

**ACCE Membership Development Division
Roundtable Call
March 24, 2020, 2 – 3 pm ET**

Led by David Prunte, Senior Vice President, Strategic Partnerships
Greater Kansas City Chamber
Chair, Membership Development Division Advisory Board
[Recording](#) available

Member renewals

There were many suggestions for ways to manage renewals. Best practices are to offer support, empathy, and an open door to alternative payment schedules or delaying payment if necessary. Some chambers are sending out renewal notices on a slightly delayed basis, some are offering a specific grace period (60-90 days usually), some are offering monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual payments, some are simply expressing support, providing resources, and working with members to craft individual solutions.

Renewal suggestions/approaches

Chambers are generally keeping up with monthly invoices. Some have taken a break or invoiced later than usual in March or early April.

Some have sent out invoices including a payment grace period of 60 – 90 days.

Some have allowed monthly, quarterly, or semi-annual payments first, and then have gone to secondary steps if needed.

- One chamber created a message with a quarterly payment option on each invoice.
- Lisa McLaughlin, Crystal Lake Chamber of Commerce (950 members): If a member is at risk, they offer monthly memberships first, then 30-day deferred payments if asked. They are offering free website advertising as well.

Another chamber has asked larger community investors to pay early.

Many have made check-in calls to members with renewals due in March or April, to let members know the chamber is there as a resource. They send invoices later.

Always focus on listening and creating conversation around needs. From Kathy Blank, McKinney Chamber:

- One member asked for a 90-day deferral and a membership discount. After talking about options, they decided upon 60-day deferral. Listening to the member's needs is very important.

Some chambers not doing open deferrals. McKinney Chamber (Tex.) is focusing on

- Resources available to assist members
- In April, will send letter with the invoice, asking how members are doing, promoting virtual meetings and sending out resources.

Mark Field, Knoxville Chamber (2300 members)

- No specific deferral time, but chamber will work members to accommodate them. If it's 90 days, it's 90 days.
- They don't want the members to worry about paying right now. They know it's not a top line item for the member. They want them to focus using the resources the chamber has put together and communicating with the chamber on how they can help.
- In 2008 - language of accommodation was helpful and chamber lost only 6% of members rather than 10-20% that other chambers experienced. Mark says, "the last thing we want a member to say to our Mayor or others is 'The Chamber dropped me when I needed them the most.'"
- They believe it is important to connect with new members in particular. The staff is making phone calls to find out how they can get return on investment, making sure their needs are met.

Gary Ciarleglio, Quinnipiac Chamber

- His chamber had previously sent out 5-month invoices in advance
- He has always had a practice of making 5 phone calls a day to members and continues to do this to soften/mitigate issues around renewals.

Josh Suiter, St. Matthews Area Chamber

- Lead with empathy
- A local establishment (bar) was going to drop membership
- Josh told them – we'll give you 60 days to use all of our resources, including our virtual networking and webinars, and we'll talk again in 60 days. The member was surprised that the chamber was willing to extend all benefits for free during this time.

Matt Curran, Florida Chamber of Commerce

- He heard about one chamber that told a member, "Sorry, I'm not letting you cancel. Let's ride this out together and reassess in X time period. In the meantime, take advantage of the resources we are offering our members."

Amber Batchelor, Sebastian River Area Chamber

- Ask people what they need
- Share info from SBA and other loan programs, state and local
- Emphasize access to resources, message is that the chamber is invested in you, we'd love to have you invest in us. Wearing a resource delivery and marketing hat simultaneously.
- Opened up virtual informational calls with economic development director and others to non-members so they can see benefits before committing to renewal

All members are including supportive language.

- E.g., from Erika Acorn, "Your support of the community as we all navigate this unprecedented time in our history is greatly appreciated. We recognize that, for some businesses, the timing to renew may not be right. If that is the case, please let us know and we'll craft a plan to connect when life returns to normal."

Also see ACCE renewal template at <https://resources.acce.org/crisismanagement>.

