



Someone once told me that a crisis communication plan is like an insurance policy: you have to have it and you hope you never have to use it. But when a crisis happens, you'll be so glad you have that "insurance policy" in place.

In today's world, large scale special events planners continue to be challenged with increased security plans and one of the pillars to that plan is having a crisis communication plan in place.

As the producer of Pittsburgh Pride, the largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) event in Pennsylvania, we face the unusual challenge of planning an event that has a political element to it in a very contentious climate. We have well over 100,000 folks in attendance and we are proud to be the 4th largest special event in Pittsburgh but with that comes the need to ensure a safe and secure environment that is safe for our attendees and reflects well upon the City and our sponsors.

After having our "insurance policy" in place for years, it was put to the test in June of 2016 when our event experienced a "triple whammy" of occurrences over the course of the weekend, none of which we were directly responsible for but which indirectly influenced us and led us to adapt quickly.

The first incident occurred when we learned that singer Christina Grimmie was fatally shot during a meet and greet with fans. As event planners I'm sure that many of us have arranged meet and greets with performers for sponsors and VIPs, but does your meet and greet have security procedures in place? Because of this unfortunate tragedy, our previous plan was changed and the morning of our event, we had to contact each of our sponsors, determine who would be attending the meet and greet, obtain background information, and provide that to our law enforcement partners. In addition to screening everyone who came, we had to rework the actual meet and greet itself to have our security partners on hand to bag check and wand each person prior to them entering a private room.

The second incident occurred Saturday evening when we had a major car accident occur just directly outside our festival entrance. It was a beautiful evening and we were expecting around 7,000 folks to attend our Pride in the Street ticketed concert which is held outside on Liberty Avenue, one of the main streets in downtown Pittsburgh. We had just opened the ticket gates when a drunk driver barreled through the intersection just outside the gates causing a chain reaction of events. In the end, six people were critically injured and while the driver was not attending our event, because we had our EMS and public safety partners in place for our event, we were able to react immediately to the situation.

The third incident occurred the morning of our Pride March when we were alerted to the shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando. Alerts about the shooting, which is now the largest mass shooting in US history, started filtering in around 4 AM. An emergency phone call to discuss safety measures was held immediately with our law enforcement partners to discuss

what additional measures needed to be put in place to protect our attendees. Our security plans shifted to full alert status, as we prepared to deal with the onslaught of media coverage and what we were going to do to respond appropriately to the 49 victims who had just lost their lives.

While none of these three events were as a result of anything we had control over, having our Crisis Plan in place gave us a roadmap of how we were going to respond and also gave us further thought as to what changes would need to happen for our 2017 festival.

Some of those changes included:

- Communicating directly with our 150 vendors about how they can help be our “eyes and ears” and maintain a safe and secure environment.
- Require all vehicles and floats participating the Pride March to be registered prior to the event.
- Require that all vehicles entering and exiting the festival footprint area be registered prior to the event.
- Put additional safety measures and vehicles into place to “harden the perimeter” at either end of the festival footprint as well as cross streets.
- Increase our level of credentialing and vetting for all personnel and volunteers to include background checks.
- Key staff and volunteers received additional training which included active shooting training.

In the past 10 years of producing Pittsburgh Pride, we are proud that we have had just two arrests. We attribute this to our strong relationships with our local public safety partners and our planning, which involves the following four components:

1. Develop a strategic vision centered on establishing a friendly and safe environment.

The Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh has an overall philosophy and specific tactics and strategies for Pittsburgh Pride that ensures the safety of attendees, demonstrators, and public safety. Our strategic vision is aligned with the local public safety strategy to effectively maintain security and public safety, while preserving Constitutional rights and civil liberties; to minimize disruptions caused by demonstrators; and to avoid unnecessary arrests.

2. Create a core planning team to oversee major decision-making and planning.

The nature of Pittsburgh Pride requires collaboration among a multitude of local, regional, and federal entities, each

with their own roles and responsibilities. Working with our local public safety partners, the Delta Foundation has established a core planning team staffed with personnel from each of the key participating agencies including police, fire, emergency management agencies and the Port Authority. The personnel selected to serve on the core planning team have the appropriate command-level authority to identify, assign and ensure the completion of tasking identified for event preparedness and conduct. We meet regularly with all the stakeholders and develop solid relationships that will likely be called upon during the event.

3. Develop scalable plans that can be altered should intelligence indicate that differing resources are required.

All large-scale security events include worst-case scenario planning and as Pittsburgh Pride approaches, intelligence is constantly monitored and adjusted accordingly. Our safety and security plan is flexible and can accommodate changes in resource demands as needed.

During Pittsburgh Pride, there are regular daily shift briefings with command staff so that all key stakeholders maintain situational awareness. There are also regular briefings with decision-makers from the federal, state, county and city. These meetings review operations from the previous day and expected activities and challenges for the upcoming day.

4. Partner with the "If You See Something, Say Something" national campaign.

Developed by the Homeland Security Department, this campaign raises public awareness of the indicators of terrorism and terrorism-related crime, as well as the importance of reporting suspicious activity to state and local law enforcement. The phrase “If you see something, say something” was born on September, 12, 2001.

The “If You See Something, Say Something” campaign respects citizens’ privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties by emphasizing behavior, rather than appearance, in identifying suspicious activity. Factors such as race, ethnicity, and/or religious affiliation are not suspicious. We are only interested in reporting suspicious behavior and situations such as an unattended backpack or package, or someone breaking into a restricted area.

What is considered “suspicious?”

Suspicious activity is any observed behavior that could indicate terror-

ism or terrorism-related crime. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Unusual items or situations: A vehicle is parked in an odd location, a package is unattended, a window/door is open that is usually closed, or other out-of-the-ordinary situations occur.
- Eliciting information: A person questions individuals at a level beyond curiosity about a building’s purpose, operations, security procedures and/or personnel, shift changes, etc.
- Observation/surveillance: Someone pays unusual attention to facilities or buildings beyond a casual or professional interest. This includes extended loitering without explanation (particularly in concealed locations); unusual, repeated, and/or prolonged observation of a building especially with binoculars or a video camera; taking notes or measurements; counting paces; sketching floor plans, etc.

Some of these activities could be innocent—it’s up to law enforcement to determine whether the behavior warrants investigation. The activities above are not all-inclusive, but have been compiled based on studies of pre-operational aspects of both successful and thwarted terrorist events over several years.

In conclusion:

- Your observations and reports can AND do make a difference in helping to protect your event when you share them with the right authorities.
- Do not hesitate to report something that doesn’t feel right
- If it looks suspicious, it is suspicious.
- Never take unnecessary risks or try to act as an official investigator when observing or reporting what you’ve seen.
- TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS.

Christine Bryan is the Director of Marketing & Development with the Delta Foundation of Pittsburgh, the leading lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) organization in Western Pennsylvania. The organization’s largest project is Pittsburgh Pride, which is the 4th largest special event in Pittsburgh and the largest LGBT event in Pennsylvania with over 150,000 attendees at its 2017 event. A 25-year marketing veteran, Chris landed in the non-profit world by accident and says her job is “the hardest, yet most rewarding because I get to make and see real change happen.” She can be reached at cbryan@deltafoundation.us