

DEI: Post Emergency Resources I

One question being asked is "Should my station be asking directly or indirectly for donations for the relief effort?"

Jim Lewis and Helen Kennedy of Lewis Kennedy Associates think it's a good idea. "Yes. They should make certain their listeners understand that NO FUNDS are going to the local station, that they are doing this as a public service. And after the fundraising activity has occurred, they should make certain their listeners know what they did. (The "proof of performance" is an area in which we often fall down. We do the good deed, but we fail to tell people we did it.)

Others think steering clear of an on air fundraiser for the relief effort is a good idea unless it's something like joining every radio station in town for a day to raise money. Everybody is raising money but not everybody is broadcasting much-needed, fact-based, non-sensational news. But, every station can promote giving to the relief effort and direct listeners to links on your station's website.

You know what is right for your station and your community. The closer you are to the tragedy, the more this should shape your response to the relief effort.

Valerie Arganbright of American Public Media is planning to fundraise for the effort. "It's the perfect opportunity to collaborate with other organizations in your community to help with this effort. So, use your resources to mobilize people off the air -- put up a special website letting people know what's available in your community. Use your partnerships within the community to help. As an aside -- our community is having a special 20-radio station on air fundraiser, partnering with other public and commercial stations to raise money directly for victims. Doing a special fundraiser on your air -- by your self -- probably not the best use of resources."

Some stations are conducting one-day fundraisers for the relief effort. NPR is teaming up with WBGO to air a benefit concert September 17th.

Each station will have to make decisions about fundraising programs on a case-by-case basis. There is no single answer will work for all stations. DEI asked its advisors and other knowledgeable leaders for their perspectives which are provided below. After review, if you are unsure of how to proceed with your on-air or direct mail campaigns, please contact your DEI Advisors to discuss your situation. Telephone and email consultations are free and part of your DEI membership.

During this time of need, many public radio staffers are wondering if they should be asking money for their station. Should stations delay or cancel their regular fundraiser?

John Sutton of Sutton & Associates said stations should fundraise as planned, especially the October stations. He said, "Use no adjectives when mentioning NPR's coverage of Katrina. Rather, remind listeners that this story has immediate and far-reaching impact and that listener gifts will help the station and NPR deliver these stories now and long after Katrina has left the headlines. This is an unanticipated cost, one that listeners can offset with their generosity now.

For September pledge drives, ensure that Katrina stories, Supreme Court stories, and significant Iraq stories will not be bumped during the news programs to allow for pledge breaks.

According to Barbara Appleby, Appleby & Associates, "There is no RIGHT answer to "if you should fundraise" because there is no RIGHT answer. Whatever people decide, they need to plan their messaging well and execute that plan well and hold a steady course. They need to be ready to come out of sobering newscasts and features, with produced elements and music that can help make transitions. On-air talent need to be assured that this is a good time to fundraise and that listeners can afford \$100 for WXYZ as well as for the Red Cross and other agencies. Very few listeners will have sold all of their possessions and liquidated their bank accounts to give their money/assets away. Like their public radio contribution, listeners give to these charities out of their disposable income, not from their grocery and mortgage/rent money."

Barbara thinks stations should continue their regularly scheduled fundraisers. "Between the hurricane news and the Supreme Court, news listeners will be listening. Some places, like Minnesota, have important local elections happening, too, so people are following those races and issues on their local pub radio station. (And classical listeners will continue to seek an oasis.)

" I was in NY for the 9/11 periods, so I do not know how raising money for WNYC sounded on the air, but I think MPR, Vermont and other stations benefited from offering listeners a chance to help WNYC."

This is an excellent time for messages about how you hear perspectives, context and INFORMATION on public radio that you do not hear elsewhere -- about news that is not sensational and that does not exploit the situations that these families have found themselves in. It's also an excellent time to talk about the resources that NPR (through member donations to WXYZ) has available to cover disasters like this, as well as events unfolding around the globe, etc.etc.

Jim Lewis and Helen Kennedy of Lewis Kennedy & Associates agree with Appleby. They said, "The big lesson following 9/11 was that most damage to the fundraising programs of stations and organizations was self-inflicted. Those that continued with their fundraising programs even though they saw a bit of attrition suffered less damage than those that didn't go ahead and respectfully ask for support. It may seem easy to pull down an on-air drive or postpone it for a few weeks, but experience has also shown that a great deal of mail activity is supported by the drive. So with few exceptions, we think stations should conduct the activities that were on their calendar. Where appropriate, they should stress their service to listeners at this time. "Public radio is always there when you need us, and your membership helps to guarantee that we will be there tomorrow."

But what about stations that are in the affected areas? For many people, the stations in affected areas have been in the forefront of providing service. Why not ask? WWOZ is not even on the air and is raising funds.

Sheila Rue of SR Sound Programming and a DEI Pledge Drive advisor thinks its important to consider "competition" for funds including the philanthropic efforts going on right now. "This is an excellent time for development and programming to work together to craft focused and consistent messages, and to formulate cohesive strategies."

To assist stations for fall drives, DEI's June Fox has adapted scripts to address the impact of Katrina and public radio's meaningful role in covering the disaster and helping listeners cope with the overwhelming amount of information available. Scripts related to news coverage are ready now and scripts for a variety of music formats will be available next week.

In addition to reviewing the Katrina/Natural Disaster Scripts and adapting them for use at your station, consider including a paragraph in mail that is not yet prepared that acknowledges the tragedy - and your station's importance either in coverage or as an oasis:

NEWS

While WDEI has been able to give you superior coverage and analysis in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the devastation of New Orleans, it is important to remember that WDEI does this on a daily basis . . . that our strength comes from the fact we provide in-depth, thoughtful news and analysis and public service 365 days a year, NOT just in the wake of a national crisis, or an emergency. We're here for you, as you are here for us.

Not a day goes by that we aren't grateful for the financial support of our listeners. Support from listeners makes up the single most important source of income for us and your support assures that WDEI has the resources to keep you informed in the fullest sense of the word.

MUSIC

In times of stress and crisis, music is our comfort and our companion. In music we can release our weariness and stress and helplessness. When we are all but overwhelmed by the images and news coverage regarding Hurricane Katrina and the devastation of New Orleans, we can turn to the music on WDEI to create an island of peace for a brief time.

For stations fundraising and mailing in disaster areas, you will want to check with the USPS regarding mail delivery in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.

On September 2nd, the USPS announced "Effective immediately, the Postal Service is not accepting any Standard Mail (Letters and Flats) or Periodicals Mail — from any source — addressed for delivery within the following three-digit ZIP Code ranges: 369, 393, 394, 395, 396, 700, 701 and 704. This emergency action has been taken as a result of severe facility damage, evacuations and other issues resulting from Hurricane Katrina." Regular updates regarding mail delivery are available on the USPS National Mail Service Update web page.

After 9/11, there was a coordinated effort by MPR to raise money to help WNYC restore its service. About thirty stations participated. Should your station help raise money for the public radio stations in the effected areas?

Lewis and Kennedy's thoughts: "Once we know the scope of what is needed and once the response can be nationally coordinated, yes. Keep it brief--a day or a weekend--and make certain it is distinguished from the station's own fundraising activities. Use the fundraising model for NPR's Gulf Coverage as a model."

Right now, the victims of Hurricane Katrina should be thought about before the stations effected. DEI is helping to coordinate donations to help our colleagues affected by Hurricane Katrina. This fundraising effort is internal to the public radio system. DEI will be providing details as soon as it receives IRS approval for this effort.