



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

**Flint River Council
Boy Scouts of America
Issues and Crisis Communications Plan**

Updated: September 2019

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1. Introduction

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) creates programs to help build the character and integrity of America's youth. Its Scout Oath teaches a dedication of duty to God, country, others, and self. The Scout Law describes how to live lives of honor by being trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. The BSA prepares young Americans to become exceptional adults by cultivating in them a sense of community, family, ambition, leadership, and priority so that they will make the world a better place.

As such, the Flint River Council must be prepared to communicate effectively with its members, employees, community partners, and the media at all times, especially when its brand and reputation could be threatened.

It is essential that in the event of a local crisis, the Flint River Council has in place a course of action to follow that will enable it to respond with a strong, unified voice and ensure effective communication to its key audiences and stakeholders.

The initial 24 to 48 hours of a crisis are the most critical. It is during those hours that the scrutiny of the Flint River Council will be at its peak, and communication will be particularly important. Positive communication is necessary to ensure that the credibility of the organization is not questioned. This period is when the council must demonstrate that it is acting responsibly and decisively to resolve the situation.

Statement of purpose

There are two general scenarios that would require the response of the Flint River Council — local market issues and national issues that affect the council.

The goal of this plan is to define the BSA's crisis communications policies and procedures, help improve the BSA's response to situations that could lead to external scrutiny, and assist it in identifying and marshalling appropriate resources so the Flint River Council can focus on its mission.

This manual is meant to coordinate with *Communicating Scouting's Values and Standards*, which provides the BSA's general position and key messages on the most frequently encountered issues and crises. (*Communicating Scouting's Values and Standards* is available on www.mybsa.org under the "Scout Executives Only" tab.)

The BSA will conduct a periodic review of this document to help ensure and maintain the effective implementation of these policies and procedures. If you find information that is out of date or inaccurate, please notify:

Crisis communications plan contacts:

Scout Executive:	Robert Johnson	470-481-1061 (w) 678-588-1302 (c)
Council President:	David Pittman	770-362-8462 (c)
Council Commissioner:	Jay Fralish	770-845-2938(c)
VP of Legal Affairs	Pat McKee Attorney	678-642-2191 (c)
Executive Committee Member	Rusty Strawn	770-317-4291 (c)

2. Understanding crisis communications

The following section examines the concepts, organization, and methodology behind crisis communications—the internal and external sharing of information during and after a crisis. This section addresses the BSA’s crisis terminology, philosophy, and goals.

Crisis communications terminology

For the purpose of this manual, it is important to recognize a standard and accepted set of operating terms and descriptions. The following are key terms:

- **Brand:** A brand is a collection of experiences that people have with an organization. It is not just a logo, a tagline, or an advertisement. Built over time, a brand is ultimately what people expect from an organization.
- **Reputation:** The public’s overall perception of the BSA’s brand and organization.
- **Incident:** A discrete, isolated event that impacts one or more councils, members, employees, or the community and has the potential to attract the attention of the media.
- **Issue:** Any unresolved point of conflict between the BSA and one or more of its key constituencies that, if not properly addressed, has the potential to escalate into a crisis.
- **Lingering issue:** An issue that has been addressed to some extent but is still being debated among the BSA’s key audiences and stakeholders.
- **Smoldering issue:** An issue that was not previously recognized either within or outside of the BSA but suddenly surfaces, threatening to escalate into a crisis that could damage the organization’s reputation, performance, and/or credibility.
- **Issues management:** The process of continually scanning the environment in order to identify and take control of a potentially damaging situation before the damage occurs and escalates into a crisis that captures widespread attention.
- **Crisis:** Any sudden and unpredictable large-scale event that invites external scrutiny and has the potential to impact the BSA, its members, its employees, or the community—the BSA’s relationship with supporting organizations or its reputation in general.
- **Crisis management:** The process of responding to adverse situations that have already occurred and taking a definitive course of action to neutralize them or minimize their short- or long-term impact.
- **Online community member:** A person or a group of people who discuss the BSA using digital media such as blogs, social networks, mobile devices, etc., and that often use these media as supplemental forms of communication with people they know in real life.

Crisis and issues communications philosophy

The BSA's crisis and issues communications management will be based on the following core principles:

- **Follow the Scout Oath and Scout Law.** It is important to communicate to key audiences and stakeholders that the BSA will uphold the Scout Oath and Scout Law in its words and actions.
- **Demonstrate concern.** Without admitting liability, the BSA will always show concern and empathy for the Scouting family and those involved in a crisis situation.
- **Manage issues, not crises.** The BSA will work to identify vulnerabilities and put strategic plans in place in order to effectively manage issues before they become public crises.
- **Position BSA management front and center.** The BSA will use its effective professional and volunteer leadership to tell its story.
- **Talk to all stakeholders directly, not just through the media.** The BSA will be innovative in its communication and speak via traditional and digital media.
- **Speak with one voice.** The BSA will coordinate the organization's messages with all involved parties to unify internal and external communications.
- **Make friends before we need them.** In many cases, the BSA's first encounter with members of the public will be during a crisis. With particular attention to the online world, the BSA needs to ensure that it is consistently reaching out to online communities such that those communities can tell the BSA's story in a time of crisis.
- **Develop third-party support.** In the event of a crisis, Scouting will identify credible third-party alliances. These relationships will be used to tell the BSA's story.

