



COVID-19 CRISIS RESPONSE WORKBOOK
FREE & CHARITABLE CLINICS EDITION

PREPARED BY:



www.nextstage-consulting.com

ON BEHALF OF:



North Carolina Association
of Free & Charitable Clinics

www.ncafcc.org

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PURPOSE

“This virus will find everyone. It may start in the cities, but I can tell you that it is going to hit [everywhere]. Don’t be on the wrong side of this. This is all of us against the virus, not red states versus blue states. And if we all don’t act now, one day it will just be one big [COVID-19] fire.”

– **Michael T. Osterholm**, PhD, MPH
Director, Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy

COVID-19 has significantly disrupted life in America as cities and states across the country institute shelter-in-place orders and struggle with the ramifications of a public health crisis. While some had predicted that a pandemic such as this was not a matter of ‘if’ but rather of ‘when,’ hospital and community response was underprepared for the scope, scale or impacts.

For decades, free and charitable clinics have made the argument that ensuring people have access to healthcare is critical to ensuring healthy communities. While some resonate with the argument that access to healthcare is a human right, clinic leaders have also made the case to business owners and political leaders that it is a matter of public health. A community health system needs options for people who slip through the cracks or else suffer the consequences during times of crisis.

That message has never been more relevant than during the COVID-19 pandemic. Free and charitable clinics are not only serving an important role in fighting this virus in the trenches of their communities, but also have an opportunity to position themselves as a vital community resource during a time of confusion, despair and loneliness as the days and weeks tick by.

The purpose of this crisis response workbook is to provide free and charitable clinics a framework for working with staff, volunteers, board members and community leaders to both react to the near-term realities facing their clinics as well as prepare for what is to come in the future. This public health crisis is an opportunity for free and charitable clinics to make a strong case about their role in the system of community health, and Next Stage believes that effort needs to start immediately.

When COVID-19 showed up in our North Carolina communities, Next Stage’s Managing Director Josh Jacobson was engaged in strategic planning with four mostly rural clinics through a grant from The Foundation for a Healthy Carolina to the North Carolina Association of Free & Charitable Clinics. As the firm works to continue strategic planning efforts with these clinics, the following workbook is a tool to support both reactive and proactive planning.

Next Stage understands the important role free and charitable clinics play in our communities, and makes this workbook free and available for all who may benefit from it.

CLINIC OPERATIONS

PROTOCOLS

The CDC has published [Interim Guidance for Healthcare Facilities](#), outlining goals and strategies for healthcare facilities for response to community spread of COVID-19. It is important for clinics to develop protocols to minimize reduce mortality, minimize disease transmission and protect healthcare personnel.

- What precautions are you taking for clinic visits? Do you have screening protocols?
- How are you maintaining a commitment to social distancing? Other strategies?

PROVIDERS

Securing consistent access to providers is a challenge for many clinics. Those who depend on volunteer providers are likely to find them unavailable due to needs in their own practices. Retired providers may be reluctant to potentially expose themselves to COVID-19.

- How are current conditions affecting the availability of your provider(s)?
- What are backup strategies to engaging providers?

ALTERNATIVE ACCCESS STRATEGIES

Identifying alternative ways to advance your clinic's mission may mean engaging in new ways of delivering access to health. Now is the time to let "necessity be the mother of invention."

- Is tele-health an option for your clinic? How could it be deployed?
- Are there opportunities to partner with other health providers in your community?

HUMAN RESOURCES

STAFF

Many free and charitable clinics are on the front lines of this public health crisis which requires a staff trained and capable to provide support during this critical time.

- What is your staffing plan during COVID-19? How do financial resources align with your clinic's ability to deliver on its mission?

- How do various scenarios for the length of the pandemic and the local impact affect your staffing?

VOLUNTEERS

Individuals who contribute their time and talent to your clinic's mission are trusted stakeholders. Ensuring their safety is important while also recognizing their desire to make a difference. It is important to stay in touch with them to maintain their connectivity.

- Who are the key sources of volunteer support for your clinic? How are you keeping them informed?

- How can volunteers support the clinic from their homes?

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The governance for your clinic is unlikely to have direct experience making decisions during a public health crisis such as COVID-19. The board of directors must be brought up-to-speed about operational considerations as well as the budgetary impact of various scenarios.

- How will the board of directors meet during the shelter-in-place order?

- What are key topics for upcoming board meetings?

MESSAGING & COMMUNICATIONS

WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

Staying in good communication with your constituency is a necessity during a public health crisis. This starts with your online presence. Many organizations have posted special COVID-19 response messaging online to ensure their constituencies understand process and approach.

- Will you create a COVID-19 message for your website? What is that messaging?

- What is the plan for social media messaging? How can social media be an opportunity for your clinic to increase its brand awareness during this health crisis?

E-MAIL MARKETING

Segmenting your e-mail database into subsets for communication is important. Patients will require a different message than your volunteers and donors. All should receive consistent messaging over the course of the COVID-19 health crisis.

- What is the calendar of communication? Can you create consistent weekly/monthly messaging?

- Is this an opportunity to increase understanding of your clinic's value proposition through an e-mail marketing campaign?

MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS

The media is focused almost exclusively on COVID-19 and its impact on local communities. This may be an opportunity for your clinic to step up and lead.

- Do you have contacts in print or broadcast journalism? Does your board?

- How might you pitch content or stories that frame your clinic and its work?

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

GRANTS

Funding from institutions is likely a central source fueling your clinic's sustainability. These funding sources are also most likely to understand the challenges of COVID-19 and the role your clinic can play in community response.

- Have you contacted the program officer for grants supporting your current work? Can you negotiate flexibility for deployment?

- How might your clinic partner with another nonprofit or agency to create a funding opportunity? Could your clinic be a vendor of services to fulfill another organization's grant?

- Are there grants you could apply for now that would support you in the near-term?

CONTRIBUTED REVENUE

Individuals with a philanthropic mindset are working from home and sheltering in place. The variability of the market may impact generosity in the midterm but concern for people in need remains a strong thread in communities across North Carolina.

- Who are your top 10 individual supporters? Could you make a targeted request of each to provide financial support to sustain your work at this important time?

- Have you considered a mini-campaign to raise funds through an e-mail and social media appeal? How would you conceptualize the ask?

- If your clinic was planning a fundraising event this spring, how might you take that event online and host a virtual event? How might you recreate the event in the virtual space?

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

GREATER COORDINATION

At a time of crisis, silos of programming are less effective than a coordinated response. Free and charitable clinics serve a constituency who are at the center of this public health crisis. Now may be the right time to build stronger connections with peer organizations.

- Is it possible to convene the public health department, hospital and other human service agencies to discuss a coordinate response to COVID-19?

- Can your clinic aid the local hospital by fielding non-emergency medical needs, thinning wait times in the emergency room?

- Is there a prevention role your clinic could play through a communication effort to your patient community regarding sheltering in place, washing hands, wearing a mask, etc?

BRAND DEVELOPMENT

This public health crisis frames the importance of free and charitable clinics – individuals without access to health care can spread a virus like COVID-19. Against the backdrop of current conditions, your clinic could use this as a chance to increase understanding of your mission.

- With so much talk of “flattening the curve,” what role historically has your clinic played in relieving the local hospital’s burden? How can that be conceptualized?

- With so many people likely to be unemployed in the months to come, how will the demographics of who you serve change?

- What human-centered stories can your clinic tell framed against a backdrop of COVID-19?