



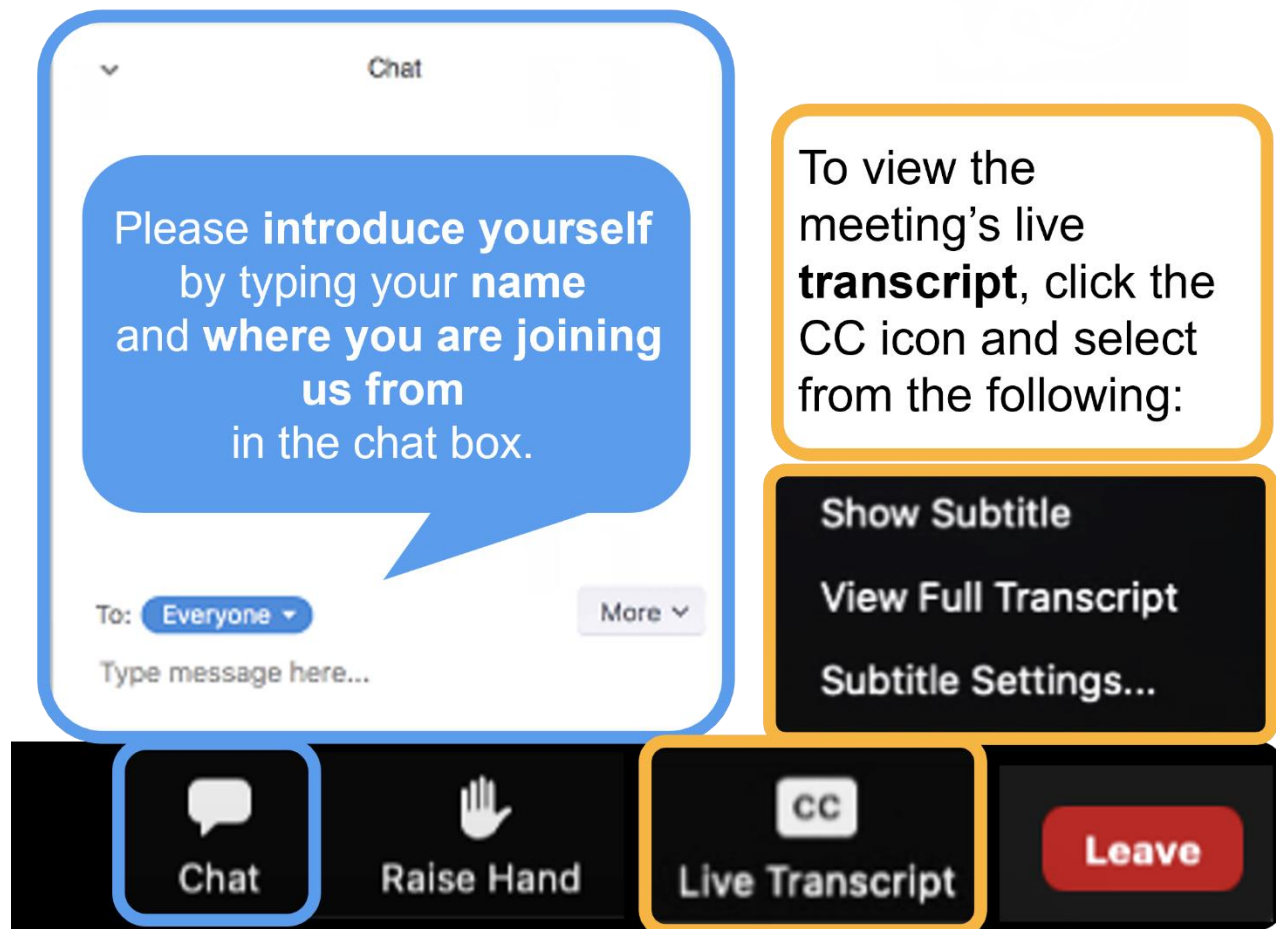
Navigating the Storm: Effective Strategies for Crisis Communications