Crisis communications goals

There are five primary goals in every media contact:

- **Position** the BSA brand as a credible, leading expert on the subject of youth development.
- **Reinforce** the values and integrity of the BSA and its brand.
- **Obtain** accurate, no inflammatory discussion of any situation that might occur and do not allow others to tell the Scouting story for the organization.
- **Balance** the dialogue by contributing to the issues-related discussion and correcting misperceptions or defining and deflecting the elements of the discussion.
- **Minimize** the amount and length of negative discussion during an issue or crisis.

3. Crisis and preparedness

A thorough examination of crisis communications revealed the following 10 categories that represent the issues and crises that most often affect the BSA's reputation. Each of these categories requires a unique set of messages tailored to a specific set of audiences. [The BSA's general position statement, talking points, and questions and answers are provided in *Communicating Scouting's Values and Standards*, available on www.mybsa.org under the "Scout Executives Only" tab. Also, at the Scout executive's discretion, these resources may be copied and provided to the designated council spokesperson.]

Crisis categories

- Duty to God
- School access
- Leadership standards
- Learning for Life
- Property and land management
- Youth protection
- Defunding
- Health and safety
- Executive compensation
- Other* [Includes product recalls, jamboree site selection, employment, governance, etc.]

Levels of preparedness planning

Within each of the aforementioned categories, there is a spectrum of incidents that ranges from minor—those that generate little to no attention—to severe incidents that will threaten the BSA's reputation and ability to continue to achieve its business goals.

There are four basic levels of preparedness planning that affect local councils and the National Council, each of which has the potential to significantly impact the brand and reputation of the organization. The following chart outlines the levels of preparedness and the general actions of the local and national teams during each level.



Levels of preparedness planning			
Level	Situation	Local council response	National Council response
Level 1 Warning	The BSA's brand and reputation are juxtaposed with an event that may impact or require the BSA to act <i>(Ex. A local volunteer is arrested on youth-protection charges)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informs the National Council crisis communications team • Discusses strategy • Involves key management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitors the situation • Discusses and provides strategic recommendations • Begins active listening on blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and any online destination where the BSA has an online "embassy"
Level 2 Caution	The BSA's brand and reputation are put at risk by potential events that fall outside the BSA's immediate control <i>(Ex. Several Scouts at a camp are isolated for cases of H1N1)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides reports to the National Council • Requests strategic counsel and reactive media materials • Serves as spokesperson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides strategic counsel and reactive materials • Updates executive and legal teams • Continues online listening program • Prepares response message and designs/uploads an unpublished page to scouting.org
Level 3 Hazard	The BSA's brand and reputation are under intense scrutiny by members, employees, and media <i>(Ex. The Hearst organization launches a prolonged investigative report on the BSA's land management practices)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides regular reports to the National Council • Requests ongoing strategic counsel and reactive media materials • Serves as spokesperson • Considers requesting spokesperson/on-site assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides ongoing strategic counsel and reactive media materials • Provides regular updates to the executive and legal teams • Provides spokesperson/on-site assistance, as required • "Unpublished" BSA response posted on scouting.org and linked to via online embassies as appropriate • Online ambassadors answer questions and refer to statement as appropriate • Delivers online "pulse reports" at three-hour intervals, as necessary
Level 4 Severe	The BSA's brand and reputation are directly challenged, and the organization's ability to achieve its mission is hampered <i>(Ex. A tornado strikes the Little Sioux Scout Reservation, killing four Scouts; or, four adults are killed at the national jamboree while erecting a tent)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides updates to the National Council • Executes aggressive media relations • Requests spokesperson/on-site assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps direct strategy • Develops media relations materials • Works directly with the executive and legal teams • May provide spokesperson/on-site assistance • Engages additional resources • Continues engagement as appropriate • Delivers online "pulse reports" at one- to two-hour intervals, as necessary

4. The crisis team

During a crisis, it is important to have identified and engaged the response team before the incident affects the BSA. There are two parts of the BSA crisis team: the core team and the support team.

Core and support teams contact information [See addendum for additional details]

The following is a full listing of the core and support teams who will receive copies of this plan.

Core team			
Name	Contact	Role	Responsibility
Robert Johnson	678-588-1302	Core Team Lead Spokesperson	Overall direction to crisis plan
David Pittman	770-362-8462	Communications	Work with Team leader
Pat McKee	678-642-2191	Legal Expertise	Work with Team leader

Support team			
Name	Contact	Role	Responsibility
Jay Fralish	770-845-2938	Support Core Team	Support Core Team Direction
Rusty Strawn	770-317-4291	Support Core Team	Support Core Team Direction

Roles of the core and support teams

In general, the core team will work to:

- Serve as the first point-of-contact
- Identify a real or potential problem
- Review and assess the situation
- Update senior management and support team members
- Recommend action
- Consider legal, operational, and reputational implications
- Determine the message, audience, and channel(s) of distribution
- Manage the distribution of the message
- Serve as the BSA spokesperson

In routine situations, the support team will:

- Provide subject matter expertise
- Assist in the key decision-making process

The core response team should have the contact information for each member of the team loaded in their mobile devices. Additionally, at any given time, one member of the core or support teams will be designated as being on call.

