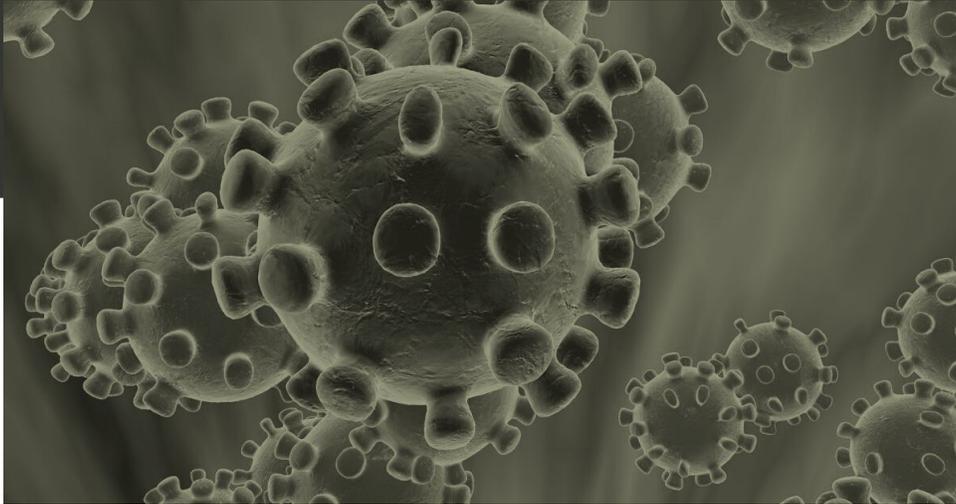


Coronavirus and Nonprofits: Challenges & Resources

03.13.20 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



What a difference a week makes.

Last week, the news media focused on the minutiae of the primary-election horse race. This week, Americans have been forced to confront the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

For the nonprofit sector, the emergency becomes a double-barreled crisis: we are both victims and saviors. This is not an unfamiliar conundrum; there are frequent natural disasters that devastate one area or another. This nation's charitable organizations – and, in particular, the social service agencies – are called upon over and over to respond with aid and assistance at the same time they must cope with the same destruction that cripples every person or entity in the disaster locale.

But the coronavirus emergency is bigger and deeper; it is poised to set off enormous social and financial disruption – immediately and worldwide.

It's certainly, as described by the National Council of Nonprofits (NCN) in *Nonprofits and Coronavirus, COVID-19*, an “evolving situation with varied impacts around the world and across the states.” The first step for the sector is to assess – as much as possible at this early stage – the scope of the challenge. The next step is to collect and disseminate as much information as possible, and to encourage a robust discussion about how to cope, once again, with the dual victim/savior role. The third stage is to take action, especially for the most pressing matters including how to safeguard the workforce and what to do about large events coming up soon.

Unfortunately, time is of the essence, and these steps must be taken right away and at the same time.

Coronavirus: Resources

Fortunately, though, there is already a robust body of information and resources – growing larger by the hour – available to the nation’s nonprofits to help them through the next difficult days, weeks, and months.

The following sources are among the many already online that include overviews and initial guidance as well as include valuable resource links:

. ***National Council of Nonprofits***

On its website, NCN offers [*The Nonprofit Community Confronts the Coronavirus*](#) and [*Nonprofits and Coronavirus, COVID-19*](#), suggesting several immediate steps including: meeting with staff about policies including sick leave, reviewing your business continuity and recovery plan (or creating one; see [sample business continuity plan](#)), and planning for working remotely (see links to free conferencing and remote-work tools).

There are Important links include also to (so far) nineteen state associations of nonprofits that “have been [exchanging information](#) they’re discovering about the fast-moving novel disease. After curating the best information about appropriate actions, they’re each tailoring the information and ideas specifically for nonprofits in their states, including information from their own state and local health officials when possible.”

Among the additional links is [Nonprofit Insurance and COVID-19](#) (March 10, 2020) and [Updates of COVID-19 Coronavirus and How to Respond](#) (March 13, 2020)

. ***Washington Nonprofits***

In [Coronavirus Response Resources for Nonprofits](#) (March 4, 2020, updated March 11, 2020) Laura Pierce offers insights about key questions and issues, and offers links to information as well as to timely webinars including its [Resilient Fundraising Strategies](#) and Alternatives to Meeting in Person.”

. ***The Bridgespan Group***

Bridgespan has updated its series titled *8 Steps to Managing Through Tough Times* “with content to help inform the critical choices nonprofits and funders are making in the wake of COVID-19.” In [COVID-19 Resources for Nonprofits and Funders](#), Bridgespan offers a “collection of online resources that offer valuable guidance on navigating the current times—both responding to the pandemic and preparing for the possibility of an economic downturn.”

It also offers four valuable case studies of nonprofits in the Seattle area – ground zero for the pandemic outbreak in the United States – which had a few weeks’ head start on the issues which will now face nonprofits around the nation. See, for example, [Report from Seattle: Jewish Family Service](#) (3/12/2020) in which CEO Will Berkovitz discusses “building and using a crisis response team, figuring out how best to keep serving clients, making decisions during a crisis, and operating while conditions are changing rapidly.” According to Berkovitz, “There’s so much uncertainty. This is like white-water rafting in the fog.”

. ***The Chronicle of Philanthropy***

In [*Responding to the Coronavirus Outbreak: Resources to Help Nonprofits*](#) (March 12, 2020), the Chronicle of Philanthropy staff have collected resource links on topics including: [*Coronavirus Advice for Nonprofit Leaders*](#) (March 9, 2020), [*How Nonprofits & Foundations Can Use Scenario Planning to Prepare for Coronavirus*](#) (March 2, 2020), and [*Nonprofit Resources for Remote Work During the Covid-19*](#) (March 6, 2020).

Directors' Duties in this Crisis

In [*Nonprofit Governance: Coronavirus and COVID-19*](#) (March 11, 2020), Gene Takagi, Esq., reminds us that each nonprofit's board of directors must "start asking questions about how" [the massive social and economic disruptions we're just beginning to see] "will affect their organizations, beneficiaries, employees and volunteers, work cultures, programs, fundraising, events, meetings, businesses, investments, governance, management, and operations." Directors must also consider how the organization will react and adapt consistent with "missions, values, and sustainability."

These are not only program and mission issues; they are potential legal issues, too: the "... circumstances now are substantially different from last month, and each director must consider how that changes the care and attention an ordinarily prudent director would provide to their organization."

Conclusion

In [*The Nonprofit Community Confronts the Coronavirus*](#), the National Council of Nonprofits reminds us that "[a] community's character is on display when a crisis hits." Already, in our sector, "the emerging crisis is demonstrating humanity's finer instincts."