



SAC Non-profit Experts Bulletin - March 2021

Emerging Stronger From The Pandemic

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Covid has been a step-change for me, personally. As the pandemic grew and lockdown came in here in the UK, it quickly became apparent that leaders needed far more time with me and their peers than ever before: to share challenges, garner ideas, and to gain some degree of perspective on everything that was happening. And so, I look back over the last ten months and find I've hosted nearly fifty seminars and roundtables for non-profit leaders since the end of March 2020. That's more than one a week.

Over 200 different executives from across the sector have joined me for at least one of those sessions, to talk topics from crisis management to collaboration, from sustainability to systems change, from value propositions to volunteering, and just about everything in between. And after each one, I invariably walk away having learned at least as much as anyone else on the call.

And one of the biggest things I've learned from the whole of that experience, is that this pandemic has shown that we all have far, far more potential than we think.

That's not to say the challenge hasn't been huge. Many of our charitable organisations have seen their incomes plummet as events have been cancelled and supporters have seen their fundraising slide off a cliff. And in [this article, Karen Eber Davies](#), one of my non-profit expert community colleagues, shares some great resources to help non-profit leaders weather the economic storm.

Nor is it to say that the impact of coronavirus is over – far from it. Its penumbra will be with us for many, many months to come, as non-profits in the health, welfare, employment, and many other social justice spaces, will already recognise.

Like the financial storm, those implications can all be addressed better if we have a clear sense of how they will play out for our organisations and those we exist to support. Another of our expert team, [Gail Bower, shares in this article an extremely powerful technique](#) for taking scenario thinking to the next level, to start planning now for what's most likely to be ahead, and Karen Eber Davies has a short, [ten-part video series](#) that will help you work through many of the implications you uncover.

These two podcasts from team member Patton McDowell and his wonderful guests also shed light, and share some powerful insights, on [leading teams through the challenges and uncertainties](#) of pandemic recovery, and [how to get the best from your team](#) in remote working and hybrid working environments.

Beyond adapting to the initial crisis however, the pandemic has also shone a light on some of the much deeper, longer-term challenges faced by the non-profit community. One in particular that I've

spoken about for many years, is the [unwillingness of the sector to invest in itself](#). The fragility this creates has been cruelly exposed over recent months, with many non-profits having to withdraw services or close up entirely.

That “fragility” challenge is far from over. The combination of underinvestment, personal exhaustion, and an ageing leadership population for example, will have implications for the long-term viability of many more non-profits in the months to come. Another member of the team, author and expert philanthropy advisor, Kris Putnam-Walkerly, explains the issue and [the five steps you need to take to mitigate the threat, in this excellent article](#).

As Putnam-Walkerly points out in that piece, and gives more powerful examples of in [another of her recent articles, this time in Forbes](#), all those trickier, tougher, chronic challenges of non-profits, can be solved. All of the solutions are out there, [if only we are prepared to step out of our comfort zones](#), to collaborate and ask for help, and to think differently about what we do and how we could achieve our aims in new and innovative ways.

Because if the pandemic has taught us all anything, it’s that we can do all of those things, incredibly well when we have to. And this, for me, is the key to how we come out of this experience far stronger, more impactful, and more resilient than we went in.

In innumerable conversations over recent months, people have shared with me again and again, how their organisations have had to change, and how they and their teams have stepped up way beyond any prior expectations in response to the needs of the moment. In most of my client organisations, the genuine transformation in beliefs, behaviours and culture is palpable.

Across non-profit leadership, we’ve witnessed a new level of agility and responsiveness, a step change in decisive confidence, an increasingly pervasive “can-do” mentality, and a huge acceleration in the pace of change, systems rollouts, collaboration and problem solving at just about every level.

The worst thing any of us can do right now, is put those huge advances down to “crisis response”.

The crisis was the catalyst, not the source, of this phenomenon. The source was the vast untapped potential within each of us, that simply never had the opportunity to show itself before.

There is a lot to be said for Marianne Williamson’s most famous (and most often misattributed) quote: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.”

The question for all leaders right now is not: “Can we keep this up once the crisis ends?” The question is: “If we can achieve all that in the teeth of an unprecedented headwind, what can we achieve with a calm sea, the wind at our backs, and full mast of sail?”

In the next couple of months there is, for all of us, the greatest window of opportunity for positive change that we may ever see. It is the opportunity to redefine our culture and our expectations, to build on what we’ve seen and achieved, to become the best that we’ve shown we can be, and more.

So, the question for all of us this month, is this: how can you ensure you learn from your network and your people, to lock in the very best of the abundant strengths and potential that you’ve seen during the pandemic, before that window closes?

The [Non-profit Expert Community](#) is a specialist group within the Society for the Advancement of Consulting, each of whom has been selected and approved for membership based on their

consulting history, client endorsements, and ongoing commitment to a high standard of practice, ethics and professionalism.