

League of California Cities  
City Managers Department Meeting  
**SESSION OUTLINE**

Session: Managing Scandals, Hoaxes and Other Unexpected Crises  
Date: Thursday, February 2, 2012  
Time: 2:00 to 3:15 p.m.

General Overview of Session: The session will discuss recent crisis cases and provide vital steps city managers can take now to prepare for future intense media scrutiny.

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| 2:00-2:10<br>David Biggs<br>City Manager, Carson<br>(10 min.)                             | Introduction of Topic and Speakers  |
| 2:10-2:25<br>Bill Workman<br>City Manager,<br>Redondo Beach<br>(15 min.)                  | I. Unexpected Crisis: How Redondo Beach turned the post-tsunami cleanup of millions of sardines trapped in a marina into a “green solution” <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Situation overview</li><li>B. Global media coverage<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Overcoming language issues</li></ul></li><li>C. Message development</li><li>D. Expert sources</li><li>E. Outcome: Cleanup, “green solution” and assessment of media coverage</li><li>F. Key lessons learned/tips</li></ul>   |
| 2:25-2:35<br>Dan Weikel,<br>Staff Writer,<br>Los Angeles Times<br>(10 min.)               | II. Reporter’s Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. How the media reports on scandals, hoaxes and other crises</li><li>B. What the media expects from government officials during a crisis</li><li>C. What government officials do right in working with the media</li><li>D. What government officials do wrong – and how to avoid these mistakes</li><li>E. Key lessons learned from covering crises</li></ul>  |
| 2:35-2:45<br>Joan Gladstone<br>President and CEO,<br>Gladstone International<br>(10 min.) | III. Crisis Manager’s Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Essential elements of pre-crisis planning<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. How this differs from emergency response planning</li></ul></li><li>B. The media’s evolution and implications for cities<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Working with traditional media (print and broadcast) in a crisis</li><li>2. Managing social media in a crisis<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Example: hoax</li></ul></li></ul></li><li>C. Key lessons learned/tips</li></ul> |
| 2:45-3:15<br>(30 min.)  | IV. Summary and Questions and Answers <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Panel/Presider Interaction</li><li>B. Audience Q&amp;A</li></ul>   |

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75 Minutes

## **Crisis Communications Guidelines**

- 1. Communicate quickly, even if you do not have all the facts.**  
Make your website the prime source of accurate information and key messages. Evaluate using a mix of traditional and social media to deliver your information.
- 2. Be honest and transparent in all communications.**  
It's OK to say "I don't know the answer" to questions early in the crisis. Keep a log of media and customer inquiries so you can follow-up when you do have the answers.
- 3. Exhibit empathy for those affected by the situation.**  
If the situation affects the public's health and safety, show you care. Then state the facts.
- 4. If you caused the problem, accept responsibility and apologize.**  
The quicker you can issue a heartfelt apologize for a situation that you caused, the better.
- 5. If you do not know what caused the problem, identify specific steps you are taking to resolve it.**  
Don't apologize until you are sure of what or who caused the problem. In the meantime, offer detailed facts.
- 6. Ensure all messaging is consistent to all audiences.**  
Provide the same core information to all of your key stakeholders, especially when you issue any information in writing, including website statements, media statements, emails and letters.
- 7. Reassure stakeholders by providing frequent updates.**  
In a crisis, the universal question key stakeholders really want to know is, "What will this mean to me?" Be proactive. Anticipate concerns and address them face-to-face, by phone, and/or in writing.
- 8. Explain how you are going to fix the problem.**  
The more detailed your descriptions of what you will do, and what you are doing, the faster you will regain the public's confidence.
- 9. Demonstrate that you are listening to stakeholder concerns.**  
Some crises last a day while others linger for months or more. Create communications channels to monitor inquiries and respond to them quickly.
- 10. Announce the resolution of the issue.**  
Don't assume people will know when the crisis is over. Create closure by issuing a final news release or messages to stakeholders.



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# Top 10 Crisis Communications Readiness Questions



1. When was the last time you updated your media policy? Does everyone at your city know how to handle unexpected reporter visits or calls?
2. Do you have a crisis communication team in place? Have you appointed primary and back-up team members including a team leader, spokesperson(s), risk management, legal and media liaison?
3. Do you have a crisis communications plan to anticipate issues that may escalate into crises, identify communications vulnerabilities and develop new procedures to manage traditional and social media?
4. Has your primary spokesperson taken crisis media training to handle difficult interviews and videotaped messages with confidence? Have you enrolled other potential spokespersons in media training?
5. Have you provided media protocol training to key management in different departments so they are prepared to serve as immediate, on-the-ground media liaisons?
6. Do you actively monitor citizen journalist and watchdog websites and blogs to anticipate potential issues that could affect you?
7. Do you actively monitor responses posted on your social media sites to identify and help resolve problems before they escalate?
8. Do you maintain an external stakeholder contact list to ensure key constituents, agencies and others hear the news from you before they see it online?
9. Have you created the architecture for a 'dark' crisis web page to enable you to immediately post information for the public and the media?
10. Have you identified a public relations expert to provide objective, strategic counseling during the first critical hours of a crisis?

## About the Speaker



Joan Gladstone is one of the California's most respected crisis communications consultants. Joan received her profession's highest honor in 2007 when she was elected to the Public Relations Society of America's College of Fellows in recognition of lifetime achievement and service to the profession.

Joan and her team at Gladstone International ([www.gladstonepr.com](http://www.gladstonepr.com)) work with cities, companies and nonprofits to help minimize the depth and duration of a crisis, quickly return to business as usual, and protect your hard-earned reputation over the long term. We specialize in crisis intervention to help you prevent issues from becoming full-blown crises. Our **crisis communications plans** become an integral part of your risk management and litigation support programs. We offer expert **media training** to prepare your spokespersons for difficult media encounters. Should a crisis hit, we provide **24/7 response** through the resolution of the crisis.