

TIP SHEET

Five Actions Nonprofits Can Take to Enhance, Protect and Defend Their Reputations

Nonprofits want to tell their stories and support their causes. To do this successfully, nonprofits must, among many other things, take care of their reputation. Reputation is building familiarity, establishing trust and fortifying confidence within your nonprofit and within the communities you serve and from whom you receive support. Conversely, nonprofits are sometimes tasked with protecting their valuable reputations during a crisis or addressing a challenging issue or political climate affecting their cause.

However, many nonprofits are unsure about their reputation (i.e., what others are saying, or not saying, about the nonprofit) or don't have the capacity to fully manage a reputation campaign. Yet, with some small steps, enhancing, protecting and defending your nonprofit's reputation can help to raise funds, increase volunteerism, raise the profile of your mission and organization, promote your cause, and share stories to illustrate your challenges and/or successes.

Below, [ReputationUs](#) – a communications and reputation management firm, as well as an NAO Verified Business Affiliate member – offers the following actions nonprofits can take now to enhance, protect, and defend their valuable reputations, thereby building and keeping trust within their communities.

Reputation Action 1: Know and Listen to Your Target Audience

- Your nonprofit's reputation precedes you. Do you know what is being said and by whom? You can proactively and cost effectively audit your reputation by actively listening via focus groups, surveys, social discussions and other similar methods to your target audience (donors, funders, community partners, other nonprofits, etc.) and get clarity on where you stand. Assess these findings and determine if there are common connections/disconnections between your mission and your nonprofit's reputation for fulfilling that mission well.

Reputation Action 2: Create a Reputation Building Plan

- This strategic and tactical communications plan may include timely and meaningful campaigns such as posting regularly on your nonprofit's social media channels about recent achievements, above-and-beyond volunteer work and memorable testimonials from folks positively impacted by your nonprofit. Developing a unique, signature event every year can also go a long way to create positive fanfare and underscore the cause of your nonprofit. If planned and performed well, the return on investment of

time and resources it takes to put on such an event is worth every penny to your nonprofit. Make sure to send thank-you notes to volunteers, donors, event spaces. High-touch personal efforts are not only valued and professional but also appreciated.

Reputation Action 3: Get the Entire Nonprofit Involved With Reputation Enhancement

- Your nonprofit's entire team (e.g., board, executives, staff, volunteers, advocates) should all be educated and aligned about your reputation goals. Share the findings of the audit, provide details of the communications plan, outline each person's specific role in executing the plan, and conduct an organization-wide message unity training session to ensure everyone is "singing from the same song page."

Reputation Action 4: Be Proud and Loud About Your Reputation

- Be proactive telling your nonprofit's story, clarify misperceptions, and be clear on what you're asking your target audience to do. Seek the most appropriate communication channels (e.g., speaking, advocacy, media, social media) to tell your nonprofit's story and constantly strengthen your reputation by releasing ongoing news, content and/or actions your target audience can take to reinforce your mission.

Reputation Action 5: Prepare for Crises

- Nonprofits, just like any business, typically can't predict a crisis; and when a crisis hits, reputations are often damaged. The good news is preparing for most crises is achievable. Preparation involves having an established communications plan (see Action 2) for such situations. Also, creating an internal task force comprised of multiple department leads and conducting realistic crisis scenario drills can help mitigate damage to the nonprofit's operations and reputation if and when a crisis arises.

In today's increasingly uncertain and rapidly changing environment, reputation management will continue to evolve and become increasingly important for organizations to consider. The difference now is you'll be in a better position to listen, understand and respond to issues involving your nonprofit's reputation.

ReputationUs is a Portland-based communications and reputation management firm partnering with for-profit companies and nonprofit organizations. More information is available at www.ReputationUs.com or 503-946-8344.

Nonprofit Association of Oregon is the statewide membership association for the nonprofit sector. We work across the state to strengthen the collective voice, leadership, and capacity of nonprofits to enrich the lives of all Oregonians. For more information, visit www.nonprofitoregon.org or contact 503-239-4001.