



Request for Proposals (RFP) for
Crisis Communication Services

RFP release date: March 1, 2023
Submission due date: April 21, 2023

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1. Services

1.1. Overview

Washington County is the fifth largest county in Minnesota by population. The county government provides services and programs to more than 260,000 residents. As such, it has a major public presence and reputation to maintain and present to the public. To aid in the response of a natural or human-made disaster, a disruption in service, a proscribed action by county employees or leadership, or any other occurrence that would require rapid, widespread communication or management of public messages, the county is seeking assistance from a crisis communicator. The work could require coordination with local, state, and federal agencies.

1.2. Goals and Objectives

The goal and objective is to have a crisis communications contractor on retainer to Washington County in the event of a natural or manmade crisis that would necessitate communication with residents and the larger communication community, such as media outlets, to provide:

- Safety and survival information for residents; and
- To maintain and ensure the protection of the reputation and standing of Washington County.

It is expected that the chosen contractor would spend the appropriate time habituating to the county, its history, reputation, communication outlets, and allies. This research phase would include reviewing the current county Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Plan (Exhibit A), most recently updated in October 2019. Once the research is complete, the necessity of the crisis communication contractor would be on an “as needed” basis.

1.3. RFP Schedule

Schedule

Washington County anticipates the following schedule for these services:

RFP solicitation release	Wednesday, March 1, 2023
Written Questions Due	Wednesday, March 15, 2023
Written Questions Responses	Wednesday, March 22, 2023
Proposals due	Friday, April 21, 2023
County review of proposals	Friday, May 5, 2023
Award contract	Friday, May 19, 2023

2. Scope of Work and Deliverables

2.1. Public Information Monitoring

Monitor public information during a crisis and provide strategic communications recommendations to the county.

2.2. Media Relations

During the crisis, draft talking points, write press releases, create social media posts, respond to media inquiries, potentially act as the agency spokesperson, and coordinate messaging with other local, state, and federal agencies.

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2.3. Optional Task 1

Update the Washington County Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Plan. This task may or may not be part of the contract, depending on available funding.

2.4. Optional Task 2

Conduct crisis communication training for county leadership. This task may or may not be part of the final project, depending on available funding.

3. Proposal Content

Proposals will be limited to no more than five pages in length, excluding a cover sheet, a cover letter, table of contents, and appendices. The font shall be no smaller than 11-point. Appendices are anticipated to contain pre-prepared marketing materials and/or full resumes or other supporting documents. Reviewers may or may not review material contained in appendices. The following will be considered minimum contents of the proposal and must be submitted in the order listed:

3.1. Title Page/Cover Letter

Introduce the contractor submitting the proposal, including the name, address, telephone number, and email address of the contact person(s) representing the team, as well as the names of any other firms or individuals participating in the proposal.

3.2. Table Of Contents

Identify the proposal material by section and page number.

3.3. Goals and Objectives

Provide goals and objectives, to demonstrate the contractor's understanding of the nature of the services and work required.

3.4. Scope of Work

Provide a scope of work that conveys the contractor's approach to the work, including a work plan and schedule itemized by task.

3.5. Qualifications and Experience

Provide a summary of the qualifications and experience of key team members and availability to perform the work.

3.6. Cost

Provide a fee schedule that includes itemized costs and annual retainer fees for a response to a crisis, including the hourly rate for each key team member.

Optional: Provide a fee schedule that includes itemized costs and fees for completing Optional Tasks 1 and 2, including the hourly rate for each key team member.

3.7. Terms and Conditions

Prospective contractors shall sign the COUNTY'S STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS (Appendix A) attached hereto as the contractor to whom the contract is awarded shall be required to comply with the terms and conditions contained therein.

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4. Proposal Evaluation

Representatives of Washington County will evaluate all responses received by the deadline. All responses will be evaluated based on qualifications. A 100-percent scale will be used to create the final evaluation recommendation.

The factors and weighting on which proposals will be judged are:

1) Expressed understanding of the goals and objectives.	30%
2) Completeness, quality, and overall technical competence of the scope of work.	30%
3) The experience and qualifications of the contractor and key team members and their work on similar services and the availability of personnel and other resources to perform the work within the specified services schedule.	20%
4) Costs.	20%

The county reserves the right to waive any minor irregularities in the proposal request process. The county reserves the right to interview any, all, or none of the respondents at its discretion. The county shall not be liable for any expenses incurred by the contractor including but not limited to expenses associated with the preparation of the proposal.

5. Proposal Submittal

All proposals must be sent electronically to:

Tina Elam, Communications Manager
Tina.Elam@co.washington.mn.us
Washington County Government Center
Office of Administration
5th Floor - Room 5506
14949 62nd Street North
Stillwater, MN 55082

Interested contractors must submit to the e-mail address above clearly marked as follows: **“Crisis Communications Services.”** Submit all copies to the address indicated above, no later than 4:00 p.m. on Friday, April 21, 2023. Late submittals will not be considered.

6. Proposal Questions

All questions regarding this RFP must be sent via electronic mail to the following contact:

Tina Elam, Communications Manager
Tina.Elam@co.washington.mn.us

Only written questions will receive responses. Washington County reserves the right to disregard questions received after 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, March 15, 2023. If a question pertains to a clarification of this RFP, the question and answer will be forwarded to all contractors who expressed interest in submitting a proposal. A copy of all written questions submitted, with responses, will be distributed to interested contractors no later than 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, March 22, 2023.

