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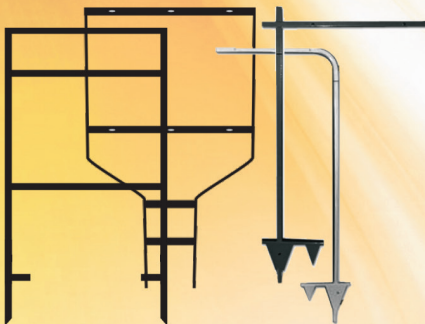
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ON THE COVER: AEs throughout the country mobilized quickly to help their members deal with the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The REALTOR® AE editorial board reviews each issue and provides critical feedback, proposes story ideas, and stays in touch with fellow association executives nationwide to scout out new programs and products to share with the AE community. To join the editorial board, write an article, or contribute information, email Ian P. Murphy, senior editor, REALTOR® AE magazine, ian.murphy@theygsgroup.com.

We Did This Together

Soon after I wrote my last article for this magazine, our lives changed drastically. We were asked to stay at home and immediately had to find new ways to provide all of the services to which our members have become so accustomed. Our purpose became hyperfocused: to operate our associations and help our members conduct business safely throughout the COVID-19 health crisis. And judging by the response from members across the country, many understand the value of their associations in a way they didn't before the pandemic.

As association executives, we rose to the occasion. We pivoted in our delivery of meetings and education. We pored over government guidelines that changed daily. We studied how newly created relief programs could benefit members. Even with our staff working remotely, the membership knew we were there for them.

In the PC (pre-COVID-19) era, we'd often say there weren't enough hours in a day. What a quaint notion. Can we collectively agree that this has been the busiest time in our work lives? There seems to be a new pandemic-related challenge every day. As I write this, we are grappling with how and when to open our offices safely, and we are finding creative ways to tackle each new challenge.

Before I became a state AE, I spent all of my time in the REALTOR® organization in the advocacy arena. We had many great accomplishments in those years. Still, I've never been more proud than I am right now of the incredible work that has been accomplished—at all levels—on behalf of the membership. The REALTOR® Party is stronger than ever before because of AEs and staff. The members see this, too; if they didn't understand the value of our "Vote, Act, and Invest" mantra before, they do now.

I'm also proud of how seamlessly we've turned our longstanding in-person meetings and conferences into successful virtual events—and in many cases, found better participation. Another silver lining is that finding speakers during quarantine has been easier. When no flights or hotel stays are involved, the barriers to participation are removed; we're not asking national experts to leave their families. They can sit in their own dens and basements and still provide members with the timeliest information about the most important issues of the day.

At Missouri REALTORS®' recent business conference, five members of our congressional delegation addressed the opening session. Speaking remotely, they didn't have to worry about missing committee hearings or floor votes to meet with their constituents.

I enjoy looking at the positives that have come from working remotely. As associations, we never really closed up shop. We never missed a beat; we found new ways to reach our members and operate our associations. Most positive of all is that we did it together. Uniting as never before, we have produced more good work.

Perhaps it goes without saying, but throughout this crisis, you—the AEs—have been my greatest resource. I'm so grateful that we can lean on each other and learn from one another. I'm thankful for you, and I congratulate each and every one of you for your extraordinary efforts this year on behalf of our members.



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Equipping Members to End Bias

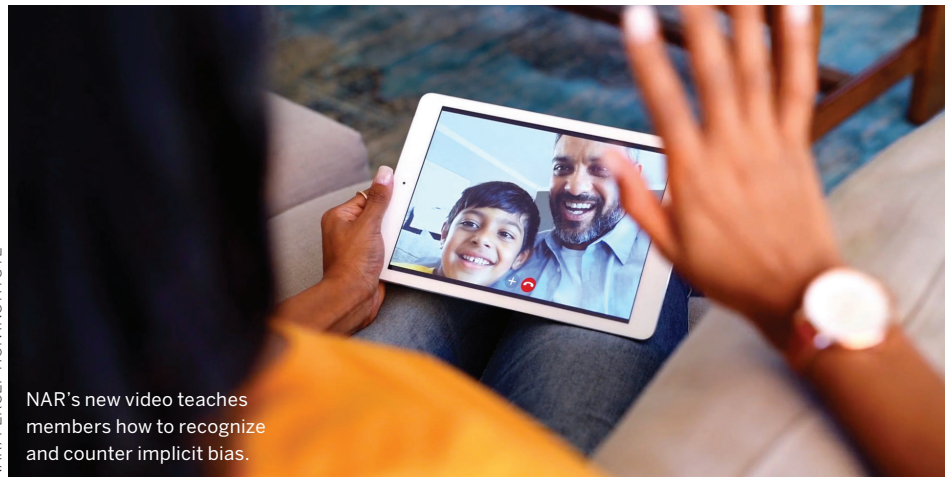
Newsday's investigative report on the residential real estate industry, published last November, was shocking. The newspaper's three-year study uncovered evidence that brokers and agents subjected minority customers to different treatment from white customers in 40% of agent-customer interactions.

Agents take prelicense training, do continuing education, and study fair housing law. Most agents believe they treat customers fairly and say they've never witnessed discrimination in real estate. So where's the disconnect?

Part of the answer is that discrimination can happen without our knowing it.

As part of its ACT Fair Housing Action Plan, the National Association of REALTORS® teamed with the Perception Institute to create an online workshop that helps REALTORS® understand how implicit bias may enter into business transactions. The 54-minute video, "Bias Override: Overcoming Barriers to Fair Housing," explains the cognitive processes that can lead to hidden biases and result in disparate treatment.

"Nothing is more important than helping people feel like they are being treated fairly when finding a new home," says Rachel D.



NAR/PERCEPTION INSTITUTE

NAR's new video teaches members how to recognize and counter implicit bias.

Godsil, the Perception Institute's co-founder and co-director.

How Biases Take Root

The human brain streamlines processing by creating categories for objects, people, and experiences, the Perception Institute says. Such cognitive shortcuts speed learning and decision-making, but can also embed historical and cultural stereotypes into our brains, creating biases. When such biases reveal themselves in conversation, body language, and other ways, they undermine trust and respect, potentially causing a consumer to lose a housing opportunity and an agent to lose a sale.

Left unchecked, routine biased behavior becomes structural discrimination.

Recent studies have identified specific practices that can interrupt and override bias. Brokerages can set protocols to ensure that every client is treated fairly and equally. Agents can learn how to manage their mindsets and perform a "respect reset" if they accidentally say something that might be perceived as negative or biased.

'The Work We All Need to Do'

Recognizing and countering hidden bias is a lifelong process and the responsibility of every person and profession, Godsil says. The most important tool for overcoming bias is to create meaningful, long-term personal relationships with people of different identities. "The next time you work with clients from different cultures and backgrounds, you will be able to provide equal and professional service because you have embraced the work that we all need to do," she says.

NAR is now collaborating with Perception Institute to design a three-hour classroom training that will be released later in 2020.

Find the video and other fair housing resources at nar.realtor/fairhousing.



NAR/PERCEPTION INSTITUTE



Jesse Purdon, a Bonita Springs, Fla., city councilman, and Meighan Harris, CEO of Bonita Springs-Estero REALTORS®, helped bring REALTORS® and lawmakers together to repair damage to a city park using a grant from NAR.

© BONITA SPRINGS-ESTERO REALTORS®

REALTORS® Restore Public Places

On June 6, residents of Bonita Springs, Fla., awakened to find a beloved community park had been vandalized. The park is a popular gathering spot for holidays and special events, and city leaders were concerned that the graffiti spray-painted on the bricks and concrete of the park's band shell and other structures would overshadow an otherwise peaceful protest calling for racial justice and equality.

Bonita Springs-Estero REALTORS® stepped in.

Meighan Harris, the association's CEO, was the first AE to apply for and receive the

National Association of REALTORS® new 2020 Community Rebuilding Grant. NAR launched the grant program in early June to support REALTOR®-led efforts to rebuild and restore communities rocked by tension and unrest. Harris worked with lawmakers to bring in a professional cleaning crew—and used the cleanup as an opportunity to convey through traditional and social media that her association stood for equality, fair housing, and inclusion.