5. Crisis communications policies

The following crisis communications policies are meant to set a general standard for a wide range of issues and crises the BSA will face at the local level. While the Flint River Council's core and support teams should try to adhere to these policies as closely as possible, the implementation of these standards will occasionally require flexibility.

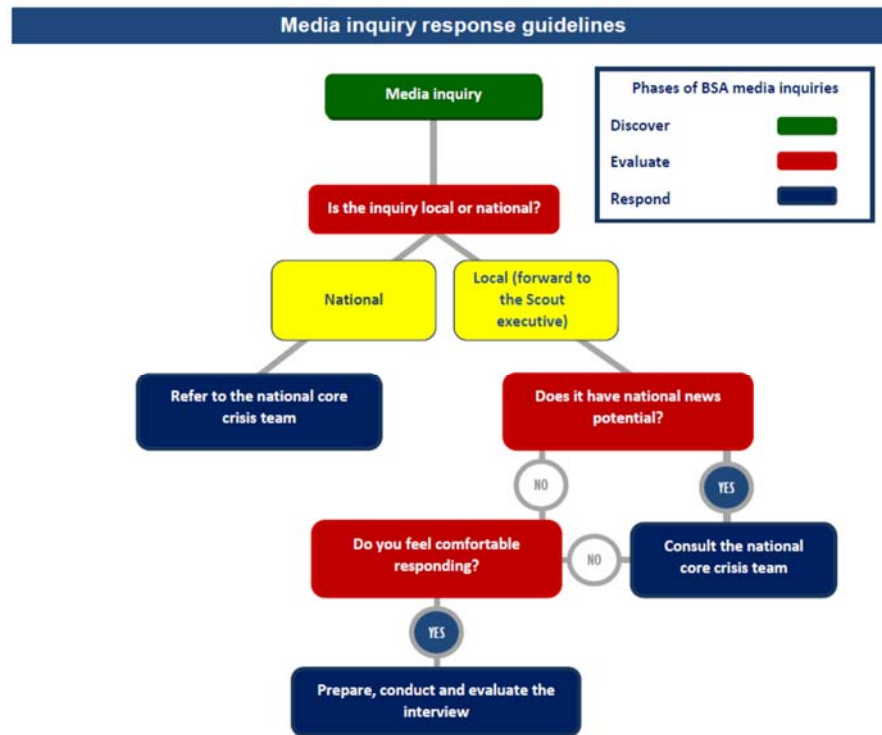
Proactive vs. reactive media relations

From time to time, the National Council will need to decide if it should proactively reach out to the media to inform them of an issue or crisis. Generally speaking, the team will follow the five goals of crisis communications and only notify media in a proactive manner if it helps achieve those goals, or involves a situation that jeopardizes the health and safety of members.

Media inquiry response guidelines

Generally speaking, it will be the BSA's policy to address local issues that have little chance of spreading beyond the local council at the local level. It is the BSA's policy that the National Council will provide resources and supports (including on-site support, in some cases) to councils regarding local issues or crises and will refer inquiries regarding local issues to the appropriate council(s). This will ensure issues and crises are addressed at the appropriate level with the team best equipped to address the situation without unnecessarily escalating the incident to a national issue.

When the Flint River Council receives an issue or crisis-oriented media inquiry, it must first be determined if the situation is related to the organization and if engaging the media will accomplish the BSA's crisis goals. Second, it is important to determine if it is a National Council or local council issue. The following diagram will serve as the Flint River Council's media inquiries response protocol in making that determination.



As the BSA engages in issues and crisis communications or public discussions, the following ground rules should be kept in mind:

- "No comment" is never an option. If an answer cannot be provided, the reason must be clearly indicated (for example, "we are currently gathering information") and the media must be advised when additional details will be forthcoming.
- The BSA will not comment on issues that are not directly related to its programs or its membership, such as political or social debates.
- Due to member confidentiality, the BSA will never provide personal information about minors or adults except to confirm an individual's name after it has been released by local, state, or federal authorities. This confirmation will only take place if that individual has an official relationship with the BSA.
- With few exceptions, the BSA's public statements should follow a similar pattern.
 - First, demonstrate concern and compassion for the people involved. Always provide reassurance that the health and safety of members, volunteers, and professionals is the BSA's top priority. Exhibit the Scout Oath and Scout Law.
 - Second, address relevant facts associated with the crisis, with due consideration to privacy and legal issues. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? The BSA will not speculate or engage in a discussion of any hypothetical situation.
 - Third, address what the BSA is doing to resolve the situation and ensure an expeditious return to normal operations. The organization will not initially attempt to attribute responsibility for an incident.