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Please note that no other Washington County personnel are allowed to discuss this RFP with anyone, including contractors, before the proposal submission deadline. This RFP does not obligate the county to award a contract or complete the services. The county reserves the right to reject any or all proposals.

Appendix A – County’s Standard Terms and Conditions

A contract will be prepared by Washington County upon selection of a firm. The following provisions must be included in any contract and are non-negotiable.

I. Cost And Payment

The Contractor will provide to the County clear documentation of work completed, dates of work, and location of work. Contractor invoice(s) will reflect charges in accordance with the Cost Proposal provided. Contractor invoice(s) will be paid within 30 days of receipt of the invoices providing proper documentation is presented. Payments made under this Contract shall be in the form of Automated Clearing House (ACH), check, or Virtual Credit Card (VCC). The County may withhold payment for failure to provide service to comply with any of the provisions of this agreement; no interest penalty shall accrue against the County.

Charges such as, but not limited to, mileage reimbursement, fuel, trip or parking charges, consumable incidental materials, etc. shall be included in the Contractor’s overhead and included on the Cost Proposal provided. These charges will not be reimbursed if labeled as “miscellaneous charges.”

II. Nondiscrimination

The Contractor agrees to comply with the nondiscrimination provision set forth in Minnesota Statute 181.59. The Contractor’s failure to comply with section 181.59 may result in cancellation or termination of the Contract, and all money due or to become due under the Contract may be forfeited for a second or any subsequent violation of the terms or conditions of this Contract.

III. Compliance with Law

The Contractor shall comply with all applicable Federal law, State statutes, Federal and State regulations, and local ordinances now in effect or adopted during the performance of the services herein until completion of said services. Failure to meet the requirements of the above shall be a substantial breach of the Contract and will be cause for cancellation of this Contract.

IV. Possession of Firearms on County Premises

Unless specifically required by the terms of this Contract or the person it is subject to an exception provided by 18 USC§ 926B or 926BC (LEOSA) no provider of services pursuant to this Contract or subcontractors shall carry or possess a firearm on County premises or while acting on behalf of Washington County pursuant to the terms of this Contract. Violation of this provision is grounds for immediate suspension or termination of this Contract.

V. Subcontracting and Assignment

The Contractor shall not enter into any subcontract for performance of any services contemplated under this Contract; nor novate or assign any interest in the Contract, without the prior written approval of the County. Any assignment or novation may be made subject to such conditions and provisions as the County may impose. If the Contractor subcontracts the obligations under this Contract, the Contractor shall be responsible for the performance of all obligations by the subcontractors.

VI. Subcontractor Prompt Payment

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Pursuant to Minnesota Statute §471.425 subd. 4a., Contractor shall pay any subcontractors within 10 days of the Contractor's receipt of payment from the County for undisputed services provided by the subcontractor. The Contractor shall pay interest of 1½ percent per month, or any part of a month, to the subcontractor on any undisputed amount not paid on time to the subcontractor. The minimum monthly interest penalty payment for an unpaid balance of \$100 or more is \$10. For an unpaid balance of less than \$100, the Contractor shall pay the actual penalty due to the subcontractor. The subcontractor shall have third party rights under this Contract to enforce this provision.

VII. Data Practices

All data collected, created, received, maintained, or disseminated for any purpose by the activities of the Contractor, because of this Contract shall be governed by the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13 (Act), as amended and the Rules implementing the Act now in force or as amended. The Contractor is subject to the requirements of the Act and Rules and must comply with those requirements as if it is a governmental entity. The remedies contained in section 13.08 of the Act shall apply to the Contractor.

VIII. Audits, Reports, Records and Monitoring Procedures/Records Availability & Retention

Pursuant to Minn. Stat. section 16C.05 subd. 5, the Contractor will:

- A. Maintain all books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices that are related to and/or relevant to this Contract or transaction.
- B. Agree that the County, the State Auditor, or legislative authority, or any of their duly authorized representatives at any time during normal business hours, and as often as they may deem reasonably necessary, shall have access to and the right to examine, audit, excerpt, and transcribe any books, records, documents, and accounting procedures and practices that are related to and/or relevant to this Contract or transaction. The Contractor agrees to maintain these records for a period of six (6) years from the date of the termination of this Contract.

IX. Indemnification

The Contractor agrees it will defend, indemnify, and hold harmless the County, its officers and employees against any and all liability, loss, costs, damages, and expenses which the County, its officers, or employees may hereafter sustain, incur, or be required to pay arising out of the negligent or willful acts or omissions of the Contractor in the performance of this Contract.

X. Insurance Requirements

The Contractor agrees that in order to protect itself, as well as the County, under the indemnity provisions set forth above, it will at all times during the term of this Contract, keep in force the following insurance protection in the limits specified:

- A. Commercial General Liability with Contractual liability coverage in the amount of \$1,500,000 per occurrence with a \$3,000,000 aggregate. An excess or umbrella liability policy may be used in conjunction with primary coverage limits to meet the minimum limit requirements.
- B. Automobile coverage in the amount of \$1,500,000 on a combined single limit basis and include hired and non-owned.
- C. Worker's Compensation in statutory amount (if applicable) of bodily injury by accident in the amount of \$500,000 each accident, bodily injury by disease in the amount of \$500,000 each employee, and bodily injury by disease in the amount of \$500,000 policy limit.