May 5, 2026

Housekeeping

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 - The Q&A portion of today's meeting will not be recorded.
- Please submit questions anytime through **Zoom's Q&A feature**. We will address them during the Q&A portion at the end.
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Zoom Housekeeping



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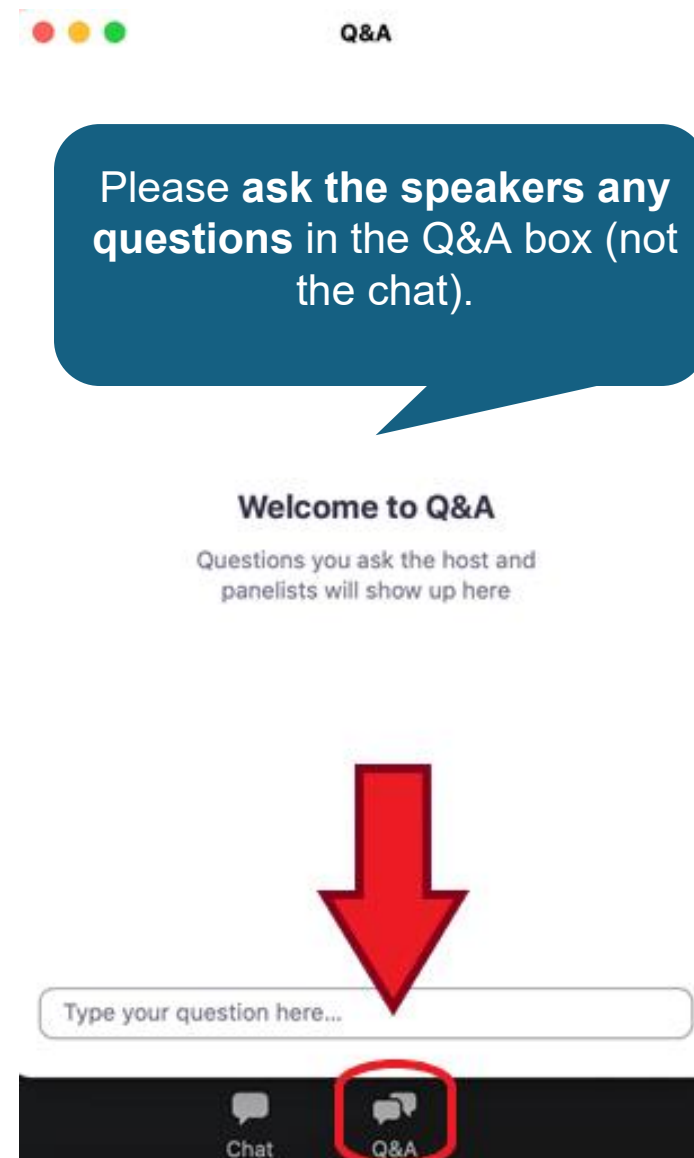
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Q&A

Please ask the speakers any questions in the Q&A box (not the chat).

Welcome to Q&A

Questions you ask the host and panelists will show up here.

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Chat Q&A

Webinar Overview & Learning Objectives

1

Identify and assess funding sources while understanding their impact on crisis response.

2

Build a clear crisis communications structure and prepare key stakeholders.

3

Develop actionable plans with leadership and create ready-to-use holding statements.

4

Protect organizational reputation and strategically engage with the media.

Presenters



Julie Burns
President & CEO
RIZE Massachusetts Foundation



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Founder & CEO
Flowetik



David Ball
President & Founder
Ball Consulting Group

Why Crisis Preparedness Matters

- Crises can interrupt operations, funding, and reputation.
- Preparation reduces risks and improves response time.
- Strong planning helps maintain trust with employees, funders, and stakeholders.

Organizations that prepare in advance can respond more quickly, minimize harm, and maintain trust with funders and partners.

Be proactive, not reactive.



Preparing: Compliance & Risk Awareness

Preparation starts with strong fundamentals.