Activation and approval protocol

The crisis communications team can be formally activated by the Scout executive or designated members of the core team, although all other members of the team can and should contribute to this decision based on their knowledge of the situation.

To ensure consistent messaging and a clear understanding of all tactics executed during a crisis, proper approval protocol should be followed for all communications materials. The following ground rules apply during a crisis situation, although professional judgment and consideration of situational urgency should be used at all times.

- Media materials and digital assets will be developed by the core team (with assistance from the National Council issues and crisis communications team, as necessary).
- All official BSA messages created for external use must be approved by the Scout executive or designated members of the core team.
- Previously approved language may be approved and distributed by the core team.
- Official BSA messages using new language—not previously approved—should be approved by the Flint River Council Scout executive and legal team prior to distribution.

Crisis evaluation

Prior to message development and any proactive media outreach, an informal evaluation of the crisis should be conducted by the core team to assess the facts at hand and examine the scope of the situation. If needed, sources outside the team such as the National Council's crisis communications team should be asked to provide pertinent information, but this crisis evaluation should be conducted swiftly and take stock of only the information relevant to the BSA. The following are general questions that may be used to inform this process:

- What do we know? What has the Flint River Council done to date?
- What key stakeholders will be impacted? How should the Flint River Council speak to them?
- Is the Flint River Council responsible? What corrective or remedial actions might be appropriate?
- Should the Flint River Council apologize if mistakes were made?
- Has the BSA previously faced a similar issue? When did it face the issues and what were the circumstances and outcome?
- What existing messaging exists? Is this issue covered in *Communicating Scouting's Values and Standards*?
- Does the council need a statement and Q&A?
- Who should serve as the spokesperson? (Typically, it will be the Scout executive.)
- Is the approach member-centric and being communicated in plain language?
- Does the positive marketing team or fund-raising team need to be informed (so that current or planned campaigns can be adjusted or curtailed if necessary)?

Key stakeholder outreach

In a crisis situation, it is important to simultaneously engage various stakeholders—including local councils, media, key volunteers, and professionals—to keep them informed of the impact the crisis might have or has had on the organization and the actions being taken to minimize damage.

As a general rule, the BSA will be guided by the premise of telling its story in a proactive manner to its stakeholders. To facilitate this communication philosophy, the following are the Flint River Council key stakeholders as well as the recommended mode, tools, and protocols for reaching each audience (next page).



Key stakeholder outreach				
Audience	Mode	Tool	When	How
National Council and regional executives	Reactive/proactive	A phone call or e-mail from the Scout executive or the core team	A local or national crisis, incident, or issue has the potential to generate media coverage and damage the local council's reputation	Prior to media coverage or in response to an unexpected crisis
Executive board and key volunteers	Proactive	A phone call or e-mail from the Scout executive	The BSA's national brand and reputation are put at risk and are directly challenged, hampering the ability to operate	On a case-by-case basis, the Scout executive team will provide updates to the volunteer leadership
Media	Reactive/proactive	Prepared media statement or an interview from a designated spokesperson	Reactively, there is a media inquiry regarding a crisis, issue, or incident; proactively, to prevent an issue or incident from becoming a crisis	For reactive use until the story is covered by top-tier media; the BSA will use the prepared statement and key messages to guide the discussion
Professionals	Proactive	E-mail from Scout executive	There is a crisis, issue, or incident that will hamper the South Florida Council's ability to operate	For distribution immediately prior to media coverage of an issue or at such a time as the issue becomes known within the organization; use talking points and include reminders related to organization policies, as appropriate
Strategic partners and corporate sponsors	Reactive/proactive	The Scout executive will recommend direct communications	The BSA's brand and reputation are directly challenged, and its ability to achieve its mission is hampered	For distribution immediately prior to media coverage of the issue
Members and the general public	Reactive/proactive	Digital media (Scouting.org, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube assistance from the National Council's crisis communications team)	Reactively, with a digital media inquiry; proactively, to prevent an issue from becoming a crisis	The core team will work with the National Council to incorporate a statement into the necessary medium and distribute it accordingly

Spokespersons

The role of a spokesperson in a crisis situation is to effectively deliver the BSA's core messages with the ultimate goal of resolving the situation fairly and compassionately while preserving integrity and reputation. This applies to communication with all stakeholders, including media members, employees, business partners, and the community.

Generally speaking, the Scout executive will speak on behalf of the Flint River Council, but there may be either a professional or volunteer spokesperson as well. Also, a member of the core team may be engaged to speak with the media as a subject matter expert. As the Flint River Council prepares to address its stakeholders, it is important to identify and answer the concerns that are specific to each audience.

Spokespersons should be chosen based on their levels of previous experience with the media, knowledge of the issues, expertise, levels of authority within management, and availability. This determination will be made by the core response team and approved by the Scout executive.

Potential key executives and volunteer leader spokespersons

From time to time, depending on the issue or crisis, it might be in the organization's best interest to enlist a key executive or volunteer leader as the Flint River Council's spokesperson. All spokespeople should be formally media trained, and in most situations, will receive additional coaching from Edelman for specific messaging in the event of a major crisis-related announcement.

