

WINNING STRATEGIES FOR REALTOR® ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES

REALTOR® AE

NAR.REALTOR/RAE

WINTER 2021

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ONLINE

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We Can Hear You

Well, goodbye 2020, and hello 2021!

I know all of us are very excited for the new year, and it's an extreme honor to represent you as the 2021 Association Executives Committee chair. I began my AE career in 1991, when I took what was supposed to be a temporary, three-month administrative position with the Washington REALTORS®.

I was a high school teacher at the time, and while waiting to get my teaching certificate in Washington state, the association seemed to be a nice fit. Who knew it would turn into a career?! I was the temp who wouldn't leave, and 21 years later, I was serving as the association's chief operating officer.

As a believer in continuous growth, I accepted the CEO position with Arizona's largest local REALTOR® association in 2012, then moved on to my current role, CEO of the MetroTex Association of REALTORS® in Dallas, in 2018. It has been a tremendous career—full of opportunities, challenges, and blessings!

So, let's talk technology. Last year not-so-gently nudged all of us to instantly find tech solutions that few had previously explored. Terms such as "Zoom" became the norm, and questions like, "Are you there? Can you hear us?" rang out repeatedly in offices throughout the country as we waded through myriad online meetings and technical challenges.

The knowledge we freely provide to each other is part of what makes our careers as AEs so great.



GETTY IMAGES / SDI PRODUCTIONS

Many of us were forced to leave our comfort zones or bring them into our own homes in order to continue to engage with members and keep staff safe, all the while never really closing. We are all facing the pandemic differently; for some, things have been closer to business as usual, while others have had to embrace every tech solution to preserve social distancing.

In this issue, you'll learn best practices for using technology in your association and tips on the various platforms available. You'll hear about progressive and innovative ideas to put to use, no matter the size of your association. The knowledge we freely provide to each other is part of what makes our careers as AEs so great.

This issue and the dedicated colleagues who are sharing their experiences for the benefit of all AEs embody the essence

of National Association of REALTORS® President Charlie Oppler's credo: "One, Together." As we waded forward into 2021, we know that what we've learned has only made us stronger and more resilient. Together, we've got this!

In closing, I'd like to recognize Ryan McLaughlin, CEO of the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS®. He is serving as the 2021 AEC vice chair, and together, we look forward to working with all of you as we lean in to 2021—and lean on each other. We can hear you! ■



Janet Kane, RCE, CAE, CIPS, is CEO of MetroTex Association of REALTORS® in Dallas and chair of the Association Executives Committee.



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Placemaking Brings People Together Safely

What started out as a push to provide a temporary outdoor dining space for the community to support local restaurants during the pandemic will soon become the latest “parklet” in Fairfax County, Va., thanks in part to a REALTOR® Placemaking grant.

As Fairfax County prepared to move into Phase 1 of the commonwealth’s business reopening plan in the spring and summer, staff from the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® reached out to Fairfax County Chairman Jeff McKay to identify ways REALTORS® could help area businesses.

The initial idea was to create a public space under the county’s proposed temporary outdoor dining permit that could support businesses that didn’t have access to physically distanced outdoor dining areas of their own. As the idea evolved, the concept shifted to a more permanent facility that would reinvigorate an existing space in southern Fairfax County.

In partnership with the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation, NVAR helped create a new, landscaped public space at Mount Vernon Plaza. Opened in November, the space features outdoor dining, family

games and activities, public art, and historical markers, and there are plans to add an event space. With the help of a Placemaking grant provided by the National Association of REALTORS®, the plaza is becoming an active community destination.

NAR’s Placemaking grant program offers financial assistance to REALTOR® associations and members engaging in placemaking in their communities. Have an idea for a future placemaking project? Visit realtorparty.realtor/community-outreach/placemaking for more information about grant funding. ■

Orange Chatham Stages Successful Day of Service

The Orange Chatham Association of REALTORS® in Chapel Hill, N.C., performed its annual Day of Service in spite of the pandemic, collecting more than 1,600 pounds of food for families in Orange and Chatham counties needing assistance.

“According to the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina, approximately 1 in 7 people living in those two counties is without sufficient food,” says REALTOR® Marcia Vaughn, chair of 2020’s “Food Drive and CAN-Struction” event. “Hearing this sobering fact was a wake-up call, and the members of OCHAR responded quickly and generously by donating over 1,600 pounds of food and household supplies.”

OCHAR offered special thanks to the member firms that participated: Coldwell



OCHAR collected more than 1,600 pounds of shelf-stable food for families in need.

Banker Advantage, Coldwell Banker Howard Perry and Walston, Fathom Realty, Fonville Morisey, Gates Management and

Realty, Real Living Carolina Property, Allen Tate, REALTORS®, Terra Nova Global Properties, and Triangle & Coast Realty. ■



Good Neighbor Awards

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Society marginalizes people with disabilities, but they want to contribute and feel productive.

REALTOR® Greg Masucci and his wife founded A Farm Less Ordinary, a nonprofit that allows people with disabilities to work, make friends and fit in.

**2021
ENTRY
DEADLINE
MAY 7**



IS ONE OF YOUR MEMBERS A GOOD NEIGHBOR?

NAR's Good Neighbor Awards could mean \$10,000 and national exposure for a worthy cause in your community. Encourage your members to apply.

Go to nar.realtor/gna for the application, and a toolkit to help AEs promote this program to their members.

Welcome to Fairhaven

In November, the National Association of REALTORS® debuted a new interactive training platform designed to help combat discrimination in U.S. real estate markets. Called Fairhaven, the immersive simulation is available free to real estate professionals across the country.

“Fairhaven is a new approach to fair housing training that is unlike anything currently available in the real estate industry,” says Charlie Oppler, CEO of New Jersey–based Prominent Properties Sotheby’s International Realty and 2021 NAR president. “Fairhaven uses the immersive power of storytelling to deliver powerful lessons that will help promote equity in our nation’s housing market.”

Produced in partnership with Ernst

& Young, the platform takes real estate professionals to the fictional town of Fairhaven, where agents work to close four deals while confronting situations in which discrimination is a factor. As agents advance through the simulation, they receive feedback on their performance that they can use in real-life situations. The course takes 60 to 100 minutes to complete and can be paused or retaken as necessary.

As a leader in supporting fair housing initiatives, NAR is making Fairhaven available to its 1.4 million members, industry partners, brokerage firms, and REALTOR® associations at no cost online at fairhaven.realtor and as a software package for brokerage and association learning management systems. ■

Encourage Smart Growth



Sign up to send copies of *On Common Ground* magazine directly to your elected officials at no cost to your association. Visit www.nar.realtor/on-common-ground for details.

Good Neighbors Year-Round

Each year, NAR acknowledges some of its most exceptional volunteers with the Good Neighbor Awards. But with 72% of REALTORS® volunteering, REALTORS® are good neighbors year-round in cities and towns across the country.

That volunteer work adds up to an enormous impact, and NAR thinks everyone should know about it. That’s why it launched the REALTORS® Are Good Neighbors campaign.

