



Information Sheet

Foundation for Community Dance • December 2011

Crisis management and disaster recovery

No one wants to experience a disaster but, in the unlikely event that one should occur, dealing with it promptly, resolutely and clearly – and being perceived to do so – can reflect favourably on the reputation of your arts group. With a positive approach it is possible to emerge from a crisis even stronger, taking the opportunity to develop more robust methods of working, and finding new ways to connect with your local community.

The obvious way to avoid a disaster is to take preventative measures. There are Voluntary Arts briefings (see Further Resources section) that deal with the prevention of disasters (such as fires, financial problems, and child protection incidents) before they occur, by introducing risk assessment procedures and contingency planning.

However, not all disasters are foreseen, and those that are cannot always be avoided. Whatever you do to reduce the risks your group faces, it is impossible to guarantee that things won't go wrong.

This briefing looks at ways you can plan for what happens if your prevention methods have failed, for whatever reason, or if something comes along that you couldn't possibly have foreseen.

A. Types of disaster to consider

There are many kinds of disasters that could strike an arts group, and it is important not to dwell on the negative aspects of what could happen. However, the groups best placed to emerge from a disaster unscathed (or even stronger) are the ones that have considered these risks, done what they can to mitigate them, and created a crisis management plan detailing what to do in the unlikely event that they happen.

Glossary of common terms

Risk assessment – the process of identifying risks to your group or organisation.

Contingency planning – the process of putting procedures in place to prevent disasters from happening. **Note:** see Further Resources section for more information about addressing different aspects of risk assessment and contingency planning.

Crisis management – (also known as incident management) the initial response to a crisis, ideally guided by plans and procedures put in place beforehand.

Disaster recovery – the medium- and long-term recovery of the situation and restoration of the group and its reputation.

Business continuity management – a term that encompasses both crisis management and disaster recovery, focusing on the continuation of the service you provide throughout the crisis period.

It's impossible to foresee all of the potential disasters that could occur, especially within this short information sheet. You may spot risks that we haven't included here, or face dangers that are unique to your locality, constitutional form, art/craft form, etc. Feel free to adapt your list accordingly, being as specific as you can about the types of disaster that could happen.

- **Financial crisis** – such as a significant loss of funding, investment losses, mismanagement of funds, fraud, embezzlement, etc.
- **Theft, criminal damage or arson** – affecting your property, or a third party's property through the actions of someone operating under your charge.

- **Mismanagement, deception, neglect or inadequacy** – in the leadership and governance of the group.
- **Catastrophic breakdown of relations or violence** – between members of the management committee or when discontented people (staff, volunteers, members, participants or others) take action against your group.
- **Injury** – of those within the group, or a member of the public caused by someone operating under the auspices of your group, or at one of your events.
- **Criminal activity** – of any other type, by the people running (or associated with) your group.
- **Allegations of any of the above** – whether true or false.
- **Rumours, slander or libel** – when someone says or writes something untrue that could potentially damage the reputation of your group.
- **Computer system failure** – resulting in loss of data or the inability to carry out the functions of your group.

Disasters of different types can come in quick succession, or all at once, especially if there is an underlying crisis causing them. If there are lots of things going wrong at the same time, it may just be a coincidence, but look to see if you can identify the common factors and (once you have made the situation safe) try to address the cause as well as the symptoms.

Case study – London Bubble Theatre

London Bubble, an arts organisation based in south-east London, discovered that their community was key to overcoming a disastrous financial situation. Like many arts organisations, they were ‘defunded’ by Arts Council England while other public funders also reduced support. This put the organisation in crisis mode.

London Bubble turned to their community for help, by setting up a two-tiered membership scheme where they actively asked for more money from people who want that ‘added warm feeling of providing even more support to Bubble’. They also created Fanmade Theatre, a scheme where people could buy a stake in a production and suggest what the show would be. Two hundred and fifty people

participated, creating a successful touring production and allowing them to reconnect with new and existing audiences.