Press conferences

In certain crises, it might be necessary to tell Scouting's story to multiple members of the media simultaneously. One effective way to do this is by calling a press conference. Generally a press conference should be used if you have more than four media outlets asking for information at the same time. When considering whether or not to hold a press conference, it is important to re-examine the BSA's five issues and crisis communications goals, and if it is an appropriate strategy, to develop media materials and a press conference script.

Reaching out to volunteers and families

In the event of a crisis that affects the health, safety, or well-being of a youth or adult member, the core team may recommend that a Flint River Council representative reach out to the family of those involved to convey sympathy and offer assistance while being careful not to admit liability. This action should be coordinated by the Scout executive and the volunteer leadership.

Establishing a communications command center

Infrequently, the BSA will face situations that require a communications command center. This approach will allow the team to efficiently assess the situation, develop strategy and messages, receive approval, and communicate the BSA’s story – should include email, internet and phone access. The decision to set up a communications command center will be made collectively by the members of the core team.

Establishing and maintaining relationships with local authorities

During a crisis, the Flint River Council will need to ensure key stakeholders that it is working directly with local authorities to respond and remedy the situation. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is to develop a relationship with local authorities before a crisis situation. The following are the key contacts at various agencies that may prove beneficial to the Flint River Council.

Local authorities contact information			
Name	Agency	Contact	Role and responsibility
Sheriff Gary Long	Butts Sheriff’s Office	770-775-8216	Law Enforcement
Sheriff Lenn Wood	Coweta Sheriff’s Office	770-253-1502	Law Enforcement
Sheriff Barry Babb	Fayette Sheriff’s Office	770-461-6353	Law Enforcement
Sheriff Brad White	Lamar Sheriff’s Office	770-358-5159	Law Enforcement
Sheriff Jimmy Thomas	Pike Sheriff’s Office	770-567-8431	Law Enforcement
Sheriff Darrell Dix	Spalding Sheriff’s Office	770-467-4282	Law Enforcement
Sheriff Dan Kilgore	Upson Sheriff’s Office	706-647-7411	Law Enforcement
Molena Volunteer Fire Dept.	Molena Fire Dept.	770-567-8888	Fire Department
Mayor Dwain Penn	City of Molena	770-884-9711	Support in Molena-Camp

Determining if on-site National Council support is needed

In extreme cases, Flint River Council might face crises that require on-site assistance from the National Council’s team. In order to initiate this action, the Flint River Council must ask for assistance or, if not asked for, accept the offer from the core team if that team believes on-ground support is essential. The decision to offer on-site assistance will be made by the national crisis communication team, in coordination with the appropriate regional director and the BSA executive team.

6. Media relations

One of the most important aspects of communicating during issues or crises is how Flint River Council will deal with and interact with the media. Following are the BSA’s policies and procedures for communicating with the traditional media.

Proactive vs. reactive media relations

From time to time, the Flint River Council will need to decide if it should proactively reach out to the local media to inform them of an issue or crisis. Generally speaking, the council will follow the five goals of crisis communications and only notify media in a proactive manner if it helps achieve those goals, or involves a situation that jeopardizes the health and safety of members. The local council core team should contact the National Council crisis communications response team for counsel on these decisions.

Media inquiry policy

In positive and crisis situations, the Flint River Council must maintain a policy regarding media and public inquiries. The council generally will adhere to the following guidelines:

Media inquiry policy*			
Situation	Affiliation	Nature of question	Action
Incoming call	The person is not with the media but is a member, volunteer, or concerned citizen	A general, nonissues-oriented question	Direct the call to the appropriate department
Incoming call	The person is with the traditional or digital media	A general, nonissues-oriented question	Refer the caller to the marketing department/PR staff member or Scout executive
Incoming call	The person is with the traditional or digital media	An issue or crisis-oriented question	Refer the caller to the Scout executive or council spokesperson
Incoming call	The person will not disclose her/his affiliation	A question of any kind (treat this person as if she/he is with the media)	Refer the caller to the Scout executive or council spokesperson
On-site visit	The person is with the traditional or digital media	A question of any kind	Employees should tell the people they are not the appropriate spokesperson; notify security and the Scout executive

[*Note: Engagement with online community members, such as bloggers, is addressed in Section 7.]

Media inquiry language for employees

It is important to communicate the BSA’s media policy to the Flint River Council’s employees and staff members. Following is a letter that should be provided to all staff:

In order to ensure that the Flint River Council responds to all media inquiries accurately, consistently, and with the most appropriate information, we would like to remind you of our policy about speaking with the traditional and digital news media.

