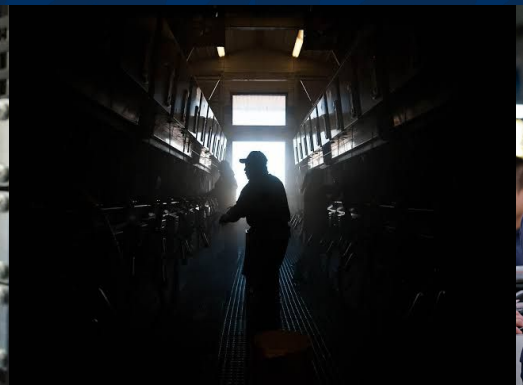
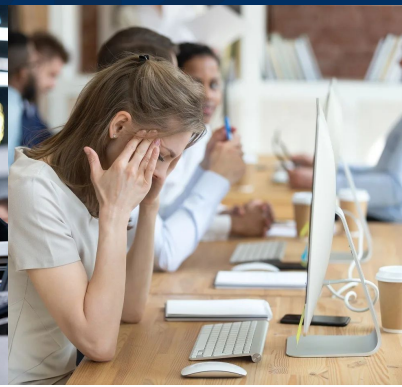
PAULSEN

Crafting a Crisis Communications Plan







©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

AP

WORLD U.S. POLITICS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS SCIENCE NEWSLETTERS QUIZZES

US politics Stock market today Interview with Lauren Boebert Plan to close Rikers Island jail Thanksgiving dinner

BUSINESS

A cyberattack leaks thousands of Chase customer emails and some phone numbers

BREITBART

Pension Fund $700 Million Game

REPORT: CYBERATTACK KNOCKS USDA SYSTEMS USED TO PAY FARMERS OFFLINE FOR DAYS

The Washington Post

The outages keep coming. Some Americans are preparing for a collapse.



With major systems failing and explanations scarce, some are stocking up and bracing for emergencies once considered unthinkable.

23 hours ago

WIRE

ANDY GREENBERG LILY HAY NEWMAN SECURITY NOV 17, 2026 2:40 PM

How to Tell If It's a Cyberattack or Just an Outage

Email, flights, banks; network failures are piling up. Here's how WIRED investigates if they're the result of hacker mayhem. (Hint: usually not.)

Reuters

World Business Markets Sustainability Legal Commentary Technology Investigations More My News

US plans to announce cause of outage that led to nationwide ground stop, FAA says

By David Shepardson

November 19, 2026 9:29 AM CST · Updated November 19, 2026

Aa

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Create a little order in the chaos

What you can do in advance

- Organize the process
- Stay calm and focused
- Keep from making a bad situation worse
- Lead the conversation
- Inform and reassure your priority audiences

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Key concepts in crisis communication

What to remember, no matter what

- **Be visible**
- **Be fast**
  - Don’t wait for all the facts to come in.
  - Proactive
- **Be honest and transparent**
  - Tell the truth.
  - Find the messages that matter.
  - Be proactive against your vulnerabilities.
- **Empower your friends**

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Step 1: Your crisis team

We don’t have time to “run it up the flagpole.”

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Crisis Management Team (CMT)

Ensure everyone shares hard copies of full contact information -both in and out of office hours.

Team knows their role before an issue hits

Typically includes Executive Leadership and Department Heads. It is important that this team has the authority to determine actions and begin executing on tactics without additional approvals.

CMT roles and responsibilities are the following:

- Understand the extent of the crisis
- Determine key messages and tactics for response
- Execute or delegate response actions throughout the organization

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Step 2: Information gathering

Work with what you've got.

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Assess the situation

What Happened?

- Date? Time? //____ **:** AM/PM
- What systems, networks or locations are affected?
- How many people were affected/impacted?
- Description of event. Breach, ransomware, outage or other? How was it discovered?
- What was the initial response? Have systems been isolated?
- Is sensitive data involved? What type, and how many records?
- Are critical operations or services disrupted? Estimated time to restore?
- Is there continued risk?
    - To data?
    - To operations?
    - To customers/members?