So far, 14 REALTOR® association projects have been approved for grants of up to \$3,000. The Fredericksburg Area

Association of REALTORS® in Virginia used its grant to sponsor a communitywide event it dubbed a "Love Scrub." REALTOR® volunteers cleaned downtown areas, including a community park, streets, and a police memorial.

"As REALTORS®, we commit to be part of the overall solution," says Ezekiel "Zeke" Morris, REALTOR® Party community engagement liaison and owner of EMA Realty & Management in Chicago. "The grant is a great first step."

Learn more at realtorparty.realtor/communityrebuilding.

Congratulations to New RCEs

These 13 REALTOR® AEs earned their REALTOR® association Certified Executive (RCE) 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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Rethink the Cityscape

Your members can take the lead in reinventing urban spaces after COVID-19.

People are talking about the long-term effect COVID-19 could have on their cities. But REALTOR® associations who serve members in urban areas have an opportunity to stake a leadership position in these discussions and bring about well-planned change that protects property rights and enhances values.

At the National Association of REALTORS® Urban Roundtable in May, hosted by Miami REALTORS® CEO Teresa King Kinney, CIPS, RCE, experts shared with association executives and presidents what a reinvented urban environment might look like. Panelists said cities adjusting to the coronavirus might:

- **Create interaction zones** where restaurants and cafés offer outdoor seating and customers can physically distance.
- **Replace vacant public, office, and retail spaces** with urban farming and food production.
- **Adapt roads** to make room for pedestrians and “micromobility” vehicles such as bikes and scooters.

The key to forging lasting change in cities is not just good planning but good



MACIEJ BLEDOWSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

design, said roundtable panelist Petra Hurtado, research director at the American Planning Association. “You have to design communities so that people want to get out of the car and experience the place.”

REALTOR® Party Community Outreach grants can help your association drive community development and design. They also offer opportunities to position your association as the leading authority on real estate development and public policies, and help you forge important relationships with policymakers and their staffs.

For example, are there plans to make public infrastructure more accommodating

to social distancing? Consider applying for a Placemaking grant to help build a walking trail or bike lane or to fund a community garden that brings fresh produce to urban residents. Or leverage a Smart Growth grant to support downtown business areas or expand access to public spaces for recreation and transportation.

The roundtable was part of NAR’s 2020 REALTORS® Legislative Meetings. Find information about all of NAR’s community outreach grants—including grants for community rebuilding, fair housing, and land-use initiatives—at realtorparty.realtor under “Programs and Grants.”



Take a Deeper Dive

- Watch the May 4 Urban Roundtable. realtorparty.realtor/about-us/nar2020-urban-roundtable-monday
- Read REALTOR® magazine’s “Community Design in the Age of COVID-19.” magazine.realtor/daily-news/2020/05/05/evolving-communities-in-the-age-of-covid-19
- Read a special edition of *On Common Ground* exploring how cities might reinvent themselves in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. *On Common Ground* is NAR’s magazine on smart growth for REALTORS®, elected officials, and other community leaders. nar.realtor/on-common-ground

The Essential Question

Start With Why shows business leaders how to plan a desired result from the outset.

I don't mind admitting the books I usually read include romance novels and other sappy stuff, so writing a business book review is outside my comfort zone. But working during the COVID-19 pandemic has made me look at a lot of things differently, and I set out to find a book that would help personally and professionally.

Searching for books on effective leadership and inspiring others led me to a classic of the genre. Simon Sinek's *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Published in 2009, the book's references are sometimes dated, but its principles remain relevant. It made me think about the individuals and organizations that might fall into its various classifications, and as I read the book, I became eager to discover my own "why."

The first chapter confirmed my choice. "There is a wonderful story of a group of American car executives who went to Japan to see a Japanese assembly line," it reads. "At the end of the line, the doors were put on the hinges, the same as in America. But something was missing. In the United States, a line worker would take a rubber mallet and tap the edges of the door to ensure that it fit perfectly. In Japan, that job didn't exist.

"Confused, the American auto executives asked at what point they made sure the door

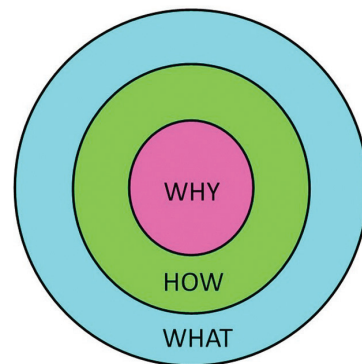
fit perfectly. Their Japanese guide looked at them and smiled sheepishly. 'We make sure it fits when we design it.' In the Japanese auto plant, they didn't examine the problem and accumulate data to figure out the best solution—they engineered the outcome they wanted from the beginning."

The mallet is a metaphor for the way in which so many people and organizations operate: Instead of ensuring that all of the pieces fit from the start, they use a mish-mash of solutions to eventually achieve the desired result.

Centered on the Why

Sinek references the "Golden Circle" throughout the book. This concentric circle contains *what* you do as the outside band, *how* you do what you do in the middle ring, and *why* you do it at its center. Most leaders and organizations tend to think, act, or communicate from the outside of the circle inward, going from what to why.

The Japanese automaker understood the importance of going from the inside out, from why to what. Its why was clear from design through assembly, and this decision was reflected in the quality of the product. Consumers recognized the difference: Sales of Japanese cars exceeded those of



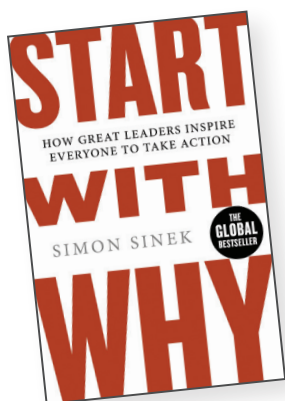
American car manufacturers in the United States for many years.

Before I could articulate the why of my association, I had to form a clear picture of it. I can easily explain what my association does and how we do it, but the why needs to be readily apparent to members and others.

Why we do what we do shows through in the charisma of leaders within the association. This belief in its purpose must be shared by the leaders and reflected consistently in the actions of the association as a whole for others to see. Keeping the Golden Circle in balance creates a culture of loyalty and trust within an organization and a clear sense of purpose for all.

Getting lost in the semantics of what we do and how we do it creates a fuzziest vision. "Leaders don't have all the great ideas; they provide support for those who want to contribute," Sinek writes in *Start With Why*. "Leaders achieve very little by themselves; they inspire people to come together for the good of the group. Leaders inspire action."

This book is a great reference for leaders and staff wanting to bring clarity to an association's why through strategic planning, and it may help inspire members to take part in demonstrating what the association does for the community and how it does it. An association's value becomes apparent when the why is evident in everything it does.



"Leaders achieve very little by themselves; they inspire people to come together for the good of the group."

—Simon Sinek, *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*



Reader: Carla A. Rose, e-PRO®, C2EX, CEO, Salisbury/Rowan REALTORS®, N.C.

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STEPPING UP

REALTOR® associations met the pandemic head-on.

By Stacey Moncrieff, Director of Content Strategy, NAR

Speed. Strength. Stamina. Courage. Mental toughness. A positive mindset.

These are some of the attributes we admire in elite athletes, and since mid-March, they have been on display daily at REALTOR® associations across the country. The sheer scope of the COVID-19 crisis—from the threat of the contagion itself to the response by federal, state, and local officials—has kept association executives and their staffs in a state of near-constant readiness.

“Being able to communicate through Zoom—four or five times a day, on a minute’s notice—what was happening in the state was critical,” says Pennsylvania Association of REALTORS® (PAR) CEO Mike McGee, recalling the early days of COVID-19, “because what was true at 1 p.m. on a given day might very well have changed two hours later.”

With members trying to follow state orders, absorb federal relief rules, grapple with changing economic circumstances, and keep themselves and their clients safe, REALTOR® associations became beacons of hope, guidance, and advocacy.

A decision McGee made in 2019 proved invaluable as members’ COVID-19 calls and questions mounted. “A little over a year ago, we brought the PAR Legal Hotline in-house and installed a new software system, HubSpot, that allows us to track

the number and types of phone calls we’re getting,” he says.

“Our goal with HubSpot was to pool all member data into one area in order to retool the member experience,” explains PAR Digital Director Kevin Juliano. “We’ve integrated our website, email marketing, and social media reporting, as well as perhaps our most valuable data—member questions—to our Solutions Center.”

