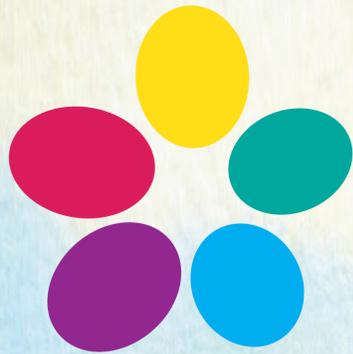


MANAGING IN A PANDEMIC

Crisis Management Tips for Charities



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Managing in a Pandemic - Crisis Management Tips for Charities

Public health systems worldwide have either already reached breaking point or are preparing for a critical situation. This has seen governments across the world take decisive action to protect their citizens and managing the strain on already busy hospitals. In Australia this has most recently seen the unprecedented level 4 travel restrictions put in place.

As seen during the Global Financial Crisis organisations are starting to make decisions which impact the livelihood of many Australian employees with the flow of effect to other businesses likely to follow. Clearly, Whilst we have experienced economic shocks in the past and global health matters the Covid-19 pandemic has not been experienced by most people in this lifetime so there is not a set template for charities to follow in how to manage through this environment. It is fair to say there will be continued adjustments needed as things develop and particularly leading into the Australian winter.

Many charity leaders will be dealing with the pandemic within their workplaces in addition to the need to plan and react for their charities. Disruption is already occurring and will continue for some time yet the work of many charitable organisations is most needed at these times. Planning and being prepared to adjust are critical. The Impact Suite hopes the following guidance helps charities to navigate the current environment.

1. Designate someone in your organisation to assess the latest government information daily.

Events and government responses are evolving at a rapid pace with updates from the Chief Medical Officer and/or state and federal government officials occurring daily. A week or so ago things seemed to be travelling more slowly with updates every few days. The current environment requires daily monitoring and having someone in your charity responsible to review the latest advice and update your executive, or crisis management, team is highly recommended. This individual should consider the new information in the context of your charity and ensure their updates consider possible issues and risks now and those that may arise soon. This lens needs to include your workers, the people you support, your community and your organisation.



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2. Make decisions based on factual information (beware of dramatics)

You have no doubt already seen a lot of information in the news and on social media which has later been reported to be incorrect. Media outlets sometimes overdramatise reports so it is important you make decisions based on factual information issued by a responsible source such as those being issues by Federal and State Governments and Health Departments. Rather than react to sensationalised reports, take the time to make sure the information you are using is current and factual.

3. Never assume - you know what they say about that!

As the leaders of your organisation you must ensure all workers and stakeholders are informed by you. Whilst it is hard to avoid information about Covid-19 at the moment you cannot assume your community has the information they need. This information will not only be about the pandemic but more importantly for them is to know how it is affecting your organisation and what that means for them. We highly recommend you establish a timetable of updates to your community and stick to that timetable. Even if you have nothing new to update them on, if you have established a rhythm and advised them you will be updating say once a week - make sure you do, even to say there is nothing new to report.

4. Use experts where needed

Depending on your organisation you may need to engage experts. For example, if you cannot revert to social distancing due to the nature of your work you may need to engage the advice of a public health expert to ensure both your workers and their clients are safe. At times experts can be misaligned on their advice. Where this occurs you should consult with multiple experts to determine the appropriate course of action for your organisation. It will be critical to constantly check any process you put in place still meets the current advice. Where it does not you will need to amend, adjust and communicate.



5. Lead with an open mind

As discussed earlier in this paper, the situation is ever evolving. It is critical you lead with an open mind or you may become complacent once you have put actions in place. Daily updates need to be followed by a review of all plans to assess whether adjustments are necessary based on new information.

Charities generally have a much flatter structure than large organisations which is a benefit in crisis management as you are able to be more agile and generally faster to decision making as multiple layers in a hierarchy are not in place. Any approved plans and new processes should be considered as simply the current document as it may need to be amended at any time given the rapidly changing environment.

6. Don't get caught up in Indecision

In-decision can be stifling for any organisation in a crisis. Not acting can cause a much worse outcome on many fronts including reputation. Having a decision-making structure, such as general consensus versus full agreement, is critical. It will also be critical to ensure everyone who has an opinion is heard providing their contribution is anchored in the reputable facts provided.

You may need to consider forming a Crisis Management Team with a smaller group of individuals with the best skills to manage and make decisions for your organisation. Finding the right balance in communicating will be critical so as not to bombard your community but also not to have too long between communications that they become anxious or worried.



