



How Charities Are Adapting To Covid-19

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Introduction

The global pandemic of Covid-19 has had a huge impact on charities. We spoke in depth with a sample of Beacon customers of different sizes and with different missions, to see how they are coping with the status quo. We asked them about the new and innovative ways that their charities have found to cope with the challenges that have been thrown their way.

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How charities have adapted to the major changes for their employees

Offices have been shut down for everybody and organisations have had to transition to remote working quickly. Some organisations were prepped for it, for example, Equality Now, an international women's rights organisation, already had offices internationally and teams spread across the different offices. This meant they were already familiar with the technology everyone else has had to rapidly engage with over the last few weeks!

For others getting to grips with the technology has been a bit trickier as they've not had time for training. However, it seems that everyone has embraced technologies in order to keep their operations running. Employers have also had to be flexible and mindful of people's situations for example if they also have to engage in childcare.

Communication

"You don't tend to need to think about communication quite so much when you're all together. There's been a lot more thought into how we coordinate our communications internally."

Said UK-Med, a Manchester based charity that responds internationally to health emergencies caused by disasters and disease outbreaks. This was a universal point. The apps used to help with internal communication included, the now ever-present Zoom, GoToMeeting, Skype - online meeting and video conferencing software, and Microsoft Teams, which combines chat, conference calling and file storage.

“I’ve been quite keen for us to use video conferencing so that we’re seeing each other’s faces, having that connection with people that you usually see on a daily basis in the office, it’s important.” –UK-Med

Many of the organisations had arranged daily check-ins, coffee breaks, and even Friday night socials in order to maintain a sense of connection.

For quicker text based communication - and more importantly – memes: WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Slack, have been extremely popular. People are looking for a fast way to communicate with their colleagues that doesn’t involve opening yet another email. At Beacon we love Slack, and have talked about its benefits in this blog post [here](#).

Accessing data

Going cloud-based instead of having on-premises servers and working with a cloud-based CRM like Beacon is useful in order to maintain access to your data when you’re working from home. As we only interviewed charities who used Beacon, this wasn’t an issue that came up.

Shift work, furlough, and pay cuts

In the case of a charity like The Hugs Foundation, primarily set up as an equine rescue centre in Bodmin, Cornwall, their immediate priority is their horses. The staff have to go in to continue looking after the horses and that means they’ve had to be put on shifts of 2 teams doing 4 days on and 4 days off in order to reduce contact and avoid infecting each other.

“The staff are working tirelessly. Everyone is in good spirits. We’ve had a baby foal, so she’s helping keeping everyone positive.”

Some charities, like many places of work, have also had to furlough some of their staff.

East African Playgrounds, who build safe play facilities for children in rural and urban areas in Africa, has had to deal with employees abroad not necessarily receiving the same benefits as we do in Great Britain,

“Uganda has got a very limited healthcare system and it has no social support system, so nobody’s going to pay their salaries.”

All of the EAP staff opted to reduce their salary between 10-45% in order that the charity continue to pay all of its staff. True camaraderie in this difficult time!

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How charities have adapted to the challenges facing their beneficiaries

Charities whose main mission is direct contact with their beneficiaries, particularly in a physical space, for example, a drop-in centre have been hugely affected and have a real need for finding alternatives that reach the people they want to help. Ill health and social distancing can also affect the most vulnerable people the worst, both at home and abroad. Some charities have had to try to help bigger numbers of people, or people in greater need, whilst also dealing with fewer resources themselves.

Shutting down a key physical space for beneficiaries

For Doncaster Alcohol Services, a charity that aims to provide the awareness, skills and confidence to make effective choices about their usage of alcohol and other drugs in the Doncaster area, the closing of their physical space has had a massive effect on their beneficiaries.

“Lots of them would have identified as being isolated when they first engaged with our services and would also say that ours was the only service that they engaged with, so they would come in every single day. Now they’re in a position where their space has been taken away.”

DAS have done their best to recreate as much of this as they possibly can online.

