
CRISIS MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP: CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: THE TECHNOLOGY BREAKDOWN

CRISIS SCENARIO: MAJOR AV SYSTEM FAILURE DURING KEYNOTE

Background: It's Day 1 of the National Finance & Economic Development Conference at the Hilton Portland Downtown. Your keynote speaker is a Deputy Assistant Secretary from the Department of Commerce, presenting critical updates on federal funding opportunities for regional economic development. The session is being livestreamed to 15 community organizations that couldn't attend in person, and the presentation contains time-sensitive information about grant application deadlines.

The Crisis: At 9:15 AM, 15 minutes into the keynote presentation, the entire AV system crashes. The microphones go silent, the projection screens go black, and the livestream cuts out. Your hotel AV technician estimates it will take at least 45 minutes to reboot and reconfigure the system. You have 200+ attendees in the room, virtual participants expecting access, and a tight schedule with breakout sessions starting at 10:30 AM.

Immediate Complications:

- The keynote speaker has a hard stop at 10:15 AM for a flight to Washington, D.C.
- Three board chairpersons drove 8+ hours specifically for this presentation
- Grant application deadlines mentioned in the presentation are next week
- Social media is already buzzing with frustrated comments from virtual attendees
- Your afternoon sponsor presentation depends on the same AV setup

Your Challenge: Develop a crisis response plan that maintains stakeholder trust, preserves the educational value of the conference, and demonstrates strategic problem-solving under pressure.

CASE STUDY 2: THE SECURITY INCIDENT

CRISIS SCENARIO: PROTEST ACTIVITY NEAR CONFERENCE VENUE

Background: It's Day 2 of the National Finance & Economic Development Conference, and you're hosting critical sessions on revenue optimization and federal tax compliance. Portland has experienced periodic civil unrest in recent years, and while the downtown area has generally remained stable, tensions sometimes flare over economic justice issues.

The Crisis: At 11:30 AM, during your "Maximizing Economic Development Through Strategic Partnerships" session, approximately 40 protesters gather outside the Hilton Portland Downtown. The demonstration appears to be related to a recent federal court decision affecting environmental regulations, though it's not directly related to your organization or conference. However, the noise level is disrupting sessions, and some protesters are attempting to enter the hotel lobby to "engage with conference leaders."

Immediate Complications:

- Hotel security is asking for your guidance on access control
- Three attendees have expressed safety concerns and want to leave early
- Local media has arrived and is trying to interview conference attendees
- Your afternoon session features a controversial panel on public-private partnerships
- Several high-profile executives are concerned about being photographed or approached
- The Portland Police have arrived but are maintaining distance per city protocols

Additional Context:

- 30% of your attendees are traveling from out of state and are unfamiliar with Portland
- Your conference app is showing increased activity as attendees share information
- Two board members were already planning to make a statement about the environmental regulation issue at tomorrow's closing session
- The hotel's main entrance is near the protest activity, but there are alternative entrances

Your Challenge: Navigate this situation while ensuring attendee safety, maintaining the conference's educational mission, respecting the legitimate concerns of all parties, and preserving your organization's reputation as a trusted convener in finance and economic development.

CASE STUDY 3: THE AIR QUALITY EMERGENCY

CRISIS SCENARIO: WILDFIRE SMOKE CREATES HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS

Background: It's Day 2 of the National Finance & Economic Development Conference, and you're hosting critical sessions on revenue optimization and federal tax compliance. September is wildfire season in the Pacific Northwest, and while Portland typically has good air quality, the region is susceptible to smoke from fires in the Columbia River Gorge, Cascade Mountains, or even distant California blazes.

The Crisis: At 7:00 AM, the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Portland jumps from "Moderate" (yellow) to "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups" (orange) at 135, with forecasts predicting it could reach "Unhealthy" (red) levels above 150 by afternoon. A new wildfire ignited overnight in the Columbia River Gorge, 30 miles east of Portland, and shifting winds are pushing thick smoke directly over the city. The distinctive smell and hazy conditions are noticeable even inside the hotel.

Immediate Complications:

- 15% of your attendees have disclosed respiratory conditions (asthma, COPD, heart conditions)
- Several senior professionals in attendance are particularly vulnerable to air quality issues
- The hotel's HVAC system is older and doesn't have advanced filtration
- Your afternoon networking reception was planned for the hotel's outdoor terrace
- Three attendees have already approached registration asking about the air quality

- Local news is issuing health warnings advising people to stay indoors
- Some attendees are considering leaving early to return home

Additional Context:

- 40% of your attendees flew in from other regions and may not understand wildfire smoke risks
- Your conference includes several important sessions that can't easily be rescheduled
- The hotel doesn't have air purifiers readily available for meeting rooms
- Weather forecasts show the smoke could persist for 2-3 days
- Some communities your attendees represent have recent experience with wildfires and evacuations
- Portland International Airport is reporting potential flight delays due to visibility issues

Your Challenge: Manage the health and safety of all attendees while maintaining the conference's educational value, ensuring vulnerable participants are protected, and adapting your programming to the evolving air quality situation.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSION POINTS

For each case study, consider:

1. IMMEDIATE RESPONSE (FIRST 15 MINUTES)

- What are your first three actions?
- Who do you contact first?
- How do you communicate with stakeholders?

2. CRISIS MANAGEMENT APPROACH

- Risk assessment and prioritization
- Resource allocation and coordination
- Decision-making under pressure
- Stakeholder impact analysis

3. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- Internal team coordination
- Stakeholder messaging (attendees, speakers, sponsors)
- Media relations (if applicable)
- Post-crisis follow-up

4. LONG-TERM IMPACT MANAGEMENT

- How do you strengthen relationships through effective crisis response?
 - What preventive measures will you implement for future events?
 - How do you maintain credibility and trust with stakeholders?
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NOTES:

Use this space to capture key insights and action items from the discussion.

CASE STUDY 1 - KEY TAKEAWAYS:

CASE STUDY 2 - KEY TAKEAWAYS:

CASE STUDY 3 - KEY TAKEAWAYS:

ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT AT MY ORGANIZATION:
