



*Leading Through* **COVID-19**

# ALIGNING FUNDRAISING PRIORITIES DURING A TIME OF CRISIS

Philanthropy has always been most successful when fueled by a strong organizational case, a sense of urgency and initiatives that spark donor interest. As COVID-19 continues to impact our organizations and our patients, it is also creating an extreme strain on organizations across the nation, causing a ripple effect of immediate and emergent needs throughout the hospital and the community. In light of the sweeping pandemic, health care foundations should consider changing their current fundraising strategies and priorities to stay aligned with the parent organization. Health care foundations solely exist to support the parent organization by helping their patients and the community. Overnight, hospital needs (and donor interests) have changed, and foundations need to be prepared to respond quickly.

Foundations should seek out the unique local health care organizational needs connected to the pandemic. Ideally, specific fundraising opportunities are vetted by a cohort made up

of administration, clinical leadership, foundation leadership and donors. Under the current pressures of the crisis on the hospital leadership team, the foundation will likely take on more responsibility than normal to help identify which organizational needs will be most enticing to donors. Once organizational priorities have been identified, the specific COVID-19 needs should be evaluated and ranked based on donor appeal. For example:

- Is the initiative meaningful and relatable with our donors?
- Will it dramatically enhance outcomes of care for patients?
- Will it make a positive impact on a significant number of people?
- Is there an emotional patient story to illustrate the importance?

Not all health care needs during a crisis equate to something a donor would support. Donors will see some projects as important but may feel

some initiatives are part of the core obligations of the hospital.

In a period of crisis, rapid response is essential. If health care organizations cannot clearly identify their priority needs around the crisis, it is advised to not wait for the dust to clear. Revealing the perfect case for support may take time, so it is essential to move forward with a general appeal (such as “greatest needs for COVID-19 patients and family”). This allows immediate involvement while more specific needs can be identified and communicated. The reality is that hospital and patient priorities are more than likely going to continue to change as we move forward.

Foundations that are actively in a campaign should consider changing or augmenting their strategy during this unprecedented time. As health care organizations temporarily shift their business by deferring non-urgent or elective surgeries, foundations should also consider if a change to their fund development strategy is needed. What was an organizational priority that sparked interest with donors even a month ago may not be as relevant or essential today for donors (or the organization). The foundation must be nimble enough to adjust to urgent needs and to engage donors in the most effective ways. The current campaign focus—such as cancer or cardiology—is arguably still essential for the organization, but, realistically, community focus will remain on the crisis at hand. Foundations can choose to continue raising money for the established campaign due to its priority, but it is recommended to add at least one new COVID-19 case for donors to support. No matter what, it is important to update our donors and community on the existing campaign initiatives from a fundraising and operational perspective. Providing clarity on any changes, such as delay in services,

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and providing transparency on any reasons for the changes, keeps donors engaged in that case for support.

No matter the approach, it is essential for foundations to be sensitive, not tone deaf, to how their constituents are feeling. Each correspondence must be thoughtful and genuine, acknowledging the concerns faced by many due to the persistent uncertainty of the future and the volatility of business. With that said, we should not automatically assume the decisions of our constituents as to whether or not they want to give. These times require us to be more thoughtful and to ensure we are providing various giving channels that allow donors to help make a difference in the community through our organization.

People want to do something; and people are doing something. If health care foundations are not proactive in connecting donors with inspiring hospital projects that they see as relevant and meaningful, constituents will find other pathways or seek other worthy organizations to support. Thus, this is the optimal time to connect our constituents with our health care organization. **Foundations must be the conduit that connects donors to causes created by COVID-19, and beyond, to elevate the organization’s mission of supporting caregivers, patients and the community as a whole.**

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