

# BEST-PRACTICES CHECKLIST FOR COVID-19 COMMUNICATION

Both your internal and external audiences are traveling the same unexplored territory as your organization is right now. They are relying on you for detailed information and clear directives. Below you will find best practice guidelines organized by audience.

## EMPLOYEES

### INTERNAL

#### CREATE A COVID-19 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TEAM OR TASK FORCE

- ❑ Ideally 5-7 people with an established meeting schedule.
- ❑ Include senior executives and department heads.
- ❑ Make sure human resources is represented.
- ❑ Include a marketing leader to manage the messaging itself.

### INTERNAL

#### IDENTIFY KEY EMPLOYEE CONTACT

- ❑ One designated member of the communication team should be the “go-to source” for all employees.
- ❑ Depending on the size of your organization, you may want to designate one member as the “go-to source” for each department.

### INTERNAL

#### ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION CALENDAR AND PRIORITIZE LIST OF TOPICS

- ❑ Communication should occur no less than every other day.
- ❑ In a rapidly changing environment, twice a day may be appropriate.
- ❑ Try to send communication at the same time every day and include a time stamp. This will help employees gauge the latest content and also track changes over time.
- ❑ Utilize all communication channels to cascade your message.

### INTERNAL

#### DEVELOP A LIBRARY OF MATERIAL AND CENTRAL COMMUNICATION SITE

- ❑ Establish an online repository of information, organized by topic.
- ❑ Make it a standalone webpage on your intranet or something similar so that employees can quickly access information.
- ❑ Add every communication piece as it is disseminated.
- ❑ Include an FAQ page as employee questions are submitted.



**PROMOTE KEY CONTACT INFORMATION AND A LINK TO THE LIBRARY OF EXISTING MATERIALS.**

- Include on every piece of communication.

**KEEP ALL COMMUNICATION SUCCINCT AND DIRECT.**

- Liberal use of bullet points will increase readability.
- Avoid use of “emotional” words such as overwhelming, unbelievable, tragic.
- Nevertheless, respect employee concerns and project empathy.
- Emphasize your focus on business continuity.

**BE TRANSPARENT**

- Always include the reasoning behind decisions or policy changes, whether it is an internal decision, or one dictated by local, state or national authorities.
- If anything represents a change or reversal from prior days, make this very clear. You may want to include a bold “CHANGE IN POLICY” icon to quickly grab attention.
- Explain what you know for certain, but also remember to include what you don’t yet know but are working to resolve.
- Include sources.

**STAY IN YOUR LANE. DO NOT OFFER ADVICE OUTSIDE THE ORGANIZATION’S “JURISDICTION” OR AREA OF EXPERTISE. DEFER TO EXPERTS BY PROVIDING USEFUL LINKS TO THEIR INFORMATION.**

- For example, a business should not be offering educational advice about remote learning for children.
- However, a business can provide links to local education resources. Or a business can address their own policies – such as the ability to shift employee hours to support parental guidance of their child’s online lessons or the acceptability of having children in the same room during conference calls.

**SHARE DETAILS ABOUT CORPORATE HEALTH RESOURCES – EMPLOYEES NEED TO KNOW HOW TO HANDLE A POTENTIAL COVID-19 INFECTION IN THE FAMILY.**

- What is covered by corporate health insurance? Does it differ by available plans?
- What is your sick days policy? How about short-term or long-term disability?
- Are employees covered if they have to care for a partner, child or parent?
- Can they use personal days?
- What is the isolation policy for a suspected infection within an employee’s family?



## EXPLAIN WORK-FROM-HOME POLICIES

- ❑ Who is eligible and why?
- ❑ What physical resources can be taken from the office to be used at home
- ❑ Expectations for conduct, hours and documentation of work performed
- ❑ Project groups and any timeline adjustments
- ❑ Document sharing
- ❑ Required apps for group meetings
- ❑ Who to call for IT issues
- ❑ What home office expenses the company will cover
- ❑ Anticipated duration or updates about work-at-home timing
- ❑ How to work across time zones – does the company defer to one time zone 9-5 or is it left to each employee to establish appropriate hours?
- ❑ Off-site meetings and travel

## EXPLAIN IN-OFFICE POLICIES

- ❑ Who is required to work in the office and why
- ❑ Any adjustments to hours
- ❑ Expected duration of work-from-home situation for other employees
- ❑ How to protect yourself, others and physical surfaces within the office.
- ❑ Safety resources provided, i.e. antibacterial wipes or hand sanitizer
- ❑ Visitor policy
- ❑ Off-site meetings and travel

## PROVIDE COVID-19 INFORMATION

- ❑ Do not editorialize. Rely on politically neutral sources.
- ❑ Local hospitals are an excellent source of community specific details, as are local and state governments.
- ❑ Up-to-date health information can be found at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).
- ❑ Share resources that may help employees manage day-to-day challenges, for example, a list of restaurants that deliver, senior shopping services, pet-care, etc.

