

Crisis Communications

A practical, guide for small charities
about responding to a crisis.

imix

What you will learn

In this resource, you'll learn how to prepare for, manage, and recover from a crisis. It provides practical tools to help you plan ahead, including guidance on the policies, procedures, and communications protocols you should have in place. You'll also find step-by-step advice on how to respond effectively when a crisis hits—from crafting an initial statement to managing ongoing communication with stakeholders and the public. Finally, the guide explores how to move forward afterwards, reflecting on lessons learned and identifying opportunities to rebuild trust or even strengthen your organisation's reputation.

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What is a Crisis

A crisis is any situation that could cause harm to your charity, the people you support, or your reputation. It may start with a post on social media, a complaint, or a media story that gains traction. Whatever the trigger, it requires a careful, coordinated communications response.

For migration-focused charities, the risks can be greater. Many of us work with people in vulnerable circumstances, where even well-intentioned attention can lead to harm or distress. The wider media and political rhetoric around migration is often hostile, creating an environment where stories can quickly escalate or be misrepresented.

At the same time, many organisations in our sector are under-resourced and unprepared when a crisis hits. Policies and response plans may be out of date or unused, and the speed of digital communications makes it harder than ever to contain an issue once it starts.

This is why being prepared matters. With clear processes, shared understanding, and a plan that centres people's safety and dignity, we can respond calmly and effectively—protecting our teams, our communities, and the values we stand for.



A crisis is not only about what happens — it's about how people perceive what happens. Good crisis communications protect trust. Research shows that audiences respond best when organisations communicate early, honestly, and with empathy. The goal isn't just to defend reputation but to show accountability and uphold your values, even under pressure.

Be Prepared

You may not know what form a crisis will take — but there's a lot you can do to prepare.

Start by ensuring you have the right policies and procedures in place. This should include up-to-date safeguarding, whistleblowing, data protection, and complaints policies, along with clear guidance on who has authority to speak publicly on behalf of the organisation.

Next, assemble your crisis management team. Decide who will lead communications, who will handle media enquiries, and who will liaise with trustees, partners, or funders. For small charities, consider who you can call on externally — for example, IMIX, funders, trustees peer organisations, or freelance communications professionals — to help if capacity is limited.

Prepare a set of key messages or a boilerplate that summarises your charity's purpose and values. This can be adapted quickly for use in a crisis statement.

Identify your spokespeople. Are they media trained and confident handling tough questions? If not, build training or mentoring into your planning.

Finally, remember that crises rarely appear all at once. They often develop in stages — a social media post, a complaint, or a media enquiry that escalates. Having clear roles, a simple decision-making process, and a shared understanding of when to act will help you respond calmly and consistently.

Be Prepared

1. Policies and Procedures

- ☐ Review and update key policies:

Safeguarding

Whistleblowing

Data protection

Complaints handling

- ☐ Add clear guidance on who is authorised to speak publicly on behalf of your organisation.
- ☐ Store all policies in one accessible place for staff and trustees.

2. Crisis Management Team

- ☐ Identify who will:

Lead overall crisis communications

Handle media enquiries

Liaise with trustees, funders, or partners

- ☐ List trusted external contacts (e.g. IMIX, peer organisations, or freelance comms support) who can step in if capacity is limited.
- ☐ Share contact details and keep them up to date.

3. Key Messages & Boilerplate

- ☐ Write a short paragraph (2–4 sentences) summarising:

Who you are, what you do, your purpose and values

- ☐ Keep it human and values-led — you can adapt this for crisis statements, media releases or website updates.
- ☐ Review and refresh it annually.

4. Spokespeople

- ☐ Identify your main and backup spokespeople.
- ☐ Check they are media trained, confident, and clear on your key messages.
- ☐ Build in refresher training or mentoring if needed.

5. Early Action & Decision-Making

- ☐ Agree a simple internal process for flagging concerns (e.g. social media post, complaint, or media enquiry).
- ☐ Define who decides when to escalate and how.
- ☐ Make sure everyone understands:
 - Who to alert
 - How to communicate updates
 - When to involve external support

Crisis Scenarios

Crises can take many forms. Some may start quietly — a comment on social media or a phone call from a journalist — while others happen suddenly and demand an immediate response. Preparing for different scenarios helps you act fast, minimise harm, and communicate with clarity.

Below are examples of common crisis types for charities, particularly in migration, social justice, or community cohesion work.

Misinformation or false claims online

Scenario:

A post on social media falsely claims that your charity is “funding illegal migration.” The claim starts to spread, gaining traction among hostile accounts and eventually attracting media interest.

Response:

- Verify what’s being said and where.
- Alert your crisis team.
- Draft a short correction that calmly clarifies the facts.
- Post your response on your own channels — do not quote or amplify the false post.
- Monitor closely and brief staff not to engage individually.

💬 Example statement:

“There has been misinformation shared about our work. To clarify, [insert fact]. Our focus remains on [mission/values].”

Negative media coverage or investigation

Scenario:

A national newspaper publishes a critical story about your work, claiming financial mismanagement or political bias. Reporters are calling for comment.

