



COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOLS FOR CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

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prepared by



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COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOLS FOR CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Communication protocols are to be followed during incidents, events or conditions that could potentially have a negative effect on program or project objectives or the Alameda CTC. These communication protocols provide methods of identifying, assessing, responding to, monitoring, controlling and reporting risks.

Alameda CTC uses these communication protocols to support staff as well as to better meet the agency's program and project objectives, improve performance, increase transparency and act as custodians of public funds.

PROTOCOLS AND CONTACTS

COMMUNICATIONS PROTOCOLS AND CONTACTS

When an incident is identified related to a project or program, the staff member should report immediately to the Project or Program Manager.

The Project or Program Manager, along with the project team, will gather information about the incident, determine if other agencies are involved, review communications to date, analyze risk and report to the Executive Director.

The Executive Director will determine the agency's response to the incident by direction:

- Who needs to be informed, and by whom,
- Who will speak to the media,
- If and when the Commissioners and partner agency Public Information Officers (PIOs) should be informed,
- Who will function as the ongoing communications team (if necessary), and
- Who will develop speaking points and distribute to staff as needed.

Primary Contacts

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Tess Lengyel
510-208-7428 *office*

DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Patricia Reavey
510-208-7422 *office*

DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PROJECTS

Gary Huisinh
510-208-7405 *office*

DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND POLICY

Carolyn Clevenger
510-208-7496 *office*

DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Seung Cho
510-208-7472 *office*

LEGAL

Zack Wasserman
Wendel, Rosen, Black
& Dean, LLP
510-834-6600 *office*

Office Security Contacts

BUILDING SECURITY (24 HOURS)

510-267-1124

BUILDING MANAGEMENT (8:00AM - 5:00PM)

510-267-1126

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

ADMINISTRATION TEAM

- Ensure that the front desk is staffed at all times and appropriate reference materials are on hand. If the assigned staff is not able to answer the phone or will be leaving the office, an alternate staff member must be informed and be available to cover the front desk.
- Project fact sheets should be available in hard copy and staff should be aware of how to access the project and program fact sheets on the website.
- Keep an updated list of staff contacts at the front desk.

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

- Keep an active list of partner agency PIOs. (See Appendix A)
- Update media contact lists regularly and actively manage relationships.
- Update and manage contact databases regularly.
- Sign up for Google Alerts to monitor agency and project and program media.
- Update the website with agency, project and program information frequently.

PROJECTS/PROGRAMS TEAM

- Ensure that staff members presenting at public meetings are fully prepared.
- Have appropriate staff attend project initiation meetings and status update meetings as appropriate.
- Ensure that staff is aware of on-going projects and programs and has information readily available.

RESPONDING TO THE PUBLIC

DIFFICULT PHONE CALLS

The language below should be used to try to reach an amiable conclusion and ensure that we have enough information to return a call with more information, when needed.

<p>→ Acknowledge the caller and their feelings.</p> <p>→ Reassure the caller that their concerns have been heard.</p>	<p>Thank you for taking the time to tell me your thoughts.</p> <p>I understand that you feel strongly about this issue.</p>
<p>→ Request the caller's contact information (name, phone, email).</p>	<p>I do not have the information you are requesting. I would be happy to have the appropriate person get in touch with you. May I take your name and contact information?</p> <p>or, when appropriate,</p> <p>This is an important project partially sponsored by Measure BB funds that Alameda CTC administers. We expect that the project will <i><list benefits from the fact sheet></i>. I can take your name and contact information and have someone get back to you.</p>

<p>If the caller will provide contact information</p>	<p>→ Take notes for accurate recording and confirm response time.</p>	<p>Thank you <i><Caller Name></i>. We will get back to you within two (2) business days.</p>
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<p>If the caller will not provide contact information and is still upset</p>	<p>→ Again, reassure the caller that their concerns have been heard.</p>	<p>It is clear that you feel strongly about this and I understand your issue.</p>
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<p>→ Again, request the caller's contact information (name, phone, email).</p>	<p>I would be happy to have someone get in touch with you. Please provide your name and contact information.</p>
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NEXT STEPS:

- ❑ Alert the Director of Procurement and Information Technology and Executive Director immediately. S/he will determine the level of risk, and alert the Executive Director and other staff and partner agency PIOs as necessary.

THREATENING PHONE CALLS

The language below should be used to try to reach an amiable conclusion and ensure that we have enough information to return a call with more information, when needed.

→ **Try to determine if they really intend violence or if they're using poorly chosen words.**

I can hear that you're very upset. Your words sound like you are making a threat. Is that your intention or can I help you by having a <Project Manager> call you back to more fully respond to your concerns?

If the caller **confirms** that it is a threat

→ **Ask for more specifics and write down as much as possible.**

What exactly are you threatening?

If the caller **does not confirm** the threat and will provide contact information

→ **Take notes for accurate recording and confirm response time.**

Thank you <Caller Name>. We will get back to you within two (2) business days.

