



Nonprofit Crisis Communication

What happened in Toronto – a true story

Birgit Smith Burton



This presentation will recount a real-life nonprofit crisis and detail some of the steps taken to navigate through the ordeal and achieve a successful outcome.



What is nonprofit crisis communication?

Nonprofit crisis communication refers to the **strategic and organized process** by which nonprofit organizations manage and **respond** to unexpected, potentially **damaging events** or situations that could **negatively impact** their **reputation, operations, or relationships with stakeholders**. The primary goal of nonprofit crisis communication is to **mitigate the damage, maintain public trust, and protect the organization's mission and objectives** during times of crisis.



Nonprofit crises communication in 90 seconds:



- Remember that crises are inherently unpredictable!
- Paramount is the importance of maintaining the organization's trust and credibility.
- Establish a crisis communication team:
 - Identify key roles and responsibilities.
 - Stress the need for clear lines of communication.
 - Make sure that messaging is consistent.
 - Create a plan to deal with misinformation
- Form a strategy for addressing the media.
- Social media can be good and bad so establish guidelines for posting, monitoring, and responding to online conversations.
- Identify key stakeholders and ways to keep them informed and address questions and concerns.

Debrief and
create
strategies for
preventing
future crises.



LESSONS
LEARNED



Here's What Happened in Toronto



In November 2019, three Black board members of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Greater Toronto Chapter (GTC) tendered their resignations amidst their allegations of being subjected to anti-Black racism.

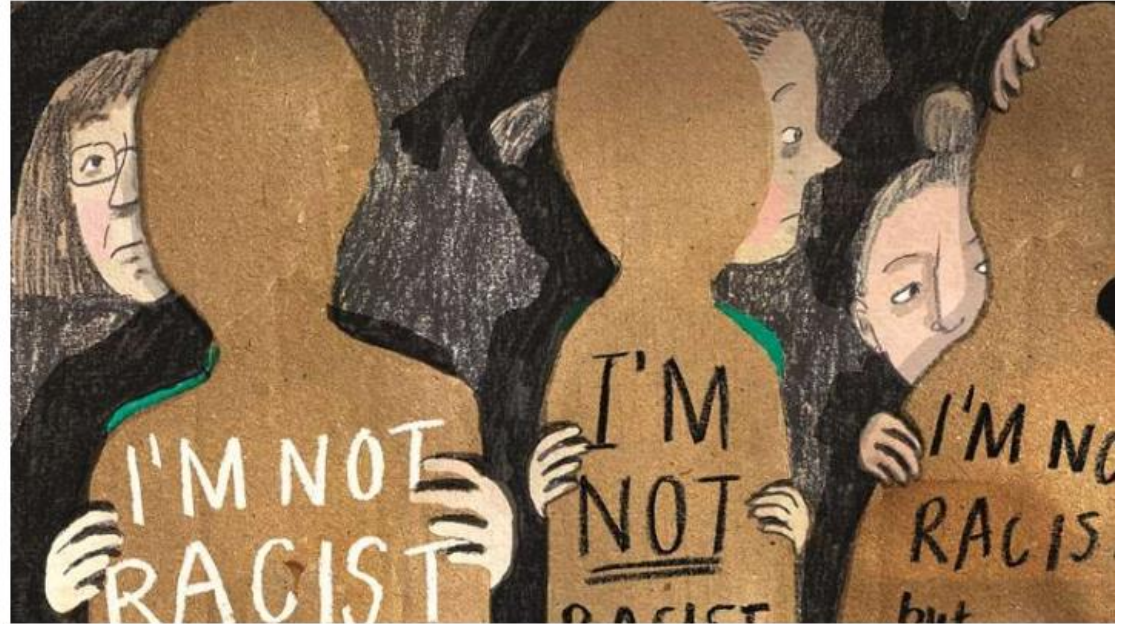


In February of this year, Nneka Allen publicly released her University of British Columbia lecture “Us and Them What it Means to Belong”, outlining her experience of anti-Black racism in detail.



This was followed by a two-part series on the Giving Black Podcast titled “Boards and Black Tokenism: What it Really Means to Belong”. In this series, these three former board members detailed their experiences of anti-Black racism, exclusion, tokenization, and abuse at the hands of AFP GTC board members.

Acknowledging their unaddressed concerns, which they have stated they communicated to AFP staff and leadership (both in Canada and US), these former board members, with the support of a group they've named their "Co-conspirators," chose LinkedIn as their platform to articulate their grievances. One individual posted a follow-up to Nneka Allen's lecture specifically citing the names that Nneka had not published.