Member engagement/contact

Many chambers are calling and checking in with all members, often according to a daily schedule requiring each caller to make a specific number of calls per day. They have organized calls various ways, often scheduling with businesses first, hardest-hit businesses first, new members first, or those who are renewing in March or April first. Depending on chamber size, all staff and/or volunteers may be involved in these calls. Contacts are documented and coordinated.

Chambers have prepared COVID-19 resource guides, web pages posting job opportunities, community hubs for information and resources, and additional website advertising for free. They have offered virtual networking and professional development providing information members need now, often featuring member business presenters in finance, law, or relevant fields. Most virtual chamber events are offered at no charge and promoted to the entire community.

Some chambers have put together campaigns promoting the entire community, including daily social media campaigns. Key is to show that the chamber is invested in the community and we need to stick together, now more than ever.

Member calls

Start calling/checking in with all members. Staff of many chambers are making at least 4 calls a day.

Michigan West Coast Chamber

- Membership director Britt Delo is the “quarterback” of these calls, makes daily assignments and keeping track. All staff are making calls, including the CEO, from 4 to 10 or 11 a day.
- They have been targeting March/April renewals first and working through the list. They aren’t mentioning invoicing in the call; they just want them to know the chamber is there, advocating for them and working for them.

Zach Snyder, Grand Rapids Chamber

- The chamber sales team has split up their books of business to the rest of the chamber team to reach out to members they know well to check in and tell them about their coronavirus toolkit.

Lisa McLaughlin (Crystal Lake Chamber) and Matt Douglas (Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce)

- They have asked chamber volunteers for assistance in making calls (board and executive committee members, or task force volunteers).

Jamie Dedmon, Greater Spokane Incorporated

- The chamber did a business impact survey to find how members are being impacted. It also allowed them to reach out for specific help and resources.

Stacey Cowan, Overland Park Chamber of Commerce:

- The chamber has been calling service industry members first. Then other members are divided by involvement groups/committees and calls are made to specific industries to be

consistent in conversations per call. All staff is making calls/outreach. All is being noted in our database labeled COVID-19

Virtual events, professional development and networking

Chambers are organizing regular webinars with resources on SBA/COVID and other professional development topics.

Dagmar Metzler, Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce

- The chamber is hosting regular calls with their County Commissioner for all their members

Jamie Dedmon, Greater Spokane Incorporated.

- Chamber is hosting webinars on topics such as “ask an attorney,” crisis communication, and business continuity and getting 200+ in attendance. All are free to participate.

Nancy McNamara, Buffalo Niagara Partnership

- The chamber is holding webinar on FMLA and have almost 250 signed up. Used experts from law firm members. Large corporate members are signed up that don't usually come to these events.

Josh Suiter, St. Matthew's Chamber of Commerce (1200 members, suburban Louisville, KY).

- Started a weekly "Coffee Chat with the Staff" where members can log into Zoom and talk about issues they are facing, to share best practices and get encouragement. It also gives them a pulse on how things are going within member businesses.
- <https://business.stmatthewschamber.com/events/details/coffee-chat-w-chamber-staff-5663>
- The chamber has also moved all of their leads groups, referral groups, networking events, member orientation and seminars to virtual.

Kathi Vanetten

- Her chamber is doing a daily Zoom morning chat with members to discuss any membership questions. They are also doing our Business Builders and Ambassador meetings, and their networking breakfasts, via Zoom.

Steven Elkins, Flint & Genesee Chamber

- The chamber will hold their monthly Chamber (BYO) luncheon via Zoom. They have lined up a presenter to talk about "Work from Home Wisdom." They are exploring Zoom rooms for some breakout networking after the presentation.

Amber Greenwood, Huntsville/Madison County Chamber:

- The chamber hosts a Mayor's Call with special guests every day at 2 pm. They send out a newsletter on Monday, promote take out Tuesday/Thursday, sends tips on Wednesday and then a Member Connection on Friday. See <https://hsvchamber.org/category/news/covid-19/>

Heavenly Walker, Greensboro Chamber of Commerce:

- The Greensboro Chamber of Commerce is hosting “Daily Action Calls” in which they bring together business experts to discuss the negative effects of this pandemic. All are at 3 pm on a common Zoom meeting link. See <http://www.greensboro.org/covid19/>.