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Key areas to cover for your organisation

1. Workforce

If your workforce cannot socially distance you will need appropriate plans and new processes to protect their health and that of your clients. You will need to order supplies, where needed, to ensure the safety of your people. Where obstacles exist, you need to anticipate these and provide your workers with scenarios and guidance. For those with a distributed workforce you should consider setting up a private group communication channel for workers to share issues and how they have resolved on the ground. This will allow best practice sharing and also for you to log incidents and determine new processes where needed. In addition, if your workforce now needs to operate remotely you need to put in place regular check ins, means to facilitate group meetings (online) and make sure you are checking on their health and well-being (physical and mental) regularly along with providing access or information about support resources.

2. Mental Health

Your workforce will likely be reading a mixture of factual information along with non-factual. We have already seen cases of misinformation such as fake Covid-19 test kits and self-diagnosis checklists. This may lead your workers to feelings of confusion and worry about their own personal actions and as a worker. It will be very important that you communicate in a timely manner on any changes and updates. It will also be critical for you to provide a balanced and calm message to both your workers and your community so they feel you have matters under control. Where you are making significant decisions it will be important to provide some explanation. This has proven to be well received as seen in the recent announcements from the Australian Prime Minister and Chief Medical Officer.



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3. Face to Face

The Australian government has put in place travel restrictions however these do not apply to domestic travel. Where your organisation needs to interact with your stakeholders face to face it will be important for you to plan workforce travel guidelines and prepare for changes should further mobility restrictions be introduced.

4. Supplies

If your organisation relies on supplies to support your community, you should contact your suppliers. You need to understand if they are able to continue to provide supplies, whether they expect increased costs due to demand and whether they can meet additional stock needs should your workload increase. It is recommended you also look for alternate suppliers, so you are ready to engage them should this be required.

5. Demands

As a charity you may find the demand for your services increases beyond your capacity. If you do not already have measurement in place to track key lead indicators such as enquiries and requests you should put those in place now. This will allow your Crisis Management Team to commence planning for solutions to meet increased demand as early as possible.

6. Teamwork

This is an unprecedented event. As an organisation you may identify practices and solutions to issues that other Australian charities could benefit from as they support their communities. Sharing your best practices and possibly your resources to help another charity meet demand would help everyone to get through the pandemic. Look out for opportunities to demonstrate teamwork with your mates.



7. Document your actions, what worked and what didn't

This is a significant issue globally, but it is unlikely to be the last crisis your organisation will face in its history. As you are managing the crisis it is easy to forget to keep notes of what actions you took, why, what worked and what could have been done better. It is absolutely critical for you to do this in a timely manner so you set your organisation up for the next event. Imagine if you, as the Crisis Management Team now, had a document to work off which had been developed by the previous Crisis Management Team; including what not to do, what did and didn't work last time and the recommended improvements. Preparation is critical in a good Crisis Management Plan. You cannot change the past if you are starting with a blank page now, but you can change the future for your organisation by taking a little extra time to track your decisions, the outcomes and learnings as you go.

8. Organisational Learning

At the end of the crisis make sure your organisation takes the time to learn. You may have implemented processes which were more efficient and could become part of your permanent way of working. This may include how your workforce responded to remote working. There are financial and employee engagement benefits to working from home. It is worth analysing how effective it was and whether this should now become normal practice. Lastly, take the time to analyse how well you handled the crisis and what learnings you can take in regard to your leadership, decision-making, governance and people management. Events such as these have many challenges and they are a great opportunity to learn.



THE IMPACT SUITE



The Impact Suite was founded with a view that all social impact organisations irrespective of their location or size should have access to the best experts and ideas in order to maximise their impact for our community.

Too many organisations struggle with limited resources, meanwhile stakeholders and donors tend to focus on simple measures like 'administrative expenses' while missing the value of impact. With founders from all aspects within the sector including charity founders, board/committee members, consultants, technology developers, and analysts - we have developed a proprietary Social Impact Rating which focuses on governance aspects and social impact of Australian charities.

www.theimpactsuite.com

The Impact Suite's proprietary Social Impact Rating is only for Australian Charities and other social impact organisations. We have extensively researched and consider 5 key factors important to an organisation's sustainability and effectiveness in order for them to make a difference in our community. The Impact Suite has taken the symbolism of the lotus flower and used it as a vital measure of an organisation's sustainability with each petal representing the 5 key success factors - Purpose, People, Process, Impact, and Review. The Social Impact Rating helps anyone instantly identify good organisations. [Click here for more information.](#)

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