A group of white women hide behind signs that say "I'm not racist"

The Lies We Tell Ourselves: Racism and a Failure of Leadership in Canada's Largest AFP Chapter



On April 12, 2023, the Board of AFP GTC posted a letter apologizing to the former board members for the “systemic, anti-Black racism” at AFP GTC.



The logo for change.org, featuring the word "change.org" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The background of the logo is a white rectangular box with a faint, dotted world map pattern.

The world's platform for change

513,542,462 people taking action. [Victories every day.](#)

In April, a petition was started through Change.org calling for the removal of the AFP GTC Chapter Ten Star Award. By late May the petition had amassed nearly 2,000 signatures.

On April 21, 2023, a Cease & Desist letter was sent by a former GTC Board Member to:


- **AFP GTC President**
- **AFP GTC Executive Director**
- **AFP Canada Board Chair**
- **Vice President, AFP Canada**
- **AFP Global Board Chair**
- **AFP President & CEO**



May 15, 2023, the full
Board of the AFP Greater
Toronto Chapter
resigned

Prior to resigning the AFP GTC followed the Chapter's Bylaws and voted to give the AFP Global Board Chair the authority to appoint an interim AFP GTC Board to establish the minimum number of required board members to lead the chapter for the next eighteen months. **Without such leadership, the chapter would face suspension.**



A close-up photograph of a chessboard with several dark wooden pieces standing upright. In the foreground, a white piece is lying on its side. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light. The text "The Result..." is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font.

The
Result...

...

The world's largest AFP Chapter was left without leadership

The looming threat of a lawsuit capable of tarnishing AFP's reputation and causing financial distress to the Association

Chapters uniting in a collective call to action addressed to AFP Global, focusing on the issue of racism within the Association and the profession

A growing number of members either canceling their membership or choosing not to renew

Concerns expressed by AFP's volunteer leadership about a lack of information and directives regarding how to respond to inquiries

A noticeable backlash on social media platforms, particularly on LinkedIn, characterized by Open Letters directed at AFP Global

Increased pressure on sponsors to withdraw their support for the Greater Toronto Chapter

Growing calls for a boycott of the 2024 AFP ICON in Toronto



Maintaining trust in AFP

Every decision was made with a singular focus: preserving trust and credibility for AFP. Recognizing that a single significant misstep could inflict lasting damage, we were acutely aware that rebuilding trust could take years.

Three crucial factors that contributed to AFP's efforts to sustain credibility throughout the crisis were:

- **Demonstrating Empathy and Consistency:** AFP did our best to convey messages rooted in empathy and compassion, to foster a sense of understanding and support during these challenging times.
- **Accountability and Apology:** In the face of any missteps, AFP issued public apologies and took responsibility, reinforcing our commitment to transparency and accountability.
- **Transparent Communication with Key Volunteer Leaders:** AFP maintained open lines of communication with its core volunteer leadership, ensuring they were informed and engaged, thus strengthening their role as ambassadors."



Olumide (Mide) Akerewusi to serve as interim president of the AFP Greater Toronto Chapter!

5-23-23

“Mide and I will carefully establish a new AFP GTC board that is dedicated to fairly and equitably serving the chapter membership and all of Toronto’s fundraisers.”

Birgit Smith Burton
AFP Global Board Chair

Today I am excited to announce that I have asked Olumide (Mide) Akerewusi to serve as interim president of the AFP GTC. @Mide Akerewusi is Founder and CEO of AgentsC Inc., an international fundraising and social impact consulting company based in Toronto. He is an accomplished fundraiser with almost 30 years experience of building successful fundraising teams and leading revenue generating campaigns and programs around the world. Mide is a well-respected leader and life-long volunteer. He is humble, fair, honest, and principled. These are the qualities needed in the leader of the AFP Greater Toronto Chapter to take the Chapter forward during this interim period. In the spirit of change and as a signal of our commitment to that change today, Mide has agreed to take on the position of interim president of AFP GTC. Through his volunteer leadership in partnership with me, and an ad hoc committee of GTC members, (we will select together) Mide and I will carefully establish a new AFP GTC board that is dedicated to fairly and equitably serving the chapter membership and all of Toronto’s fundraisers.

