

Leading Through Crisis & Change

Strategies for Nonprofit
& Foundation Leaders

Workshop 2

La Piana
CONSULTING



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Introductions in Chat

- ✓ Name
- ✓ Role
- ✓ Pronouns
- ✓ Organization
- ✓ One word to describe how you're feeling entering today's conversation



3-Part Series

Workshop 1

Identify and implement **leadership strategies** to effectively **manage crises and organizational changes**

Workshop 2

Strengthen **communication and decision-making skills** to build trust and maintain stability during uncertainty

Workshop 3

Learn how to **personalize action plans** to address specific challenges facing your nonprofit organization

Participation Norms



Be present and open



Share generously and listen actively



Confidentiality: what's shared here stays here






Take what you need, leave what you don't

Workshop 1 – Recap

- Skills for leading through crisis and change, including what “good leadership” and “ineffective leadership” looks like
- Technical vs. adaptive challenges and why the distinction is important
- Crisis leadership framework
- Call to action – what leaders should be doing “right now”
- Small group discussions on superpowers, adaptive challenges, crisis leadership framework reflection, and key upcoming priorities.

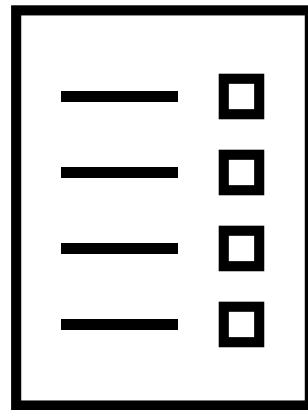
Workshop 2 Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will:

	Strengthen decision-making
	Create space for shared learning
	Build communication strategies

Agenda

- Communication & Trust
- DEI stance
- Navigating Tension
- Case Studies
- Small Groups
- Resources + Q&A



Opening Reflection Prompt

Think of one communication decision you made during a crisis that stayed with you. What made it hard – or powerful?



COMMUNICATIONS

Reconnect with Your Mission and Core Values

Lead with Transparency, Even When the Path Isn't Clear

Speak Directly to Each Audience

Use the Right Channels and Use Them Often

Create a Simple, Clear Message and Deliver it in a Consistent Voice

Anticipate, Don't Just React

<https://www.lapiana.org/leading-with-clarity-communicating-through-volatile-times/>

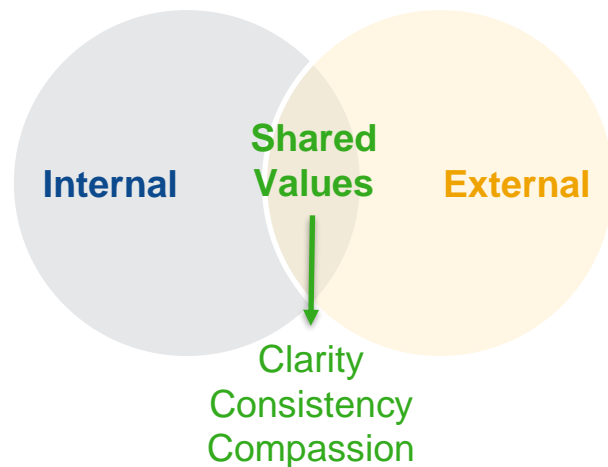


Communication in Crisis – What Builds Trust?

- Transparency vs. oversharing
- Empathy, clarity, and consistency
- Timeliness – build trust through regular updates and accessible language
- Lead with Confidence
- Communicate Often and With One Voice, Be Consistent
- Be the Calm, be Empathetic
- Care for your Staff
- Create tailored messaging

Internal Vs. External Communications

Audience	Goals	Tone & Style	Key Channels	Common Mistakes to Avoid
Internal (Staff, Board)	Build trust, reduce anxiety, align on next steps	Honest, empathetic, transparent	Staff meetings, email, 1:1 check-ins	Withholding info, inconsistent messaging
External (Funders, Clients, Partners, Public)	Maintain credibility, reassure, clarify impact & response	Confident, measured, forward-looking	Website, social media, press, email	Over-promising, silence, or spinning the truth



Cast Study 1 – Everyone Panic!

Subject: URGENT – Major Funding Cut and Program Changes

Hi all,

I hate to share this, but we just learned that a major funder is pulling out immediately. This is a huge problem, and we have no idea how to cover the gap. We're looking at major cuts, maybe even layoffs. It's a mess, and I'm still trying to wrap my head around it myself.

I need everyone to stop spending immediately and prepare for big changes. I wish I had better news, but I don't. We'll probably have to cancel some programs and figure out who we can keep. I know this is sudden, but I don't have time to explain everything right now. Just hang tight.

We'll get something on the calendar to talk, but there's no clear plan yet.

Case Study 2 – Trustworthy Communication on a Difficult Topic

Subject: Update on Funding and Next Steps

Hi team, I want to share an important update with you transparently and respectfully. We've just learned that one of our core funders will not be renewing their support, which impacts about 30% of our current operating budget. While this is difficult news, we are taking swift and thoughtful steps to assess the impact and plan next steps together.

Here's what we know:

- The funding loss takes effect immediately.
- Our leadership team is reviewing all active programs, expenses, and staffing to determine short- and long-term adjustments.
- No decisions have been made yet about layoffs or program closures.

Here's what we're doing:

- We're meeting with the board tomorrow and will hold a full staff meeting within 48 hours to walk through the details and hear your input.
- We are prioritizing clarity, compassion, and fairness in every decision.
- We are identifying ways to stabilize through reserve funds, bridge funding, and restructured programming.
- What you can expect:
 - A follow-up staff email within 24 hours with an invitation to the staff forum.
 - Weekly updates throughout this period of transition.
 - An open door for questions—please reach out to your supervisor or directly to me with concerns or ideas.

