Nonprofit Essentials for Responding for the COVID-19 Pandemic

Topic 3: Communications

The Greater New Orleans Foundation wants to help the nonprofits in our region best respond to the disruptions that this new coronavirus will cause.

In partnership with CoronavirusREADY (www.coronavirusreadynow.com), a group of local consultants, led by Jay Altman, Adam Hawf, and Meghan Turner, GNOF is creating the resource series **Nonprofit Essentials for Preparing for the COVID-19 Pandemic**. In it, we will be sharing topical resources to help nonprofits in our region better respond to public health threats and any associated operational disruptions. We will also be hosting Virtual Town Hall meetings with topical experts in the field.

The series will cover such topics as supporting your [staff](#), communication practices, financial planning and continuity of operations.

Please find below a checklist of actions and associated resources to support your **Communications:**

1. General

❏ Establish and share a written emergency communications tree. If an emergency results in a change to your organizational structure with someone out short-term, for example, this is the plan that your organization will follow to communicate with key internal stakeholders. Some of these groups may be organized into subgroups with different communications leads for the different subgroups. Also, include the method of communication and individual responsible for:

- ❏ Board of Directors
- ❏ Staff
- ❏ Vendors
- ❏ Clients
- ❏ Funders
- ❏ Partner Organizations
- ❏ Government Agencies

General Communications Planning - Resource	Purpose
[Emergency Communications Tree - Template](#)	This template provides instructions and structure to setting up an emergency communications tree

2. Internal Communications

❏ Board of Directors

- ❏ Initial communications: BOD members should receive written communication explaining how your nonprofit organization will shift operations in response to COVID-19. Precede this written communication with a phone call to your board chair and, as needed, to individual board members to discuss and finalize any shift in operations.
  - ❏ What is the impact COVID-19 has on your clients? How does this change your priorities and organization's finances?

- ❏ What is your plan to continue serving your clients throughout this period?
- ❏ How is your staff shifting operations? (i.e. Will your staff be working remotely? How will your organization support staff members who are either infected themselves or caring for someone who is infected?)
- ❏ Establish a method and cadence according to which the BOD will continue to meet throughout this period.
  - ❏ Video chat: https://zoom.us/; Google hangouts premium is free through July 1; GoToMeeting is also offering their remote work tools free for three months.
- ❏ Reiterate emergency communications tree.
- ❏ Provide any necessary financial updates.
- ❏ Continue to share updates on the bulleted items above according to the communication frequency you indicate in your initial letter to funders.
- ❏ Staff: If your organization is able to move to a virtual workspace
  - ❏ Create and share guidelines to staff outlining pertinent information about the transition to a virtual workplace, which may include any or all of the following:
  - ❏ Establish unified communication platforms, such as a standard conference line or internal communications platform
    - ❏ Virtual work platforms that are free or inexpensive:
      - ❏ Conference lines: http://freeconferencecall.com/; https://www.uberconference.com/
      - ❏ Video chat: https://zoom.us/; Google hangouts premium is free through July 1; GoToMeeting is also offering their remote work tools free for three months.
      - ❏ Internal messaging: https://slack.com/; Microsoft Teams is available for free for six months.
  - ❏ Explicitly spell out health plan coverage options (preventive and treatment), and policies around attendance, paid time off, work-from-home/telecommuting, payroll continuation, travel, and group meetings.
  - ❏ Share HR contact information for employees to ask questions or report absences, sickness, etc.
  - ❏ Share good hygiene practices (for staff who must come into the workplace) (see WHO resource)
  - ❏ Keep employees up to date about steps you are taking, any transition to remote working, and how you will keep them informed. For an example, see this sample staff email.
  - ❏ Provide staff with weekly updates on organization-wide priorities and changes in operations due to COVID-19.
  - ❏ Establish a communications protocol according to which staff members centrally communicate, track, and resolve:
    - ❏ Regular meetings that will remain ongoing throughout the remote working period
    - ❏ What they learn from clients about their needs
    - ❏ Their own HR-related concerns (leave, PTO, etc.) - specifically, where staff should surface HR issues related to leave if they/a family member becomes ill
      - ❏ This includes opportunities to reallocate tasks and/or shift priorities as individuals require leave time
    - ❏ Questions from funders and board members
- ❏ Vendors
  - ❏ Itemize in a centralized location how changes in organization operations changes vendor needs.

