



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,  
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA

## **Crisis Communication Plan**

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority

Jackson County, NC

**FINAL DRAFT – November 13, 2019**

**Adopted Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Last Update:** \_\_\_\_\_

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## Executive Summary

Tourism in Jackson County is a critical part of the economy. With over \$205 million in annual tourism expenditures, 1,890 jobs directly supported, and \$50.87 million in annual worker paychecks supported (according Visit North Carolina Tourism Impact figures FY/18-19), it is of the utmost importance that this industry is not only properly maintained, but also protected.

Although the tourism industry provides many benefits, it can also be vulnerable to many uncontrollable circumstances including both man-made and natural disasters. This is why it is of the utmost importance The Jackson County Tourism Development Authority has a proper and timely crisis communication plan.

It is important to note not all crises are the same and there is no one “perfect” way to handle them. However, in a fluid crisis situation, messages need to constantly be adapted and evaluated to assess the effectiveness of its goal. This plan will provide a framework for how the Jackson County Tourism and Development Authority, along with its affiliates, plans to efficiently and properly handle multiple types of crises.

Crises are typically unpredictable and often reactive measures are utilized rather than proactive measures. That is the reason for the adoption of the following Crisis Communication Plan. The aim of this plan is to have a clear concise message in the event that the unfortunate occurs. It is up to the Tourism Development Authority to protect one of our area's most valuable assets and to ensure our residents enjoy the benefits of a prosperous local economy. The TDA's responsibility is to ensure the safety and enjoyment of our visitors and to indulge them in the best of our local culture and Southern hospitality.

# Introduction

## Aims & Objectives

The purpose of this crisis communication plan is to prepare the JCTDA in planning for, responding to, and recovering from potential crisis events, either natural or man-made. The attempt in this CCP is to protect Jackson County's tourism industry as well as to minimize the impact on the local economy.

This goal will be achieved by utilizing the following objectives:

- Highlight potential crises that would impact local tourism and the tourism economy
- Create collaboration between local authorities, county commissioners, emergency management, tourism businesses, and affected stakeholders to ensure proper and unified messaging during and after crises
- Identify stakeholders and channels of communication
- Identify and utilize proper measures for a timely, unified, and professional response
- Detail the role of JCTDA's Crisis Management Team (CMT)
- Outline a proposed Media Management Plan, including procedures, protocols, holding statements, social media strategies etc.
- Identify who and how to best manage media relationships and communication
- Examine communication efforts as part of a recovery plan

## Defining a Crisis

For the purpose of this plan:

A crisis will be defined as any serious event, perceived or real, that could or has disrupted normal tourism activities or portrays Jackson County tourism operations in a negative public image. The time scope of which includes the immediate to short term. Some samples of a crisis issue or situation include, but are not limited to:

## Natural Disasters Crises

- **Flooding**
- **Landslides**
- **Winter storm**
- Gasoline/Natural resource shortage
- Wild/Forest fires
- Tornado/Straight-line winds

***\*Bolded numbered items are most frequent occurrences according to Jackson County Emergency Management. of likely imminence listed by Todd Dillard, Emergency Mgmt. Director.***

- Naturally Caused Crises
  - Severe animal attack
  - Missing/Killed visitor
  - Waterfall accident/death
- Public Health Crises
  - Infectious Outbreak
  - Air pollutants
  - Food poisoning
  - Hazardous material spill
  - Sewer release
  - Water pollutants
- Man Made Crises
  - Active shooter situation
  - Threat of terrorism
  - Active terrorism
  - Water pollutants harming ecosystem (ex. impacting the fishing industry)
  - Fires affecting downtown buildings/businesses
  - Homicide/body found
- Reputational Crises
  - Extremely negative experience by social influencer/celebrity
  - Police brutality

- Negative racial relations situation
- Negative equality issues (LGBTQ+ community relations)
- Cultural insensitivity
- Political Crises
  - Negatively perceived legislation
  - Controversial development

The diversity and broad scope of potential crisis situations mean that there is no one way to prepare for such an incident. Crises are typically changing and therefore need to be handled delicately. Proper discretion and discernment need to be utilized when determining who is best fit to communicate a particular message. The following tactics are produced for the purpose of reducing the impact of defined crises on Jackson County tourism.

## Member Roles & Responsibilities

### Crisis Management Team

The Crisis Management Team (CMT) needs to be an influential and informed group of community leaders. In the event of a crisis directly affecting the tourism industry, the Executive Director of the TDA will be the immediate point of contact.

Name	Affiliation	E-mail
Nick Breedlove	Jackson County TDA, Executive Director	director@discoverjacksonnc.com
Ann Self	Jackson County TDA, Chairperson	info@villagegreencashiersnc.com
Caleb Sullivan	Jackson County TDA, Sales and Marketing Manager	calebsullivan@discoverjacksonnc.com
Ron Mau	County Commissioner, TDA appointee	ronmau@jacksonnc.org
Deborah Stone	Pineapple PR	dstone@pineapple-pr.com
Melissa Webb	Pineapple PR	mwebb@pineapple-pr.com
Brianna Reid	Pineapple PR	breid@pineapple-pr.com
Julie Spiro	Jackson County Chamber Executive Director	julie@nc-mountains.com



Stephanie Edwards	Cashiers Area Chamber Executive Director	stephanie@cashiersareachamber.com
Todd Dillard	Jackson County Emergency Management	toddillard@jacksonnc.org

## CMT Personal Action Plans

### **TDA Director**

- Handle media inquiries related to tourism
- Work with CMT to determine best course of action.
- Coordinate press conference with CMT when necessary

### **TDA Sales and Marketing Manager**

- Creating social media messaging and website updates for TDA
- Directly assist TDA Director with immediate duties as needed.

### **TDA Chairperson**

- Work with TDA and update on situation.

### **County Commissioner**

- Update County Leadership

### **Pineapple PR Team**

- Create press releases for media

### **Jackson County Chamber of Commerce/Sylva**

- Update and remain in contact with community partners.

### **Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce**

- Update and remain in contact with community partners.

### **Jackson County Emergency Management**

- Update CMT on events as they unfold

## Emergency Meeting Requirements

If the CMT is activated, it will need to be noticed as an emergency meeting. N.C. State law dictates this and the statute is below.

§ 143-318.12. Public notice of official meetings.

(b) If a public body holds an official meeting at any time or place other than a time or place shown on the schedule filed pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, it shall give public notice of the time and place of that meeting as provided in this subsection.

(3) For an emergency meeting, the public body shall cause notice of the meeting to be given to each local newspaper, local wire service, local radio station, and local television station that has filed a written request, which includes the newspaper's, wire services, or station's telephone number, for emergency notice with the clerk or secretary of the public body or with some other person designated by the public body. This notice shall be given either by email, by telephone, or by the same method used to notify the members of the public body and shall be given immediately after notice has been given to those members. This notice shall be given at the expense of the party notified. Only business connected with the emergency may be considered at a meeting to which notice is given pursuant to this paragraph.

## **Contact Lists**

### **Stakeholders**

Local stakeholders are individuals that directly support and accommodate tourism in Jackson County. This includes accommodation, dining, entertainment, emergency services, attractions, local businesses and the general community. In a crisis situation, it is important to assess this list and to determine which entities will be affected by this crisis. Contact information for the Stakeholders is located in an Appendix attached to the CCP.

