NEXUS PIONEER CONSULTING GROUP, LLC

Crisis Communications Planning Checklist

Free Resource Template

A practical checklist for reviewing whether crisis communications arrangements support timely message approval, coordinated stakeholder engagement, accessible public information, rumor control, and dependable leadership updates.

Template Version	Version 1.0
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Prepared By	Nexus Pioneer Consulting Group, LLC
Intended Use	Downloadable resource for structured crisis communications planning review and improvement support
User Entry	Organization / Communications Plan / Review Team information may be completed on the next page

Where Experience and Innovation Converge in Crisis Preparedness

Template Use and Crisis Communications Review Instructions

Purpose: This checklist supports a structured review of crisis communications arrangements for authority, speed, accuracy, coordination, accessibility, and operational resilience. It helps reviewers identify gaps in message approval, stakeholder alignment, public information, monitoring, rumor response, leadership briefings, and documentation.

Use: The checklist may be used during annual plan maintenance, pre-incident preparation, exercise planning, leadership briefings, public information annex reviews, Joint Information System or Joint Information Center preparation, corrective action meetings, or a broader preparedness assessment.

No scoring: This version intentionally does not include formal scoring criteria, weights, maturity ratings, or readiness calculations. Reviewers should apply professional judgment and organization-specific requirements when documenting findings.

Public resource note: This free template is provided for planning support and does not replace jurisdiction-specific legal, regulatory, grant, accreditation, policy, privacy, security, or compliance review.

Review Notation Options

Use the Status / Notation column to document the review result in plain language. Suggested terms include: Satisfactory, Partially Addressed, Needs Revision, Not Addressed, Not Applicable, or Follow-Up Required.

Communications Plan Review Information

Organization		**Review Date**	
Lead Reviewer		**Review Team**	
Plan / Annex Title / Version		**Review Location / Format**	
Primary Review Purpose		**Known Constraints**	
Documents / Channels Reviewed		**Follow-Up Meeting Date**	
Approving Authority		**Crisis Communications / PIO Contact**	

1. Communications Governance, Scope, and Authority

Communications Review Item	Status / Notation	Plan Reference / Evidence	Review Notes / Findings	Owner / Follow-Up
Does the plan define purpose, scope, audiences, activation conditions, assumptions, and links to related plans?				
Are executive, PIO, legal, operations, HR, IT, security, and partner roles assigned?				
Are primary and alternate spokespersons, succession, delegations, after-hours authority, and approval limits documented?				
Are privacy, legal, personnel, health, investigative, security, and sensitive-information controls defined?				
Are message ownership, version control, release logs, corrections, retractions, and retention procedures established?				
Are governance arrangements tested after exercises, incidents, organizational changes, and leadership transitions?				

Prompt for discussion: Where could unclear authority or information controls delay or compromise a release?

2. Message Development, Validation, and Approval

Communications Review Item	Status / Notation	Plan Reference / Evidence	Review Notes / Findings	Owner / Follow-Up
Does the plan define message collection, drafting, validation, review, approval, release, update, and archiving?				
Are pre-approved templates available for warnings, protective actions, disruptions, operational changes, and recovery updates?				
Are approval pathways scaled by incident level and urgency, with backup approvers and emergency release authority?				
Do messages distinguish confirmed facts, uncertainty, assumptions, source, timestamp, and next update?				
Are consistency checks and rapid corrections defined across all public and partner channels?				
Are plain language, translation, accessibility, audience needs, and unintended effects reviewed before release?				

Prompt for discussion: Can an accurate, actionable message be approved and issued fast enough?

3. Stakeholder Coordination and Joint Information

Communications Review Item	Status / Notation	Plan Reference / Evidence	Review Notes / Findings	Owner / Follow-Up
Are priority stakeholders, information needs, relationship owners, and trusted messengers identified?				
Are coordination pathways defined among incident command, the EOC, leadership, departments, sites, and partner PIOs?				
Are Joint Information System or Center activation, staffing, liaison, virtual coordination, and demobilization procedures documented?				
Are message synchronization, partner review, embargoes, conflict resolution, and unresolved approval issues addressed?				
Are contact lists, alternates, after-hours contacts, and redundant coordination methods current and tested?				
Are officials, regulators, service providers, vendors, community groups, and critical partners appropriately included?				

Prompt for discussion: Which stakeholders could release conflicting information, and how will it be resolved?

4. Public Information, Media, and Audience Access

Communications Review Item	Status / Notation	Plan Reference / Evidence	Review Notes / Findings	Owner / Follow-Up
Are priority audiences, trusted messengers, concerns, barriers, and required public actions identified?				
Are procedures defined for warnings, protective actions, service status, assistance, recovery, and changed guidance?				
Are media inquiries, briefings, interviews, spokesperson support, staging, and visual materials addressed?				
Are web, social, alerts, email, hotlines, signage, traditional media, and community channels available?				
Are language access, disability access, low connectivity, cultural needs, and underserved communities addressed?				
Are public questions, call-center trends, community feedback, and media coverage used to refine messages?				

Prompt for discussion: Who may not receive, understand, trust, or act on the information?

5. Monitoring, Rumor Control, and Misinformation Response

Communications Review Item	Status / Notation	Plan Reference / Evidence	Review Notes / Findings	Owner / Follow-Up
Are news, social media, call centers, community reports, and partner channels actively monitored?				
Are rumors, misinformation, disinformation, impersonation, and manipulated content assessed for reach and harm?				
Are verification, ownership, escalation, approval, and response thresholds defined?				
Are rumor-control updates, FAQs, source links, corrections, and partner amplification methods prepared?				
Are corrections issued across affected channels and outdated content identified, replaced, and documented?				
Are compromised accounts, phishing, fake profiles, deepfakes, and malicious campaigns coordinated with appropriate partners?				