London Bubble’s experience shows how money is not necessarily the most valuable input that a community can have. They want to participate and be given opportunities for involvement in various ways, and they may think of payment as just another way of participating. It also shows how a disaster can actually help improve the reputation of an organisation by forging closer links with those who wish to help.

Watch Jonathan Petherbridge, Creative Director, talk about this experience in a short video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpQN25rfGFE

Case study from the NCVO website at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/networking-discussions/blogs/21433/11/07/06/funding-stories-how-theatre-company-used-their-supporter

B. The crisis management plan

Preparing a crisis management plan is the first step to ensuring that your group is as prepared as it can be. With a plan in place, if a disaster occurs, you can spend crucial time implementing the plan rather than working out where to start – or panicking!

The plan could include:

- **ways to identify that a crisis is coming** – set up a regular monthly or quarterly system of assessing any threats to the organisation (such as loss of funding, inappropriate behaviour, discontent, etc.) and flag up those that are new or perceived to be increasing.
Note: information regarding individuals employed by the group on a paid or voluntary basis may be confidential, and therefore only accessible to the line manager and/or personnel manager – these records should be kept separate from the main crisis management plan as appropriate. Nominate someone to whom people can go if they suspect that a crisis is about to occur. Make sure that everybody involved with the group knows who that person is, and that concerns raised to them will be taken seriously.
- **step-by-step procedures of what people should do at a time of crisis** – establish who is responsible for various tasks in the event of

a crisis, such as decision making, ensuring continuity of service, coordinating the recovery, speaking to the media/public, etc. Ultimate responsibility for disaster recovery lies with the management committee or Board, but this can be delegated to staff or volunteers if deemed appropriate. Some of these tasks may be carried out by the same person, but it is useful to distinguish them to help get the priorities clear in people's minds. For each task, agree what the step-by-step actions will be in each of the scenarios identified above.

- **ways of ascertaining who is responsible** – disasters can be internal (caused by someone or something within your group), external (caused by something completely out of your control), or a combination of both. It is important to ascertain who is responsible as quickly as possible, so you can begin to put things right. If you are at fault, it is important that you express sympathy with the victims of the disaster as soon as possible, and take legal advice as necessary. Note: expressing sympathy is different from issuing an apology, which could be seen as an admission of liability, with potential legal repercussions for your group. Take legal advice before you decide to issue an apology in such cases.
- **a list of important contact details and information that you might need to hand** – such as:
 - emergency service phone numbers, including gas board and child protection helplines;
 - your group's registered address, company/charity numbers and PAYE reference (if relevant);
 - bank account details;
 - contact details of your accountants/auditors;
 - Board/committee members' contact details;
 - volunteers/staff members' contact details and emergency contact names and numbers;
 - passwords for IT systems, website content management systems and commonly used websites;
 - salary details of paid staff;
 - funding arrangements (who the funder is, how much they have agreed to fund you, when that funding is due, and

what the terms of the funding agreements are);

- insurance arrangements, including details of what is covered and how you go about making a claim;
- grievance and disciplinary procedures.

Note: some of these details are confidential (such as individuals' contact details or salaries) or sensitive (such as passwords) and therefore should be kept separate from the main crisis management plan, and accessible only to those with permission.

- **advice on how to respond to the media** – for management committee members, Board members, volunteers and/or paid staff. In a crisis situation it is a common practice to appoint a single spokesperson for the whole group, to help avoid the kinds of conflicting messages that can make it seem that you're not in control. If this is the case, everyone needs to be aware of who this person is and how journalists and others can contact them (for more details on dealing with the media, see section C).
- **pre-prepared media releases** – separate statements can be prepared for different types of potential disaster, and adapted at the last minute according to the nature of the situation. Include clear details of who needs to approve the final version of media releases before they are sent out.
- **analysis of your insurance needs** – these will alter according to changes in the make-up of your group, its legal structure, the activities you take part in and the external threats you face. Take independent advice to make sure you are adequately covered (more details in Voluntary Arts Briefing 118, see Further resources).
- **analysis of your computer back-up and maintenance arrangements** – including procedures for data recovery from back-up systems, details of any maintenance contracts in place, and guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office (UK) or Office of the Information Commissioner (RoI) on what to do if private data ends up in the wrong hands.
- **Remember, your crisis management plan is not a static document** – it needs to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis as part of a wider risk assessment and contingency planning process.