Only designated BSA representatives are authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the organization. Following are our media inquiry guidelines:

- *For incoming calls: Ask if the person is with the media. If not, direct the person to the appropriate staff member.*
- *If the person is with the media and asking a general BSA or nonissues-related question, refer the caller to the marketing department/PR staff member or the Scout executive.*
- *If the person is with the media and asking about issues or a crisis, refer the person to the Scout executive or marketing department/PR staff member.*
- *Anyone who is making inquiries about issues or a crisis and will not reveal the nature of her or his call should be handled as if she or he is a member of the media. Forward those calls to the Scout executive or media department.*
- *If the media appear on-site, notify the Scout executive. The Scout executive will then inform the reporters of the BSA's policy prohibiting photography without approval and notify the marketing department/PR staff member.*
- *If you encounter media on-site, inform them that you are not the appropriate representative, and immediately contact on-site management and notify the Scout executive or marketing department/PR staff member.*

If you come into contact with a member of the media, you may choose to respond to inquiries with the following language:

- *[If contacted by phone] "Thanks for calling, but I'm not the appropriate person to answer your call. Let me direct you to the right person."*
- *[If approached in person] "I'm sorry. I am not the appropriate person to comment on this issue. Please have a seat and let me find the appropriate person to help you."*

Additionally, if you notice any member of the media who is not accompanied by a council representative, immediately notify the Scout executive and the marketing department/PR staff member. Do not, however, leave a visitor unattended.

Media inquiry log

In the event of a media inquiry, those answering phones should use the following template for capturing information on potential issues so that it is readily available should the issue suddenly begin to escalate.

BSA media inquiry log	
Date and time	
Name of contact	
Name and type of media	
Phone number and e-mail	
Nature of inquiry	
Received by	
Referred to	
Deadline	
Call return date and time	
Status	

Key media contacts

In the event of a crisis, the Flint River Council will need to quickly and efficiently speak with the media. Following are the top media outreach priorities of the Flint River Council:

[Add local council] key media contacts				
Name	Outlet	Contact information	Previous interactions	Notes
Ray Lightner	Griffin Daily News	678-231-2490	Positive Coverage	Scoutmaster

7. Digital communications

The following section is not meant to serve as the BSA's positive digital communications plan, but rather to define how the BSA will use digital communications in times of crisis and respond to online discussion about the organization.

Digital philosophy

Success in online community engagement, particularly where crisis communications is concerned, rests with the adage "Make friends before you need them." Communication with an organization's supporters, evangelists, members, or even detractors should never wait until a crisis has come to a head. At that point, an organization enters a community with a defensive posture.

As soon as possible, the BSA should establish "embassies" at key online destinations (as it already has done on Twitter and Facebook) and develop relationships with bloggers who have demonstrated histories of following Scouting. This engagement should be a consistent dialogue over time, holding as paramount the exchange of information and content that has mutual, objective value for all parties. At that point, the BSA will be able to get in front of a crisis quickly, having already identified its "friendlies" and detractors.

BSA social contract

As the BSA continues to engage in digital communication, online community members will post an inappropriate comment to a BSA-managed digital medium occasionally, and the BSA will have to make a decision about deleting it. The following is the BSA's social contract to help make that determination:

This digital Scouting community is governed by the Scout Oath and Law. We will delete any comment that we believe does not reflect the Oath and Law. This includes comments that use inappropriate language or are potentially libelous or injurious to the privacy of a private person. Such users posting these comments will be banned from commenting on this site. Off-topic comments will also be removed. From time to time, certain comments will be investigated if they are deemed to affect the health and well-being of our Scouts, current and former, adult volunteers or employees.