Join the movement! Here’s how:

1. Follow and share uplifting content at “REALTORS® Are Good Neighbors” on Facebook and Instagram to generate member engagement and pride.
2. Share your association’s volunteer contributions at nar.realtor/rgn. Write a short

description of the volunteer project and attach photos so NAR can tell how your association is giving back.

3. Log REALTOR® volunteer hours at nar.realtor/rgn. Through November 2021, NAR is tracking volunteer hours, and with our tremendous reach around the country, we think we can easily meet a goal of 5 million hours served.

4. Launch your own Good Neighbor Award—or, if you already have a community service award, rename it. An awards program generates positive stories about REALTORS® that often get picked up by the local news media.

REALTOR® associations are key partners in this effort. Find a toolkit of ads



and messaging at nar.realtor/rgn, or for more information, contact Sara Geimer, manager of the Good Neighbor Awards, at sgeimer@nar.realtor. ■

That's Who We R

RCE designees offer a variety of descriptors for the certification on its 30th anniversary.

The award-winning “That’s Who We R” campaign demonstrates to consumers that the people who wear the REALTOR® “R” are experts in the field of real estate and professionals who adhere to a higher standard. As association executives serving those REALTORS®, we have our own mark that denotes professionalism and commitment: The REALTOR® association Certified Executive, or RCE, designation.

As we recognize the 30th anniversary of the RCE designation this year, I’d like to reflect on the AE professionals who hold this designation. Since the first class in 1991, 905 AEs have achieved the RCE designation, and there are 523 designees currently active. With the new membership system, MI, and the Insights Hub, we can take a closer look at some of the statistical data about our RCE peers. To accompany the data, I’ve reached out to a few to ask what single word best describes the designation to them.

This is who we are:

- Mike Barr, RCE, CAE, CEO of the Greensboro Regional REALTORS® Association in North Carolina, says “professional” is the word that comes to his mind. According to an involvement profile of RCE designees compiled by the National Association of REALTORS® Data Science Team in October 2020, 53% of all RCEs hold other REALTOR® certifications, and 28% are C2EX-endorsed.
- Amanda Creel, RCE, CAE, CEO of the Prescott Area Association of REALTORS® in Arizona, tells me that “forward” is what describes the 7% of local association staff and 5% of state



“Dedicated” only begins to describe the engagement of these AEs.

association staff who hold the RCE designation.

- When told that 97% of RCEs attend conferences and 45% are “supervoters” who are in the top 20% of voting frequency for primary and general elections in their states, Ruth Hackney, RCE, CEO of the REALTORS® Association of South Central Wisconsin, says RCEs are “engaged.”
- “Earned” is the word that comes to mind for Sheila Dodson, RCE, CEO of Baldwin REALTORS® in southern Alabama. Knowing the time and effort required to receive the designation, it’s impressive that 44% of designees come from medium and small associations with limited staff and resources.
- At Tennessee REALTORS® in my home state, we have two new staff specialist RCE designees. Governmental Affairs Director Jennifer Farrar, RCE, and Communications Director Phil Newman,

RCE, respectively, offer “thorough” for the amount of knowledge gained in the program and “advancement” for the growth one experiences when learning about the entire organization.

There are dozens of other words that can describe our designation and our RCE peers; among them are experienced, committed, educated, broad-minded, competent, and collaborative. When I asked the question of Stephanie White, RCE, CEO of the Mobile Area Association of REALTORS® in Alabama and 2020 chair of the AEC-RCE Certification Board, she said “dedicated.”

In 2020, White led the charge for a 20-week virtual study group for 65 RCE candidates, and “dedicated” only begins to describe the engagement of these AEs. The involvement profile shows that more than 15% of RCEs serve on the Association Executives Committee at some point in their career.

As we celebrate the RCE designation’s 30th anniversary, I look forward to meeting even more RCEs and hearing what their word is. No matter which you use to describe us or what statistics you cite to illustrate our achievements, esteemed REALTOR® association Certified Executives are the top of this profession and comprise a group I am proud to belong to—because that’s who we are! ■



Deb Haines-Kulick, RCE, C2EX, is executive officer of the Clarksville (Tenn.) Association of REALTORS® and 2021 chair of the AEC-RCE Certification Advisory Board.

Congratulations to New RCEs

These 32 REALTOR® association executives earned their REALTOR® association Certified Executive designation after an extensive course of study and exam. RCE is the only designation created specifically for REALTOR® association executives. It exemplifies goal-oriented AEs with drive, experience, and commitment to professional growth. For designation requirements and more information, visit nar.realtor/rce.



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Pacific West
Association of
REALTORS®, Calif.



Jacob Bruynell, RCE
Greater Tampa
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Sharon Chard, RCE
MLS of Greater
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Jacksonville Board of
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Melissa Groth, RCE
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Ann Gutkin, RCE
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Rebecca Marcum, RCE
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Association of
REALTORS®, Tenn.



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Allison Woodham, RCE
Baldwin REALTORS®,
Ala.



Kendra Yevoli, RCE
Commercial
Association of
REALTORS®, N.M.



Seeking Insights on Othering

Isabel Wilkerson reveals the roots and implications of systemic racism in *Caste*.

Be forewarned: *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson is a dark study of violence and power. The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of *The Warmth of Other Suns* considers the social divisions in American society—many of them unacknowledged—using comparisons with India and Nazi Germany.

For a 65-year-old, privileged white man like myself, and for anyone else seeking insights into the origins of racism in America, this is required reading. To make her points, Wilkerson found the term “racism” to be insufficient, and she instead uses “caste” as “the most accurate term to describe the workings of American society.”

She does not argue that the words “race” and “caste” are synonymous. She does argue that they “can and do coexist in the same culture and serve to reinforce each other. Race, in the United States, is the visible agent of the unseen force of caste. Caste is the bones, race the skin.” She persuasively joins the two constructs

while addressing internal wounds that have not healed in America.

Caste made me think and feel in equal measure. I found its vivid stories about the mistreatment of Black Americans by government and law and in everyday social life—from the violence of the slave plantation to the terror of lynchings to the routine discourtesies that are still a common experience for so many—appalling and unsettling. I experienced flashes of indignation and moments of sorrow. The result is a book that is at once beautifully written and painful to read.

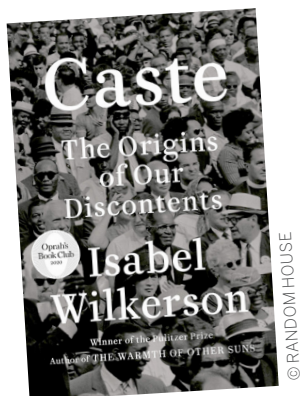
As I search for understanding of my (and our collective) place in this moment, I have often asked myself, “How could I not have known all of this sooner?” I am embarrassed and ashamed that even if I knew about Jim Crow laws, I did not fully understand how the gains made by newly freed slaves in the South were erased after Reconstruction. I did not truly grasp the horrors of the burning of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Okla., in 1921. And so much more.

