

COVID COMMUNICATION

LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION

Child Care Teacher:
"I am not really sure what is going on. It seems like things are changing every day.

We aren't even sure who is going to be in the classroom. I am not even sure who to ask."

Director:
"Communication is the heart of the work and certainly during COVID we have found a clear, compassionate message is critical."

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

Communication can be used to build community.

It is important to build resilience with stories about how you can continue to deliver the highest quality.

Communicate with **transparency**, this builds trust.

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

Communicate frequently with your stakeholders (families, staff, etc.) and through different modes.

When we layer communication it has a bigger more effective impact.

What does that look like?

Layers of Communication:

- app
- texts
- email
- physical handouts
- verbal
- “remind-me” bracelets

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

As a community/program
are you communicating
best practice with your
actions?

Are you "walking the
talk"?

It is more important than
ever.

Communicate with a
spirit of: *"this is who I
want to be taking care of
my children"*.

Being confident in an
uncertain time is crucial.

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

Repeat.

Repeat.

Repeat.

**Policies and procedures
need to be shared over
and over.**

Give staff scripts to help them with delivering the message and answering frequently asked questions.

Don't assume they know the answer.

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

Communicate how your stakeholders (families, children and staff - don't forget staff) can give feedback safely. Again, many modes to "hear them" try surveys, focus groups and one on one. Make this a priority. Make sure you communicate back out so they know you heard them and how you will respond to their concerns, etc. This will build trust.

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

Increase visuals to families on what their child's days look like. This can be through apps, documentation in pick up areas and weekly newsletters with detailed information..

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

**When possible ask
stakeholders what
they want and need.**

**Do this only if you are
able to use the
feedback.**

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

When things are changing constantly, strong effective communication can build empathy. We do this through creating a sense of “we are all in this together”. Emphasising the Do..... when we focus on the yes it creates a more positive message.

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LESSON ONE: COMMUNICATION TIPS

When difficult information needs to be communicated facts and a frank manner have been shown to be most effective. Followed by clear messaging on who they can contact with both email and phone to answer specific questions.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Sept 2020 survey of families in the Pediatrics Journal reported 29% of children had a higher rate of clinginess, being distracted and fearful.

**Teacher:
"The resilience of children is amazing. Children adapt and typically are resilient when they have trusting adults."**

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LESSON TWO:

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

As one teacher said, "It's on us to figure out how to make the best of this situation, which is what we do on a day to day basis. Whether we are providing an early education in the form of in-person, hybrid or all virtual, the children still look for us. We are there to build connections with them. We continue to provide routine and predictability, which children need and desire.

Children are provided opportunities to play and explore at their own pace. We are there to challenge, age-appropriately, by guiding their investigations in order to help them answer their own questions about their world. We still provide children with love and respect in any way we can, whether it is a quick hug, air hug, wave, fist bump or an elbow bump. The biggest change for us has been learning to smile with our eyes".

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

**Early childhood educators
continue to be grounded in
best practices.**

ECE's continue to support
children's learning through
hands-on experiences, asking
open-ended questions and
encouraging children to solve
problems.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Masks are essential for the ECE and there is some evidence to show it is harder for young children to recognize people since children focus on individual features. Also, that we display emotion through our movements on our face and with masks they don't read these cues.

The younger the child the more important it is that families understand using face to face interaction without masks on. Children typically learn best when auditory and visual are paired together. Listening (auditory) alone can be hard for some children.

Gestures and an expressive tone of voice become more important along with speaking clearly and unhurried conversations. More than ever it is important to show pictures and/or books of emotions to support language and social/emotional development.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Interestingly, research on children during crises shows that adults/teachers/caregivers underestimate children's distress and overestimate their resilience.

There is a direct correlation to how children are doing based on how the adults in their lives are doing; the caregiving burden directly impacted children.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Families in remote learning have a direct impact on children and how they are developing during COVID. ECE's need to use descriptive and specific feedback to the caregiver. The caregiver is critical to the relationship with the educator and how the child is impacted. This partnership is more important than ever.

Some suggested scripts for ECE's include:
I wonder what would happen if..... Ask what they have tried.....