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Assess the situation

What can be done? What is being done? By who?

- Who has been contacted? (IT, insurer, legal, FBI, regulators)
- Who still needs to be contacted?
- Will vendors or agencies communicate publicly? Are we coordinated?
- What is being done to contain the incident and protect data?

Messaging

- What do we need to communicate, and to whom?
- Are there notification deadlines?
- Will this be seen as preventable? Has it happened before?

Recovery Assessment

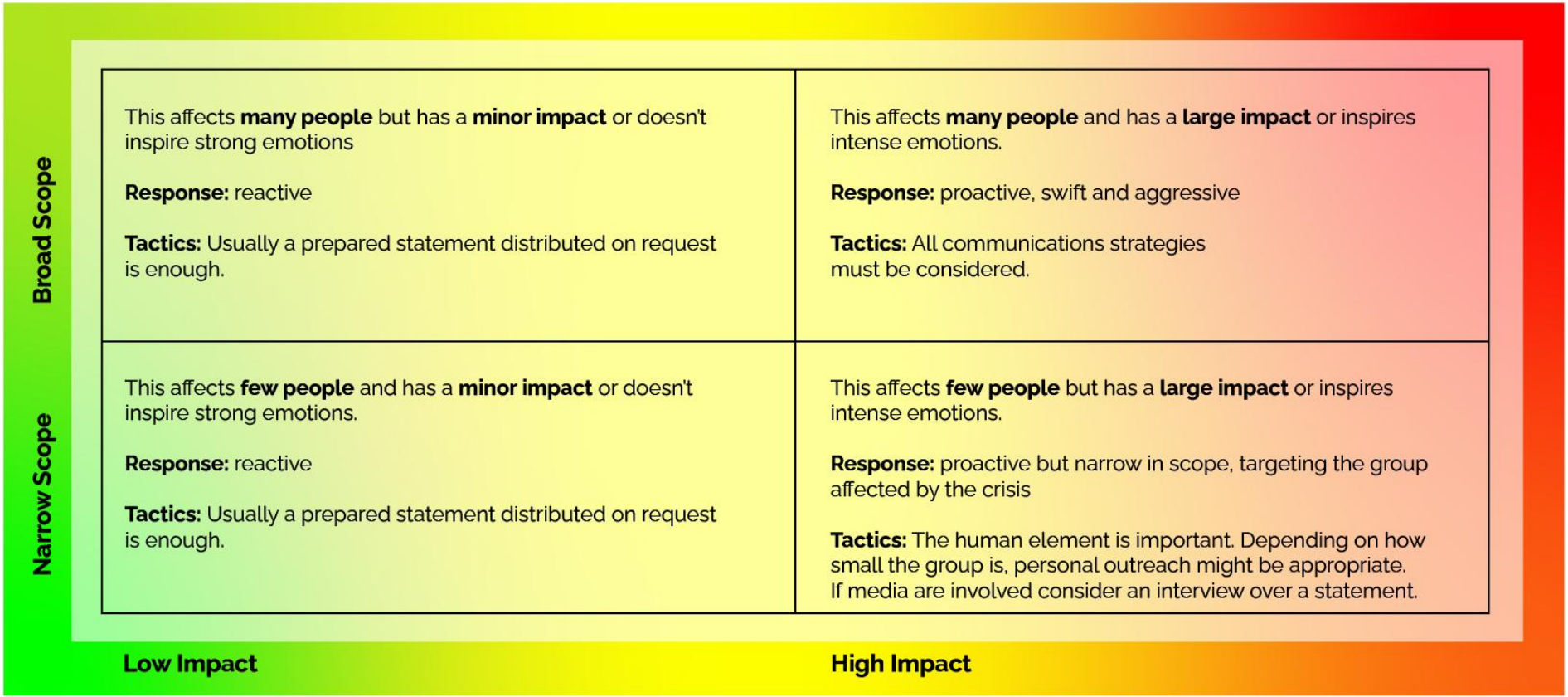
- Long-term impact on:
  - People
  - Systems and data
  - Trust
  - Profit

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Step 3: Assess the situation

Who cares? How much do they care?