### **Media**

All media inquiries involving the TDA will be handled by the Director and a response will be formulated by Crisis management team or Director and PR firm, depending on the severity of the issue and conferring with the TDA Board Chair as to the appropriate level of activation that needs to occur. Some situations may require additional coordination with the Sales and Marketing Manager if media inquiries are excessive. If that is the case, all responses will need to be fully approved by the Director or the Board Chair.

### **Press Conferences**

Determination about whether a press conference should be called by the TDA, or if the TDA's presence is merited within another organization's press conference will be decided by the Executive Director.

Nick Breedlove

Director, Jackson County Tourism and Development Authority

Jackson County TDA Administration Office

116 Central Street, Sylva, NC 28779

(828) 848-8711

director@discoverjacksonnc.com

## Media Coordination

The following is the JCTDA media list. These entities may be contacted during a crisis if prompted. This list will likely be expanded due to the scope of the incident.

Media Outlet	Name	E-mail
The Sylva Herald	Carey Phillips	news@thesylvaherald.com
The Sylva Herald	Quintin Ellison	quintin@thesylvaherald.com
Crossroads Chronicle	General	news@crossroadschronicle.com
Crossroads Chronicle	Reporter	reporter@crossroadschronicle.com
Smoky Mountain News	Holly Kays	holly@smokymountainnews.com
Smoky Mountain News	Scott McLeod	info@smokymountainnews.com
Smoky Mountain News	SM News Desk	news@smokymountainnews.com

WRGC	General	info@wrgc.com
Macon News	Brittney Parker	Bparker.maconnews@gmail.com
WLOS	Newsroom	news@wlos.com
WLOS	Rex Hodge	rmhodge@wlos.com

## Key Audiences

Several key audiences need to be prioritized when communicating responses for a crisis or incident affecting tourism in Jackson County. These audiences include:

- Current visitors (and potentially their families elsewhere)
- Potential visitors
- Media
- Local tourism operators
- Local tourism employees
- Local community
- Intrastate travel industry
- Interstate travel industry
- Federal, state, and local governments
- Visit North Carolina

Each of these audiences require specifically targeted messages but will gain needed reassurance and confidence from a well-planned and executed response.

## Key Messages

The development of key messages is foundational upon the success of a CCP. Key messages are to be thought of as the “thesis” or the reason that we are communicating. Although the crises listed in this CCP vary, the key messages will remain largely the same:

**Safety** - The safety of our visitors is of the utmost importance. We are monitoring the situation closely to make sure that our visitors have a safe, hospitable, and enjoyable experience in our town.

**Transparent Communication** - We will be communicating any further updates as soon as they become available. We want to ensure that everyone who needs information will receive information.

**Sympathy**- As a tight knit community, we are unified by our humanity. We empathize with the affected individuals, not only as it affects our home, but also how it affects our visitors. We want everyone to know that when you visit Jackson County, you are one of us.

**Reconciliation**- Our community will come back from any form of crisis. We are strong when we come and work together. Our current situation does not define our future.

## Communication Tools

Tools of conducting proper communication shall be:

- Internal Emails - Crisis Management Team. (Be reminded these are public record)
- External Emails - Stakeholders (view stakeholder section) & Key Audiences.
- Radio public service announcements
- Advertising - Paid Media
  - o Radio Commercials
  - o Print and/or Newspaper ad placements
  - o Digital ad placements
  - o Social Media ads
- Advertising - Earned media
  - o Commenting on published material
  - o Commenting on news release (or holding a press conference)
- Advertising - Shared media
  - o Responding to social media posts about crisis
  - o Responding to influencers about crisis
- Advertising - Owned media

- o Blog posts on website
- o Social media posts on all platforms
- o Update notifications and emergency banner on TDA website

## **Media Release**

Depending on the situation, the content of the media release will vary. Any media release shall be made by the Jackson County TDA contain the following elements:

- Factual statements- NEVER speculate.
- Provide contact information for further inquiries.
- Date and time clearly stated specifying on whether for immediate release.
- Detail efforts to resolve the situation (if details are available).
- Be calm, reassuring and positive (avoid terms such as “crisis” and “emergency”).
- Acknowledge responsibility to visitors, the community and all other stakeholders.
- Indicate that further information will be released as it becomes available.
- Acknowledge importance of visitor welfare etc. (if appropriate).
- Indicate the key stakeholders will be briefed (if appropriate).
- Quote county commissioners, mayors, and TDA Director.
- Empathize with any victims (if appropriate).

## **Holding Statement**

Due to the media’s deadline requirement, it is important to keep in mind that they are going to require information in a timely and organized manner. If the information is not reliably available, it may prove necessary to provide an interim “holding statement” to media outlets in the short term.

This action is to reduce uncertainty about the crisis situation from the TDA. In addition, this statement will help Jackson County to not appear defensive and allows a reason as to why further details are not yet known.

This 2-3 paragraph statement needs to be factual and cannot leave room for speculation. This statement needs to be clear, concise, factual, and qualified (e.g.: “as far as can be ascertained at this early stage”) and will be drafted by the assigned JCTDA Executive Director and/or PR agency.

The distribution of this statement will be at the discretion of the JCTDA Executive Director and can be done verbally (on live newscast via. press conference) or written (website, news release, social media etc.).

A copy of this statement should be issued to all JCTDA members, relevant tourism operators, local agencies and any necessary third parties.

## **Preparedness**

### **Triggers**

Defining and diagnosing a trigger response can be difficult depending on the situation. The “trigger” or “triggering event” is the immediate consequence of the crisis that will result in media attention. The following is a list of how to effectively diagnose a “trigger” response.

#### **General Factors for Diagnosing Trigger Response**

- Whether the crisis is “acute,” ongoing, repeated, or still evolving
- Public perception of crisis severity, either factual or perceived
- Public perception of blame or accountability, either factual or perceived
- Victims or casualties: who, how many, and how rapid
- Projected time-frame and scope of active crisis state
- Projected time-frame and scope of crisis recovery
- “Celebrity” or well-known public figure involvement
- Scope and intensity of media involvement
- Law enforcement, military, or other governmental agency involvement

- Whether our understanding of the crisis is still evolving
- Availability of appropriate or adequate emergency response
- Amenities, services, infrastructure, or businesses disrupted, inaccessible, or destroyed
- Scope of crisis: local, statewide, national, or international

## **How to Diagnose an Immediate Response**

Responses in which visitors need more information about safety or remaining calm must be immediate. This could include a real or perceived threat. Casualties or the possibility of casualties requires an immediate response, as does major disruption of amenities, especially those used frequently by visitors.

### Examples:

- 1) Fires have resulted in downtown buildings being at risk for evacuation. There have been no known casualties, but downtown buildings may need to be evacuated pending fire location. Visitors should visit our website to be updated on this situation.
- 2) There has been an animal attack that has resulted in one casualty. Visitors will want to know if the hiking trails and outdoor amenities are safe and which trail(s) are currently closed due to this event.

## **Specific Potential Triggers**

These factors shall be used to diagnose a crisis response. If these factors are present, they need to be monitored for severity and scope to determine if an immediate response is necessary. In general, an ongoing or developing crisis is more serious, and one in which there are victims, or major disruption of amenities will almost always require an immediate response. The following is a list of potential specific potential triggers:



## **Natural Disasters**

(Flooding, landslides, winter storm, fires, straight-line winds etc.)

