Impact of COVID-19 on Charity Communications

April 2020

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Introduction

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Now, more than ever, charity communications matter. But for many of us, the knock-on effect of COVID-19 has created new and unexpected challenges as well as fears over our short and long term survival.
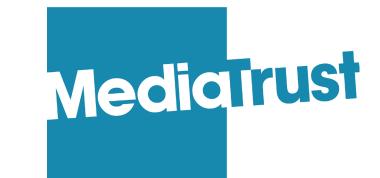
It's our job as charities to find ways to navigate these challenges effectively and strategically in order to keep delivering the best services we possibly can to our beneficiaries at this crucial time while continung to get key messages out to donors and volunteers and engage with other stakeholders.

That's why Media Trust and CharityComms partnered to survey the sector about the main communications challenges charities are facing at this time. We will use these findings to help deliver the support and resources charities need in the weeks and months ahead.

We asked charities what they needed and here's what they said…

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Summary
WHAT THE FINDINGS TELL US

We received **219** completed survey responses with **70%** coming from **small charities**. The survey is therefore not representative of the sector as a whole. However, answers were consistent across organisations of all sizes on the comms channels being used and challenges faced, suggesting the universality of the comms challenges across the sector.

The data highlights the key areas of resource and support charities need in light of COVID-19. The top three comms challenges charities have are **supporting users who would normally have access to face to face services**, **producing digital content** (films, vlogs, infographics) **and moving services online**.
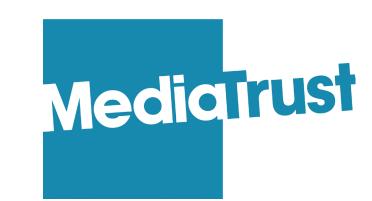
Strikingly, **20%** of respondents don't know what resources are available showing the need for better signposting to resources. **97% would like pro bono or volunteer support**, underscoring the opportunity for the media and creative industry to get involved and contribute resources, training and volunteer support.

Only **2%** (6 respondents) **said they aren't worried about comms challenges at this time** demonstrating an overwhelming need for support.

" **20% of respondents felt they didn't know what resources are available**

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Survey Respondents

OVERVIEW

The respondents' organisation type/area of work was widely spread across the sector:

The highest number of respondents were charities working in **Health including Mental Health** – 21% (45 responses) which is reflective and consistent with the wider charity sector.
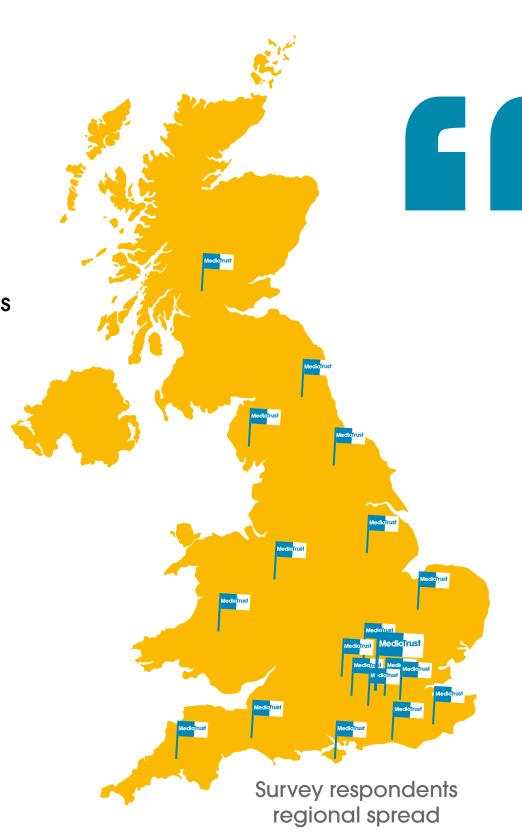
A high level of respondents were organisations whose work focuses on face to face interaction with their service users including:

- Disability – 11% (23 responses)
- Education and Training – 7% (17 responses)
- Community groups – 6% (18 responses)
- Children – 5% (12 responses)
- Housing and Homelessness – 4% (9 responses)

Half of the organisations were located in London and Greater London (50% –101 responses). The rest were spread out across the UK but mostly located in the south of England.
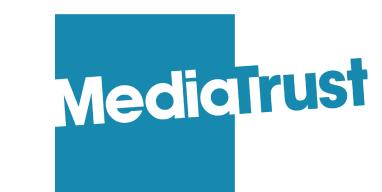
The top three roles respondents held were:

- Director/CEO - 26% (57 responses)
- Communications Officer – 21% (46 responses)
- Senior Managers – 20% (43 responses)

Survey respondents regional spread

> " **The highest number of respondents were charities working in Health including Mental Health - 21%**

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Charity Size

70% of respondents were from small charities (income under £1m).