Continue reflection between meetings with families. Ideally, you will have follow up with families consistently.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Not all challenging events need to negatively impact children. We know that obstacles can build resilience and increase coping strategies.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Is it possible to meet in small groups with children who are receiving remote learning for a stay and play a few hours a week?

Teachers who are doing this report it assists them in building a partnership for the next week.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Not surprisingly children do best once they return to attending early childhood programming and their routine. Early Childhood Educators play a key role in supporting families and children.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

**Building
relationships can be
developed in
remote learning that
positively impact
children.**

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Our youngest children benefit from “serve and return”. The back and forth interaction before they can speak includes engaging and returning attention. A classic game of peek a boo is a good example.

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LESSON TWO: IMPACT ON CHILDREN

**Important to have as
much continuity of
caregivers and
teachers in
programming.**

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LESSON THREE: IMPACT ON FAMILIES

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LESSON THREE:

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

"The impact of a parent's mental health on the family and especially on the child's well-being is very significant, but we rarely pay attention to it."

- Zero to Three

A study found that the greatest risk factor for burnout during COVID is being a working mom with children between 0-5 years old. Especially if their partner is working outside the home.

@curiousneuron Journal of Pediatric Psychology 2020

Director:
Families report being unsure about group care, especially when they aren't in classrooms like they have been. This changes the relationships, but we understand the safety risk is greater. That is where we struggle, what are these long term outcomes we haven't seen yet?"

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LESSON THREE:

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Connecting with families looks different.

Early Childhood professionals are stretching to communicate primarily in a virtual manner or in quick nuggets during pick up and drop off. They are working to balance engagement with children and being on the computer/phone. They have found engaging children with the communication is an added bonus. "I am sending our families pictures from a small group so they can see what we are learning." Making children part of this ideally supports both families, children and the classroom.

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LESSON THREE:

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Overall Families Feelings:

- **No time to myself**
- **Not seeing family...."it's been so long!"**
- **Pressure to zoom/connect virtually**
- **Guilt over parenting - especially more screen time**
- **Never ending burden of being a mom, teacher, wife, employee, friend, etc.**
- **Not being able to interact with their community - church, friends, library...etc.**
- **Families in face to face programming feeling not as connected**
- **Families working hard at keeping positive but it's exhausting**

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LESSON THREE:

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Families in Care:

- Families in face to face programming feeling not as connected - miss seeing the classroom and community events/activities.
- Families worry about safety protocols.
- Families report staff looking distracted or rushed.
- Families are very grateful for daily communication with staff via apps, e-mails and phone calls.

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LESSON THREE:

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Families in Remote Learning

- **Families shared feelings of incompetence with “teaching”.**
- **Families shared guilt/shame for not following up/keeping up on expectations.**
- **Families expressed being overwhelmed trying to balance all of their children’s educational needs.**
- **Families who are sending their child to a program where they are handling remote learning report both relief and guilt.**

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LESSON THREE: IMPACT ON FAMILIES

How can we help families? Genuinely check in with families and follow up. How are we supporting them? Survey families asking how you can help. Some families might not ask for help but will when surveyed.

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LESSON THREE: IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Include resources for Mental Health to families - normalize asking for support! Share resources on how to reduce stress, increase mindfulness, etc.

Connect families to support groups in the community.

Families need to understand that they are not in this alone.

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LESSON THREE: IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Consistency is critical...families meeting in person need to see the same faces! This builds trust and connection.

No matter what the setting was, families wanted to “feel” like they “trusted” the teacher/caregiver.

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LESSON THREE: IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Layered Communication

Having layered communication such as verbal, e-mail, text/app/reminders was reported as ideal. Audit the tone of your communication....is it empathetic, hopeful, supportive?

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LESSON THREE: IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Resource Hub

Families reported they often asked for resources/learning opportunities (or picked up resources) during drop off and pick up.

Do you have a way this continues to happen? Sending home a weekly/monthly resources/learning opportunity?

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LESSON THREE: IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Remote learning families expressed appreciation for teachers who didn't seem rushed to "finish" and were flexible with a good sense of humor.

