

## WHAT DID WE MISS WHILE MANAGING THE COVID-19 CRISIS?

### A CHECKLIST OF COMMON ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The staff and trustees of grantmaking foundations and nonprofit organizations across the state have been fully immersed in supporting response and relief efforts connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, working to ensure their communities' needs are being met. After months of deep crisis-focused activity, as organizations create capacity to turn their attention to other efforts, many are realizing some essential activities have been missed and critical deadlines are now rapidly approaching. This resource serves as a starting point for staff to assess which tasks need to rise to the top of the to-do list.

The categories within this checklist are appropriate to a broad range of foundations and nonprofits; this may not serve as a comprehensive list for every organization. The timing of an organization's fiscal year is one of several critical factors that can substantially impact the activities of a nonprofit.

#### **Organizational Strategy**

Beyond leadership through the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have an obligation to continue to meet their institution's overall mission, vision and core strategies. Consider aspects of the strategic plan that may be permanently altered by the crisis, such as individual tactics that may need to shift in their focus and/or implementation timeline. If this crisis showed need for growth in your organization's readiness for crisis, particularly in adapting its operations, this may also be the time to develop a business continuity plan that captures how the organization will function effectively through various kinds of disruptions. A business continuity plan typically includes ongoing, proactive efforts and responsive strategies to be implemented once crisis strikes.

- Review the **strategic plan** and consider whether the impact of COVID-19 has highlighted gaps in strategy or affirmed the core pillars of the strategic plan.
- Update strategic plan tactics and activities (sometimes known as the **Plan of Work**) that need to be adjusted or reconsidered due to the crisis, particularly their timeline for implementation.
- Implement or adjust the annual **evaluation plan** to represent current or updated institutional strategy.
- Develop or re-assess the **business continuity plan**.

## **Board Governance**

Board members continue to play an important role throughout the current crisis, as key stakeholders, decisionmakers and ambassadors. For organizations with monthly, quarterly or annual meetings, some meetings may have been missed in the wake of the “Stay at Home” orders. Use this opportunity to re-schedule missed meetings, recommit to board development or make a [move to virtual board meetings](#). Check to see if any board members may be term limited over the coming months to ensure the nomination/election process is on task, and their replacements are oriented for their forthcoming service.

- Verify all required **board meetings** are scheduled.
- Adjust **board Development, recruitment and succession** activities as needed to provide educational, recruitment and orientation activities for existing and incoming board members.
- Conduct the **annual review of conflict of interest policy** and ensure that board members’ **attest to potential conflicts**.
- Schedule and conduct the **executive director’s performance review**.
- Check your organization’s bylaws to ensure **virtual board meetings** are permitted.

## **Communications**

Consider how the organization’s crisis communications strategy corresponds with the original communications plan for the year. Are there typical or traditional deadlines, publications or materials that key stakeholders expect every year? This may also be a good opportunity to document the organization’s crisis communications strategy.

- Determine any necessary adjustments to the **annual report** timeframe or content.
- Evaluate the **annual survey’s** timeframe and content relevance for key stakeholders.
- Determine necessary adjustments to the current year’s **communications plan**.
- Develop or edit the **crisis communications plan** to meet needs revealed by COVID-19.
- Evaluate relevant **printed material deadlines** that were perhaps delayed by the pandemic.
- Consider potential changes to the **social media editorial calendar**, including changes in programming or content.
- Implement or adjust a **website and digital content strategy** to meet increased need for web-based communications.

## **Facilities**

Ensure that while staff have been working remotely, facility rental payments are being made, regular cleaning and maintenance issues are addressed and new COVID-19 procedures for the workplace are being followed (i.e. display of required posters in common areas). If a staff person has not been visiting the office space regularly, consider conducting a thorough walk-through to check for any potential problems (water leaks, general disrepair, evidence of pests, etc.) and make a list of issues that need to be resolved prior to other staff returning to the facility.

- Consider increased frequency or other adjustments to the existing **cleaning procedures**.
- Determine **health and safety procedures** appropriate to the existing facility and workforce.

- Verify **internal rental or facility agreements** are up-to-date and adjustments have been made to meet new facility use procedures.
- Check the **maintenance schedule** for any missed or upcoming maintenance activities impacted by Stay at Home orders or restricted construction activities.
- Review the **meetings and events policy for internal and external parties** for potential conflicts related to social distancing and new “Returning to Work” procedures.
- Ensure **mortgage or office rental agreements** are signed and **payments** are made in a timely manner.

### **Finance, Legal, and Tax Issues**

Many administrative expenses of foundations are regularly scheduled, but the increased load of COVID-related activity may have impacted staff members’ awareness of the timing of approaching deadlines and payments. Double check that bills are being covered and review contracts that may be impacted by the crisis. While the [IRS has extended payment deadlines](#) for many necessary forms, staff should ensure completion of all required forms and payments in a timely manner.

