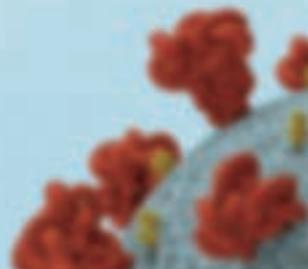
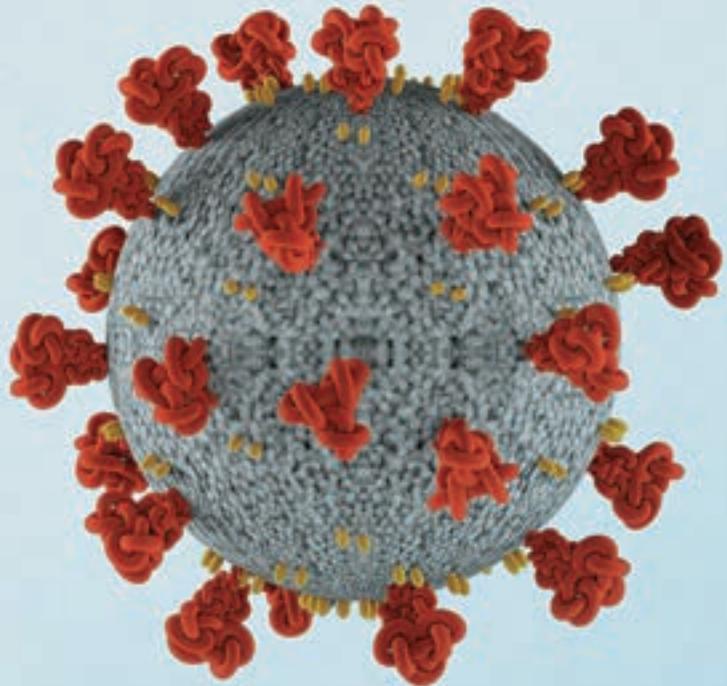
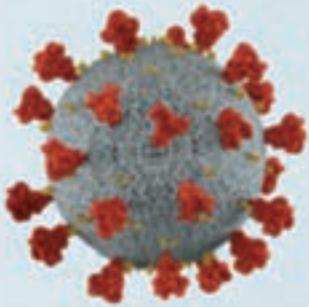


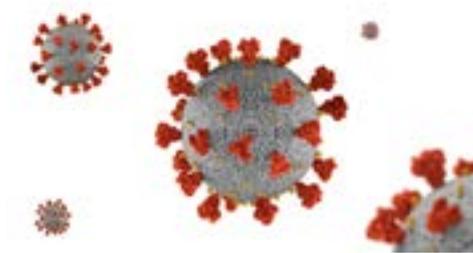
# Nonprofit Crisis Management

## *Response to COVID-19*

Roseanne Mirabella, Heather Carpenter, Norman A. Dolch,  
Timothy J. Hoffman, Helen Wise



# **Nonprofit Crisis Management: Response to COVID-19**



**Roseanne Mirabella  
Heather Carpenter  
Norman A. Dolch  
Timothy J. Hoffman  
Helen Wise**

**SAGAMORE  VENTURE**

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*We dedicate this book to the many nonprofit professionals and volunteers who have been good stewards to their organizations and strived to serve their constituents, especially those from marginalized constituencies.*



## Overview of the Sagamore-Venture Nonprofit Series

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many colleges and universities across the country changed from 18-week semesters to 15-week semesters, which brought about changes in course content, course projects, and course writing assignments. The last 10 years have seen a similar change, particularly in graduate online courses, from 15-week courses to seven or eight weeks. Our observation is that textbooks have not adapted. Previous changes from 18 to 15 weeks eventually saw a reduction in chapters in many textbooks to 15. The Sagamore Publishing Nonprofit Series is targeted for the new seven- or eight-week courses.

In seven- and eight-week courses, decisions have to be made about content. Instructional consultants have advised the editors that in developing these courses, decisions have to be made regarding what is really important for students to know. The content of each book in this series reflects this advice. Are these books useful in courses of longer duration? We think so, because the content of the books in the series conveys the essential knowledge and skills on the topic of the book.

As the 21st century progresses, we are convinced that knowledge and skills are not enough for nonprofit professionals and key volunteer leaders. This is why each book has a critical thinking component. Nonprofit leaders today need to carefully apply their knowledge and skills by thinking how actions will impact the organization, its personnel, its clients, and the community in general. This is not necessarily new or novel, but it is important to encourage potential leaders to be critical thinkers.

