# MANAGING RISKS AND CRISES: A PLANNING GUIDE

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# Acknowledgement

# ↘ Getting started

## Why is it important?

The advocacy process is dynamic and ever-changing. Over the course of your campaign, unanticipated events may arise with the potential to derail your campaign efforts. While it is impossible to foresee every crisis, some analysis of potential risks and crises can be very helpful. Conducting a risk assessment and developing a complimentary crisis management plan early in your campaign enables you to respond rapidly and minimize the damage should a crisis occur.  A crisis management plan can also help you and your partners be prepared should an unanticipated crisis arise, as well.

## What needs to be done?

Firstly, after you have developed your advocacy campaign action plan (see GRSP's **Strategic Planning:  How-to Guide** tool for more information) you will want to conduct a risk assessment using a risk matrix. A risk assessment is the process by which your team tries to understand the potential risks to your plan. Next, your team will want to engage in contingency planning, where you develop strategies –including specific roles and responsibilities– to mitigate risks and respond efficiently to crises – both anticipated and unanticipated.

In order to work through the Risk Assessment and Crisis Management Plan templates included in this guide, you will want to gather a core group of campaign partners (for more information, please see **GRSP's Building an Advocacy Partnership** tool). Ideally, these will be the same partners who developed the campaign's action plan. The campaign leadership team should complete these elements in a group setting so that ideas can be debated, discussed, and built upon – making for a more complete plan. This process should take no more than a few hours.

Your risk assessment and crisis management planning documents should be completed at the beginning of a campaign. However, similar to political mapping and campaign action planning, both are living documents that should be regularly updated to reflect changes to the advocacy landscape and any new or emerging threats.

**HELPFUL HINT:** When a high-risk/ high-reward opportunity arises during your campaign, you can apply a risk assessment to help you decide whether or not to engage in the activity and/or how to mitigate any associated risks.

# Developing a Risk Assessment Matrix

**As you complete your risk assessment matrix you will want to reference your campaign action plan with an eye toward identifying what disruptions may occur. In brainstorming potential risks, you will want to consider where and when things are likely to change and what outside factors may impact or influence your campaign. Use additional paper as needed.**

## 1. RANK POTENTIAL RISKS

In the left-hand column of the table below, list the factors likely to impact your campaign. Common risks include:

- Elections that cause a policy champion to lose a seat or be reassigned
- Policy champions or partners' taking positions on other issues which prevent or affect others' support for your campaign
- Partners not fulfilling their parts of the campaign action plan
- Opponents receiving high-profile attention for a report or interview that voices opposition to your argument
- Other political priorities arise which push your road safety objective off of the political agenda
- No resources to sustain campaign action plan over the long-term

But your campaign will likely have other – or different – risks depending on your policy objective, political landscape, campaign partners, or other factors. This is your opportunity to brainstorm all possible risks to your campaign and its objective.

Once you have brainstormed the various risks – including those unique to your particular road safety policy campaign – identify the potential consequences of each risk in the second column. In the next two columns, you will want to evaluate both the probability of the risk occurring and the threat it poses to the campaign.

Finally, you will use two criteria (probability and threat level) to provide an overall risk assessment of low, medium or high. This will inform the amount of time and energy your campaign should spend monitoring and mitigating the risk.

Risks that are high probability and high threat are clearly high risks overall. Similarly, low-probability and low-threat risks are low risks overall. When a risk presents a combination of high, medium or low rankings, the overall risk is less clear cut. Make sure the team weighs the variables and comes to consensus on in order to determine how much attention the risk deserves. You may also find it helpful to consult additional experts to evaluate risks, the potential consequences, and the probability of risk.

| Description of Risk | Potential Consequences | Probability of Risk | Threat Level | Overall Risk |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low |
| | | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low |
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| | | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low |

## 2. MONITOR RISKS

For risks ranked high or medium overall, your campaign team will want to plan how to monitor them over the course of the campaign using the criteria below.

| High or Medium Risk | What types of information/resources will you monitor in order to learn about risk? | How often will this information be monitored? | Who on the campaign team will monitor the information? | How (and when) will they share it with their wider campaign team? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
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## 3. MITIGATE RISKS

Your campaign leadership team will want to brainstorm ways to reduce the chance that high or medium risks will happen. Common strategies include:

· Preparing talking points, messages or communication materials for the team to reference if a risk occurs
· Identifying and developing additional champions if leads cannot continue on with the campaign
· Deciding in advance how the team will respond if partners are not able to carry out their assigned roles or planned actions
· Developing a fundraising plan

· Pro-actively countering opposition arguments to key decision-makers and influencers

Don't limit yourself to these strategies, however. Make sure you design actions that address risks unique to your particular campaign. Be as specific as possible in describing the types of steps you will take, using the columns below as a guide.