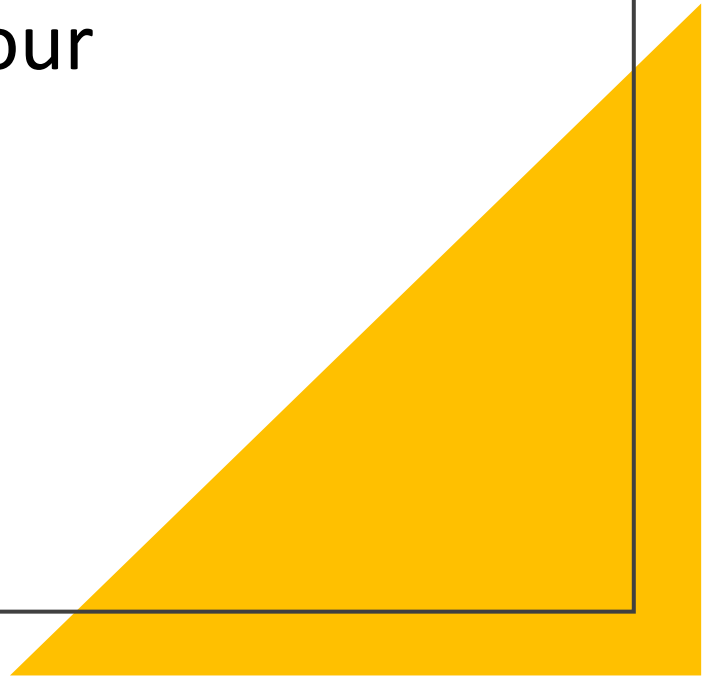


AFP sought recommendations for crisis management firms and selected one to engage with.



Crisis management: Leading amidst uncertainty

AFP Global attorney provided invaluable guidance and counsel, advising us on the actions and statements that would ensure our insurance company's protection.





We initiated a series of meetings with AFP leadership, including AFP Canada and AFP Foundation for Philanthropy Canada, to engage in discussions regarding the concerns at hand and to seek their insights and guidance on potential courses of action.

We met with Mide, Nneka, and Muthoni to better understand and lean into what restitution and reconciliation looks like.

“Only some organizations have the courage to confront inequity and racism and commit to change. And an even smaller group is successful, and many are not.” Nneka Allen

Here is what they requested:

- An unreserved apology from Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP Global) for the harm caused.
- Removal of Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Greater Toronto Chapter 10 Star designation by AFP Global
- Revocation and return of the AFP GTC Fundraising Award
- Acknowledgement from the former board members that the three things requested have been accomplished and is satisfactory restitution and reconciliation for the harm caused.



At the April opening of AFP ICON in New Orleans, President & CEO Mike Geiger gave an apology that stated in part:

“...although we have made some good steps forward, we acknowledge that there is more work to do. We recognize that we will not always get it right, but we will make our best effort to stand against oppression and injustice in the AFP community. We encourage our chapters and members to continue to engage with us and each other in this important work in that spirit of accountability. We apologize for the harm done thus far.....”



Important AFP Global Board Decision



In a recent Mike's Monday Message, I made the commitment to update the AFP Community on the steps AFP Global is taking as we continue our work towards a more inclusive and welcoming fundraising association for all of our members. Staying true to that commitment, here is the latest update:

This past Thursday, June 22, AFP Global Board Chair Birgit Smith Burton convened a special meeting of the [AFP Global Board](#) to consider two important decisions regarding the AFP Greater Toronto Chapter.

After investing considerable time discussing and expressing their unwavering support for change, the AFP Global Board voted unanimously to rescind the Greater Toronto Chapter's Ten Star award.

Included in this unanimous vote was the AFP Global Board's decision to rescind the Greater Toronto Chapter's IDEA Champion designation - this designation is solely focused on AFP chapters' commitment to the AFP Global IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access) pillar - one of the four pillars of the AFP Global strategic plan.

There is much more work to be done and, as I shared previously, I will continue to update our AFP Community in this weekly message on our actions.

As always, please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or concerns. You can reach me via email at Mike.Geiger@afpglobal.org or on Twitter at [@AFPMikeGeiger](#).

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads 'Mike Geiger'.

Mike Geiger, MBA, CPA

The AFP Global Board voted unanimously to rescind the Greater Toronto Chapter's Ten Star Award and their IDEA Champion Designation.

Important Next Steps



*We believe there is much more work to do, especially as it relates to creating safer spaces for Black fundraisers within AFP. Beginning with a review of our **Code of Ethics, Member Fair Behavior Policy, and the Donor Bill of Rights** we have begun to review and revise these policies to create greater Global oversight of chapter behavior and **develop a formal complaints process to prevent future harm.***

Together We Stand



“This road of restoration has been long, but we have now arrived at the final act of repair.”

Mide Akerewusi, Nneka Allen, Muthoni Kariuki



- An unreserved apology from Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP Global) for the harm caused. **COMPLETD**
- Removal of Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Greater Toronto Chapter 10-Star designation by AFP Global. **COMPLETED**
- Revocation and return of the AFP GTC Fundraising Award. **COMPLETED**
- Acknowledgement from the former board members that the three things requested have been accomplished and is satisfactory restitution and reconciliation for the harm caused. **COMPLETED**

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

~ Former President Barack Obama