Machiavelli in the 1400s pointed out that leaders needed to use their intellect rather than always rely physical strengths. The importance of intellect is again pointed out by James Maccoby in the 1970s in his book, *The Gamesman*, in which he sees leaders like the quarterbacks of a football team, who process information and make decisions about what play to run. For both Machiavelli and Maccoby, it was more than knowledge, it was the critical application of knowledge to situations. For Machiavelli in the 1400s, it was critically applying knowledge to situations confronting Italian city states; and for Maccoby in the 1970s, the leaders of corporations needed to apply knowledge to confront rapidly changing economic conditions. For the nonprofit leaders of today, this book series helps to make them critical thinkers who use knowledge and skills to advance the common good rather than just take action. How does the proposed action make the organization better, improve its personnel, better help the clients, and make the community a better place to live? This is the issue of the nonprofit world that the Sagamore-Venture Nonprofit Series addresses.



## Preface

*Crisis Management: Response to Covid-19* developed in response to student questions in our classes this past spring when our campuses were shutdown and the whole country was figuring out how to respond to the pandemic. It is a book responding to student interest and embraces stories of actual nonprofit organizations and their responses to those they serve, their employees, and the health challenges of Covid-19 and shelter-in-place orders across the country. It shares insight on a range of topics from leadership, fundraising, personnel issues, and risk management, to name a few.

This book is not a manual on risk management but rather is designed to promote critical thinking about dealing with unforeseen occurrences affecting one's community, one's organization, and those they serve. In the past, nonprofits have experienced crisis management in response to occurrences of a fixed time period such as fires, vehicle accidents, tornadoes, and hurricanes. What may be unique to the Covid-19 crisis management response is the unknown time of the required response.

Chapter one provides a broad overview of Covid-19 and crisis management by nonprofit organizations. Chapters then shift to a collection of stories about the responses of various types of nonprofit organizations to the health crisis in their communities, the stay-in-shelter orders closing their operations for 8 weeks or more, depending on their location. These are not randomly selected nonprofit stories but rather nonprofits known to the authors and selected because they deal with populations at particular risk of one type or another (mentally challenged individuals, abused women and their children, and homeless persons). The final chapter examines lessons for moving forward and being better prepared for future crises, including the possibility of future rampant Covid-19 outbreaks.

Our hope is that the book will provide instructors an insightful piece for discussing the response of the nonprofit sector to Covid-19. We hope it will stimulate thinking about the importance of leadership by professionals and key volunteers, such as board members during crises confronting organizations. Finally, we hope it will stimulate students to think critically and creatively about how nonprofits respond to their various constituents (clients, funders, personnel, etc.).

We dedicate this book to the many nonprofit professionals and volunteers who have been good stewards to their organizations and strived to serve their constituents, especially those from marginalized constituencies.

Roseanne Mirabella  
Heather Carpenter  
Norman A. Dolch  
Timothy J. Hoffman  
Helen Wise

## **Directory of Fund-Raising Strategies around COVID-19**

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScuYTOh9pil4ahpWPJTdxHox-FJAzh58w0aeu19X2O8KbtbZvQ/viewform>

This is a collection of resources to support the financial well-being and viability of nonprofit organization during and after the of the COVID-19 crisis from the students and faculty at Slippery Rock University's Department of Philanthropy, Nonprofit Leadership, and Public Affairs. Special thanks to Alice DelVecchio, Department Chair.

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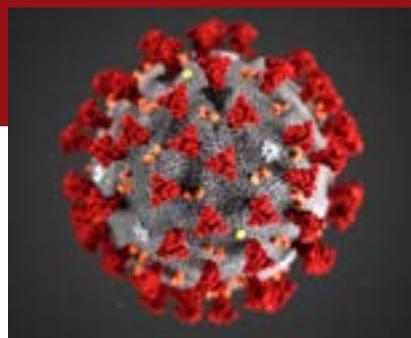
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## Chapter

# 1

# Nonprofits, Crisis Management, and COVID-19

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The 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic is a pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Centers for Disease Control, 2020). This pandemic has caused the world to shift how it operates in a blink of an eye. With 1.9 million nonprofits operating in the United States (McKeever, 2019), various subsectors have been impacted in very different ways by this crisis of epic magnitude. This book attempts to explain crisis management from various perspectives of nonprofit leaders through a series of case studies of events that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic during the months of March and April 2020 when the country was sheltered in place. This book also provides crisis management perspectives and viewpoints that shed light on critical perspectives and equity issues in the nonprofit sector.

