

PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

TIPS FOR FUNDRAISING WITH CONFIDENCE DURING CHALLENGING TIMES



HOW CAN YOU PREPARE FOR THE UNEXPECTED?

I love this idea! Being prepared for things we don't expect is something leaders and fundraisers seldom have the luxury to do. Just looking at our daily schedule of meetings can take the wind out of our sails. When are we ever going to find extra time?

Well, there's good news: in this booklet, we've done much of the heavy lifting already!

Several members of our Leadership Team at Douglas Shaw & Associates have brought their own experience to you in this helpful and timely booklet. It's great stuff, and certainly worth the read!

If you're not involved in fundraising, you can simply hand this off to those who are. If fundraising is your role and passion, this piece has given you an incredible head start in making your fundraising plans for times and/or events that you may never have expected!

Just look at the Table of Contents on page 7 and you'll see a list of 9 critical factors that can affect your organization's fundraising. And if you keep reading, you'll gain insight from some of our most experienced people to kick-start your own preparation!

May you and your organization continue to be part of what is right with the world!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Shaw', with a stylized, cursive script.

Douglas Shaw

Chairman of the Board/CEO

Douglas Shaw & Associates, Inc.

4 KEY POINTS TO HELP YOU FUNDRAISE SUCCESSFULLY THROUGH ANY CRISIS:

These are challenging times for fundraising, but being diligent and agile will help your organization weather this storm—and the next ones, too.

1 KEEP YOUR DONORS FRONT AND CENTER.

Communicate quickly and clearly about what's happening in your community, the country, or even the world—*and* how that impacts your organization and, potentially, your donors.

2 MAXIMIZE OPPORTUNITIES TO BE SEEN BY DONORS AND POTENTIAL DONORS.

Demonstrate that your organization is vital to meeting needs *now*. Increase your multi-channel presence—direct mail, email, digital platforms, telephone, broadcast, etc.—and consistently nurture those who partner with you. It may even be a good time to review, and possibly increase, your donor acquisition efforts.

FOUR KEY POINTS

3 SHORE UP YOUR SYSTEMS.

Top-notch customer service is imperative! Donors view the quality of your processes and services as a statement of how much you value them.

4 HAVE A DISASTER PLAN.

Anticipate emergencies your organization may face and devise strategies that position you to respond swiftly and wisely while remaining true to your mission.

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CHALLENGING TIMES— PANDEMIC

“When COVID-19 hit, causing more people to struggle with the basics of life, new and existing donors opened their hearts and pocketbooks to provide organizations with critical resources to meet urgent needs. People genuinely wanted to help their neighbors—and they continue to do so. It is inspiring to be part of a such huge outpouring of help and hope.”

—Graham Shaw, Chief Operations Officer

Some organizations chose to mail less and not to pursue acquisition during the chaos of COVID-19, civil unrest, and more. But many organizations who chose to communicate *more*, not less, were able to meet—even exceed—their previous years’ efforts, seeing *more* donors and *more* income. And because they chose to increase acquisition efforts, their new donors will position these organizations for greater impact in the days, months, and years ahead.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

CHALLENGING TIMES—

NATURAL DISASTER

“Hurricane Harvey gave charitable organizations a chance to give back to supporters who were affected by the disaster. We adjusted mail plans and launched emergency communications to garner financial support from people who wanted to help their neighbors. But—just as important—we implemented outreach on many different tiers to reach donors who were devastated by the crisis with prayer and/or emotional support.”

—Christa Huff, Senior Vice President, Client Services

When a natural disaster strikes—whether it's a fire, flood, hurricane, earthquake, or tornado—respond swiftly to inform donors that the crisis threatens your organization's ability to serve others. Whether you are using fundraising or donor care messaging, involve all channels to communicate your unique needs and goals via emergency grams, e-updates, social posts, pop-up ads, or whatever it takes.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

CHALLENGING TIMES—

WAR OR ACT OF TERROR

“When war, terrorism, or a major disaster impact the work of your organization, your donors want to hear from you immediately and often. You can’t overcommunicate. In fact, the biggest mistake is waiting until you have every last detail or fact in hand before reaching out to your donors. Engage your partners at the outset and keep them involved with a good mix of communication that informs *and* inspires.”

—Amy Sewell, Senior Vice President of Digital Solutions

Having a disaster plan in place allows your organization to begin work immediately along already defined communication channels. Although specifics will vary for every emergency, an established framework unites team members in action and in focus. That means you'll be able to put the crisis in front of your donors quickly, engaging them to be part of the solution. Prioritize your fastest channels—email, homepage banners, hover ads, social posts—so your organization is prominent when people go online to seek information.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

CHALLENGING TIMES—

LEADERSHIP CHANGE

“When a leader abruptly leaves or is removed from a donor-facing position, it may feel like an insurmountable hurdle. It’s not. There will be challenges, but people support your organization for the good work you do. Remind them of how important they are to the lifesaving, life-changing work you’re doing *together* through their partnership, and you’ll weather the storm.”