- Understand and ensure compliance with:
 - Federal, state, and contractual obligations.
 - IRS requirements for 501(c)(3) organizations.
- Create a succession plan for planned and unplanned departures.
- Monitor financial health (cash flow, funding dependencies).
- Have a risk management plan and conduct regular assessments.
- Create a crisis response plan and team.

Preparing: Risk Assessment Planning Process

Define purpose & context

Understand why risk management is vital (e.g., past close calls, new exposures, changing government ideology).

Assign responsibility

Form a risk management committee. Define roles and responsibility.

Identify risks

List all potential risks, even unlikely ones.

Evaluate & prioritize

Focus on high-likelihood, high-impact risks affecting operations, reputation, or compliance.

Preparing: Risk Management Planning Process

Establish your risk strategy

Determine how your organization will handle risks.

Implement your risk management plan

The board should formally adopt the plan. Implementation includes updating job descriptions for staff and volunteers, including relevant risk management information in participant handbooks.

Preparing: Determine How Your Organization Will Manage Risks

Avoid

Discontinue programs or services that are most vulnerable to federal policy shifts or scrutiny.

For example, pause or wind down activities if they pose significant compliance or funding risks.

Modify

Adapt existing programs to align with new federal priorities or guidelines.

This could include revising language, changing target populations, or restructuring activities to lower the risk of federal intervention.

Retain

Accept some level of risk for mission-critical activities, but develop contingency plans for potential loss of funding, increased oversight, or reputational harm.

Share

Partner with peer organizations, coalitions, or networks to distribute risk and strengthen collective advocacy and support.

Preparing: Relationship Management

Map key **external stakeholders**:

- Funders
- Legal counsel
- Nonprofit associations
- Government partners
- Media
- Peer organizations

Build relationships *before* a crisis happens.

Preparing: Understanding Your Funding Sources

Inventory Federal Funding

- List all direct federal grants/contracts.
- Include employee, contractor, and pass-through funding.
- Capture funding from state/local entities acting as intermediaries.

Review Grant/Contract Terms

- Understand termination/cancellation clauses.
- Know the requirements for funding in future years.
- Track allowable drawdowns and deadlines.

Monitor Executive Orders & Memos

- Identify relevant executive orders affecting your mission.
- Note restrictions on service provision, DEI, immigration, environment, etc.
- Review activities for compliance and document use of federal funds.

During a Crisis: Immediate Actions

When a crisis occurs, the first step is to bring together your response team and verify the facts.

- 1 Convene the crisis response team quickly.
- 2 Verify facts before acting.
- 3 Assess risk level: *Low / Medium / High*.
- 4 Avoid speculation – focus on confirmed information.

During a Crisis: Monitor & Adapt

Crisis response isn't static—it requires ongoing monitoring.

Continuously reassess:

Has the risk level changed?

Is the response working?

Adjust strategy as needed.

Track communications and stakeholder response.

After a Crisis: Reflection & Recovery

After the immediate crisis has passed, it's important to reflect.

Conduct an after-action review:

- What worked?
- What didn't?

Document lessons learned.

Update crisis plans accordingly.



Protecting Your Brand Story in Times of Funding Uncertainty

How to stay clear, credible and consistent

When Funding Is Uncertain, Clarity Can Break Down

What breaks down:

- 1 Teams don't know or are not sure what to say.
- 2 Messaging becomes inconsistent.
- 3 Language turns reactive.
- 4 Others fill in the gaps for you.

Result: confusion, inconsistency

Your Brand Is What People Say When You're Not in the Room

It's also what people understand about you when things are unclear.

Stay Clear

Every person in your organization tells the same story, from the staff to the board.

Stay Credible

Your language holds up under scrutiny – accurate, grounded, and consistent with your actual work.

Stay Consistent

Your message doesn't shift based on who's speaking or which channel they're using.

Three Practical Actions to Help You Stay Grounded

1

Clarify Your Core Message:

A 1-2 sentence anchor that keeps every person in your org telling the same story.

