

## Emergent Situations

This plan outlines the ACSTA's communications protocol for responding to emergent and/or crisis situations, which include events or allegations which require immediate and coordinated action because they may impede the ACSTA from achieving its strategic priorities, and/or threaten the reputation, integrity or survival of the ACSTA.<sup>1</sup>

## Intent

This plan positions the ACSTA to respond quickly and effectively as a proactive, coordinated, transparent and trusted community leader – the voice of publicly funded Catholic education in Alberta, Northwest Territories and Yukon. It is intended to be used as a template which ACSTA leadership can complete in each individual situation that arises, with responses appropriate to the situation.

## Guiding Principles

Be honest and transparent - This can take courage, especially if mistakes have been made. As the trusted voice of public Catholic education in Alberta, honesty is essential.

Be thorough - Gather all the facts possible, as quickly as possible.

Be timely - Do not sit on new information, or new developments. Release these ASAP.

Be everywhere - Release information and updates as widely as possible and appropriate.

Be prepared - Use this plan before and during an emergent situation.

## Objectives

1. Provide staff and board members with clearly defined roles, responsibilities and duties in these situations to mitigate crisis and/or serious repercussions.
2. Manage message development and information flow both internally and externally, through clearly-defined channels.
3. Maintain and enhance the ACSTA's reputation and understood value.

## Action Plan

Details for each step, including roles, duties and timelines, are listed in the Action Plan Steps Chart on page 4.

### Step 1: Anticipate emergent situations

Use board meetings to brainstorm upcoming situations or events which may require an emergent response.

### Step 2: Prepare information-release details in advance

The Executive Director should have an up-to-date list/file of all media and social media contacts, all avenues for internal information dissemination, and contact information channels for specific stakeholders such as parents, or teachers.

### Step 3: Identify the Crisis Communications Team (CCT)

A CCT is created for 'larger' emergent or crisis situations. It ensures there is consistency in your response, and that there will be several points of view considered with each decision, both pre- and post-event.

### Step 4: Gather the facts

Your CCT must be aware of all the facts of the situation, potential new developments, and be kept aware of updates.

### Step 4: Identify your spokespersons

These are the only people who will respond publicly to the situation.

### Step 5: Develop your key messages

Ensure these are clear, concise and there is a maximum of THREE. See key messages info sheet at the end of this document.

### Step 6: Inform your internal and external audiences

Update often, as new information develops. Be transparent and honest.

### Step 7: On-going fact gathering

New developments are shared with the CCT immediately, to ensure consistency of understanding and information delivery.

### Step 8: Evaluation

Action Plan Steps

STEP 1	RESPONSIBLE	DUTIES	WHEN TO DO THIS
Anticipate emergent situations	Executive Director, Board of Directors	Plan regularly scheduled opportunities to discuss upcoming events/situations which may require a crisis response. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In each situation consider the best-case and worst-case scenarios.</li> <li>2. Determine proactive steps you can take to mitigate.                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Determine appropriateness of advance media and social media notification and responses (noting the ACSTA will comment when the event occurs).</li> <li>i. If advance notification is used, implement Steps 4,&amp; 5 before you start disseminating information.</li> <li>ii. During and after the event itself, implement Steps 3 through 8.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	At every board meeting.
<b>Step 1 A</b> Brainstorm possible crisis scenarios	Executive Director, board of directors	** this is a widely-recommended exercise, as it prepares you for potential for issues, and the complexity involved in dealing with each.  Use one board meeting to brainstorm possible crisis scenarios. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Break up into groups of 2 or 3, each comes up with one scenario</li> </ol> Review at least one (or potentially each) scenario, and run it through steps 3,4,& 5 to get a sense of all there is to be done.	In the first year of a new board (after the election)  In a challenging political climate

STEP 2	RESPONSIBLE	DUTIES	WHEN TO DO THIS
Prepare information-release details in advance	Executive Director	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In one place, that is easy to find and in a format that is easy to understand, maintain:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) up-to-date media and social media contact info</li> <li>b) Internal communications contact info. How is this best done during emergencies?</li> <li>c) Contact info for key stakeholders (parents, teachers, government)</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Know the social media landscape well (sites, chat rooms, or other places where potentially damaging material could appear) or know who you can hire to help you in an emergent situation. I.e. generating keywords and optimizing your info release for these.</li> </ol>	Update the lists annually in October.

STEP 3	RESPONSIBLE	DUTIES	WHEN TO DO THIS
Identify the Crisis Communications Team (CCT)	Executive Director, Board of Directors  CCT members should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ACSTA Executive Director</li> <li>▪ ACSTA Board Chair</li> <li>▪ Eugenia</li> <li>▪ a board or staff member who can</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Determine how this team will communicate. Text? Email? Group chat? Internal communication tool?                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Ensure each CCT members has a list of all CCT member’s phone numbers and emails.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. The CCT is responsible for                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Developing key messages at the start of the event and updating these as required (see Step 4).</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<b>In advance</b> When you’ve identified an emergent situation on the near horizon, which will require on-going management (not just a news release and an interview).

