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Navigating COVID-19 and 2020 Elections in Your End of Year Campaign

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If this year has taught us anything, it's the importance of having a plan. Not that anyone could have guessed what 2020 had in store! Rather, when the unexpected arrives, reviewing your initial plan reminds you of your end goal. Then you pivot as needed to set a new path to get there.

Nonprofit fundraisers know this process firsthand. Planning and pivoting are a regular part of our work. Although 2020 has been more challenging than expected, this is what you do! End-of-year fundraising is on the horizon, so it's time to focus on the end goal, assess the variables of the day, and take next steps to meet your nonprofit's goals.

PLAN

In the fundraising world, year-end is here—at least the planning is. Work with your development and marketing team to set goals, key messages, and campaign elements. Negotiate and source client or impact stories—as well as photography and video—from your services staff—these take time to collect, so don't wait. These personal and missional impact stories feed that Human-to-Human Approach.

The 2020 Presidential election is another factor that should be part of your plan for this year, specifically. Plan for either outcome—a lesson some of you learned in 2016.

As a progressive nonprofit, a Biden/Harris win likely means your base is ecstatic and joyful. But it their win could come with a slowdown for your nonprofit if your base takes some time to enjoy the win or because they're worn out from that achievement. Have messages ready to celebrate the win with them with a "don't forget" the work is not done.

And if Trump wins a second term, your base could may be too stunned or disillusioned to respond to the typical end-of-year campaign. You may need to test the messaging a bit more than usual to see what connects best. In fact, 2016 saw a bump in donations after the 2016 election because donors wanted to feel connected to important causes and make a difference. Either way, a Trump win in November will give fundraisers a reason to add urgency to their messaging.

Planning human-centered communications for your donor messaging acknowledges the emotional impact this election will have on your donors, and it enables you to push through to a successful year-end campaign.

Bonus note: don't forget to prime your board for the potential impact the election results could have upon your donors. This gives them a chance to be mentally and emotionally prepared for potential donor disengagement.

NURTURE

To set your year-end campaign up for maximum impact, you'll want to plant seeds in your October and November communications. We'll explore this in more in an upcoming supporter acquisition post, but in short, begin weaving in your theme's messaging to nurture donors' hearts for the full-on campaign to come.

For example, let's say you are a healthcare nonprofit and plan to ask for funding for prevention. You'll want the content on your channels to pave the way by highlighting the importance of prevention. Whether it's a message about diabetes or HIV or cancer, mention the importance of prevention and how your organization provides it. You could plan some blog posts that highlight types of prevention and how effective each one is. Maybe even consider some infographics for your website and social sharing. Feeling ambitious? Then consider an Instagram Q&A with your prevention staff. All of this will prime the pump

1. so your supporters see prevention is core to what you do and
2. with excellent content you can share when asking for money come end of year.

Or, let's say you offer after-school tutoring support for grade schoolers and plan to ask for funding to cover a new computer center. You can use your channels to prime the pump so your donors see the connection between computer access and future academic performance. You could consider a Facebook Live interview with a tech expert who will speak about the role of coding in inspiring children in their future careers.

This nurturing can be done in all channels—letters, emails, blog posts, social, and so on. Just don't go the extreme and *only* talk about prevention for four months! The goal is to slowly acquaint your audience to the importance of your campaign topic so when you make the ask, they aren't starting at square one in the decision-making process.

ASK

Let's get one thing straight: **you can ask** for money during COVID-19 pandemic. We know it can be uncomfortable, but the evidence we've seen with our client is consistent or growth in giving. In the wake of this pandemics, nonprofits like you have filled in the increasing chasms of support from our government. Trust us and trust that if you treat your donors as humans and not as transactions that asking during this time is a-okay. With that squared away, here are 3 tips for your success.

First, your ask needs to **be clear and consistent**. So often donors don't give because the need wasn't spelled out specifically enough. The easiest way to improve clarity is to have only one call to action per engagement. Thank you messaging is a great place to ask supporters to engage in other ways (social, video, sharing, volunteering). Don't clutter your ask emails with other requests beyond the your ask. Each communication element needs to have a specific aim. Remember that Human-to-Human Approach: you are talking to individual people, so talk with them as you would a friend. A message loaded down with requests is overwhelming and leads to paralysis. Help people engage with your organization in small, steady ways.

Second, **include GivingTuesday** as part of your ask strategy. There's no reason to have distinct campaign messaging for *both* GivingTuesday and year-end. Put that messaging to work for you during the entire year-end season, from GivingTuesday is a great chance to kick-off your end of year campaign.

Third, **schedule your emails** for maximum impact. Plenty of research details the best times and days to send emails. A study done by NextAfter found that donor inboxes are most crowded between 7 a.m. and Noon on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. You'll have to test your own email results to learn the best day and time for *your* donor file, but generally speaking, emails sent on weekdays between 1–2 p.m.—and anytime on Wednesdays—will reach a less-crowded inbox than those sent in the . (Watch for a more thorough blog post on this in October.)

Bonus note: if you pre-schedule your emails, keep an eye on current events. Occasionally a large news event will break which could cause your fundraising message to appear tone deaf.

ANALYZE

Many organizations wait until January to assess the effectiveness of their year-end campaign. Don't be this nonprofit! Check in on your KPIs weekly during the campaign so you can pivot as needed. For example, **if you see social is bombing but email is glowing, shift your efforts and work that email list!**

Be sure to look at website analytics to discover which pages people are visiting and staying on. You may also want to consider a website heatmap tool—like Hotjar—to see where people are actually clicking. You may learn that folks are struggling to locate the give button—weekly monitoring allows you to catch this before the end of campaign.

If you already have thorough metrics established, skip this next bit. If you are still deciding what metrics to track, here are our recommended metrics to track for year end giving:

- Number of first-time givers
- Average gift amount
- Average open rate + click-through-rate
- Conversion rate (# of people who clicked on your call to actions)/(# of gifts with your end of year email campaign as the source)
- Total giving from emails
- Total giving from social

If you aren't set up to track these standard metrics in a centralized location—this is why you planned in September—you have time!

After the campaign wraps, be sure to do a full campaign analysis in January, complete with a summary of what worked and what didn't. You'll want to do this while it's all fresh in your mind. Then you're ready to the lessons you've learned for implementation in 2021.

Once you've followed these steps—Plan, Nurture, Ask, and

Analyze—it's time to sit back, grab a sugary or alcoholic drink with your team (via socially distanced Zoom of course), and congratulate yourselves on being one badass development team!

Bonus note: if you need help setting up your metrics ahead of year end, Firefly Partners can conduct an audit and access your Google Analytics account to track key filters, make sure key components are turned on, and create customized conversions and dashboards for your organization. You'll be amazed at all the insightful data you've been missing!