



Donor care during the COVID-19 pandemic

One of the many challenges of operating a not-for-profit organization during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is that just when you desperately need financial support, many donors are unable to help. Widespread unemployment, stock market volatility and general uncertainty make even dependable donors reluctant to part with their money.

Then there's the fact that donors are receiving a staggering number of charitable solicitations right now. If your nonprofit doesn't directly serve constituencies harmed by COVID-19, your appeals are likely to go to the bottom of donors' piles. Here are some ideas for keeping your organization's needs top of mind.

Avoid mass appeals

Now is generally not the time to make mass appeals for donations. If you do contact your entire mailing list, use the opportunity to express concern for your supporters' well-being and to update them on how your organization is faring under the circumstances. Also let donors know that charitable donations made in 2020 are deductible up to \$300, even if donors don't itemize.

To keep supporters engaged, stay on top of your social media accounts. Use Twitter, Facebook and other platforms to announce program suspensions and reopening dates and to share success stories — either recent or, if your nonprofit is temporarily closed, from the past.

Build support

Reach out to significant donors in person. Obviously, face-to-face meetings are out of the question, so give major supporters a phone call or arrange for a videoconference. Be sensitive to donors' financial challenges and prepare to be flexible. If donors express the desire to help but can't commit to an amount right now, suggest they might want to make a multi-year gift or include your nonprofit in their estate plans.

Donors might also be able to provide your group with professional services — such as PR expertise or legal advice — or be willing to contribute an item to an online fundraising auction. It's a great time to learn more about major donors and ask them how they want to help, now and in the future. You may be surprised by their answers.

Chances are these supporters are well established in the community and have friends and colleagues they can introduce to your nonprofit. If these well-connected donors aren't already on your board, invite them to become members — or ask them to chair a future event.

Resist the temptation

Although you may be tempted to throw yourself on the mercy of donors, desperate appeals may not be wise right now. Donors generally want to invest in fiscally sound nonprofits that will be around for the long haul. So long as your nonprofit has adequate operating reserves and a contingency plan, you should be able to weather the current storm. Contact us if you need help getting over any hurdles in the meantime.

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