

PRECISION POLICING DURING COVID-19

Strategic Communication Checklist for Pandemic

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Law enforcement can instill calm and a sense of safety and security in a community when fear is dominating. Historically, this type of leadership has emerged during controversial critical incidents, but we are all learning how necessary this is during our current national health crisis. This document outlines the necessary steps for law enforcement to take to guide, comfort, and inform its community during a pandemic.



1 IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The most affected or high-risk demographics will vary based on the specifics of the pandemic.

2 IDENTIFY COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The agency should research effective platforms for reaching the most affected audience. These should be added to the typical channels used to reach the broader public.

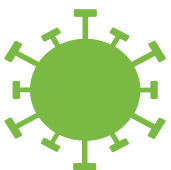


3 DEVELOP MESSAGING CONTENT

It is important for the agency to project strength and leadership while still showing compassion and concern.

Draft Messages

Draft messages that can be quickly edited to ensure the rapid release of information when a crisis strikes, such as safety protocols in place during a critical incident, or pandemic preparedness during civil unrest.



4 CREATE AWARENESS OF THE PANDEMIC

Support health officials' efforts to inform the community of the issue. Communicate with the internal audience to answer questions and keep officers focused on the mission.

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PROVIDE REASSURANCE AND DISCREDIT FALSE INFORMATION

External Communications

Provide general health guidance so people know how to protect themselves. Tell the community how the pandemic will affect police services, with specific direction about what community members should do if they have an emergency or delayed incident to report.

Internal Communications

Shift internal communication to specific steps the agency is taking to protect officers and employees. Explain any changes to police services and altered duties. Provide detailed instructions on how officers should address individuals not following the orders of the local, state, or national government. Agencies must be consistent in their operations and messaging. Keep officers and employees up to date on personal matters such as time off, changes to schedules, overtime, etc.



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COMMUNICATE A UNIFIED AND CONSISTENT MESSAGE

Coordinate messaging with the mayor or city manager. Include local officials in some messaging.

7

BE OPEN AND TRANSPARENT

Inform the community of how the agency is affected, such as the number of officers who are ill or quarantined and the need for personal protective equipment.

8

CONDUCT REGULAR UPDATES

While law enforcement is not the primary source of information during a pandemic, it still plays an important role in keeping people informed and reassured.

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BE AGILE WITH MESSAGING

Be prepared to adapt messaging quickly as the medical community learns more about the pandemic.



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PROVIDE REASSURANCE AND DISCREDIT FALSE INFORMATION



Distribute Factual Information

Distribute factual information to external and internal audiences to refute rumors and misinformation.

Share videotaped messages from experts, medical professionals, health department professionals, or emergency management personnel.

Inform the Community

Inform the community of wellness checks that the agency is conducting on high-risk community members.

This could be achieved via a phonebank or home visits, depending on the size of the city and agency.

Highlight Partnerships

Highlight partnerships to instill confidence with both external and internal audiences.

Conduct media and public briefings with key stakeholders, such as the fire department, emergency management, hospitals, health department, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, schools, and more.

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UPLIFT DISCOURAGED COMMUNITY MEMBERS

People can become discouraged and depressed during a prolonged crisis. The department should use social media and other platforms to highlight good news in the community during a difficult time.



Thank Community Members

Thank community members for donated food. Highlight the selfless actions of medical personnel or other key stakeholders who are at risk during the crisis. Share acts that show appreciation for medical personnel or other groups helping the community. Conduct a question-and-answer session with a local psychologist about how to manage the stress brought on by dramatic changes to daily life. Share positive messaging from partners and other community members.

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LOCAL ORDINANCES SUCH AS MASK REQUIREMENTS



Safety Ordinance Passed

If the local government passes a safety ordinance such as a mask mandate, the agency should develop an educational campaign to encourage compliance and ensure public safety.

This should include social media messaging, story development with the local media, and video messages from the agency and/or political leaders.

The same key messages should be shared with officers and employees.

Misinformation and rumors can be very distracting from the mission during a pandemic. Keeping employees informed and focused is critical for morale and consistency of operations.

Transitions to Enforcement

If the agency transitions from education to enforcement, a second campaign telling the community that the department is shifting to enforcement is needed, emphasizing community safety and the obligation of all residents to participate, in the same way, that residents are expected to follow all laws involving community safety.

This should engage all possible communication channels: social media, local media, video distribution, and the agency website.

A detailed operational plan for enforcing a safety ordinance should be developed and shared through the normal internal channels, such as roll calls. The public information officer should use this operational plan to develop the internal message which would be similar but less detailed. Officers and employees should hear the information from multiple channels to reduce false information from taking root.



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VACCINES

Even though the agency is not a source of vaccines, it should still use its communication channels to share information about where people can obtain a vaccine. If the agency is successful in establishing itself as a source of information, then community members will turn to the department for direction during a crisis. Sharing this information can also help temper heightened emotions.

This checklist is not meant to be exhaustive; rather it is a set of strategies which we have found to be useful over years of experience working with agencies across the country and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you or your agency would benefit from more information, please reach out to Jessica Dockstader at dockstaderj@cna.org