“We’ve created an e-sober social. It’s on a Facebook group. And we’ve translated every single thing that we would do in that space to a digital thing. So we would run sessions with them every day, and so we’ve started running the sessions online. Today, we’ve got a poetry session and a poetry

competition so that everyone's writing their own poems."

Having all of the beneficiaries' contact details logged in Beacon also meant that DAS could reach out to everyone.

"The biggest challenge really has been trying to get people involved. And we wouldn't have that information if they weren't registered on Beacon. So it's been a lifesaver."

The Hugs Foundation not only uses its premises – a farm – to rehabilitate horses but also to offer mental wellbeing interventions for disadvantaged children and young people who come for 6-8 sessions on the site.

"Because we didn't want to stop reaching out to beneficiaries at this time, because some kids come from domestic abuse backgrounds so lockdown could be awful for them we've launched a Facebook Live event called Hugs TV: A Daily Hug."

They've found a way to virtually bring their beneficiaries on site! The event includes small tasks and challenges aiming to brighten their day.

Increase in need or number of beneficiaries

In times of increased need or number of beneficiaries, efficiency is key. Foothold, the Institute of Engineering and Technology Benevolent Fund, have found themselves more in demand because engineers have been losing their jobs and requesting more support. They are setting up an emergency financial support program. Not only are they responding to their beneficiaries' needs, but they are being as flexible as possible.

"It's going to our Board of Trustees as soon as possible for signing off. We're looking at how we can relax the normal rules which we would have about

paperwork through the post, how we can get that documentation submitted electronically, and very quickly get that financial support into a person's bank account for them."

UK-Med are directly involved in the Covid-19 response, so the need for what they do has massively increased. They have streamlined their processes.

"I think for my team strict prioritization, and being outcome focussed."

With the increased need for them, UK-Med have also found an increase in awareness of their organisation.

"People's awareness of what we do has massively increased too. Fortunately, these things don't often happen here in the UK, but everyone's feeling the effects of it."

Some beneficiaries are harder to reach and more in need. For East African Playgrounds most of their beneficiaries are in Uganda.

"They're in rural communities or refugee camps. If coronavirus hits them, it will decimate their communities because the healthcare is not there."

In this climate it is key that charities continue their fundraising efforts.

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Fundraising: the effects and how to diversify

The pandemic has already had its impact on charitable fundraising and this in turn impacts service delivery. While it is more important than ever to fundraise, it is also more difficult.

Foothold, whose main source of funding is professional membership subscription and legacies, points out the need to diversify.

“Never ever has it been more important than now for a portfolio to have a balance of income streams.”

Corporate funding

It's a good time to check in with corporate donors and brands to see how they're doing. It's worth bearing in mind that while many companies are suffering economically, some are thriving. Brand sponsorship from Zoom, anyone?

Grant funding

Some charities have shifted their focus to applying for grants as other sources of fundraising are more difficult to access. Young Epilepsy, a charity supporting children and young people aged 0-25 with epilepsy, explains.

“The charities that run grant funding are still having their meetings because they can do them all over conference calls.”

Sometimes you have to focus on the things you can do, rather than the ones you can't.

Another solution to freeing up working capital was to request that some of the restrictions on restricted grants be removed. This worked for East African Playgrounds.

“The majority of our grant funders have been exceptionally supportive.”

Individual Giving

This is a time when people are unsure of their own finances because of loss of work or reduced income, as such many charities have seen significant losses in individual giving as people have tightened their belts. Equality Now have seen a reduction in their smaller gifts, even during Women’s History Month

“We typically get a lot of individual smaller donations during this month, but we’re going to hit about a third of what we projected.”

East African Playgrounds reported a 96% drop in individual giving partly due to having to postpone a student trip until next year.

“We’ve postponed close to 200 students due to go out to Uganda this summer on our brilliant volunteer programme whereby they fundraise and then they come out to Uganda and help build a playground that they’ve fundraised for. This has a huge impact on our fundraising.”