	<p>provide communications guidance (or a consultant), anyone with special knowledge of the situation.</p>	<p>b) Connecting with ACSTA’s legal department for guidance if necessary.</p> <p>**Remember – some believe ‘no comment’ is generally the preferable response. This can threaten the perception of ACSTA being transparent and trusted.</p> <p>c) Assigning responsibility for decisions re: information release: which person will be responsible for alerting the team to new developments, and for letting the team know these are going to be released internally and externally?</p> <p>d) Managing ACSTA’s information flow: all internal and external communications regarding the event – through the identified spokespeople (see step 6).</p> <p>i. This includes all media interviews, all social media posts and responses, all discussions with external stakeholders such as parents, teachers, government officials, etc. as required.</p> <p>e) Maintaining all evidence and communication records from the start until the event is completely wrapped up.</p> <p>f) Evaluating the ACSTA’s response to the event. See step 7</p> <p>i. How successful were we? Why or why not?</p> <p>ii. What did we learn from this?</p> <p>iii. What could we do better next time?</p>	<p><b>When the unexpected happens</b>                  When an unexpected emergent situation occurs, which could affect ACSTA’s reputation or survival.</p>
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STEP 4	RESPONSIBLE	DUTIES	WHEN TO DO THIS
Identify your spokespersons	CCT	1. These people are the ONLY people who speaks publicly about the situation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All should have had recent media training.</li> <li>• One person should be responsible for social media. They may require additional help monitoring, posting, etc. But the lead person is the only decision maker.</li> <li>• One person should be responsible for traditional media and internal audiences.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ You may require a third person to take responsibility for internal audiences.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	As soon as you know there is a situation ACSTA will have to deal with.

STEP 5	RESPONSIBLE	DUTIES	WHEN TO DO THIS
Develop your key messages	CCT	1. Develop these at the start - as soon as you know there is a situation you'll have to speak to - and as new information unfolds. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you don't have information to release, develop a holding statement, identifying that you're keeping apprised of the situation and will respond as soon as information is available.</li> </ul> 2. Keep them concise and clear. Aim for THREE	In advance where possible, ongoing during the situation, and after the emergent situation has wrapped up

STEP 6	RESPONSIBLE	DUTIES	WHEN TO DO THIS
Keep internal and external audiences informed	CCT	1. Following the steps above will ensure this is timely, transparent and consistent.	As often as there is new information to release.  Note: different types of information can be released using different methods. i.e. For public audiences, smaller updates on social media, larger developments with social and traditional media.

STEP 7	RESPONSIBLE	DUTIES	WHEN TO DO THIS
Ongoing fact gathering	Executive Director, CCT, board members, other ACSTA members who are involved/have knowledge of the event	1. Share the facts with the CCT, and/or board of directors. 2. Update the CCT with new facts immediately. 3. Use the facts pre-emptively when possible; don't be waiting to respond to the latest update. Be the provider of information – the go-to source. 4. Follow-up with the final story, internally and externally (i.e. after all is done, how many affected, or what change is now implemented, or how this change has impacted Alberta students and plans for change because of this)	Ongoing during an emergent situation  One final follow-up

STEP 8	RESPONSIBLE	DUTIES	WHEN TO DO THIS
Evaluation	CCT and board members	1. Evaluate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) How successful were we? Why or why not?</li> <li>b) What did we learn? What new processes/methods/etc. did we learn?</li> <li>c) What could we do better next time? Did we anticipate well? Did we reach all necessary audiences? Did we update as quickly as possible?</li> </ul>	When the situation is dealt with.

### Key Messages

Key messages are the primary thoughts you want people to remember about the situation. IN an emergent situation, key messages would contain important information, as well as what you want people to know about ACSTA’s response and the organization in general.

Your key messages should ensure people’s understanding of the issue and ACSTA: its decisions, strategies and actions, and the value of your work. Consistency is key: no matter who within ACSTA is delivering the message, it comes from ACSTA. A lack of consistent messages from within not only threatens credibility, it looks incompetent and unprofessional.

### Clear and Concise

Aim for three key messages. At least one message should include an example that illustrates the ‘message in action’ – something people will remember. Use plain language. You should supply facts to illustrate your messages as well, if possible. No jargon, and don’t assume people have a background in what you’re telling them.

Key messages are not about ‘spin’ in emergent situations. They are about transmitting the facts of the situation honestly, with compassion where appropriate, and ensuring people understand ACSTA’s position and role.

### when to use them

Your key messages are your home base - the place you always want to come back to in an important conversation.



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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from “Managing Crisis: Risk Management and Crisis Response Planning,” Compassion Capital Fund, [www.strengtheningnonprofits.org/resources/guidebooks/Managing\\_Crisis.pdf](http://www.strengtheningnonprofits.org/resources/guidebooks/Managing_Crisis.pdf)

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