That centralized reporting enabled the association to quickly spot trends and keep its COVID-19 resources relevant during the critical weeks between March 19, when Pennsylvania’s strict stay-at-home order went into effect, and May 19, when some in-person real estate activity was allowed to resume. As a result, the association’s website saw unique users spike from 40,000–50,000 in a typical month to 160,000 in March.

Essential Advocacy

Pennsylvania was one of a handful of states where in-person real estate activity was halted by a stay-at-home order. The March 19 order allowed only “life-sustaining” businesses to continue physical operations, so PAR launched a wide-ranging advocacy effort to put real estate on the table. “We took every possible avenue that we could think of to support that real estate be deemed an

essential service, from legislation to direct communication with the governor’s office to the state Real Estate Commission to filing an amicus brief on a lawsuit,” says Sherri Martin, PAR’s political affairs manager.

The effort culminated in legislation being introduced by state Rep. Todd Polinchock (R-Bucks), a REALTOR®, that would give residential and commercial real estate services a waiver from the governor’s order. To encourage passage, REALTOR® leaders in the state shared stories about the plight of sellers who couldn’t sell and buyers who couldn’t buy, and they put together a guide for government officials detailing how real estate sales could be conducted safely.

The bill passed. PAR applied for, and quickly received, an issues mobilization grant from the National Association of REALTORS®, launching a digital media campaign and calls to action to secure the governor’s signature. “The governor vetoed the bill,” Martin says, “but about two hours later, he came out with new guidance that followed what we had been advocating for weeks.”

Offering Guidance

In states where real estate was deemed an essential service, associations were called upon to provide guidance on sometimes confusing or vaguely written state orders.

FLAMINGO IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Early on, daily phone and Zoom calls made it clear to Emily Chenevert, CEO of the Austin Board of REALTORS® in Texas, that both REALTORS® and association affiliates were looking to her and her team for information that was current and accurate.

"We stayed alert and worked fast to ensure that changes in health regulations or government orders were shared with members within hours, and we pivoted quickly to offer free, live online education," she says. The Austin board also created a Stay Home, Work Safe Resources Kit (abor.com/worksafe), with business-building resources, client FAQs, expert interviews, and wellness tools "to make sure our members are informed, equipped, and empowered during this difficult time," Chenevert says.

With the situation changing rapidly, push communications became must-reads for REALTORS®. "That old mantra, 'Don't email the members all the time'? We threw that out the window very quickly," Juliano says. "We were sending almost daily emails—updates from our attorney and our advocacy team—because members would see something on Facebook and not realize it was old information."

Similarly, Virginia REALTORS® introduced daily touch points using a combination of email and social media to reach its membership of about 34,000. On Monday, it issued an analysis of a weekly flash survey of members; Tuesday was a Facebook Live event with General Counsel Laura Farley; Wednesday featured an all-member email focused on COVID-19 updates; Thursday was a Facebook Live event with Chief Economist Lisa Sturtevant, and Friday was an all-member e-newsletter.

"These constant and consistent touch points helped us combat the stress of the unknown for our members," says Robin Spensieri, vice president of communications and media relations.

The Friday e-newsletter existed before the pandemic and offers more than just COVID-19 news. "We think it's really important to continue offering the same types of resources and news our members rely on," Spensieri says.

Value in Virtual

Indeed, even as they've stayed hyper-focused on COVID-19, AEs continued to offer their normal services, albeit with adaptations.

"We started working from home a week before [Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer]

issued a stay-at-home order," says Vickey Livernois, CEO of the Greater Metropolitan Association of REALTORS®, which serves 9,400 REALTORS® in the Detroit area. The 12-person staff adjusted quickly. "All of our committee meetings have gone on as scheduled," she says.

"We're holding virtual [professional standards] hearings. We conducted 70 candidate interviews. And we've hosted 40 virtual classes, with about 1,100 registrants."

The staff has even found ways to reduce social isolation for members, hosting a Roaring '20s murder mystery night and a *Family Feud*-style game night on Zoom.

Similarly, the Austin board has moved events and programs, such as its Small Broker Meetups and Global Lunch & Learns, to the virtual arena. The Reading-Berks Association of REALTORS® in Pennsylvania

and its Young Professionals Network co-host online member happy hours, with guest speakers leading conversations on topics from virtual work-life balance to staying focused and hopeful in times of crisis.

At the Cape Cod & Islands Association of REALTORS® in Massachusetts, hundreds of members have tuned in to a new weekly webinar called "Zoomed in on Real Estate." Each edition features a guest expert discussing issues in an interactive, informal question-and-answer format. The webinars have covered legal and ethical issues posed by the pandemic, including what REALTORS® need to know about tenant rights, evictions, and short-term rentals under stay-at-home rules.

There have been hiccups in adjusting to the new reality. After a GMAR member logged into a confidential meeting while in a car with other people, Livernois says, the association buttoned down its virtual meeting process. Another day, she got a call from the state president, a GMAR member, who'd spotted a fellow member tiling a floor during a Zoom education session. "We took care of it by creating a distance learning policy as well as a Zoom guide," Livernois says.

Bottom line: "We're doing everything we were doing, and we're engaging way more members," says Livernois, whose staff uses Zoom for member meetings and Microsoft Teams for internal communications.

In fact, the COVID-19 crisis has been an opportunity to engage with members in a more intimate way. "The listening has been happening very intently on both sides," Spensieri says. "Members are listening to us for guidance and a translation of what the news means for their business, and we are listening to them to learn about the specific challenges they're facing."

Working with members remotely is not only possible, Livernois says, but looking into the future, "this might be the preferred way that members want to engage."

—Additional reporting by Carolyn Schwaar



Virginia REALTORS® expanded member communications and virtual learning during the pandemic.



WHAT IT TAKES TO THRIVE DURING TUMULT

As unusual as the pandemic may be, previous disruptions hold lessons for AEs.

By Jerry Matthews

The COVID-19 pandemic has produced the fourth major market disruption I've experienced during my tenure with the REALTOR® organization. While the pandemic differs from previous economic downturns, there are some similarities in the way people and markets respond to extended traumatic events. But many association executives haven't experienced a serious disruption before, so this is new territory for them.

Fortunately, disruptions are rare, they get resolved, and they are followed by a return to normalcy. But getting through that transition will test you as an AE. You need to be quick, creative, and confident, even though you may not feel that way. You might be your members' only source of leadership and confidence.

Each of the disruptions I experienced challenged my association. We lost mem-

bers, revenue, influence, and key volunteer leaders. But there were also opportunities for the association and myself. We actually increased some programs and created new member services. If the current disruption follows the patterns of the past, there will be many familiar themes and opportunities.

Here are several aspects of the downturns of the past—and lessons for today:

Speed. The speed of change in market conditions—and their impact on the association—was very fast in previous upheavals. As with the stock market, positive change is slow and gradual, but negative change tends to be quick and dramatic. There isn't a lot of time to make vetted decisions. AEs were pressed to give quick opinions, make judgments, and deflect moves that might be detrimental in the long term. Many used their skills

to increase their stature with leadership, market leaders, and members.

Lesson: Think of all the potential scenarios and options now to be prepared.

Attitudes. Member attitudes became very negative during previous disruptions. This was understandable, as a market disruption directly threatens careers, businesses, and ways of life. Negative comments were often misdirected at the association, however, and staff members were inappropriately targeted. The best associations quickly engaged members as a source of information, ideas, and assistance to keep attitudes positive.

Lesson: Focus creatively on solving members' problems and offer hope for the future.

REALTOR® value. The consumer's view of value provided by a REALTOR® changed. When perceptions change, everything

changes. Identifying new consumer wants and needs became critical to members' success. It was also vital for associations; the most successful among them aggressively created educational products and opportunities based on new market realities—new tools for a new time. They also dumped programs and services that should have been deleted long ago.

Lesson: Lead with solutions that help members get in sync with new consumer desires.

REALTOR® advocacy. With an understanding of consumers' changed needs, smart associations quickly engaged in promoting newly identified REALTOR® services of high value. There were multiple benefits to this—not only did these associations connect with the changed consumer, but they also improved members' self-image. It helped many members better connect with new marketplace realities and the association.

Lesson: Be the first and strongest advocate for new member value.

