Guidance for Colleges and Universities Navigating Disruption

Reach out to donors and other key stakeholders.

Don't wait until you have all of the information. Donors want to hear from you *now*. Development leaders need to create a prioritized list of contacts and determine who will be contacting each one. How many can be contacted within the next two weeks by gift officers and administration? What communication should the next tiers of donors receive?

Reach out through the most personal means – telephone or a videoconference resource like FaceTime. By the way, if your donors are grandparents, they almost certainly use FaceTime.

Use e-mail or social media only as a last resort (or to schedule a more personal interaction). If you do, beware of sounding like you are addressing a large group of people (i.e., not "…I hope you are *all* doing well…" but "…I hope *you* are doing well…").

Hopefully, your institution has created talking points or an FAQ. But this situation is fluid, and everything is changing rapidly. Try to avoid speculation or rumor. Stick to the facts (at least today's facts).

A more detailed approach to outreach can be found here.

Focus on your mission first, viruses and disruptions second.

While it might be tempting to jump right into the unprecedented circumstances, it's critical to reaffirm your commitment to students, scholarship, and the community when communicating with stakeholders. Only then should you turn to our social and financial disruptions – but do so without sowing fear or sensationalizing.

Here's a very practical example: if you are e-mailing a general update, don't lead with "COVID-19" in the subject line. Instead, herald "Building Resilience and Moving Forward" or something similarly resolute.

Identify resources that can help your extended community.

- Do you have credible authorities who can debunk COVID-19 myths and emphasize sound actions at this time?
- Can your College of Business faculty help small businesses develop contingency plans?
- Will your IT department eventually have the bandwidth to help others with their remote technologies?
- With parents working from home and caring for children, can your educators provide helpful resources or guidance?
- Access to art and literature can be a balm during these trying times. Do you have digital archives of artworks, performances, or presentations that your community might appreciate?

Identify ways that your extended community can help you and your students.

As we've seen, these trying times are inspiring our country's citizens to help one another. You might be able to connect donors and supporters to the needs of the university family. For example:

- Many graduating seniors are missing career fairs and placement opportunities. Could your donors (or their HR professionals) conduct virtual "mock interviews" to help students prepare?
- This is the time when next year's internships are arranged. Do your donors have openings they could fill?
- Would you most loyal alumni boosters be willing to contact graduating seniors and welcome them into the alumni family?

Cancelling commencement or other events? Here are some things to think about.

Events build affinity. When they are cancelled, it is important to seek other ways to engage. There is anecdotal evidence that a cancelled commencement or disrupted senior year can wreak havoc in that class' alumni participation rates down the road. Try to make up for this disappointment by:

- Holding some sort of virtual graduation using social media
- Ask alumni to reach out and welcome graduating seniors into the alumni family (see above)
- Invite the Class of 2020 to a special commencement, or to participate as VIPs in your next regular commencement.

Of course, the cancellation can also have a big impact on contributions and expenses. Here are some ways to navigate an event cancellation.

Planning a Giving Day? You may need to pivot.

We're hearing that Giving Days might become a common response across the nonprofit world. In order for yours to stand out,

- Be sure to follow these best practices:
  - Knight Foundation Giving Day Playbook
  - 13 Takeaways from A Crowdfunding Forum
- Make sure that the "cause" is relevant for the times. Don't request support for athletics or buildings. Instead, pivot to emergency assistance funds for students and staff, research support, or other relevant and resonant objectives.

The potential impact on campaigns, pledges and solicitations

- Are you on the threshold of a campaign planning study? You can proceed with the preparatory steps, like development of the preliminary case for support. And it's probably a good time to engage your dispersed team in any internal interviews via phone or videoconference. But in most cases, we'd recommend delaying any discovery with external audiences until the health and financial picture is more certain.
- Do you have donors in the midst of campaign pledges? We see both risk and opportunity.

  - The risk: donors will ask to defer pledge payments while their portfolios recover. Can the university manage cash flow for these projects if the payments are deferred?
  - The opportunity: ask high-capacity donors if they'd be willing to devote their next pledge payment to more immediate needs—like shoring up the operating budget—and extend their payment schedule for one more year on the back end.
- Once the dust settles, we expect that the environment for solicitations may be similar to post-Great-Recession. Donors may be unwilling to confirm a multi-year pledge. They may be more comfortable making the equivalent of the first year's pledge payment, with the intent to continue payments as the economy recovers.