Toward a Reckoning

If you have not yet read *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein, do so—but read *Caste* first. It will inform you about much of what has transpired. The real estate industry was complicit in practices that robbed generations of people of housing opportunity and its attendant generational wealth accumulation. In light of recent activities at the National Association of REALTORS® and around the country, I believe we have reached a new plateau of understanding that will lead to action.

REALTOR® associations at all levels are having a critical reckoning with the past—addressing hate speech and providing our members with tools to combat implicit bias and solve fair housing and housing opportunity dilemmas. We must also advocate for an aggressive public policy agenda that addresses the systemic barriers to homeownership.

Many Black Americans will find little to surprise them in *Caste*, but the book could offer much interest to anyone wishing to see America’s race problem in a more comprehensive context. We Americans who are not Black must recognize our country in this careful indictment and face up to the truths Wilkerson shows us. And we need to face up to these truths if we are to bring the calls for racial justice echoing in our streets closer to reality. ■



We need to face up to these truths if we are to bring the calls for racial justice echoing in our streets closer to reality.



Chuck Kasky, Esq., RCE, is CEO of Maryland REALTORS® in Annapolis.



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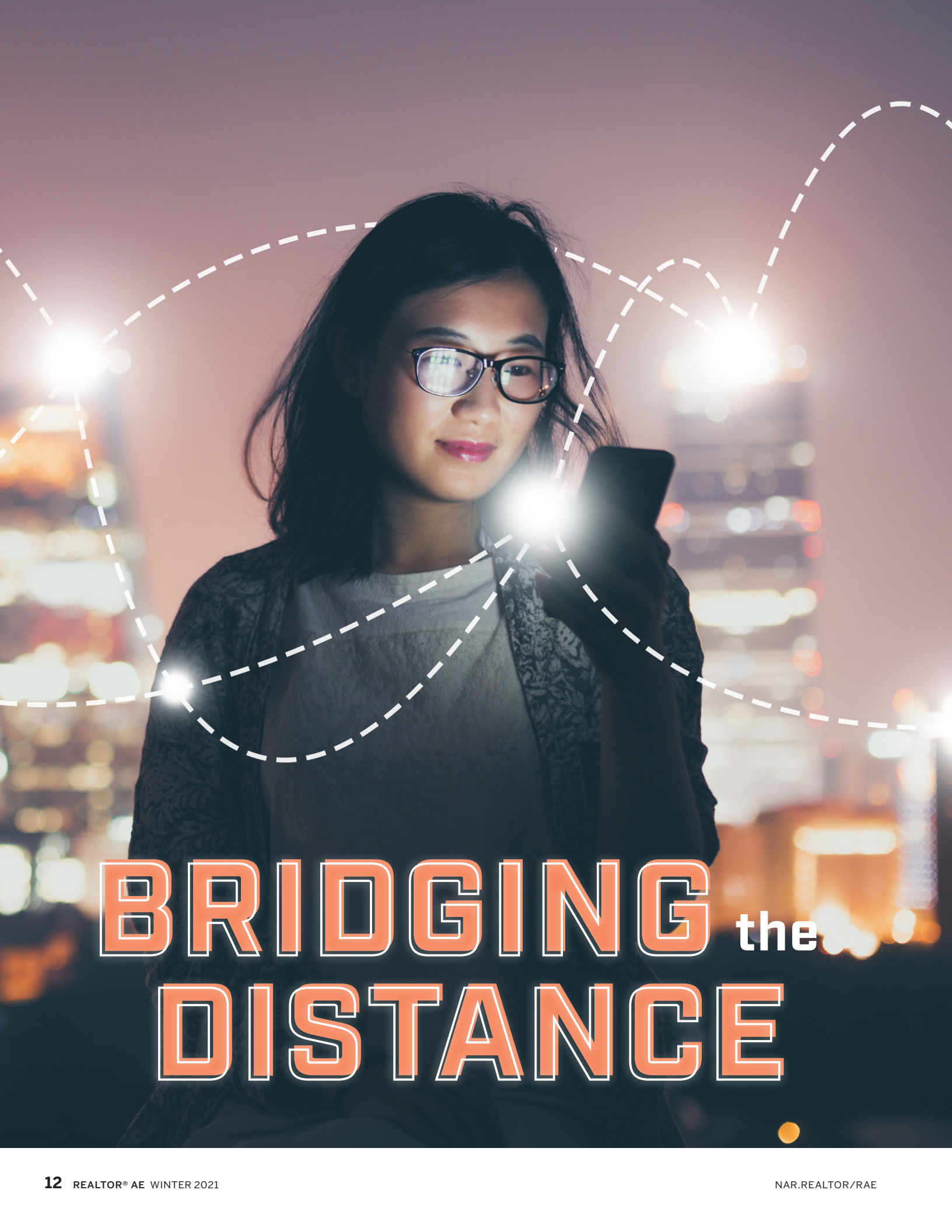
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BRIDGING the DISTANCE



GETTY IMAGES / AERIAL PERSPECTIVE IMAGES

Associations embrace
the hybrid future of
virtual and in-person
service.



BY RICHARD WESTLUND

While real estate is traditionally a face-to-face business, REALTOR® associations had to pivot dramatically last spring with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many offices were closed, at least temporarily, and staffers shifted to a work-from-home model. Even with a vaccine slowly being distributed, many association executives want to retain the significant benefits of serving members using virtual platforms.

“During the pandemic, our members were able to see the real value of our association,” says Tracy Huotari, CEO, North Bay Association of REALTORS® in Santa Rosa, Calif. “Now, we have an amazing opportunity to continue to work more efficiently while increasing member engagement and participation.”

For many association executives, the COVID-19 situation accelerated the adoption of technologies to manage associations remotely, such as team collaboration tools and videoconferencing platforms for leadership meetings and member events. Other innovations popularized during the pandemic include drive-through member services and product pickup lockers.

As association offices reopen in accordance with public health guidelines, AEs are looking at hybrid approaches that combine the best aspects of in-person and virtual services.

“It’s all about meeting your members where they are,” says Mike Valerino, chief operating officer of the Akron Cleveland Association of REALTORS® in Ohio. “Today, that means delivering content virtually, as well as in person.”

Here’s a closer look at how four associations are adapting to the new business landscape.

Northern Virginia: 32 staff, 13,000 members

Staying ahead of the game gave the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® a head start in responding to COVID-19.

“We rolled out Microsoft Teams in 2019, first to our senior staff and then to everyone,” says Ryan McLaughlin, CEO of the Fairfax-based association. “Using Teams rather than email for our internal communications gave us better cross-organization collaboration. We created teams for different projects and gained more transparency across the association.”

When the pandemic initially took hold, the association went 100% virtual, using GoToMeeting and Zoom to interact with members while adding more social media content and chat and opt-in text messaging features. After Labor Day, staffers returned to the office with health and safety protocols in place.

“To help our members, we created drive-by services,” McLaughlin says. “Members could order products online and pick them up at their own lockers.”

Perhaps the biggest change for the Northern Virginia association was putting on a three-week virtual convention and trade show in the fall with 100 sessions and 2,500 attendees.