2

Strengthen Your Language:

Review what's public-facing and ensure it's clear, accurate, and holds up under scrutiny.

3

Prepare Ready-to-Use Messages:

Have holding statements for staff, stakeholders, and the public.

1

Clarify Your Core Message

1-2 sentences that answer:

What you do.

Who you serve.

Why it matters right now.

This message keeps everyone aligned.

Use it everywhere:

Website

First sentence of your About or mission section.

Email updates

Opening line to funders, partners, and community.

Staff talking points

What anyone says when asked about your work.

Board communications

Shared language that keeps leadership aligned.

2

Strengthen Your Language

Review

- Website & social media channels
- About description
- Program descriptions
- Impact statements

If someone unfamiliar with your work reads this, do they understand it the way you intend?

What to look for:

Clarity

Plain language. No jargon. Focused on community impact.

Consistency

Your mission reads the same across every channel.

Political sensitivity

Reframe terminology that has become contested.

Designate an owner

Identify who in your org approves external language during a crisis – before the crisis.

3 Prepare Your Ready-to-Use Messages (Examples)

A. Holding Statement

Public-facing

"We are aware of the current developments and are assessing what this means for our work and the communities we serve. We will share updates as we learn more."

Acknowledge the situation without overcommitting to details you don't yet have.

B. Stakeholder Message

Funders, partners & board

"We are closely monitoring funding developments and assessing potential impacts on our programs. Our priority is continuity of services. We will share updates as the situation evolves."

Reassure partners that you are tracking the situation and maintaining operations.

C. Internal Staff Note

Staff & team

"We are actively assessing recent funding developments. There are no immediate program changes. For external inquiries, direct questions to [designated contact]. Updates will follow."




Prevent improvised responses and name a communication owner.



Strategically Engaging With the Media

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Benefits of Proactive Outreach

-  Pitching stories generates news coverage AND keeps local reporters up to date.
-  Good news coverage leads to more referrals and greater volume, and that supports growth.
-  Can prevent negative coverage.

What Makes News?

Stories that sell...

Breaking news

Outrage

Analysis



The Public Wants to Know...

What happened?

Who is affected?

How are you responding?

Who is to blame?