Most respondents were from micro charities and when combined with small charities, this made up 70% of total respondents.

Breakdown

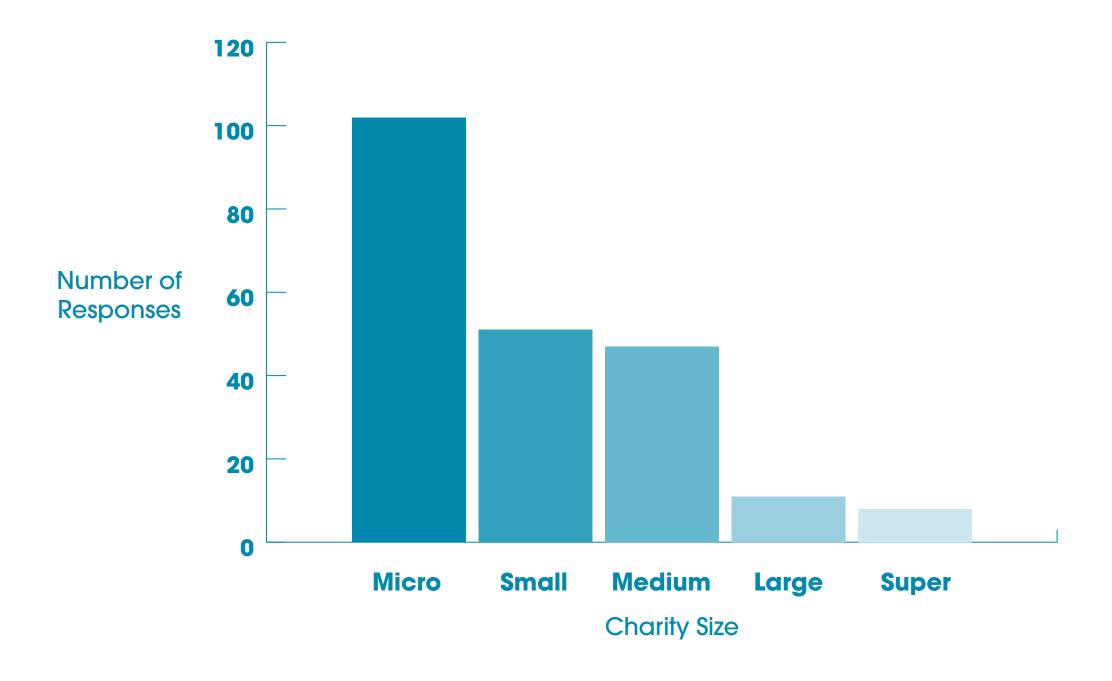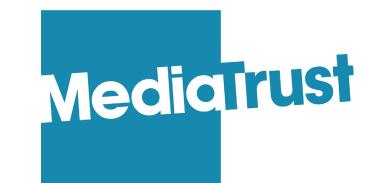|	
Micro - less than £0.5m turnover	47% (102 responses)
Small - £0.5m - £1m turnover	23% (51 responses)
Medium - £1m - £5m turnover	21% (47 responses)
Large - £5m - £10m turnover	5% (11 responses)
Super - £10m+ turnover	4% (8 responses)

