

Navigating a Shutdown:

Corporate Communications Guidance

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■ STATE OF PLAY

The federal government shutdown is imminent. RH Strategic has developed this guide to help your team navigate the uncertainty, mitigate risks, and communicate effectively with stakeholders. As public relations, public affairs and strategic communications experts, we are here to ensure your organization remains visible, credible, and resilient throughout this period.

Scenarios.

- » **Short-term shutdown (up to a week).** Disruption will be highly visible and dominate headlines, but once a deal is reached, coverage will quickly fade.
- » **Extended shutdown (weeks or longer).** Impacts include increased economic costs, stalled operations, and heightened political fallout. Organizations should activate contingency plans, increase internal communications, and prepare for uncertainty.

What to Keep in Mind.

- » **Government slowdowns.** A significant portion of the federal workforce will be furloughed. Expect a reduction in communications from current federal partners, and delays in permits, grants, contracts, FOIA requests, and economic data releases.
- » **Media saturation.** Shutdown coverage will crowd out other news – policy and national – making it harder for non-shutdown issues to break through.
- » **Unpredictable engagement.** Congressional offices and federal agencies may be minimally staffed, limiting responsiveness. Broader policy progress will likely stall.
- » **Polarized narratives.** Policymakers will frame the shutdown's consequences to advance their agendas, heightening scrutiny of impacted industries.

Key Considerations for Your Organization.

- » **Contract exposure.** Review ongoing and pending grants or contracts that could stall. Assess potential financial and operational risks.
- » **Regulatory delays.** Anticipate paused rulemakings or missed deadlines that could affect compliance and planning.
- » **Reputation management.** Consider how weighing in – or staying quiet – affects your brand perception in this politically charged environment.

Communications Strategy.

- » **Internal alignment.** Provide clear updates to employees, partners, and stakeholders on shutdown impacts and your response strategy.
- » **External visibility.** If publicly discussing the shutdown, be prepared to share timely updates and thought leadership that position your organization as credible and solutions-oriented.
- » **Tone matters.** Stay calm, measured, and forward-looking. Emphasize resilience and readiness rather than unpredictability.
- » **Breaking through the noise.** If engaging publicly, differentiate your message with forward-thinking insights that offer value and perspective beyond the headlines.



Taking the time to understand the impact of proposed changes and developing a thoughtful response (one that leaves politics out of the message) protects you from making premature conclusions without knowing the full set of facts, or from needing to walk back statements.

ELIZABETH FAWCETT
Associate Vice President, Public Affairs
// RH Strategic



RAFFETTO HERMAN
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

WASHINGTON D.C.
1301 K St. NW, Ste. 220 West
Washington, D.C. 20005

SEATTLE
601 Union St., Ste. 2404
Seattle, WA, 98101

www.rhstrategic.com

■ THE 1-2-3 PLAYBOOK

1. Own Your Message.

Avoid choosing sides. Keep politics out of responses, indicate a desire to wait and see what is signal and what is noise, and commit to helping decisionmakers be fully informed.

Develop talking points to avoid speculation while demonstrating knowledge.

Ensure that your mission and the data that support your narrative (i.e. jobs numbers or economic contribution) showcase your knowledge in the field. Don't contribute to the echo chamber; be a thought leader and contribute unique, relevant insights.

Be transparent and authentic. Be measured and patient in internal and external communications as the situation evolves. Be up front about the fact that there may still be many unknowns, and the situation is fluid.

Prepare reactive statements. Prepare a media holding statement, along with Q&A documents/key messages for customers, employees, and prospects to support sales and customer service teams. Political questions are some of the most difficult, so be prepared to block and bridge.

2. Ready the Team for Impact.

Assemble a "tiger team." Bring together members from customer relations, corporate communications, legal, government affairs and HR to assess the latest and adjust response strategies. Prepare for both short-term and extended shutdown scenarios.

Audit messaging. Assess your marketing materials (website, social media channels, press releases, etc.) for references to government programs, funding, or data that could be disrupted.

Control the chatter. Inform internal teams on who and where to go for the latest information on federal guidance and the impact on your organization. Remind employees about social media policies to maintain control of brand communications and avoid unintentional associations. Assume all private communication can be made public.

Be aware of the impact. Understand your company's current policies, how they are communicated externally, and how a shutdown may impact these policies.

3. Activate Your Ecosystem.

Engage your partners. Stay connected with your trade associations, coalitions, and Congressional delegation during the shutdown. Share clear, relevant data that highlights the value your organization delivers, particularly in areas that resonate with policymakers, such as job preservation, economic resilience, and community impact, without being political. Tie your messaging back to how a shutdown directly affects your business, employees, and customers. Position yourself as a constructive resource as lawmakers and stakeholders weigh the implications of the shutdown.