### *Specific Response Factors:*

- ☐ Disaster time-frame - Acute, ongoing, or repeated, and expected duration
- ☐ Recovery time-frame - Major ongoing, minor ongoing, or minor short-term
- ☐ Property disrupted or destroyed - Local businesses, eateries, accommodations
- ☐ Amenities disrupted or destroyed - Parks, hiking trails, campsites, waterfalls
- ☐ Infrastructure disrupted or destroyed - Roads, highways, traffic lights, street lights, parking, buildings
- ☐ Services disrupted or destroyed - Water, electricity, or cellular services unavailable
- ☐ Victims or casualties

## **Natural Causes**

(Animal attack, missing visitor, waterfall accident, etc.)

### *Specific Response Factors:*

- ☐ Incident time-frame - "Acute," actively ongoing, expected duration
- ☐ Investigation time-frame - Major ongoing, minor ongoing, minor-short-term
- ☐ Amenities disrupted - Hiking trails, waterfalls, parkway access
- ☐ Law enforcement involvement - JC Sheriff's Office, Sylva PD, Blue Ridge Public Safety, Forestry Services (park rangers), SBI, FBI
- ☐ Victims or casualties

## **Public Health**

(Disease outbreak, air pollutants, food poisoning, water pollutants, hazardous spill, etc.)

### *Specific Response Factors:*

- ☐ Disaster time-frame - Singular, ongoing, or repeated incident
- ☐ Recovery time-frame - Major ongoing, minor ongoing, minor short-term
- ☐ Available Medical Support - Vaccines, hospital occupancy, crisis care units
- ☐ Symptom Severity and Morbidity

- ☐ Vulnerable populations - Elderly, people with respiratory issues, general population
- ☐ Victims or casualties

### **Man Made (Terrorism)**

#### *Specific Response Factors:*

- ☐ Severity of Attack
- ☐ Location - Public space, private business, school, residence
- ☐ Victims or Casualties
- ☐ Mode of attack - Homemade explosive, vehicle, biochemical, etc.
- ☐ Nature of attack - Hate crime, extremist group, lone attacker
- ☐ Infrastructure disrupted - specific areas closed, freeways, exits, streets
- ☐ Amenities disrupted - Schools, hospitals, or businesses shut down, access limited
- ☐ Law enforcement response - Local police, National Guard, SWAT, FBI, SBI

### **Man Made (Major Crime)**

(Homicide, group/gang violence, high crime)

#### *Specific Response Factors:*

- ☐ “Acute” (singular incident) or “chronic” (repeated incidents)?
- ☐ General or specific victims?
- ☐ Law enforcement response - Local police, national guard, FBI
- ☐ Level of media response - Local, state, or national news, current events.
- ☐ Victims or casualties

### **Man Made (Other)**

(Downtown fires, Water pollutants, major accident)

#### *Specific Response Factors:*

- ☐ Disaster time-frame - Acute, ongoing, or repeated, and expected duration
- ☐ Recovery time-frame - Major ongoing, minor ongoing, or minor short-term
- ☐ Property disrupted or destroyed - Local businesses, eateries, accommodation

- ☐ Amenities disrupted or destroyed - Parks, hiking trails, rivers, downtown businesses
- ☐ Infrastructure disrupted or destroyed - Roads, highways, traffic lights, street lights, buildings
- ☐ Victims or casualties

### **Reputation Disturbances**

(Negative influencer/celebrity experience, police brutality, negative racial relations etc.)

*Specific Response Factors:*

- ☐ Scope of disturbance - Country wide, state wide, region wide, county wide, town specific
- ☐ Incident time-frame - Major ongoing, minor ongoing, or minor short term
- ☐ Recovery time-frame - Major ongoing, minor ongoing, or minor short term
- ☐ Media coverage - National media, regional media, local media
- ☐ Social media following of an influencer - 100k+, 10k-100k, 1k-10k
- ☐ Cultural considerations - Who is affected, how many, and why? Large or small scale?

### **Political Disturbance**

(Largely perceived “negative” state or local legislation)

*Specific Response Factors:*

- ☐ Media coverage - National media, regional media, local media
- ☐ Social media coverage - 100k+, 10k-100k, 1k-10k
- ☐ Affected publics - residents, visitors, or both
- ☐ Environmental considerations - mountains, rivers, waterfalls, other natural amenities
- ☐ Infrastructure disrupted or removed - Roads, highways, traffic lights, street lights, buildings
- ☐ Amenities disrupted or destroyed - Parks, hiking trails, rivers, downtown businesses

# Scenario Plans

The following Crisis Communication Cycle chart shows common public questions, concerns, or fears following a crisis at its various stages. Suggested response styles are also included.

## Initial Crisis

Common Public Concerns	Appropriate Response Styles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What happened? When? Where?</li><li>• Was anyone hurt or killed? How many? Who are they?</li><li>• Who is to blame? Who is responsible?</li><li>• Are we safe? What's the danger now?</li><li>• Who's in charge?</li><li>• What are you/those in charge doing to protect and help people?</li><li>• How does this immediately impact my travel plans?</li><li>• What happens next?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acknowledge both crisis and public concerns with empathy and respect.</li><li>• Establish spokesperson and credibility.</li><li>• Be honest, informed, and transparent.</li><li>• Provide appropriate courses of action, including where to get more information.</li><li>• Commit to continued communication with stakeholders.</li><li>• Reduce crisis-related uncertainty wherever possible.</li></ul>

## Crisis Monitoring & Maintenance

Common Public Concerns	Appropriate Response Styles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is it safe to visit, evacuate, or leave? Where? When? Should I change my travel plans?</li><li>• What is the risk to me and my family? What can I do to minimize risk?</li><li>• What can/should I do to help?</li><li>• Why are those in charge doing what they're doing?</li><li>• Why aren't you/they doing it differently?</li><li>• Who should I listen to? Who's right? Who's the most appropriate authority here?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clarify risks and help public understand them.</li><li>• Provide background-encompassing information.</li><li>• Gain understanding and support for emergency response and appropriate authorities. Inform and clarify.</li><li>• Listen to public and stakeholder feedback, and correct misinformation.</li><li>• Explain emergency information and recommendations.</li></ul>

## Recovery: Resolution

Common Public Concerns	Appropriate Response Styles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What's the long-term impact? Is it safe to visit again? Where? When?</li><li>• Why didn't the emergency response go better/differently?</li><li>• Why is it taking so long to get back to normal?</li><li>• I'm not seeing news about this anymore. Should I still be concerned?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promote local activities and services that are safe and available.</li><li>• Improve future response and public understanding through education.</li><li>• Support public policy and express confidence in responsible authorities. Educate and persuade public to do the same.</li><li>• Honestly examine problems/mishaps.</li><li>• Reinforce what worked/went well</li></ul>

## Recovery: Evaluation

Examine, reflect, learn and revise.

# General Crisis Message Map

Depending on audience, medium of communication, and the crisis itself, crisis messages will look different. This is a good general outline for crafting crisis messages for any scenario.

See "General Crisis Message Map" in Templates.

### Message Style and Tone:

- Apply an honest, open, and transparent tone.
- Stick to verifiable facts and cite the appropriate authorities.
- Avoid jargon (e.g. say "outbreak" instead of "pandemic").
- Communicate religiously neutral message (our thoughts and prayers are with the affected)
- Use simple words and phrases, and straightforward sentences.
- Avoid humor, judgmental phrases, and extreme speculation.

