

#RamadanAtHome

Ethical Considerations for Muslim Charities

EMPOWER COMMUNITIES!
DO NO HARM!



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Overview

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The holy month of Ramadan is the most blessed month in our religion. It is a time of reflection and contemplation, where we work to reconnect with our faith, and improve ourselves and the world we live in.

In this blessed month of reflection, we look not only to how we can improve ourselves on an individual level, but also, as charitable organisations. There are always ways we can improve the sector and our organisations, and it is important we take the time needed to reflect, discuss and grow, so that we can do what we do best: support and empower communities across the globe.

COVID-19 has meant that our traditional Ramadan customs and celebrations have had to be suspended, with masjids closed, and taraweeh prayers and communal iftars cancelled. But, the giving spirit of Ramadan lives on, with charities stepping up their digital campaigns and fundraising to compensate for the loss of in-person fundraising. It is important that, during this time, we do not become overly competitive and practice unethical behaviour in our fundraising.

This guide offers suggests areas that we believe the sector should consider reflecting on, as well as advice on how to implement changes within your charity and the culture of the sector.

Ethical Principles

All charities operate based on their own values, but most organisations share in some basic core ethical principles, including:

- Respect for human dignity, human rights and social justice
- Fairness
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Sustainability
- Empowerment and agency
- Commitment to excellence

As Muslim charities, we are guided also by the values and ethical codes of our faith, which both reinforce the core ethical principles outlined earlier, and expand them. As Muslim Charities, we have a duty to those we serve, and we will be held accountable for how well we practice that duty, whether by donors and recipients in this life, or by Allah (SWT) in the next.

It is important for us to strive to enact these ethical principles, and that we constantly reflect on our work, and note areas both of success and in need of improvement.

Working collectively is one way that we can all share, learn and grow as a sector.

Marketing materials

Marketing is central to the work of charities, and the accumulation of funds used to help vulnerable and marginalised people across the globe. Charities need to market the work they do in order to increase donations. Without it, the lifesaving work they do is simply not sustainable.

With this said, there are ethical considerations that need to be had when it comes to the creation of content and marketing materials. Everything does not go, and unfortunately, sometimes charities can be guilty of reinforcing the very same stereotypes, discrimination and oppressive behaviours they seek to eradicate in their work.

There are several ethical issues charities need to consider:

- Depictions of those we serve
- Consent
- Empowering communities to tell their own stories
- Welfare and safety of those we serve
- Welfare of donors and those viewing content

Depictions of those we serve

Whilst it is important to highlight the plights and struggles of those we serve, there is a fine line between what is acceptable and what could be seen as exploitative. We should be careful of reproducing and reinforcing damaging stereotypes and/or exacerbating the trauma and difficulties faced by those we serve.

Consent

Those we serve our human beings deserving of dignity, respect and agency. Content should only be produced with their explicit consent, and those featured in marke-

Marketing materials

ting materials should be made fully aware of how this content will be presented. They should be given full rights to remove their consent at any point.

Empowering communities to tell their own stories

Those we serve have incredible stories to tell, both of joy, and of sadness and trauma. They are best placed to talk about their life and their experiences, so it is important that charities empower communities to share their stories and to be part a central part of how their story is shared and presented.

Welfare and safety of those we serve

Charities intend to do good, not harm those they work in service to. However, some times, the way in which charities present recipients within their marketing material can cause greater harm than good. It is important for charities to understand the social, cultural and political contexts of the communities they work with. In some scenarios, identities or locations should be withheld so that those sharing their stories are effectively protected and do not face further harm, whether physically, emotionally or otherwise.

Welfare of donors and those viewing content

Charities also have a duty to protect the welfare of donors and those who view their materials. Charities should avoid causing excessive stress or trauma to viewers. Some viewers may have had direct experience of conflict and/or abject poverty and content should be produced in a way that is sensitive to this.

Competition

Whilst a healthy level of competition can be beneficial to our area of work, we should all remind ourselves that, we share a charitable (and not a profit-driven) ethos, we exist to serve people in need (and not to make the most profit at all costs) and that we constitute a relatively niche sector united by a common faith of reference, which emphasises solidarity and fair play.

With the coronavirus pandemic, reliance on digital campaigns and marketing has been extended, and it is expected that digital competition will increase with the reduced fundraising avenues currently available to charities. Many charities have adopted real time bidding practices to maximise the reach of their charity.

We would advise caution when using RTB as there are three main ways in which bidding on another charity's name can backfire on a practical level, and make it more expensive for your ad to show.

1) Bidding War

One serious downside is that you may start a 'bidding war' because – in response to your strategy – your 'competitor' may start bidding on your own brand name. Nobody in the Muslim charity sector wants to see this happening. Not only for the ethical reasons summarised earlier, but also because nobody would benefit from such a scenario, as your bidding will make it more expensive for them to bid on their own name and vice versa. This is money that could be better spent on diversifying content, or on work in the field.

Competition

2) You still pay even if someone doesn't click your ad

When someone searches for a specific charity online, it is very likely that they have already set their mind on supporting that charity. This means that not many people will be clicking on your ads, causing a low CTR (Click-through rate). While this may not seem bad given that you aren't paying when they don't click on your ads, low CTR can actually cause your Quality Score to decrease, which in turn will make it more expensive for your ad to show. In a way, you still pay when someone doesn't click on your ad.

3) Costs rise, whilst CTR and Quality Score may decrease.

If you're bidding on another charity's name, your ad isn't going to be very relevant. Since Google's reputation is based on the quality of its search results, it is in Google's best interest to deliver relevant results, therefore, in all likelihood, Google will penalise you with a low-Quality Score. And the lower your Quality Score, the higher your cost per click.

We are confident that all MCF members will appreciate the ethical and practical downsides of bidding on another charity's name, and we hope that all will refrain from adopting such a strategy.

Competition

We encourage all charities to apply the following to their online bidding strategy:

- Do not intentionally bid on each other.
- To avoid accidentally bidding on other charities, we encourage all charities to add the other charity's names, and campaign names as a 'negative' input in your systems, both on exact match and phrase match.
- If you believe that your charity's name or campaign name has been bid on by another member (whether intentionally or accidentally), we advise your organisation to formally inform the other organisation in writing, with the evidence. The two charities should resolve the issue between themselves, and if this is not possible, MCF can be called upon to mitigate if both parties see fit.

Within the sector, we should be fostering a positive environment of cooperation and unity. We should not engage in defamatory language or the spreading of misleading information or rumours about other charities within the sector. This is where healthy competition ends and divisive and unethical behaviour begins. We may not be the same, and we may disagree on certain issues, but we all share in the same ideals of making the world a fairer and safer place for the most vulnerable.

Transparency

Transparency is key to ensuring your charity works in an ethical manner.

One of the issues that requires tackling is that of overpromising. Overpromising can come in both intentional and unintentional forms. Those who engage in intentional overpromising, knowing that they cannot deliver what they are promising donors, are engaging in unethical behaviour.

However, there are many reasons that may lead to your organisation promising something that it can no longer deliver, where circumstances are beyond your organisation's control.

In these instances, we would recommend for your organisation to:

- carefully consider what 'promises' you make, and ensure, to the best of your ability, that you can deliver it.
- If a promise cannot be delivered, inform the donor of this and what you plan to do with their donation
- Give donors the right to withdraw their donation given that you could not deliver the promise of which they donated to. Or, at the bare minimum, allow donors to choose which of your projects they would like their donation to go to instead.