Conferences and COVID-19: Decision Framework

The [Online News Association](#), like many organizations, faces critical decisions regarding hosting in-person events as the COVID-19 crisis evolves and vaccines become available. We've created a set of decision frameworks that we will monitor to determine the best course of action for continuing planning for large in-person events.

A member of the ONA leadership team is assigned a section(s) to track for us to review during our regular meetings. For each section, we discuss what percentage to weigh the assumptions in our decision-making process.

We're sharing our framework with the hope that it will be helpful to the broader community.

Health Organizations' Projections

- Create a list of 3-5 trusted resources to regularly monitor the COVID-19 transmission curve, health system capacity and vaccine rollout projections. No one can fully predict what will happen, but we can create a knowledge base around certain assumptions.
  - Ex: [IHME COVID-19 resources](#); [JHU COVID-19 Map](#)
- Create assumptions around public health interventions. *E.g.* will a public health response effectively and rapidly identify or control the virus spread? How soon will enough people get the vaccine to achieve herd immunity? How long do we predict physical distancing to last?

Government Actions: International, National, Regional, State and Local

- Create a list of regions:

- ○ The top ten regions our attendees come from.
- ○ The location of our event and the surrounding regions.
- ○ The region(s) our staff is located.
- Are there any stay at home or travel orders in those regions? How long do we predict physical distancing to last in those regions?

Travel Advisories

- Monitor global air travel advisories and projections, especially as they relate to the location of our event. Examples: CDC Travel; WHO COVID-19 Travel
- Are there travel advisories that impact our attendees?
- What services will airlines be equipped to offer after potential furloughs or layoffs during the dates of the event, and at what price?

Community and Member Feedback

- What's the percentage of speaker commitments, wait-and-see responses and cancellations?
- Monitor social media to understand our community's comfort level for attending in-person events.
- Through formal and informal channels, gauge how safe our participants feel about attending an upcoming event.
- How many members of the community would be willing to prove that they have been vaccinated before attending an event? Would they consent to rapid health screening on site such as temperature checks or rapid tests?

Peer Organizations

- How are our peer organizations handling hosting in-person events? What decisions have they made? What perceptions will those decisions have for our attendees?

Social Responsibility

- What is our perception of social responsibility that we'd be putting people at risk, regardless of government guidance?
- How prepared might we be to host an in-person event surpassing safety guidelines, meaning going above and beyond the minimum?
- What steps have been taken by event venues to ensure the safety of its inhabitants?
- How prepared do we feel the region hosting the conference could meet the following criteria?
  - Hospitals can safely treat all patients requiring hospitalization, without resorting to crisis standards of care.
  - The region can at least test everyone who has symptoms.
  - The region can monitor confirmed cases and contacts.
  - The region has seen a sustained reduction in cases.
  - The region has administered a sufficient number of vaccines to its population, and what do we consider sufficient to host a business event?

Revenue Projections / Financials

- Are registration targets being met? Is YOY revenue significantly down?
- Are hotel booking rates meeting projections? Are YOY hotel bookings down?
- If registration is open, what's our rate of cancellations?
- Is the overall sponsor engagement meeting projections? Are YOY sponsorships significantly down?
- Are sponsoring organizations allowing employees who are potential attendees to travel? What percentage of top funders have travel/in-person event restrictions?
- What challenges, including penalty fees, do we face from canceling? What opportunities or new ideas could we create from in-person cancellations?
- How long before consumer confidence is restored in the travel industry?