“We used the Boomset application and a digital registration and lead-generation process,” says McLaughlin. “We saved a ton of money on facility costs, and our members didn’t have to travel anywhere.”

Looking ahead, McLaughlin expects to offer more in-person and hybrid events and activities.

“Our members are ‘people people’ who thrive on networking,” he says. “We are encouraged about doing more things in person, while offering virtual options.”

Akron Cleveland: 11 staff, 6,000 members

ACAR also turned to Microsoft Teams when the pandemic hit.

“Everyone embraced the change,” says Valerino. “That was a big factor in enabling us to transition to a remote work environment. In June, we came back to the office on a rotating schedule, taking a hybrid approach to serving members.”

Along with collaboration tools such as Zoom and Teams, the association staff turned to monday.com for project management.

“It’s great for collaboration, because you can chat on it, upload documents, [and] follow a discussion thread to work through challenges without relying on email,” he says.

The association also launched online communities so its leadership groups have a place for discussions and a repository for documents without needing to dig through emails.

NAR Rolls Out New Technology

State and local associations aren’t the only ones rolling out new technologies. The National Association of REALTORS® introduced Members First, or M1, a member database project that seeks to replace the current version of the National REALTORS® Database System.

A multiyear initiative, the M1 project will produce a feature-rich member engagement system that’s easy to use and provides accurate, holistic data, says Faisal Ghauri, NAR’s vice president of information technology.

“The Insights Hub portion of M1 provides actionable and intelligent insights by incorporating dynamic dashboards highlighting different aspects of membership data,” he says.

NAR’s first-ever virtual REALTORS® Conference and Expo also relied on new technology.

Using the MeetingPlay platform, “we offered networking opportunities during sessions, along with a virtual expo, chat functions, and moderated Q&A sessions,” says Heidi Henning, vice president, Meetings & Events. Members filled out profiles in advance so they could be matched with like-minded attendees and make new contacts. MeetingPlay provided detailed visitor metrics for sponsors and exhibitors looking to follow up.

As robust as the platform was, the staff and technical support teams played an indispensable role in the success of the program, which drew more than 11,000 registrants, Henning says.

“If you are having a major event, like a leadership inauguration, we suggest using a production company, along with a virtual platform service, in order to deliver a better event. It is vital to have the right level of professional support.”

“We want to add new diversity and inclusion and LGBTQ communities for our members,” Valerino says. “That will be another great value-add for our association.”

Following the lead of the National Association of REALTORS® and Ohio REALTORS®, ACAR held a virtual expo in the fall, using BigMarker’s browser-based online platform. Attendance was high,

and Valerino expects to include a virtual component for future in-person events.

“A hybrid approach lets us engage with more members because they don’t have to get in a car and drive to a session,” he says.

Orlando: 43 staff, 18,000 members

In shifting to remote operations, the Orlando Regional REALTOR® Association deployed several platforms, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Hangouts.

“We hunkered down, assessed the damage, and made sure we had multiple ways to communicate with our members,” says CEO Cliff Long.

One of the most important steps ORRA took was to move its educational programs to a virtual format.

“We offered classes for free in most instances, helping members meet their license requirements,” Long says.

Meanwhile, the association office remained open as an essential service in Florida, with split groups of staffers following safety protocols inside the building. ORRA also engaged a firm to provide COVID-19 testing for the staff and invested in creating a coronavirus-free environment, including disinfectant fogging and ozone treatments for the building.

“Follow the guidelines, but don’t obsess over every detail,” Long says. “This is how America will have to deal with COVID. Take precautions and move on.”

In October, ORRA went back to in-person leadership and committee meetings and offered hybrid education classes. Long expects that trend to continue in 2021, with the balance shifting toward more in-person meetings with social distancing.

“We will continue to offer a video option for our classes,” he adds. “It’s a worthwhile expense to serve our members.”

North Bay: 7 staff, 3,500 members

Based in Windsor, Calif., the North Bay Association of REALTORS® was able to adjust to the pandemic without missing too many beats, according to Huotari.

“We serve a huge geographic area, so we have been using Zoom since 2015, and [we] moved our voice system and network to the cloud in 2016 for business continuity purposes,” she says. “But we found that some of our staffers working remotely needed better equipment or stronger Wi-Fi connections.”

Huotari says Microsoft Teams has been a great collaboration app for her staff.

“We do video calls and meetings with Teams,” she says. “It’s much more efficient than email, and there’s a quick learning curve.”



We changed everything. Now, we can all move ahead, offering virtual programs and events along with in-person activities to meet our members’ evolving needs.

—Tracy Huotari, CEO, North Bay Association of REALTORS®, Calif.

Now, Huotari goes into the office regularly, while others are still working from home.

“We offer curbside pickup [of store products] for members who don’t want to come into the office,” she says.

Along with providing tech support to her staff herself, Huotari turns to members with strong technical backgrounds for assistance.

“One of the takeaways for other associations is to look at the expertise and skill sets of your members,” she says. “That can be an amazing source of help.”

Financially, the shift to virtual meetings and educational classes has reduced association facility rentals and travel costs. But an even bigger benefit for Huotari is turning travel time into productive activity; she can attend meetings virtually in any of the association’s 11 market areas.

“I’ve also seen more cross-pollination as our members attend sessions in other market areas,” she says, “getting out of their silos and building their networks.”

Reflecting on the changes of the past year, Huotari says the big surprise “is how quickly our members adjusted to the COVID situation. After all, we changed everything for them. Now, we can all move ahead, offering virtual programs and events along with in-person activities to meet our members’ evolving needs.” ■



Richard Westlund is a Miami-based freelance writer.



YOU'VE GONE **VIRTUAL.**

**NOW
WHAT?**



GETTY IMAGES / MASKOT

Once you've helped members navigate the learning curve, you might find that virtual meeting platforms offer advantages to your association.

BY AMY DUBOSE, RCE

As state governments and businesses across the country continued to battle COVID-19 with lockdowns and closures into the winter, many association executives shifted association meetings to a virtual space.

Recent changes to the National Association of REALTORS® Core Standards include a requirement that associations have a way to offer virtual meetings to their members. This will look different to each of us, depending on our association's size and available resources. But working with virtual meeting platforms can deliver great value to members.

Where to Start

There are several virtual meeting platforms you can use; the most common is Zoom. Others include Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting, WebEx, and Google Hangouts. Each comes with its own functionalities, limitations, and workarounds, but most will provide a great experience at an affordable price.

Associations with limited budgets should consider partnering with a neighboring association to offset the cost of a videoconferencing platform license. The California Association of REALTORS®, for example, purchased a block of Zoom licenses for its associations to use. This represents a huge cost savings, and expanded licenses often come with advanced features.

Beyond the platform, you need only a few basic tools for a successful meeting: a computer, a camera, and a working audio input. Keep in mind, too, that your tech can malfunction. "I always have a backup computer ready with all of the documents loaded onto it, just in case," says Jan Marie Ennenga, AE with the Yuma Area Association of REALTORS® in Arizona.