note. Size categories are based on Media Trust's bandings

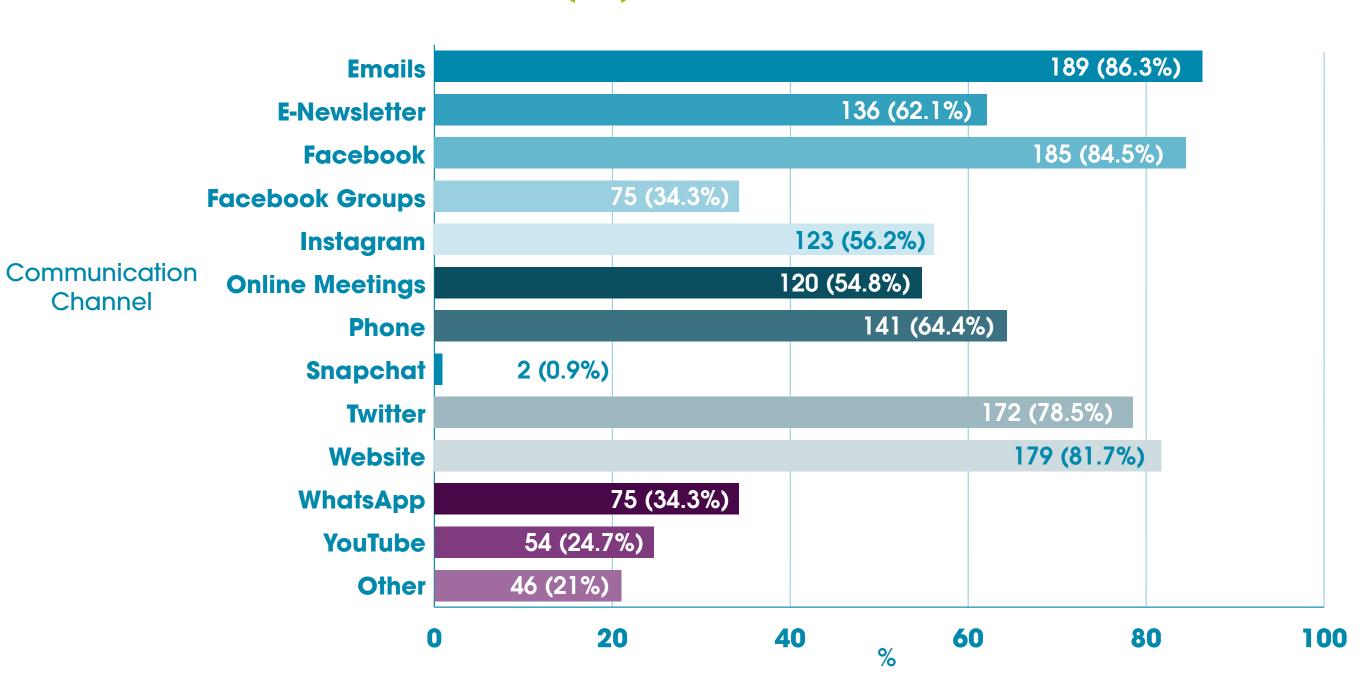## CHARITY SIZE BASED ON TURNOVER

Communication Channels during COVID-19

The comms channels charities are using the most during this period of isolation and remote working are **Emails, Facebook*, Website** and **Twitter**.

More than half (119 respondents) **intend to use all four of these channels combined** to connect with stakeholders.

This was consistent across all organisation sizes demonstrating the popularity of these channels.

*84% of respondents said they would be using Facebook and 34% also said they would be using Facebook Groups

COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS INTENDED FOR USE (%)

Bar chart — Communication Channel (vertical axis) vs % (horizontal axis, 0 to 100):

- Emails: 189 (86.3%)
- E-Newsletter: 136 (62.1%)
- Facebook: 185 (84.5%)
- Facebook Groups: 75 (34.3%)
- Instagram: 123 (56.2%)
- Online Meetings: 120 (54.8%)
- Phone: 141 (64.4%)
- Snapchat: 2 (0.9%)
- Twitter: 172 (78.5%)
- Website: 179 (81.7%)
- WhatsApp: 75 (34.3%)
- YouTube: 54 (24.7%)
- Other: 46 (21%)

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Communication Channels during COVID-19

OTHER WAYS RESPONDENTS PLAN TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR AUDIENCES

attendanywhere®

vimeo

zoom

TikTok

Ti

Linkedin

slack

Printed Newsletters

Post

Leaflet dropping

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Communication Challenges

THE TOP FIVE COMMS CHALLENGES CHARITIES ARE FACING AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 ARE:

Supporting users who normally have access to face to face services	Producing digital content for example, films, vlogs, infographics	Moving our services online	Digital fundraising	Communicating and engaging our stakeholders
61%	**53%**	**41%**	**40%**	**39%**
133 responses	115 responses	90 responses	89 responses	87 responses

