



Trends that Will Affect You This Year – & How to Take Advantage of Them

The upheavals of 2020 may be over, but you now face new, unique challenges. Here's how to meet them with aplomb.

By Nicole M. Jolley

The top issues this year? Most are continuations of last year's challenges but with one overarching theme: sustainability. Keep that word in mind as you consider your current struggles.

Face Your Challenges with a Resilient Mind

Here's a rundown of today's challenges and ways to address them.

Finding funding: Federal and state grants are never a certainty – especially not during uncertain times. These days, government budgets fluctuate so much that it would be imprudent to count on these funds to help you carry out vital parts of your mission. Instead, focus your energy this year on obtaining additional and diverse sources of funding.

Consider trimming your budget down to key operational line items that will allow you to keep the doors open. View any potential federal and state grants as “bonus money” – icing on the cake.

Adjusting to tax deductions: There continue to be discussions around universal charitable deductions on the federal level. As legislators consider the impact of the coronavirus, you can expect to see additional refinements to last year's CARES Act, which allows all taxpayers to deduct charitable contributions on their tax forms. See your tax advisor for guidance on your specific situation.

Watching for cybersecurity risks: With more people working online, there's a greater risk of cybercams and data breaches.

- **Warn everyone in your organization** not to click on links from suspicious senders. Always ignore e-mails with multiple typos and grammatical errors.
- **Safeguard information** related to your clients – including their personally identifiable information (pii) and confidential records – by limiting the information to only those who absolutely must have access to these digital records.
- **Don't use unsecured smart home devices while working from home.** Secure your home's wi-fi access point with a new password. Connect to your organization's virtual private network (VPN) to create a trusted internet connection between you and your organization.
- **Be wary of suspicious login info requests.** While staff and volunteers may ask you to share your login information when you're working at home, beware hackers who pose as members of your community. Update your passwords every two weeks and use two-factor authentication that verifies a person's identity for all internal systems and data.
- **Notice unexpected visitors on your video conferences.** Use the waiting room feature of video conferencing to screen attendees and require passwords for all participants.

Staying engaged at every level: Rather than focusing on when you can return to “business as usual,” concentrate on what you can do to ensure business continuity. For example:

- **Hold online meetings.** Your staff, board, and volunteers should still be meeting regularly – even if it needs to be online for the time being. A multitude of platforms have

emerged as vital to keeping the world running, including FaceTime, Google Hangouts, Zoom, GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, and Cisco Webex.

- **Host live talks and forums.** You can use YouTube, Facebook Live, and other platforms to host live speakers, open forums, and other methods of creating community. Either host a question-and-answer period via a chat sidebar or solicit questions and comments through social media.
- **Make phone calls.** Don't dismiss the importance of a good, old-fashioned phone call to foster engagement.
- **Create a resource repository.** Use your website to create a space tailored specifically to the people you serve. You can create a contact form that allows people to get in touch with questions, concerns, and needs, as well as a list of service opportunities unique to this unprecedented time.

Make the Most of Every Opportunity

Here are a few more steps you can take to make the most of the resources you have – and find some new ones.

Communicate with your stakeholders. Keep in close contact with your leaders, staff, volunteers, donors, and clients using a variety of mediums to keep them engaged.

Continue to live out your mission. Now is the time to show your community why you exist, and why the programs and services you provide are so vital.

If you need assistance, ask for it. Send a message to your e-mail list explaining your financial situation and what it will take for you to continue providing services to the people who depend on you. Be specific. You'll be surprised by how many people come to the rescue once they know you need help.


Actively promote online giving to your organization. Make sure you have a good system in place to donate online. People are much more likely to donate if they can do so quickly and digitally. Additionally, don't assume your supporters know your needs. Put together an online giving campaign – with milestones and incentives – that will help your organization through this tough time.

Be flexible with your donors and volunteers. Some donors may no longer be able to give financially. Consider whether they can instead help you with your social media strategy or bring in other donors who are passionate about the cause.

Likewise, some volunteers may no longer be able to serve in person due to concerns about their health or changes in how you offer your services. Reach out to your loyal volunteers and ask them to consider converting their time into money until they can resume their volunteer activities for your organization.

Think of creative fundraising ideas. The following are a few pieces of advice as you attempt to tweak the format of annual fundraisers . . . or try some new ones.

- **Don't knock a virtual event until you've tried one.** The possibilities are limitless when you're raising money online. For years, crowdfunding campaigns have leveraged the power of social media to spread the word. And people are becoming creative with virtual runs, talent shows, and online auctions.
- **Wrack your brain to think of unique incentives.** What items are hard to find in your area? Listen to what your community wants and deliver. One humane society in Wisconsin even pledged to give every donor a handmade (and often hilariously poor) drawing of the donor's pet. Innovative ideas like that can turn into huge successes.
- **Consider socially distanced events** in lieu of in-person services such as doing chores or delivering items. It's key to prioritize safety above everything else. Follow all Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations for masking and other safety precautions.

The goal is sustainability. The tactic is adaptability. And the mission? Well, the mission is whatever drives you – and whatever will keep you grounded as you work to keep up with all the changes. 

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It's a Time Like No Other

To ride these trends into a successful future, you'll need to find a balance of old and new tactics. Gather tips from articles such as these at NonprofitWorld.org:

Raising Funds in an Uncertain Economy (Vol. 27, No. 2)

Mitigate Cyber Risks with the Right Security Controls (Vol. 36, No. 1)

Simple Tips to Nail Your Online Fundraising (Vol. 38, No. 1)

New Ideas for a New Era (Vol. 38, No. 3)

Top 10 Things Donors Want from Your Website (Vol. 38, No. 3)

Restructuring Contracts in Stressful Times (Vol. 28, No. 3)

Livestreaming for Good: A Nonprofit Guide (Vol. 38, No. 3)

How Can You Keep Your Remote Workers Productive? (Vol. 38, No. 3)

Connecting through the Camera & Keyboard (Vol. 38, No. 3)

Top Tips for Tough Times (Vol. 27, No. 4)

The Power of Crowdfunding (Vol. 38, No. 3)