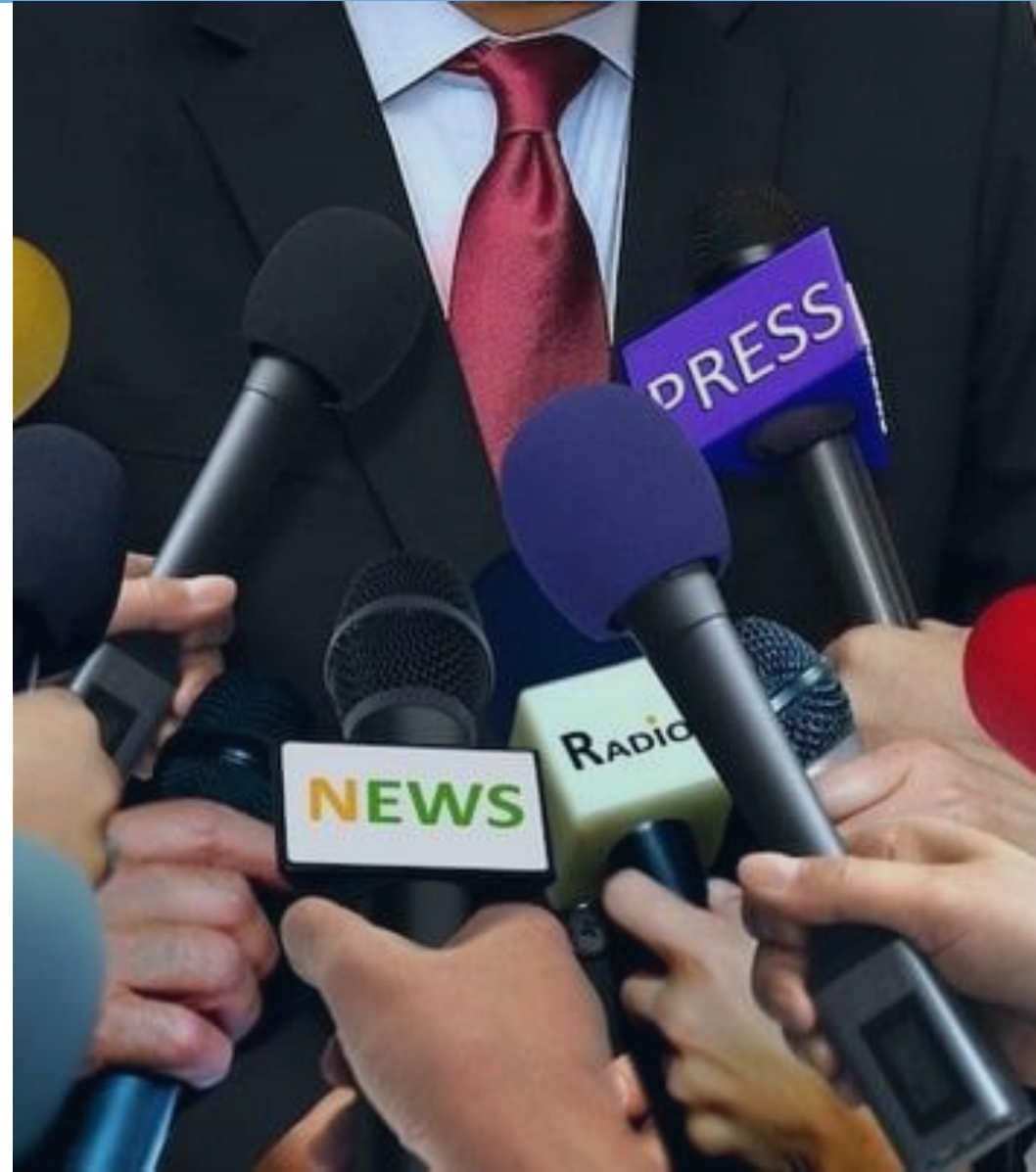


Messages That Resonate

Quick/to the point.

Providing context & information.

Nicely packaged.