Charities are clearly feeling the digital divide with key challenges including:

- Digital content   53%
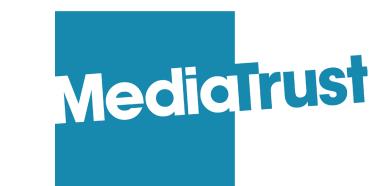- Digital fundraising   40%
- Digital leadership   34%
- Digital campaigning   32%
- Digital comms   29%

Other comms challenges include:

- Internal communications   23%
- Mobilising volunteers   21%
- Communicating safeguarding advice
  for frontline staff and volunteers   19%
- PR   17%
- Media interviews   8%

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Communication Challenges

BY BREAKDOWN OF THEMES

When grouped together in the categories below, the biggest communication challenges related to **digital communications**, closely followed by **stakeholder engagement and commuications** and then **service delivery**.

Digital comms
22%

Producing digital content	53%
Digital campaigning	32%
A lack of digital communications skills	29%

Engagement and comms
21%

Engaging stakeholders	39%
Mobilising volunteers	21%
PR	17%
Media interviews	8%
Internal communications	23%

Service delivery
20%

Supporting users used to face to face services	61%
Moving services online	41%

Operational
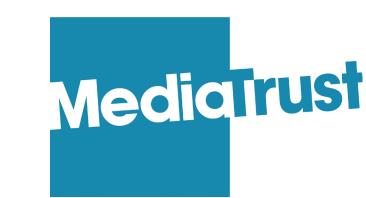### 18%

Managing workloads and projects	38%
Digital leadership: how to make our organisation more digital	34%
Communicating safeguarding to frontline staff and volunteers	19%

Fundraising
15%

Digital fundraising	40%
Diversifying funding streams/review business model	33%

Other
4%

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Communication Challenges

OTHER COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AND AREAS OF CONCERN RAISED BY RESPONDENTS:

We want to build our website to support members, but all funds are on hold or cancelled

We are a small independent employee assistance provider supplying 24/7 mental health support to over 1m employees worldwide. We work with many NGOs and media organisations and would really appreciate any support you can offer us as we move from face to face therapeutic support to digital mental health programmes

Most of our face to face customers do not have or cannot operate digital services

Communicating to older people using technology

Increasing digital literacy and capacity among our local networks

How to engage with the media while press is so focused on the virus

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Communication Barriers

Charities are struggling to effectively communicate with stakeholders.

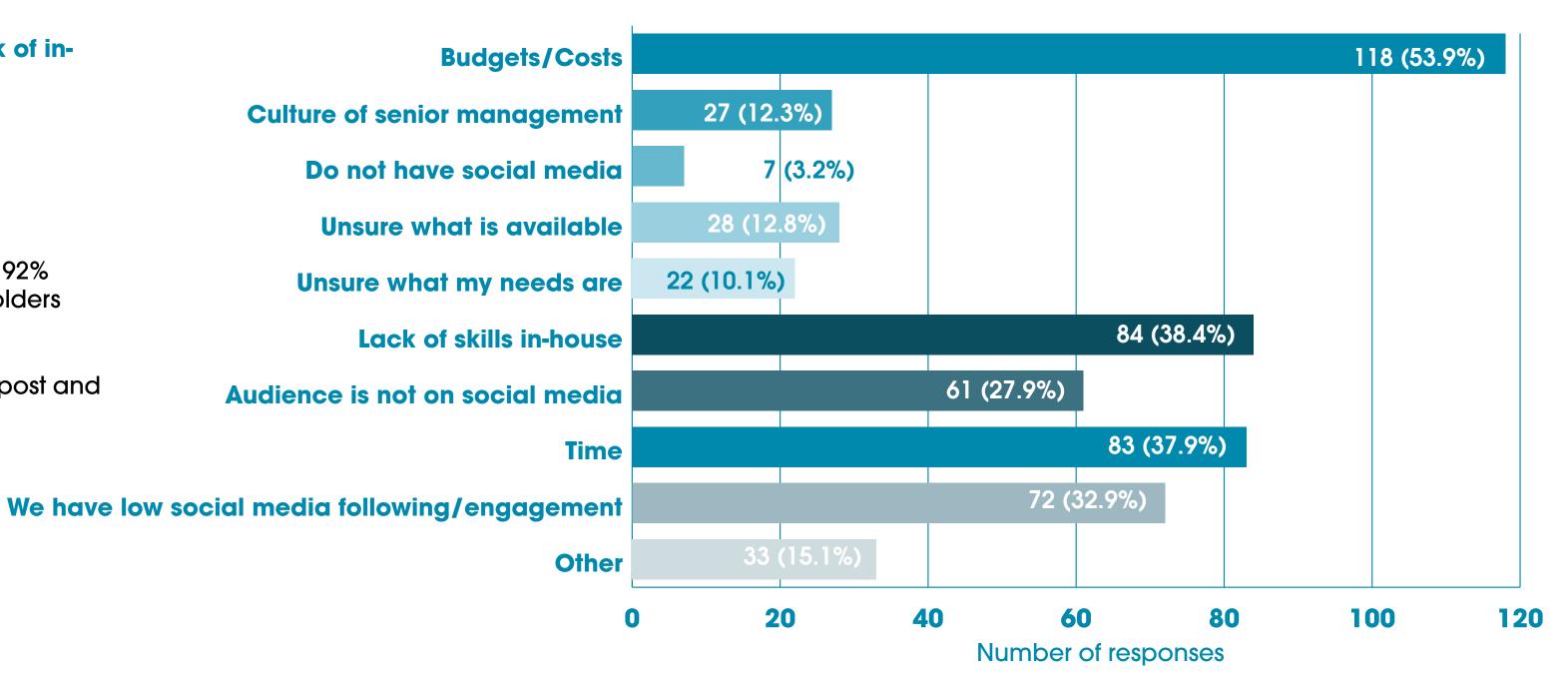The top three barriers they are facing are **costs**, **lack of in-house skills** and **time**.

