Crisis Communication Plan

~With A Focus on COVID-19~

Date:

Created by Divya Narala

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1: INTRODUCTION

Section 2: IDENTIFY AND RESPOND

Section 3: DISBURSEMENT OF INFORMATION

Section 4: POST CRISIS REVIEW

Section 5: APPENDIX

Section 6: RESOURCES

Section 1: INTRODUCTION

Dear Tribal Nations,

We would like to create this plan to help organize an effective means of communicating during a pandemic or an emergency. This plan is geared for those living in the Tribal Nations of Montana and Wyoming (as well as anyone else that may benefit) and focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic. The CDC Foundation is committed to cater as best as it can in supporting communities in need, especially during a crisis. "We are a catalyst for unleashing the power of collaboration between CDC and philanthropies, private entities and individuals to protect the health, safety and security of America and the world."

Objectives:

- Defining terms needed to understand the communication plan

- Developing methods to form a communications team

- Be able to identify, assess and prepare for a crisis

- Learn how to disburse information to the community

- Identify ways to best handle press releases

- Identify ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan

Definitions:

- Hazards: Any source of unpredictable or predictable danger[1].

- Risks: Possibility of loss or injury to someone or something; suggesting a hazard1.

- Impacts: A significant or major effect based on a prior event[1].

- COVID-19: A mild to severe respiratory illness caused by coronavirus that was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It is transmitted via infectious droplets or contaminated surfaces. It is commonly characterized by fever, cough, and shortness of breath (other symptoms may arise[1].)

- Pandemic: a disease that occurs over a wide range of geographic area and affects majority of the population[1].

- Mitigation: The act of making something less severe, dangerous, harsh, or damaging[1].

- Quarantine: To separate those who were exposed to a contagious disease from others to prevent the spread of a disease[2].

- Isolate: To separate those who are sick with a contagious disease from those who are not sick[2].

Section 2: IDENTIFY AND RESPOND

Hazards and Risks:

Assessing the situation and identifying hazards and risks are important

factors and possibly the first factors regarding preparation for a crisis. This

includes planning and laying out potential disasters that can happen as well

as any potential hazards, risks, and impacts (refer to Appendix 1a). Hazards can be classified into the following categories[3] (refer to Appendix 1b):

- Natural

  · Meteorological, geological, and biological[3]

- Human-caused

  · Accidents and intentional[3]

- Technological

  · Information, utility outage, explosion, chain interruption[3]

COVID-19 would fall under the Natural Hazard→ biological hazard as it is a Pandemic thus resulting in a Public Health issue. It is important to identify which categories hazards fall into, to take the proper steps to prevent major impacts on a community. Next step would be to identify the risks based on the hazards, also known as risk assessment. During the risk assessment, it is advisable to compare all the risks to determine which hazards need to be attended to immediately and those that can wait[4]. This requires evaluating and rating each of the hazards qualitatively[4]. For example, high, medium, low or on a scale of 1-10[4]. How can you go about doing this? Figuring out how the hazards will have an impact on the community regarding the frequency and severity, frequency, magnitude, intensity, location, duration, and warnings available of each hazard and risk[4].

Impact Estimate:

Impacts are the results of the hazards that are strategized initially (as seen in Appendix 1a). Some impacts (to name a few) that need to be accounted for are the following:

- Casualties

- Infrastructure damage

- Financial loss

- Environmental contamination

This involves planning to set aside emergency funds to mitigate the impacts that may occur. A budget model created by Ed Tucker, CPA, CMC, is one that can be used to plan for the emergency expenses[9]. (Refer to Appendix 2) In addition, budget planning will account for lawsuits, insurance coverage, liabilities and having sufficient resources on hand. Resources need to be available for minimum of 2 weeks as quarantining and isolation periods for COVID-19 is 14 days.

Role Assembly:

Communication amongst those involved in an emergency is very crucial as it can lead to further catastrophes when not planned correctly. The personnel that will be part of the Emergency Team should be thoroughly planned out inclusive of the duties held by each person. A general guideline to how a

communication team may be formed for COVID-19 is provided in Appendix 3. The order should be as follows: identifying an Emergency Manager is key, then he/she should start building a team as appropriate. Next, are the following potential persons: a CEO, Law Enforcement, Mitigation Coordinator, Social Services, Volunteer Organizations, Hospitals, Public Health, and Media Team[4].