By March 15, 2020, most states had made the decision to shelter and place and close all nonessential businesses (Miller, 2020). However, nonprofits on the front lines of the crisis, such as hospitals, food banks, and social services agencies, began to ramp up their operations as school children around the country were sent

home, and layoffs began from almost every industry (Guina, 2020). Health care nonprofits and hospitals were scrambling to acquire personal protection devices (PPE) for their employees and ventilators and other necessary apparatus for their patients (Dunn & Fitzpatrick, 2020). Charter schools, the vast majority of which are nonprofit organizations, were impacted in their day-to-day operations, particularly those operating in low-income communities, where not only were they responsible for educating students, but were often the primary source of food, after-school programs and health care. Food banks saw a tremendous uptick in the number of food insecure people showing up at their doors, while at the same time experiencing a steep drop off in monetary donations and food donations from supermarkets and farms.

The United States government passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, aka the CARES Act, in March of 2020 (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2020), including provisions for a program to protect the earnings of Americans employed by small businesses and nonprofit organizations, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). In the first round of the PPP, almost \$350 billion in forgivable government-guaranteed loans became available. A survey of nonprofit access to PPP loans conducted by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities and the *NonProfit Times* (2020), found that more than half (59%) of nonprofits that submitted applications for PPP loans were accepted, while 24% of the organizations had their applications denied. The latter reported having to begin to lay off or furlough staff as a result of these denials, although they report expecting to reapply for loans upon the replenishing of funds with an additional \$310 billion by the federal government for the program in late April 2020 (Inside



Charity, 2020). The PPP provided critical financial support to nonprofit organizations that were on the front line of service delivery to beneficiaries in need.

However, despite the federal initiative, nonprofit organizations were hard hit financially. Entities such as LaPiana Associates (2020), Nonprofit Finance Fund, and Institute for Nonprofit Education and Research at the University of San Diego (2020) surveyed nonprofits about how they were responding to the pandemic. Early survey results in March 2019 showed that 19% of survey respondents had furloughed or laid off their staff. Forty-four percent of respondents had lost 0-50% of their revenue. In addition, 79% of respondents had moved their programs or services online (LaPiana, 2020). Nonprofit Finance Fund results showed that 61% of respondent nonprofit's services had either increased or decreased by 25% or more.

CAF America (2020), a global grant-making organization, polled 880 nonprofit organizations around the world to assess how COVID-19 was impacting their delivery of services. Almost all of the organizations reporting, 94%, reported being negatively impacted by the pandemic, including a reduction in contributions (73%), disruption in staffing (39%), increased costs (39%), and a break in the supply chain (25%). About 15% of the organizations responding to the survey reported having to suspend all operations, and more than 60% were forced to eliminate or suspend at least some of their regular service delivery, while also freezing salaries or reducing salaries of highly paid employees.

There are many best practices for crisis management and actions that nonprofits can take during a crisis. A typical crisis management plan, similar to a risk management plan, includes a crisis communications team, documentation and backup of key information, a technology and remote work plan, and a quick response team (Council on Michigan Foundations, 2014). Interestingly, following the crisis management plans wasn't as easy as anticipated for nonprofits, because the plans often didn't account for a system-wide pandemic. Even those crisis management plans that planned for a pandemic didn't plan for a countrywide shutdown of epic magnitude, which disrupted how organizations could continue their services in meaningful ways.

This crisis called for nonprofits to rethink how they operated from the leadership, human, financial, fund-raising, and programmatic perspective. Each of the cases will discuss a few of these nonprofit management perspectives as well as critical perspectives and recommendations for how nonprofits can prepare, react, and respond to future crises, whether small or of pandemic magnitude.

## Leadership

Leadership articles and webinars are calling for empathetic leaders, leaders who are flexible, and leaders who can pivot operations and make decisions quickly (Alexander, De Smet, & Weiss, 2020). Many nonprofit leaders were able to meet this challenge, while others were not. Some nonprofit leaders quickly pivoted, others were forced to close their operations. Leaders who understood finances applied for and persisted with the bureaucratic red tape of the Cares Act and Paycheck Protection Program. Others did not have the capacity or resources to be able to respond.

Leaders who can practice high levels of emotional intelligence and use intercultural competency and equity in their decision making saw the toll the pandemic had on the most marginalized communities and their front-line staff.

Their decision-making required strategic thinking and not following “normal” protocols. Strategic and annual plans were thrown out the window. Organizations needed to continually communicate with their stakeholders, which had positive or negative responses. Some organizations overcommunicated, others undercommunicated. Among the key factors recognized by those CAF America polled as essential for strong leadership during the pandemic were communication and listening to both internal and external stakeholders, adaptability and creativity in operations by other adjusting existing programs or launching new services, and planning through early evaluation of possible impacts and developing an action plan.

