Transitioning to Virtual Events

COVID-19 Rapid Response Leadership Series Resource

Alone we are **rare**. Together we are strong.®

NORD, an independent nonprofit, is leading the fight to improve the lives of **rare disease patients and families.**

We do this by supporting patients and organizations, accelerating research, providing education, disseminating information and driving public policy.

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COVID-19 Rapid Response Leadership Series

NORD® COVID-19 RAPID RESPONSE LEADERSHIP SERIES

Tentative Rapid Response Video Topics:

- ☑ NORD's Virtual Platforms for Meetings, Fundraisers and Conferences

- ☑ Fundraising in a Pandemic – June 4

- ☑ Crisis Communications Sensitivity – June 11

- ☑ Leader Roundtable: Virtual Platforms for Conferences – June 18

- ☑ Activating Your Board in Crisis – July 8

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Considerations when Transitioning from In-person to Virtual Events

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Transitioning from In-person to Virtual Events

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Madilyn Yang (far left) has been battling a rare breathing disorder since birth called Central Congenital Hypoventilation Syndrome (CCHS) or Ondine's Curse.
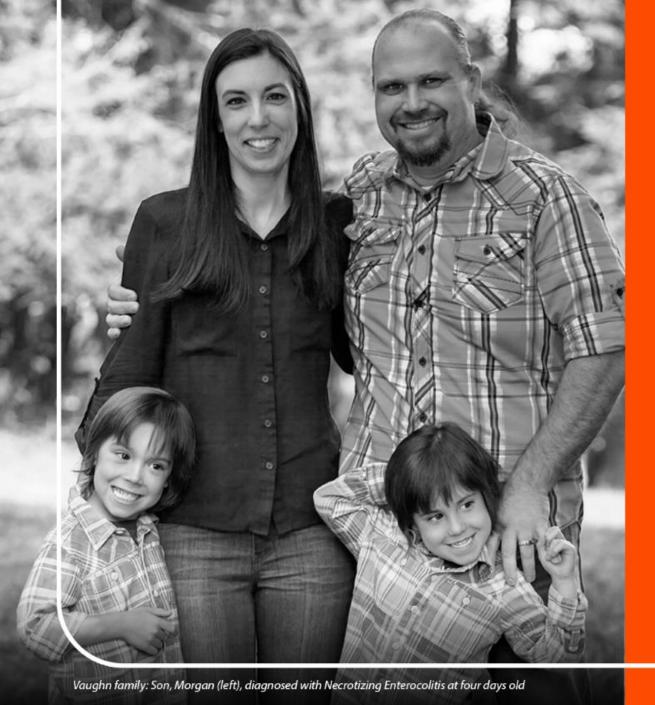
Considerations

When the health crisis impacted all of our plans, it was important to take a step back, determine the new direction and how best to implement the changes for a seamless experience for all involved.

Included are the key considerations that NORD took into account when making our decisions.

In-person Contract Cancellation Tips

Before you cancel, be sure you understand your contracts.

Vaughn family: Son, Morgan (left), diagnosed with Necrotizing Enterocolitis at four days old

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In-person Contract Considerations

- Read your contracts and check the Force Majeure[1] clause.

- Be sure to closely follow the government regulations in place for the location of your in-person meeting.

- The website for the state's Governor's office or equivalent should be considered most accurate in many cases.

- Be careful not to talk publically about the idea of transitioning to a virtual event prior to finalizing the contract negotiations with your vendors.

- Make sure your organization's Board of Directors or others involved in this process are also keeping your potential move to virtual confidential. **This could negatively affect your negotiation with vendors if they were publically known.**

1 *As defined by Merriam − Webster: force majeure is an event or effect that cannont be reasonably anticipated or controlled.*

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In-person Contract Considerations (con't)

- When working with your vendors, **offering to rebook to a future date** (next year?) will help you in the negotiations.

- If the vendors are holding you to the contract, ask if they will consider revisions to the **attrition clauses** and/or **food and beverage minimums** to help mitigate the organization's financial liability.

Adjusting Programming for Virtual Events

Now is the time to determine what you want to offer in the new virtual environment. Some content and experiences will translate very well from live to virtual events, others will need to be recreated to gain a similar or better effect.

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Stacy McCaroll and daughter, Cystic Fibrosis

Adjusting Programming for Virtual Events

Duration of Panels

- Our research has shown that the attention span for virtual presentations is shorter than in-person. Also, panelists can start promptly on a virtual meeting as they do not have obstacles like rushing from one hotel room to another while talking to conference attendees along the way!

- Keep the sessions under 1 hour; 30-45 minutes is acceptable.

- Determine if you want to offer live or pre-recorded sessions or a mix of both.

- Keep breaks brief. A break longer than 15 minutes could cause significant drop off in attendance.

Adjusting Programming for Virtual Events (con't)

Number of speakers
- With a shorter session, you'll want to limit the number of speakers to 2 or 3 plus a moderator to introduce the session and panelists, facilitate any Q&A, and keep the session on time.
- Make sure to allocate time in the session for Q&A if that is important.