And keep in mind that risk management is also important but that will be part of your Risk & Crisis Management Action Plan, discussed a bit later.

| High or Medium Risk | Risk Mitigation Actions | Resources Needed | Persons Responsible | Timeframe |
|---|---|---|---|---|
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# Developing a Crisis Management Plan

**When a risk that you've identified as a possibility occurs, crisis management is relatively straightforward. You simply enact your contingency and management plan and adapt as needed.**

**In many campaigns, however, crises will occur that you were unable to anticipate. In these instances of unanticipated crisis, it is important to have campaign protocols in place that allow you to take immediate, direct action.**

**The tool below will help you in managing possible anticipated crises you identified above as well as unanticipated crises.**

## 1. SET CRITERIA

Not every risk or unanticipated event is a "crisis." That means you and your campaign leadership team will want to establish criteria you can apply to help you decide if you want to respond and implement your crisis management plan.

In the left-hand column below, list the different criteria you intend to use. Examples of criteria might include whether the event:

· Threatens to delay, weaken or stop enactment of an effective policy
· Provides new counter arguments that might decrease public or decision-maker support for your policy objective
· Publicly overwhelms your messages, e.g., an aggressive paid media campaign
· Reveals corruption, lack of transparency in the policy-making process

Once an anticipated or unanticipated event takes place, rank each of the criteria in terms of its likelihood to derail your campaign – high, medium, or low – in the right hand column.

Finally, total the number of highs, mediums, and lows. While there are no absolutes, events with several highs and mediums will likely require your team to respond.

| Criteria | Event |
|---|---|
|  | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low |
|  | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low |
|  | ❑ High ❑ Medium ❑ Low |
| **Totals** | # of Highs _____ # of Mediums _____ # of Lows _____ |
| **Implement Crisis Management Plan** | ❑ **Yes** ❑ **Now** |

## 2. DEFINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

When a crisis occurs, knowing the roles and responsibilities of campaign team members in advance – such as who can make decisions and who can serve as spokespeople – will help your team respond rapidly. Use the chart below to help establish your crisis management leadership team.

| Crisis Role | Responsible Person |
|---|---|
| **Crisis Point Person:** Directs all activities throughout the crisis phase. | |
| **Final Decision-maker(s):** In a crisis, turnaround time is crucial. Identify someone who can make clear and decisive decisions, or establish a system for getting clear and decisive decisions from a group quickly. Generally, the fewer people whose sign off is required, the faster you will be able to act. The final decision-maker(s) does not necessarily have to be the same as the point person. | |
| **Spokespeople:** Delegate persons who are permitted to deliver messages and speak publicly on behalf of the campaign throughout the crisis. | |
| **Communications Person:** Identify whose role it is to continue to monitor the situation and keep the rest of the team informed of any decisions and actions at all times. | |
| **Other:** Include any other roles your team believes are relevant for your policy advocacy campaign. | |

# 3. DEVELOP RESOURCE PLAN

Once an event occurs, your crisis management leadership team should come together immediately to develop an action plan. This will save valuable time and prevent disorganization. Use the chart below to establish objectives, strategies, and specific activities. The plan should also clearly outline who needs to be involved in the planning and execution of any activities, responsible parties and the timelines for carrying out those activities. Be sure to routinely monitor the impact of your effort and adjust your plan when necessary.

Your team will also need to be prepared to adapt as things continue to play out. Be flexible, calm and focused, and stick to any agreed upon messages at all times. GRSP's Developing Advocacy Messages tool can be used to help you craft specific messages for this crisis time.

Routinely monitor the impact of your effort and adjust your plan when necessary.

| Strategy | Activity | Person(s) Responsible | Time-frame | Monitoring Outcomes | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Indicator of Success | Documentation |
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## 4. EVALUATE EFFORTS

Once the crisis is over, the team should come together in an after-action meeting to discuss what went well, what should be improved and any important outcomes. This takes discipline and is often overlooked in the heat of the moment. Nevertheless it is a valuable learning tool and should not be skipped. Answer the following questions and make adjustments to your risk assessment matrix and crisis management plan as necessary.

What could have prevented this crisis, if anything?

What worked well in the response?

What could have made the response easier?

What could have turned the crisis back into the campaign's favor faster?

What will we do differently if something similar arises in the future?

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