## **Understanding the Communication Goals for JCTDA Audiences**

### **Visitors (Present)**

Visitors to Jackson County are not familiar with the community or the layout of the area. They consequently may not be familiar with issues/crises related to the mountainous region of Western North Carolina such as waterfall danger, landslides, animal attacks, or winter storms. It is for this reason that communication to this group needs to be clear, respectful and simple even of the most basic facts and action points. Specific tactics on social media can be utilized to target people who are 'visiting' a destination.

### **Visitors (Future)**

The relaying of clear and accurate information about the status of the crisis and recovery is key to maintaining the tourism industry following a crisis.

### **Residents**

Residents of Jackson County are more familiar both with the county layout as well as with potential crisis situations. However, they may look to the JCTDA for the same basic facts visitors will, such as action plans or where to go for emergency medical services. Additionally, they may want to know how to donate, volunteer, or show community support both during and following a crisis.

### **Local Stakeholders**

Local stakeholders and JCTDA partners will need to be briefed as soon as possible. The JCTDA and Chambers have e-mail databases for rapid stakeholder communication. Maintaining a positive relationship while being as transparent as possible is key to properly handling a crisis communication situation. In many cases, these stakeholders will be where most of the information flow comes from. Keep in mind that different stakeholders may require different messages. Always be forthright, transparent, and encourage stakeholder feedback.

## Local Media

Communicating with the local media can be an opportunity to provide facts, action plans, and to correct misinformation for those stakeholders who are directly impacted by the crisis, residents and visitors alike. Keep in mind that local media may not have the same goals as the public officials and stakeholders that JCTDA may be working with. Issues revolving around accountability, blame, adequacy of emergency response, and both real and perceived danger will be paramount to the media.

## National Media

An awareness of any national media is of top priority. We need to be aware of their presence and accommodate their inquiries but we cannot ignore local media. Information must flow to both the local and the national media in a synchronized manner. National media's presence can make it more difficult to shape a story. The national media will have similar interest in danger, blame, accountability, and the effectiveness of the response. The JCTDA Executive Director will act as one of the faces of Jackson County to the state or nation but the same guidelines still apply: be factual, honest, and empathetic.

# Scenario Response Maps

## Scenario: Natural Disaster

- o Flooding
- o Landslides
- o Winter storm
- o Wild/Forest fires
- o Tornado/Straight-line winds

<i>Audience</i>	<i>Key Message Points</i>	<i>Supporting Facts/Resources</i>	<i>Communication Channels</i>
<i>Visitors (present)</i>	Areas to avoid or to evacuate.	Harris Regional Hospital	Local Media

	<p>Areas affected: towns, hiking trails, specific mountains, local businesses.</p> <p>State of freeways, roads, and town infrastructure.</p> <p>Casualties, if any.</p> <p>Reality of personal danger.</p>	<p>Highlands Cashiers Area Hospital/Mission Health Systems</p> <p>Subject Matter Experts</p> <p>Jackson County Emergency Management</p> <p>Local law enforcement</p> <p>NCDOT</p>	<p>Social Media</p> <p>DJNC</p> <p>National Media</p>
<i>Visitors (future)</i>	<p>What areas and activities are safe for use.</p> <p>Likelihood of a recurring incident.</p> <p>Current state and safety of infrastructure.</p>		
<i>Residents</i>	<p>How to help.</p> <p>Where to access resources/medical services.</p> <p>Where to find temporary shelter.</p>		
<i>Local Stakeholders</i>	<p>Safety and status of local Stakeholders.</p>		



	<p>How we are assuring and informing visitors.</p> <p>What educational resources we've made available.</p> <p>Where our information is coming from.</p> <p>How we are representing our Stakeholders during the crisis.</p> <p>Address common concerns and goals.</p>		
<i>Local Media</i>	<p>Action plans.</p> <p>Clear facts.</p> <p>Dispel misinformation.</p> <p>Honesty about unknowns.</p>		
<i>National Media</i>	<p>What impact this crisis has had on the community, natural environment, and infrastructure.</p>		

## Scenario: Naturally Caused Crises

- Severe animal attack

- Missing/Killed visitor
- Waterfall accident/death

<i>Audience</i>	<i>Key Message Points</i>	<i>Supporting Facts/Resources</i>	<i>Communication Channels</i>
<i>Visitors (present)</i>	<p>Areas to avoid</p> <p>Areas affected: towns, hiking trails, specific mountains.</p> <p>Casualties, if any.</p> <p>Reality of personal danger.</p>	<p>US Forestry Service</p> <p>US Park Service</p> <p>Local Law Enforcement</p> <p>Subject matter experts</p>	<p>Local Media</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>DJNC</p> <p>National Media</p>
<i>Visitors (future)</i>	<p>What areas and activities are safe for use.</p> <p>Likelihood of a recurring incident.</p>		
<i>Residents</i>	<p>How to help.</p> <p>Current danger</p>		
<i>Local Stakeholders</i>	<p>Safety and status of local Stakeholders.</p> <p>How we are assuring and informing visitors.</p> <p>What educational resources we've made available.</p>		

	<p>Where our information is coming from.</p> <p>How we are representing our Stakeholders during the crisis.</p> <p>Address common concerns and goals.</p>		
<i>Local Media</i>	<p>Action plans.</p> <p>Clear facts.</p> <p>Dispel misinformation.</p> <p>Honesty about unknowns.</p>		
<i>National Media</i>	<p>What impact this crisis has had on the community, and natural environment.</p>		

## Public Health Crises

- Infectious Outbreak
- Air pollutants
- Food poisoning
- Hazardous material spill
- Sewer release

<i>Audience</i>	<i>Key Message Points</i>	<i>Supporting Facts/Resources</i>	<i>Communication Channels</i>
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<i>Visitors (present)</i>	<p>Who is accountable?</p> <p>What areas are affected (mountains, highways, etc.).</p> <p>What is being done to clean up/return to normal?</p> <p>What authority is managing clean-up?</p>	<p>Jackson County Public Works</p> <p>Jackson County Emergency Services</p> <p>Jackson County Health Department</p> <p>TWSA</p> <p>WCU</p>	<p>Local Media</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>DJNC</p> <p>National Media</p>
<i>Visitors (future)</i>	<p>Expected timeline for when this issue will be fixed/cleaned up.</p> <p>What authority is handling the issue.</p> <p>Long term damage to local amenities, such as mountains or hiking trails.</p> <p>Environmental impact.</p>		
<i>Residents</i>	<p>When major roads and sites will reopen.</p> <p>Action plans for volunteering and community involvement.</p>		
<i>Local Stakeholders</i>	<p>How they are being represented to visitors, if applicable.</p> <p>What educational resources we've made available to visitors.</p>		

	Messages and facts, they would like our organization to relay.		
<i>Local Media</i>	<p>What is being done to deal with the problem.</p> <p>Condolences to victims, if applicable.</p> <p>Affirmation of accountability.</p> <p>Express support of authorities managing disaster.</p>		
<i>National Media</i>	<p>How community is coping.</p> <p>Environmental impact.</p> <p>What is being done to deal with problem.</p> <p>Authority in charge of managing crisis.</p> <p>Who is responsible, location of blame?</p>		

### Man Made: Major Crime

<i>Audience</i>	<i>Key Message Points</i>	<i>Supporting Facts/Resources</i>	<i>Communication Channels</i>
<i>Visitors</i>	Whether or not the	Jackson County	Local Media