C. Dealing with the media

Your crisis management plan as outlined above should include details of who is authorised to speak on behalf of the group to the media during and immediately after a disaster. It is important that this person is articulate and confident (but not arrogant), but perhaps more importantly that they are well prepared.

Information should be timely and accurate. Providing misleading or false information in order to cover up an incident, or misplace the blame, can only make the situation worse, and can damage your reputation for years to come.

On most occasions it is good practice to divulge as much of the relevant information as possible at the start, to avoid a prolonged drip-feed of bad news and to speed the recovery process. However, if there is any information that might exacerbate the problem, incite further confrontation, or compromise any pending or future legal proceedings, think carefully before you decide whether to release it. If in any doubt, take advice from a solicitor or legal advisor.

When preparing a statement or set of responses, think like a journalist and try to pre-empt the kinds of things that they might ask. Consider your key audiences and how they might react to the story.

Always acknowledge public concern, even if you think it is misplaced, express genuine sympathy for those adversely affected, and demonstrate complete cooperation with the emergency services or anyone else involved in rectifying the situation.

Once you have prepared your response, stick to the prearranged message and try not to improvise answers on the spot. If you do not know the answer, or are unsure of whether the answer might put people in jeopardy or reflect badly on your group, say that you do not know and that you will try to get the relevant information as soon as possible. Never say 'no comment' as this is a strong indication to the media that you are holding back or have something to hide.

D. If disaster strikes...

Remember, your first duty is to make sure that everyone is safe – everything else is secondary. By having a crisis management plan, the rest of the recovery process should be a lot less panic-stricken than it would be if you were just thrown into the

situation unprepared. It will give you the confidence to assert a degree of control over what would otherwise be an out-of-control experience.

Further Resources

FCD Information Sheets

- **Health and Safety for lone and remote workers** (January 2011)
- **Just how safe are you?** (January 2011)

VA Briefings

- **132 – Child Protection Part IV – Garda vetting and the arts** (Republic of Ireland) (October 2010)
- **132x – Child Protection Part IV – children and vulnerable groups** (March 2010)
- **124 – How to make sure your group is still here in ten years' time** (March 2009)
- **118 – Insurance for voluntary arts groups** (June 2008)
- **108 – Health & Safety in Offices – assessing the risk** (June 2007)
- **105 – Health & Safety in Offices – fire safety** (March 2007)
- **103 – Health & Safety in Offices – electrical equipment** (December 2006)
- **78 – Creating a financial risk policy** (March 2004)
- **72 – Risk management for charities – a good opportunity** (September 2003)
- **67 – Risk assessment for event organisers** (October 2002)

Stronger Together is a free programme that will help you to identify, develop and support the leadership potential in your group.

www.voluntaryarts.org/strongertogether

- 1 – Unlocking the leadership potential in your voluntary arts group
- 2 – Using roles to strengthen your group
- 3 – Strengthening yourself and your skills — your leadership learning journey

Other organisations

- **Information Commissioner's Office (UK)** – www.ico.gov.uk
- **Office of the Information Commissioner (RoI)** – www.oic.gov.ie

Other resources

- **How to stay cool in a crisis, The Guardian** (November 2000) – www.guardian.co.uk/society/2000/nov/09/voluntarysector9
- **Disaster Recovery, SCVO** – www.scvo.org.uk/information/financial-management/disaster-recovery
- **Running your organisation** – risk management, WCVA – www.wcva-ids.org.uk/wcva/1111

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