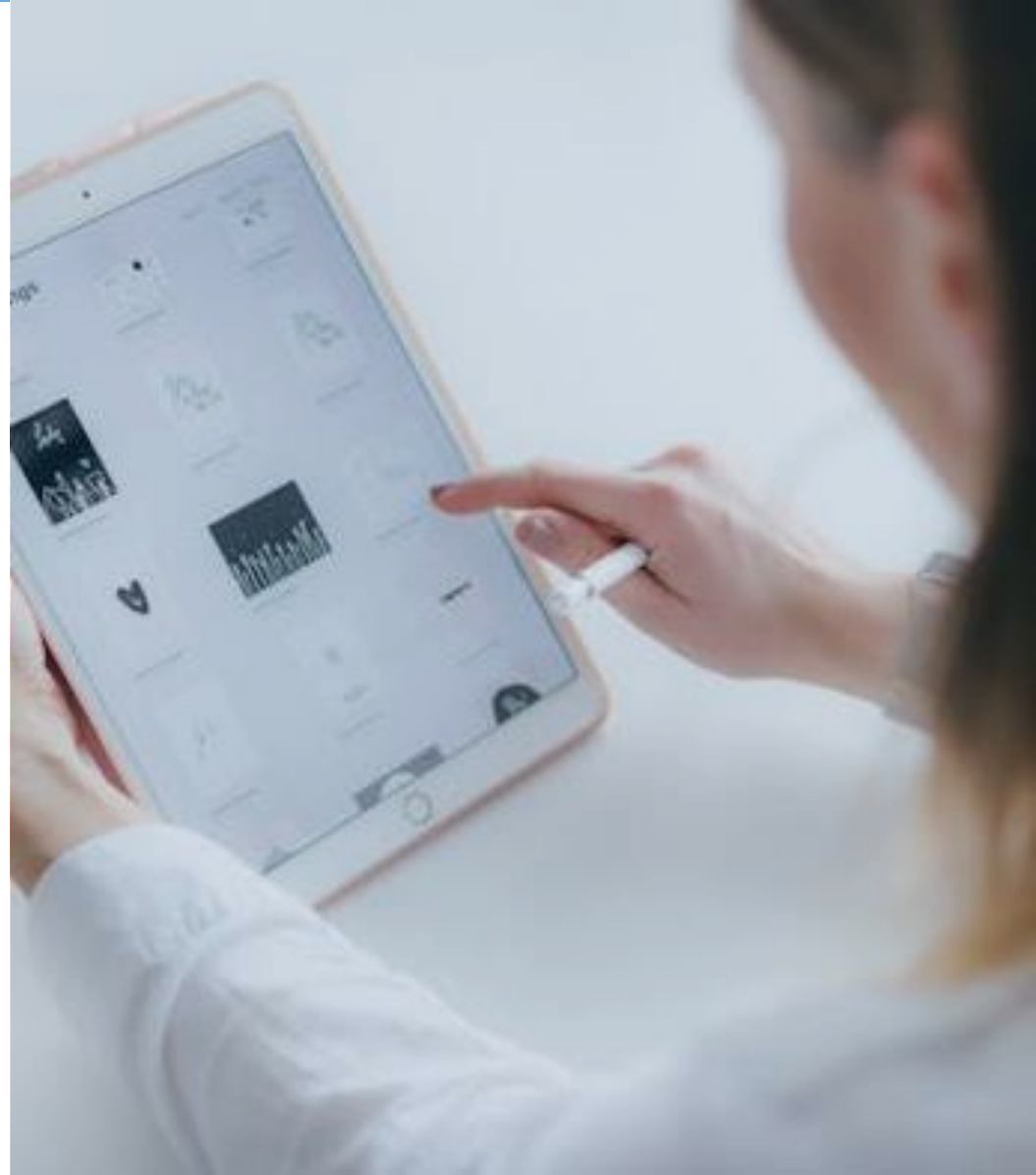


What People Care About

How are you responding to criticism?

Are you accountable?

What's in it for me (WIIFM)?



How to prepare for media inquiries

Prepare potential media materials:

Holding statement for first 24 hours of crisis

Concern, clarity, control, communication.

Create templates

Media procedures memo

Only approved media spokespeople!



What Goes Into a Holding Statement

Rule #1:
Convey empathy

Rule #2:
Don't forget rule #1

- Less is more...keep it short.
- No need to recite what is already known.
- Demonstrate control over the situation.
- Identify what steps your organization has taken.
- Emphasize proper procedures.

Statement from RIZE Massachusetts Foundation CEO Julie Burns

BOSTON (DATE, 2026) – RIZE Massachusetts, an independent nonprofit foundation working to end the opioid epidemic in Massachusetts, is proud to work alongside the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and municipalities to support the effective utilization of opioid settlement funds by guiding the adoption of public health strategies that are proven to save lives. Our nonprofit foundation assumed control of the state’s municipal training and technical assistance program last year. Since then, we have worked closely with cities and towns to ensure that they have a trusted, local partner to support the development of strategies and solutions that have contributed to a significant decline in opioid overdoses over the last two years.



Who Has Questions For My Answers?

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Frame the Message

- **Establish three core messages:**

Gold, silver, bronze

- Use facts, illustrations, and data to support messages.
- It's OK to repeat a message.





Q & A

Resources

- [General FAQs on Executive Actions Impacting Nonprofits | National Council of Nonprofits](#)
- [Effects of Executive Actions on Nonprofits | National Council of Nonprofits](#)
- [The Impacts of the Recent Executive Orders on Nonprofits | National Council of Nonprofits](#)
- [Surviving a Crisis: Practical Strategies for Nonprofit Organizations E-Book | Nonprofits Insurance Alliance](#)
- [Crisis Management Resources for US Nonprofits | The Bridgespan Group](#)