Leadership. The strongest members of the leadership cadre focused nearly all of their time on their real estate firms (as brokers) or their business pipeline (as agents). This created a vacuum for other, less qualified members to fill or prompted the AE to take a stronger leadership role. With less attention from current leadership, some AEs had “shadow” leadership groups to consult. Association culture determined what was acceptable, but in challenging times, bold leadership was even more appreciated and supported.

Lesson: Connect with elected—or unelected—leaders to take bold, supported actions.

Budget cuts. Accompanying the loss of membership were demands to cut the budget. If membership dropped 20%, for example, proposals often sought to cut 20% across the board. If staff compensation and



Across-the-board cuts are not a strategic decision, but a fear-based reaction.

benefits were in one line item, the call was to cut that 20%, too; in some cases, associations cut staff while keeping all programs!

Across-the-board cuts are not a strategic decision, but a fear-based reaction. Leading associations had program-based budgets, and all costs—including staff compensation—were included in prioritized programs. So, the focus was on which programs continued to have value, not the staff positions that should be eliminated or the salaries that could be cut.

Lesson: Present your budget by program format and priority. Cut the losers and keep or expand the winners.

Reserves. A market disruption clearly qualifies for use of reserves. If associations had adequate reserves, they were prudent in deploying the funds, pruning programs, and advancing valuable services. Some of them delayed dues collection, but they did not lower dues permanently. When you cut dues, you cut value. You know the saying, “Time is money”? Well, the reverse is also true: Money is time. Reserves gave associations the time needed to engage in reasoned debate and make wiser decisions.

Lesson: Deploy reserves strategically, and use the current disruption to validate a strong reserves policy.

Survival mentality. In past disruptions, most members went into survival mode. “Cut everything to keep the business” was the majority opinion, but a few members were

more assertive and expanded their business. This added to the market tension among members. Most of the leadership was in the survival camp, and AEs had to diplomatically question the wisdom of those making strategic decisions for the association based on short-term thinking. Like the few prepared members who developed big plans, some associations expanded their market area through mergers during tumultuous times.

Lesson: Use sustained or increased value—not survival—as your mantra.

Community feeling. Despite business downturns and accompanying feelings of anger, fear, and uncertainty, a unifying spirit developed among members. Effective associations reinforced the camaraderie through communications, personal contacts, and encouragement while assisting members with their business challenges. Empathy and assistance were a powerful combination; for many associations, it was their finest hour.

Lesson: Don't wait for the next crisis. Develop community spirit now to help sustain you during any difficult time.

Plan Now for the Next Disruption

The pandemic will test your skills, especially where innovation and diplomacy are concerned. Like past disruptions, this one has moved quickly, and you must do the same. When the COVID-19 crisis transitions into a new normalcy, be prepared to apply the lessons learned immediately. Design and build a stronger association now to be ready for the next disruption. It will be here soon enough.



Jerry Matthews' executive career spans more than 20 years as a REALTOR® state association CEO and more than 15 years as an industry consultant. Known as “The Expert on Executive

Success,” his consulting practice focuses on executive performance and recruiting. For more information, visit jerry.matthews.com.

SOARING PAST AN 'INCONVENIENCE'

Not even cancer could stop my commitment to share knowledge and keep achieving. By Russ Boyce



Everyone's leadership journey is unique. In 2005, I was asked to be a director at my local association; I accepted and spent two years on the board. I then submitted my application to continue as a director. The association executive and the current president-elect asked me to stay after a board meeting. They said they'd like me to consider a different position—president-elect.

I was stunned. I thanked them for their confidence. That's when I realized how blessed I had been over the years in the real estate industry. I was a successful agent and fortunate to have a great team and award-winning production, and I realized that this was a way for me to give back. I accepted and became 2008 president-elect. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would be president of our local association. And if you told me I would be state president five years later, I would have laughed.

My AE told me about the Maryland Leadership Academy. I applied and was accepted. I had no idea what to expect. In our first class, I knew it was different from anything I had done before. The camaraderie was excellent, and I formed bonds and friendships. A month after I graduated, the state president-elect asked me to serve as vice chair of the academy and chair it under her presidency the following year. Again, I was stunned, but I accepted the challenge.

Leading in a Crisis

I was sworn in as the 2009 president of the Southern Maryland Association of REALTORS® in the third week of September 2008. On Sept. 29, the market crashed. No

one saw it coming; there had been a lot of talk about a "bubble," but the market was so robust, it didn't seem possible. One day, we were getting multiple offers on listings, then the offers stopped almost overnight.

It was difficult to see our membership struggle. Members shared their business and personal hardships with me, and I applied what I learned in the Leadership Academy—especially in communication and media relations—to help. I found myself writing encouraging, inspirational "Letters From the President" in the local newsletter.

As I wrapped up my year as president and chair of the state Leadership Academy, I got a call from the incoming state president asking if I would accept an appointment to the state executive committee. I told her I would be honored. After about four months on the executive committee, the current president said I should consider getting on the leadership ladder. At this point, I was no longer stunned when asked; I had learned that people often see things in you that you may not recognize in yourself.

I did some research and decided to move forward. On March 17, 2011, I entered the race for state secretary. I didn't know the two people I was running against, but I got to know them as we traveled across Maryland meeting with local boards of directors. In July, I had an interview with the nominating committee. They usually notify people of their decision by phone, but since I was still on-site, they asked me to step back into the room and congratulated me on being selected as the 2012 secretary of the Maryland Association of REALTORS®.

Over the next couple of months, I met with the other two candidates. We made a resolution to move forward in unison. One didn't want to run again, and the other said she would return the following year. I promised I would do everything I could to help her move forward. She ran the following year unopposed. She did an outstanding job and is one of my closest friends to this day. After I complimented her on her inaugural address, she said, "I knew you were there and if I had trouble, you'd have my back." I don't believe I have ever received a finer compliment.

I learned a lot about our state association while serving on the executive committee. And I started getting better acquainted with the National Association of REALTORS®. After a meeting one day, the immediate past president asked if I knew about NAR's Leadership Academy. She had graduated from its first class and thought I would be a good candidate. I submitted my application; a few months later, I was accepted into the NARLA class of 2012.

A Diagnosis, not a Definition

In September 2011, I was sworn in as secretary at our state convention. A busy schedule began with a tour of the state to support incoming local leaders. I immediately hired an assistant to be sure my clients were taken care of while I handled association responsibilities. About a month after taking office, I started feeling ill. A doctor told me I had a severe sinus infection.

In November, I attended the NAR annual conference in Anaheim, Calif., and



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

From left, Boyce makes a toast at the Maryland Association of REALTORS® Past Presidents' Luncheon; Boyce (right) meets with Sen. Mac Middleton (D-Md.) at the Maryland State House; Boyce (center) flanked by two of his sons.

we had our first NARLA class. I felt worse but pushed through. My doctor changed my medication three times. By the time I headed to the President's Circle Issues Conference in Miami in February 2012, I had little energy. I flew home on a Sunday and was in the doctor's office Monday morning. I was diagnosed with stage 4 large B-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

My world changed in a matter of minutes, but I refused to let the diagnosis define me. I told family and friends I wouldn't say the word "cancer" and instead called it "my inconvenience." I felt that the cancer had already had enough energy since it had reached stage 4. If they wanted to discuss "the wellness of my inconvenience," we could have a conversation.

My hair fell out after the first chemotherapy treatment. We were getting ready to have a state board meeting, and I knew I had to face the leadership team. Needless to say, they were surprised to see me with a bald head. I explained what was going on and offered to step down, but they offered their full support as I battled the beast. I asked to speak early at the state board meeting so I could explain my new appearance sooner rather than later. I was taken aback by the outpouring of kindness, love, and support, and was more inspired than ever to fight.

Fortified With Gratitude

The next few months were a roller coaster ride. Family and friends asked if they could accompany me to treatments, but those often took seven hours, and I didn't want

anyone to sit there all that time. I used the time to write emails and texts, reflect, and pray. Chemo took its toll: All I could do was lie on the couch for days after a treatment.

I cleaned off the fireplace mantel and placed all of the cards and emails I received there for inspiration. There were times I would feel sorry for myself; I would give myself three minutes to process those feelings, then go to the mantel to read some of the get-well messages, count my blessings, get back to gratitude, and force myself to move on. I also learned to laugh at myself.

