

Messaging and fundraising now — and beyond this pandemic.

At first it seemed surreal. Now, the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic has set in — and you've got a better sense of its overall impact on your organization. Inevitably, much of the initial reaction was crisis driven: ensuring clients and staff were safe, moving from in-person to virtual services where possible, and closing non-essential programs, for example. Simultaneously, you've doubtless been adjusting your fund development and communications approaches to meet the latest challenges.

Based on our experience and research, Thurlow/Associates is pleased to share the following recommendations.

Show how you're meeting this challenge: You need to continue fundraising. You don't want to appear tone deaf by not acknowledging the current healthcare crisis. Your first instinct may be to relate how this pandemic is hurting your organization or preventing you from doing your work. A stronger approach is to discuss how you're being responsive, how you're altering your approach as needed, and how you're continuing your impact. (Even better, discuss how donor funds can help you make any needed transition.) Here's an example regarding educational and supportive services for youth, which demonstrates our point:

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating new challenges, of course. In order to continue serving our target population, we have pivoted our support groups to an online platform to ensure client and staff safety. All 250 of our participants are continuing to receive vital educational enrichment, especially vital during this time of school closures. Staff members (now working remotely) are mailing supplementary learning materials as needed. In addition, to address anxiety or other emotional health needs, we have set up a 24-hour hotline through which children and families can receive counseling from our trained professionals. Your gift will help ensure the ongoing strength of our programs this year. It will also help cover the costs of technology, supplies and shipping related to virtual services. As it becomes possible to return to regular programming, the new technology will transition into our on-site classroom, further strengthening our services into the future.

Don't forget the big picture: Your mission continues during this crisis, and it will continue after it is over. Sure, you may need to adjust your approach to fundraising (using a video call to connect with a major donor, instead of an in-person meeting, for example). But don't lose sight of the fundamentals. For example:

- *Listen to your donors.* Some of your most generous donors, while concerned about COVID-19, may not be interested in making a major gift specifically related to COVID-19 response. Those making truly transformative gifts are generally inspired by long-term impact. How do you know what the best approach is? Listen!

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- *Personalize your requests in light of your donor's priorities.* While we're in the thick of this, it's hard not to be thinking all COVID-19 all the time. And, again, it's hard not to at least mention COVID-19 in your outreach to donors without appearing tone deaf. Strategize about how you include mention of the pandemic in a way that's appropriate to your request. Can you point to your COVID-19 response as an example of how your organization is vital to its clients more broadly? Don't forget that things are changing quickly, so avoid including details that could be out of date by the time your donor reads your message.
 - *Offer options that are appropriate to the prospect's circumstances.* You may already offer the opportunity for major donors to pledge funding over more than one year. As the economy responds to the global health crisis, it will be even more important than ever to identify ways in which you can make giving easier.

At this challenging time, Thurlow/Associates continues to help our clients:

- Create effective, customized communication strategies that demonstrate compassion and action.
- Identify new funding opportunities, including rapid-response grants related to COVID-19.
- Modify donor relations to encourage continued engagement and contributions.
- Provide additional counsel and hands-on help.

Taking strategic action now can help your organization weather this storm. Let us know if we can help you.

Over almost three decades, Thurlow/Associates has helped numerous nonprofit organizations to weather economic and other challenges. To learn how Thurlow/Associates can help your organization put a plan in place to address the challenges that come with this public health crisis, contact us for a no-cost consultation. You can reach us at (310) 675-6497 or at hello@thurlowassociates.com.