Consider your stakeholder groups
- Your Board, Medical Advisors and key opinion leaders (KOLs)
- Conference Attendees & Speakers
- Conference Moderators (volunteer and staff)
- Hospital, Institution, Industry and other Corporate Sponsors
- Exhibitors
- Media Partners
- Scholarship or travel grant recipients
- External and Internal Planning Committees

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Adjusting Programming for Virtual Events (con't)

Key points to consider:

- **Registration**—how to/FAQs
- **Pricing**—does this include a mailing of promo items (aka "Registration swag")
- What to include in the **event confirmation email**
- How to use the **virtual tool(s)**
- How to **connect** with organizers, speakers and sponsors
- Speakers will need **best practices** for participating in a **virtual panel** and an understanding of how the **Q&A session** will work.
- Moderators will need an understanding of your **expectations of their role**
- **Sponsors/Media Partners** will need to understand what they can expect in exchange for their support and how the deliverables will be tracked.

Adjusting Programming for Virtual Events (con't)

Networking Sessions

- Some vendors offer rooms for networking sessions embedded in the platform; our experience is that most do not, and rely on Zoom or another conference service to be used in tandem.
- Networking rooms should be kept small so that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the conversation.
- Consider volunteer moderators assigned 1 per session and then have staff moderators pop in and out of multiple sessions to check in.
- If using Zoom, make sure to check the security settings ahead of time. Zoom provides great guidance on how to protect your meeting from traumatic infiltration by "zoom bombers".

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Adjusting Programming for Virtual Events (con't)

Networking Sessions (con't)

- Send out meeting links close to the scheduled meeting time to avoid the links being shared with non-registered attendees; common practice is one-hour or 30 minutes prior. Let your registrants know when they sign up for these networking sessions that they will receive an email with login details at the amount of time you set in advance.

- Host a training session prior to the event for the moderators so that they are comfortable with the platform tool, that their internet connection works with the platform and that their audio and video are functioning.

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Swag: how to offer this to virtual attendees

- **Incentivize paid registrations**
  - Fulfill manually or use an external vendor, if possible and cost efficient
- As a **Sponsor benefit** with shared branding between the host organization and the sponsor
- Virtually if the platform offers **downloadable brochures**, etc.
- **"Swag Rooms:"** where attendees can shop for the items that they want and pay with points that have been earned through platform engagement or pay in cash.

Software Platform Selection

Just like choosing a host venue for an in-person event, it is important to approach software selection in an organized manner.

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Software Platform Selection and Considerations

- **Have an agenda** (draft is ok) in place and then shop for the right platform, just like when you are researching in-person venues. You will need an understanding of
  - duration
  - amount of content
  - number of speakers
  - engagement opportunities
  - important features
- Consider **revising your agenda** to accommodate this new virtual audience.

- There are many platforms on the market right now and at **various price points.**
- Some continuously rise to the top and others are hidden gems.
- Some offer more than you need and others do not offer enough functionality for your purpose.

It is important for you to understand what the key priorities are to your organization in order to make the best selection.

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Software Platform Selection and Considerations (con't)

- We found it time efficient to **issue a formal RFP** before scheduling demos with the various tools;

- We were able to **eliminate vendors who didn't clearly meet our needs** thereby reducing the number of calls and the amount of time our team needed to spend on calls with various providers.

- We issued our RFP to 7 vendors and then once we heard back, decided that **demos were only necessary on half of these few platforms.**
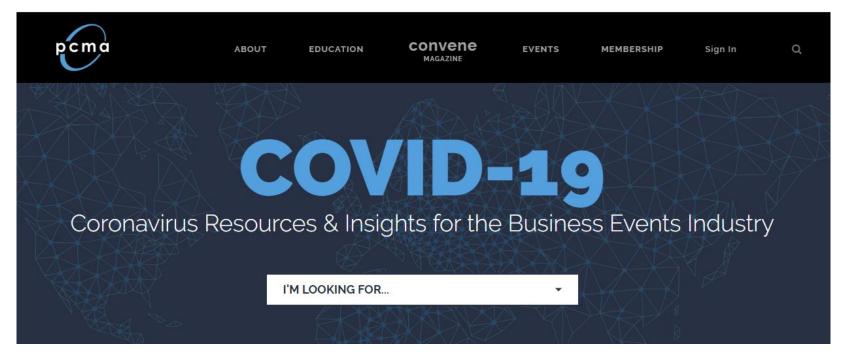
- When you develop your RFP, be sure to
  - **set your priorities**
  - use them to **evaluate the responses**
  - **determine the top responses**.

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Resources

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Resource

PCMA is the world's largest, most respected and most recognized network of business events strategists. Our members are industry leaders.

https://www.pcma.org/coronavirus-business-events-professionals-need-to-know-faq/?

ABOUT THE COVID-19 RAPID RESPONSE LEADERSHIP SERIES
NORD has developed a multi-faceted program to support patient organizations through education, training and resources to better equip them to face the additional challenges brought on by this pandemic. Topics covered in this program are informed by NORD's expertise in capacity-building and nonprofit management during crisis, input from member organizations in NORD's closed Facebook group, and direct outreach. A critical component to this program is the timely cultivation and delivery of these resources to ensure rare disease organizations remain solvent in this time of crisis.

PROGRAM SPONSORSHIP
This fund is made possible by individual donations, grants and corporate sponsorships.

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