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Pivot Your Fundraising: Six Steps for Moving Forward in 2020



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Over the last few weeks, the world as we know it has been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic - nonprofit organizations are not immune. **We are all in uncharted waters.** As an Executive Director, Development Director, or a member of the Board of Directors your leadership will not only help determine how your organization navigates this crisis today, but will also define how your organization recovers. Your work is vital to the success of your organization, perhaps now more than ever.

COVID-19 is not just a crisis for your nonprofit; it is a crisis for everyone. As a leader, you may have some tough decisions to make. Before taking action be sure you consider how it will affect your organization in the long-run. Remember, the first rule in crisis management is, Do Not Panic. By using data-driven scenario planning, your team can imagine the implications of various 'what-ifs'.

There is, however, good news. While our global landscape has drastically changed, the fundamental principles of fundraising have not. Fundraising is inherently about building meaningful relationships while clearly communicating the need for and impact of programs and projects. Even in a pandemic, this holds true. While some donors may not be in a position to give now, many can and gladly will.

Resilient organizations are agile and responsive. While there is no going back, these six steps will help your organization move forward in 2020:

1. Gain Clarity

Describe how this crisis is affecting your organization's mission. Get specific and compile data.

Clearly define what your organization needs to accomplish by the end of 2020 to walk into 2021 healthy and capable. This may include retaining key staff, bolstering essential services, and establishing non-negotiable goals.

2. Create a Short-term Action Plan (4-6 months)

Review and evaluate all existing plans affecting 2020 such as your strategic, annual, program, or campaign plans, and determine the feasibility of each by answering these questions: *What must be canceled? What must be postponed? What must be put on pause (until more information is available)?*

This time of social distancing does not mean losing connections. Brainstorm with your team and answer the following questions: *How will your organization fulfill its mission over the next 4-6 months? How will your organization meet community needs? How will your organization embrace technology?*

3. Calculate Financial Impact

Define and prioritize immediate financial needs.

Revise all 2020 budgets and projections to reflect the short-term action plan.

Establish clear decision-making criteria and timelines.

4. Pivot Your Fundraising: Throw away your existing fundraising plans (if printed, please recycle!). Create a 4-6 month emergency fundraising plan and prioritize your efforts around the following:

Emergency Response Funding Take advantage of the relief offered through the CARES Act.

There are also several emergency response funds available. The National Council for Nonprofits provides [a state by state breakdown](#) of these resources.

Grant Program Connect with your current funders immediately. Many foundations are transitioning restricted grants into unrestricted grants. There is also ample opportunity for your organization to secure new grant funding. The lead time from application to receipt of funds is typically six months, so you need to start securing funds for Fall 2020 programming and projects now.

Major Donor Program Steward and care for your donors. You cannot communicate enough. Show empathy and concern with personal communications. Make a compelling and emotional case for the value your organization brings to the community and the funds needed to keep core components intact. Allow your key supporters to share their insights and opinions. Provide them a chance to be the heroes they want to be during this crisis. In times of distress, loyal donors with capacity will give. Create personal solicitation plans for each of your significant donors. Don't forget donor-advised funds as these have increased dramatically in recent years and, historically, perform well in times of economic downturn.

General Fundraising All organizations will need to continue general fundraising efforts, but don't rely on it to save your organization. Tailor all fundraising communications to acknowledge the new era of COVID-19. Embrace digital tactics and plan for an additional mail campaign in the third-quarter as year-end fundraising will be mostly directed to basic human needs.

5. Increase External Communications

Motivate stakeholders by keeping them fully informed and deeply engaged.

Revise all messaging to demonstrate how the values, mission, and vision of your organization align with, and are relevant to, the current circumstances. Keep it simple!

Deliver targeted messaging through video calls, phone calls, email, and text.

6. See the Opportunity in Crisis

Use this time wisely. Get your database into shape, build a grant program, research new funders, increase capacity-building efforts, and tackle all the projects your team hasn't had time for before now.

Identify what support and guidance you need to navigate this challenging time. Call in the help you need.

What gives me hope is the indomitable optimism and determination I've seen from my clients and countless other organizations. If you focus on the mission, strengthen relationships, and stay nimble your organization will not only survive this temporary crisis, but come out of it stronger than before. Show up every day with confidence and take comfort in the fact that everyone is in the same boat.

We can navigate these uncharted waters together. If you have any questions about pivoting your fundraising, [Neubauer Consulting Group](#) is here to help. Send us [an email](#) with your question or concern, we'll respond right away with our thoughts and share relevant resources. Our new [Grant Management Services](#) were explicitly created to provide organizations with critical support during this time.

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