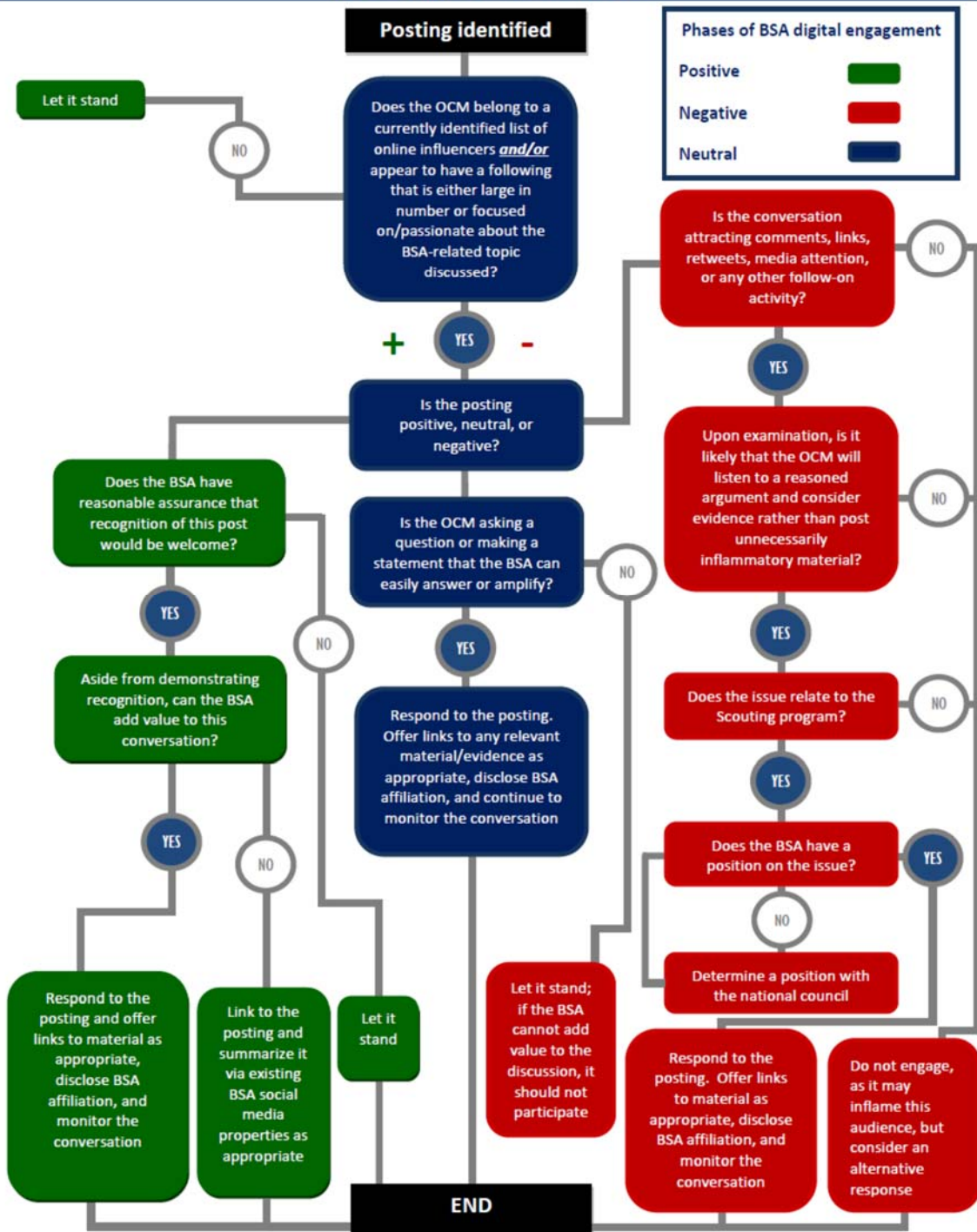
In the event that someone posts a message to a BSA digital channel that exposes a potential threat to the health and safety of one of the BSA members, present or past, the team will forward that posting to the legal department for review, and it will take appropriate action.

The BSA digital response protocol

As the media continues to evolve, and traditional and new journalists continue to influence the brand and reputation of the BSA at the local and national levels, there will be a large-scale increase in the number of digital postings about the BSA. In many cases, the BSA will treat these postings like a traditional media outlet and engage the digital journalists. The following chart will serve as the BSA's rules for digital engagement of online community members (OCM).



The BSA digital response protocol



How to engage digital postings

If the BSA decides to engage a digital journalist, it will respond in much the same way as it might with the traditional media. Since digital media can have national implications, please contact the National Council’s spokesman or communications specialist. In each digital interaction, the responder’s tone will reflect that of the Scout Oath and Scout Law, disclosing her/his connection to the BSA.

Posting messages to the BSA’s digital assets

In times of high-profile crises—typically those in the level 3/severe or level 4/hazard phases—the BSA may use one or more of its digital assets to distribute messages to the public. The decision to post messages to the Web site will be made by the Scout executive and the National Council spokesman or communications specialist, and should reflect the type of media discussing the topic (i.e., if the crisis involves a YouTube video, the BSA should respond with a YouTube video as well). Typically, the BSA will take this action when the BSA:

- Anticipates a crisis scenario in which key information needs to be disseminated to multiple audiences very quickly.
- Needs to communicate directly with the media on a broad scale.
- Needs to provide unfiltered information and share its perspective directly—without interpretation of news media, advocacy groups, or other potentially biased sources.

Digital assets engagement roles and responsibilities

The following chart outlines the roles and responsibilities of key team members when the Flint River Council decides to engage its digital assets during an issue or crisis. [Note: The specific manager(s) will notify the appropriate members on her/his team.]

Digital assets engagement roles and responsibilities				
Digital asset	Content managers	Initiation procedure	Manager	Approver
Flint River Council’s Web page	Suzanne Cummings	At request of SE	Robert Johnson	Robert Johnson
Flint River Council’s Facebook page	Rebekah Florence, Andrea Strawn	At request of SE	Robert Johnson	Robert Johnson
Flint River Council’s Instagram site	Rebekah Florence, Andrea Strawn	At request of SE	Robert Johnson	Robert Johnson

8. Post crisis

Determining the clear end to a crisis can be difficult, but it is important for the Flint River Council to take stock of the situation after the crisis has been resolved and respond accordingly with important audiences in mind.

Evaluation

Following the conclusion of a crisis situation, the crisis communications team will convene to explore the scope and impact the crisis had on the BSA, as well as on the public's perception of the brand. Although the crisis may have ended, this information should be collected and reviewed in a timely manner for use in outreach materials and to inform those handling future crisis situations. During this evaluation, the team should consider the following questions as they relate to the post-crisis situation:

- Did the crisis impact key stakeholders?
- How did the crisis impact the brand or reputation of the BSA and the BSA?
- What was the extent and tone of media coverage surrounding the crisis?
- Are there any apparent misconceptions by the public or media about the BSA?
- How did the team serve the local council(s)? What improvements could be made?
- Will there be any lingering concerns requiring re-visitation or re-evaluation?

