



# **“Let’s Take the Panic Out of Pandemic”**

## *Managing through the COVID-19 Crisis*

### **An Institutional Leaders ACTION GUIDE**

*-Rick Biddle-*

Everyone is asking – *how do we best proceed given our unprecedented situation?* From our collective discussions, we would like to share eight actionable steps for leaders to consider as we navigate through these challenging times:

#### **1. Do Plan. Do NOT Panic.**

Now is the time to work closely with your Board, drawing on members’ diverse skill sets and experiences to strategize and develop specific contingency plans based on different scenarios and timelines.

#### **2. Commit to your Staff.**

Your employees are the foundation of everything you do, and they need as much support and reassurance as possible right now. Communicate with them regularly, providing as much information and clarity as possible.

#### **3. Be Proactive, Not Reactive.**

Focus now on developing guidelines/policies/procedures that City/County/State and health officials will endorse relative to maintaining open hours and/or re-opening as soon as possible. Ensure that you are prepared to be among the first public venues ready to welcome visitors with safe and sound protocols.

#### **4. Be Adaptive, Creative and Flexible.**

Knowing that the situation keeps changing, be ready for what’s next by engaging your staff in open discussions about what’s possible – virtual tours, live podcast keeper talks, webcams or other opportunities to connect with your community (e.g., Houston Zoo with goats and the Shedd aquarium with penguins). Consider using resources you already have - for example, traveling zoo/keeper experiences – and adjusting them to the present situation. For example, if you are the leader of a zoo or aquarium, consider arranging for pop-up, no-contact animal experiences in community parks or supermarket parking lots where people can feel hopeful and share in some fun through real and virtual animal experiences and keeper chats.



## 5. Hold Steady to Your Mission.

Resist the temptation to start slashing costs through “budget cut fire drills” and “value-engineering” your mission by targeting seemingly “expendable” expenses like conservation programs. Budget adjustments will likely be required, but do not rush into decisions based on fear and uncertainty; allow some breathing room for a more measured and long-view approach.

### **WE WILL RECOVER FROM THESE CHALLENGES!**

## 6. Communicate!

Determine the best ways to reach out to your community, focus your messaging and position your organization to welcome guests and engage your community as conditions allow.

- If a public opening is not possible, then pivot to do more with your social media presence or upload you-tube videos of the animals or your collection and make your website more dynamic. A virtual zoo, aquarium or museum is better than none at all!
- Since the keepers come to work to take care of the animals, develop some unique video/web-based experiences to share with your community.
- **Our technology partners are building some fun, family-friendly apps that we will provide links to this week – will add a smile to your face!!!**

## 7. Invite Partners to Help.

Reach out to loyal friends, trusted supporters and local/regional corporate partners to support and help develop socially responsible initiatives to uplift the community, whether by ensuring safe opening conditions or developing outreach activities such as those listed above. Local pharmaceutical companies or health care providers may be equipped to offer professional expertise, access to information or even to establish a virus testing station at your organization as a community resource.

## 8. Support Each Other.

We are all in this together, so be generous with your colleagues in sharing what’s working for you. Feel free to reach out to me at [rbiddle@rssconsultantsllc.com](mailto:rbiddle@rssconsultantsllc.com) with ideas, questions or comments. We’re here to help.

Lastly – **Let’s all try to balance the worry with more smiles and laughter.**

Wishing you a little Luck o’the Irish in honor of this St. Patrick’s Day and reminding you to heed some wise words of wisdom from our good friend Snoopy!!