- Verify that **bookkeeping and records** continue to be updated.
- Schedule **budget process** activities.
- Ensure that **digital financial platforms** are working properly or consider implementing a digital approach to financial activity.
- Check that **financial audit** activities continue in keeping with the organization’s fiscal year.
- Implement **financial control procedures** appropriate to remote workers and limited in-office staff.
- Develop necessary **financial reports** as needed for board and staff meetings.
- Review **fiscal sponsorships** to ensure documents are up to date.
- Determine **insurance policy** timeframes and check that all policies are updated for facility and staffing changes.
- Review **investment and endowment reports** for potential impact on the organization’s financial decision making.
- **Review contracts**, including their timeframes, relevance and terms:
  - **Consultants**
  - **Contracted personnel**
  - **External counsel (legal, financial, tax, etc.)**
  - **Insurance**
  - **Vendors**
- Implement a **records retention process**, including a means for properly archiving digital files.
- Ensure timely **tax filings and related paperwork**, including those impacted by COVID-19 and adjusted IRS tax filing dates.
  - **990 form and federal income tax documents**
  - **License to Solicit**
  - **Local property tax or tax exemption**
  - **State corporate filing and income tax**

- Check with insurance carrier regarding **workers compensation** and other issues related to many staff working from home offices, rather than the standard workplace location.

### **Fundraising and Donor Engagement**

Consider how crisis fundraising fits with the organization’s overall fundraising strategy, including planned events and donor engagement opportunities. Has this crisis impacted the organization’s development processes or policies? What areas of this work may need to catch up or adapt to the current situation?

- Determine potential adjustments for **annual fund** strategy and focus.
- Review **board fundraising** participation levels and the related engagement strategy.
- Evaluate **corporate philanthropy** involvement with COVID-19 and standard programmatic activity.
- Check that **Donor Advised Funds’** activity follows internal and legal parameters, including those related to emergency designations.
- Ensure **donor database** procedures continue to be followed, even while staff work from home.
- Re-evaluate annual donor **events strategy** in keeping with social distancing policies.
- Verify that the **gift acceptance policy** continues to be used for crisis fundraising efforts.
- Conduct **gift acknowledgement processes** for standard and crisis fundraising activity, involving board and staff members to say “thank you” to donors.
- Determine necessary adjustments to the organization’s **grant writing strategy** and evaluate changes to foundations’ grant **deadlines and requirements**.
- Assess **individual giving** activity levels and strategy for both crisis and standard fundraising activity.
- Continue **planned giving** activity, with sensitivity to changes in donor engagement strategy.

### **Grantmaking and Programmatic Activities**

As the COVID-19 pandemic has now spanned several months, organizations are looking at its influence on another quarter of planned activities. For grantmaking foundations, the crisis is now impacting an additional round of quarterly grantmaking activity (applications, evaluations, etc.). Staff should make decisions about the continued effect of COVID-19 on the current grantmaking cycle and how that will impact future grants over the coming year. For nonprofit organizations, future programming and activity are being changed to fit with new restrictions and emerging needs within local communities. Consider how the rapidly-evolving strategy of the organization fits with its original plans for the year. Has anything important been missed that needs to resume or can certain programs be postponed without significantly impacting the organization?

- Review **disaster/emergency grantmaking strategy** and identify changes to be better prepared for future emergencies.
- Determine the impact of COVID-19 on the foundation’s standard **grant cycle activities**, including quarterly and annual deadlines, reports and processes.
  - **Incoming applications**
  - **Due diligence**

- **Reporting**
- **Evaluation**
- **Multi-year grant review**
- Ensure that essential **programmatic activity** continues, while making adjustments to meet the current and emerging needs of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Evaluate necessary adjustments to **scholarship programs** related to changes in K-12 and university procedures, community needs and students' financial need.

### **Human Resources**

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the staff and volunteers of nonprofits and foundations. While federal and state policies for individual and workplace safety have emerged, other human resource functions (such as performance reviews and professional development) may have been set aside. Staff should determine the most appropriate way to proceed or make necessary adjustments to regular HR functions.

- Participate in an **annual salary survey** to support industry benchmarking for the upcoming year.
- Create **COVID-19 staff policies and procedures** appropriate to the organization's workplace.
  - Use [Department of Labor posters](#) regarding COVID-19 workplace policies, which are required even if only one employee returns to the office.
  - Determine appropriate [safe return to work procedures](#) that ensure safe workplace activities for all employees.
- Evaluate the organization's **benefits** packages, including retirement and health insurance plans, to ensure they fit with the emerging needs of remote workers.
- Review the **employee handbook** for any workplace procedures or policies impacted by COVID-19, including remote work.
- Ensure timely payment of **employment taxes**, in keeping with organization's staffing and IRS requirements.
- Adjust procedures for **interns and volunteers** to align with safe returning to work policies.
- Provide staff members with **mental health** resources and activities to assist employees with coping during the COVID-19 crisis and remote work periods.
- Plan for the year's **performance reviews**, including its impact on compensation and policies for holding virtual reviews.
- Assess employees' **professional development** needs and determine alternative options available for standard and emerging topics of concern, taking into account conferences and trainings that had been cancelled and not rescheduled.
- Evaluate **recruitment and hiring** strategy for the coming months based on the organization's financial position and essential positions that need to be filled.
- Revisit the employee and board **reimbursement policy** (travel, tuition, etc.).
- Verify that **regulatory-required employee procedures**, such as required drug tests (for select industries) are conducted for employees who may have missed them due to COVID-19 or remote work.

