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# Bonding with your donors & the importance of demonstrating your impact during the COVID-19 crisis

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## It is a challenging time...

**But be positive and take this time to strengthen relationships with existing donors, volunteers and supporters who believe in your mission**

**Challenging times impact everyone. Being sensitive to the challenges your donors, volunteers and supporters may be experiencing and offering to help where possible is an important part of nurturing and strengthening relationships.**

The dramatic changes that are taking place with the Covid-19 crisis are having a real impact on our communities across the country. It is clear that at least in the short to medium term, it will also have an impact on how our communities respond to requests for donations from for-purpose organisations. Some organisations will require emergency appeals to meet the increasing needs of those they serve. We have already seen donors begin to respond positively to those organisations. Other organisations will need to work through the challenges of continuing to meet the needs of beneficiaries that may not be so obvious during this crisis and so perhaps not so obvious to their supporters. Regardless of the situation your organisation is in, you must remain positive and take this time to strengthen relationships with existing donors, volunteers and supporters who believe in your mission.

These important stakeholders care about your cause and are as much a part of your team as your staff, board and beneficiaries. In challenging times, looking out for each other and having open authentic conversations with your supporters is as important as those conversation you have with your team. Challenging times impact everyone. Being sensitive to the challenges your donors, volunteers and supporters may be experiencing and offering to help where possible is an important part of nurturing and strengthening relationships.

**Don't neglect your donors' generosity, regardless of the value, especially first time donors. There is evidence that donors who stopped supporting specific for-purpose organisations during or after a crisis did so primarily because they no longer felt connected to them.**

**Organisations that stay connected and engage with their key stakeholders emerge successfully.**

Giving in all its forms to charities typically follows economic trends down, although not as dramatically, and then back up during the subsequent economic recovery. Donors, when they can, continue to respond generously to causes they care about when those causes can demonstrate they are meeting a need and making a difference during troubled times. Don't neglect your donors' generosity, regardless of the value, especially first time donors. Often those who give during a crisis represent a much greater lifetime value than those who give during the good times. For that reason, think carefully before reducing resources and activities that lead to first time donors, or could. The single most common reason people give to any cause, typically 85% of the time, is because they are asked.

This does not change during an economic crisis, but it can shift during the current health crisis because of restrictions, fear and financial impact. As such being sensitive to the impact of Covid-19 on your donors is important. In challenging times, organisations that stay connected and engage with their key stakeholders emerge successfully. These situations offer an important time to demonstrate their relevance and strengthen relationships with donor. There is evidence that donors who stopped supporting specific for-purpose organisations during or after a crisis did so primarily because they no longer felt connected to them. Therefore, in times like this communicating, developing, maintaining and nurturing relationships with people who care about your cause and are connected to your mission is important. This can be simply phrased as 'bonding' with your donors.

# Bonding with your donors

**Our advice to you and your team is to reach out to your donors, supporters and volunteers and provide them an update. Below is an overview of how we would typically recommend this approach:**

## **Informing communication with donors, volunteers and supporters:**

Keep your donors, volunteers and supporters fully informed and deeply engaged. In times like this, they care and will want to know how these events are impacting your organisation and understand what actions are being taken. Use video where possible as to replace the inability to be face to face. Use technology to connect with donors.

## **Avoid immediate cancellation of fundraising plans:**

*While events planned for the short term need to be cancelled, evaluate your overall fundraising plans and strategies thoughtfully.*

Make reasonable adjustments, particularly timing depending on the circumstances and events that are rapidly changing. Review the situation fortnightly. It is better to postpone than cancel where possible, unless it's an annual event in which case you need to consider cancellation. Look to digitise alternative outcomes to compensate this loss if possible

## **Support the development of a short-term action plan:**

Develop a plan of action, including a communications plan to cover the next four weeks, featuring an initiative of personal calls, video calls and emails to key donors and friends.

# Bonding with your donors contd...

## **Motivate internal and external stakeholders:**

It is a time to reflect on and remember the resilience of philanthropy in difficult times. Donors who feel engaged and connected will continue to support, especially in times of crisis when the need is clear and well understood. Authentic regular communication is critical at this time so donors are engaged and can be ready to give where possible or when their situation improves.

## **Leverage technology where appropriate:**

Find ways to more effectively incorporate video calls, podcasts, or virtual briefings that make meetings more dynamic and create more personal experiences regardless of distance.

They will be interested in knowing how the organisation is responding to the current situation, how are those who depend on the organisation being helped, any events being cancelled or postponed, how employees are being cared-for, how operations are impacted and if there are changes to service delivery.

## **Show empathy and concern for your donor:**

Everyone is impacted by COVID-19 in some way. Giving is a two-way street and donors want to know that you value them and are concerned about their welfare as well. Offer any resources that might be helpful to your donors if possible. For example, if you have elderly donors, donors who have committed a bequests or prospective donors you are currently engaging with, contact them first. Be authentic and genuinely offer help.

# It may feel like now is a moment to pause or delay fundraising activity but...

it is very important to note that in previous downturns, those who continued to push forward in their efforts with suitable adjustments to their plans ultimately succeeded, and those who took a step back lost ground. During every major disasters or financial crisis in recent history, it felt like it was unprecedented.

It is encouraging to know that during those times humanity survived, and philanthropy thrived. Even today, despite the chaos, we can see that generous giving continues.



