Human Services COVID-19 Sample Messages

To help human service organizations respond during the COVID-19 crisis, the National Reframing Initiative surveyed the Network to see what communications aids would be most helpful to the sector. Based on the results of that survey, we developed the following sample message to policymakers to support public funding and sample communication to private donors to support development efforts. The first applies to human services generally, while the second focuses on housing and homelessness prevention as a more specific example. Human service organizations and allies are welcome to freely borrow or adapt any language that meets their communications needs.

Overarching Guidance:

• Appeal to our society’s interconnection and our responsibility to each other.
• Feature the collective, societal benefits of human services and/or your organization’s work before getting into the particulars of your request.
• Move quickly from expressing urgency around the COVID-19 crisis to offering solutions when possible.
• Avoid framing that focuses on the vulnerability of specific people, which activates zero-sum, us vs. them thinking.
• Offer explanations and concrete examples relying on the tested Construction Metaphor for human services. Do not assume the public and policymakers will understand how your organization operates in typical times, how your organization’s work is being impacted by the pandemic, or what role your organization would play in the long-term recovery effort.
• Consider your audience’s existing relationship with your organization as you craft your messages. For example, if your request is not specifically related to responding to COVID-19, it may not be the best time to reach out to new donors and funders.

SAMPLE MESSAGE FOR POLICYMAKERS – General Human Services Advocacy

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting our community’s health and well-being at unprecedented levels, causing major disruptions for people of all ages and walks of life. While we are all weathering this storm together, the effects are intensified for people who were already on shaky ground prior to the pandemic because of things like low wages, a lack of health insurance, or a health or mental health challenge.

Human service organizations are buffering against some of the most serious health, mental health, economic, and social consequences for our community members. We are calling on our policymakers to include human services in COVID-19 response efforts by adequately funding our work in the face of increased demand and by engaging our skills and expertise in the rebuilding process that repairs the gaps in our systems exposed by the pandemic.

Here are some of the ways that human service organizations are shoring up our community during this crisis.

• Providing meals to people who are experiencing hunger, including sourcing, packaging, and delivering nutritious food directly to people who are unable to safely leave their homes.
• Making sure everyone has the stability of a safe and nurturing home by offering things like rental assistance so people can stay in their homes without risk of eviction, and by providing a home for people

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Sample Message for Policymakers continued...

who would not otherwise have a place to live, are unable to live on their own, or are not safe in their home due to issues such as domestic violence.

- Providing child care for the workforce that is keeping our hospitals, grocery stores, delivery services, pharmacies, fire departments and other essential systems functioning.
- Transitioning to online programming when possible, including mental health services, early childhood home visiting, mentoring programs, and support groups.

Human services are designed to strengthen our community by providing the solid foundation of essential supports that help people live up to their full potential. The sector’s deep experience and commitment to the well-being of every one of our community members makes us uniquely prepared to help our community navigate through the immediate response to COVID-19 and the long-term rebuilding process that will follow. Our policymakers must make a meaningful and sustained commitment to bolstering the community’s health and human service infrastructure through adequate funding and must ensure that human service leaders have a seat at the table as important decisions are made about our community’s response.

SAMPLE MESSAGE FOR DONORS – Housing Services and Homelessness Prevention

Dear [Name],

Having a safe and stable place to live is at the very foundation of overall health and well-being and it’s [Organization Name’s] goal to make this a reality for everyone in our community. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating a health and economic environment that is rapidly destabilizing this foundation for our community members at levels that we have never seen before. The effects are intensified for people who were already on shaky ground prior to the pandemic because of things like low wages and high housing costs.

[Organization Name] is working hard to shore up our community during this crisis, but we need your help to continue this work over the coming months. There are now more people in our community who are unable to pay their rent due to lost income and more people who cannot leave their homes for essentials like food and prescriptions. Meanwhile, the highly transmissible nature of the virus means that our shelters have had to reduce the number of people living in each facility in order to create safe distances. It also means that our staff and volunteers must now wear personal protective equipment to do their work safely and responsibly.

With your support, we can help our community weather this storm by:

- Providing rental and mortgage assistance so that people who have lost their job and a reliable income do not lose their home.
- Delivering groceries and prepared meals, assisting with personal care and hygiene practices, and making sure that health and mental health needs are being met for our many community members who need additional support to be able to live healthy at home.
- Ensuring that homes remain functional and safe by advocating to end the practice of shutting off water and other essential utilities when people cannot afford to pay their bills.
Sample Message for Donors continued...

- Offering a safe and nurturing place to live for people who do not have a home, are unable to live on their own due to a disability or a health or mental health challenge, or are not safe in their home due to issues such as domestic violence.

- Partnering with our community leaders and policymakers to identify spaces that can be repurposed to shelter unhoused people while maintaining appropriate distances that reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission.

- Purchasing the protective gear, disinfectants, and cleaning products that will keep our staff and the people we serve safe.

With your partnership, we can help ensure that our neighbors have the solid foundation of essential supports that we all need and that their gifts and talents are available to our community as we rebuild.

Sincerely,

[Name]

Sources:


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