Don't Go Viral

By now, you might have participated in a videoconference call that has gone a bit haywire, or maybe you witnessed something cringeworthy. Members might have checked in while driving, lounging in bed, or talking about something inappropriate on a hot mic. The No. 1 rule of virtual meetings is, "Don't be that guy."

Pay attention to what attendees will see and hear. As the host or administrator for your meetings, you will want to watch attendees closely for any unusual behavior. If you see any, you should send a private chat message to let the person know. You may also wish to address the group as a whole at the start of each meeting to outline the rules of proper videoconferencing etiquette.

Offer Tips for Success

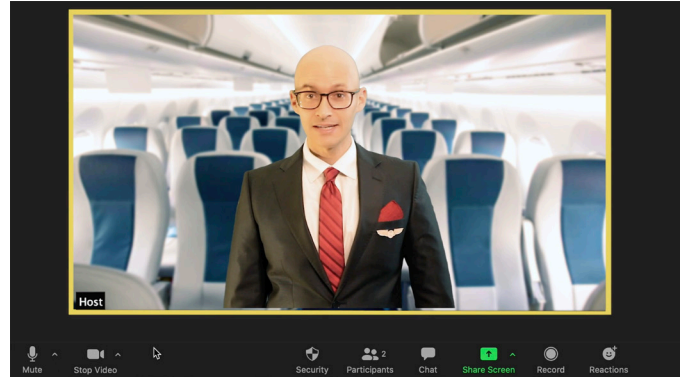
Your willingness to help members overcome technology hurdles means a lot to them. Any time you can offer a helping hand instead of criticism, you should do it. "Start out with your housekeeping rules," says Elizabeth Breen, AE with the Santa Ynez Valley Association of REALTORS® in California. "If members are having issues, call them after the meeting and offer to run a test Zoom with them to troubleshoot sound, video, etc., for future meetings."

Many associations have produced short videos that offer tips and tricks for virtual meetings. One video produced by Eric Schwartz and the Sprighthouse Agency for the California Association of REALTORS® uses humor to drive its points home, taking members on a "CAR Airways" flight to "Zoomland." If producing a video isn't in your budget, a simple tips page that you can screen-share can help.

Sharing responsibilities can keep things running smoothly. Many associations have found that having two hosts on an online meeting is helpful, especially if something goes awry. "Always have a co-host—either staff or a member," says Kaaren Winkler, CEO of the Tacoma-Pierce County Association of REALTORS® in Washington state. "It is helpful to have another set of eyes on the waiting room, chat box, etc."

Rules of Engagement

- **Make sure your space is free of distractions.**
- **Unmute your mic only when you want to participate.**
Test your mic settings before the meeting.
- **Wear appropriate clothing. This seems like a no-brainer, but people have gotten a bit too comfortable in the virtual world.**
- **Follow the rules established by your state.**



CAR took members on a virtual "flight" to to discuss Zoom settings and usage.

Next-Level Connection

Many REALTOR® associations have learned to embrace virtual meeting tools to reach members like never before. But some members have trouble learning something new without seeing it. "I simply send them a quick Zoom invitation at a time that's convenient, share my screen with them to show them how to complete the task, and send them on their way," says Amber Scholl, executive officer of the Greater Mason City Board of REALTORS® in Iowa. "My frequent callers have actually been learning and retaining information."

Providing step-by-step training to a member is a great way to use a virtual platform. "We utilize Zoom, and we use it to replace our once in-person REALTOR® caravan," says Darla Frye-Guevremont, CEO of the Key West Association of REALTORS® in Florida. "We have a private Facebook group that is for members only, and we utilize the Zoom-to-Facebook Live feed to open the homes up to more of our membership than before."

Embrace the Change

Virtual platforms have made state and national conferences more accessible to members, and local associations have been able to offer A-list learning opportunities. "We have taken advantage of larger meetings that are now accessible," Breen says. "This has allowed us to get speakers we would never have been able to afford in person."

Members want to stay active while staying safe. Since we can't predict what lies ahead, we need to make the most of the available tools. Still leery about working in a virtual world? Reach out to your colleagues through AEI Year-Round, your state association, or a neighbor. Collaboration can be the key to your success! ■



Amy DuBose, RCE, is association executive of the Bryan-College Station (Texas) Regional Association of REALTORS®.

Life Goes On(line)

Videoconferencing etiquette and best practices for the COVID-19 era.

BY CHUCK KASKY

Many of the changes we've experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic will ultimately be integrated into our lives on a permanent basis, and online videoconferencing applications are part of that new normal. All of us will be attending more meetings remotely from this point on, so here are a few tips and tricks to share with your members that will help the process go more smoothly.

Check the lighting. The placement of the light source is key; bright light, such as a sunny window, behind you will turn you into a silhouette. Position your desk so you'll face the window or light source.

Not too close and not too far. Position yourself in the center of the screen so you can be seen from the shoulders upward. Your shoulders should take up approximately half of the horizontal space on the screen. Anything closer might be overwhelming (producing gigantic-face syndrome); anything farther away will make you hard to see.

Keep the camera at eye level. In person, eye contact helps people connect. You want that kind of connection in virtual meetings, too, so it's important to position your webcam at or near eye level. You may have a separate camera or need to raise your laptop by putting it on a stand.

Look at the camera when you're talking, so you seem to meet the eyes of the person(s) to whom you're talking. On some platforms, you can modify the view to help you focus on one person at the appropriate times.

Check the audio. You want to be seen and heard clearly. If you're in a quiet room, you can use the microphone on your laptop. Otherwise, it's a good idea to use a microphone that is closer to your face. A decent pair of earbuds or headphones equipped with a mic should work.

Mute yourself when not actively speaking. Extraneous noise can be distracting or embarrassing. Platforms often switch to the active speaker, so if your dog begins to bark, the program will broadcast you in place of the person who has the floor.

Keep your environment simple. Seeing colleagues in their homes can be distracting. Make sure the background is uncomplicated, like a solid-colored wall that's far enough

away not to show shadows. If someone can look over your shoulder at family photos, artwork, or books, it diverts attention from the discussion.

Choose clothing wisely. Most clothing is fine, but there are a few fashion choices to avoid. Don't wear pinstripes or checks, which can create distracting moiré patterns on camera. Avoid bright white and deep black clothing, because many webcams have automatic exposure settings that adjust to the lightest or darkest thing onscreen.

Get comfortable. You don't want to fall asleep. Pick a chair comfortable enough to sit in without fidgeting. If you talk with your hands, practice keeping them still. Also, keep head movements to a minimum. And please: Don't eat during a meeting.

Be courteous and punctual. Allow sufficient time to log on to the platform and to verify that your audio and video are functioning properly before the meeting is scheduled to begin. Once the meeting begins, don't interrupt; wait for an opening in the conversation or use the chat or "raised hand" function.

Your focus should always be on the person(s) at the other end of the videoconference. Avoid typing, and turn off the sounds on your phone. When you are on camera but your attention is elsewhere, people notice. If you really need to multitask, turn the camera off and attend with audio only. When you are ready to give the meeting your full attention, turn the camera on again.

