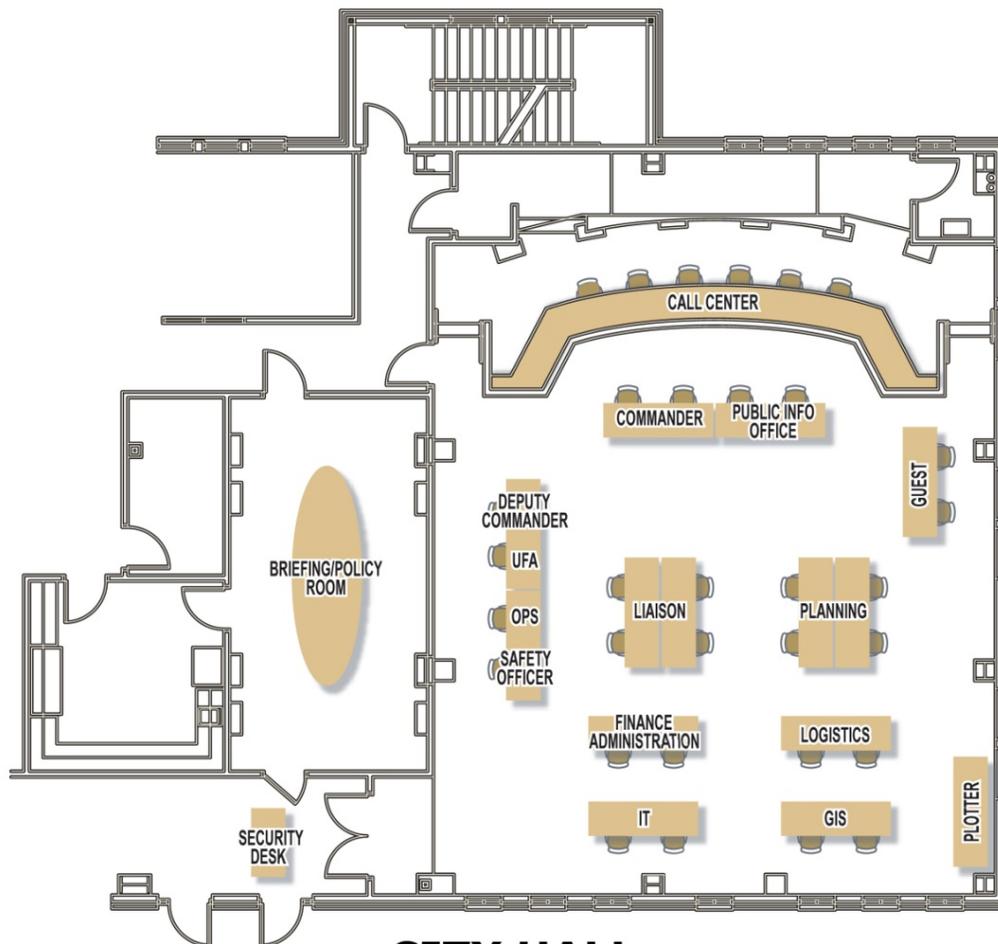


- Emergency Operation Center



DRAPER CITY

Emergency Operation Center
1020 E Pioneer Road



CITY HALL
COUNCIL CHAMBERS



Crisis Communications – Draper Storm August 19, 2010



- 11:15 am
 - Call received from National Weather Service.
 - Police, Fire and Public Works staff put on alert.
- 11:40 am
 - Flash Flood Warning issued.
 - Emergency notifications sent to residents near the Corner Canyon burn scar area.
 - Public Works crews sent to hillside to watch for flood areas.
 - Eight pallets of sand bags ready to go.



Crisis Communications

- 11:45 am
 - The storm started.
- 11:54 am
 - Storm drains were overflowing.





Crisis Communications

- 12:05 pm
 - First call from a resident reporting flooding.
 - City Hall also experiencing flooding.





Crisis Communications

- 12:15 pm First debris flow reported from Cherry Creek.
- Draper City activates its Emergency Operation Center.





Crisis Communications

- 12:32 pm
 - Manhole covers are blown off and flooding reported throughout Draper.
- 12:37 pm
 - Pavement on 12300 South has lifted and a sinkhole has developed.
 - Press releases sent to the media and information posted on the Draper web site.





Crisis Communications

- During a 2-hour time period, the Emergency Call Center at City Hall responded to 75 calls from residents reporting flooding, mud, and debris flows.
- The National Weather Service reported that Draper received 1.2" of rain in a 20-30 minute time period. They rated this as a 30-year event.



Crisis Communications

- Clean-up after the storm





Crisis Communications





Crisis Communications

- Don't "spin" information – "The Mayor was merely avoiding the police because he thought they were pursuing someone else."
- Assist the media with their story, do not say "No comment"
- Monitor media accounts so you can quickly correct errors.
- It is the Communication Champion's job to defend the city and turn any negative information into a positive.
- Get a feel for the timeline – will this be resolved in days or months?
- Follow-up with the news media and report preventative actions that were taken after the crisis ended.



Crisis Communications





Questions and Answers

- What's going on in your community?
- How can we help?
- What keeps you up at night?