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved



©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Step 4: Audiences

Don’t forget your own team, members

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Audiences

Internal

Employees, Board of Directors, Members, Partners/Vendors

Media

Have your press list in print, with cell phone numbers

Customers

Can a third-party tool or partner access your customer list to notify them? Can you use social media to announce issues?

Government Partners

Do you need to notify legislators? Regulatory partners?

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Step 5: Messaging

How do you want people to feel?

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Share what happened

As quickly as possible

- Share what you know and when you learned it. Honesty and transparency build trust.
- Use clear, simple language. Avoid technical jargon.
- Explain what was affected and what customers/members should do.
- Don’t speculate about the cause or scope. Share only confirmed facts.

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

People remember how you made them feel

Use your regular, authentic voice - don’t fall into legal speak

- How do you want people to feel?
  - Safe (physically, professionally, financially, etc.)
  - Informed
- What qualities do you want people to associate with you?
  - Trustworthy
  - Competent
  - Consistent
  - Authentic

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Create a concise message document

Before any issues, consider the content you'll want:

- Statement
- Q&A
- Talking points - For use in verbal conversations with customers, friends and family
- How you'll direct people to the web page with updates
- Employee comms -
    - Do not speak to media. Media inquiries should go to [designated spokesperson]
    - Email/written communications will come exclusively from HR
    - Do not discuss on social media, even to correct misinformation

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Step 6: Tactics

Consider all channels of communication.

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

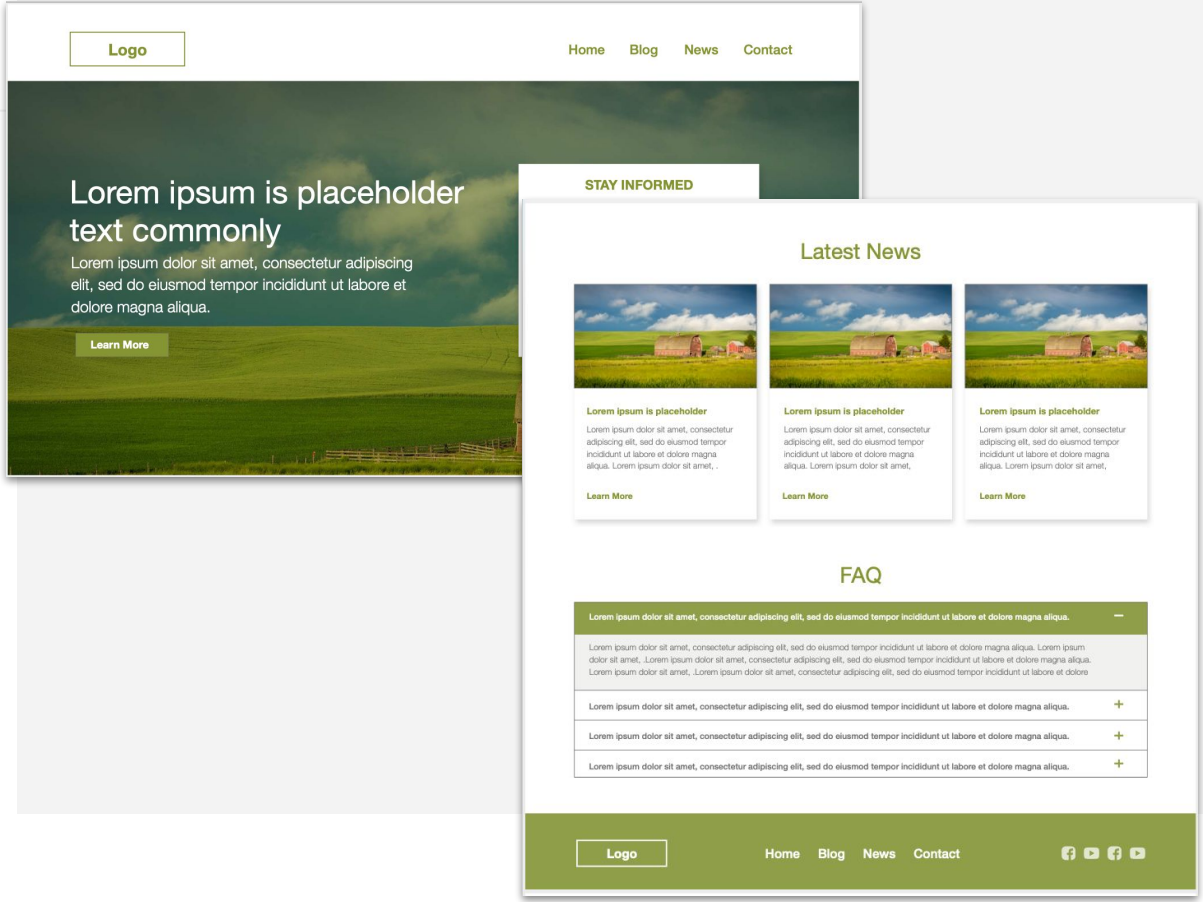
How do we communicate?