Be yourself. Relax and have a good time. Break the ice with a joke. Having some fun will help keep people focused and interested in what you have to say. It's easy to tune out in a face-to-face meeting, and it's even easier in a virtual one. And finally, remember to say goodbye when you leave the call. That might seem unimportant, but good etiquette is never a bad idea. ■



Chuck Kasky, RCE, is CEO of Maryland REALTORS® in Annapolis.



TOTAL TECH

Lockdown was only the beginning of Florida-based Bonita Springs–Estero REALTORS®' transformation.

BY MEIGHAN A. HARRIS

On March 18, 2020, the Bonita Springs–Estero REALTORS® Board of Directors held its monthly meeting just as COVID-19 was starting to spread throughout the United States. Members felt that with the rise in coronavirus cases, it would be prudent to shut down the board office and send the staff home to work remotely.

As a medium-sized board with five full-time staffers, we had been functioning on a networked server and landline phones. How were our members going to get in touch with us if we weren't in the office? I had to act fast. I consulted my peers on the AEI Year-Round Facebook page and switched our phones to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). It took two weeks, but I was able to get a new phone number that members could use to reach us at home.

GETTY IMAGES / OSCAR WONG

Taking the advice of fellow Florida CEO, I installed the tawk.to chat widget on our home page, which quickly became a member lifeline. A word of advice: When setting up tawk.to, be sure to set the hours in which you can be contacted, or your members will be reaching out for help overnight! Our tech guy then helped me upload all network folders to the cloud so we could function as efficiently at home as we did at the office.

Reducing our Physical Footprint

By the time the initial six-week lockdown ended, I had learned a lot. As I write this, eight months have since passed, and we have opened the office lobby to members wearing face masks, but all of our committee meetings and classes are held virtually. Fall is our peak season, and class attendance is higher than ever! But with just four employees sitting in a 4,000-square-foot commercial building and only the occasional member dropping in to pick up signs, I presented the board with a suggestion: Let's downsize and go fully hybrid.

Bonita Springs–Estero REALTORS® owns the building, which has four office suites. One of our tenants was in need of additional space, and following a short meeting with the CEO, the boards agreed to swap spaces, adding \$15,000 per year to our bottom line.

There were other reasons to move, as well. The new space would allow staff members to be closer to each other for team-building and project planning. The board's only wish was to give the office a "wow" factor if we wanted to downsize, and we are now remodeling the space (staff are working from home during the transformation). When members enter the new office, they will be greeted by a colorful 3D art wall with a walls.io display in the main lobby that will highlight major investors, C2EX members, and social media posts about our events and education.

Streamlining Management

Another form of technology we are leaning on heavily during the pandemic is GrowthZone association management software. We switched to it in August 2019 and were happy with its functionality, but we had barely scratched the surface when it came to the features offered. I realized that there were a lot of things we could be doing with GrowthZone to communicate with our members more efficiently.

One of the coolest features is the free mobile app for members. After a member downloads the app, we can send push notifications that go right to the member's cellphone. The staff app can be used to scan QR codes when members register for an event for touchless check-in. Using the system's forms and surveys, I was able to stage the annual board vote, survey members on our performance, and ask for nominations and volunteers to serve.

One of Bonita Springs–Estero REALTORS®' core values is innovation.

Bonita Springs–Estero REALTORS® did have to downsize staff by one position, but the automated workflows in my AMS helped pick up the slack. Using a marketing workflow, I was able to "set and forget" our marketing plan for new members; I was also able to send an exit survey to nonrenewing members so we could have a better understanding of the reasons members leave the association, a brokerage, or the business.

The member recruitment module allowed me to create a proposal that was clear and concise; all I had to do was send the prospect a link to view and accept. I was also able to place our REALTOR® store online with ease using the store module, allowing contactless pickup of needed supplies such as signs and lockboxes.

Working virtually, our staff had a Zoom call a few times a week, but the AMS helped me check progress using the projects/tasks module. I was able to assign projects and deadlines, then track a percentage of completion for each assignment. It has been a great way to keep staff accountable, and quarterly bonuses have turned out to be excellent positive reinforcement.

The Hybrid Future

Moving forward, Bonita Springs–Estero REALTORS® plans to continue to hold board and committee meetings virtually. If a member prefers to come in person, we will offer a hybrid option. Our AMS cloud storage program allows us to place important documents in the member portal securely.

For education, we have invested in a Mevo Start all-in-one wireless camera, which can follow an instructor around the room. All staff now have webcams, wireless headsets, and Zoom accounts. We incorporated Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Shifts for paperless time tracking. When the new office opens, staff members will have an Amazon Echo on their desks to replace the intercom system on the old landline phones.

As technology continues to produce new tools and make them more efficient, we will continue to embrace them. After all, one of Bonita Springs–Estero REALTORS®' core values is innovation. ■



Meighan A. Harris, RCE, IOM, is CEO of Bonita Springs–Estero REALTORS®.

Author, Author

Avoid accidentally infringing on the copyright of another's creative work.

The discussion of copyright issues in the real estate industry usually centers on listing photographs. But the use of any third-party materials without proper permission can make a REALTOR® association the target of a copyright infringement lawsuit. Adopt risk management strategies that can help you avoid costly mistakes.

What Is a Copyright?

Copyright law protects original works of authorship fixed in a tangible form of expression, including photographs, music, and art, as well as news articles and broadcasts. Copyright does not protect ideas or works that aren't original, such as facts, names, and short phrases.

The copyright owner owns an exclusive bundle of rights: the rights to reproduce, distribute copies, perform, display, and prepare derivative works. A derivative work is a transformation of the original, like a translation of a book from one language to another.

Using a work without proper permission infringes upon the owner's copyright. Remedies for copyright infringement include destruction of the infringing materials, injunctive relief, actual or statutory damages, and attorneys' fees. Statutory damages can be as high as \$150,000 for willful infringement, which is when the infringer either knew the use was infringing or recklessly disregarded the possibility. Citations or disclaimers do not "cure" an infringement.

Mitigate Your Risks

So, how do you ensure that you have the proper rights before using third-party works? You get permission in writing. If you

can't determine whether a work is copyrighted or who its owner is, don't use it.

It's critical to document permission in a license agreement and to make sure your use complies with the terms of that agreement. Even with a license agreement, the use of a work outside the scope of the agreement would constitute infringement.

Finally, make sure you save copies of your license agreements. If your use of the material is ever challenged, you will be able to prove you had permission.

Additional Issues for Music

There are generally two types of licenses needed to use music in connection with your business: a performing rights license and a synchronization ("synch") license.

Playing music, live or recorded, at your next awards dinner or open house? You'll need a performing rights license, which allows you to perform music at events. BMI and ASCAP are two organizations that offer performing rights licenses for a large selection of popular music. If you host virtual events, make sure your performing rights license permits the use of music virtually.

