How to Manage a Congressional Office Remotely During a Crisis

Thursday, March 26, 2020
12:00 PM ET

There is no phone connection to this webinar – computer audio only.
Presenters

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Agenda

• 5 Changes to Immediately Consider
• 6 Common Mistakes in a Crisis
• How to Make “Virtual Meetings” Seem Real
• Helpful and REALLY silly things you can do remotely to help everyone maintain their sense of humor...and their sanity!
• Webinar Preview:
  “Online Town Hall Meetings & COVID-19”
What Do I Do Now?

Best Practices
5 Changes to Immediately Consider

1. Change goals
   - Stop, think, plan, execute

2. Establish core responsibilities
   - Communicate WHICH tasks take priority

3. Don’t forget staff’s personal needs
   - Operate in flex-time environment
5 Changes to Immediately Consider

4. Increase individual meetings with direct reports
   - Crises require MORE communications, not less

5. Reconstruct some social interactions
   - Recreate “water cooler” conversations online
Changing Responsibilities

• All of your plans have changed
• Events previously planned are now changed or modified
  ▪ Town Hall meetings
  ▪ Coffees on your corner
  ▪ Workshops and Expos
Changing Responsibilities

• Possible options
  ▪ Continue preparations, knowing disruption will end at some point
  ▪ Readjust responsibilities of staff to focus on what is possible now
Establish Core Responsibilities

- Normal operations have changed
- Staff may be confused on priorities
- Modifications or changes will need to be made to previously planned in-person meetings and may now need to be converted to live-streaming or webinar formats
Establish Core Responsibilities

Questions for examination of each staff

• What was that person’s responsibilities before the crisis?
• Has that work changed or become irrelevant?
• Should new responsibilities be added?
• What responsibilities can be modified?
Remember Staff’s Personal Needs

• Abnormal is the new normal
• Everything has been rushed
• New responsibilities at home
• New responsibilities may require accommodation
• Failing to do so, may result in less productive, distracted staff
Increase Meetings with Direct Reports

• First sense is a feeling of distance
• Regular daily routines in the office cease
Increase Meetings with Direct Reports

• Option for response may include additional meetings with direct reports so:
  ▪ Managers can better track work and oversee staff since they’ve lost direct oversight abilities
  ▪ Managers can re-establish connectivity with staff by increasing lines of communication for staff to raise concerns or questions.
Reconstruct Some Social Interactions

• Regular interactions have been eliminated.
  ▪ Create “Random” Slack channel
  ▪ Post non-work related interesting stories

• Can you recreate some in-office activities?
  ▪ Lunch-hour book club
  ▪ Lunch-hour trivia competition
6 Mistakes in a Crisis

1. Too much time attacking – too little time understanding.
2. Don’t try to do too much and spread resources too thin.
3. Organizations deal with problems through their normal organizational structure – not designed to handle the new work demands.
4. Managers shouldn’t get pulled into doing line work.

5. Decision-making all too often breaks down under pressure.

6. Organizations fail to train individual staff on new duties.
General Rules in Crises

• You can't be frozen by "we just don't know what will happen."

• Make the best decisions today with the data available.
How to Make “Virtual Meetings” Seem Real
Participation in Virtual Meetings

“How to Get People to Actually Participate in Virtual Meetings”
Four Reasons to Hold a Meeting

• Influence others
• Make decisions
• Solve problems
• Strengthen relationships
Rule #1 – 60 Second Rule

• Make staff experience the problem at hand:
  ▪ Caseworker discussing a constituent case
  ▪ Legislative staff shares constituent letter

• Keep everyone involved with suggesting solutions
Rule #2 – Responsibility Rule

• Determination of an individual’s role
  ▪ Attending a movie – your role is observer
  ▪ Going to the gym – your role is an actor

• Greatest threat in virtual meetings is staff unconsciously becoming observers
  ▪ Create shared responsibility
“Research shows that a person appearing to have a heart attack on a subway is less likely to get help the more people there are on the train.”

- Harvard Business Review
Rule #3 – Nowhere to Hide Rule

Diffusion of responsibility

“If everyone is responsible, then no one feels responsible.”
Rule #3 – Nowhere to Hide Rule

• Assign tasks to staff in which they can actively engage.
• Define a problem, and assign to groups of 2-3 staff
• Provide limited time frame to take on task
Rule #4 – 5 Minute Rule

• Don’t exceed 5 minutes without:
  ▪ Engaging on problem solving matters
  ▪ Open to questions
  ▪ Have other staff bring in topics
Rule #4 – 5 Minute Rule

• Many distractions at home
• Maintain involvement or staff will retreat
• Have 2-3 meaningful engagements
• Keep track and summarize action items
Technical Setup Checklist

✓ Test the technology
✓ Raise webcam to eye-level
✓ Use a good microphone
✓ Position conference window near camera
“Tips From Experts—Our Co-Workers in Asia—About Working From Home”

- “Go” to work
- Create an “office environment”
- Set boundaries – don’t overwork
  (unless you’re responsible to save our lives)
- Think ahead about activities for kids
- Avoid isolation
- Stay healthy
- Embrace unexpected dividends

Source: Bloomberg News
HSAA District Security Service Center: 202-225-3380

• General security related questions or concerns and district security including:
  ▪ Security systems
  ▪ Mail safety
  ▪ Training
  ▪ Security for public events

• For security resources, information, and training go to saa.house.gov
Microsoft Teams

• For on-demand video and audio conferences with your staff and your constituents

• Easy set up
  ▪ Chats
  ▪ Calls
  ▪ Conference Calls
  ▪ Conference Call Lines
CAO still has laptops, surfaces and tablets for sale if offices need them.

Please do not use personal devices to access the House network.

Microsoft Teams provides good internal and external web conferencing tools for offices.

More guidance on HouseNet about tools for web and audio conferencing.
DEMOCRACY AWARDS

CongressFoundation.org @CongressFdn #DemocracyAwards
Categories

- Constituent Service
- Workplace Environment
- Transparency and Accountability
- Innovation and Modernization
Recognize Legislators and Staff
Provide Examples to Colleagues
Change Perception of Congress
• Finalists Selected!
• Finalists Announcement – April 2!
• Ceremony Postponed Until September 17

CONSTITUTION DAY!!!!
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