At one point, I needed a blood transfusion. Two days after the transfusion, I ended up in the hospital with shingles and MRSA. It was April, and the following week was a NARLA class in Chicago. I had booked the room and a flight. I came home from the hospital on a Sunday and told my family I was going to my class in Chicago on Tuesday. This did not go over well.

I explained to them that if I missed a single class, I couldn't graduate, and I explained how important graduating was to me. After promising I'd rest immediately after class, they reluctantly backed off. I hadn't yet shared "my inconvenience" with class members. Monday afternoon, I wrote them an email and said that I would see them the next day.

The encouragement, love, and support that came from each of them felt like family on steroids; I tear up thinking about it. I had never experienced such a connection with a group of people before.

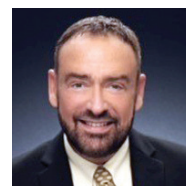
The NARLA class was pivotal in my healing. Along with my family and friends,

the class members were there to lift me up. By July, through the grace of God, I was in remission, and I went on to serve as president-elect, president, and immediate past president. I was first in my class to become state president. Now, most members of my class have been state presidents or will be soon, or they have held higher positions in state and national leadership.

Paying It Forward

Every year after I graduated from NARLA, I asked to be on the Leadership Advisory Group Committee. The academy inspired me so much that I wanted to pay it forward. NARLA taught me the importance of not just working hard, but working smarter. It encouraged me to be engaged and serve effectively as a leader. Not only did it make me a better real estate agent and leader, it made me a better person. My perseverance paid off: I was appointed to the committee in 2017 and now serve as 2020 chair.

My goal is to lead by example and empower as many people as I can along the way. I'm working closely with NAR to create the best curriculum available and share higher achievement through education. We can make a difference by putting our expertise to work to raise the confidence of our peers. And in the process, we'll earn their respect and that of the general public.



Russ Boyce, GRI, CRS, CDPE, RE/MAX One, Waldorf, Md., is an NAR director and 2020 chair, NAR Leadership Advisory Group/Leadership Academy.

Flirting With Disaster

A preparedness plan can be a reassuring road map for what to do and how to communicate in times of crisis.

The coronavirus pandemic has underscored the importance of being prepared for the unexpected. A properly drafted, up-to-date disaster preparedness plan enables businesses to act quickly and effectively during a time that is otherwise filled with stress and panic.

While your association may already have a disaster preparedness plan in place, it may have outgrown that plan, or circumstances may have changed since the plan was last reviewed. Be sure to evaluate your plan at least once a year to ensure that it's accurate and that its protocols are effective in light of current circumstances.

After every disaster or crisis, take time to consider how well your plan fared. Act to improve any portions of the plan that didn't function as intended or proved ineffective. For example, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, businesses nationwide have struggled with issues such as communications, monitoring state laws and government guidance, and deploying and enabling staff to work remotely.

Voice of Authority

Clear and timely communication to staff in times of disaster is critical. During the coronavirus pandemic, circumstances and governmental guidance have changed rapidly, highlighting the need to be able to update employees on the status of business operations quickly and regularly.

Update the communications protocols in your disaster preparedness plan to ensure the association can provide information to



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In your preparedness plan, include a remote work policy that outlines when remote work is encouraged or required.

staff and members quickly, and specify how it will do so, whether through an internal website, a Facebook page, or email blasts. Make sure staff and members know where to find these updates and know whom to contact in the event of questions or concerns. You can also establish a phone tree to communicate emergency information to staff.

Appoint someone in the association to monitor applicable laws and government-issued guidance pertaining to disasters, and to develop and communicate policies related to such laws or guidance to staff and members.

From a Distance

Remote operations are another critical facet of any preparedness plan. Many em-

ployers weren't prepared for the sudden, nationwide COVID-19 shutdown and had to scramble to put rules and protocols in place. In your preparedness plan, include a remote work policy that outlines when remote work is encouraged or required; the virtual platforms to be used for meetings or events; any reserve equipment, such as laptops or phones, that will be made available for use by staff to work remotely; and how that equipment will be distributed.

Be sure your association has the infrastructure necessary to allow remote work, such as virtual private network access to servers and ample cloud storage, and audit the sufficiency of the infrastructure regularly. Update cybersecurity protocols to restrict external access to virtual meetings, and remind staff to update their antivirus software and report any suspicious emails.

If your association doesn't already have a preparedness plan in place, the time to start is now. Factor in plans for universal crises such as COVID-19, and those likely to strike your geographic area, such as hurricanes, wildfires, or floods. As you draft your plan, keep in mind the issues discussed in this article, as well as other issues such as staff safety, data management, and financial obligations.

Every disaster presents unique issues, but an up-to-date preparedness plan will help your association weather the storm.



Katie Garrity is a National Association of REALTORS® associate counsel. Contact her at kgarrity@nar.realtor or 312-329-8434.

Need help creating and updating your association's preparedness plan?

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Lessons From the Pandemic

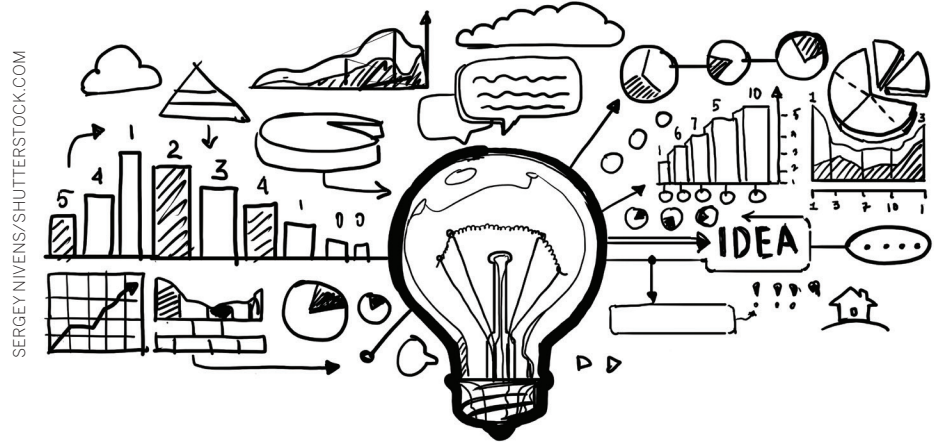
What have AEs learned that will change how they run their associations?

“These are unprecedented times” is probably one of the most common phrases you have heard over the past several months. Association executives have had to ask themselves how they can manage, lead, parent, work, and generally exist during this pandemic.

Even though we have never experienced this kind of event previously, AEs were made for this challenge. We have learned so many lessons to help us prepare for the future. “One test of leadership is how one prepares for possible crisis—and handles it when it comes—without losing perspective,” says Chuck Kasky, RCE, CEO of Maryland REALTORS®.

Professionals across the industry have been able to ebb and flow with the waves of crisis washing over us. Some of us discovered that our boards are behind us. “My board of directors gave me the authority and trust to get my job done from the start of the pandemic,” says Kim Clark, AE and government affairs director of the Silver City Regional Association of REALTORS® in New Mexico. “I have been an AE for 23 years, so I have always felt that I had the trust of my membership and leadership.”

Not every experience has been so positive, though. One colleague who wishes to remain anonymous says his association recently formed a committee to discuss best practices concerning COVID-19 because of inaction by the association’s board. “The state did not issue a stay-at-home order, and so members did not take [COVID-19] seriously,” he said in May. “Though as states are opening back up, our members seem to be taking it more seriously. Going forward, I would love to see more uniformity and guidance to AEs and leadership.”



Work From What’s Known

One of the things you likely already know is that you can’t please everyone. “With the support of our executive committee and other board members, we had to reeducate a couple of directors about their roles,” says Jim Haisler, RCE and CEO of the Heartland REALTOR® Organization in suburban Chicago. “It reaffirmed for me that AEs have to have thick skins and must stand committed to their dedication to the members of their organization.”

Another “known” is that communication is key—and it is certainly paramount during times of crisis. Members want someone they can turn to, as well as a centralized message and resources they can use for their businesses. Going beyond Zoom while under stay-at-home orders, many associations amped up communications with video, enhanced newsletters, and Facebook groups.