Are you incorporating music into a virtual tour or marketing video? Then you need a synchronization license, also known as a "synch license." This type of license is required even for a video of an event where music was played pursuant to a performing rights license. ASCAP and BMI licenses do not include synchronization rights, so you will need to obtain a separate license.

Maintain copies of music licenses. Music owners may use software to find

uses of their music in online videos. The music owners then send cease-and-desist letters, placing the burden on the video's owner to prove it secured permission to use the music. A copy of the license agreement will easily dismiss these claims. Without a copy of the agreement, the video owner could be forced to pay a settlement fee for using the music or face litigation.

Don't Assume Fair Use

You might have heard the term "fair use" and wondered if that excuses your unauthorized use of copyrighted materials. Fair use is actually a very narrow defense to copyright infringement, and you shouldn't assume it will apply without proper legal advice.

Courts have broad discretion in finding fair use, which makes it difficult to predict the outcome of a fair use defense. Recognized fair uses include a person recording a TV show for home viewing, a critic quoting song lyrics in a review, and a teacher making copies of a book chapter for use in the classroom.

Diligently ensuring you obtain the necessary permissions for the use of third-party materials will help you avoid copyright infringement claims down the road. Check out nar.realtor/copyright for additional information on copyright issues in the real estate industry. ■



Chloe Hecht is the National Association of REALTORS®' senior counsel and director of legal affairs. You can reach her at checht@nar.realtor.

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Easy-to-use GrowthZone software integrates with select MLS providers, Supra, and SentiLock.

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- ✔ Track & manage continuing education hours & credits for your members.



Drawing a Line

Changes to the NAR Code of Ethics hold members accountable for discriminatory speech and conduct.

During the 2020 REALTORS® Conference & Expo, held virtually in November, the National Association of REALTORS® Board of Directors approved recommendations from the Professional Standards Committee on the Code of Ethics' applicability to discriminatory speech and conduct.

These changes can be grouped into three broad categories:

1. Changes to the Code of Ethics' applicability to a REALTOR®'s activities.

Previously, the policy statement in the "Code of Ethics and Arbitration Manual" limited the applicability of the code to real estate–related activities and transactions involving REALTORS®. As such, members could engage in conduct and speech that was discriminatory and abhorrent, but unless it could be tied to a real estate–related activity or transaction, the Code of Ethics—specifically, Article 10—did not apply. The new policy expands the Code of Ethics' applicability to all of a REALTOR®'s activities.

2. A new Standard of Practice 10-5.

This provides that REALTORS® must not use harassing speech, hate speech, epithets, or slurs based on race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

3. Revisions to the definition of public trust.

The definition of "public trust" was expanded to include all discrimination against protected classes under Article 10 of the Code of Ethics and all fraud, and to limit the reporting requirement to final ethics decisions involving real estate–related activities and transactions. Previously, the definition of public trust included demonstrated mis-

Discriminatory speech against protected classes is a violation of the Code of Ethics and is subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

appropriation of client or customer funds or property, willful discrimination, or fraud resulting in substantial economic harm. This revision expands the definition to include all discrimination against the protected classes under Article 10 and all fraud.

The Board of Directors also approved enhancements to the Code of Ethics and Arbitration Manual consistent with these three categories.

Why Now?

These are significant changes, and many associations are curious about both the reasoning behind them and the method of enforcement. For context, it is important to note that not only did NAR receive an unprecedented number of complaints in 2020 about REALTORS® using discriminatory speech online, but local and state associations also experienced an increase in complaints.

Many associations struggled to find explicit and direct justification for disciplinary action under either NAR's Code of Ethics or their own bylaws. NAR's

approved changes should make it clear to members and associations alike that discriminatory speech against protected classes is a violation of the Code of Ethics and is subject to appropriate disciplinary action, even if that discriminatory speech occurs outside a real estate–related activity or transaction.

When it comes to enforcement of these changes, keep a couple of things in mind. First, this doesn't mean that the Code of Ethics will apply to all portions of a REALTOR®'s personal life. Most articles and standards of practice remain specific to real estate transactions and other real estate–related activities. The focus of these changes is meant to be narrow, applying only to discriminatory speech against the protected classes identified in the Code of Ethics.

Second, the concern has been raised that terms such as "hate speech" or "epithets" can be subjective. To assist associations with the consistent application of these policies, NAR has also adopted a new Appendix XII to Part Four of the Code of Ethics and Arbitration Manual (cdn.nar.realtor/sites/default/files/documents/Exhibit-02-Standard-of-Practice-10-19-20.pdf).

NAR will roll out further guidance, including comprehensive training, for associations and members in the coming months. Feel free to contact narpolicyquestions@nar.realtor with any questions. ■



Daniel Doepke is the National Association of REALTORS® director of member policy. Contact him at ddoepke@nar.realtor or 312-329-8410.

Use Tech Tools to Show You Care

5 ways small associations can use technology to create membership value.

Association members' behaviors change constantly, and that has been especially true during the coronavirus pandemic. Association executives have been forced to adapt quickly to changing needs with the technologies we use, and our focus must always be on providing the right package of services for members.

With the technology available today, fortunately, small associations have the ability to operate just like larger ones. Many tech services are free or low-cost, and they allow us to provide added value to our members.

Have you thought about asking members how they wish to receive communications? Now is the time to do so, since many member preferences have changed during the pandemic. AEs have to review the available technology and rethink our old assumptions: What are we doing to stay on top of tech trends? What are you offering now, and is there something better out there?

Some members are complaining that they have developed tech fatigue in the pandemic. Many associations are seeing fewer members show up to online meetings. What are you doing to drive them there?

We have to guide members to knowledge, because that's what will empower them to succeed in their businesses in the future. If they are sick of online meetings, consider creating two- to three-minute videos on YouTube instead. It's free, and you can get your point across quickly.

Here are a few steps you and your association can take toward better tech usage:



1. Know your membership. Using an affordable application such as Constant Contact or Survey Monkey, survey members and ask what their needs are. Ask them how they like to receive communications. Ask them if they are satisfied with the services they receive.

2. Organize your plan in an online calendar and stick to it. Programs such as Google Calendar can help you create a schedule to share with members, staff, volunteer leaders, committees, and even family members. A well-organized calendar will keep everyone apprised of the tasks you set out to complete.

3. Make your site interactive. The more information and tools you offer on your website, the more you can drive members to it for answers. Give them everything they might need there; make it a one-stop shop for all of the great

information that your association, your state association, and the National Association of REALTORS® provide.

4. Boost your social media presence. If you don't have social media accounts, it's time to create them. Check out Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Take a look at other associations' pages, and follow what the successful ones do.

5. See what Zoom and other videoconferencing platforms have to offer. Even if members are tired of being onscreen, they will still appreciate the safety of online meetings as well as the money and time they save. See "You've Gone Virtual. Now What?" on page 16 to find out which platforms might be right for you.

There is a quotation from leadership guru John C. Maxwell that has helped me serve my members over the years: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." This is a game-changer! It truly can make a difference in someone's day to know that someone else cares.

