

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Fundraising and Donor Relations Tactics

The Coronavirus has brought some level of worry to all of us. We worry about the needs of those we serve, the needs of our community, the needs of our families, the needs of our organizations, and our own needs. The list goes on.

These are unprecedented times. I don't know what the future holds, no one does. But having built seven nonprofits and a few businesses over the last 30 years, I've weathered a number of stormy seas and I believe America, you, and your organization, will be "okay" as the sea calms.

Here's a list of five things you can do to remain steadfast at the helm as you navigate the stormy seas of fundraising and donor relations during the coming months:

1. **Inform your donors.** Keep them posted about how you're managing programs and helping your beneficiaries. Donors have a lot on their minds but they do care about you and your mission, which is why they supported you in the first place. Send a short, and I mean short, email highlighting what's going on and how you're handling operations, programming, beneficiaries, and staff. The biggest reason donors don't read your emails is that they are too long. Keep it short and to the point so they actually read about the great work you're doing during these trying times.
2. **Empathize with your donors.** In a separate email, write a well-crafted message that shows empathy for your donors and their families. Many of your top donors, those who have family foundations and a lot of money invested in the stock market, are hurting. Some of your donors may have had to shut down their businesses, or are no longer receiving paychecks, or have elderly parents who are at risk of getting the Virus. And some have college-aged children who are now living back at home. Let your donors know that you care about them and *their* circumstances. I assure you, your compassion for them will be reciprocated when things settle down.
3. **Only ask for money now if you need it.** This is not the time to be making general appeals to donors. However, if the services of your organization are in greater demand because of the Virus, such as a food bank, then you should be asking for money. If you do ask, it's better to ask donors to fund specific things. For example, offer a \$500 sponsorship that will buy 10 food boxes, each of which will feed a family of four for week.

Or, create "emergency relief" funding opportunities for things like utility bills, rent, salaries, and other expenses. You may even want to ask a super donor for a zero-interest loan to pay for expenses. For organizations that have financial reserves, let some time pass, there will be plenty of opportunities to ask for money when people's worries subside. Or, offer some "Virus Relief" sponsorships that may help you offset some of the unexpected expenses you've incurred.

4. **Postpone fundraising events and don't do one online.** If you were planning to have your annual gala this spring, or any fundraising event, postpone it. Even if the virus curve flattens, people may still be leery of crowded venues. Push your event to late summer or fall. The worst thing you can do right now is cancel your event and then try to scramble to hold it online. From my experience, these quick-fix solutions often look cheesy and the responses are typically small.

Remember, many people are worried about their finances. Some have lost 10 to 20 percent of the wealth they had in stocks. Instead of putting together a haphazard online event, make specific appeals to specific donor segments for specific needs as outlined above. I've had huge success creating sponsorship lists and wish lists of items I needed funded.

Spending your creative energy and brainstorming power here will go much, much further to helping you raise the funds you need. For your largest donors, first send them a list of your sponsorships or "needs list," then call them or meet with them (when it's safe to do so). This will also give you a chance to explain how you're handling the virus crises in a more personalized manner.

5. **Engage donors and volunteers.** Let your donors and volunteers know how they can help your organization in ways other than giving money. This may include saying prayers, doing chores, running errands, making phone calls, picking up food for seniors, etc. Americans are gracious with their time and resources in times of need, you just need to let them know what they can do to help. This is also a great way to keep donors emotionally connected to your mission and its work, which is a powerful reason why donors give and remain loyal.

Looking for answers to your worries and concerns?

I'm here to help. Contact me . . .

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