Where to Start – ABC Checklist

Living through a pandemic means having to accept a new reality of daily life with many changes. This can feel scary and overwhelming. It is critical that organizational leaders take immediate action to ensure the safety of their staff and the communities they serve. **The purpose of this checklist is to help NGO/CBO leaders think through the first set of actions they should take in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.** The actions outlined below are meant to achieve 3 key goals:

(A) Create a safe work environment where there is low risk of staff/volunteers becoming exposed to the virus or transmitting the virus to others.

(B) Establish clear communication systems among your staff, donors/stakeholders, and volunteers

(C) Assess operations and programming to begin identifying what work is feasible and safe for your organization to continue doing, what is not, and what work can be adapted to meet new community needs.

**Please note that this checklist is meant to be applicable to all types and sizes of NGOs/CBOs. As such, the guidance will sometimes be more general so that you may adapt to fit the particular context of your organization.

(A) Create a safe work environment

1. **Provide staff and volunteers with clear guidance and appropriate resources on the preventative measures they need to practice in order to protect themselves from contracting COVID-19** (e.g. wash their hands frequently with water and soap for 20 seconds, practice social distancing, wear a face mask when in public, avoid non-essential public outings, stay home if feeling short of breath, fever, or coughing). The U.S. CDC provides a list of steps that everybody should take.

   o As the leader of your NGO/CBO, it is critical that you *stress the severity of COVID-19*. You want to set the tone so others know they are expected to take the situation seriously.

2. **Transition staff to working remotely as much as possible** – your staff are much less likely to get sick and to get others sick if they work from home. Determine who can work from home and what resources/technical support they will require in order to work from home, such as a computer and internet stick.

   o For remote staff, be sure to provide them with an orientation to this new work environment so that they understand what is expected of them. Also let your staff know that you recognize working from home can be challenging — especially for those with children — and some days simply won't be as productive and that's ok!

3. **Institute protective measures in the workplace** for those staff members who will still need to come into the office, whether on a regular basis or from time to time.
   o Ensure handwashing facilities are available and are always stocked with water and soap.
   o Re-structure work spaces so staff are able to maintain at least 2 meters distance while working.
   o Provide cloth face masks for staff to wear while at the office.
   o Clean and disinfect surfaces daily, especially high-touch surfaces like door handles and computers.

(B) Establish clear communication systems

☐ 5. **Set-up communication structures to check-in with staff on a regular basis.** Whether your organization has become fully remote or you have a mix of remote and office staff, it will be necessary to adopt new communication channels, such as WhatsApp and online meeting platforms like Zoom, to replace the in-person communication that typically happened in the workplace. More so than ever, it will also be important to establish daily or weekly scheduled meetings as a way to check-in with staff and provide a comforting sense of structure and stability.

☐ 6. **Create a central location where staff can receive organizational updates related to COVID-19.** You will likely experience rapid change and need to make decisions at the last minute. Establish some sort of central communication channel that staff can check for regular updates, such as a designated WhatsApp group or email chain.

☐ 7. **Communicate updates to donors, board members, volunteers and other stakeholders.** Write blog posts, make short videos, or create other forms of communication material to send to relevant stakeholders so they understand how your organization is being impacted and responding.

(C) Assess operations and programming

☐ 8. **Take stock of your organization's assets.** The first step in assessing your operations and programming is to tally up your organizational assets. With a clear idea of all the resources, limited as they may be, you'll be equipped to make creative and informed decisions about resource allocation.

☐ 9. **Assess all programs to determine which should continue, stop, or be modified.** Create a list of all your programming and assess whether each program can be carried out with very limited in-person contact in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus among community members. Some programs might be able to continue as they are (such as a mobile health program), some might need to be put on hold, while others could continue with modifications (such as a monthly nutrition group that transitions to meeting virtually).

   o Refer to the "COVID-19 Program Assessment" template to help you think through programming
   o If you find many programs must be placed on hold, consider keeping staff/volunteers engaged by assigning back-logged projects such as updating the organization's website, digitizing records, writing reports, etc. Also consider taking this time to engage staff in skill-building such as learning a new software or going through online professional development.

☐ 10. **Consider designing new programs to meet arising community needs.** Conduct (or intuit) a community needs assessment to identify possible issues your organization could address. This assessment could be done by administering a brief survey to community members over the phone. Information could also be gathered through local news sources or through interviews with other organizations providing community-level services. Once you have identified needs, critically examine the skill set and capacity of your organization to determine if there is a feasible program you could administer to meet a given need.

   o It is very easy for harmful misinformation to spread. One important role that NGOs/CBOs can play is being a leading voice in providing communities clear and accurate information on how to protect themselves from the coronavirus and what to do if a community member becomes sick.

This will be difficult and there will be stumbles along the way. Make sure you take time to take care of yourself!
This Checklist is complemented by other materials and a free online course:
omprakash.org/resilience