

A storm's a comin':

THREE YEARS PRIOR

Batten down the hatches

By Sharon Danosky

Non-profits have weathered storms in the past; so much so that stormy weather is just part of the long-range forecast. The beauty of having weathered so many in recent years, is that we have gained perspective and learned a thing or two about how to prepare and how to batten down the hatches. With anticipated cuts in both federal and state budgets, we contend that the time to do so is now. At Danosky & Associates, we put our heads together and have compiled a list for you to consider as the storm clouds begin to gather. We know for some, you may be already be seeing the early weather warnings. For others, the forecast is further down the road. Regardless of where you are – here are a few suggestions.



1) Plan.

This is a good time to seriously consider your strategic plan. You may need to adjust it. Focus on those areas that will have the greatest effect – whether it is operational or building one initiative that will have the greatest impact. If you don't have a strategic plan – then it is wise to invest in doing one. With strong strategic objectives you won't get lost in the myriad of challenges that are bound to come your way.

2) Perform an organizational assessment.

Understand where your strengths are and what areas are most vulnerable. How can you modify your systems, build capacity, strengthen your teams, and improve your processes so that you are operating on all cylinders?

3) Test your assumptions.

Budgets and financial plans are based on good assumptions: growth assumptions, revenue assumptions, cost assumptions and others. Testing those assumptions will allow you to do the financial modeling and scenario planning that can anticipate changes and act precipitously when they occur.

4) Invest in fundraising.

If there were a downturn in our economy, donors do not stop giving; rather they become more selective. Are you retaining your donors, stewarding their generosity and building the relationships that ensure they will continue to give and further invest in your organization when the going gets rough.

5) Utilize social media.

Building a community of support – whether it is for advocacy or raising money or volunteers, is most effectively done by using multi-plat-formed messaging. Capturing stories and communicating both your value and impact can set the stage for stronger support in the most cost effective manner possible.

6) Collaborate.

This a term that has been used by the sector for a generation or more. Collaboration may be as simple as sharing people, sharing space or sharing back-office systems. For some, though, collective impact, innovative partnerships, acquisition of new services or even merging with another organization can all have a meaningful impact on how you deliver your mission.

While we hope that funding and support is stable, we know that the above steps will serve you well at any time. And early investment in these activities will strengthen the organization, regardless of the weather o'er the horizon.