Also, when teachers treated them as partners in the work - - even when they weren't as consistent as they wanted to be.

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**LESSON FOUR:
PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE
LEARNING**

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

Director:

“Our goal is to do our best everyday based on the challenges for that day.”

Teachers/Caregivers:

“I feel guilty. I am not able to do some things I used to because I am so focused on sanitation.”

There is very little data beyond anecdotal data from administration/teachers/caregivers, families and children on how program quality has been impacted due to COVID.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

“We give ourselves a great deal of GRACE - we are essential workers delivering care during a pandemic.”

- Director of Early Childhood Center

Finding ways to encourage one another has been critical. Sticky notes with affirmations in community spaces/bathrooms and individual texts/cards to staff have been important. Directors report giving gift cards and small gifts of appreciation have been important.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

“I miss collaborating and engaging with other classrooms. Collaborating is challenging with keeping our children in their pod.”

- Teacher in Child Care setting

Using a journal back and forth between classrooms and sending mail/pictures to each other has increased a sense of community. Making a snack for a room or leaving a special activity outside for them.

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LESSON FOUR:

PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

Teachers/Caregivers continue to share that relationships are the heart of their programs and classrooms regardless of setting (remote/hybrid/in person). Family connections were such an indicator of quality that it feels different.

Directors/Teachers/Caregivers who have set up intentional reflection on quality report higher satisfaction. Quality indicators such as daily schedule, small groups, large groups, curriculum, classroom setup and children's development were commonly discussed.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

Remote/hybrid teachers report that their quality of teaching feels very different. Although they report everyone is doing their best they have a great deal of uncertainty around quality.

Directors/Teachers who had scheduled conversations/surveyed families on what was working and what wasn't working in remote teaching felt more comfortable overall.

Programs that were able to deliver materials to the children in their classrooms to support their learning felt it was very important.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

One specific area was sensory that was shared numerous times. Some programs invested in enough sensory materials for all children to have opportunities throughout the week.

Many Directors/Classrooms have strived to continue having ample materials available for the classroom.

This has resulted in additional costs and time with sanitation but feel it has positively impacted quality.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

Remote learning for young children can be effective. The analogy has been that Mr. Rogers, Sesame Street were wonderful examples. I personally agree with that....HOWEVER.... They had a production crew and writers to produce a half hour show per week.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

American Progress published that Child Care costs have increased 47% during the pandemic. It is reasonable to assume that additional costs have challenged programs to cut expenses which could result in program quality being impacted.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

**Program Quality was
directly impacted by
turnover and
inconsistent
staffing.**

**Hiring and training
during COVID has
been very
challenging for
programs.**

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

Staff in programs that continued to have time to plan in their week felt they were offering a quality classroom. Programs that reflected and engaged with others felt they were delivering a higher quality program.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

Families of all children liked short videos they could look at with their child of the teacher reading, sharing a cooking experience or singing a song.

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LESSON FOUR: PROGRAM QUALITY/REMOTE LEARNING

Families who had access to, comfort with technology and consistent support/adult reported remote learning to be a quality experience. Shorter time together worked better.

Program Quality is a topic near and dear to my heart. As I navigated conversations with Directors/Administrators, Families and Teachers around how they are delivering program quality during COVID was both encouraging and difficult.

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COVID COMMUNICATION

LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

Teacher:

We are essential workers. This held a lot of weight for me, when I could finally give myself and early childhood educators that recognition. It helps me get through the scary moments by reaffirming my purpose of being in this field. Many families are still working and they need us to be able to sustain their families. Young children need us to provide them stability and a secure place to be that encourages learning through play, when they were not with their families. Our own families need us to be working to support them financially and model the importance of supporting one another, especially during a pandemic.

Director:
Our staff have been amazing, accountable, worked diligently and set the health and safety protocols in place immediately. Their passion for the work they do is noticed and keeping the health and safety of the children in their care has made an impact on the health and safety of our center as a whole.

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

“Why is early childhood educators’ work viewed so minimal compared to others? During this crisis, we’re expected to be front-liners - now others see our value in society. How important we are!”

