

# COVID-19 *Response*



## WHAT ARE SOME DOS AND DON'TS WHEN COMMUNICATING THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

### Do's:

- **Acknowledge the situation for what it is and lead with empathy.** The world is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis. While your organization plays a vital role in society, this disruption is extensive, widespread and changing quickly. On an individual level, the people you communicate with may themselves be sick, be caring for or worried about loved ones, or managing their own financial concerns.
- **Remember your audience.** Your board, donors, employees and beneficiaries will all have different interests and concerns. Remember to tweak your message depending on who you're talking to.
- **Be transparent and accessible.** Provide clear contact information or point person so that people know who they can call or email with questions.
- **Provide a call to action.** When speaking to your various audiences keep in mind what you want them to do. When communicating with employees, you may want to reiterate your organization's purpose and remind them why their passion and continued involvement is integral. On the other hand, when speaking to donors, you may like to remind them of the tangible impact their donations will have.
- **Anticipate questions** that may arise and address them proactively.

### Don'ts

- **Avoid articulating a panicky narrative.** When communicating your organization's operational and financial position, be factual, calm and demonstrate an appropriate level of emotion. If the leadership is panicking, the donors, employees and beneficiaries will also panic.
- **Do not assign blame for current situation.** Address COVID-19 as the cause of the disruption but demonstrate leadership – be action oriented and focus on the future.

## THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES WILL HELP YOU COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY THROUGHOUT THE CRISIS.

### PROVIDE A SITUATION OVERVIEW

*Be prepared to briefly but effectively outline your operational and financial status.*

- Think about your key messages – What do you want your audience to remember from your communication?
- Deliver primary key messages early – e.g. *we face unprecedented times but we are maintaining some operations.*
- Be prepared to disclose broad, high-level financial overview to the donors– specifics might create more unease.

- Share the appropriate information with the right audience – it may not be helpful for all employees to be privy to specific financial details.
- Acknowledge the situation for what it is. Empathy and reassurance in uncertain times is also crucial.

### COMMUNICATE MORE FREQUENTLY OR AT THE SAME FREQUENCY AS BEFORE, NOT LESS

*When organizations go quiet in times of crisis, people often either assume the worst or forget you're still operating.*

- The personal touch goes a long way when fundraising. Phone or video calls will prove most effective.

- Communicate often and effectively, but be careful not to spam.

### CONTINUE POSTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

*Social media will remind people of your organization's impact and will remind your donors of who they are helping.*

- Continue social media content, but be sensitive to situation.
- Focus on content that highlights the impact your organization has on the community.
- Promote and encourage 'user generated content' – specifically encourage your beneficiaries, volunteers and employees to share their experiences online.
- Repost the best content to your official social media channels.
- 'Throwback Thursday' and 'Flashback Friday' content is a great way to repurpose existing content.

### GET AHEAD OF FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Start making a list of potential questions and the key messages you have in response.*

Weave these into the narrative or have a breakout Q&A in your communications. This reassures recipients that you are acutely aware of general concerns:

- How are your operations and/or programs impacted?
- (If operations will resume through the crisis) How are you making appropriate changes to ensure the safety of beneficiaries, employees and volunteers?
- Have your costs changed?
- What is your overall financial situation?
- What can we do to help?

### KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE: THE BOARD AND DONORS

*What do you want from them and what do they want to know from you?*

- Board Members and donors want updates on organization viability, donation requirements, and current spending.
- If applicable, key messages may include:
  - Actions the organization has taken to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on operations.
  - Current financial position.
  - The organization's immediate financial or practical needs.

### KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE: EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

*What do you want from them and what do they want to know from you?*

- Employees/Volunteer base are likely concerned about job security and/or organization viability.
- Key messages may include:
  - Employees are critical to the organizations and reductions are a last resort.
  - The organization, like every other organization in the world right now, is not immune to COVID-19. Their engagement and enthusiasm is more important than ever.
  - A message of thanks for their ongoing passion and commitment for the organization.
  - A reminder of the organization's purpose and outcomes.
  - Reiterating the fact that these services/program will resume and will be critical to the communities we serve.

### KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE: BENEFICIARIES

*What do you want from them and what do they want to know from you?*

- The people who rely on your organization will want to know about its stability and the future of the programs
- Key messages may include:
  - The organization, like every other organization in the world right now, is not immune to COVID-19.
  - The leadership, staff and donors are committed to doing everything possible to continue the program.
  - A very high-level overview of the organization's operational future. Specifically, any changes to programs, scope, etc.
  - Steps the organization is taking to ensure the safety of beneficiaries.