



Strengthening charitable causes to change the world through generosity

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There is a lot of anxiety among professional fundraisers and organizational leaders. We dislike what we don't know and understand. It is certainly true that those of us in leadership today have never lived through a pandemic. However, the oil embargo of the 1970s, the farm crisis of the mid-1980s, the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the banking crisis, and the recession of 2008 were all unknowns when they occurred as well.

What we know from all of these events is that people still strongly support charitable organizations, even amid challenges and recessions. In his March 16, 2020 article in "Donor Voice", Roger Craver mentions the following:

- Charitable giving in the U.S. remained positive for more than 12-months after the start of the last recession.
- Existing donors remain loyal.
- Fortune favors those who are prepared.

So, assuming that this recession looks similar, what should we do?

1. Assume that people will still give. Certainly, those who have been laid off may hold back, but others will step up in their place. We should not say "no" on behalf of our donors. Make your case and invite your donors to help make the world a better place because of what you do.
2. Along the lines of people still giving, it may be time to focus less on acquiring new donors and more time on cultivating your existing donors.
 - a. Tell your stories of impact better than you have ever told them.
 - b. Thank your donors better than ever.
 - c. Check-in on your donors and be present, even by phone, virtual meeting, email, and other means.
3. Hopefully, your organization has a strong identity and purpose to enable you to mobilize quickly. Evaluate your systems so you can receive gifts right away. For instance, we have heard that gifts given through Facebook fundraisers are taking 90 days to reach the charity. What are you doing to make giving to your organization easy for givers?
 - a. Check your website that giving information is correct and easy-to-find. Arrange for online giving if you don't already have it. Donors will seek out your website to make an online gift first before sending you a check.
 - b. Don't send out panic communications. People care more about you making an impact than they care simply about your survival. There may be a time for you to have an emergency appeal, but it is not at the beginning of the downturn.
 - c. Align your impact stories with who you are and your core mission. These impact stories are what donors want to invest in.



4. Don't assume your donors are in worse financial condition than when this started.
 - a. Donors are holding approximately \$121 billion in donor-advised funds (according to National Philanthropy Trust). This money can be deployed by the donors who hold it at any time.
 - b. Many older donors are not heavily invested in the stock market at their stage of life and still have the liquidity to make gifts.
 - c. Seek challenge and matching gifts just like you normally would stimulate giving from your supporters.

The difference in this crisis versus the September 11 terrorist attacks, a natural disaster, or other crisis is that it is ongoing. Because we haven't moved from crisis to recovery yet, we need to proceed with caution. Take this time to make your plans, engage your volunteers and donors, and be ready with what comes next. History shows us that your donors want you to thrive in your mission and will be ready to help you do just that.