28% said their audience are not on social media. 92% intend to utilise emails to communicate with stakeholders during this period.

Other ways of communicating cited were print and post and online chat platforms including Teams and Zoom.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS (%)

Barrier	Number of responses
Budgets/Costs	118 (53.9%)
Culture of senior management	27 (12.3%)
Do not have social media	7 (3.2%)
Unsure what is available	28 (12.8%)
Unsure what my needs are	22 (10.1%)
Lack of skills in-house	84 (38.4%)
Audience is not on social media	61 (27.9%)
Time	83 (37.9%)
We have low social media following/engagement	72 (32.9%)
Other	33 (15.1%)

Number of responses

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Communication Barriers

OTHER BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION RAISED BY RESPONDENTS

Knowing what our supporters want from us

Most of our audience is online but the most vulnerable are not
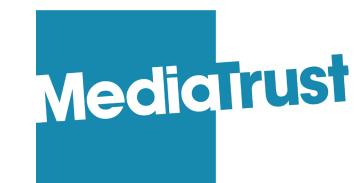
How best to use what we have and manage longer term digital strategy

Planning and executing comms through a remote team

Reaching some of our audience who are not on social

Too much information – what is going to cut through?

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Communication Support Needs

Over 20% of respondents don't know what their needs are, suggesting the need for a concerted effort to help charities evaluate and benchmark their comms capabilities as a longer-term goal for the sector, perhaps once the current crisis is over.

Over 20% of respondents also don't know what is available in terms of support, indicating the need for better signposting to resources, advice, training, and pro-bono and volunteering support.