Response:

- Gather the facts immediately. What’s true? What’s not?
- Prepare a short, factual holding statement.
- Decide whether to issue a fuller response or speak directly with the journalist.
- Keep trustees and funders informed.
- Share internal comms with staff so they hear from you first, not the press.

💬 Example statement:

“We are aware of a report published today. We take these matters seriously and are reviewing the concerns raised. We remain committed to transparency and our mission to [insert purpose].”

Crisis Scenarios

Public backlash after a campaign

Scenario:

A new campaign or social media post sparks backlash — e.g. accusations of being “political” or “unpatriotic.”

Response:

- Assess the tone and scale of reactions.
- Decide whether to clarify or quietly let it fade.
- If responding, keep it values-based and calm.
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💬 Example statement:

“We understand that some people have different views on this issue. Our campaign highlights the experiences of people in our communities and reflects our mission to build understanding and belonging.”

Violence Involving Someone Linked to Your Charity

Situation:

A volunteer, service user or partner is alleged to be involved in a violent incident. Media are asking for comment.

Response:

- Confirm facts with police or authorities before speaking.
- Avoid speculation — don’t discuss details under investigation.
- Keep tone calm, factual and compassionate.
- Remind staff not to comment online; direct all media queries to your press contact.

💬 Example statement:

“We are aware of a serious incident involving someone connected to our organisation.

We are cooperating fully with the authorities and will not comment further while investigations are ongoing.

Our thoughts are with everyone affected.”

Early Warning Signs

Crises rarely appear all at once. Make sure you're ready to spot and act early You can use this grid to be prepared, add in other possible early signs.

Type of Early Sign	How to Monitor	Who Flags It	Escalation Step
Negative social media activity	Set up alerts, monitor mentions		
Media enquiries	Centralised inbox / shared phone, google alerts		
Complaints or safeguarding concerns	Logged and reviewed weekly		

Monitoring Tools

- Google Alerts (for organisation name, key staff, partners)
- Talkwalker Alerts / Meltwater / CrowdTangle (for social and fringe monitoring)
- TweetDeck or X Pro lists (for tracking journalists and campaigners)
- Hoaxy / NewsGuard (to trace misinformation sources)

In a Crisis– Immediate Steps



Boilerplate Builder Worksheet

A boilerplate is your organisation's short, go-to description — a clear way of saying who you are, what you do, and why it matters.

In a crisis, it anchors your message in your identity and values, not just the issue at hand.

Why it matters

- ✓ Keeps public statements consistent and values-led
- ✓ Gives staff and trustees shared language
- ✓ Reinforces your mission during scrutiny

Step 1: Gather your core ingredients

Answer each prompt in 1–2 sentences.

Prompt	Your Answer
What do you do?	
Who do you work with?	
What values guide your work?	
What change do you want to see?	
What makes you different?	

Boilerplate Builder Worksheet

Step 2: Write your paragraph

Combine your answers into 3–4 sentences that sound natural and human. Aim for 60–100 words. Keep it simple.

Example:

[Organisation Name] supports people rebuilding their lives in the UK after fleeing war or persecution.

We believe everyone deserves safety, dignity, and belonging.

Working with communities, we help people connect, contribute, and thrive.

Step 3: Test it

✓ Does it sound like us — clear, human, values-led?

✓ Could someone outside the sector understand it?

✓ Would we use it confidently in a crisis?

Step 4: Share it

- Save it in your Crisis Comms folder
- Share with staff and trustees
- Review it every 12 months
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💡 Tip: Write a short (50 words) and long (100 words) version for different uses.

Key Message Grid Worksheet

A key message grid helps your organisation stay clear and consistent when communicating — especially in a crisis.

It connects facts and values to real stories, showing not just what you do, but why it matters.

Use this page to define 3–5 key messages you want every public statement, interview, or post to reinforce.

How to use it

- Start with your core message — the main idea you want people to remember.
- Add a supporting fact or example that proves it's true.
- Finish with a human story that brings it to life.
- Keep each row short and simple — plain language is always stronger under pressure.

- ✓ Focus on clarity — one idea per message.
- ✓ Link to your mission and values.
- ✓ Keep stories brief, anonymised, and permission-based.
- ✓ Review messages after each campaign or crisis.

💡 Use this sheet before interviews, media briefings, or when drafting statements — it's your quick reference for staying on message.

Core Message	Supporting Fact / Evidence	Human Story / Example
We are transparent and accountable.	Our finances are independently audited each year.	Last year we supported 2,000 people to find housing.

Agreeing a Statement

When something goes wrong, people look for reassurance — from your staff, supporters, and the wider public.

A clear, timely statement shows you take the situation seriously and are acting responsibly.

Silence or delay creates confusion and lets others shape the story.

Why It Matters

- Builds trust: Honest, human communication reassures people you're in control.
- Prevents speculation: If you don't speak, others will — often inaccurately.
- Shows accountability: Demonstrates transparency and values.
- Reduces harm: Addresses rumours quickly and protects staff and communities.