“Early on, we determined the need for a central go-to place for communications and information,” says Dale Zahn, RCE, CEO of the West Michigan Lakeshore Association of REALTORS®. “In a blast email, we directed members [to our

Facebook group] and immediately saw membership explode.”

Make Changes That Stick

Even AEs who had never used these tools to their fullest prepandemic were forced to be more proficient. That’s how change takes hold: A crisis sheds light on areas that may be lacking within your organization, and you make the moves necessary to shore them up. Once we move past this moment, what will stick?

Tools. All of us have discovered whether or not we had the tools needed to cope with a crisis. My association and MLS dealt with internet, computer, and phone issues. Our internet service provider got bogged down. To work through that, we had our association management software provider move our files to a cloud-based system. It was something that needed to be done, and the coronavirus nudged us forward.

Policy. The pandemic has highlighted gaps in policy for many organizations. Some colleagues revisited who speaks on behalf of the association. Many focused on ways to support staff in times of need and

“Early on, we determined the need for a central go-to place for communications and information.”

—Dale Zahn, RCE, CEO, West Michigan Lakeshore Association of REALTORS®

offer flexibility in how work is done. “We have a small endowment available for charitable contributions but no formal way to award the funds,” Kasky says. “There are so many needs. REALTOR® associations should have a process in place to make these decisions about how best to serve the community at large.”

Growth. During the shutdown, thousands of REALTORS® nationwide worked on classes and designations with a focus on bettering themselves and their businesses. Staff, too, broadened their horizons through the National Association of REALTORS® Right Tools, Right Now program; my staff accelerated their learning

through Association Management Self-Study, e-PRO, RCE, and C2EX. The extra time gained from event cancellations has helped this along.

Connections. One of the most important things we rediscovered due to the crisis is the importance of connections. Whether remote or in-person, human interaction is crucial. Creating connections helps you stay focused on what’s best for your organization. Members want us to lead through this tragedy, showing strength and devotion to the task at hand. Reaching out and showing genuine care also shows members that we are human and doing the best we can, just like they are.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to crisis management. Colleagues have had to lead through natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and financial collapses; we can now add managing AORs through a pandemic to our list of qualifications. The way our industry has come together to help REALTORS® and association staff work through this has been remarkable.

The coronavirus seems certain to remain a concern as fall approaches. Take the time you have now to prepare for further uncertainty. Lead with positivity, passion, competency, and empathy. And know that we are here for you.



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Remote Control

How to ensure decisions can be made without face-to-face gatherings.

With the COVID-19 pandemic virtually eliminating large gatherings for the foreseeable future, many association executives are at a loss for ways to conduct the meetings necessary to make collective decisions without endangering the health and safety of board members and other parties.

While business and nonprofits alike quickly pivoted to Zoom and other virtual platforms for education and communication, many REALTOR® associations find themselves in a proverbial Catch-22 when it comes to remote meetings. Many associations' bylaws contain the following verbiage or something similar:

"The latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* shall be recognized as the authority governing the meetings of the association, its board of directors, and committees in all instances wherein its provisions do not conflict with these bylaws."

Meanwhile, *Robert's Rules of Order* states the following: "Except as authorized in the bylaws, the business of an organization or board can be validly transacted only at a regular or properly called meeting—that is, as defined on pages 81–82, a single official gathering in one room or area—of the assembly of its members at which a quorum is present."

One could interpret this to mean that if your bylaws don't explicitly allow for virtual meetings, consult *Robert's Rules*. But *Robert's Rules* appears to prohibit virtual meetings unless your bylaws explicitly allow them. So, now what?

First, your association should consult legal counsel to interpret your bylaws and provide guidance on options for conducting business virtually. Your counsel should also closely examine your state's not-for-profit



laws and whether the association is permitted to hold meetings by telephone, videoconference, or other interactive means.

If it is determined that your association is indeed unable to hold virtual meetings, all is not lost. Your bylaws may allow the executive committee to act on behalf of the board of directors between meetings, especially in urgent matters.

In addition, you may be able to take action through the unanimous written consent of the voting body. This works exactly as it sounds: The consent must be in writing and approved by all individuals entitled to vote on the matter, with no objections or abstentions.

Once in-person meetings are able to resume, be sure to take action to amend the association's bylaws to enable the association to be nimbler and more responsive to future needs by allowing decision-making bodies to gather virtually. Thanks to COVID-19, virtual meetings are likely here to stay.

Check out the official *Robert's Rules of Order* website at robertsrules.com for updated guidance related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The site recently published downloadable sample rules for electronic meetings at robertsrules.com/pdfs/electronic-meeting-sample-rules.pdf.



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Q: Does NAR allow virtual ethics and arbitration hearings?

A: Yes. Professional Standards Policy Statement 56 of the *Code of Ethics and Arbitration Manual* authorizes associations to allow certain testimony for hearings via teleconference or videoconference. It reads, in part:

"The policies and procedures established [in the manual] contemplate that parties and their witnesses will participate in ethics and arbitration hearings in the physical presence of hearing panels and the respective parties. Parties and their witnesses may request permission to participate in such proceedings via teleconference or videoconference."

(Revised 11/14)

"Parties and witnesses to ethics and arbitration hearings may be permitted to participate in those hearings by teleconference or videoconference at the discretion of the hearing panel chair. Only those parties eligible to attend the entire hearing in person would be entitled to participate 'remotely' for the entirety of the hearing. Witnesses may only participate remotely for their own testimony." (Revised 11/14)

NAR policy can be interpreted to permit associations to hold virtual hearings, and divergence from historical practice may be appropriate. Given local, state, and national recommendations regarding the pandemic, including White House guidelines and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations regarding social distancing and the avoidance of in-person gatherings, virtual alternatives should be leveraged to the greatest extent possible so that professional standards matters can continue to be processed.



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Streaming Ahead

Virtual open houses were quick to appear during the coronavirus, but will they remain once the pandemic subsides?



ANDREY_POPOV/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

COVID-19 has disrupted typical daily life across the country, and in a profession that relies on relationships and face-to-face interaction, real estate professionals have had to adjust quickly to a new reality. Conducting business nowadays means digging deeper into the marketing toolbox.

Virtual tours and videos have been a part of listing information packages for decades, but virtual open houses weren't seen widely before COVID-19. Adoption of the practice sped up as a result of the pandemic, as

brokers and agents observed stay-at-home orders and put in place the precautions recommended by health officials when scheduling showings.

When the pandemic worsened, MLS vendors worked quickly to stage virtual open houses. MLS governances could not ban in-person open houses or showings outright, but it was their duty to support participants trying to weather such unusual circumstances. MLS executives talked about the challenges posed by COVID-19 and their

solutions at a webinar hosted by the National Association of REALTORS®.

Satisfying the Sellers

Real estate pros have historically individualized their marketing approaches according to sellers' expectations. But the decrease in in-person open houses during the pandemic is not necessarily an indicator that virtual open houses will replace them.

"The focus here should be on the sellers and what best serves their needs," said

Nicole Jensen, RCE, CMLX3, vice president of business technology at the MIBOR REALTOR® Association, which serves 8,800 participants and subscribers in central Indiana. “The most realistic future will likely be a hybrid of in-person and virtual showings and open houses. In-person creates greater relationship-building opportunities, and virtual offers convenience and larger geographical reach.”

Virtual open houses are an example of how technology can help expand the resources available for practitioners to market properties. Using 3D scanning software to give virtual tours and videos a fresh perspective might be the next tech tool to catch on with a wider audience.

“I don’t think we will see more virtual open houses after the pandemic,” said Ani Pollack, MLS director for the Santa Barbara Association of REALTORS®, which serves 1,600 participants and subscribers in California. “I think consumers want to see properties in person, and I think our members want to show the properties in person. But I think 3D virtual tours, such as those created using Matterport, and videos that can be edited before distribution will grow in popularity.”

Adding to the Mix

A steep learning curve might explain why few professionals have taken advantage of the virtual tool so far. Staci Wood, vice president and chief product officer for REcolorado, a regional MLS serving 23,000 participants and subscribers in the Denver area, said she anticipates that virtual open houses will grow in popularity as agents become more comfortable with the technology. “It is great to be able to offer these virtual tools and add another element to an agent’s marketing mix.”