Prepare to have a partner help access what you cannot

- Social media
- News media
  - Press release
  - Press conference
  - Interviews
- Email
- Advertising
- Phone
- Face-to-face interaction
- Town hall meeting
- Letter

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Prepare a dark site that can go live when needed



©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Step 7: Execute

Clearly define roles and responsibilities.

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Roles and responsibilities

Know who is going to do what, and who has final approval

Every department has a part in the response. Decide who does what before a crisis happens, so no time is lost figuring it out during one.

- **Name a point person for each department,** with a backup, and keep their contact information current.
- **Define each person's responsibilities ahead of time,** including who can make decisions and who speaks for the organization.
- **Keep contact information somewhere you can reach offline.** In a cyber incident or outage, email, phones and shared drives may be down.
- **Review and update the list regularly,** at least once a year and whenever staff change.

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

YOU are the advocate for communications.

Lawyers are not communicators.

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

OUR BELIEF

Trust, Earned

At Paulsen, this work matters to us. Asking the hard questions. Listening for what people really believe. Helping leaders earn trust when the stakes are highest. This is why we're here.

But more than anything, we're here to help you connect with the people who carry the success of our country — and the world — on their shoulders.

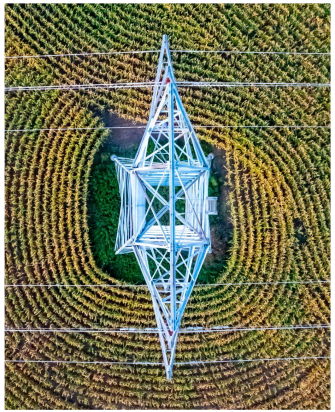
Together, we're moving rural America.













©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

SOLVING CHALLENGES

We Help Rural Leaders Earn Trust When the Stakes Are Highest.

Trust isn't given easily or bought at any price. It's earned.

Consulting Services

Listen and Strategize

Rural Audience Research & Sentiment Analysis
What a community actually believes, not what we assume.

Social License Strategy
Earning the support a project needs before it breaks ground.

Public Opinion Strategy
Turning findings into a plan to shift where sentiment lands.

Prepare and Align

Message Training & Spokesperson Development
Leaders and boards who can speak credibly under pressure.

Board, Leadership & Sales Team Alignment
One voice internally before there's one in public.

Respond and Mobilize

Crisis & Issues Response
The first 48 hours decide the next two years.

Advocacy & Coalition Building
The coalition and grassroots support a position needs to move.

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved

Matt Merritt, Director of Public Relations, Paulsen
matt.merritt@paulsen.agency
605.336.1745

©2026 Paulsen. All Rights Reserved