

PhilanthropyMatters

We Share Your Passion! March 2020

Special Newsletter: Fundraising and the Coronavirus

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I know we have never been through what we are experiencing today. For some the 2008-2010 recession was the closest. For others, it was 9/11 or recent weather-related disasters. In any case, no one can know what's next. But I believe we all feel that we will get through this.



I have included a variety of articles from colleagues and notes from a recent national webinar that I think will be helpful to you as you communicate with donors and your leadership. With everyone so isolated – hearing from you, talking with you – will be the perfect time to show you care. It will be a great time to listen, hear what's important, and help where you can. **I suggest you keep your place in line with your donors.**

Some folks have asked, *“should I talk about a gift?”* I suggest you listen very hard during your conversation. If a donor inquires – *“How is the campaign going?” “What’s new with the appeal?” “How did your event go since it was cancelled?” “Is the JCC losing money at this time?”* These questions may give you the opportunity to ask for their permission to talk about their support of any of these efforts. **They will lead you. Trust your instincts.**

Remember, even during the 2008-2010 recession, giving throughout the United States increased slightly. There was not a dramatic drop that we may have expected. Our donors know that in these difficult times, those who need us, **need us more.**



David Valinsky Associates LLC
614.238.3390 / www.davidvalinsky.com



Consider strategies from these articles to help you connect more deeply with your donors during a time when you can't visit in person:

1. Do more in-depth research on your donors — As a major gift officer/Executive Director or Chief Philanthropy Officer, your main job is to know your donors. Now that you have the time, take time to find out more about donors so you can have more informed conversations and the ability to [create touch points](#) that show the donor you know them.
2. Write every donor in your portfolio a note, hand-addressed, letting them know you're thinking of them during this time — this is a great way to connect.
3. Program update via video — Review your caseload, cluster donors who are investing in similar programs with your organization and invite them to a “program update webinar” that one of your program staff can lead, with you moderating.
4. A video from the CEO or Executive Director — Give donors an update on how your organization is handling the COVID-19 situation.
5. Host a live Q & A on Facebook Live or through a video conference call, when donors can ask questions of the CEO and program staff.
6. Send out program updates via text or email using photos or video if possible, to let your donors know your mission is still being carried out during this time.



Fundraising in Tough Times

With this very difficult situation affecting nonprofit organizations and institutions here in the US and around the world, we would like to share with you a piece Jerry Panas wrote during the 2008 financial crisis. In so many ways, it seems very appropriate for today.

It's a puzzling phenomenon. It may seem counterintuitive, but in tough financial times people actually give more. But they give to organizations they care greatly about. Those organizations that have done an outstanding job of thanking them properly and often, and where they feel their gift has been celebrated and used effectively. Donors become more selective in tough times. They choose organizations that demonstrate how much the donor means to those the organization serves.

Some Surprising Advantages

There is no "perfect moment" to raise money. There is no such thing as a time when all possible factors are in your favor.

But there are some surprising and significant advantages to raising funds in tough times.

This may surprise some. But we find that economic conditions are not a prime factor in the success of raising funds or in a campaign. Philanthropy has been one of the most stable factors in the economy, year in and year out. From the time we've been keeping records, philanthropy has increased steadily, each year more than the year before.

In fact, since 1980, we have experienced five "official" recessions— and still, philanthropy has continued to grow. Each year more than the year before.

The plain fact is in good times and bad, Americans give to worthy causes. But when times are difficult, they seem to respond with even greater dedication, generosity, and a genuine sense of sacrifice. They will allow nothing to interfere with their fervor in supporting worthwhile causes.

The Campaign that Never Was

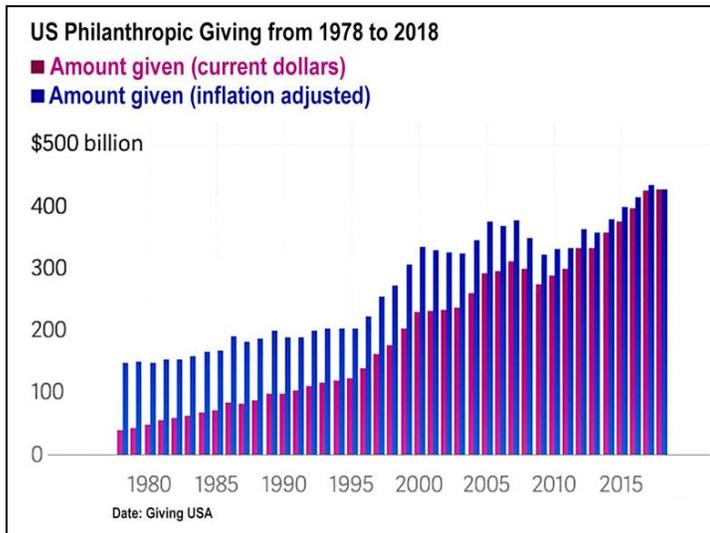
Through 24 Tax Revisions since 1980, a Standard & Poor Index that looks like a roller-coaster, and economic peaks and valleys— **Americans support those organizations they believe in. They have never failed.**

Not raising money when you are ready causes program deficits. Not raising money when you are ready means you are not meeting needs. Not raising money when you are ready results in a mission unfulfilled.