Other notes:

- As chambers have moved in-person networking to virtual platforms and offered additional virtual professional development, they are seeing members they don't normally see in person at these virtual events.
- Offer these virtual events at no charge. Many chambers opening classes to non-members for free to the community and non-members, hoping it will pay dividends later.
- Most chambers using Zoom for professional development. Michigan West Coast Chamber uses RingCentral, which has a similar platform.
- Freeconferencecall.com is free up to 1,000 people per call.

Resource guides/community hubs

Steven Elkins, Flint and Genesee Chamber of Commerce

- Developed a community resource page open to all, members and non-members alike. Organizations will be able to share needs and resources with others by posting to a shared space and searching for solutions. <https://www.flintandgenesee.org/resource-marketplace/>
- Community resource hub: <https://www.flintandgenesee.org/supportlocal/>

Britt Delo, Michigan West Coast chamber

- Resource page: <https://www.westcoastchamber.org/CMSPages/GetPage?pageTitle=Coronavirus%20Toolkit&pageName=coronavirus-toolkit&menuId=317&parentNavigationId=17488>

Kathy Blank, McKinney Chamber:

- Resource page: <https://www.mckinneychamber.com/blog/mckinney-chamber-blog-2364/post/we-are-mckinneystrong-22878>

Gary Ciarleglio, Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce

- They had underutilized feature called “hot deals” Chambermaster. Gary rebranded it as a virtual marketplace. We have more postings because of the circumstance. These are deals, discounts or services. <https://business.quinncham.com/hotdeals>

Suzette Ellison, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce

- The chamber is working with the OKC CVB to provide one location for retailers, restaurants, and other business at <https://www.visitokc.com/support-okc/>

Grand Rapids Chamber

- Coronavirus response: <https://www.grandrapids.org/member-resources/coronavirus-toolkit/>

Kenzie Jessup, Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce

- Chamber is posting jobs on website for partners and future partners. Created special Facebook group for all local businesses to post their hours, and any special deals.

Deb Mueller, Quad Cities Chamber

- Has a blog that is updated as needed. Chamber is also part of the QC COVID-19 Coalition, which also included health experts in our community.
<https://www.quadcitieschamber.com>

Sales staff compensation

Chambers are still figuring out how to take care of their commission-based sales people when sales are not coming in. A few ideas were shared, but we will continue to learn more as time goes on.

- Kristen Cargill, Capital Region Chamber
 - Paying sales people 80% of their goal number, if they hit their goal, they get paid over 80% (usually is 50% salary, 50% commission)
 - Don't need to solicit membership at this time and making calls to members instead
 - Put the membership sales people at ease
- Meghan Kelley, Dallas
 - Adjusted Q1 to 75% of original goal to compensate for when the crisis hit

Good news stories/new sales/sponsors

In general, this is not a time to be selling new memberships for most. There are some industries doing well and hiring: grocery stores, Instacart (grocery delivery), IT, construction, others. Some chambers are approaching these industries, but always use a soft empathetic approach: individual dialogue and listening prior to any sales pitch.

Deb Mueller, Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce, has been sending resources and asking to get together on the other side of the COVID-19 crisis.

Matt Douglas, Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, has gotten sponsors for online events. Slides on screen before event list sponsors. They also turn the program over to sponsors who can deliver a sponsor message.

ACH opportunities

A few chambers are offering payment options using Automated Clearing House (ACH) payments, made either monthly, quarterly, or semi-annually. It has been popular with small business members of some chambers and may be popular option after the crisis. Keep an eye on the fees charged by the financial institution.

Kathy Blank, McKinney Chamber says their chamber has offered ACH for some members to pay on a quarterly basis for some time. Withdrawals will be done on the regular schedule for the next quarter. She hasn't had anyone ask to defer payment yet. If they do authorize a deferral, the member would still owe the entire amount, unless they negotiate to move into a lower membership tier.