Finally, many nonprofit leaders faced with certain closure or devastating losses in revenue made the decision to pivot their operations to services needed during the crisis. By being adaptive and responsive to community needs, these organizations were not only able to survive, but filled an important gap in services. Among these were the Discovery Center in Missouri that closed its museum and reopened as a childcare center for children of essential workers; food banks across the country shifted their operations from inside pantry displays to curbside pick-ups with prepackaged food allotments to ensure social distancing; nonprofits adjusting communication strategies to ask more questions and practice “social listening” to stay relevant to community needs; and the United Way of Johnson County, Kansas, created a Facebook group to link those with supplies needs with those who have supplies on hand (United Way of Johnson and Washington Counties, 2020).

## Human Resources

Nonprofits either saw a huge increase or decrease in demand for services because of the pandemic (LaPiana, 2020). Those who saw a huge increase then had to act quickly to accommodate the increase in needs. The sector saw a volunteer effort for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) drives and donations of PPE equipment for front-line workers (Young, 2020). Leaders polled by CAF America report that team commitment on the part of staff, volunteers, and board members, were key to organizational success during the pandemic (2020).

Many nonprofits made the transition to remote work, which caused them to quickly have to move to the cloud and provide money for various technology for their workers, including online meeting software (Cale & Forbes, 2020). These technology shifts have been disruptive for nonprofit employees and clients. Organizations that could normally meet with their clients and constituents in person slowly tried to adapt to online or phone call client interactions. Children, youth, senior citizens, and low-income populations were impacted most by these shifts. Access to wifi and a computer became necessities to complete work assignments, but many nonprofits were unable to provide these supports to their workers.

Those nonprofits that saw a complete decline in services, such as childcare facilities, laid off workers. Early unemployment numbers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020) are showing that women, people of color (POC), young people, and the poorest workers were the hardest hit by layoffs. Women and POC hold many of the front-line direct service jobs such as childcare workers, caseworkers, and art organization employees, and were often the first to be let go. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in April 2020 that the unemployment rate rose sharply among all major categories of workers. Howev-



er, the rate was 13% for adult men compared with almost 16% for adult women, and by race, while the unemployment rate for whites reached 14%, more than 16% of African Americans were out of work, and unemployment among Latinos reached its highest level ever recorded, almost 19%. Employees earning less than \$20 an hour were 115% more likely than those making \$30 an hour to be laid off. And young people were more negatively impacted than their older peers; those under 25 experienced a higher rate of job loss (93%) than those 35 and older, with a staggering 31.9% unemployment rate for teenagers.

With children home full time, learning remotely, survey results show that men were more productive while women were responsible for the brunt of child-care and remote learning responsibilities (Elks, 2020). This continual push for business as usual is taking a toll on individuals' mental health, particularly those who are sheltering in place while working, remote schooling their children, and perhaps even attending school themselves. As reported by Kindred Counseling (2020), there were steps that many nonprofits took to safeguard equity in remote workplaces for employees, including ensuring employees had necessary technology such as a computer with required software and access to wifi, putting policies in place outlining expectations for remote work, sick leave, and other work protocols, training where necessary, acknowledging differences in homelife that might impact work such as remote schooling children, living in a multi-generational household, and lack of quiet workspaces, and developing plans to give employees assurance that any necessary furloughs or pay reductions were created fairly and communicated clearly.

## **Financial Management**

With many nonprofits reliant on fees for services from government funding, the reduction in government workforce resulting from the pandemic, caused more delays than usual in payments for services. In addition, many nonprofits locked into restricted funding had to have tough conversations and bring to a halt many programs that they had planned on opening. Some nonprofits were more successful than others in managing finances during the pandemic, as reported by CAF America (2020). Nonprofits that were more successful in riding out the pandemic often had good financial reserves and good fiscal management, the ability to raise needed funds based on trust and their good reputation, and cutting expenses such as elimination nonessential costs and reducing overhead.

Facing the lost of revenue, nonprofit organizations were advised to take certain steps during these unprecedented times of the pandemic to assess their financial situation and position themselves for all possible exigencies. Nonprofits

should determine how to best manage their cash flow through a critical examination of revenue and expenses including an understanding of reserves and other possibilities for liquidity of assets. This exercise will assist the leadership in determining if they have enough cash to cover daily expenses, enough of a cushion in reserves to manage fluctuations in income, and the ability to manage debt and other financial obligations over the course of the pandemic.



