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## **Did you Prepare for the Pandemic?**

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On March 11<sup>th</sup> I was with the Sacramento Association of REALTORS®. The same day the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. I worried the meeting room was too small and breakout groups were a bad idea.

I was glad to get home to Florida. It is almost 150 days since I have been on an airplane to visit with associations.

In the Body of Knowledge for association management, you won't find a chapter on "Preparing for a Pandemic." Nor is it on the CAE exam.

### **Being Prepared**

Some associations were caught ill-prepared, big-time. They lacked reserves, income streams were not diversified, technology was outdated, communication channels were awkward, and they resisted the transition to on-line platforms.

Benjamin Franklin expressed by sentiment, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

Prepared associations found themselves well positioned. Many are succeeding and even thriving.

Associations are generally in a good position with decades of experience and resilience. They have leadership teams in place, they work strategically, they are experienced with social media and technology use, and they are loyal to their membership.

### **Nobody Told Me**

Here are how some organizations have fared.

1. **Technology** – Associations that had invested in technology found it easier to adapt. Technology supports efficient member communications, governance processes and remote staffing. Equally important was the staff's comfort with tech-usage.

2. **Savings Reserves** – Most associations maintain a minimum in savings equal to half a year’s budget. Boards with accessible funds were able to use reserves to retain staff and build a contingency budget.
3. **Right-Sized Board** – The pandemic transformed governance to on-line meetings. The smaller the board the easier to convene a quorum. The average size board is 15.
4. **Remote Work** – Not long-ago supervisors (and maybe the board) insisted being at the office was more productive. Now remote work is proving to be efficient. The associations that were prepared had already adapted to the possibility with computers, file access and phone connections.
5. **Value Calculation** – Members will always ask, “What have you done for me lately?” Benefits and services should have increased during the crisis. Having a means to calculate and communicate the worth of the benefits package is important when it comes time for dues renewal.
6. **Social Media** – In a crisis, communication channels are critical. Associations using multiple social media channels maintained two-way communications.
7. **Risk Aware** – Practice risk management. Boards avoid losses through risk identification, avoidance, and mitigation. Protect assets through insurance, smart practices and the advice of legal and accounting.
8. **Documented Processes** – Similar to a franchise operation, by documenting processes anybody can step into a role and perform effectively. Make the procedures and leadership manuals accessible on-line for easy remote access.
9. **Training** – Volunteers and staff have distinct responsibilities. Some boards wrongly used the crisis as a reason to micromanage. Providing orientation and professional development prepared the board and staff to perform their roles.
10. **Determination** – It would have been easy to think, “We can wait for the pandemic to go away.” Successful associations rallied forces to assess the situation, adapt and be a leader of recovery efforts.
11. **Strategy** – Associations are fortunate to have a strategic roadmap to advance mission and goals. Though the crisis may distract from the plan, it is a roadmap to which to return.

**12.E-Sales and Service** – Successful associations were ready with on-line registration and sales processes in place. Some organizations have increased membership, registrations, and sales --- without face to face contacts.

These practices have helped associations survive and prosper.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at [www.nonprofitcenter.com](http://www.nonprofitcenter.com).