<i>(present)</i>	<p>perpetrator(s) have been arrested.</p> <p>Location of crime, area of effect.</p> <p>Who are the victims, whether visitors are in danger?</p>	<p>Sheriff's Office</p> <p>WCU Police Department</p> <p>Sylva Police Department</p> <p>SBI</p> <p>FBI</p>	<p>Social Media</p> <p>DJNC</p> <p>National Media</p>
<i>Visitors (future)</i>	<p>How the situation is being dealt with.</p> <p>Whether or not it is safe to visit/where it is safe to visit.</p> <p>How local amenities have been disrupted, if at all.</p>		
<i>Residents</i>	<p>Location of crime, area of effect.</p>		
<i>Local Stakeholders</i>	<p>How Jackson County and Stakeholders are being represented to visitors.</p> <p>What educational resources we've made available to visitors.</p> <p>Messages and facts they would like our organization to relay.</p>		
<i>Local Media</i>	<p>Condolences to victims.</p>		

	<p>Affirm confidence in the authorities handling the issue.</p> <p>Give facts and dispel misinformation.</p> <p>Affirm Jackson County's continued safety, if applicable.</p>		
<i>National Media</i>	<p>Condolences to victims.</p> <p>Affirm a positive representation of Jackson County and local community.</p> <p>Affirm confidence in the authorities handling the issue</p>		

## Man Made: Terrorism

Terrorism is a particularly challenging crisis to address. The public may have a stronger emotional response to terrorism than any other crisis, and may have a greater risk response, even in the case of a hoax. Media coverage will be more intense and aggressive than in any other crisis. There will also be greater involvement of major governmental agencies, and possibly warnings of future attacks, which can spike public anxiety. Clear, simple communication and factual dissemination is a must.

<i>Audience</i>	<i>Key Message Points</i>	<i>Supporting Facts/Resources</i>	<i>Communication Channels</i>
<i>Visitors (present)</i>	Location and status of attack (whether ongoing).	<p>Jackson County Sheriff's Office</p> <p>WCU Police</p>	<p>Local Media</p> <p>Social Media</p>

	<p>What type of attack.</p> <p>Who was hurt, how many?</p> <p>Why this happened, attacker's motive or affiliation, if known.</p> <p>Where it is safe/when it is safe to resume activities.</p> <p>What authority is handling the incident.</p>	<p>Department</p> <p>Sylva Police Department</p> <p>SBI</p> <p>FBI</p> <p>US Department of Homeland Security</p>	<p>DJNC</p> <p>National Media</p>
<i>Visitors (future)</i>	<p>What happened, where, and why.</p> <p>Whether this is likely to happen again.</p> <p>If any local amenities have been disrupted or destroyed.</p>		
<i>Residents</i>	<p>Location and status of attack (whether ongoing).</p> <p>How to help, volunteer, or show solidarity with victims and local community.</p>		
<i>Local Stakeholders</i>	<p>Safety and status of local stakeholders.</p> <p>How Jackson County and stakeholders are being represented to visitors.</p> <p>What educational</p>		



	<p>resources we've made available to visitors.</p> <p>Messages and facts stakeholders would like our organization to relay.</p>		
<i>Local Media</i>	<p>Condolences to victims.</p> <p>Reaffirm what we know and be honest about what we don't know.</p> <p>Affirm confidence in authorities to handle the issue.</p> <p>Directions for action.</p>		
<i>National Media</i>	<p>Condolences to victims.</p> <p>Reaffirm what we know and be honest about what we don't know.</p> <p>Show confidence and solidarity with local community.</p> <p>Affirm confidence in authorities.</p>		

## Reputational/Political Disturbance

<i>Audience</i>	<i>Key Message Points</i>	<i>Supporting</i>	<i>Communication</i>
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		<i>Facts/Resources</i>	<i>Channels</i>
<i>Visitors (present)</i>	<p>How will this affect their visit to JC?</p> <p>Will my trip be interrupted by this occurrence?</p> <p>Do I agree with Jackson County's perceived ideals?</p>	<p>Local elected officials</p> <p>Office of the Mayor</p> <p>Commissioners</p> <p>Town Manager</p> <p>County Manager</p> <p>NAACP or other racially related thought leaders</p> <p>LGBTQ+ Community</p>	<p>Local Media</p> <p>Social Media</p> <p>DJNC</p> <p>National Media</p>
<i>Visitors (future)</i>	<p>Is Jackson County a place I want to visit due to this disturbance?</p> <p>Can I agree with their perceived ideals?</p> <p>Would I ever consider visiting again/at all?</p>	<p>Local and regional religious thought leaders</p> <p>Other subject matter experts.</p>	
<i>Locals &amp; Residents</i>	<p>This event does not define Jackson County.</p> <p>We do/ do not agree with what is going on politically.</p> <p>We hold to a Southern Hospitable stance.</p>		

<i>Local Stakeholders</i>	<p>How will this negatively perceived political move affect my business?</p> <p>Are we going to have to close/relocate?</p> <p>What is something good/bad that will come out of this?</p>		
<i>Local Media</i>	<p>Remain neutral on issue depending on its nature.</p> <p>Voice support for anything that will help tourism in JC but also sympathize with other side.</p>		
<i>National Media</i>	<p>Remain neutral on issue depending on its nature.</p> <p>Voice support for anything that will help tourism in JC but also sympathize with other side.</p>		

## Maintenance

This plan will be reviewed annually by the Executive Director and changes will be presented to the Executive Committee for consideration and adoption.

## Response

### Initial Response Strategy

**LEAD:** Leverage, Evaluate, Act, Disseminate

Upon responding to a natural disaster or other crisis, the CMT needs to consider these issues as a matter of urgency:

- ☐ What is the nature and potential duration of the crisis?
- ☐ Is there continuing danger?
- ☐ Is there a risk of over-reacting?
- ☐ Does the Crisis Communications Plan cover this situation?
- ☐ Which is the lead emergency services agency?
- ☐ Who can provide the CMT (Crisis Management Team) with authoritative, timely information?
- ☐ Will this crisis really reduce Jackson County or the region's desirability as a tourist destination?
- ☐ Do we need to stop any active advertising campaigns (social, digital, etc.)
- ☐ Can the crisis be isolated to a specific area?
- ☐ What is a realistic assessment of related safety issues?
- ☐ Should travel to the area be suspended?
- ☐ Have any visitors been directly impacted?
- ☐ Are any short-term measures needed to assist affected visitors?
- ☐ Are arrangements required for visitors' families?
- ☐ Have any tourism businesses been directly affected?
- ☐ What disruption has been caused to travel, accommodation and visitor activities in Jackson County or the region?
- ☐ Is staff safe?
- ☐ Have you scheduled a time to gather the team via conference call or in person ASAP?
- ☐ How can reliable information be passed to visitors and tourism businesses?
- ☐ How is the crisis being reported in the media?
- ☐ How widespread is the media coverage?
- ☐ Who is monitoring media coverage?
- ☐ Who is keeping a record of journalist contacts?
- ☐ Should the Jackson County's existing marketing or social media efforts be immediately suspended?
- ☐ Which tourism operators need to be consulted?
- ☐ How quickly can the destination be promoted / marketed again?
- ☐ What proactive communication measures can the CMT take in the immediate to short term?
- ☐ Should a holding statement be issued?
- ☐ Is outside expert assistance required?