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Washington County shall be listed as additional insured as it relates to Commercial General Liability and Automobile Liability.

Prior to the effective date of this Contract, the Contractor will furnish the County with a current and valid proof of insurance certificate indicating insurance coverage in the amounts required by this Contract. This certificate of insurance shall be on file with the County throughout the term of the Contract. As a condition subsequent to this Contract, Contractor shall ensure that the certificate of insurance provided to the County will at all times be current. The parties agree that failure by the Contractor to maintain a current certificate of insurance with the County shall be a substantial breach of the Contract and payments on the Contract shall be withheld by the County until a certificate of insurance showing current insurance coverage in amounts required by the Contract is provided to the County.

Any policy obtained and maintained under this clause shall provide that it shall not be cancelled, materially changed, or not renewed without thirty days' notice thereof to the County.

XI. Independent Contractor

Nothing within the Contract is intended or should be construed in any manner as creating or establishing the relationship of co-partners between the parties or as constituting the Contractor as the agent, representative, or employee of the County for any purpose or in any manner whatsoever. The Contractor is to be and shall remain an independent Contractor with respect to all services performed under this Contract.

The Contractor will secure, at its own expense, all personnel required in performing services under the Contract. Any and all personnel of the Contractor or other persons, while engaged in the performance of any work or services required by the Contractor under this Contract shall have no Contractual relationship with the County and shall not be considered employees of the County.

XII. Termination by County for Convenience

The County may terminate the Contract at any time and for any reason by providing the Contractor written notice of such termination. Upon such termination the Contractor shall be entitled to compensation for work activities in accordance with the Contract which were incurred prior to termination.

XIII. Termination by County for Cause

The County may immediately terminate the Contract if the County determines that the Contractor has failed to comply with any of the provisions of the Contract, for breach or default. Termination will be in writing setting forth the manner in which the Contractor is in default.

The County in its sole discretion may, allow the Contractor a reasonable period of time not to exceed ten (10) days, in which to cure the defect. In such case, the notice of termination will state the time period in which cure is permitted and other appropriate conditions. If Contractor fails to remedy to the County's satisfaction the breach or default of any of the terms, covenants, or conditions of this Contract within ten (10) days after receipt by Contractor of written notice from County setting forth the nature of said breach or default, County shall have the right to terminate the Contract without any further obligation to Contractor. Any such termination for default shall not in any way operate to preclude County from also pursuing all available remedies against Contractor and its sureties for said breach or default.

XIV. Contractor Debarment, Suspension and Responsibility Certification

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Federal Regulation 45 CFR 92.35 prohibits the County from purchasing goods or services with federal money from vendors who have been suspended or debarred by the federal government. Similarly, Minnesota Statutes, Section 16C.03, subdivision 2, provides the Commissioner of Administration with the authority to debar and suspend vendors who seek to Contract with the County. Contractors may be suspended or debarred when it is determined through a duly authorized hearing process, that they have abused the public trust in a serious manner. By signing this Contract, the Contractor certifies that it and its principals* and employees:

- A. Are not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from transacting business by or with any federal, state, or local governmental department or agency; and
- B. Have not within a three year-period preceding this Contract: 1) been convicted of or had a civil judgment rendered against them for commission of fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining, attempting to obtain or performing a public (federal, state, or local government) transaction or Contract, 2) violated any federal or state antitrust statutes, or 3) committed embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements or receiving stolen property; and are not presently indicted or otherwise criminally or civilly charged by a governmental entity for:
 - a. commission of fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining, attempting to obtain or performing a public (federal, state, or local government) transaction,
 - b. violating any federal or state antitrust statutes, or
 - c. committing embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements or receiving stolen property; and
- C. Are not aware of any information and possess no knowledge that any subcontractor(s), that will perform work pursuant to this Contract, are in violation of any of the certifications set forth above; and
- D. Shall immediately give written notice to the Contract manager should the Contractor come under investigation for allegations of fraud or a criminal offense in connection with obtaining or performing a public (federal, state, or local government) transaction, violating any federal or state antitrust statute, or committing embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification of records, making false statements, or receiving stolen property.

*Principals, for the purpose of this certification, means officers, directors, owners, partners, and persons having primary management or supervisory responsibilities within a business entity (e.g., general manager, plant manager, head of subsidiary division or business segment, and similar positions).+

XV. Safety

The Contractor must comply with all state and federal Occupational Safety and Health regulations and laws.

This includes but is not limited to employee right to know concerning all materials classified by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) as hazardous. All chemical dispensers/applicators will be clearly marked showing contents. All Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) relating to all chemicals shall be displayed where chemicals are stored. Any chemicals used in County buildings or in the performance of County services shall have an MSDS which will be given to the County before any work begins. Any spillage of chemicals shall be reported immediately to the County and appropriate reporting agencies (i.e., MPCA). Report any problems, breakage, fires, etc., immediately to the County.

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Contractor shall remove all supplies, chemicals, etc., from County premises that were used to perform services and dispose of them properly. There will be no disposing of supplies and chemicals on County property. There will be no loaning of County tools and/or equipment to Contractors from County staff.

Drinking of alcoholic beverages, using of controlled substances (drugs) or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol is expressly prohibited. Refrain from smoking of any substance in or about County buildings.