Practice/ Anticipate:

Practicing and anticipating a crisis will go a long way when an actual disaster strikes. One thing to anticipate would be what kinds of disasters occur in the areas where the communities reside. Next, practicing a drill for the predicted disasters will make it easier for the community to be prepared when the real disaster occurs. Lastly, anticipating how to handle the media should be placed as another priority as false information, rumors and other unplanned developments that may occur would cause an extra challenge[5].

Section 3: DISBURSEMENT OF INFORMATION

Internal Communication

Internal communication is the information delivered amongst all the personnel belonging in a community. This is crucial to build trusting relationships, especially when communication needs to spread to all members rapidly amidst a crisis. Within the American Indian Reservations, it

is important to have internal communication to relay the necessary information and to best prepare for a crisis. However, in the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, some issues come to the surface within the reservations. The top 3 issues that prevent proper communication are the following: decrease in face to face interaction; lack of how Tribal Governments function; and lack of adequate infrastructure[6]. Refer to Appendix 3 as well as Figure 1 to see what the most appropriate way to establish an internal communication would be.

Figure 1
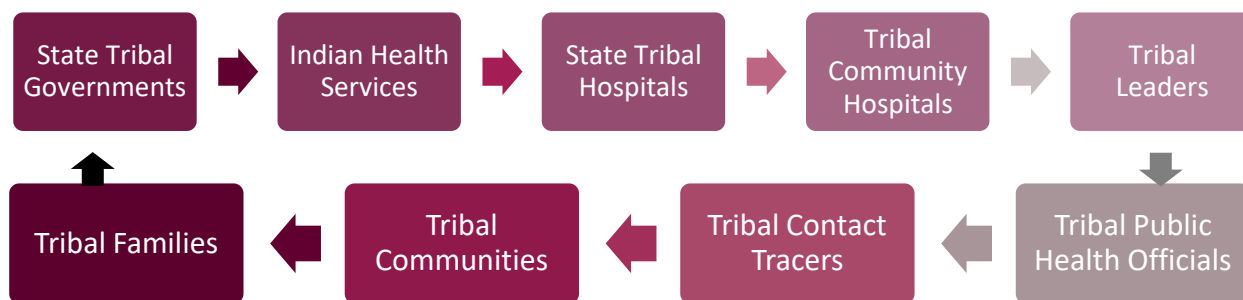
External Communication

This is when the communication must be escalated to nearby communities as well as outside sources. Tribal governments as well as all those involved in and around the crisis from on community need to communicate accordingly with neighboring jurisdictions. In addition, the responsible personnel should work with Volunteer organizations to get the proper resources in preparation for the impacts that may occur. This may happen in

scenarios such as: power outages, internet towers down, natural disasters, etc. Refer to Figure 2 regarding the suggested flow for externally communicating.

| State Tribal Government | → | Neighboring State Tribal Governments | → | State Governments | → | Volunteer Organizations | → | Neighboring Hospitals |

Media

Within the community undergoing a disaster, a media center should be established to get out information as fast as possible. There are multiple ways to use various media during an emergency. Developing messages from officials and disbursing accurate information for the public should be a priority[4]. The media should be used to relay accurate information in a timely manner to the public. The following are items that should be readily available for the media team:

- Copies of the response plan, prepared statements and crisis & communication team contact information[5]
- Computers and phones[5]
- Internet and phone/cell phone access with multiple phone lines available[5]
- Scanner and copier access[5]

- Media and social media monitoring software[5]

- Community contact lists (print and digital versions) [5]

- Social media, monitoring sites and web login information[5]

- Emergency supplies[5]

In addition, it is important to not flood the media with calls from agencies involved nor from the public. Lastly, media communication should be split into pre- during- and post-disasters to obtain the best results with the least impacts while being able to control for the events[5].

Media Methods

The following are the various types of media that should be used during the COVID-19 pandemic as face to face will not be the most appropriate. If electricity and/or WIFI is intact: Calling landlines, emailing, facetiming, press releases on news websites, social media or TV and warnings on TV. If cell towers are intact: Calling cellphones, facetiming, and sending out warnings on them. Also, transmitting warnings or messages on battery powered radios would be advisable. It is important to correct any wrong information, rumors and negativity that may arise during a crisis. Lastly, press releases should be distributed as soon as possible and posted in all appropriate places.

Press Releases

Press releases allow to control events head on and need to incorporate the following items: who, what, when and where[5]. It is crucial to have a prepared statement as new updates about the crisis come about[5]. This requires knowing all the facts before releasing the information, but it is possible to start broad and go into specifics as needed[5]. Lastly, have 1 or 2 members responsible to gather the updated information so there is not any cross contamination when information is released to the public.