❏ Assign individual(s) on staff to be the lead in communicating with particular vendors. Keep in mind that any changes to your operations likely have significant impact on vendors and their employees.
❏ Provide an initial update regarding operational changes to all vendors. This should be at least in a written communication if not both in writing and in direct phone calls.
  ❏ Initial update should indicate the norms according to which vendors should expect updates from your organization: your method of communication and the frequency with which you will provide updates.

Vendor Communications - Resource	Purpose
External Communications: Vendors	This letter from Intel demonstrates best practices in communicating with vendors through this period.

3. External Communications
❏ Clients[1]
  ❏ Assign individual(s) on staff to be the lead in communicating with individuals or groups of clients. Maintain a client communication tracking document that tracks communications with individuals and groups and that allows you to have staff members assume responsibilities for communications if other staff members are unable to work.
  ❏ Provide in writing, on social media platforms, and, as needed, via text message or direct phone call updates regarding changes to organization operations. In initial communication, establish norms on method and frequency of communications.
  ❏ Reiterate hygiene best practices.
  ❏ Provide regular updates to clients according to norms initially communicated.
❏ Funders
  ❏ Initial communications: funders should receive written communication explaining how your nonprofit organization will shift operations in response to COVID-19. Consider communicating with top funders via phone call from either a staff or board member in addition to the written communications:
    ❏ What is the impact COVID-19 has on your clients? How does this change your fundraising needs?
    ❏ What is your plan to continue serving your clients throughout this period?
    ❏ How is your staff shifting operations? (i.e., Will your staff be working remotely? How will your organization support staff members who are either infected themselves or caring for someone who is infected?)
    ❏ Establish a cadence according to which funders should expect to receive communications from your organization (e.g., We will continue to share updates with the [*Your Organization's Name]* on a biweekly basis throughout this period).
    ❏ Express gratitude for their ongoing support - explain the meaning of their support for your organization.

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[1] The individuals/population that a nonprofit organization serves in accordance with its mission.

❏ Review contractual obligations for each funder and engage in direct conversations with any funders where you may need to discuss timelines or specific obligations that you may not be able to meet or that may need to be modified given the situation.
❏ Continue to express gratitude. Continue to appreciate and engage your funders throughout this period, potentially in new and creative ways: use video acknowledgements, hand-written thank you notes, text updates and phone calls from board members to recognize funders, key prospects and volunteers.
❏ Continue to share updates on the items above according to the communication frequency you indicate in your initial letter to funders.

Communications: Funders	Purpose
Sample Letter to Supporters	This letter from the Seattle Times explains how staff is responding to COVID-19, changes to their operations, the necessity of ongoing donor support, and expresses gratitude for their support.

❏ Partner Organizations
  ❏ If you do not already have it, establish a centralized database of partner organizations and the individuals responsible for communicating with each.
  ❏ Reach out to key partner organizations via phone calls to connect on how each other's operational changes will impact your respective organizations.
  ❏ If there are any MOUs or contracts between your organization and partner organizations, speak specifically with that partner organization about whether the terms of those agreements will need to change for the duration of this period and, if so, how.
    ❏ Formalize those changes in writing with a revised MOU.
  ❏ For all partner organizations, share in writing how your organization's operations will change. Establish norms for method and frequency of communication during this period.
  ❏ Continue to share updates according to norms initially communicated.
❏ Government Agencies
  ❏ Track centrally each government agency that regulates any part of your organization's operations or mission. Identify a staff member responsible for collecting, tracking, and communicating centrally the information each agency provides.
  ❏ Identify government agencies requiring direct updates from your organization due to regulatory oversight. Identify the staff member responsible for managing communications with each such agency and arrange extensions if needed.

❏ General Public
  ❏ Norm on the parameters of your communications (itemize what you will and won't talk about in your public communications throughout the period of the COVID-19 outbreak).
  ❏ Establish a central tracking system for information that should go out on all public communications (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, your organization's blog, your organization's newsletter).
  ❏ Norm on the frequency of posting to each account/platform and the individual responsible for managing that posting.

❏ In an initial communication across platforms, communicate out how your organization will shift operations/serve the public through this period.
❏ Continue communications across platforms according to the internally normed cadence.

General Communications Planning - Resource	Purpose
External Communications: Social Media Tracking System	This tracking template created by BoringBrands helps plan social media content in one place in order to manage content topics, schedule posts, and manage deadlines

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