XVI. Security & Privacy

The Contractor is responsible to close, secure, and lock all doors in County facilities when services are performed after normal County hours or when no County personnel are present. While Contractors are working in County buildings, Contractor must sign in/out on a daily basis in addition to wearing a badge. Contractor should produce sufficient identification.

The Contractor agrees to take any precautions necessary to maintain security of County buildings and privacy of data found throughout County buildings or on County premises. All questions concerning security issues will be reported to the County immediately upon discovery.

XVII. Jurisdiction & Venue

This Contract, amendments, and supplements thereto, shall be governed by the laws of the State of Minnesota. All actions brought under this Contract shall be brought exclusively in Minnesota State Courts of competent jurisdiction with venue in Washington County.

XVIII. Modifications

Any material alteration, modification, variations, or additional tasks to this Contract shall be reduced to writing as an amendment and signed by the parties. Any alterations, modifications, variations, or additional tasks deemed not to be material by Contract of the County and the Contractor shall not require written approval.

XIX. Merger

It is understood and agreed that the entire Contract of the parties is contained herein and that this Contract supersedes all oral agreements and negotiations between the parties relating to this subject matter. All items referred to in this Contract are incorporated or attached and deemed to be part of this Contract. In the event of any conflict, contradiction, or ambiguity between the terms and conditions of this Contract and any other document(s) incorporated by reference to this Contract, the terms and conditions of this Contract shall prevail.

XX. Counterparts

This Contract may be executed in two or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which shall constitute one and the same instrument.

Respondent acknowledgment

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ (Please print or type)

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Exhibit A – 2019 Washington County Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Plan



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Revisions and Updates

Note: The Washington County Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Plan will be reviewed and updated annually with input from subject matter experts. Revisions will be made as necessary to continue to ensure our plans meet the requirements to respond to emergencies.

Reviewed/Updated	Date	Signature
CREATED	October 2018	Angela Eastman, Shannon Eisentrager, Yvonne Klinnert
REVIEWED	January-July 2019	Emergency Management, Administration, Public Health & Environment, Social Media Super Users
UPDATED	July 2019	Angela Eastman, Shannon Eisentrager, Yvonne Klinnert

Introduction

During and after an emergency, the need for public information is critical. Impacts to communication systems, language barriers, and misinformation impede efforts to reach affected populations and provide adequate control measures. The public can be a powerful ally in combating an emergency, when given factual information. Many emergencies that have implications for public health and safety include infectious disease outbreaks, fires, bomb threats, natural disasters, long lasting power outages, or bioterrorism.

A. Purpose

This plan establishes policies, procedures, responsibilities, and relationships to aid Washington County in effectively providing timely, accurate and effective information, and instructions to internal and external audiences before, during, and after an emergency. This includes direct communication to the public and indirect communication through partner entities and the news media.

B. Scope

This plan provides policies and procedures for the coordination of internal and external communications for Washington County in the event of a crisis. The scope of this plan is to provide a description of the role Washington County plays in ensuring effective risk communications during the preparation, response, and recovery phases to events or emergencies that affect the lives and well-being of the residents, employees, and visitors of Washington County.

This plan is intended to be used in conjunction with the Public Health and Environment All Hazard Plan or the Washington County Emergency Operations Plan. Response should comply with the existing decision making process established by Washington County.

C. Policies

Washington County Guidelines and Procedures for Minnesota Government Data Privacy Policy. ([Policy #1300](#))

Situation

A. Risk Communication in an Emergency/Disaster

Risk communication is a critical component of the overall response and recovery to a crisis event. Risk communication is defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as “the effort by experts to provide information to allow an individual, stakeholder, or an entire community to make the best possible decisions about their well-being within nearly impossible time constraints and help people ultimately accept the imperfect nature of choices during the crisis.” The goal of risk communication is to promote behavior and action that allows for rapid response and effective recovery from the event.

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Six principles of effective crisis and risk communication

1. **Be first.** Crisis are time-sensitive. For members of the public, the first source of information often becomes the preferred source.
2. **Be right.** Accuracy establishes credibility. Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what is being done to fill in the gaps.
3. **Be credible.** Honesty and truthfulness should not be compromised during crisis.
4. **Express empathy.** Crisis create harm, and the suffering should be acknowledged in word. Addressing what people are feeling, and the challenges they face, builds trust and rapport.
5. **Promote action.** Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety, helps restore order, and promotes a restored sense of control.
6. **Show respect.** Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable. Respectful communication promotes cooperation and rapport.

B. Planning Assumptions: Coordination with Federal, State and Local Agencies

The lead role for managing the response to an emergency — including the communications function — will evolve according to the situation. This communication plan is written with the assumption that Washington County has deemed it necessary to establish Incident Command or a local response has been established according to the County Emergency Operations Plan. Command and control responsibilities for the response to the emergency will be the responsibility of the Incident Commander, including providing overall direction for communications. However, the plan recognizes that, as the situation changes, the lead role for managing the response and, therefore, communications may be taken on by other federal, state, or local agencies. While an emergency risk communication plan cannot alleviate the threat of terrorism or solve tactical problems, effective communication can have a positive impact on how county employees, the public, and media respond to the emergency.

In a local emergency, if the incident requires implementation of this plan, but does not require establishment of an Incident Commander, then the command and control responsibilities will remain with the Washington County Emergency Management director or the communications manager or designee.

