Question:
How should independent schools approach fundraising and communication with donors and alumni during COVID-19?

Answer:
We wanted to share the following expert insights related to fundraising and donor/alumni communications from our higher education COVID-19 resource center. Administrators at independent schools may find these insights valuable as they adjust school fundraising initiatives and deliver communications to donors and alumni during this time.

- **3 Ways the COVID-19 Crisis is Affecting Advancement Strategy:** Earlier this month, EAB researchers surveyed 77 advancement partners on their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and synthesized their responses in this expert insight. Administrators can view survey data [here](#).

  - **Divisional fundraising goals remain largely unchanged.** Most surveyed institutions (67 percent) are not changing their divisional fundraising goals, with 14 percent of the remaining survey respondents stating they haven’t yet decided. Only 19 percent state they have revised their goal downward or are planning to do so. Of those that are revising their divisional goal downward, about three-quarters are moving it down by somewhere between 11 percent and 30 percent.

  - **Some institutions are changing individual gift officers’ metrics.** While a majority of surveyed institutions are not changing their divisional fundraising, 38 percent state they are changing frontline officers’ goals. Many are lowering individual dollar goals. Beyond dollars raised, institutions are most often changing metrics related to visits, proposals submitted, and proposals closed. To counterbalance the decreased in-person activity, some institutions are adding in or revising upward metrics around meaningful remote contacts via phone, email, and text.

  - **Many institutions are canceling giving days but will still continue fundraising.** Over half of surveyed institutions plan to cancel a giving day occurring in the next two months. However, 84 percent of institutions state they are not suspending fundraising activity entirely.

- **Should We Cancel Our Giving Days, Senior Class Gifts, and Phonathons?** This expert insight offers three ways to rethink spring fundraising activities. For example, instead of cancelling a planned giving day, institutions can shift their focus to “just-in-time” funding for students in need. Students struggling with food and housing insecurity are especially vulnerable as campuses close residence halls and limit dining services during this time. In 2019, Kansas State University focused their giving day on the campus food pantry and raised over $320,000. If administrators have already designed and printed the bulk of their giving day materials, administrators could consider featuring funds for the food pantry and/or emergency grants in their social media marketing and communications strategy.

- **3 Examples of Alumni Solicitations to Support Vulnerable Students:** This expert insight profiles three examples of recent solicitations sent by colleges and universities—in these communications, administrators inform alumni on how they can help current students. For example, the University of Vermont established a new pandemic response fund that will be used to support student emergency travel and remote education assistance. Administrators can review their solicitation [here](#). Similarly, Ohio University rebranded its upcoming day of giving to focus on supporting “our most affected students during the COVID-19 pandemic.” Administrators can review their solicitation [here](#).
Finally, administrators may also be interested in the expert insight Lessons from Independent School Leaders About Messaging School Closures and COVID-19 Diagnoses. While these recommendations on communications pertain to current families, teachers, and staff, administrators may also apply them to messaging aimed at alumni and donors. For example, when administrators refer to campus shutdowns as a “closure,” administrators send an unwanted message that all educational and community activity is suspended. Instead, administrators should use “remote learning environment” or some variant thereof to reassure alumni and donors that the institution’s mission is in force.