Section 4: POST CRISIS REVIEW

Mitigation

Once the crisis has settled down, the community would go into the resolution or recovery stage followed by an evaluation stage. At this point, the Emergency Response Team (ERT) needs to assure the necessary lifeline systems are available for individuals and societal needs for the community are met[4]. In addition, the ERT would assess the situation and figure out what should be improved as well as what worked for the next crisis that may arise. The length of time a community may remain in the recovery stage will vary based on acknowledgement of the mishaps, support allocation of resources, and guiding the community to the new normal[7]. Communities tend to be more responsive to risk avoidance as well as implementing mitigation strategies
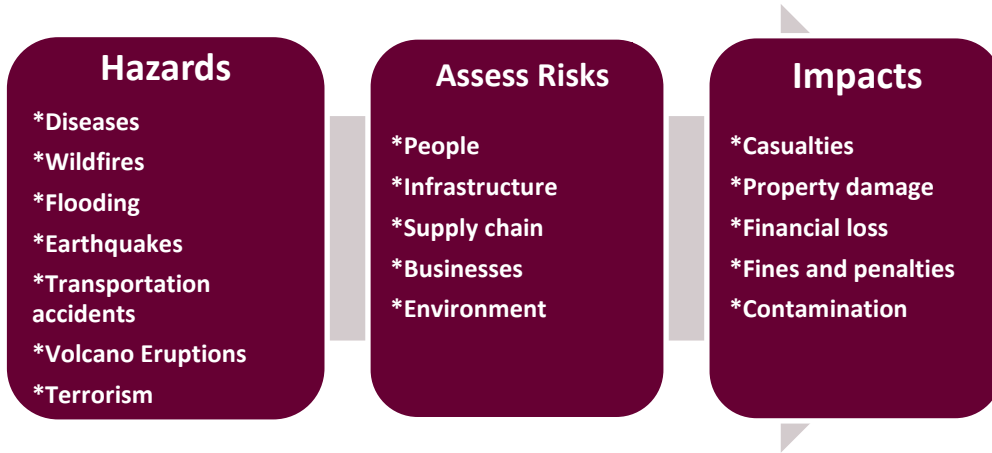
right after experiencing an emergency or crisis[7]. Lastly, getting in touch with all the appropriate volunteer organizations is crucial during this stage.
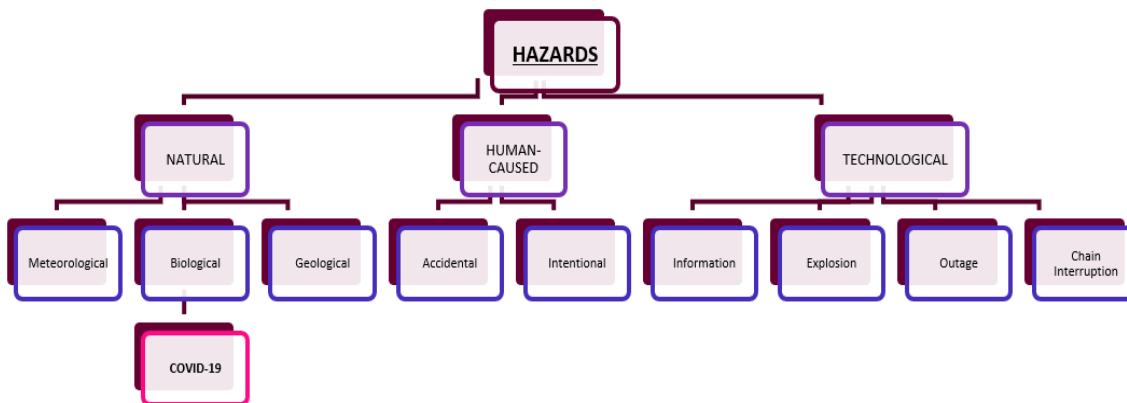
Evaluation

The communications team as well as all other responsible teams and individuals should examine the short- and long-term impact of the crisis. If proper lessons are not learned, there would be an increased chance of the same mishaps to occur in future disasters[7]. Appendix 4 portrays 1 way to assess and evaluate a disaster for improved disaster readiness in the future. In addition, Appendix 3 allows for a draft for the evaluation phase as it can help better plan for resources or lack thereof. Lastly, "Federal, state, tribal, and local governments, business, organizations, and individuals have spent trillions of dollars recovering from disasters. Mitigation works to reduce those losses, both fiscal and those that cannot be given a price, such as a life or sentimental items, by preventing the losses and even sometimes the disaster… goals and objectives have been developed to mitigate potential losses from those hazards[8]."

