

Philanthropy Corner – June 26, 2011
“School’s Out For Summer – But Nonprofits Are Not”
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Summer has officially started—schools are out, many seasonal residents have left town, and vacation plans are being made. Some nonprofit organizations may be inclined to take a break for the summer waiting for donors and board members to return next season. But this isn’t the time for nonprofit organizations to sit back and wait. Rather, nonprofit organizations would be better served if they have appropriate plans in place, work with their boards on planning before they leave town, and keep board members and donors engaged throughout the summer.

Just like the preparation needed to secure your personal property for hurricane season, nonprofit organizations need to have a plan in place for their organization and staff, as well as clients, in case of a hurricane. Although hurricanes are the most prevalent natural disaster threat here in the Keys, a hurricane evacuation plan may also serve as an outline for the necessary steps to take during other types of disasters as well.

A hurricane evacuation plan should be part of an overall risk management plan that includes instructions for how to secure the physical site and all its contents, including the database of organizational records, as well as serving the needs of clients should a hurricane occur. A hurricane evacuation plan contains instructions for business interruption during an evacuation phase, remote operation phase and re-entry phase. Responsibilities of the board and staff are delineated in the plan which also contains a communication plan with instructions for how to inform key staff, supporters and clients in case of the need to operate remotely or shut down the business operations for an extended period of time. Creating a checklist and assembling the materials in an organized location such as a folder or notebook will make the process much more efficient when the time occurs. Once the plan is in place, updating the information and conducting a test at least annually before an actual emergency occurs is beneficial.

Prior to departing for the season or summer vacation, hopefully nonprofit groups convened their board to develop a strategic or annual work plan for the upcoming season. It is best to conduct a strategic planning session outside a regular board meeting in order to allocate sufficient time to discuss the organization’s future. In preparation of the work session, an evaluation of current programs and activities will help identify strategies for improvement or growth for discussion during the meeting. Using a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) is an efficient technique to uncover topics for discussion as well as identify market trends affecting the organization, nonprofit sector, or field of interest, constituents and clients. Once the strategic initiatives are identified and prioritized, a budget and fundraising plan can be created to identify funding sources to acquire the necessary resources needed to accomplish the activities.

Throughout the summer (and year round), successful nonprofit organizations maintain regular communication with their boards, donors and patrons. Having an ongoing communication strategy as part of a marketing and public relations program is a prerequisite of a successful fundraising plan. The internet has increased the relevance of computer generated communications and accessibility to information in order to maintain regular contact with clients, patrons and constituents. An active, regular communications strategy will help keep a nonprofit organization on a donor’s radar screen rather than being out of sight, out of mind when it’s time to ask for a gift or participation in a program.

Board engagement is also an important summer activity for nonprofit organizations. Email communications can keep board members informed and involved. There are many cost effective electronic communication tools and programs to help facilitate group participation. In today's mobile, computerized society, a great number of people regularly use a variety of electronic communication tools. Savvy board members may be available to help develop the appropriate infrastructure and tools to monitor and facilitate an electronic communication platform for the board and constituents for organizations with limited knowledge or staff.

Planning is an integral function of successful organizations. Utilizing the summer months to plan for next season and keep donors and board members engaged will positively affect the fundraising and momentum for any organization. With the appropriate plans and tools in place, nonprofit organizations will be better suited to withstand the forces of nature and the world in which we operate during this hurricane season and throughout the entire year.

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