

CRISIS-RESPONSE TOOLKIT FOR NONPROFITS

MARCH 2020

A row of smooth, dark blue stones is arranged on a reflective surface, likely water, during a sunset. The stones are arranged in a line that recedes into the distance. The water is calm, and the sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The stones are dark blue and have a smooth, rounded texture. Their reflections are clearly visible in the water below them.

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CONSULTANTS IN GIVING AND RECEIVING

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Secure your mission in challenging times.



If the world seems like a mixed up, confusing place right now, you're not alone.

We agree and created this toolkit to help you make sense of the challenges confronting your nonprofit. It's steeped in the basics: communicate regularly with stakeholders, diversify your revenue stream, use technology better, engage your board members

in cultivation and make sure your staff and office are properly equipped. There are no short cuts or secrets to success.

These are confusing times, and the best way out of them is through them. Use these tools to get organized and lead your mission to the other side.

We're here for you. Call or email us with questions.

Aly and the ASP team

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "aly".

Contact Us

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CRISIS-RESPONSE TOOLKIT FOR NONPROFITS

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Download these resources and more at alysterling.com/resources

The logo for Aly Sterling Philanthropy, featuring the name "aly sterling" in a cursive script and "PHILANTHROPY" in a smaller, sans-serif font below it.

Responding to the crisis and market volatility

Amidst the sea of emails carrying cancellations and tips for safeguarding your health against COVID-19, we want to offer you some key considerations for safeguarding your mission and livelihood during this temporary setback.

The power of positivity

We become what we believe. That adage is so true and at a time like this, we need to resist the urge to believe the sky is falling and instead seek all the examples of why the opposite is true. While there's no universal playbook for us to depend on, we know our emotional, mental and behavioral attitudes and mindset are our **most powerful antidotes and change agents**.

Staying the course

Your mission is even more important today than ever before. If you are in a campaign or contemplating one – ask yourself this – is your need legitimate? If so, stay the course! **Now is not the time to abandon your greatest mission needs – your constituency is depending on you.** Your donors would not want you to, but they might desire more flexibility and creativity. Read on...

Get creative

Look at this as an opportunity to **strengthen and fortify your organization's infrastructure** and most importantly, your relationship with your donors. Get creative – continue your cultivation and solicitation efforts – but offer options for gifts that are more flexible.

For example, secure that pledge now but allow it to begin later this year.

Consider reversing your strategy order and ramping up that **planned giving program** *earlier* than intended. Use any extra time to cultivate and solicit (because we all know a good portion of our donors and prospects need extra knowledge-building and cultivation). And finally, **deploy those stewardship plans!** Time to really turn up the **extra attention and communication** – especially related to how your mission might relate to crisis issues and responses like this one.

In summary, here are **four things** that we are recommending our clients and friends prioritize immediately:

① Lead, communicate, listen, repeat.

These are confusing times and your supporters likely have family and jobs and all kinds of things to worry about. If you don't reach out regularly and keep them tethered to the mission, they could easily drift away. Contact your donors to let them know how much you value them and their support, especially in times of distress or ambiguity. Do this 1:1 with key donors (and take advantage of technology like FaceTime and remote meeting platforms). Ask your board chair to make a new gift to demonstrate commitment to the cause and vision for the future.

② Consider how to express your mission digitally.

It doesn't need to be fancy or expensive. Record a small performance and post it online. Post a certificate of graduation on Instagram. Pull out some older photos of group activities and repost them with new insight or narrative. You've got the material – repurpose it to keep energy and activity (and needs) high!

③ Fundraise for crisis-related initiatives and general mission support.

Leave the major gifts asks for later: use this time to check in with your people and deepen existing relationships.

④ Ensure your team and department are functioning optimally.

Become a best practice! Consider conducting a quick assessment and creating a new strategy so that when things turn around (as we all know they will – remember the Great Recession?) you are first out of the gate!

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WORKSHEET – Market Volatility Fundraising 90-Day Plan

Use this worksheet to create an action plan based on the priorities outlined on the previous page.

Market Volatility Fundraising 90-Day Plan SAMPLE

Strategy	Who	When
Immediate Communications – Donor and General For example: create new messaging throughout communications; weekly email from ED/CEO with relevant content, impact story and highlights of continued need; begin video series		
At-Risk Events For example: convert Spring Gala to online giving event, complete with auction/paddle raise, guest speakers, table captains – invest in tech consultant		
Annual Fund and Digital Response For example: create emergency fund appeal (run for 90 days); increase social media postings and positioning; divide active donor base by all staff for personalized attention and stewardship calls		
Major, Capital and Endowment Campaign Strategy For example: convert cultivation efforts to phone-based, ensure all materials are digitally accessible; support each volunteer with an updated and customized cultivation and solicitation strategy; allow pledges to be made and be funded flexibly, including 2021 deferral.		
VIP Donor Stewardship For example: see above annual fund staff portfolios; below for board allocation of key donors; above for all enhancements of communication tools		
Board Leadership For example: immediate allocation of 2-5 key VIP donors to board members for 90-day communication plan; event outreach to key sponsors		


Creating a communications plan during a crisis

When the world (or even just your world) is embroiled in a crisis, it can be difficult to know what to say.

Use the crisis communications questionnaire below to cut through the noise and uncover your most pressing messages and most critical audiences. Now is the time to turn what you've been doing on its head – and reach out to your supporters in meaningful and direct ways that, in turn, help them process all that's going on and give them some way to act. Be their beacon in the dark, not just another talking head.

Crisis Communications Questionnaire

Question	Answer
1. What is your crisis operation plan? What must you, will you do during this time – next 30, 60, 90 days?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distribute special funds for...<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ To whom• Raise special funds for... (do you have a short-term fundraising and cultivation plan?)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ From whom• Conduct regular business<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Manage investments○ Receive grant reports○ Etc.• Pay staff• Work remotely	
2. Additionally, what percentage of your current budget is funded with private dollars and how does this affect cash flow?	
3. If the crisis grows, will your operations change? If so, how?	
4. Who are your audiences? Please provide detail.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local, regional and/or national?	

See the rest of this questionnaire at alysterling.com/resources or by downloading the worksheets. 

 Download Worksheets

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WORKSHEET – Crisis Communications 90-Day Plan

Use this worksheet to create an action plan based on your answers to the Crisis Communications Questionnaire.

Crisis Communications Plan SAMPLE

Audience	Message/s	Channel/s	Frequency/dates	Who	Completed/notes
Staff					
Board					
Client/customer					
Donor					
Volunteers					
Community					
Partners					
Media					

 Download Worksheets

Aly Sterling Philanthropy is a partnership-driven consulting firm
powering fundraising, strategic planning and board leadership solutions
for the well-positioned nonprofit.

Let's get started.

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