What to Include

Keep it short, factual and compassionate:

- Acknowledge – “We’re aware of an incident involving...”
- Show care – “Our thoughts are with those affected.”
- Action – “We’re working with relevant authorities.”
- Accountability – Link to your values.
- Next steps – When you’ll update.
- Contact – One clear media contact.

⚠️ Avoid speculation, blame, or sharing personal details.

Where to Share

- Website: Official home for full statement.
- Social media: Short post linking to your site.
- Email: Staff, partners, funders first.
- Press: Send proactively with a contact name.

💡 Keep language consistent across all platforms.

Tone and Timing

Be fast but careful — a brief holding statement now is better than silence. Stay calm, human, and guided by your values.

Dealing with the media

When the media call, it means someone has already been in touch with them — or that a story is circulating. The key is to stay calm, stick to facts, and speak with one clear voice.

1. Stick to your agreed line

Journalists may be “fishing” for more information or a reaction. That’s their job. Yours is to stick to your agreed statement and share only confirmed facts. You don’t need to fill the silence or add detail you’re not certain about.

Example response:

“We’re aware of the situation and are currently looking into it. We’ll share further information as soon as we can.”

2. Be proactive, not defensive

If appropriate, outline the steps you’re taking to show you take the issue seriously. Being open and constructive helps demonstrate accountability.

“We understand why people are concerned. We’re reviewing what happened and working with the relevant partners to address it.”

3. Avoid saying “no comment”

A flat “no comment” can sound evasive or uncaring. Instead, acknowledge the question and explain what you can say.

“It wouldn’t be appropriate to comment while investigations are ongoing, but we are cooperating fully and will share updates when possible.”

This reassures journalists that you are aware, responsive, and responsible.

Dealing with the media

Build relationships

The media can be your ally as well as your critic. Treat journalists professionally and fairly — they're doing their job, and good relationships now can make future interactions smoother.

- Be polite and responsive, even under pressure.
- If you don't know something, say so and commit to finding out.
- Correct inaccuracies calmly, with evidence.

Choose your format wisely

You are under no obligation to give an interview.

If you do decide to speak, choose the format that feels most appropriate:

- A written statement if the issue is sensitive or complex.
- A pre-recorded interview rather than a live one if you want more control.
- A background briefing if you need to clarify context without direct quotes.
- Always brief your spokesperson beforehand, keep your key messages simple, and maintain a calm, human tone.

Remember your values

In moments of scrutiny, it's not just what you say but how you say it that shapes public perception. Speak with empathy and integrity — even when challenged — and always centre the dignity of the people you work with.



The goal isn't to win the story, it's to tell the truth clearly, calmly, and in line with your values.

When a 'Story' Starts in a Far-Right or Hostile Outlet

1. Pause and Assess Before Responding

Don't amplify the story unnecessarily.

Check: is it staying within a fringe audience, or is it crossing into mainstream debate?

Monitor tone and reach first, not every provocation needs a public reply.

2. Verify and Understand the Narrative

Identify who is driving it and what agenda is being pushed.

Look for patterns recycled claims, misquotes, distorted images.

Use monitoring tools such as google alerts

3. Decide on the Right Response Strategy

Ignore – if engagement risks amplifying or legitimising fringe content.

Correct quietly – brief trusted journalists, allies or community voices with accurate context.

Respond publicly only if the story has broken into mainstream or is causing real-world harm.

(Key principle: respond in proportion to the threat, not the outrage.)

4. Protect Staff and Communities

Flag potential harassment or online abuse early involve police or platform moderators if needed.

Support staff wellbeing: brief them not to engage online and provide clear reporting routes.

Pipeline of Misinformation



Crisis Checklist

Key policies reviewed and up to date	
Identify and plan responses to possible or probable crisis scenarios	
Crisis response team appointed	
Boilerplate and key messages drafted	
Media spokespeople agreed and trained	
Sign-off procedure agreed and documented	
Communications chain agreed — who needs to be informed, and when	
Staff briefed on flagging potential crisis, and next steps	

Reflecting on Your Crisis Response

After any incident or simulation, it's vital to take time to honestly appraise how you managed the situation. Reflection helps identify strengths, gaps, and practical lessons for next time.

Use these questions to guide your debrief:

Core Reflection Questions

- What went well?
- Which actions, decisions or messages made a positive difference?
- What needs work?
- Where were the delays, confusion or missed opportunities?
- Recognise individuals or teams who showed strong leadership, calm under pressure, or great collaboration.
- Who needs more support or training? Identify where extra skills, confidence or clarity would help next time.
- What will we do differently in future?
- Turn insights into clear actions or changes.

Areas to Think About

As you review, consider the broader implications:

- Policies and procedures: Do any internal policies need updating to reflect what you've learned?
- Training and preparation: What new training or refreshers would build confidence and readiness?
- Sharing learning: How will you share key insights with staff, volunteers, partners and other organisations so everyone benefits?

Plan how to tell your recovery story — e.g. a blog, learning report, or community meeting to rebuild trust.”



Telling the human story of migration

Find us on



@imix_uk



@human_journeys

Email us at

media@imix.org.uk