- Renee, Child Care Provider

Families and communities showing appreciation and respect for the role of the ECE’s is necessary.

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

Child care providers and early educators are deeply concerned about the health risks of operating during the pandemic.

Administrators find it is imperative that they need to focus on staff's Mental Health.

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

36% of providers are worried that their staff will be exposed to COVID-19 by the children/families they serve.

Increased Health and Safety protocols have been successful in programs. Children and staff working and learning in small pods decrease exposure when there is a positive test.

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

Early Childhood Educators reported that the work environment was more stressful than before COVID. Staff working remotely expressed a feeling of “this isn’t what I signed up for”.

Need a layered approach of checking in with staff on managing the stress.

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

As Administrators we need to get more comfortable with being honest with staff. This is not going to get easier BUT you are going to get stronger. We will develop better systems and protocols.

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

Asking follow up questions beyond “how are you doing” is critical. Tell me more.... What can I do to help? Ask specific questions. Listen and follow up..

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

We need to be watchful of each other. Does someone need our help? Support? Is compassion fatigue increasing. Mental Health should be a normalized part of conversations and check ins.

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

**Recognize misplaced
guilt....many staff in EC
reported how guilty they
felt when a room or their
center needed to close.**

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LESSON FIVE: IMPACT ON STAFF

Encourage one another to be actively engaged in self care. Have this be a routine part of checking in with staff. Self care looks different for everyone. However it looks it makes a real difference in the overall health of the staff.

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COVID COMMUNICATION

LESSON SIX: OVERALL IMPACT

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LESSON SIX: OVERALL IMPACT

The child care system in the USA was fragile before COVID-19. It continues to be unstable at this time throughout the country.

Child Care Aware of America reported one major issue is how fragmented it is. Each state has its own system, rules, requirements and funding stream. How do we rebuild better?

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LESSON SIX:

OVERALL IMPACT

The average wage in the US for an ECE is 13.70 an hour. With the average age being 36.3 years of age with 93% of the workforce being women.

In September 2020 alone, 865,000 women dropped out of the labor force. This number was four times higher than the number of men who did so during that period.

Recruitment and retaining qualified staff will be a key indicator of program quality as we navigate forward.

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LESSON SIX:

OVERALL IMPACT

Child Care prior to COVID was inequitable throughout the United States. Children of color and children from low-income families had less access to quality child care.

Overall, quality Child Care is not accessible to all families. There is just not enough child care to meet the demands of families, especially of our infant and toddler age children. COVID has only amplified these disparities. It will be essential that these gaps continue to be part of the funding conversations.

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LESSON SIX:

OVERALL IMPACT

Child Care is critically underfunded throughout the United States. The cost for delivering care will continue to increase as health and safety protocols will be necessary to stay or re-open.

This includes lower ratios of children/class size and more health standards.

Government and community support and initiatives will be necessary for Child Care to Rebuild better than ever. Directors/Owners reported significant revenue decline.

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LESSON SIX: OVERALL IMPACT

Himama reports that 45% of child care owners and directors aren't confident they'll survive another 12 months of COVID-19. My conversations with Directors are experiencing significant stress by almost a year of change.

The average Director in Michigan reported by Zip Recruiter is 27,500.00.

In addition, 64% of providers have non-ideal staffing levels. Directors shared many stories of staffing challenges.

Staffing including turnover was an issue prior to COVID and has only intensified over the past year.

A stable workforce will be necessary to rebuild Early Childhood.

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LESSON SIX: OVERALL IMPACT

Our voices matter more than ever. Tell your story of what you do and why it's important to your circle of influence. We can't assume that others know how crucial our work is.

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LESSON SIX: OVERALL IMPACT

**Stay informed locally,
statewide and nationally to
move the agenda forward.**

**How are you getting
updates? Make sure you
sign up for email and text
alerts from your trusted
organizations..**

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LESSON SIX: OVERALL IMPACT

Government and community support and initiatives will be necessary for Child Care to rebuild better than ever.

Directors/Owners reported significant revenue decline.

Apply for these grants, support other programs in your community and thank the legislators and policymakers who are hearing your stories!.

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