

## Roundtable Overview

**Topic:** Crisis Response – Public Unrest, Major Incidents & Natural Disasters

**Event:** Connect & Share: Public Safety Forum

**Format:** Peer-to-peer roundtable discussion (no presentations or formal experts)

This roundtable brought together district leaders and practitioners to share real-world experiences responding to high-stress, rapidly evolving incidents. Participants reflected on moments when plans were tested, expectations shifted, and communication became critical highlighting both strengths and gaps in current crisis response approaches.

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## Executive Summary: What Attendees Should Know

District organizations are often thrust into a highly visible role during crises, even when they do not have formal emergency authority. Participants emphasized that the public, businesses, and media frequently look to districts for reassurance, clarity, and leadership in the absence of complete information.

Across incidents ranging from violent crime to natural disasters, the discussion reinforced that **pre-incident preparation, clearly defined roles, and disciplined communication** are the most effective tools districts have to protect staff, maintain trust, and support community recovery. Ambassadors and frontline teams often carry the emotional and operational weight of these moments, making training, support, and safety protocols essential.

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## Why This Topic Matters

District organizations frequently become a trusted source of information during emergencies, regardless of their official authority. When crises occur, unclear roles or inconsistent messaging can quickly erode public confidence. This roundtable underscored the importance of **advance coordination, realistic expectations, and alignment with city partners** to ensure districts can contribute meaningfully without overextending their teams.

## Types of Incidents Discussed

Participants shared experiences across a range of high-intensity scenarios, including:

- Downtown shootings and violent incidents
- Individuals threatening self-harm (e.g., jumpers)
- Gas line leaks and other hazardous infrastructure failures
- Disruptive youth gatherings and potential riot situations
- Severe weather events and natural disasters, including tornado warnings

These scenarios illustrated how quickly conditions can escalate and how critical early coordination and messaging are in shaping outcomes.

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## Key Discussion Themes

### 1. What Surprised Participants During a Crisis

Participants were often surprised by how quickly public expectations shifted toward districts for information and reassurance. Even without verified details, silence or delayed communication allowed misinformation to spread. Ambassador teams were frequently placed in the position of managing heightened emotions without clear authority or guidance.

### 2. Expectations from Ratepayers and Stakeholders

Stakeholders consistently expect districts to serve as a stabilizing presence during crises. This includes sharing timely updates, helping frame the public narrative, communicating recovery efforts, and connecting businesses to city resources. These expectations often extend beyond formal responsibilities, increasing pressure on district teams.

### 3. Role Clarity with Police and City Leadership

Participants noted ongoing challenges around role definition. While police typically provide official incident details, districts are often asked to supply context and community insight. Without pre-aligned roles, ambassadors can face

unrealistic expectations, particularly around enforcement and cleanup responsibilities following incidents.

## Lessons Learned & Opportunities for Improvement

- Proactively share emergency response plans with clients and stakeholders
  - Align district messaging with police and city leadership before incidents occur
  - Establish clear communication protocols and escalation pathways
  - Prepare ambassadors for both operational and emotional demands of crises
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## Key Concerns if a Major Incident Happened Tomorrow

- Lack of clearly defined evacuation and sheltering plans
  - Ambassador and staff safety during chaotic or rapidly changing situations
  - Gaps in comprehensive crisis response planning
  - Limited post-incident support for small businesses
  - Availability of equipment and supplies to address hazards quickly
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## Practical Takeaways for Attendees

### What to Borrow:

- Proactive communication planning and pre-aligned messaging with city partners

### What to Avoid:

- Allowing role ambiguity to create unrealistic expectations during a crisis

### One Question to Keep Exploring:

- How can districts better support immediate business recovery following major incidents?