Pick up the phone and call three members every day just to ask how they're doing, what they need, and how you can help. Find out what matters most to your members, and do a few of those things really well. This is your year to shine as an AE and lead your association into the future! ■



Heather Wiedrich, RCE, ePRO, C2EX, is association executive at HomeTown Association of REALTORS® in Sycamore and Sterling, Ill.

Emphasizing Equity

Diversity and fair housing are now minimum requirements for REALTOR® associations.

Last year, the Association Executives Committee appointed a work group to review the National Association of REALTORS® Core Standards program and the process it uses to hear appeals. As world events unfolded, however, our priorities shifted: A review of the hearing process moved to the back burner, and the changes ultimately put forth focused on social issues in response to the current environment.

The purpose of Core Standards is to establish a minimum level of service that members can expect from any local REALTOR® association they join. NAR is not the only organization to have such standards: National and international associations throughout the world maintain standards for affiliation to help ensure legal compliance as well as strategic alignment with the parent organization.

The work group met six times in 2020. We pored through research and examined every requirement, asking ourselves, “Should this be core to a local REALTOR® association?” We concluded that the original Core Standards advisory group did an incredible job and established a solid foundation.

The original Core Standards include requirements for ethics, advocacy, consumer outreach, unification efforts and support of the REALTOR® organization, technology, and financial solvency. However, the work group agreed that two very important aspects were missing: DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) and fair housing. The Diversity in Leadership Workgroup reached a similar conclusion.

I’ve learned a lot about racial inequity in the United States in the last year. The issue was pushed to the forefront of the national

New DEI and fair housing requirements in the Core Standards list a range of possible qualifying activities. Everyone should be able to find right-sized solutions for their organizations.

conversation following the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, and the ensuing protests.

I read *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein. The major takeaway is that REALTORS® and REALTOR® associations, along with banks, housing providers, regulators, and government agencies at all levels, played a major role in segregating neighborhoods and creating inequities in housing that still exist today. It should be required reading for all REALTORS® and association executives.

Accepting Responsibility

NAR has owned up to its responsibility for being on the wrong side of history regarding the Fair Housing Act of 1968. In November, NAR President Charlie Opler apologized for past NAR policies that supported racist practices including

steering, redlining, and creating covenants that prohibited nonwhite people from living in certain communities. The apology felt like a natural evolution of the work NAR has done over the past three or four years to not only acknowledge the past but also plot a new way forward.

That new path is important, because many of the problems created by the discriminatory policies of the past remain unresolved today. It is incumbent upon REALTOR® associations all over the country to take up this work.

We need to better understand the backgrounds of our members and the markets they serve. We need to actively seek out members of marginalized groups and encourage them to get involved so that our boards of directors look like our general memberships. We need to train volunteer leaders and staff about the benefits of diverse perspectives. We need to engage with community leaders to advance housing opportunity. We need to raise awareness about fair housing among consumers, educate our members, and assist with reporting violations. All of these things should be core to operating a REALTOR® association.

Our associations come in many different shapes and sizes, and they serve different markets. Some have large staffs, while others employ a single part-time executive. Some have multimillion-dollar budgets, while others struggle to meet costs. Those variations make it impossible to create a one-size-fits-all solution to any problem.

That’s why the new DEI and fair housing requirements in the Core Standards, approved by the NAR Board of Directors



in November, list a range of possible qualifying activities—everything from promoting NAR’s Implicit Bias video to hosting a large-scale fair housing event. Everyone should be able to find right-sized solutions for their organizations.

The other modification to the Core Standards was in the technology section, which previously required associations to have only a website and email. The pandemic has taught us that associa-

tions must be able to conduct business remotely, so Core Standards now dictate that we must be able to conduct meetings remotely. Check out “You’ve Gone Virtual. Now What?” on page 16 to survey the options.

In the coming year, you can expect to see a plethora of opportunities to learn about Core Standards. You’ll also see an improved reporting tool and related resources to help satisfy the require-

ments. Many thanks to those who served on the Core Standards Work Group. It has been an honor to chair, and I believe these changes will “move the needle” for our members and housing consumers alike. ■



Mike Valerino, CAE, RCE, is chief operating officer of the Akron Cleveland Association of REALTORS®.

Extended Engagement

KCRAR's Kipp Cooper talks about reaching members in a hybrid setting.

As the CEO of the 10,000-member-strong Kansas City Regional Association of REALTORS® (KCRAR) and Heartland MLS, Kipp Cooper, RCE, has had his hands full since the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders went into effect last March. Fortunately, he has long championed tech tools that can help meet members' needs whether they are in the office, showing properties, or working from home.

REALTOR® AE asked Cooper about coping with COVID-19 and creating engagement with members as a hybrid organization. Here's what he said:



Q: How has the coronavirus changed how your association communicates with members?

Cooper: At the beginning of the pandemic, our first challenge was convincing 36 county governments to include real estate as an essential service. Many of our members didn't understand how close they came to losing their right to sell real estate.

We had to develop guidelines for REALTORS® and continually communicate through the MLS, our website, podcasts, emails, and articles what was allowed and what changes and emergency rules were in place.

Q: Which association functions translate well to a hybrid environment?

Cooper: We were already working on online and virtual classes. This works well for MLS training, but we still have many students who want a live education experience. We have been offering a large number of Zoom classes and have returned to very small in-person classes. I anticipate future curricula as hybrid classes with

“
‘Blanket’ Zoom meetings are like blanket emails—they won’t cut through the noise.
 —Kipp Cooper

30 students live and 60 virtual, and huge video screens so the instructor and students can all interact as if everyone were seated in the same room.

Q: How has the office atmosphere changed?

Cooper: During our stay-at-home order, we repurposed and issued laptops to staff fully loaded with our phone system, Microsoft Teams, and our membership system, seamlessly enabling 40 employees at three offices to work from home. Some of our accounting and membership team remained at the office, and we set up services such as curbside, touch-free

pickup or delivery of store items, personal protective equipment, and lockboxes.

Q: What are you doing to keep members engaged and active in the hybrid environment?

Cooper: We have podcasts, virtual happy hours, and virtual latté-and-learns. We do some limited outdoor activities, such as our Habitat for Humanity “Pride” build, golf tournament, neighborhood cleanups, and a very exciting virtual Unity Concert.

Our new website, kcrar.com, went live in November. It is the culmination of a multiyear project to learn individual member needs using artificial intelligence, user behavior data, and available MLS, demographic, social media, and voter data, and membership information. We are serving up custom content based on members' specific and anticipated needs.

Q: Has the pandemic had any effect on how you operate the MLS?

Cooper: We developed new policies to allow for greater flexibility in staggering showings, permitted virtual and live-streamed showings, and moved all of our board meetings and trainings to Zoom. We never skipped a beat.

Q: Any other words of wisdom you'd like to share with fellow AEs about remote outreach?

Cooper: It's a challenge [because] our members are social beings. Focus on creating quality interactions. “Blanket” Zoom meetings are like blanket emails—they won't cut through the noise. It's a massive waste of time for members if it isn't specific to them and doesn't offer some way to improve their business immediately. ■



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