A large majority of respondents said they would value help with comms-related training and skills development through **webinars, online guides** and other **shared resources**.
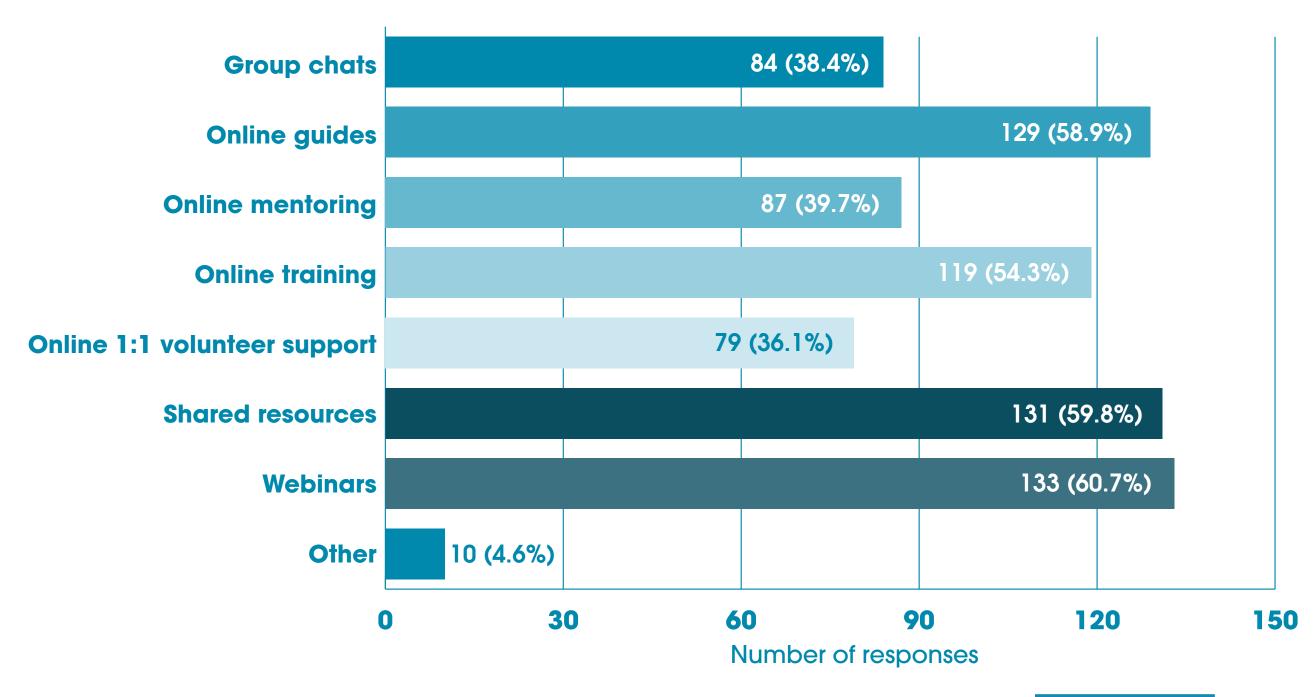
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Communication Support Needs

Charities clearly want help with comms training and skills development.

Respondents cited **webinars**, **shared resources** and **online guides** as their preferred methods for delivering training. This was consistent across all sizes of organisations.

Other requests included direct contact for more organisation-specific issues, strategy templates, phone calls and face to face support.

INTENDED COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USE BY CHARITIES (%)

Channel	Number of responses
Group chats	84 (38.4%)
Online guides	129 (58.9%)
Online mentoring	87 (39.7%)
Online training	119 (54.3%)
Online 1:1 volunteer support	79 (36.1%)
Shared resources	131 (59.8%)
Webinars	133 (60.7%)
Other	10 (4.6%)

Number of responses

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Pro-bono and Volunteer Communication Support

97% of respondents said they would like appropriate pro-bono or volunteer comms support.

The pro-bono or volunteer support charities are most in need of right now include:

Social media and digital marketing	48% (105 responses)
Communications strategy and planning	41% (89 responses)
Digital strategy	40% (88 responses)
Film and content production	34% (75 responses)
Website design and management	28% (62 responses)
Crisis communications	26% (56 responses)

Other areas include marketing (21%), campaigning (20%), copy writing, editing and proofreading (18%) and IT and data management (18%).

" **97% of respondents would like access to appropriate pro-bono and volunteer comms support.**

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Communication Support

OTHER PRO-BONO AND VOLUNTEER SUPPORT CHARITIES SAID THEY ARE IN MOST NEED OF RIGHT NOW

We want to continue to fundraise and we could do with some advice on that given the current climate
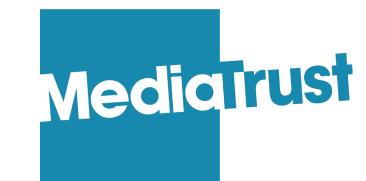
Digital engagement i.e. all our engagement was face-to-face (using digital comms to communicate the value of this). Now the only way to connect is digitally

eLearning advice and platform recommendations

Strategic oversight for the sector in this geographical area

Creating relevant support content for digital channels to free up our helpline for urgent enquiries

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Media Trust Communications Support

