

Advice and guidance: Category A death

Advice for arts and culture organisations

Introduction

This document offers advice and guidance for artists and organisations in the event of the death of a senior member of the Royal Family. You may also wish to follow this guidance following the death of a notable person who has a close and special relationship with your organisation, and/or in the event of a major incident that causes loss of life.

For the Royal Household, 'Category A' is a term used to describe the most senior members of the Royal Family – The Queen, Prince Philip, Prince Charles, the Duchess of Cornwall and the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. It does not apply to other members of the Royal Family. We have not experienced the death of the monarch for over sixty years and most people in the UK have known Queen Elizabeth as the monarch for all of their lives.

For your own organisation, you should consider who you should classify as a Category A person, whose death you may wish to mark. In addition to senior members of the Royal Family, it could also be your patrons, artistic leaders, artists or people with particular relevance to the work you do. Examples over recent years of this might be the Duchess of Devonshire for Chatsworth House, Laurence Olivier for the National Theatre. You may also wish to follow or adapt this guidance in the event of a major incident that causes loss of life, in which case this guidance may support your organisation's Major Incident Plan.

In the event of a Category A death, there are particular processes and procedures that have already been planned for by the Royal Family, the Government and the BBC. But for arts and culture organisations, there are no prescribed formal processes, procedures or rules to follow.

We are offering this guidance in order to help shape your organisation's response, but it is for you and your organisation to decide on the most appropriate actions to take, given that this is likely to be determined by:

- public mood and opinion
- the specific nature and circumstances of the death or the major incident
- your role in the community and as a publically funded organisation
- your connection to the Royal Family (ie, whether you are operating under Royal Charter)

Hearing the news

In the event of the death of a Category A member of the Royal Household, a formal announcement will come first from Buckingham Palace, though it is possible that the news may have been circulating via social media or informal networks beforehand. A mourning period will be communicated (likely to be between 2-7 days depending on the individual and nature of any death) and in some cases (eg, the Queen), there will be a lying-in-state in Westminster Hall. The funeral of the Monarch will take place in Westminster Abbey, and the day will be a public holiday.

For other notables, or in the case of a major incident, you might hear the news via social media, or through your informal networks. In these cases, the timing of your response would obviously need to take account of how and when the deceased's family and friends wished to communicate the news and the specific nature of any major incident.

Responding to the news

Tell your staff

Make sure your staff know what has happened as soon as you can. Tell them what actions you plan to take and how this might affect their work. Bearing in mind their feelings of loss, you might want to think about offering opportunities for everyone to come together and reflect.

Tell your audience or your visitors

Once the news has been announced, you may decide to inform your audience or your visitors. For example, if the news breaks during a performance, will you carry on, or stop and make an announcement?

Making an initial response

In terms of external communications, an initial response, communicated via social media, the website and any other appropriate channel, might be a suitable first step for your organisation. This should happen quickly after the formal announcement and would usually take the form of an expression of sorrow.

Reviewing planned activities – are they still appropriate?

Once the news is known, it is important to review any planned communications and activities in the light of what has happened to make sure they still feel appropriate. Do they feel respectful to the memory of the deceased or might they be perceived to offend or feel out of synch with the mood of the community and the nation?

This might include for example:

- parties, receptions and other planned celebratory occasions
- specific arts and cultural events (for example, we understand that the BBC may postpone scheduled comedy programmes during a period of mourning). We suggest that you take into account the financial and organisational implications of cancellation of events (staffing, ticket refunds etc)
- automated communications – scheduled tweets, emails or updates

Following up your initial response – celebrating the memory of the deceased and allowing people to reflect

Once the organisation has made an initial response, it would then be a case of following the protocols that your organisation has already planned.

The following activities might form part of the planned response:

- a more detailed statement from your organisation. If this takes the form of a broadcast interview who should be the spokesperson for your organisation (Chair, CEO, Artistic Director, Director of Communications)? Ensure that appropriate clothing is on hand in your venue for them to wear.
- a book of condolence, hosted in the foyer or entrance to your venue, so that your organisation offers the chance for the community to come together
- tributes to the person on your website or social media channels; either through a statement, an image gallery, a short film referencing that person's involvement or impact on your work

- if your venue has a flag, then flying it at half-mast (the suitable time period would be from the moment of announcement to the funeral)
- deciding whether or not your venue should be open or closed following the announcement and on the day of the funeral (which in the case of The Queen will be a bank holiday)
- enabling people to reflect together (perhaps by welcoming people into your venue to watch the funeral, which will be televised in the case of a Category A death in the Royal Family).

Being prepared- things to do now

1. Decide who might be on a Category A list for your organisation. For most organisations, and certainly those in receipt of public funds, the list will include the senior members of the Royal Family mentioned above. It might also include people who are particularly important either to your venue, your community, or to your artform.
2. Agree a set of protocols that you will follow in the event of a Category A death, or a major incident that causes loss of life.
3. Make sure you gather together everything you might need to follow your protocols – for example, if your plan involves having a condolence book in your foyer, make sure you have bought one (and consider what you will do with the condolence book after the period of mourning). If you think you would host a series of images on your website of that person visiting or enjoying your venue, then gather these together now.

It is important to stress that there are very few formal rules to follow. It is up to you to consider and formulate an appropriate response, given your organisation, your audience and your community.