



## Town Hall: Fundraising During Coronavirus | March 18, 2020

*Following are questions posed in the Q&A and Chat box that were not addressed during the Town Hall, with responses from our panelists.*

**Craig DePole**, President, Newport One

**Eric Overman**, Vice President, Mal Warwick | Donordigital

**Polly Papsadore**, Director of Marketing & Business Development, Production Management Group

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I would be interested in knowing thoughts on changing ask strategies - limit upgraded asks? I'm thinking about organizations that are hospitals and directly impacted by this crisis.

**Craig:** I think a hospital in particular has a compelling reason to ask the donor to give more if they can at this time. I would test a more aggressive ask string.

**Polly:** I received a really good email the other day from Mass General Hospital. Look at what others are doing for balance and tone.

Is this an opportunity to bring on monthly donors at low levels, and then upgrade them later? Maybe for donors who typically give less than \$50 per year, asking them to chip in \$5 a month.

**Craig:** I hope so. We have a couple of clients launching monthly giving campaigns in the next week or two. I believe this is an opportunity for people to sign up who may have otherwise been on the fence or haven't had the time to consider it.

I think the bigger question is what conversation do we have with high level donors? Or mid-level donors who just saw their (savings for) kids' college tuition evaporate?

**Craig:** It's a difficult time for a lot of people. Similarly, in the 2008 recession, the organizations that continued to cultivate relationships with these high value donors found that the donors were generous when their portfolios returned. Treating the donor as a friend, expressing genuine concern for their situation and being understanding that they may not be able to give now is key. The donors' interest for the cause may not have changed even if they can't give right now. Use this time to try to deepen the relationship.

**Eric:** Now is a good time to make some efforts to see if they have DAF accounts since those funds don't experience the negative effects from market downturn.

**Polly:** I think we need to carefully monitor events in the days ahead. Things could get much worse before they get better. At this point, investors are looking for liquidity which is stressing the system. If the government doesn't come up with a good solution or mitigation strategy soon, things could get very dire quickly. But I do think we'll have a better idea about where we stand within the next two weeks in terms of the economy and the effectiveness of the social distancing policy, and any new direction from the government, and thus how people may feel about their own financial situation. My opinion.

A mail - postage question - since many mail donors are older, most likely, there will be limited or no trips to buy stamps. Should all mail return envelopes all be BRE's ... and then challenge is for an org to make the trip to the post office to open that acct.

**Craig:** Pre-stamped or BRE return envelopes would be useful at this time.

What are some examples of calls to action for donors right now?

Craig: Many organizations have provided a list of ways to help during this time with donating being only one of the ways. Animal shelters are looking for fosters. Meals on Wheels and other senior, veteran and human services organizations are looking for volunteers 18 and older to deliver food. It's unique to each cause. Ideally you'd look for ways to directly tie to the delivering programs and services, but you can also look for things donors can help with from home, perhaps making thank you calls or calling people to check in, creating small group video "coffee" meetings or happy hours to connect people, perhaps encourage people to be creative and post their favorite experience with your organizations.

Polly: I really like the idea of thank you calls and check in calls with donors. I remember Angel Aloma of Food for the Poor presented about how their callers checked in with donors in the tri-state area after Hurricane Sandy just to see how they were doing, and they got tremendously positive feedback. I think calls would be so welcome as people are anxious and lonely. This is something that nonprofit staff could do too, to keep their spirits up as well, making these human connections helps everyone feel better.

I would be interested in hearing thoughts on how one changes or adapts their messaging in an acquisition package - do you add an insert to the control addressing how the crisis is impacting the organization and the critical need for support?

Craig: We are adding an insert in some and in others, where appropriate, we are changing a few words in the letters to reference "this challenging time" or "challenging times like these". Acquisition controls are built on years of testing. You don't want to completely overhaul it for this moment, but at the same time, you don't want to ignore the world around you.

The poll asks about acquisition mail plans, but what about house mail? Renewals and appeals?

Craig: It's more important than ever to continue your appeals and renewals to your donors. These are people who already have an affinity to your cause. Keep communicating and explain your need.

Polly: Especially since we should be out of this situation in a matter of a few months so with our lead times on planning campaigns and programs, it makes sense to keep moving forward.

Any tactical fundraising recommendations for an organization not directly impacted (e.g., not a public venue, not holding events, not providing services to people)?

Craig: Keep communicating honestly about the fact that your organization is not directly impacted but your mission continues and needs support.

If you have a bonafide connection to helping find a cure/treatment to COVID-19, what are thoughts on this time as an acquisition opportunity without looking opportunistic?

Craig: Absolutely.

Eric: Yes.

Polly: Agreed!!!