Section 5: APPENDIX
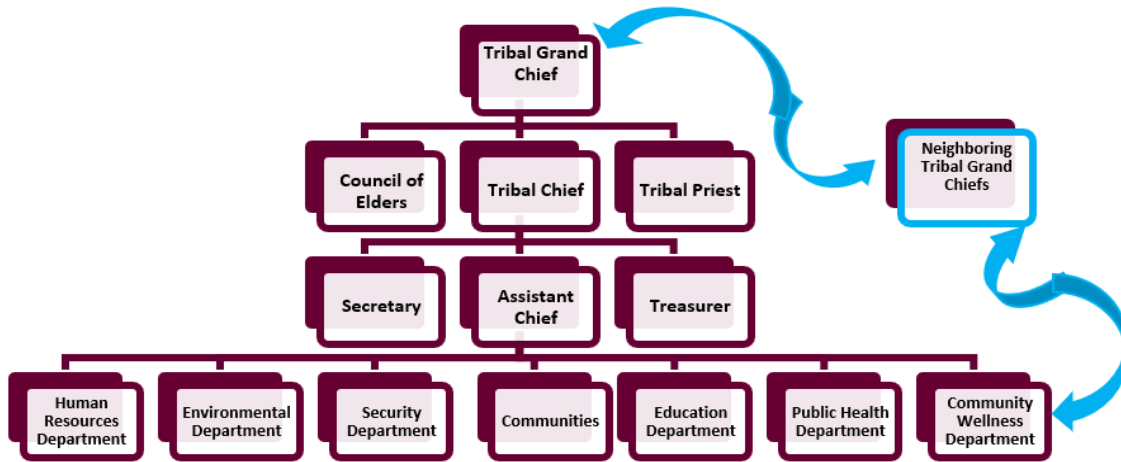
Appendix 1a (adapted from[3, 8])

Hazards	Assess Risks	Impacts
*Diseases *Wildfires *Flooding *Earthquakes *Transportation accidents *Volcano Eruptions *Terrorism	*People *Infrastructure *Supply chain *Businesses *Environment	*Casualties *Property damage *Financial loss *Fines and penalties *Contamination

Appendix 1b

Appendix 2 (adapted from [9])

Appendix 3 (Note: Hospitals should be assumed as a communication tool at all levels)

Appendix 4 (Adapted from[5])

Task	Description	Phone number		Key Dates			Issues
		Responsible Personnel	Target Start	Target Complete	Actual Complete	
1	Crisis-specific key messages and updates					
2	Crisis response center set up and management					
3	Media communications					
4	Government official outreach					

Section 6: RESOURCES

[1] Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved December 1, 2020, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/

[2] Quarantine and Isolation. (2017, September 29). Retrieved December 1, 2020, from https://www.cdc.gov/quarantine/index.html

[3] Risk Assessment. (n.d.). Retrieved December 1, 2020, from https://www.ready.gov/risk-assessment

[4] *Guide for All-Hazard Emergency Operations Planning* [Brochure]. (1996). Retrieved December 1, 2020, from https://www.fema.gov/pdf/plan/slg101.pdf

[5] (n.d.). Retrieved from https://bloomerang.co/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Crisis-Communication-Plan.pdf

[6] Chico-Jarillo, T. M., Burgess, J., & Granillo, B. (2018). Strategies From American Indian and Alaska Native Community Partners on Effective Emergency Response Collaboration. *American Journal of Public Health, 108*(S5). doi:10.2105/ajph.2018.304842

[7] CERC: Crisis Communication Plans. (2014). Retrieved December 18, 2020, from https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/ppt/CERC_Crisis_Communication_Plans.pdf

[8] Tech, T. (2018). STATE OF MONTANA Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan Statewide Hazard Assessment. Retrieved December 18, 2020, from https://drought.unl.edu/archive/Plans/GeneralHazard/State/MT_2018.pdf

[9] Disaster Preparedness Budget Model. (2020, September 23). Retrieved December 18, 2020, from https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/readiness/healthcare/disasterbudget.htm

CONTACT INFORMATION

2929 3rd Ave N, Suite 300
Billings, MT 59101
406.252.2550
rmtec@rmtlc.org
www.rmtlc.org