Concept Memo

“Managing Congress in a Crisis”

Webinar Series

Summary

The Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) will conduct four (4) webinar series for congressional staff in April and May of 2020 to help congressional offices during the coronavirus outbreak. The series will rely on CMF research on best practices in management during a crisis, as well as subject matter experts.

CMF will accept one sponsoring organization for each, at $5,000.

Background

Immediately after it became clear in March 2020 that the coronavirus would drastically change congressional operations, CMF began shifting our resources to meet the needs of our stakeholders in Congress. On week before offices decided to begin teleworking, CMF issued a short backgrounder, Advice to Congressional Offices: Managing the Coronavirus Pandemic.

On March 26 CMF conducted a webinar, “How to Manage a Congressional Office Remotely During a Crisis.”

- 477 congressional staff registered; 264 attended. In CMF’s 43-year history this was by far largest event (as measured by attendance).

- We estimate about 50% of congressional personal offices had a representative attend or watch the video recording of the webinar. Watch Video of Webinar Here.

- 84% of attendees said they were either “Extremely likely” or “Very likely” to use the content in the management of their offices.

- 58% of attendees rated the webinar content as “Excellent,” 42% rated is as “Very Good” – or 100% of all attendees.
Content

CMF will conduct four webinars, two in April and two in May, responding to this crisis.

Webinar #1 – Managing Stress in Constituents and Staff During a Crisis. As the coronavirus crisis worsens, stress levels amongst congressional staff and their constituents are going to rise and your team will have to deal with terribly difficult issues, including death, loss, anger. These times will place new pressure on congressional managers, requiring them to demonstrate empathy and employ new skills, while facing a myriad of mental and physical illness challenges. The Congressional Management Foundation will provide a webinar to managers on how to adapt in this environment. Participants will learn strategies and communication skills for dealing with emotional constituents, ways of managing their personal emotions in this stressful time, resources to turn to for support and other key tools for managing this crisis and serving the public effectively. The webinar will be led by former Congressman Brian Baird Ph.D. (D-WA), who served in the US House of Representatives for 12 years and is also a clinical psychologist.

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Webinar #2 – Managing a District/State Congressional Office During a Crisis. Congressional staff and managers in district/state offices are facing significantly different challenges than their Washington, DC counterparts. CMF will present a webinar highlighting three outstanding District and State Directors we have worked with in the past and have demonstrated excellent management skills. How should managers respond differently based on the spread of the outbreak? Are there lessons to be learned from one part of the country who managed other crises? CMF specifically will bring on staff from around the U.S., including those from the hardest hit areas, so that managers who have relatively more experience with the coronavirus outbreak can provide a glimpse of what may happen to other areas and congressional offices.

Webinar #3 – Managing a DC Congressional Office During a Crisis. As the Congress has shutter until at least late April, with no legislative activity underway, DC congressional office staff are largely idle. How can managers repurpose their teams to support needs in the district? Are their “get-ahead” or professional development activities which staff can conduct and engage? CMF will present a webinar highlighting three outstanding District and State Directors we have worked with in the past and have demonstrated excellent management skills.

Webinar #4 - Improv your Online Meetings - How the Principles of Improv Comedy Can Help Us Listen and Collaborate Online, Stop Interrupting Each Other in Video Chats, and Generally Help Us Get Through This Shit. Every time professional improvisers take the stage, they need to engage their audience, collaborate effectively, and innovate in a high-stakes, off-the-cuff scenario full of uncertainty and change. Sound familiar? Can the principles and skills that improvisers rely on also help improve the management of your congressional office teams in the midst of crisis? Participants will leave the workshop with new principles and techniques to improve their online communication and foster greater
collaboration and creative problem solving within their teams. The webinar will be led by John Windmueller, who holds a PhD in Conflict Resolution, leads improv-based senior leadership training across a wide spectrum of government agencies, and whose work was featured in this Washington Post article, “Explain a Toaster to a Cave Person – and Other Improv Challenges.” And yes, there will be laughter.

**Sponsor Benefits**

CMF is seeking one sponsor each webinar at $5,000. Benefits include:

- Name and logo on three invitations sent to 2,700 senior congressional staff.
- Name and logo on webinar registration page.
- Introduction of webinar (via video) and two minutes on your organization/company.
- Lists of all registrants and participants.