## ENCOURAGE MORALE

- ❑ Remain positive and reinforce your organization's commitment to solving each issue that surfaces.
- ❑ Facilitate solutions – create an online portal for employees to ask for or offer specific assistance, i.e. Looking for ideas to keep my kids engaged while I work; We need a baby jogging stroller.



# EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

EXTERNAL

## CREATE A COVID-19 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION TEAM.

- Ideally 5-7 people with an established meeting schedule.
- Include senior executives and department heads.
- Include a marketing leader to manage the messaging itself.
- Invite participation by individual client teams as appropriate

EXTERNAL

## IDENTIFY KEY CONTACT

- One designated member of the communication team should be the “go-to source” for all outside inquiries.
- The key contact person can then coordinate engagement with the proper company personnel.

EXTERNAL

## ESTABLISH A COMMUNICATION CALENDAR AND PRIORITIZE LIST OF TOPICS

- Communication should occur no less than once a week.
- In a rapidly changing environment, or in particular industries, a more frequent schedule may be appropriate.
- Identify topics by industry group, client type or audience.

EXTERNAL

## TARGET MESSAGING

- Develop a spreadsheet to organize which audiences will receive which information.
- Send appropriate content to appropriate individuals only – don't inundate inboxes with unrelatable information.
- Follow up with phone calls as appropriate.

EXTERNAL

## DEVELOP A LIBRARY OF MATERIAL THAT IS VISIBLE AND EASILY ACCESSIBLE.

- Establish an online repository of information, organized by topic.
- Make it easily identifiable on your company's homepage.
- Use relevant hashtags on social media.
- Add critical communication pieces to the library as it is sent out.
- Pre-populate an FAQ page and expand as additional questions surface.



## KEEP ALL COMMUNICATION SUCCINCT AND DIRECT.

- Liberal use of bullet points will increase readability.
- Emphasize your focus on business continuity.
- Include contact information and link to library of existing materials on all communication.
- Always close with an invitation to contact your company with any questions or concerns.

## BE TRANSPARENT

- Always include the reasoning behind decisions, whether it is an internal decision, or one dictated by local, state or national authorities.
- If anything represents a change or reversal from prior days, make this very clear. You may want to include a bold "UPDATED" icon to quickly grab attention.
- Explain what you know for certain, but also remember to include what you don't yet know but are working to resolve.
- Include sources.

## STAY IN YOUR LANE.

- Your communication should address how your company will operate going forward and how you will be supporting clients and business partners.
- Address how your products or services can directly solve issues related to COVID-19, but do not provide health advice (unless that is your area of expertise).
- Refrain from taking a political stance or commenting on your view of government decisions.

## SHARE DETAILS ABOUT YOUR OWN CORPORATE STANCE RELATED TO EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY.

- Only include those details that directly impact your client, business partners or the community.
- Don't promise something you can't deliver
- Offer any easing of payment or deadlines if possible or appropriate
- Explain whether you are deemed an "essential" business and the impact on day-to-day operations
- Provide any delineation between in-office and work-from-home staff – who and for how long
- Share how the company will manage business when an employee is suspected of an infection
- Explain policies for:
  - Visitors
  - Off-site meetings
  - Corporate travel



EXTERNAL

- Detail how clients can interact remotely with your teams
- Share which document sharing or online meeting sites your company uses
- Include any other physical or operational changes created by the pandemic that may impact your relationship
- Highlight any resources you are able to share with clients or the community to ease management of issues created by the pandemic

EXTERNAL

### OFFER YOUR EXPERTISE TO THE MEDIA

- Approach existing media contacts explaining your potential role with solutions or community services.
- Provide key contact information.
- Forward press releases or communication pieces as appropriate.

EXTERNAL

### PROVIDE COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Brainstorm ways your company can support individuals or other organizations in the community.
- Engage online audience with messages of support.