Prior to the pandemic, agents used recorded media in virtual tours and videos or hired professionals to do the work for them. But virtual open houses are a different

“I think consumers want to see properties in person, and I think our members want to show the properties in person.”

—Ani Pollack, MLS director, Santa Barbara Association of REALTORS®, Calif.

animal, said Jensen: “The greatest opportunity for learning was in differentiating a virtual tour versus a virtual showing versus a virtual open house.”

Pollack agreed that it’s the responsibility of MLS administrators to communicate the distinction between virtual tours and virtual open houses to participants and subscribers. “There’s still confusion over the difference between a virtual tour and a live, scheduled event that is held via Zoom, Skype, GoToMeeting, or some other, similar service,” she said. “We only have a handful of agents who have used the open house function.”

Richard Gibbens, MLS director of the Central Panhandle Association of REALTORS®, which serves 1,600 participants and subscribers in the Panama City, Fla., area, said his organization has provided education for participants and subscribers via video. The association uses the MLS platform to advertise virtual open houses rather than relying on social media.

“Tech-savvy members caught on fast, and many have been doing Facebook Live virtual open houses,” he said. “I created a video explaining what a virtual open house is, how it is different from a virtual tour, and how to hold a virtual open house using Zoom.”

Ramping Up Fast

MLS software vendors responded quickly with virtual solutions. A vendor working with the Santa Barbara Association of REALTORS® had virtual open house capabilities programmed within days after a stay-at-home order was issued by the state of California. Larger portals such as Zillow haven’t always been so nimble.

A potential barrier is the difficulty in supporting different videoconferencing software. For example, Facebook Live doesn’t offer interactive audio, so prospective buyers have to ask questions by typing them into a chat box. Zoom and Skype offer immediate, two-way conversations.

Some MLS governances responded to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations by disabling the in-person open house feature on their platforms to emphasize the importance of social distancing. “The open house and caravan function was disabled the same day the stay-at-home order was issued by our governor,” Pollack said.

Some markets saw more of an impact than others. While many MLS systems have reported decreased activity, it’s difficult to discern how much the slowdown is attributable to low inventory versus the pandemic. “To gauge the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on our market, we are producing weekly housing market statistics,” Wood said. “As compared to last April [2019], both closed listings and new listings are down 26%; average sale prices for April 2020 have held steady and are up 1% compared to April 2019.”

Given the uncertainty over how long the pandemic will last, it’s not clear how business practices will look in the future. But virtual open houses are becoming a viable option for occasions when an in-person showing isn’t practical.



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Remote Possibilities

Members and leaders appreciate that virtual meetings are here to stay.

Over the past 10 years, remote work has become more common in many professions. But thanks to the coronavirus, people who otherwise might never have left the comforts of a traditional office environment have been suddenly thrust into remote life.

Adjustments needed to be made quickly at REALTOR® associations. Staff, volunteer leaders, and members developed a strong solidarity, and technology and communication skills became indispensable. As comedian and author Sara Benincasa quipped, “Strap in. You’re about to get to know yourself a LOT better.”

In my 25 years as an association executive, I have witnessed the association model evolve in many ways. Paper files have gradually shifted online to a cloud-based environment, and physical visits by members have declined. Meetings tend to take place virtually, and live networking events were among the few in-person gatherings that were thriving—before COVID-19.

Since the pandemic started, more members (53%) read our communications, up from 27% previously. There are a few challenges with issuing lock boxes and key cards, and some members still like to pay their invoices and fees in person. Proctoring exams isn’t easy, either, but we’ve provided online proctoring via webinars.

Although some small boards were operating remotely pre-pandemic, others struggled to put a plan in place quickly. The current stay-at-home environment now has some small board AEs thinking, “Why can’t I operate like this all the time?”

“Throughout all of the change related to the pandemic, both in office procedures and our personal lives, I have found that

Remote work offers benefits to AEs and members alike.

the ability to attend and offer virtual meetings, trainings, and seminars to be the one thing I would not change,” says Gail Pyszka, e-PRO, CEO of the Illini Valley Association of REALTORS® in Peru, Ill. “A perfect example of this was the recent National Association of REALTORS® Legislative Meetings. Attendance was the highest it has ever been!”

“I was also able to attend NAR Legislative Meetings, which [wasn’t] possible in the past due to budgetary constraints,” adds Peggy Missel, RCE, e-PRO, C2EX, CEO of the Midwest City-Del City-Moore Association of REALTORS® in Midwest City, Okla. “The updates and information provided by NAR helped me answer questions and direct members to the right resources to help their businesses.”

Local at a Distance

Local associations are also adapting to virtual meetings, events, and seminars. New platforms use password-protected meetings, secure waiting rooms, and screen sharing to ensure security and allow associations to stay connected with their members in ways that weren’t possible prior to COVID-19. “New members are becoming involved and participating,” Pyszka says. “This type of technology is the future, and we need to be part of it. I hope to continue to see virtual technology as a means of offering events that will benefit all members.”

Remote work offers benefits to AEs and members alike. “The biggest positive for

me was that I could schedule blocks of time for focused work on large projects,” Missel says. “Secondly, it provided a great opportunity to show the value members receive for their NAR dues. Approximately 20% of our members started C2EX, with 5% attaining certification between mid-March and the end of April, [and] several completed their e-PRO certification.”

Members are using Right Tools, Right Now, and connecting virtually has engaged some who don’t usually attend association meetings and events, Missel adds. “It was, however, difficult for some members to make the transition to virtual,” she says. “The difficulties were primarily centered on the perceived lack of personal connection. The virtual format is cumbersome to manage when trying to engage people who are new and in their first association experience.”

I believe that changes made during the pandemic will continue evolving for the betterment of association executives, staff, volunteer leaders, and members. We will be implementing policy changes to conduct business and all meetings virtually; we’ll also offer more educational sessions online.

Members and leaders seem to appreciate being able to do business safely from their homes, and it may save them time and money. As we work to reduce health risks, the “new normal” offers unexpected blessings. We’re learning so much that can help improve the association and the services it provides to members.



Heather Wiedrich, RCE, e-PRO, C2EX, is executive vice president at the HomeTown Association of REALTORS® in Sycamore and Sterling, Ill.

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Core Under COVID

While certain standards have been waived for 2020, consider completing them anyway.

As the impact of COVID-19 became clear in March, the National Association of REALTORS® leadership team agreed to approve the Association Executive Committee's recommendation to waive Section 2, Standard E and all of Section 3 for the current Core Standards cycle, which ends Dec. 31, 2020. When the word came, our board had already completed those items on our Core Standards checklist.

Why? Because when I became an AE last July, I was baffled by the Core Standards. I went through the checklist every single day until I was finally sure we had satisfied them. In the process, I learned a lot—and I resolved that this year, I would complete our Core Standards with time to spare.

If you haven't gotten to that place yet, you may be wondering what the changes encompass and how can you complete your Core Standards requirements now that our day-to-day lives have changed so much. Here are some thoughts on that:

Advocacy Is Easy

Section 2, Standard E includes REALTOR® Party's "Vote-Act-Invest" goals. With this year being an election year, this section is easy to complete even though it isn't required. You might conduct an online get-out-the-vote activity, share information about the U.S. Census, or remind people to sign up for NAR Calls for Action via social media.

You should be able to complete the rest of Section 2 without too much trouble. Sharing information from NAR and your state association with members can be as simple as including it in your newsletter and social media posts. If you follow the REALTORS® Political Action Committee

At face value, Core Standards appear to be much more difficult than they actually are.

(RPAC) on Twitter, you'll have so many ideas, you won't know what to do with them.

In Arkansas, we're having a Loyal Companion Photo Contest to raise funds for RPAC. One photogenic pet will be chosen to represent each local association, and those winners will compete at the state convention in September; preliminary voting will take place online. The folks at Aristotle will be happy to help you set up a contest like this or an online trivia night to raise funds.

Outreach Is Essential

Section 3 involves consumer outreach. This is where we demonstrate engagement with the community. We have many associations that have excelled in response to COVID-19. "I am super-proud of my Connecticut association execs," says Cindy Butts, CEO of Connecticut REALTORS®. "I'm finding they are stepping up in huge ways to continue to expand their commitment to their communities during the pandemic and through the rest of the year."

