

Staying Ahead of the Curve During a Global Pandemic: Thoughts on How to Grapple with the COVID-19 Infodemic

For most organizations, there is an information overload at present. There are multiple daily webinars with guidance on how to navigate federal and state relief programs (both grants and loans). There are also daily directives on how to maintain operations and ensure public safety. The following is designed to be a navigational resource for organizations desperately trying to stay ahead of the curve through this confusing time. The sections break down into:

- **Strategy and operations**
- **Advocacy**
- **Federal grants and loans**
- **State and local emergency loans**
- **State and local emergency grants**
- **Fundraising**
- **Human Resources**
- **Technology**

Strategy: Balancing Near Term Viability and Long Term Strategy: We've reconnected with [Risk Alternatives](#) to identify a more integrated approach to addressing organizational risks in the moment ([here's a quick checklist](#)). This is an incredibly noisy time to try and step back and consider an organization's long-term strategy. However, it is imperative for groups to do so. [SeaChange Capital Partners](#) has put together a [decision-making framework](#) for nonprofits to consider whether you are a hibernator (can't function at present), responder (heightened need for your services) or a hybrid (in between). Our best bet as organizations is to consider a small working committee of key staff and board members (as you would with strategic planning) to work through key considerations around: cash management, staffing, business continuity and emergency succession planning.

Additionally, [Cause Effective](#), [Support Center](#) and [Community Resource Exchange](#) along with the [Association of Nonprofit Specialists](#) are resources for risk management and strategic planning supports.

Advocacy: Advocating for Nonprofits and Our Communities: Our national and state membership organizations have been actively monitoring the federal and state grant landscape ([National Council of Nonprofits](#), [Center for Nonprofits \(NJ\)](#), [Nonprofit New York](#), [NY Council on Nonprofits](#), and [Human Services Council](#)). These entities are also actively surveying the landscape. While you may feel overly surveyed at the moment, these surveys ARE IMPORTANT! Let's all take the time to answer those surveys since that's the best collection tool for evidence and surveys to inform policy decisions.

Federal Grants and Loans: Navigating the Federal Emergency Loan Programs through the CARES Act: The program that we have heard the most about is the [Paycheck Protection Program \(PPP\)](#). This program is administered through the Small Business Administration (SBA), which typically serves the for-profit sector, but PPP includes provisions for nonprofits with fewer

than 500 employees. While this is a loan program, a portion of this funding behaves differently than traditional loans because qualifying expenses may be forgiven, acting like a grant (payroll expenses, interest on debt, utilities). Our friends at [FMA recently launched a series of virtual office hours and created a toolkit](#) for pulling together application materials for the program.

The [Economic Injury Disaster Loan \(EIDL\)](#) is broader than PPP in the expenses it will cover (such as the full mortgage payment, not just the interest) but the loans are not forgivable and must be repaid. However, as part of the application process, borrowers can request a \$10,000 loan advance, which may be forgiven if used for qualifying operational expenditures, such as maintaining payroll. The Jewish Federations of North America put together [this comparison of the Paycheck Protection Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan programs](#).

State and Local Emergency Loan Programs: There are a number of emergency loan programs. In NYC, [Nonprofit Finance Fund](#) is administering an emergency loan fund with loans from \$10K to \$3M (need to be at least \$750K operating budget). In NJ, there is a [NJ Economic Development Authority Emergency Assistance Grant Program](#) and the [NJ Community Capital Garden State Relief Fund](#). Often when you knock on doors like these and you're not eligible, you can at least get some help understanding the landscape of other programs and get some help. It's the financial equivalent of asking for directions at the gas station (for those of you who still relate to that pre-cell phone analogy)

We would also strongly encourage organizations to reach out to their auditors or bankers to help navigate any new offerings or to find a friend in their network plugged into these programs. The two most widely talked about programs are the Paycheck Protection Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program.

Fundraising and Grants: Additional Relief Grant Programs: This is an incredibly difficult time to navigate fundraising with new funds arising, new grant programs launching and in-person fundraising events cancelled or converted to virtual efforts for the foreseeable future. We believe key steps for organizations should include connecting with all of your current funders with an update on your operations and needs (could be financial as well as needed expertise, advice, connections) and prioritizing existing relationships first. One such effort could be sharing a memo detailing your response to COVID-19 (one or two pages in length) with your funders [along with an ask for flexibility](#) on your grant requirements.

Beyond immediate relationships, our friends at Candid (the combined Guide Star and Foundation Center entity) are maintaining a [number of web pages](#) monitoring new grant funds. Some of the most notable include the [NY Community Trust emergency fund](#) (now more than \$50M of funds) and we're hearing a commitment to moving quickly on the approval process and fund disbursement. Lastly, entities like [Cause Effective](#) are helping organizations to think through how to navigate virtual fundraising events over the next few weeks and months along with your large fundraising software companies. If you do have a third-party fundraising vendor, it would make sense to reach out to them for any supports.

Human Resources: Guidance on Human Resource Issues: One of the highest priority topics has been employee relations and human resources. A quick scan of the landscape shows that [Pro Bono Partnership](#), [Lawyers Alliance](#), [NY Lawyers in the Public Interest](#) and the [NY Council of Nonprofits](#) have been providing key one-on-one consultations and seminars on related topics. On the topic of remote team management, we've found some useful resources from Gallup on [remote team management](#). [Support Center](#) is also pulling together sessions on this topic in the next two weeks.

Technology: Guidance on Technology and Remote Operations: Another hot topic right now is guidance on technology and platforms for facilitating teams working remotely. The tools we have been reading and hearing about include Zoom, Monday.com, Slack, Basecamp, Google's suite of tools. It's all a little overwhelming at the moment. Some places to start include exploring [NTEN](#); specific vendors that we know well include [Roundtable Technology](#) and [Nonprofit Solutions Network](#). This would also seem an ideal place for identifying a skilled volunteer who might help you to prioritize and adopt those systems most critical to continued operations.

Hopefully, this brief memo can prove helpful to Support Center's staff, board, leadership council, navigators, affiliate consultants, facilitators and others. If you have feedback on any major omissions, please let me know at: ktimko@supportcenteronline.org.