NEXT STEPS:

- Alert the Director of Procurement and Information Technology and Executive Director immediately. They will determine the level of risk and communicate with staff as necessary and will determine next steps (alert public safety authorities, partner agency PIOs, building security) when necessary.

If the caller **threatens violence and/or won't provide contact information**

→ **Tell the caller that you are feeling threatened.**

I want you to know that I am feeling threatened. I am hanging up now.

NEXT STEPS:

- Alert executive staff to determine the threat level, if it requires changes in planned meetings, and if it should be reported to local law enforcement.
- If the threat seems immediate, call **911** and notify building security: **510-267-1124**.

DIFFICULT VISITORS

The language below should be used to try to reach an amiable conclusion and ensure that we have enough information to respond to a visitor with more information, when needed.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Acknowledge the visitor and their feelings. → Reassure the visitor that their concerns have been heard. 	<p>Thank you for taking the time to tell me your thoughts.</p> <p>I understand that you feel strongly about this issue.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Request the visitor's contact information (name, phone, email). 	<p>I do not have the information you are requesting. I would be happy to have the appropriate person get in touch with you. May I take your name and contact information?</p> <p>or, when appropriate,</p> <p>This is an important project partially sponsored by Measure BB funds that Alameda CTC administers. We expect that the project will <i><list benefits from the fact sheet></i>. I can take your name and contact information and have someone get back to you.</p>

→ **If the visitor requests documents pursuant to the Public Records Act (PRA), respond by saying:**

Thank you for your request. Alameda CTC will respond. We are not able to collect these materials today, but will do so promptly and will get back to you.

Note: A local agency must respond promptly but no later than ten (10) calendar days from the receipt of the request, to notify the requestor whether records will be disclosed.

<p>If the visitor will provide contact information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Take notes for accurate recording and confirm response time. 	<p>Thank you <i><Visitor Name></i>. I will have the <i><Project Manager></i> get back to you within two (2) business days.</p>
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<p>If the visitor will not provide contact information and is still upset</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Again, reassure the visitor that their concerns have been heard. → Again, request the visitor's contact information (name, phone, email). 	<p>It is clear that you feel strongly about this and I understand your concern/issue.</p> <p>I would be happy to have the <i><Project Manager></i> call you, if you'll provide a phone number.</p>
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NEXT STEPS:

- Alert the Director of Procurement and Information Technology and Executive Director immediately. They will determine the level of risk, and alert other staff as necessary.

THREATENING VISITORS

The language below should be used to try to reach an amiable conclusion and ensure that we have enough information to respond to a visitor with more information, when needed.

→ **Try to determine if they really intend violence or if they're using poorly chosen words.**

I can see that you're very upset. Your words sound like you are making a threat. Is that your intention or can I help you by having a *<Project Manager>* more fully respond to your concerns?

If the visitor **threatens violence**

→ **Tell the visitor that you are feeling threatened.**

I want you to know that I am feeling threatened. I need to ask you to leave now. I am calling building security now. (Call Security 510-267-1124)

NEXT STEPS:

- ❑ Get to safety. Secure the doors to the Alameda CTC offices, if possible.
- ❑ Alert building security: **510-267-1124**
- ❑ If the threat seems immediate, call **911** and notify building security that you called 911.
- ❑ Alert executive staff to determine the threat level, if it requires changes in planned meetings, and if it should be reported to local law enforcement.

If the visitor **does not pose a physical threat but refuses to leave or back down**

→ **Ask the visitor to leave.**

I must ask you to leave. I am calling building security now. *(When security is present)* I need you to leave.

If the visitor **backs down**

→ **Tell the visitor that you are going to find someone to assist them.**

I am going to find someone to assist you. Please wait here.

NOTE:

Building security must be present to hear you ask the visitor to leave before they can escort them from the building.

RESPONSIBILITY OF RESPONDING TO THE PUBLIC

As a public agency, Alameda CTC has the responsibility to be responsive to members of the public who are seeking information. Alameda CTC is not obligated to assemble and provide documents immediately, although staff can provide agenda materials or other items that happen to be available, and recommend visiting the Alameda CTC website.

A local agency must respond promptly, but no later than ten (10) calendar days from receipt of the request, to notify the requester whether records will be disclosed. If the request is received after business hours or on a weekend or holiday, the next business day may be considered the date of receipt. (*Gov. Code 6253.9, subd. (c)*)

There is no obligation to make any specific person available to respond to questions; however you may call staff assistants to ask about availability.

If a staff member feels uncomfortable because of an individual's (or group's) behavior, they can request another staff member to join them in dealing with that individual.

If a staff member feels threatened by the individual's (or group's) behavior, they can respond by calling building security at 510-267-1124 and/or 911.

