SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL

In a time of crisis, social media is as important – if not more important – as traditional media. In an age when anyone with a smart phone can act as is a journalist, and stories "break" on Twitter, social media channels cannot be ignored. The following is a social media protocol to follow should a crisis hit:

Monitoring: It is critical that you know what is being said, when, and by whom. As soon as a crisis hits, begin monitoring social media channels through key word searches and provide timely and relevant updates to the team, as well as plans for responses, if appropriate.

Becoming Part of the Conversation: Just like when working with traditional media, it is critically important to be authentic and honest in social media interactions. As you monitor online conversations, there may be a desire to engage through your social media channels. Social media engagement should only occur when deemed absolutely necessary to enhance the conversation, correct misinformation, and/or to point to official resources, when available. When developing social media responses, consider the following best practices:

- **Speak in a respectful tone.** Regardless of the tone of the commenter, take the high road and interact in a polite, respectful way. Consider your comment a direct quote that can be attributed to the organization. If you wouldn't want it to show up on the front page of the local paper, don't post it.

- **Point to resources.** When possible, point commenters to resources that can help answer questions and correct misinformation.

- **Don't argue.** Do not engage in a back-in-forth, point-for-point argument.

- **Equip others to speak on your behalf.** Third-party supporters can play an instrumental role in protecting your reputation online.

- **Take the conversation offline.** Whenever possible, work to move the conversation offline through direct message or email to engage in a one-on-one conversation.

- **Whenever possible, don't delete.** There are very limited instances when it is appropriate to remove content posted on social media channels. It is very important not to censor the viewpoints of your followers, but rather to ensure that all content is appropriate and inoffensive. That said, it may be appropriate to remove user comments in instances such as:
  - » When inappropriate language or "hate speech" is used
  - » When there are repeated negative comments from one user – only after you have attempted to rectify the situation and/or take the conversation offline
  - » Allegations from current/former employees (e.g. "For legal purposes, we cannot discuss personnel matters online.")