It’s now more important than ever to say a big thank you to anyone who does donate. This is where your CRM can lend a helping hand.

“Beacon helped us set up a quicker system so that we can log who’s had a thank you call - it’s a time-saving thing - but also where we’re supporting our organizational aim of making sure that if somebody gives a donation to UK-Med, they know how important that is. And they have a wonderful experience of giving to us.”

This can encourage people to keep giving during this difficult time.

Events moving to digital

Another way to keep people giving is to shift events into a digital space where possible, or come up with alternatives that work online.

Equality Now shifted a physical event to a webinar and found there were some positive outcomes.

“We would have expected 30 to 50 people, and we had about 150 people on the webinar. I think we had a more cohesive and beneficial conversation as a webinar than we would have at the event.”

In some ways physical events are more constricted in terms of who can get there. Equality Now say that being unable to hold traditional events has opened up possibilities to them. They are hopeful that webinars will continue to be popular in the future. Post social distancing and lockdown, people are more likely to be more comfortable with using technology like Zoom, and therefore perhaps more likely to sign up for a web conference or digital event.

East African Playgrounds are doing an ingenious alternative event - a virtual race across 10 countries to Bidibidi - a refugee camp with over 270,000 refugees, through an app called My Virtual Mission. It uses the data from your phone or your FitBit to calculate the distance you've walked, cycled, or rowed and plots it out on a map between your start and end point. It even converts other physical activities into steps walked towards the destination.

The Vagina Museum, which is the world's first brick and mortar museum dedicated to vaginas, vulvas and the gynaecological anatomy, has had to temporarily close its doors. They've redoubled their efforts in their already successful online shop, but they've also put the focus on digital events, and even a podcast that ties in with their most recent exhibition, vagina myths. Furthermore, they'll be looking for corporate fundraising to sponsor those events.

“We are getting new people in digitally. They’re going to probably have a bit of a higher baseline of knowledge, potentially, and so there are going to be interesting changes. From my perspective as a marketing person, being digital for a little while is great because we can really build up sort of an audience analysis of whom we’re talking to, and then when we re-open, compare that. I always like to be optimistic!”

Other digital content and marketing

Some charities have been ramping up collaborations with Instagram Influencers during this time. Influencers still have to fill their feed with content, and doing something for a good cause puts them in a good light too! Equality Now found that some of the influencers they team up with seemed particularly excited about working with them now. As a result they’ve already done a ‘ask me anything’ on their Instagram stories with a well-known actor.

“The celebrity got really excited about one of our issues. And so the program staff answered questions, but it was co-hosted on that celebrity’s Instagram so that we can get a new audience with her followers.”

They also have been doing a monthly round up of books, podcasts, films and TV shows, with a global feminist bent on their monthly email and also on their blog.

“It’s great, because people are at home, thinking which TV show should I watch, which books should I read? We have all these things for you!”

Young Epilepsy, too, have upped their newsletter game, **“we’re getting them out every few weeks”** in order to strengthen their relationships with donors.

One last thing that Zoe from The Vagina Museum has done is film herself reading out My Immortal, a notoriously bad Harry Potter fan fiction. She posts it on Twitter with a link to a donation page for the museum. That really is thinking outside the box!

Unexpected benefits

Some organisations like Foothold have managed to find surprising benefits. For example, alongside digital marketing, a good old-fashioned phone call can sometimes go a long way.

“it’s been a good opportunity to look at things like that is a great time for donor care, and never have more people been at home in the day, so we can call people, we can speak to donors, we don’t need to ask for money, we can use it as real information gathering, building relationships.”

The Hugs Foundation found that using a CRM can also be useful in giving care and attention to building those relationships.

“Beacon has been a godsend because people who have signed up to newsletters, I’ve got all their details and I can contact them, and they’ve got contact preferences on there. They can still see what we’re doing, like the lovely new baby foal. We’ve got a video of her jumping around being very cheeky.”