## Crisis Assessment Checklist

Depending on the crisis itself, the potential economic impacts can be devastating to local tourism operators and long-lasting in terms of the county or region's reputation as an attractive tourist destination.

Every disaster or crisis will attract unwelcome attention of varying degrees, with the potential to impact negatively on visitors' perceptions regarding personal safety, suitability of access, availability of accommodation and the likelihood of disruption to travel plans. Furthermore, the nature of media coverage and social media means that often the seriousness and extent of incidents will be magnified.

These factors underline the benefit of a planned communications response that seeks to put the incident into perspective, reassures observers about the measures taken to control and address the situation, and fully explains the true extent of the crisis.

Following is a Crisis Assessment list to guide the CMT in determining the level of response required and whether further expert support and advice is needed.

- What is the nature of the crisis?
  - Type of incident and how extensive?
  - What visitor operations are affected?
    - Safety
    - Travel
    - Accommodation
    - Activities
    - Reputation
  - Is the incident/problem contained or escalating?
  - Are there any health issues for visitors or tourism operations?
  - What stakeholders are affected/potentially affected?
  - What are the potential short- and long-term impacts on Jackson County or the region's desirability as a tourist destination?
- What are the impacts/issues regarding Jackson County or the region's tourism image, operability and earning power?
  - Is there substantial media coverage?
    - Local
    - Statewide
    - National
    - International
    - News
    - Current Affairs
  - What are the economic impacts?
    - Direct business interruption
    - Indirect disruption to associated businesses

- Duration
  - Potential liability claims
  - Insurance issues
- Other issues
  - Is the CMT receiving timely and accurate information? Issues to be considered include
    - Communication links to site of crisis
    - Need for CMT observer at site
    - Effective interface with other key audiences and stakeholders
    - Need for additional resources
    - Need to bring in outside communications expertise
  - Are media inquiries being adequately addressed in a timely fashion?
  - How frequently will the CMT need to meet?
  - Are there any directly affected stakeholders who should be asked to join the CMT to address this specific crisis?

## Action Checklists

### 1-2 hours after incident

- ☐ Make an initial assessment of the probable scale of the crisis

#### Executive Director

- ☐ Activate the CMT and arrange for verbal/written briefing
- ☐ Advise senior stakeholders
- ☐ Activate plan on social communication strategy
- ☐ Communicate with Emergency Management on use of any county-wide social media alerts they are allowed to push out as a local government.
- ☐ Establish and maintain contact with emergency response lead agency for regular information updates
- ☐ Share emergency evacuation routes, if applicable, with all stakeholders and lodging partners
- ☐ Refer all initial queries and requests back to lead agency unless there is a specific tourism focus
- ☐ Prepare and update holding statements, talking points, and Q&As to send to media outlets
- ☐ Set up media log
- ☐ Handle subsequent media inquiries based on updated holding points

#### Sales and Marketing Manager

- ☐ Immediately revise, cancel, or suspend advertising
- ☐ Organize team briefings and activate communication strategies with Marketing & PR team

### 2-6 hours after incident

#### Executive Director

- ☐ Convene CMT and report on communications to date
- ☐ Liaise with senior stakeholders
- ☐ If needed plan a briefing within 48 with stakeholders

#### Communications Manager and Social Media Firm

- ☐ Liaise with emergency response team
- ☐ Set up media monitoring
- ☐ Coordinate tone of messaging
- ☐ Ensure all channels are activated

#### Visitor Services

- ☐ Communicate and consult with affected parties

### 6-24 hours after incident

#### Executive Director, and Office Manager

- ☐ Undertake impact assessment process
- ☐ Liaise with stakeholders

#### Communications Manager & Vice President of Sales & Marketing

- ☐ Develop response to tourism industry
- ☐ Update holding statement

### **Day 2 onward**

Executive Director

- ☐ Liaise with stakeholders
- ☐ Update speaking points and holding statement
- ☐ Convene CMT as needed

## **Preferred Communication Channels**

Press Releases

Website & Emergency Messaging Banner

Mass Email (Stakeholder Newsletter)

Social Media

## **Protocol**

### **Media Management**

Media management at any incident, including access and safety for media representatives, is the responsibility of the control agency on site.

Visitor information and advice released by the JCTDA and CMT must be consistent with that released by these bodies and must not interfere with the operational management of the situation.

At the same time, the CMT network of tourism operators and accommodation providers can prove invaluable for the dissemination of urgent information to regional visitors – particularly those visitors who do not have the benefit.

### **Media Protocol**

A consistent, strategic and carefully managed approach to media interaction is absolutely vital in the event of a crisis. Jackson County's authorities must be portrayed as responsible, professional and responsive, placing the interests of the community as well as visitors first and foremost. They must also be seen to be open and accountable. For this reason, it is essential that all media contact by the JCTDA conforms to the following protocols:

- JCTDA Executive Director should be notified immediately of a crisis by Emergency Management and other community partners with the potential to impact tourism and receive an initial briefing.



- All initial media queries and requests should be referred back to the lead agency dealing with the crisis or incident unless there is a specific tourism focus. They should then be handled by JCTDA Executive Director.
- No speculation or unauthorized comments should be made on any basis by Board Members or TDA Employees.
- The CMT should be notified as soon as practicable about any media contact.
- If media attend the scene of a crisis incident, the CMT should make contact with the lead agency's media liaison coordinator to ascertain whether tourism-specific queries are being raised.
- The CMT will provide the media with authorized factual updates on the situation relating to tourism as quickly as possible.
- If further or specifically requested information is not immediately available, the media should be told why.
- The CMT must be regularly updated regarding media interest and attitudes, as well as any community feedback.
- Clear and concise messages should be formulated by the CMT before any media interview or statement.
- All media releases should be disseminated to area tourism stakeholders as soon as possible after being issued.
- As far as practicable, JCTDA Executive Director and Communications Manager, will be the public face of Jackson County's tourism sector and will take part in all significant radio and television interviews and media conferences.
- If appropriate, the CMT will identify appropriate local experts or tourism operators to provide additional comments and/information to be included in TDA messaging.

### **Procedures for information verification, clearance, and approval**

Should be case specific.

### **Procedures for coordinating with stakeholders**

Should be case specific.

### **Agreements on releasing information**

Dictated by Executive Director.

### **Industry Communications Strategy**

In the event of a crisis or major incident, members of the local tourism industry can expect a communications response that is practical and realistic but also measured.

- The tourism sector will be given clear and concise information as well as regular updates so that visitors, their families and potential visitors can be properly informed about the situation in the area.
- All CMT media statements should be immediately distributed to tourism industry stakeholders.
- Information being released to the media should be consistent with that being disseminated among those in the industry.
- If evacuation from an area proves necessary, then procedures must be put in place to ensure the cancellation or postponement of inbound tourism to that specific area (and surrounding areas if necessary).
- CMT will provide advice and possibly short-term assistance as a matter of urgency to those visitors that are directly affected.
- During an incident, area tourism operators and accommodation providers may be well placed to provide feedback to the CMT regarding the nature and extent of the incident as well as its likely impact on visitor activity.
- Tourism operators and accommodation providers are perfectly positioned to provide their customers with practical and authoritative information regarding travel plans, safety of routes, alternative activities and so on.
- As appropriate, the CMT needs to consider whether it needs to liaise with and seek assistance from outside industry stakeholder bodies.
- The CMT also needs to either revise or suspend any current marketing programs for the area until an appropriate recovery strategy has been determined.