## **Fund-Raising Including Grantmaking**

To respond to the increased need of the nonprofit sector during the pandemic, the grantmaking community did a unified call (Council on Foundations, 2020):

As of May 11, over 745 funders responded by signing a pledge of action as follows:

- Loosen or eliminate the restrictions on current grants. This included converting project-based grants to unrestricted support; accelerating payment schedules; and not holding grantees responsible if conferences, events, and other project deliverables must be postponed or canceled.
- Make new grants as unrestricted as possible, so nonprofit partners have maximum flexibility to respond to this crisis. We will also support organizations created and led by the communities most affected that we may not fund currently.
- Reduce what we ask of our nonprofit partners, postponing reporting requirements, site visits, and other demands on their time during this challenging period.
- Contribute to community-based emergency response funds and other efforts to address the health and economic impact on those most affected by this pandemic.

- Communicate proactively and regularly about our decision-making and response to provide helpful information while not asking more of grantee partners.
- Commit to listening to our partners and especially to those communities least heard, lifting up their voices and experiences to inform public discourse and our own decision-making so we can act on their feedback. We recognize that the best solutions to the manifold crises caused by COVID-19 are not found within foundations.
- Support, as appropriate, grantee partners advocating for important public policy changes to fight the pandemic and deliver an equitable and just emergency response for all. This may include its economic impact on workers, such as expanded paid sick leave; increasing civic participation; access to affordable health care; and expanded income and rental assistance. It should also include lending our voices to calls to action led by grantee partners, at their direction and request.
- Learn from these emergency practices and share what they teach us about effective partnership and philanthropic support, so we may consider adjusting our practices more fundamentally in the future, in more stable times, based on all we learn.

Experts have encouraged nonprofits to not stop fund-raising during the crisis, encouraging them to pivot to other methods of fund-raising that don't require large gatherings or other face-to-face scenarios. One way to do this is by increasing the use of technology and digital methods of raising funds. For example, on May 5, there was a U.S.-wide Giving Tuesday created as an emergency response to COVID-19 to emulate the historic Giving Tuesday held on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. Activities were held in more than 145 countries as millions of people donated money, talent, and time to make a difference in the lives of others. Giving Tuesday reported on many of the outcomes of this initiative, including a collaboration in Texas that included more than 45,000 donors giving more than \$20 million and 9,400 donors pledging 300,000 volunteer hours to 2,500 nonprofits in Texas, a 12-year-old whose grandma is an essential worker at Lowe's, organized a group that delivered handwritten thank-you notes and hand-sewn masks to the "unsung heroes" at Lowes, and families from Northeast Ohio participated in six community challenges that raised funds for 40 local nonprofits in events coordinated by Together at Home with Cleveland Kids (Giving Tuesday, 2020).

## Marketing and Social Media Awareness

With so many stories of hardship and suffering, nonprofits found themselves competing for visibility with everyone else. In addition, faced with financial shortages, worker furloughs, and increased community needs, nonprofit leaders are often hard pressed or quite frankly too overwhelmed to think about keeping up their website and social media presence. Experts caution that although struggling during this time, it is essential for nonprofits to continue marketing themselves through digital means. Experts in the field suggested a number of ways in which nonprofits could increase their social media presence while also remaining sensitive to the realities of the community living during the pandemic (Candid, 2020). For example, nonprofits in low-income areas can share information on the devastating impact of the virus on those living in poverty as they are more likely to contract and die from the disease. Those less impacted financially by the pandemic can be encouraged to increase their donations to offset the loss of donations from those unable to keep up their support. Link your organization's hashtag to those that are trending to illustrate how vital your organization's services are at this moment. An example would be an advocacy group combatting domestic violence by linking their organization's twitter handle to vital information on protecting vulnerable people remotely during the lockdown.

For the most part, all the issues described above were usually not accounted for in the typical crisis management plan, as the cases that follow will attest to. As a result, there was a great human toll exacted as a result of the pandemic, a toll on the mental health of individuals both those working for and those who are beneficiaries of nonprofit organizations, and uneven access to resources that became obvious as the weeks of the pandemic progressed.

In the next five chapters of this book, we explore the COVID-19 response of these nonprofit organizations located across the USA:

- Hope Connection
- Hope Place of Texas
- Unified Vailsburg Services Organization
- NJ Coalition for Inclusive Education
- United Way of Central Maryland
- Jersey Battered Women's Services

## Critical Thinking

1. What did the typical risk management plan look like and how do nonprofit organizations need to modify their thinking about these plans?
2. What is the role of creative response and ingenuity to unforeseen occurrences when it comes to risk management?
3. Is there a difference in responding to risk from a management and leadership perspective?

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