This moment is challenging, but it's also a chance for us to show the integrity and care that defines our work. We will move through this together—and keep you informed every step of the way.

With gratitude,
[Name], Executive Director

How to Communicate the Unknown

- Communicate early, even if you don't know everything.
- Share:
 - Known impacts (e.g. funding loss, program change, etc.)
 - Decision-making processes and timelines
 - What's being explored (e.g. options, scenarios)
 - Values guiding decisions
- Hold
 - Speculation, personal opinions
 - Names of potentially affected staff (prematurely)
 - Early-stage ideas not yet vetted
 - Blame or emotional venting
- Scripts:
 - "Here's what we know..."
 - "Here's what we're exploring..."
 - "Here's what we don't know yet, and when we'll follow up."

Leadership Tensions in Communications During Crisis

Tension	Description	Risk if Mishandled
Transparency vs. Stability	Sharing openly while maintaining confidence and control.	Oversharing can cause panic; under-sharing can erode trust.
Urgency vs. Accuracy	Communicating fast versus communicating precisely.	Acting too fast can spread misinformation; waiting too long can appear evasive.
Reassurance vs. Realism	Calming stakeholders vs. being honest about difficulty.	Too much optimism can feel disingenuous; too much realism can demoralize.
Authority vs. Empathy	Making decisions confidently vs. leading with compassion.	Being too top-down feels cold; being too soft can feel indecisive.
Unified Message vs. Tailored Message	Consistent story vs. audience-specific nuances.	Over-generalizing misses key needs; over-customizing can confuse.

Questions?



Reflection Prompt – Pick One

Have you experienced a time where overcommunication or undercommunication backfired?

Which of these tensions do you personally find hard to navigate? Why?

What communication guardrails or values could help guide decisions under pressure?



Decision Making

- Establish decision-making criteria
- Determine the lifespan of each decision and under what circumstances you may need to revisit it.
- Stick to the tried and true. Clarify decision making roles.
- Strategy Screen
- MOCHA, RACI

Strategy Screen

- Criteria to assist in decision-making
 - Does this leverage our differentiating strength?
 - Is this decision financially sustainable?
 - Does this advance our mission and/or strategy?
 - Do we have the capacity to take this on?
 - Does this respond to an urgent need?

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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RACI Matrix

Project tasks	Senior Analyst	Project Manager	Head of Design	SVP Finance	SEO Lead	Sales Director	Senior Management
Phase 1: Research							
Econometric model	R	I	I	A	C	I	I
Strategic framework	A	I	I	R	I	I	C
Risk factors	R	I	I	A	I	I	I
Phase 2: Structure							
Product specs	I	A	R	I	C	C	C
Design wireframe	I	C	R	I	C	I	C
User journey	I	C	R	I	C	C	C
User experience testing	I	C	R	I	C	C	C
Evaluation framework	I	R	C	I	C	I	C
Development backlog	I	R	C	I	C	I	C
Delivery roadmap	C	R	A	C	C	C	I

DARCI Accountability Grid

Example 1: DARCI Grid for multiple projects

PROJECTS	DECIDER/ DELEGATOR	ACCOUNTABLE	RESPONSIBLE	CONSULTED	INFORMED
	Holds the ultimate power re. the project	Person fully accountable for making the project happen.	Those responsible for doing the work on the project.	Those from whom input will be solicited.	Those to be kept apprised of relevant developments.
Develop new training curriculum	Jorge	Jennifer	Esther, Barbara, Eli, Sophia, Henry	Dave	Wilma, Jim
Enroll allies in legislative fight	Wilma	Mary	Mary, Gustavo, Pamela	---	Sam, Jorge
Create high donor campaign	Jorge	Ernesto	Sarah, Mercedes	Ephraim, Mark	Board finance committee
Recruit new organizing director	Wilma	Ben	Ben, Sophia	Jane	Jorge
Develop new performance	Jorge	Ben	Kenny, Mercedes	Wilma	---

MOCHA Framework

Manager	Owner	Consulted	Helper(s)	Approver
María	You!	Rini (event plan and your workload as needed) Kevin (major donor list, work plan for Joelle) Ariana (program, work plan for Thuy and Kara)	Joelle (outreach and registration) Thuy (fundraising) Kara (program logistics)	Mana (budget) You (program)

Questions?



Breakout Groups

Options (choose one per group):

- What is your biggest communication gap right now?
- What tools do you use to guide decision making? Are they working or not working? Why?
- How do you decide when to speak up or wait?



Share out: What are TWO THINGS you want to share back with the group about what's working for you with communication and decision-making that might be helpful for others?

What's Next?

Workshop 3

Learn how to personalize action plans to address specific challenges facing your nonprofit organization

EVANSTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

LEADING THROUGH CRISIS

THREE-PART SERIES

NONPROFIT WORKSHOPS

SAVE THE DATES:

Wednesday, April 23, 2025	12:00p- 1:30pm
Wednesday, April 30, 2025	12:00p- 1:30pm
Wednesday, May 07, 2025	12:00p- 1:30pm

JOIN US ON ZOOM

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

La Piana Resources

- [Leading with Clarity: Communicating Through Volatile Times](#)
- [Transparent Communications During Uncertain Times](#)
- [Where Collaboration Meets Communication](#)
- [8 Signs That You Should Engage in Advocacy... Right Now](#)
- [Subscribe to our Quarterly Newsletter](#)



Need links to resources

- Crisis communication – bridgespan guide
- Decision making nonprofit quarterly
- Dei in crisis equity in the center
- Internal communications the management center
- Bridgespan: Crisis Communications for Nonprofits – need to find link
- <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/managing-in-tough-times>
- [Adaptive leadership Heifetz framework HKS](#)



Thank you!

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