Clear lines of communication between tourism stakeholders will be established to avoid misunderstandings and damaging speculation.

Operators need to understand why certain things might be done or said, as well as appreciate the benefits of having a sole spokesperson on tourism and the need for protocols in working with the media.

The industry should resolve any disagreements about contentious elements of the Crisis Communications Plan in advance of an actual crisis occurring.

# Media Strategy

## Tips on dealing with the media

People want to know that you care before they care what you know

### Key tips:

- 4 R's: Regret, Reform, Recovery, Restitution
- 4 C's: Confident, Clear, Concise, Consistent
- Talk in headlines, highlight what's important, "what's important right now is... details... but what's most important is...,"
- Be the expert, answer the question then bridge to message, don't ignore or evade questions, questions are opportunities to build trust, do not allow speculation, when asked about problems talk about solutions, majority of communications is nonverbal.

### Other guidelines:

- The CMT will play an important role in managing public perceptions about an incident and how the county is responding to it.
- All media interaction must be calm and measured in order to convey a sense of control and preparation.
- Know what you are talking about.
- Trust, integrity and good faith are vital components when liaising with the media, particularly in times of crisis. This underlines the requirement for the release of only authoritative, reliable information.
- Regular updates will serve to counter speculation and misunderstandings.
- The CMT must be upfront, even regarding bad news, if it is to be relied upon, and given credence by the media for an official position. Often, bad news can be tempered by emphasizing the actions taken to address it and by putting the matter into its full context.
- All reasonable media requests should be accommodated as quickly as possible in order to disseminate factual details and to position the tourism industry as being open and responsible, and working in the best interests of its customers.
- The nature and timing of the CMT media response must be guided by the extent of the crisis or incident. In some cases, particularly those that require sensitivity such as the loss of life, it will be advisable to wait until an appropriate time before issuing anything other than essential factual advice for travelers.
- As far as practicable, JCTDA Executive Director should be the sole public face of the industry. This will ensure consistency of message and style.

## Media Interview Guidelines

- Speak concisely and in short sentences.

- Formulate a handful of central key messages - write them down and stick to them.
- Remember who your real audience is – viewers, listeners, readers.
- Be aware of latest information.
- Be aware of how the crisis or incident is being reported and of any specific concerns raised.
- Don't do media interviews off-the-cuff – think first and have a clear objective.
- If appropriate, ask whether the journalist has spoken to anyone else.
- Anticipate potential questions and prepare thoroughly.
- Don't be defensive.
- Know the facts – never attempt to bluff.
- Never lie – you will be found out.
- Don't repeat provocative phrases e.g.: “No, we're not embarrassed by this situation ...”
- Avoid debates.
- Be mindful of media deadlines.
- Never assume the cameras or tape recorders are off.
- Make written background information available if appropriate.
- Use everyday language – not technical jargon.
- Minimize surrounding distractions.
- Dress appropriately.
- Ensure an appropriate backdrop for TV interviews.

## **Spokespeople**

Should be case specific.

## **Draft background materials**

Should be case specific.

## **Draft Q&A**

Should be case specific.

## **Social Media Strategy**

- Pause all current social advertising, scheduled posts and evaluate content.
- Prioritize positivity and transparency
- Use unifying hashtags
- Use time stamps on posts as they may be reshared or continue to show in news feeds after the incident has passed
- Focus on gratefulness and community
- Engage all comments
- Respond to all direct messages

- Let users vent but be aware of excessive or “off the wall” responses.
- Ensure information is crossing all channels
- Stop and ask if this is information we should explore having as bi-lingual communication
- Disseminate accurate information
- Dispel rumors
- Guide travelers
- Provide links to more and updated information
- Share guidelines with partners
- Provide partners back up images
- Provide partners key messaging
- Determine if the posts need to be removed after the crisis is resolved

## Recovery

A number of actions will be necessary to restore a county’s desirability as a tourist destination following the ‘bad publicity’ that may accompany a crisis or negative incident.

Several factors will influence consumer confidence and determine the speed of recovery from natural and manmade disasters, including:

- The nature of the crisis and its impact on perceptions of safety
- The extent of damage caused to vital infrastructure
- The efficiency with which facilities are brought back online and services resumed
- The success of media management strategies
- The effectiveness of marketing to promote the destination’s status.

There are not only economic benefits in restoring a county’s attractiveness to visitors. From a psychological perspective, the return of visitors to an area following a disaster event will assist the overall recovery process.

### *Combined Effort*

A destination’s recovery efforts should include a combination of different tactics to spread the word that it is safe, open for business (sensitive to this wording), and ready to welcome visitors. In most cases, a mix of media publicity, targeted marketing and advertising may be necessary to reassure the travel industry and potential travelers that the destination’s visitor desirability remains intact.

### *Importance of Communication*

Misinformation and rumor are the natural products of the confusion that normally surrounds crises and natural disasters, and nothing should be taken for granted when communications is concerned. During recovery, too much information for key stakeholders and audiences is better than too little.

### *Coordinated Response*

The existence of a CMT or similar body will be crucial in leading a coordinated industry response for the destination's recovery efforts. It will ensure a destination-wide focus and will lead to consistent and united marketing and promote media messages designed to effectively address the perceptions of observers and potential visitors.

### *Timing Considerations*

The timing of a destination's recovery strategy will depend not only on its level of preparedness but also on the appropriateness of marketing and media activities in the wake of an incident that may have involved loss of life. The destination must be sensitive to such considerations when planning its response.

### *Involve the Local Tourism Industry and other Tourism Stakeholders*

Once the incident has been resolved or contained, local tourism industry participants should have input to the CMT's deliberations on the recovery efforts so that plans take into account as many views as possible. They will be able to contribute ideas and potential solutions as well as useful information on the expectations of their customers and employees. This can be ascertained through a simple industry questionnaire.

Expertise from outside bodies such as Visit North Carolina and the travel industry should also be utilized.

### *Regional Emergency Recovery Planning Committees*

The State's Emergency Management Planning guidelines require the establishment of a Emergency Recovery Planning Committee. Key roles of each committee are to:

- Develop and maintain a recovery plan
- Plan for the establishment and support of community recovery committees when required
- Monitor and review recovery operations and the effectiveness of the recovery plan.

The CMT should seek input to this committee to ensure that the local/regional tourism sector is acknowledged and taken into account from the start of the recovery process. In fact, the CMT could be designated a Community Recovery Committee under the Emergency Management guidelines to fulfil its role.

## **Recovery Checklist**

### **Immediate**

- ☐ Convene a debrief/meeting to review all actions taken during the crisis.
- ☐ Ensure that there is an up-to-date position paper available that also details what authorities are doing now. Update any web site information with a “concluding statement” and remove outdated crisis releases.
- ☐ Be aware that the media usually writes post-crisis feature stories and may require further comment. Ensure that communication is maintained with contacts made during the crisis (travel industry, accommodation providers etc.).