—Keith Cleghorn, Senior Vice President, Client Services

Whatever the reason—death, disgrace, or disagreement—your organization must react quickly to a leadership change, making donor communication a top priority. A professional and transparent effort to communicate the change will go far with donors, helping them remain bonded and committed to supporting the work of your nonprofit.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

CHALLENGING TIMES—

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF DATA

“Good data helps you know your donor’s heart and values so you know how and when to engage them. You need to have a disaster plan in place so that when the unexpected happens, you can communicate quickly with your supporters. Be sure to communicate in a way that recognizes your donors as unique individuals by accommodating their preferences, while also maximizing the value of your efforts.”

—Mark Mangin, Senior Vice President of Data and Analytics

Data is at the core of every strategy, but it's especially critical when wars, natural disasters, or other crises impede the work of your organization. Good data lets you know where people are located so you'll know if they are affected. Good *historical* data informs you of how donors have responded to previous emergency outreaches so you can put the right message in front of every donor through the right channels in print and/or digital.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

CHALLENGING TIMES—

BAD PROCESS

“The biggest crisis your organization ever faces might be of your own doing. Poor process can take you down in a hurry. One example: a great offer will bring donors in, but if they aren’t warmly and promptly thanked and receipted, they will be lost to you. Be vigilant and document everything. Check and recheck every process you have—often.”

—Wiley Stinnett, Executive Creative Director, Senior Vice President

It's not enough to be a great charity that does lifesaving, life-changing work for others each day. You must also establish and maintain air-tight, thought-through, and thoroughly documented processes. The sad truth is that slow or poor receipting, lack of training among staff, errors in data entry or flagging, lack of established protocol, and poor leadership—any one of these and dozens of others—can devastate your organization and threaten the mission you hold dear.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

CHALLENGING TIMES—

PUBLIC RELATIONS NIGHTMARE

“Somehow, somewhere, some way, someone is going to say or do something that either is or will be deemed inappropriate. You can choose to sit and watch everything go up in flames, or you can get in front of your donors swiftly with a clear message that one person’s misstep cannot derail important outreach that is bringing help and hope to others.”

—Jason Wood, Vice President, Client Services

Bad press can be harmful to your organization, so start building an action plan today that will equip the right person to quickly step up and share the right message across the right channels to realign donors with the important work that is at stake. Being prepared for the unexpected enables you to spend more time and donated dollars doing what matters and less time cleaning up a mess.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

CHALLENGING TIMES—

EMERGENCY LANGUAGE

“Nitty gritty details can kill a great offer—especially during a time of crisis. Some organizations reject proven donor-focused messaging on the grounds that their organization is solving complex problems and their donors are smart people who want to know the technicalities. But when you distract a donor from the reason they should give now, you’re going to lose them. Make it easy for a donor to say, ‘I care about that and want to support it!’”

—Shelley Cochrane, Vice President, Strategic Partnerships

Direct response language works because it employs simple, emotive words with a clearly stated need and strong call to action. If a committee has veto power over your fundraising messaging, especially when the organization is undertaking an emergency response, you could end up with a complex message that is scanned and discarded—even by your most committed donors. Choose clear and compelling communication that penetrates the clutter and capture your donors' attention so they will support your cause immediately, and year after year, across all channels.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

CHALLENGING TIMES—

COMPASSION

“It takes solid strategy to respond effectively to a crisis—but it also takes a lot of heart. When a tragedy hits, we come alongside clients swiftly, engaging compassion and leaning into our experience. This equips us to respond with effective and meaningful strategies that create solid solutions . . . and gives donors an outlet to express their concern for others.”

—Robert Johnson, Senior Creative Director

Leading with your heart will put an emotive message in front of the people and partners who support your organization—those who care and donate to make your work possible.

Every story you share in print and online, every ad and post, should make readers and viewers do two things—*feel* and *act*.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PLAN:

SINCE OPENING OUR DOORS ALMOST 30 YEARS AGO, DOUGLAS SHAW & ASSOCIATES HAS WORKED TO BE PART OF WHAT IS RIGHT WITH THE WORLD.

That's why we partner with nonprofit organizations who are giving their very best *every day* . . . and it's the reason we stand with our clients through any crisis.

Our hope is that this resource will give you the ideas and encouragement to fundraise with confidence, even during the most challenging times.

And if you need a partner who will be there for you through the tough times (and the not-so-tough times), we would be honored to stand with you, too.



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