Media Trust's Volunteer Platform connects charities with professionals from across the media and creative industry who want to share their skills and expertise with charities for free. If you would like some virtual digital, marketing or communications support, all you need to do is register your charity and post your volunteer request on the platform to get started.
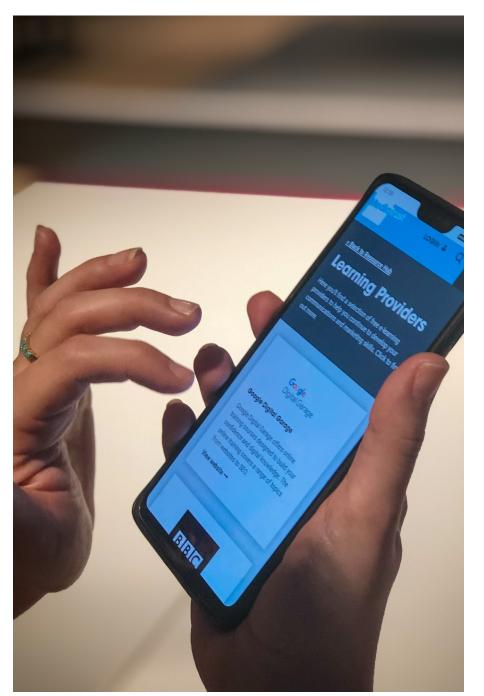
Media Trust's Resource Hub is a comprehensive collection of free guides, webinars, toolkits and tips created by our media and creative industry and charity partners specifically for the charity sector. Topics covered include Digital Strategy, Social Media, Creative Campaigns and Digital Fundraising. We have listed a selection of available resources below:
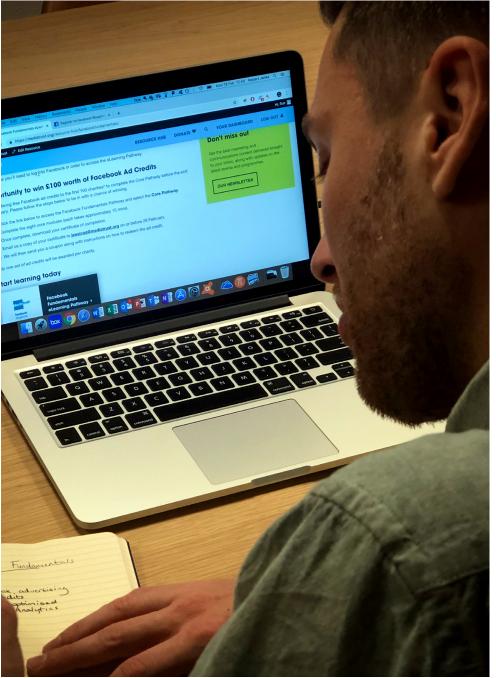
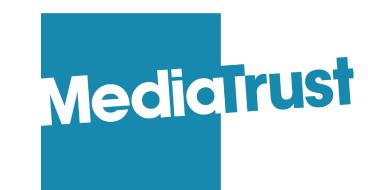**SOCIAL MEDIA**
Facebook: Facebook Fundamentals
Twitter: Get started with the Twitter content strategy playbook
Instagram: How to use the Donate sticker on Instagram
Marketing strategy: Digital Marketing Strategy Webinar series

Media Trust's Training Programmes provide tailored training for charities from Media Interview training, Social Media and Writing for the Web to Digital Strategy. We will be offering new online training sessions in the coming weeks and months.

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CharityComms Communications Support

The CharityComms website is packed full of free guides, toolkits and tips created by charity sector experts specifically for the sector. Below are a select few:

RESOURCES
Charity communicator coronavirus resources
CharityComms knowledge hub
Best Practice Guides
CharityComms events

SERVICES
AskCharity
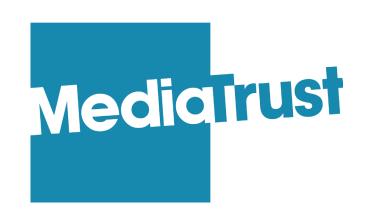Digital benchmark
Mentoring scheme

We are here to help

PLEASE GET IN TOUCH IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SURVEY FINDINGS OR SUPPORT WE CAN OFFER OR NEED HELP ACCESSING OUR RESOURCES

MediaTrust

Email	carlyb@mediatrust.org
Phone	020 7871 5600
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