In this plan, the public information officer (PIO) refers to the designated role within the Washington County emergency operations center. During an emergency, the PIO will coordinate with local and state emergency response partners and other pertinent agencies to deliver risk communication and information to the public through every available channel.

The media should be treated as an essential participant in the county's risk communication system and should be regularly provided with verified and confirmed facts relating to an emergency. Media deadlines should not prompt the release of unverified information at any time. Information released to the public will be limited to data that is classified as "Public Data" according to [Minnesota Statute Data Practices Act, Chapter 13](#).

Some events may bring large numbers of reporters, photographers, and camera crews to the area, creating inordinate demands on emergency public information systems and the need to credential media representatives. Reporters, photographers, and camera crews may be legally barred from crime scenes to prevent the compromising of evidence, from infectious zones to prevent their exposure to and subsequent

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spread of infectious agents, and from certain service areas to protect individual privacy like a Family Assistance Center or Public Health Open Point of Dispensing.

Rumor management is a major element of the public information officer role. Public feedback and regular monitoring of news media reports and social media enable this effort and provide a means of measuring the effectiveness of previously released risk communication messages.

Concept of Operations

A. Washington County Operations

In the event of an emergency, the PIO reports to the Incident Commander or designee. When the scope or potential escalation of the emergency warrants it, the PIO will work with the Incident Commander to request additional positions be activated to support risk communication.

If the scale and scope of the emergency warrants it (e.g. high risk situation involving multiple response entities, municipalities, or organizations), a Joint Information Center (JIC) may be activated. The joint information center serves as a single-point source of public information from all entities involved in Washington County's emergency response.

In a declared emergency, information that is critical for the public to know should be expedited and released quickly. In coordination with the Incident Commander or if an Incident Commander has not been established, three people should officially approve information before it is released to the public:

1. Incident Commander or designee
2. Washington County PIO
3. Subject Matter Expert (examples include: Sheriff's Office, Public Health and Environment Director, Public Work's Director, Washington County's Medical Examiner)
4. County Administrator, County Attorney and/or the County Board Chair or designee may be required to clear some releases, especially those that deal with Washington County policies.

Information to be released at all news conferences, online, and through direct public communication methods will also be provided to the county's emergency phone line and other appropriate Washington County staff for use in responding to public calls. This includes, but is not limited to: Community Services intake line, and Public Health and Environment hotline.

In the event of a public health emergency, the Minnesota Department of Health or other sourced information will be used as the basis for disease agent and health advisory information issued by the county, to help ensure consistency of information issued to the public.

B. Coordination with Other Local, State, and Federal Agencies

Coordination between Washington County and local, state, and federal emergency response partners is extremely important, particularly in multi-jurisdictional situations. In general, the agency that has the lead role in managing the emergency will also have the lead role in managing communications.

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If Washington County agencies have the lead role:

If the emergency appears to be isolated to Washington County, the Incident Commander will provide command and control functions, including direction for communications. If the emergency does not require Washington County EOC activation, then the lead county department will provide the command and control functions including direction for communications through the Department Operations Center (DOC) structure.

- Additional information can be found in Washington County Emergency Support Function (ESF) 15 – External Affairs and Public Information. ESF 15 coordinates actions to provide public affairs support to local incident management operations and elements. It identifies the support positions necessary for coordinating communications to the general public. This ESF applies to all local agencies within Washington County to include Washington County if they require public affairs support during emergencies or disasters. The provisions of this ESF apply to any event designated by the Emergency Management Director or Elected Officials where significant interagency coordination is necessary.

If the emergency requires a regional or state response:

If the emergency involves multiple counties or jurisdictions, Washington County expects and recommends that other regional, state, or federal agencies establish an EOC and JIC and take the lead on communication functions. Washington County staff will provide assistance, if requested, and may be dispatched to the JIC or other location to assist with communications.

C. Designated Spokespersons

Emergency risk communication spokespersons are designated to serve as the public face and voice of the county for its proactively organized media interviews and news conferences.

If Washington County agencies have the lead role:

All media requests for interviews will be facilitated by the PIO and conducted as the topic warrants, unless otherwise specified by the Incident Commander. Spokespersons should have a preparatory discussion with the PIO to rehearse key talking points before making any public statements or participating in any media interviews. Key talking points will be developed by the PIO with the assistance of the EOC Manager or Incident Commander. The Washington County Sheriff's Office will be responsible for all law enforcement related information.

Responsibilities

- Work with the PIO to develop, review, and approve messages.
- Stay on message. Continue to emphasize key messages.
- Know your organization's policies and stay within the scope of responsibilities.
- Embody the organization's identity.
- Describe the incident and its magnitude: What, where, when, why, how?
- Describe the health and safety impact on individuals and communities: What is the risk?
- Describe the process in place to respond to the incident: What are we doing.
- Put the good news in subordinate clauses. (e.g., "It is too soon to say we are out of the woods, but we have not seen a new case in the past x days.")
- Acknowledge uncertainty. (e.g., "I wish I could give you definite answer on that.")
- State when the next update will be provided.

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If the emergency requires a regional or state response:

The county PIO will coordinate public information efforts with Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM), the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and other federal, state, and local jurisdictions. In the event of a public health emergency, MDH will coordinate a state response to ensure a unified message. Fact sheets on potential bioterrorism agents, infectious agents and medications will be posted online.

