



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: ONLINE DISCUSSIONS FOR NONPROFIT BOARD & SENIOR STAFF

TOPIC: CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS DURING COVID-19

Thought Leaders: **Beth Krallis & Jamison Ludgate**
Marketing/Communications, Community Foundation

Dealing with a pandemic is unfamiliar territory for most nonprofits. Internal and external messaging must be clear, direct, and communicated in accordance with public health guidelines. Programs and events need to be evaluated, reformatted, and most likely cancelled, rescheduled, or turned virtual. Fundraising and service delivery will be altered dramatically. There is no roadmap to follow, so this is a challenging time for all of us. Here are some best practices the Community Foundation has compiled to help guide your nonprofit through this COVID-19 crisis.

First a note: *Be sensitive to the current climate. Do not be overly self-promotional in your marketing while people are getting sick and dying. Better safe than sorry to delete anything you had planned or scheduled that no longer seems appropriate. Also, be kind to your team and colleagues who are also adjusting to their new normal during the crisis.*

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TO DO:

1. **Identify your crisis team's assignments and roles.**
 - a. Are there staff who are no longer performing former roles due to COVID-19? Can they be part of the crisis communications team? Can you cross-train them to learn new skills?
 - i. Example: Security Guard at a Cowboy Museum Is Now in Charge of Their Social Media — and His Posts Are Hilarious <https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/tim-security-guard-takes-over-national-cowboy-museum-instagram>
 - b. Organize key team member meetings to keep on-task moving forward (phone or video conference calls daily/weekly/monthly)
2. **Identify the programs and services your organization needs to offer during the crisis** (life-saving/sustaining essential services).
 - a. Examples: food delivery, domestic violence support, homeless shelters, healthcare providers, senior support
3. **Identify opportunities to shift your program and service goals to meet the current crisis.**
 - a. Examples: putting tours online, streaming classes through Facebook Live
4. **Develop relevant internal & external messaging templates.**
 - a. Website updates and banners
 - b. Branded emails and banners, to staff/board/volunteers and external audiences
 - c. Social media messaging
 - d. Press release and op-ed
5. **Determine the scope of your outside vendors and budget adjustments.**
 - a. Are you running paid ads for something that has been cancelled? Cancel ads and promo
 - b. Now that you have time, can you learn to do some of these tasks internally?
 - i. Example: update website yourself or create your own content in Canva
6. **Reach out to key stakeholders with a phone or video call.**
 - a. Use this as an opportunity to connect with board members, volunteers, and friends
 - i. One-on-one communication helps maintain and strengthen relationships
 - ii. Have staff members who hold the strongest relationships with key stakeholders reach out individually
 - b. Don't be afraid to ask for what you need to get through this difficult time (funding, help with grant applications, remote technology)

7. **Determine ways to work with other organizations and trusted sources.**
 - a. Can you promote the great work another complementary organization is doing? This will showcase partnership and highlight information or services that might be helpful for your audiences. Bonus, this will also create more content for you!
 - b. Are you sharing public health information? Tax updates? Are you fact checking your sources? Now more than ever, you must! Best advice is to promote from Chester County Health Department, CDC, or another trusted source. Another best practice is to google what you're sharing and look for 3 trusted/nonpartisan sources promoting the same info.
 - c. Good idea to include a disclaimer on material that it is informational only and suggesting individuals consult an expert before making a financial or a health related decision.
8. **If you have extra time, catch up on the projects you never have time for.**
 - a. Update media contact list
 - b. Update media communications plan for next fiscal year
 - c. Is there evergreen content in your archives you can repurpose
 - d. Learn and grow a new social media platform (who doesn't love TikTok)
9. **Keep on doing the tasks you can do.**
 - a. Measure analytics
 - b. Share stories of inspiration for your organization
 - c. Like/comment/share other positive content

THINGS TO DO BEFORE A CRISIS (for next time)

- **Have log in information for all social media and marketing websites (password vault)**
- **Have personal contact information for all staff**
- **Ensure remote computer and telephone access**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What communications platforms have you had the most success with?
2. What has been the biggest communications struggle you have faced?
3. What have you learned through the crisis with regard to marketing and messaging?
4. What do you expect moving forward will change for your nonprofit's communications strategy?
5. What advice can you offer the rest of your staff/board based on what you have learned today?
6. What have we not addressed yet that you still want to discuss?

RESOURCES

- PRSA <https://www.prsa.org/about/crisis-communications-resources>
- 5W Public Relations <https://www.5wpr.com/new/crisis-communications-coronavirus-covid-19/>
 - Crisis communications plan
- Coronavirus Impacting Your Nonprofit? Here's What to Do (Network for Good) <https://www.networkforgood.com/nonprofitblog/coronavirus-impacting-your-nonprofit-heres-what-to-do/>
 - Create new ways to communicate and engage with your supporters, ex. video and phone calls. *Now is the time to strengthen relationships.*
- Forbes <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbooksauthors/2020/04/13/create-a-war-room-to-tackle-crisis-communication-in-the-age-of-covid-19/#7ea308a67847>
 - Create a War Room to Tackle Crisis Communication in the Age of COVID-19