Andrew Sims, CEO of the Raleigh Regional Association of REALTORS®, N.C., offers a wealth of ideas to help you complete Core Standards:

- **Be the voice for real estate** in your market, using news releases, media interviews, and other channels to share market statistics, NAR research reports, and the local or state analysis of NAR statistics.

- **Collect money** using a GoFundMe page and donate it to a local food bank, or raise money for gift cards that can be donated to homeless shelter residents.
- **Have your local president do an interview** with appraisers and inspectors to talk about changes in the marketplace. Or interview a lender about the changes in the mortgage industry and share it with the local news.

"It's crucial that we're doing these things right now for our communities," Sims says.

I feel like the waived areas are the meat and potatoes of the Core Standards, and what remains isn't difficult to complete.

NAR and state associations offer all types of free training opportunities for staff and leadership. Continue to look for and promote them! This year's NAR Leadership Summit will take place virtually, enabling AEs and volunteer leaders to participate easily.

At face value, Core Standards appear to be much more difficult than they actually are. When you take them apart section by section, it's easy to see how they can be completed during the pandemic. I'm the only staffer at my small association, and if I can do it, you can do it.

"Even if you aren't 'required' to report it in Core Standards, please do these things anyway," Butts says. "It's really hard now, but this is when our members and communities need us most. This is our time for greatness, everyone!"

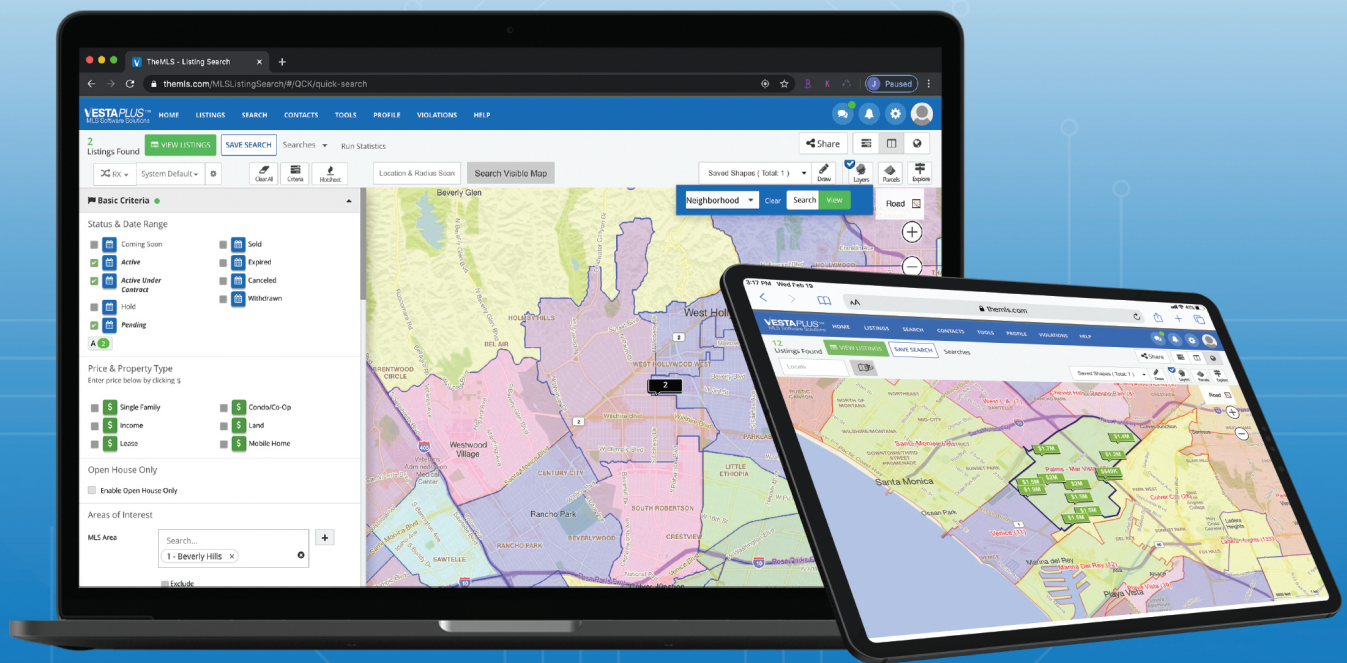


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Making Meaningful Moves

Beth Hansen, CEO of the Mississippi Association of REALTORS®, looks back to when the pandemic's scope was just beginning to dawn on the nation.

Q. What are the first things you did as an association to respond to the COVID-19 crisis?

Even as we were making the transition to working remotely, our 10 talented and tireless staffers quickly moved through a long list of things we could do to help our members and industry. Since we were juggling so many interconnecting pieces, we had virtual staff meetings every morning to prioritize.

We enjoy a strong relationship with Gov. Tate Reeves, and we immediately contacted his staff to request that real estate activity, both residential and commercial, be listed as an essential service. When the governor established a Restart Mississippi commission, we were able to secure positions for several REALTORS® on the commission's small business committee.

I have the privilege of working this year with a true servant-leader, President Keith Henley. He established the MAR Restart task force with members from different real estate disciplines, and that group developed a list of concerns and issues to guide our work.

We reached out to our Real Estate Commission to request extensions for licensing and education deadlines. Our Standard Forms Advisory Committee worked with legal counsel to develop multiple contract addenda and forms specific to COVID-19 concerns. We've also been in weekly meetings with other Mississippi business association staff to address liability and other issues with state elected officials.

Mississippi REALTORS® operates a statewide school that teaches pre- and post-license courses and continuing education. We've had online courses for years but didn't have any virtual classroom courses with



The biggest lesson to me has been to be prepared to improvise quickly and adapt to new challenges.

live instructors. Our education staff rapidly plowed through the complexities of pivoting to a virtual classroom platform while also complying with the state Real Estate Commission's requirements for verification of attendance. Our days have been full of meaningful work!

Q. How have you kept your members informed?

We've used social media and all-member email blasts regularly and created a resource page on our website, which we update often, including videos from our president. Many of our members have commented that watching President Henley's videos has been reassuring as they navigate this unknown territory.

Q. Have you taken any steps to galvanize member volunteerism during the crisis?

President Henley's theme this year is "Community Champions," and he has focused all of us on celebrating the generous nature of REALTORS® in our state. During the pandemic, we've heard many heartwarming stories of our members taking care of their neighbors and communities—delivering groceries, taking lunches to front-line health care workers, donating blood, and so on.

We also have REALTORS® who graciously devote their time to serve on the board of our 501(c)(6) Mississippi REALTORS® Disaster Relief Fund. We continue to receive applications for assistance from Mississippi residents whose homes were damaged or destroyed by three days of powerful, deadly tornadoes in April.

Q. What advice can you offer to fellow association executives about planning for or managing a crisis?

I haven't heard of anyone whose crisis management plan anticipated something this large in scope. The biggest lesson to me has been to be prepared to improvise quickly and adapt to new challenges. Take advantage of your relationships with local and state leaders, fellow AEs all over the country, and the wealth of information available from National Association of REALTORS®. You're a part of a REALTOR® community that is willing to collaborate and share, so lean on your AE friends and use their knowledge and advice to benefit your members.



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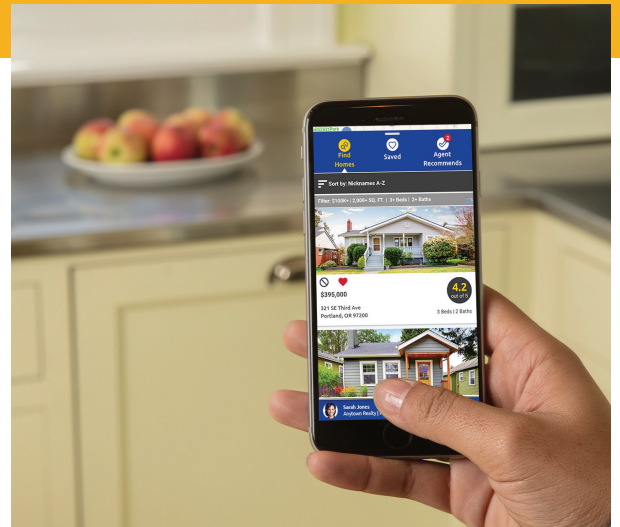
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