

Your Nonprofit's Crisis Response Team: What, Why, When, Who and How

What is a Crisis Response Team & when do you need one?

A cross-functional, action-oriented Crisis Response Team (CRT) will help your leadership and staff more effectively and nimbly respond to any crisis facing your agency. You should pull together a CRT anytime your agency faces an unpredicted crisis or emergency. There are three levels of crisis and three kinds of CRTs:

Level	Type	Description	Examples	Crisis Response Team Typically Needed
Level 1	Limited Crisis	Any incident, potential or actual, that will not seriously affect the overall functional capacity of your agency but does require some degree of action.	A major leak in your roof during the rainy season.	LIMITED CRT TEAM, usually within a single department within your agency.
Level 2	Issue-Driven Crisis	Any issue or situation that will negatively impact your agency, that could potentially cause severe damage or interruption to your operations.	A hate crime targeting your agency or a policy change that will terminate a major source of revenue.	PARTIAL CRT TEAM typically involving several departments within your agency and usually the CEO/ED or representative.
Level 3	Major Crisis	An incident posing major risk to your clients, staff, volunteers or resources. A Level 3 crisis may develop from situations that began at a Level 1 or Level 2.	An earthquake, major civil disturbance, acts of terrorism, a global pandemic.	FULL CRT TEAM with representatives from board, CEO/ED and staff leaders from across the organization.

Who should be on your Crisis Response Team?

- ❖ Ask yourself these questions:
 - What level of crisis are we facing?
 - What are the key functions of my agency that will be impacted by this crisis?
 - Who should be at the table representing that function?
- ❖ In most nonprofits, members of a *full CRT* will include the CEO/ED, Board president/chair, Treasurer and staff members who are responsible for:
 - Operations/Human Relations
 - Finance
 - Fundraising/Development
 - Communications/Public Relations
 - Programs/Services
 - Facilities/Technology
- ❖ Consider adding the agency's attorney, as some decisions you make will have legal implications.

5 reasons a CRT is important

Creates a process for leadership to constantly evaluate new information/situations throughout the crisis.

Keeps leaders focused on priority tasks.

Ensures that agency leaders are coordinating efforts, rather than working in silos, throughout the crisis.

Enables leaders to quickly make better, more unified and more informed decisions.

Helps leaders manage strong emotions (including their own) during a crisis.

What is the role of a Crisis Response Team?

The exact work of a Crisis Response Team (CRT) will vary, depending on the level of the crisis. *At your first meeting, spend 5 minutes agreeing on your CRT's goals.* In most nonprofits, the role/goals of a CRT in a Level 3 crisis will include:

- A. Determine the nature and scope of the crisis.
- B. Protect health and safety of clients, volunteers and staff.
- C. Coordinate a mission-focused, cross-functional agency response.
- D. Determine and authorize program closures and resumptions.
- E. Deploy resources and temporarily assign staff to perform emergency work.
- F. Coordinate communications with all agency stakeholders.
- G. Minimize loss, damage or disruption to the agency's facilities, resources and operations.
- H. Take action to procure and allocate necessary resources.
- I. Monitor and evaluate conditions throughout the crisis.
- J. Lead scenario planning and ensure the agency is prepared for any scenario.
- K. Plan and prioritize long term recovery.

Worksheet

1. **What crisis level are we facing?**
2. **Which key organizational functions will be impacted by this crisis?**
3. **Who should represent each function and, therefore, needs to be a member of our Crisis Response Team?**
4. **What are our Crisis Response Team goals?**
5. **Who would make a good facilitator and secretary for our CRT?**

Annotated agenda for a Crisis Response Team meeting

1) Support & care

- a) This has to be brief (*no more* than 1 min. per person) but you can't skip it. Always put your own oxygen mask on before you help your seatmate.
- b) Here is one suggestion for this part of the meeting:
 - i) Ask each person to identify which "zone" they're in at the moment and why: Green Zone (doing pretty good), Yellow Zone (feeling cautiously optimistic), Orange Zone (feeling very anxious) or Red Zone (freaking out).
 - ii) Everyone listens but no one interrupts, asks questions or tries to solve it. This is a space for each person to let everyone else know where they're coming from and name it, which can serve to take its power away, and give everyone an opportunity to focus in on the issues at hand.

2) Identify the 2-5 TOP PRIORITIES and the "FIRE OF THE DAY"

- a) There may have been several fires identified in the opening part of the meeting and the team may identify more than 5 issues that need to be addressed.
- b) Once everyone has had a chance to put "their" issue on the list, look for consensus about what the top priorities and the "Fire of the Day" are.
- c) If there is no clear consensus, ask each person to write down what they think the FIRE and the top 3 priorities are. Add up the votes. Focus there.

Simple Agenda
How can we take care of each other?
What are our Top Priorities today & is there a Fire that needs to be put out?
What "NEXT STEPS" can we take & who is responsible for doing it?
What do we need to tell our stakeholders?

3) Make a plan

- a) What is the "next step" (REPEAT: Just the "next step"!) you can take in addressing the Fire of the Day and each priority issue?
- b) Who is the point person for each action going to be?
- c) What, if anything, does each point person need to get it done?

4) Communication Strategy

- a) Is there a need for any internal or external statements? Decide that now and assign a point person (if you don't have a Communications Director) to get it done.

Suggestions for team meetings

1) Appoint a facilitator.

- a) Your facilitator may not be the CEO/ED or even have positional leadership within the organization. They *do* need the skills and temperament to be able to do the following:
 - i) Help the team follow the agenda and maintain calm and kindness throughout the meeting.
 - ii) Ask helpful and clarifying questions, especially in identifying top priorities and the Fire.
 - iii) Ensure that there are next steps and a point person identified for each priority issue and the Fire.
 - iv) Follow up with the point persons to make sure they have what they need to get their work done.
- b) It may be helpful to have an outside facilitator.

2) Appoint a secretary.

- a) Again, this person may not have positional leadership. They *do* need the skills and temperament to:
 - i) Take careful notes to document the top priorities and Fire, Next Steps and point person for each next step.
 - ii) Distribute these notes to each member of the team.

3) Frequency & duration of meetings

- a) Meet at least 2x per week throughout the crisis but try to keep your meetings to no more than 1 hour. Everybody is busy. Be brief and stay focused on what you can DO to respond to the crisis.