Should an established template be used for local information purposes, each message will be evaluated for potential modification for local purposes and any new information should be approved through established protocols.

Examples of local information adaptations to established templates include local contracts, local hotline numbers, sites of mass dispensing clinics, location of a Family Assistance Center, etc.

D. Public Information Officer

The Public Information Officer (PIO) is responsible for the overall management and coordination of emergency risk communication activities. This position is appointed by, and reports to, the Incident Commander to support the information needs of the response and authorize development of all public information matters relating to the incident. The PIO serves as the lead Public Information strategist on the Incident Command team and collaborates with the Incident Commander and subject matter experts to develop the county's key risk communication messages.

This section is written with the assumption that the Washington County EOC is managing the overall response and providing direction for communications. In the event of a widespread emergency, Washington County EOC staff will coordinate with other local, state, and federal partners on all aspects of the response, including communications.

Responsibilities

Under the direction of the Incident Commander or the Department Director, or designee, the PIO will assume these responsibilities:

- Identify key information that needs to be communicated to the public.
- Craft messages conveying key information that are clear and easily understood by all, including those with access and functional needs.
- Prioritize messages to ensure timely delivery of information without overwhelming the audience.
- Verify accuracy of information through appropriate channels.
- Disseminate messages using the most effective means available.

E. Messaging

Six principles of effective crisis and risk communication

1. **Be first.** Crisis are time-sensitive. For members of the public, the first source of information often becomes the preferred source.
2. **Be right.** Accuracy establishes credibility. Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what is being done to fill in the gaps.
3. **Be credible.** Honesty and truthfulness should not be compromised during crisis.

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4. **Express empathy.** Crisis create harm, and the suffering should be acknowledged in word. Addressing what people are feeling, and the challenges they face, builds trust and rapport.
5. **Promote action.** Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety, helps restore order, and promotes a restored sense of control.
6. **Show respect.** Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable. Respectful communication promotes cooperation and rapport.

In an emergency, it is often necessary to develop and deliver a message even though all of the facts are not known. Go forward as quickly as possible with what you do know. Initial information should include:

- actions the public should take;
- impact of the incident;
- actions the response agencies are taking;
- actions businesses and industries should take;
- a summary of the incident;
- and overall steps to be taken by the government and by citizens to return to normal after the incident.

The following factors are important to consider when creating initial messages about a crisis:

- Be concise and focused
- Include only relevant information
- Give action steps in positives, not negatives
- Create action steps in threes or fours, or create an acronym
- Repeat the message
- Say “we” not “I”
- Promise or guarantee only what can actually be delivered
- Use plain language; No jargon and acronyms
- Avoid condescending or judgmental phrases
- Avoid speculation and assumptions
- Avoid discussion of money and liability
- Avoid humor

F. Public information monitoring

The PIO or designee within the Emergency Operations Center or Joint Information Center will monitor media coverage and public sentiment regarding the county’s organized response to the emergency, watching for instances of factual misrepresentation, misguided public perceptions, unanswered concerns, and emerging challenge issues. This public intelligence gathering can serve as the basis for modified, clarified, or expanded public messaging efforts.

Public Information Monitoring role includes:

- **Email.** Receiving, reading, researching, and responding to all public web mail from the county’s emergency response web pages – and then tabulating and analyzing topic trends as they emerge.
- **Front-desk referred calls.** When unable to answer a client or public question about the emergency, front-line staff (receptionists, call centers, service centers) will refer all off-script questions to the emergency operations center or PIO.

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- **Multi-language information line usage.** Summaries of call volume, selected languages and message options data.
- **Web page usage.** Summaries of web page usage data.
- **News media monitoring.** Ongoing media monitoring; enhanced Internet “key words” news monitoring.
- **Response partner intelligence sharing.** Metro joint information monitoring.
- **Social Media.** Monitor social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Dealing with rumors: Rebut a rumor without really repeating it. Limit the rebuttal to the places where the rumor exists. Be prepared to answer these questions:

- Are my family and I safe?
- What can I do to protect myself and my family?
- Who is in charge here?
- What can we expect?
- Why did this happen?
- Were you forewarned?
- Why wasn't this prevented?
- What else can go wrong?
- When did you begin working on this?
- What does this information mean?

G. Methods of Dissemination

The PIO will use the following vehicles to provide emergency risk communication and information to the media, citizens, and partner/stakeholders about health and safety factors involved in the emergency. Management of communication platforms will allow for a two-way conversation with the public:

- Media, including print, radio, social media, and television
- Telephone, with calls made to media and partners/stakeholders on the telephone hotline/phone bank to/from residents (2-way)
- Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter (2-way) – Reference: [CDC Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices](#)
- E-mail, (2-way) using prepared media and partner/stakeholder lists and listservs
- Public health information can be shared quickly with health and medical partners through the Health Alert Network (HAN)
- Fax (2-way), using pre-programmed broadcast fax lists (Health Alert Network)
- 800 MHz radios
- News conferences (2-way)
- Code Red
- TPT/ECHO which is a multi-language health, safety, civic engagement and emergency readiness process
- Utilization of the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS) through Emergency Management may be used
- Washington County website, partner/stakeholder websites, and media websites
- Printed materials, including news releases, fact sheets and other specially-prepared materials. When appropriate, materials will also be posted on the website. Partner newsletters and fax and/or email distribution lists

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The PIO or designee will maintain up-to-date contact lists for local media, key emergency response partners, and special populations.