If you do not build or go forward with your project— the services of your organization will be less than you believe they should and could be. Less than what they must be.

Look at it this way. The real loser is not the campaign that raises only 85% of its goal. **The great failure is the campaign that never gets off the launching pad. Zero! 85% beats zero any day.**





Waiting for precisely the right time to raise money, and keeping an anxious eye on the economic barometer, is not the prudent answer.

What is truly good stewardship is taking the time and thought to prepare properly. Creatively conceived, carefully prepared, and tightly organized fundraising programs and campaigns win— in both good times and bad.

Not One Day Before

Here's what you need to remember. If you are not properly prepared, your fundraising program is almost certainly doomed to failure. In good times and bad.

Is there a good time for your organization to raise money? Yes. When you are ready. That is a good time to raise money. **Not one day before.**

There is one way to be certain to find out if you're ready. It is fail-proof. You can be assured there will be no surprises.



3 Ways to Help Donors During the Coronavirus Crisis

Below are three simple ways to do that. Adapt each of them to fit your organization.

1. LEND AN EAR

Social distancing makes people hungry to connect. And with phone and video chat, that's easy to do. As fundraisers, we're naturally good listeners, and in times of crisis, people often need someone to simply listen. While the cornerstone of effective fundraising is grounded in personal visits, face-to-face meetings are simply not possible right now. The good news is that everyone is home. So, pick up the phone and call your donors. They will be glad to connect and commiserate, as well as to have someone to chat with. Of course, the conversation shouldn't focus on your needs, but on the needs of your donors during this stressful time.



Pay extra special attention to the elderly.

Older people are one of the groups that's most at risk from the Coronavirus. Scan your list of top donors. Email or call your older donors to see how they are and ask if they need help. Pay particular attention to older people who live alone. While you may not be able to deliver groceries, you may be able to recommend a delivery service, or help coordinate with a neighbor to check in on them. A simple phone call can help alleviate their anxiety. Be sure they have your contact information in case they wish to call you back. While you're sitting at home, take pen to paper. Write one or two handwritten letters per day to your top donors. Let them know you're thinking of them and hope they are doing well. Provide your phone number in case they wish to call you. Let them know you're available to talk.

2. SHARE A STORY

It's easy to get caught up in your own problems. Your job is to connect people and share what's happening from the point of view of your clients and your organization. Send a weekly update about what you see and how you're handling the situation.

Share stories via email to give supporters the flavor of what's going on from the perspective of your clients. How are they coping? What do they need? Give donors a chance to help.

You might set up times during which you invite your community to come together virtually to get the most recent information. Host a group video call with a report from your executive on the state of the sector.

3. PROVIDE WAYS TO PAY IT FORWARD

If you see overwhelming need in the community you serve, invite people to make a special gift that will enable you to address the situation more fully. Your donors are likely wrapped up in their own lives but would gladly help if given the opportunity. It will give them some relief from focusing on their own problems.

Those who can give, will. It's up to you to offer them the opportunity to help those in need. You might even consider providing a list of organizations in your community that you believe are doing critical work at this difficult time. You will not lose donors by being generous and caring. In fact, you are likely to make them more loyal to you in the future.



Navigating the Crisis (webinar)

We will rise to this challenge

We will get through this

We will be focused, express confidence and keep our eye on the prize.

We must do the same with our organization's leadership

Regarding Your Fundraising:

- Do not postpone
- Do not pause
- Do not delay
- Do not cancel

Also

- History has shown us to keep the pace, change the cadence, tell your story
- Fundraising is an institutional priority
- Continue communication w/stakeholders
- Adjust to short term FR plans
- Show strong leadership
- Commit to staying the course of your plan

Crises can create:

- a lasting bond,
- opportunity to reaffirm your organization's mission
- how you feel about your stakeholders and those who your organization serves

2/3 of donors who stopped giving to an organization after the 2008 recession did so because they no longer felt connected.

Think of your fundraising as *physical* distancing not *social* distancing.



Webinar notes continued

9 Steps to consider

1. Communicate with stakeholders (Internal/external)
2. Leverage Technology, use it more than ever
3. Appeals may be focused on immediate relief related to the crisis
4. Provide special briefings to your stakeholders
5. Avoid wholesale cancellation of FR plans
6. Develop a short- term FR action plan-one week, one month
7. Reaffirm your mission and importance in your messaging
8. Help stakeholders understand the resilience of philanthropy in difficult times
9. Show empathy and concern for your stakeholders



Thank you to Gail Perry, Andrea Kihlstedt, From the Essay archives of Jerold Panas, CCS, and Amy Eisenstein.



**For more information or to discuss any of these strategies,
please give me a call.**

Stay safe. Stay healthy



David Valinsky Associates LLC
614.238.3390 / www.davidvalinsky.com

Dawn Hensley, Editor