Prompt for discussion: Which false narratives could threaten life safety, operations, or trust?

6. Leadership Updates and Internal Communications

Communications Review Item	Status / Notation	Plan Reference / Evidence	Review Notes / Findings	Owner / Follow-Up
Are leadership information needs, briefing cadence, formats, preparation roles, and alternate delivery methods defined?				
Do executive updates cover facts, uncertainty, public sentiment, message activity, risks, and next actions?				
Are decisions, approvals, unresolved issues, resource requests, and deadlines clearly identified?				
Are employee, contractor, board, and internal partner messages aligned with public releases?				
Are official and oversight updates coordinated without bypassing command or releasing unverified information?				
Are briefing records, decision logs, approvals, handoffs, and leadership direction documented?				

Prompt for discussion: Can leaders quickly see what is known, communicated, required, and likely next?

7. Communications Continuity, Security, and Improvement

Communications Review Item	Status / Notation	Plan Reference / Evidence	Review Notes / Findings	Owner / Follow-Up
Are PACE methods defined for drafting, approving, coordinating, and distributing messages?				
Are remote operations, staffing depth, shift relief, surge support, fatigue, and vendors addressed?				
Are account access, multifactor authentication, emergency credentials, permissions, and secure approvals tested?				
Are contact lists, templates, media lists, translation resources, monitoring data, and essential records backed up?				
Are approval time, release speed, reach, accessibility, corrections, rumor response, and workload measured?				
Are exercises, after-action reviews, corrective actions, training, and plan revisions used to improve readiness?				

Prompt for discussion: Can communications remain trusted during system failure, staff loss, or a prolonged incident?

8. Crisis Communications Review Summary

Use this section to convert checklist findings into a focused communications improvement conversation. Keep entries specific, evidence-based, tied to plan or process references, and connected to clear owners.

Key Strengths

Strength	Supporting Plan / Process Reference or Evidence	Why It Matters

Key Gaps or Required Improvements

Gap or Required Improvement	Operational Risk / Impact	Recommended Plan or Process Change	Owner / Due Date

Follow-Up Questions for the Communications Plan Owner

Questions Needing Clarification

Question or Clarification Needed	Responsible Person / Office	Follow-Up Needed By

Recommended Improvement Actions

Recommended Improvement Action	Responsible Office	Suggested Timeframe

30 / 60 / 90-Day Communications Improvement Planning

Timeframe	Priority Communications Improvement	Owner	Due Date	Evidence of Completion
30 Days				
60 Days				
90 Days				

Reviewer / Facilitator Certification

Reviewer Name		**Title / Organization**	
Date Reviewed		**Plan / Annex Title / Version**	
Reviewed Materials		**Additional Notes**	

Common Crisis Communications Review Sources and Facilitation Guide

Use these examples to keep the review grounded in what can be located, cited, compared, tested, or validated. Organizations should adapt the list to their sector, jurisdiction, authorities, audiences, and communications environment.

Governance and Message Control	Coordination and Public Information	Monitoring, Continuity, and Improvement
• Crisis communications plan or public information annex • Emergency, continuity, cyber, and incident plans • Delegations and message approval matrix • Spokesperson and media policies • Message templates and talking points • Legal, privacy, security, and records guidance	• Joint Information System or Center procedures • Stakeholder maps and contact rosters • Media relations and briefing protocols • Alert, warning, and channel procedures • Accessibility and language access plans • Leadership and internal briefing formats	• Media, social, and community monitoring reports • Rumor logs, FAQs, and correction records • Channel tests and notification records • Account access and PACE backup plans • Exercise or incident after-action reports • Metrics, dashboards, and corrective actions

Suggested 60-Minute Discussion Format

Time	Focus	Discussion Output	Facilitator Note
0-10 min	Purpose and scope	Confirmed plan or annex version, assumptions, and constraints	Confirm the communications system and review objective.
10-35 min	Checklist sections	Initial strengths, gaps, and supporting references	Use Not Addressed when evidence is unavailable.
35-50 min	Priorities and ownership	Top improvements, owners, and near-term actions	Prioritize life safety, approval speed, coordination, access, rumor control, and leadership awareness.
50-60 min	Leadership summary	Decisions, resources, timeline, and approval path	Convert findings into an approval-ready communications improvement plan.

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Guidance Alignment References

This checklist is designed as a practical review aid and is informed by widely used emergency management planning, public information, alert and warning, risk communication, continuity, and preparedness improvement guidance. Users should adapt it to their organization, jurisdiction, sector, authorities, and program requirements.

- FEMA Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101: Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans
- FEMA National Incident Management System public information, Joint Information System, and Joint Information Center doctrine
- FEMA Integrated Public Alert and Warning System guidance and public alerting best practices
- CDC Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication Manual
- CISA National Emergency Communications Plan and PACE planning concepts

Website Resource Page Description

Crisis Communications Planning Checklist: A free, downloadable template that helps organizations review message approval, stakeholder coordination, public information, media engagement, rumor control, leadership updates, communications continuity, and improvement actions. Designed for emergency managers, public information officers, communications teams, executives, consultants, and preparedness professionals.

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