Postcards could be sent with the assistance of the Property Records and Taxpayer Services and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) – and could include the following information:

- Updates of how to access and find information (e.g., hotline number, County’s website, etc.)
- Location of Community Points of Dispensing (for emergency supplies)
- Public Open Point of Distribution location (for medications) and how they will operate
- Other identified information

H. Telephone Hotline/Phone Banks/Webpage

If Washington County agencies have the lead role:

The telephone hotline will be used for incoming calls in emergency situations where the capacity of the staff is exceeded. In consultation with the Incident Commander, Washington County Public Health and Environment will activate a telephone hotline.

The hotline number will be shared with the appropriate audience (e.g., health care providers or the general public) when the hotline is activated. The hotline will be monitored for call volume and when calls taper off, the hotline will be discontinued with calls transferred to normal telephone receptionist. Multiple staff and volunteers will be provided with just-in-time training and current information to allow them to respond accurately and consistently. See [Hotline Operations](#) is the Response and Preparedness SharePoint site on the WashNet County Collaboration site.

For a Public Health Emergency, the use of CDC-INFO line (800-CDC-INFO) will be considered and recommended as determined necessary. CDC-INFO is CDC’s national contact center and publication fulfillment system. CDC-INFO offers live agents by phone and email to help you find the latest, reliable, and science-based health information on more than 750 health topics. CDC-INFO is here in emergencies, using additional agents and extended hours as needed to support CDC’s response.

County Administration shall establish a draft emergency incident webpage on the external website to be activated and populated with necessary information. There will be a link from the website homepage to this webpage.

If the emergency requires a regional or state response:

If the emergency involves multiple counties or jurisdictions, the EOC or Incident Commander may recommend that the MDH or other regional, state, or federal agencies establish a hotline under the direction of an EOC and JIC. Washington County staff or volunteers may provide assistance, if requested, and may be dispatched to the JIC or other location to assist in handling calls to the hotline.

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I. Health Alert Network (HAN): Communications with Health Care Providers and Other Partners

HAN enables public health staff, health care providers, emergency workers, and others working to protect the public to exchange information during a disease outbreak or disaster. Washington County Public Health and Environment is an active participant in the Health Alert Network.

When a health threat is suspected or identified during normal business hours (Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), MDH makes the decision to activate the HAN. The HAN message contains a summary of the health threat, web links and recommendations regarding the distribution of the alert information. This message is then sent via email from MDH to local public health. The message is then distributed to local community partners based on MDH recommendations. Washington County agencies that participate in the HAN include:

- Hospitals
- Medical clinics
- Nursing homes
- Schools
- Veterinarians
- Local elected officials
- Public works
- Pharmacies
- Assisted living facilities
- Emergency management
- Law enforcement
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS)/Ambulance service

When an urgent health threat is suspected or identified after business hours, MDH will notify WCPHE staff via 24/7 alerting system. The WCPHE Director and the WCPHE Nursing Director use smart cellular telephone technology to receive 24/7 HAN messages. MDH also has home and cell phone numbers for these WCPHE staff members. As stated above, it is the responsibility of WCPHE staff to alert community partners of urgent health threats as it necessitates.

J. Media Relations

All news media inquiries regarding incidents including requests for participation on radio and television talk shows and other programs, must be directed to the PIO.

Once a reporter has been referred to the PIO the referring staff member must not talk with that reporter again until authorized to do so by the PIO regardless of that reporter's persistence. The PIO will coordinate the county's response with appropriate internal entities and external partners.

All media contacts and public inquiries should be tracked. This can be done through an Excel or Word document, or via paper. The PIO or liaison will determine the best method at the time of the event and share with necessary staff. Contact, data, time, query, and outcome should all be recorded.

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Guidelines for releasing information to the media

- Provide accurate and consistent information. Release only those facts that can be confirmed. If little information is available, indicate this fact and schedule future briefings as information comes in.
- Release only approved, specific, and verified information, such as:
 - Nature and extent of emergency occurrence
 - Impacted or potentially affected areas of the community
 - Advice on emergency safety procedures, if any
 - Mitigation activities being conducted by responders
 - Procedures for reporting emergency conditions to the Emergency Operation Center (EOC)
- Control rumors. Correct any inaccurate information published by the media.
- State when the next update will be provided.
- Do not release information that might hinder emergency response, prejudice the outcome of an investigation, or pose a further threat to public safety.
- Do not allow media access to the EOC except under limited, controlled circumstances, and only with the prior approval of the Incident Commander.
- Keep logs and, if possible, tape recordings of public information briefings, releases, interviews, and warnings.

K. Disseminating Information to Populations with Specific Functional Communications Needs

During an emergency, information must be provided to all residents, county employees and guests/visitors, including at-risk populations; this includes, but not limited to, those whose primary language is not English, minority populations, the deaf and hard-of-hearing, people with disabilities, people with mental illness, people with limited mobility, and the elderly. Messages need to be tailored to audiences in a way that makes the messages easy to understand and relevant. Different channels may be needed to disseminate messages to reach culturally diverse and other at-risk needs populations.