TIPS FOR HANDLING DIFFICULT/THREATENING CALLS

- **Stay calm.** Keep your voice low and even.
- **Listen to the caller's statements** and acknowledge them, even if their statements are incorrect. Do not get sucked into an argument.
- **Acknowledge the caller's feelings** and that they feel strongly about the issue.
- **Always be polite and courteous.** You are speaking for Alameda CTC, whether or not the project or program is led by the agency.
- **Be responsive.** If you don't know the answer to the question or where to find the information, say so. Acknowledge that this may frustrate the caller. Tell them that someone will be in touch within two (2) business days.
- **Take notes.** Request contact information.
- **Be resolute.** If a caller refuses to accept your responses and persists with unreasonable demands on your time, end the call with a polite yet firm conclusion ("I am sorry, but I need to end this call now. Good bye.").

RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

RESPONDING TO THE MEDIA

GENERAL MEDIA PROTOCOLS

The Executive Director is the official spokesperson for Alameda CTC. Media should always be directed to her as a first course of action. The Executive Director, executive staff and communications team may speak to the media as needed. Project staff may receive permission to speak with the media on a project-by-project basis.

Consultants should be advised to respond to the media as follows: "I am not a spokesperson for Alameda CTC, but I would be happy to put you in touch with their spokesperson."

If staff other than authorized spokespeople are approached by media:

"I'm not a spokesperson for Alameda CTC, but I would be happy to have someone respond to you. May I have your contact information and question(s)? What is your deadline?"

BEST PRACTICES WHEN HANDLING NEGATIVE MEDIA COVERAGE

- ❑ **Check with a neutral party.** Before you act, ask a trusted outside source to read, listen to or watch the story and provide feedback. You may be surprised to learn that your message did get through and no other response is required. Do not overreact!
- ❑ **Write a response.** A letter to the editor or a website comments section can give you an opportunity to get your message out. Do not cite the original errors; instead articulate your view, using objective facts and statistics. Cite sources and quote third parties where possible.
- ❑ **Use the outlets you own.** Online and social media give you opportunities to get your story out to your key audiences. Do not name the offending news outlet or repeat the errors. Instead, use your owned media to increase positive communications about the agency and the project or program.

The Executive Director will make the determination as to when a response to the media is required. As a first step, the Executive Director or her designee should contact the news agency (usually the editor) and thank/acknowledge the story or editorial and correct factual errors and request equal time in the publication when appropriate.

In general, the best response to unsolicited media coverage (also known as “earned media”) for Alameda CTC is no response. However, if factual errors need to be corrected or the agency or a partner is being harmed by the publicity, it may be important to respond directly to a story or editorial for the permanent record.

PREPARATION (COMMUNICATIONS TEAM)

- ❑ Sign up for Google Alerts in order to audit local, regional, state and national media regularly.
- ❑ Know your local and regional transportation reporters/editors (include transportation bloggers and advocates).

APPENDIX A

Partner Agency Contacts

The following contact information is provided to help facilitate communication between Alameda CTC and partner agencies. If a caller or visitor contacts Alameda CTC staff regarding a project, program or issue that is the responsibility of a partner agency, staff should direct them to the appropriate customer service contacts.

AC TRANSIT

Customer Service: 511 (say "AC Transit")

Beverly Greene
Director of External Affairs, Marketing
and Communications
510-891-7168 office
bgreene@actransit.org

BART

Customer Service: 510 464-0000

Alicia Trost
Communications Department Manager
San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District
510-464-6154 office
atrost@bart.gov

CALTRANS DISTRICT 4

Customer Service: 510 286-4444

Rocquel Johnson
Branch Chief A
Public Information Officer: Sonoma/Santa Clara/
Contra Costa/Alameda-West
510-501-0446 office

Vince Jacala
Branch Chief B
Public Information Officer: Alameda-East/San
Mateo/San Francisco/Marin/Solano/Napa/Bridge
510-385-7069 office

Chiconda Davis
Public Information Officer: Alameda West
510-715-7906 office

Marcus Wagner
Public Information Officer: Alameda East
510-622-8758 office
marcus.wagner@dot.ca.gov

CONTRA COSTA TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

Customer Service: 925 256-4700

Linsey Willis
Director of External Affairs
925-256-4728 office
lwillis@ccta.net

LAVTA

Customer Service: 925 455-7500

Jonathan Steketee
Customer Service and Contract
Oversight Manager
925-455-7555 office
steketee@lavta.org

MTC

Customer Service: 415 778-6700

John Goodwin, Principal Public Information Officer
415-778-5262
jgoodwin@bayareametro.gov

Randy Rentschler
Director, Legislation and Public Affairs
415-778-6780
rentschler@bayareametro.gov

SAN FRANCISCO BAY FERRY/WATER EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY (WETA)

Customer Service: 415 291-3377

UNION CITY TRANSIT

Customer Service: 510 471-1411

Stephen Adams
Transit Manager
510-675-5446
SAdams@unioncity.org