- Check that **succession planning** documents are in order, including emergency/short-term plans for leadership staff and board members.
- Verify that the organization has an up-to-date **telecommuting and remote worker policy** in place or adjust the existing policy to allow for long-term remote work.
- Create a **travel restrictions policy** for staff that outlines when and under what conditions they can engage in work-related or personal travel, with or without additional quarantine restrictions.

## **Technology**

With “Stay at Home” policies in place during the COVID-19 crisis, many organizations transitioned into virtual offices overnight. Anticipating that elements of the virtual office environment will continue for the foreseeable future, consider how this extended activity will impact the overall IT strategy, as nearly all staff members will need to interact using the organization’s hardware and software to continue to meet their institutional mission and goals.

- Assess **cybersecurity concerns** related to increased use of the organization’s technology by a remote workforce.
  - Enable two-factor authentication on all cloud-based systems and tools.
  - Continue to test and educate users on cybersecurity threats.
  - Be extraordinarily cautious regarding any new payment/wire instructions, validating changes with a known contact who can confirm changes over the phone.
  - Restrict login access to specific locations, i.e. U.S. only.
- Inventory the organization’s current **devices and device strategy** and address staff needs for remote work.
  - **Computers**
    - Consider supplying all staff with laptops to allow more flexibility. They can be used with a docking station, monitor, mouse and keyboard to give users a desktop-like experience when in the office.
    - If the above is not viable, ensure all staff have proper devices available at home.
    - If using office-supplied devices, ensure with your IT team that these computers will function for long periods of time off the office network; traditional office networks/computers need periodic check-ins with servers.
  - **Networking**
    - Ensure staff have adequate bandwidth to work remotely.
    - If on limited data plans for at-home connectivity, consider a stipend to support a larger data plan or the addition of high-speed internet service, if available.
  - **Phones**
    - Ensure your phone system has the ability to be portable (softphone or app) and allows call forwarding to an alternate number, such as staff cell phones.
    - Be prepared to support staff without a cellular device or adequate data plans to support their remote work needs.

- Evaluate potential adjustments to the organization’s **systems**, including the need for cloud-based solutions, considering what can easily move to cloud-based solutions or hosted platforms. Some shifts may be quick or simple, while others will require long term-strategy to work toward. With the proper security and best practices, cloud solutions can be extremely secure, or even more secure, than internal servers due to the enhanced technology that is available (i.e. two-factor authentication or more security options for time and location-based login).
  - **CRM** (donor, vendors, grantees, etc.)
  - **File server**
  - **Financial software**
  - **Grants management software**
  - **Logging/user management** – Removes in-office network dependency
  - **Payroll**
  - If systems cannot be cloud-based or still server-based in your office, ensure you have proper **secure access and systems** to support logging in remotely.
    - If staff have computers at home, verify what are they logging into.
    - If staff are using personal devices, consider enabling a remote login tool to allow staff to connect to their work computer.
    - For those with a work computer at home, consider VPN for secure access by work devices to connect to the network. Personal devices should not be using VPN, as this could pose a risk of unsupported devices connecting to the organization’s network.
    - Remote Desktop Server allows any work or personal devices to securely log in to a single server and run server-based applications.
- Ensure that the organization’s **data management strategy** is sufficiently robust for broad-scale remote work by staff.
  - Staff should be able to easily access data files.
  - While using some of the remote access technologies for remote workers to access your office network, these tools can prove to be difficult to use, slow and problematic for staff.
  - Consider **cloud-based file collaboration tools**, such as Microsoft Office 365 (OneDrive, SharePoint, Teams), Google GSuite (Google Docs), or Box.com.
    - Plan and implement strategically, perhaps with a staged plan that focuses on the most used files first.
    - Use this as an opportunity to clean and re-organize files.
  - Evaluate potential information bottlenecks and consider how to use **Customer Relationship Management (CRM) or databases** to ensure access for all required users.
    - If data/information is stuck in one users’ computer, email or spreadsheet, consider moving to a database. Something like a CRM can help you keep organizational data in one system and accessible by all. Most have cloud-based options so this data can be accessible on any authorized computer, phone or tablet connected to the internet.

- Consider transitioning **paper files** to electronic records for easier access, search and security.
  - Scanning allows better access to traditional paper files.
  - OCR (Optical Character Recognition) enables searching within the contents of scanned files.
  - Be sure to properly secure and permission those files once moved to a digital format.

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