



Leading Through **COVID-19**

HOW CRISIS CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING IN DONOR COMMUNICATIONS

You have likely heard them all. Some of the most often-told excuses for ineffective health care philanthropy communication have been around for years:

- *It's hard to communicate with and grow a pipeline with young donors through their desired channels.*
- *The cases for support have no real urgency or relevance for donors.*
- *The marketing and development teams don't see eye-to-eye, so work is done in silos.*
- *Identifying and telling compelling stories is so challenging.*

COVID-19 just temporarily provided you reasons to ignore these obstacles and push forward with communication urgency. The key word here is 'temporarily.' If you're not operating with a collaborative approach to communications, yet, you need to start now. The wick is short, but the opportunity for your organization to strengthen relationships with existing donors and establish new relationships with prospects has arrived.

STRAIGHT-FORWARD COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

While these opportunities are largely intuitive, these necessitate repeating to emphasize their importance:

- **Pick up the Phone**
Many major gift donors are in the particularly vulnerable age group for coronavirus. You don't need to have all the answers (nobody does), but you do need to communicate early and often. Pick up the phone and ask how they're doing. A

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bonus: personalize a handwritten note simply to check in, follow up or show you care.

- **Plug Into the Command Center**

Your hospital will likely have established a disaster command center. It's important to plug into this existing infrastructure—or to create a collaborative, virtual, communications command center with all the right people around the table and a commitment to meet regularly. This allows the philanthropic team to know marketing's outreach plan with the public, to know messages provided to employees and to report what is shared with donors. Position the foundation to serve as a trusted and valuable conduit to the philanthropy team, donors and the community.

- **Go Digital**

Changes are too rapid for print to be responsive. Having the ability to communicate through your website, email or social media is essential. Be an integral part of each form of communication. Offering your donors immediate, hyper-local information through these channels provides immense value.

- **Follow Up Mail**

Quickly develop and mail a postcard to your donors that provides health safety tips, encourages email and social media engagement and invites them to reach out directly. Always include a thank you for their support.

INNOVATIVE GAME-CHANGER STRATEGIES

- **Emergency Fund: Your Bridge to Pipeline**

Health care is suddenly the business of everyone. Students are home and businesses are operating on minimal capacity. We are isolated in our homes. This situation is emergent, leaving many to wonder how they can help.

Health care providers are serving a huge need right now. Health organizations are in a unique position to increase new donors through emergency fund gifts. Specifically outlining and communicating how gifts of support will benefit ongoing efforts of the health organization and

its caregivers gives donors relatable reasons to participate and help. Assemble a collaborative team to connect all necessary details to effectively launch this campaign. Ensuring an easily accessible Donate Now button is just as important as external promotion.

- **Stories of Heroism**

In times of uncertainty, it is easy to become solely preoccupied with crisis resolution. Meanwhile, there are missed opportunities to capture once-in-a-lifetime stories. While many crises end as quickly as they begin, we are currently facing one with an unpredictable timeline. The impact of coronavirus has forced health teams to literally create additional sites and teams, so community members can receive care with lower risk and exposure.

We are likely not facing a few tough weeks; we are facing months of exhausted physicians and nurses battling at the frontlines of this rapidly-spreading pandemic. Compelling stories are found here. The foundation can rely on trusted relationships with clinicians to identify remarkable team members and stories. Record them. Share them.

With the uncertainty of COVID-19, it is essential to prioritize communication to ease fears and build trust. Disruption such as this offers opportunity to prove ourselves as community leaders, strengthen relationships and develop new ones through effective and ongoing communication.

Choose urgency over panic. Choose thoughtfulness over stressed reactions. Demonstrate you are an authentic friend to your donors and communities in a way that has potential to change how they look at your organization for years to come. Communication leads the way.

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