Media outreach

Post-crisis media outreach should focus on providing updates to the media, as necessary, correcting any misconceptions and addressing any reputational damage, while meeting the BSA's five goals of crisis communications. A succinct and informative letter, set of talking points, Q&A, press release, or digital posting—together with media spokespeople – should be used to conduct media outreach.

Stakeholder outreach

Similar to media outreach following the crisis, it is important to contact stakeholders to keep them informed of the impact of the crisis and the actions being taken to minimize any ancillary damage. If needed, follow-up communications to stakeholders should be completed as soon as possible and no later than one week from the date the crisis concludes.

Post-crisis report

Following the conclusion of the crisis and post-crisis outreach, the communications crisis team should prepare a report documenting the crisis, its impact, lessons learned, and any process or organizational changes made as a result of the crisis. The report should be delivered to the core response team and filed for future internal use.

9. Putting the plan into action

In the event of a local or national crisis, it is important to swiftly and efficiently put the principles and policies of this plan into action.

Response guide checklist

The following is a response guide checklist and set of questions to ensure the Flint River Council is responding appropriately to each situation.

This list corresponds with the previously discussed levels of preparedness, and each section offers a general guide of what should be accomplished. Each level of to-do action steps is meant to build on the previous levels' steps (e.g., when executing the steps for Level 3, first accomplish the steps outlined in Levels 1 and 2).

Response guide checklist	
Level 1 Warning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Reach out to the National Council and regional staff <input type="checkbox"/> Alert the crisis management core team and relevant support team members via e-mail and provide a copy of correspondence to all team members <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate media and digital monitoring <input type="checkbox"/> Begin a media inquiry log <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare communications materials for possible release to media and key volunteers
Level 2 Caution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Engage the legal team to approve all communications materials <input type="checkbox"/> Work with proper authorities to determine the scope of the situation and to provide ongoing support <input type="checkbox"/> Update the media services/PR department and engage the digital content editor and video production team, as necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare the council's spokesperson <input type="checkbox"/> Direct media requests to the pre-approved spokesperson <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate stakeholder outreach <input type="checkbox"/> Release communications materials to traditional and digital media, and post them on the appropriate Web sites <input type="checkbox"/> Provide the team with timely updates regarding the situation
Level 3 Hazard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Establish a communications command center, as necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Dispatch family or volunteer support teams <input type="checkbox"/> Determine if on-site National Council support is needed
Level 4 Severe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Engage a phone response team to address member inquiries, as necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor the situation and release additional statements, as necessary

10. Addendum

The following information is meant to provide a supplement to your crisis plan. For additional assistance on these points, please contact the National Council crisis communications team. This section may be omitted upon completion of your plan.

Creating core and support teams

One of the most important elements of crisis communications is identifying both a core and support issues and crisis communications team. Following are some recommendations for individuals you should include on your crisis team:

- Scout executive: **(Robert Johnson)** The Scout executive should be a member of the core team and serve as the council's spokesperson (unless assigned to another senior team member). The Scout executive will ensure the council has the tools and policies in place for the council to efficiently communicate during a crisis. Also, she or he will make the final decision about how to respond to media.
- Marketing department/PR staff member: **(Rebekah Florence/Andrea Strawn)** The Scout executive should designate a member of the marketing department to manage the communications process and direct the council's media interaction.
- Senior staff: **(Danny McCranie, Brooke Watson & Rachel Cole)** It is important to include the council's senior operational staff as part of the core or support teams.
- Council president and executive board: **(David Pittman, Jay Fralish, Pat Mckee & Rusty Strawn)** These key volunteers should be a part of the support team in order to provide volunteer leadership and assistance to the council's executive team.
- Executive assistant: **(Suzanne Cummings)** Make sure to have someone organizing incoming calls and assisting with the administration of this plan. This individual should be prepared to speak to the media as a receptionist.
- National Council issue and crisis communications team: During times of crisis, Deron Smith and David Burke of the National Council should be included as members of the communications team. They can provide media counsel, assist in the preparation of media relations, and provide ongoing updates to the National Council's general issues response team.

Establishing a communications command center

Before a crisis occurs, make sure to choose a location to use as a communications command center. This secluded area should have the resources the council's team will need to manage a crisis response. At the minimum, these items should include e-mail/Internet access and phone lines.

Identifying key media contacts

Prior to a crisis, take time to create a target media list and establish relationships with the key editors/reporters. Be sure to include journalists you already know, as they will help your council in disseminating Scouting's messages. The following questions can help serve as a guide in creating your target media list:

1. With whom does the council have a relationship? (Make sure to consider volunteers and their connections.)
2. What outlets have the most impact on your council's community?
3. Are there online community members (blogs, social media sites) that impact your council's key stakeholders?

Completing this plan

Make sure to share this plan with your volunteer leadership in order to officially adopt it. Also, you may consider providing this plan to your team in hard-copy form and as a soft copy, accessible on mobile devices.