### **Short-term considerations**

- ☐ Is a burst of tactical or infomercial advertising required?
- ☐ Do reporters need to be brought to the destination to demonstrate the effectiveness and progress of recovery efforts?
- ☐ Is market research required?
- ☐ Can the State Tourism Office, VisitNC, assist or other government departments assist?
- ☐ Does an up-to-date briefing paper need to be circulated for consumers, trade and/or media? Are any external briefings required? Is a letter to industry required?
- ☐ Taking into account the sensitivities of those directly impacted, when is an appropriate time to resume marketing efforts?
- ☐ Can you promote any ‘good news’ stories about how well the destination responded and the support provided to visitors at the time?
- ☐ Are visitor testimonials available for dissemination?
- ☐ Should a coordinated marketing campaign revolve around special deals?
- ☐ Are there significant milestones in the recovery process that could be used for publicity? Are there any matters to bring to the attention of government?
- ☐ Are there any positive stories to issue?
- ☐ Should there be a thank you letter or function for internal and external people who helped out? Update this Handbook, reviewing what did and didn't work.

### **Medium to long term**

- ☐ Be aware of post-crisis follow-up stories, particularly on anniversaries.

### **Key steps to take and principles to follow include:**

- ☐ Establish industry credibility
- ☐ Determine all the facts
- ☐ Consider the sensitivities
- ☐ Accurately gauge outside perceptions
- ☐ Assess extent and tone of media coverage
- ☐ Consult affected industry stakeholders

- ☐ Explore availability of financial assistance
- ☐ Determine budget for recovery phase
- ☐ Define key messages
- ☐ Address negatives head-on
- ☐ Stay flexible

## **Restoring Consumer Confidence**

The most crucial and urgent requirements of a tourism recovery plan is to restore consumer confidence and to raise awareness that the impacts of the crisis or incident have either been contained or completely resolved.

- ☐ Agree on the most cost-effective communications option(s)
- ☐ Implement coordinated recovery strategy
- ☐ Measure success of campaign
- ☐ Refine campaign as necessary

As discussed earlier, when a crisis occurs, the destination's recovery process should begin immediately by portraying the local tourism industry's response as being upfront, authoritative and timely.

Constructive media relations are the key to addressing misperceptions and will ensure that the destination's marketing efforts are not contradicted by negative stories. Smart use of the media can also be far more cost-effective than relying solely on advertising and other marketing activities.

Consideration should be given to engaging professional media liaison services.

Once established as a reliable and credible source of information, the industry will find the media and other observers far more receptive to subsequent messages that the destination is 'open for business' and ready for visitors.

Following the initial response, the next step is to fully assess the situation and gather as many facts as possible so that the process of relaunching the destination is realistic and properly informed.

Assisted by expert and up-to-date operational advice, the CMT will then be in a position to determine the timing and content of its communications activities during the recovery phase.

Naturally, all information used in media releases, briefings, fact sheets, advertising and marketing efforts must be accurate and consistent, although emphasis will obviously vary.



## **Recovery Options**

Once the extent of the relaunch effort has been decided, a number of options are available depending on the budget available and the audiences to be targeted. These include:

### **Low Cost Media and Advertising**

- Provide regular media updates
- Promote newsworthy stories
- Distribute fact sheets
- Highlight recovery milestones
- Encourage high profile visitors
- Highlight impact of crisis on local businesses
- Purchase targeted marketing in tourism publications
- Have direct communication with inbound travel operators
- Set up an information line
- Use existing outlets (Visitor Center, newsletters)

### **Medium Cost Media and Advertising**

- Host individual media FAMs
- Pursue positive coverage
- Conduct briefings/FAMs for influencers
- Conduct market research
- Purchase more extensive print/digital advertising in mainstream media
- Pursue opportunities for advertorials
- Coordinate travel and accommodation deals

### **High Cost Media and Advertising**

- Host group media FAMs
- Purchase extensive print/digital/broadcasting advertising in mainstream media
- Purchase advertorials
- Direct market to key audiences
- Introduce and promote generous travel and accommodation deals

The timing of any re-launch activities will be dependent on the status of the crisis itself and of those people directly affected by it. The premature launching of a public recovery program can prove disastrous by squandering the goodwill of potential visitors and other observers who will scrutinize such efforts.

Fund Balance set aside for Disaster Recovery

The TDA will consult with its ad agency and public relations firm and present a plan to the Marketing Committee for approval. The TDA will utilize its Media Contingency or Fund Balance reserves for such advertising.

## **Implement lessons learned**

As identified in internal debrief.

# Templates

## Media inquiry log template

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Handled by: \_\_\_\_\_

Journalist: \_\_\_\_\_

Representing: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Response: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Questions:

Response Given:

Follow-up Required?

## Sample Media Statement

Date / Time

### MEDIA STATEMENT

Jackson County has moved quickly to ensure the safety of / reassure international, interstate and local visitors following (description of event) which occurred (time, date) affecting (description of specific area /operations).

In line with a well-established action plan, a senior tourism group is undertaking necessary measures to provide clear and concise information to people regarding their travel and accommodation plans.

The Government and other key agencies such as Visit North Carolina are being briefed on the situation and further details of any interim tourism measures will be released as soon as they become available.

(CMT Chair) said that the destination's tourism sector was extremely concerned about the loss of life / destruction of property / disruption caused by the (description of event).

The (event) is restricted to the ( ) area of the destination.

"We have well-developed contingency plans to deal with these types of incidents /issues and will offer every possible assistance to visitors currently in Jackson County," said (CMT Chair).

"Visitors can be reassured that authorities are doing everything possible to ensure safety and minimize disruption to travel plans in the destination."

For further information, contact: [name & number]

## **Urgent Information Request**

The following information will greatly assist in assessing the extent of damage or disruption caused by the recent crisis or incident to this destination's tourism industry. Please complete it as soon as possible and email it back to [contact] at [email].

Name of tourist operator / accommodation provider

Location and main contact

Have you or your visitors been directly impacted? If so, how?

Do you or your visitors require any urgent assistance? If so, what?

What further information do you need?

What feedback have you had from visitors?

Have you heard any speculation or rumors? If so, what?

Have you been approached by the media? Have you seen or heard any damaging media reports?

Can you detail or forecast the current/potential economic impact on your business?

## **Advisory Notice / Update**

[Time & Date]

## **Visitor Information Update**

The following are the latest details available regarding the [crisis/incident] and its impact on travel and holiday plans in the destination.

Status of the situation

Casualties and damage

Areas specifically affected

Disruption to travel e.g.: roads

Accommodation affected

Disruption to tourist activity e.g.: beaches, waterways

Relief operations

Areas and activities not affected

## **Tourism Industry Debrief Questionnaire**

Please complete the following to assist in efforts to learn from the recent [crisis or incident] and to enhance our destination's preparedness to respond effectively and professionally to help safeguard our tourism industry. Email back to [email].

Name, business/position and contact details

How were you affected?

How many visitors/consumers were directly or indirectly affected?

What feedback did you receive from visitors/potential visitors?

How many cancelled bookings did you have?

What was your view of media coverage – local and metropolitan?

What was your chief source of reliable information during the incident?

Did you receive enough information and timely updates?

Did visitors get the information/assistance they needed?

## General Crisis Message Map

Depending on the audience, medium of communication, and the crisis itself, crisis messages will look different. This is a general outline for crafting crisis messages for any scenario.

Audiences respond to communication differently in a crisis. It is often most effective to choose three important facts or talking points, and to repeat them.

1. *Expression of empathy:*
2. *What we know now & action plan:*
  - a. *Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?*
  - b. *Clear steps for action:*
  - c. *Correct misinformation:*
3. *What we don't know:*
4. *How to get more information:*
5. *Referrals:*