



*Leading Through* **COVID-19**

# THE CRYSTAL BALL OF PHILANTHROPY EVENT PLANNING

Are you rethinking your special event during this uncertain period? If so, start by evaluating what you initially wished to accomplish with your event.

Traditionally, many organizations have used special events to connect with donors, elevate mission and cover operating costs. While elaborate events and complimentary invitations cultivate donor stewardship, there is often no clear return on investment (ROI) and only an assumed return on relationship (ROR).

COVID-19 provides a strategic opportunity to reaffirm best practices to share vision and mission. Evaluate the purpose for the special event and if it is being achieved. Is there a way to better fill that purpose through a unique relationships-based approach that offers a stronger ROI without time-intensive efforts? Is your event the most efficient and effective way to push your mission forward?



**“To golf or not to golf?” That is the question.** Consider the following when determining your path forward:

- **Ethics** | Social distancing is in our foreseeable future. While you long for a Broadway show, concert or a signature organizational event, you must be realistic. Hope for the best but plan for the worst. Guidelines change frequently. Individuals look to health organizations to implement recommendations that keep them and their communities the safest. Permission to hold events of 10, 50, or even more people doesn't mean you should. It is incumbent for your health organization to set a good example in slowing the spread of disease. Imagine the reputation damage if your hospital gala became the next super spreader event? Is it currently worth the risk?

- **Return on Investment (ROI) versus Return on Relationship (ROR)** | The room that once held 1,000 people will likely hold 250 with updated capacity guidance. Golf courses are open, yet there is now the additional cost of one golfer per cart. At this point, the juice may not be worth the squeeze as costs may soar above money raised, resulting in negative ROI. Intimate donor gatherings won't provide connection as people sit at tables six feet apart with no allowed mingling, eliminating the ROR. In fact, your event could be a cruel reminder to what was lost.
- **Strategy** | Short- and long-term strategic consideration is needed before cancellation or postponement of any cyclical event. Conversations must consider alternative ways to accomplish goals. Some are canceling events completely while others are using a "wait and see" approach. The latter requires timeline planning from start to finish, determining a future date that allows ample preparation time for the rescheduled event or the option to reevaluate or postpone indefinitely. Regardless of your strategy, ongoing widespread communication is key.

### Not This Year.

If 2020 event cancellation is inevitable, consider these to cultivate relationships:

- 1 Lead with the reality of the situation but with the sensitivity of humanity. Don't appear tone deaf. Acknowledge all factors, including COVID-19, impacting this decision. Share how you will remain connected and partner as you advance the health of your community together.
- 2 Include the individuals within your corporate sponsor teams. They have most likely been instrumental in your efforts.
- 3 Leave no one guessing. Communicate with past attendees, donors, prospects and the

entire community. Share the beautiful stories around the heroes of your organization. Share the insider pride and how the hospital is serving in and for the community.

- 4 Leverage all tools and communication channels. Newsletters, social media, website banners and note-writing campaigns add depth and information.

### Maybe Not Again.

Is it time to permanently replace your event with a creative and inspirational new strategy? Many events are becoming things of the past. Health care is at the forefront of conversations. Take advantage of these opportunities to engage your community and ask them for input and continued mission support in other ways such as:

- 1 Share inspiring videos (even amateur) of the successes within the health care organization, asking for support to further your efforts.
- 2 Arrange virtual chats with your executive leaders, pre-recorded and live with Q&A opportunities.
- 3 Host a phone thank-a-thon or letter writing campaign that inspires former event attendees to show gratitude for health care heroes. Share these through organizational channels while asking participants to share on their pages as well.

Times have changed. This pandemic is challenging us to find new ways to connect. While some events may eventually resurface, many are realizing there are more innovative ways to engage their prospects and donors. How will you move forward?

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