

What organisations should be doing to cope well in the COVID-19 crisis

In such unprecedented circumstances as COVID-19 has presented, there has never been a more critical time for us to consider our strategy and approach to putting our house in order. The urgency and need for pursuing our Mission more determinedly is clear. Otherwise we risk being a victim to a change we are being forced to adapt to and address. Some of the most experienced consultants working on our Emerge programme and who are supporting organisations in their fundraising capacity development have provided their Top 10 tips to cope with the current situation, mitigate risks and plan ahead.

1	<p>Your People Prioritise your team's well-being above all else, and enable your team to manage the stresses of the unfolding situation. Your team needs to be a support network for each other and you need to ensure you have addressed your team's safety before anything else. Educate staff and Board members about online platforms to maintain connections and communicate frequently and positively with your staff teams and colleagues, and counter the negative news where you can.</p>
2	<p>Your Leadership Approach Help your staff to adjust to the new 'normal'. Stay positive and be open to the potential opportunities this massive disruption provides in terms of operations, communications, marketing and fundraising. Reflect on your work and its impact and look for those special things that help you stand out as an organisation and that you can sell to your donors during this crisis and beyond. Get into adaptive mode immediately. Be flexible. Be prepared to change plans and this includes adapting your strategy to the situation.</p>
3	<p>Your Donors Communicate with your donors, sponsors and supporters regarding your organisation's response to COVID-19 and show that you are on top of the situation, thinking and acting strategically about how to respond appropriately. Engage or involve them, where appropriate, in planning for managing the risks. Remember donors select you, and you DO NOT select donors. This is not the time for acquisition. Build current relationships.</p>
4	<p>Service Development Review your current service portfolio to see what is relevant and impactful and whether you need to sustain, develop or innovate. If there are services you have always delivered, look at them in a new light to see whether they will now be sustainable and whether they are really needed based on what the future need might be for your service users. Use this unique time to consult with your service users and colleagues to see where you might be able to develop more impactful and scalable services.</p>
5	<p>Your story Develop or strengthen your case for support in context of COVID-19, describing the immediate impact of the pandemic as well as the expected longer term impact. Collect case studies and testimonials from your service users and use social media, Website and other avenues to communicate your messages about the impact of the pandemic. Make sure they address what is urgent, where the need is, and who the beneficiaries are. This is an opportunity to revisit your organisation's Mission and see where the alignment is with your programmes and services.</p>
6	<p>Future Planning Review your fundraising strategy accordingly to see if the activities you had planned are still relevant. What will your organisation need most post Covid-19? Think about how to build your unrestricted reserves so that you can be financially sustainable. Take some time during the week to check news coming from funders and supporters. Knowing what funders are interested in will help you plan effectively your "big asks".</p>
7	<p>Your thinking and actions Accept that once the initial crisis is over things will NOT return to normal. There will be a new normal defined by significant economic, social and possibly political change - spend some time thinking through how that might impact your NGO. For any social sector organisation, no matter the challenges you are facing, now is your time to shine and to be there for your constituencies and support them in flexible, responsive, and new ways.</p>
8	<p>Your Beneficiaries Consider how the crisis is likely to impact the users of your services or campaigns, what help they might need in the current situation, and what you could do to help. You may need to</p>

	divert existing resources to offer that help (with funders' permission where required) or you may require additional funding to do so. Be honest about how existing services might need to change (perhaps radically) or even that some existing services may not be needed or, perhaps more likely, may need to be sacrificed because the capacity or funding is not available due to the need to support recovery.
9	Fundraising Diversification is key and for any organisation which relies on one or two sources of income is going to have to rethink their fundraising strategy – this is the time to do this. Review your current funding mix against what opportunities might now be available and set priorities in terms of best returns on investment, relationship management and communications. Be bold in considering new and untested avenues for fundraising, engaging your entire executive and non-executive team to review and refresh your fundraising strategy, particularly in context of COVID-19. Be alert to a rapidly changing funding environment - funders are quickly channelling funds from existing programmes to crisis response and emergency support.
10	Compliance Comply with all local, regional and national recommendations and guidelines regarding a response to the pandemic. Check with your regulator, if your region has one, to see if there have been any changes to fundraising practices in view of the epidemic. Otherwise, check with regulations and guidance from other regions, such as the fundraising regulator in the UK (https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/) or through the European Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (https://ecnl.org/).

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