Washington County has contracts with translation and interpretive services and would contact those resources to assist in communication efforts in the event of an emergency. Washington County would draw upon existing resources in other languages, including fact sheets developed by the HSEM, DPS, MDH and CDC. The program Google Translator could also be used as a means to translate when other resources are not available. Real time translations could happen utilizing Language Line, bi-lingual county staff, and contracted bi-lingual employees. Washington County would first use staff and contracted employees, then would use Language Line, Voiance or expand contracted work. The use of online translation programs may be utilized, but would require review by verified language personnel.

Additional information on translation, interpreter services, websites, points of contacts, costs, and staff can be obtained from the Community Services Department or Public Health and Environment Department. The Public Health and Environment Quick Start Guide contains information on how to use Language Line.

Washington County would partner with and use the services of the organization [TPT ECHO](#) to reach English, Spanish, Hmong and Somali speaking populations. TPT ECHO is a regional collaboration of organizations including Twin Cities Public Television (TPT), multicultural organizations, local and state agencies, public safety, and emergency management organizations. The goal of TPT ECHO is to deliver timely health and safety information to people with limited English skills with content broadcast on TV Channel 2.5 reaching one-million households in the Twin Cities and surrounding areas (see attached coverage map). This ensures

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that when a public health or safety emergency occurs, TPT ECHO has a proven system in place to translate, produce and distribute critical information rapidly and effectively.

In the event of an emergency, Washington County would work with TPT ECHO to televise emergency information in four languages (English, Hmong, Somali, and Spanish).

Washington County is able to find the video's on the TPT web site server by going to <http://www.mnvideovault.org> (Type in ECHO in search area).

Washington County could also reach out to Rice County. Rice County has unique resources available to partner with. They have two colleges with bilingual year-around students, a high school hosting students from more than 25 countries, a school for the blind, a school for the deaf and hard of hearing, and additional translation resources.

To reach populations during a power outage, the following are examples of communication means could be used: radio stations, flyer distribution, social media, signs on trucks moving through communities, personnel moving through the communities using megaphones, door-to-door canvassing, emergency alert systems on TV (for those with backup generators), emergency alerts on the county website, internet, local mass notification systems (school call systems, local government notifications systems that use texting and calls).

Printing services can be done in-house through the Washington County Building Services.

CDC's [Everyday Words for Communities](#) can assist in the development of low literacy/easy to understand materials. This document lists frequently used terms in materials and their common, everyday alternatives in plain language sentences.

Populations with Specific Functional Communication Needs

Communication Barrier	Who is Experiencing Barrier	Possible Communications Methods to Reach Populations
Can't/Won't receive message:	Blind	Radio, television, CodeRED, website
	Deaf	Television, internet, TTY, CodeRED, Relay, written materials, social media, website
	Physically disabled	Television, internet, radio, written materials, social media, website
	Tourists	Internet, media, social media, website
	Transients	Flyers posted in targeted areas In-person communication (trucks, volunteers), social media, website
	Migrant workers	Flyers posted in targeted areas, social media In-person communication (trucks, volunteers), website
	Homeless	Flyers posted in targeted areas, radio, internet, social media, website In-person communication (trucks, volunteers)
	Isolated elderly	Radio, television, CodeRED, written materials, senior centers, social media, internet, website
Can't/Won't understand message:	Illiterate	Radio, television, CodeRED, social media
	Language barriers	PSAs (radio, television), Social Media, Community volunteers Written translated materials, Cultural centers/targeted areas, internet, website
	Migrant workers	Flyers posted in targeted areas, Social Media, internet In-person communication (trucks, volunteers), website
	Mentally disabled	List of Group Homes, DD Case Managers, website
Can't/Won't act on message	Immigrants	In-person communication (trucks, volunteers) Written translated materials, Social Media, internet

		Cultural centers/targeted areas, website
	Isolated elderly	Radio, television, written materials, senior centers, social media, internet, website
	Homeless	Flyers posted in targeted areas, radio, social media, In-person communication (trucks, volunteers)
	Religious restrictions	Families and Individuals Sharing Hope (FISH), Community churches, social media, internet, radio, media, faith bulletins, website
	Cultural restrictions	Community, FISH, social media, internet, radio, media, flyers posted in targeted areas, website
	Tourists	Internet, List of hotels/motels, Social media, radio, media, website
	Displaced residents	Internet, media, social media, radio, website
	Geographically isolated	Radio, television, written materials, through Community churches, social media, internet, flyers in targeted areas, website
	Language barriers	PSAs (radio, television), Community volunteers, social media, website Written translated materials, Cultural centers/targeted areas, internet
	Migrant workers	Flyers posted in targeted areas, social media, internet, website, radio, media, In-person communication (trucks, volunteers)
	Mentally disabled	List of Group Homes, DD Case Managers, website

Appendix A: Acronyms

CERC	Crisis Emergency Risk Communication
CDC	Center for Disease Control
CSD	Community Services Department
DOC	Department Operations Center
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EOP	Emergency Operations Plan
ESF	Emergency Support Function
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
HAN	Health Alert Network
HSEM	Homeland Security & Emergency Management
IC	Incident Command
ICS	Incident Command System
JOC	Joint Operations Center
JIC	Joint Information Center
MDH	Minnesota Department of Health
MJIC	Metro Join information Center
PHE	Public Health and Environment
PIO	Public Information Officer
TPT/ECHO	Twin Cities Public Television/Emergency Communication Health Outreach
WCPHE	Washington County Public Health and Environment
WCSSO	Washington County Sheriff's Office