Charities have also been using it as an opportunity to build relationships with other charities, to work on campaigns together, and even look at some possible mergers. Foothold also point out that now is a good time for training, and many online courses that are free.

“There are so many virtual training opportunities that are popping up now. We’ve been really encouraging our staff to access that.”

It's also a prime opportunity to get all that admin off your desk, and tidy up your CRM! At Young Epilepsy they're doing a data spring clean!

"It's giving the team time to actually go through Beacon and dedupe our data and do all those little admin-y tasks to clean it, so there's a blessing there."

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Just to Finish Off, Here Are a Few Fun Ways Charities Have Found to Stay Connected and Lift Each Others Spirits...

At Doncaster Alcohol Services someone is responsible for getting the team to do a fun activity to start the day. They've played such games as a 'Mr and Mrs' style game where they have to guess a colleague's answers. They write their answers down and hold it up against the screen.

At Young Epilepsy they've started doing quizzes on the app House Party, where you can play various games.

The Vagina Museum held a virtual pub quiz for staff and friends, ***“that was tremendous fun.”***

At Foothold they've held virtual birthday parties, including the 130th party for the charity itself, where everybody brought a piece of cake and some fizz.

At Equality Now they have a virtual knitting club every Friday. It started in the New York office, but is now held online. One of their colleagues teaches everyone how to knit. Katherine from the London office can now join it by virtue of its online nature and says happily, ***“I get to join with wine because it's like six o'clock my time.”***

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Conclusion

Although this has certainly been an enormous challenge for the charities we've spoken to, so many of them have found truly inspiring ways to keep going. We hope that learning how other charities are coping might have given you some ideas for new ways to adapt.

We are aware that it is a time of uncertainty. In this ever-changing landscape things could be very different, even in 6 weeks time. If you would like to reach out to us to let us know how you're doing, please get in touch.

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About our contributors

East African Playgrounds - build safe play facilities for children in rural and urban areas in Africa.

Murielle Maupoint - CEO

The Hugs Foundation - provide a rescue and rehabilitation centre for horses, ponies and other animals that have been abandoned or abused. But also, to offer alternative support using some of the rescued horses and ponies, to help children, young people and to those suffering from poor mental health.

Laura Dennis - Charity Fundraising Coordinator

Young Epilepsy - a charity supporting children and young people aged 0-25 with epilepsy, providing diagnosis, assessment, rehabilitation, and research.

Sophie Stevens - Special Events & Donor Insights Lead

The Vagina Museum - the world's first brick and mortar museum dedicated to vaginas, vulvas and the gynaecological anatomy.

Zoe Williams - Development and Marketing Manager

Doncaster Alcohol Services - a charity that aims to provide the awareness, skills and confidence to make effective choices about their usage of alcohol and other drugs in the Doncaster area.

Callum Dixon - CEO

Equality Now - an international women's rights organisation who aim to achieve legal and systemic change that addresses violence and discrimination against women and girls around the world in four main categories; ending sexual violence, harmful practices, sex trafficking, and achieving legal equality.

Andrea Edman - Development Campaign Officer

Katherine Payne - Digital Campaign Officer

Foothold - The Institute of Engineering and Technology Benevolent Fund who work to ensure that no engineer or their family needs to face life's challenges without support.

Felicity Rook - Fundraising Manager

UK-Med - a Manchester based charity that responds internationally to health emergencies caused by disasters and disease outbreaks.

Jak Dyehouse - Membership Coordinator

Holly Smith - Head of Fundraising and Communications

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About Beacon

Beacon is a technology startup that builds world-class CRM software for charities and nonprofits. Based on the latest technology and design principles, Beacon makes running an organisation with a remote team a breeze. If you would like to learn more about how Beacon could work for you, you can visit our [website](#) or email David directly at david@beaconcrm.org.

About The Authors



Alice
Content Manager
alice@beaconcrm.org



David
Co-Founder & CTO
david@beaconcrm.org

