

# Crisis Communication Beyond the first few weeks

By Sharon Danosky

We are now entering the sixth week of “Sheltering at Home.” Nothing seems normal, yet many have found a new routine and rhythm. And so it should be with your communications at this stage.



As you move through this extended crisis, maintaining communications with your constituents is vitally important. One and done just doesn't work. Instead, this is the time to engage with your constituents – and particularly your donors.

During a crisis there are actually four phases to the communication process. Each requires different messaging which is based on the changing perspective and circumstances of your constituents – and your organization. If done well, each phase can strengthen the connection with your constituents and lead you to a having a stronger long-term relationship.

**Phase 1:** This is all about the immediate crisis and the changes that are coming about every day. We are in the midst and even toward the end of this phase. This phase was marked by your immediately changing what you were doing, notifying your constituents of those changes, cancelling activities, moving to a virtual platform. Those who were on the front lines, offering food, shelter, direct care – you found yourselves having to communicate quickly and urgently. Others – museums, libraries – you were also notifying your constituents of the changes.

**Phase 2:** At this phase, the initial shock has subsided. Now into the 6<sup>th</sup> week of sheltering at home, people know what these changes are for the most part – no one is going to a library to borrow a book – they are now receiving programs virtually at home. This is the time where you need to communicate

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value, comfort, and reassurance. This is where consistent communications are so important. You need to pivot from the crisis mode to providing current, factual, trust-based information along with information that can enhance people's lives – from comfort to entertainment - to ways they can help and make a difference.

**Phase 3:** – Once the re-opening of our state begins – you will need to pivot your communications once again. At this stage it will be important to consider that there are segments of the population whose circumstances will have changed. So thoughtful and mindful communications are a necessity. It won't be a celebration and a time to reschedule your events. During this time it will be important to read the tea leaves, and continue to provide relevant information. Are your programs open – will you continue virtually; can you bring people together in small groups; are there now opportunities for people to volunteer while socially distancing?

**Phase 4:** This is the phase where we enter “a different normal”. We don't know what that will be. But with effective communications, you can bring your constituents with you. Help them see how you have evolved, grown, become stronger and able to offer your programming differently. It is very important during this phase not to lose sight of consistent communications and to recognize how valuable your organization is. With this phase - you will begin to reap the good will you have generated.