



Managing in a Time of Uncertainty

Helping Our Clients Navigate COVID-19

March 2020

Navigating Uncertainty Supporting Your People

Communicate
more than normal

Acknowledge
that uncertainty is disruptive
and disorienting

Listen
to the fears, concerns and
recommendations that
emerge from all stakeholders

Manage
concerns with honesty,
transparency, and timeliness

In Times of Crisis and Uncertainty:

- Consider the specific needs and concerns of varied stakeholders and craft customized messaging when possible.
- Acknowledge the sense of loss, grief, and fear that your people (and their people) may be experiencing.
- Explain the rationale used to make decisions that affect them.
- Minimize uncertainty by being clear about what is known and not known.
- Reiterate and share relevant policies, procedures, and resources.
- Use language that is direct and uncomplicated.
- While there should be a central location for official messaging, use a variety of communication channels to share your messages.
- Call on key influencers to help communicate and to alert you to concerns.
- Model calm and competence. Your people are looking to you for leadership.
- Reinforce your expectations regarding flexibility, productivity, respect and kindness.

Times of Uncertainty Require Strategic Leadership

Strategic leaders recognize the importance of asking questions and considering diverse perspectives before taking action. During times of crisis or profound disruption, effective leadership teams address the following:

- What are our most critical and pressing issues to focus on first?
How do we prioritize the rest?
- What are our biggest risks and what steps do we need to mitigate them?
- Do we have a holistic business continuity process to manage this situation
(this may include disaster recovery and incident response)?
- What information do we need to make the most effective decisions?
- How can we inspire confidence that we will get through this difficult period?
- What role modeling can we provide to demonstrate that we are worthy of our stakeholders' trust and support?
- What is our stakeholder communication strategy?
- What do we not yet know, and how can we communicate this honestly?
- How are we tracking — and nimbly responding to — evolving legislation and other guidance?

Anticipating Concerns*

The ability to define key constituencies and anticipate their concerns enables organizations to respond quickly and effectively. As we move through the current COVID-19 pandemic, here is a partial list of questions you may be called upon to address:

Stakeholder Group	Concerns
Current students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will I be able to complete my courses?• Will I be able to graduate?• Will graduation ceremonies occur?• What if my courses are online and I don't have a computer or Wifi access?• Will my on-campus or off-campus job continue?• If my residence hall closes, where will I go?• Will I have access to health and mental health services?• Will there be summer school options?
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will my student be safe?• Where can I find updates about plans and activities?• Will tuition and fees be impacted?
Potential students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will admissions processes and determinations be impacted?• Will processes and timelines for registration and enrolling in classes be impacted?• Will classes resume in the new academic year?• Will my scholarships or financial aid be affected?
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can I ensure a quality learning experience for my students?• How will I get through my syllabus?• My class is highly interactive, how can I turn that into an effective online experience?• How can I ensure academic integrity among my students?• Which instructional activities can be transitioned to an online platform?• Which online tools will be used and how will I be trained to use them?• How can I replicate a lab experience on line?• How will I grade students who are doing experiential education that is no longer available? Which substitutes are possible?• Will promotion and tenure processes and decisions be impacted?• How will travel restrictions and meeting cancellations affect my scholarship and career advancement?

* Legislation and other guidance relating to COVID-19 is rapidly evolving. Concerns may change as a result of these developments.

**Stakeholder
Group**

Concerns

**Research
community**

- Which research assets require care and monitoring? Where are they located and who has oversight?
- What minimum staffing levels are required to care for research animals, monitor plants, preserve cell lines, and protect other research assets?
- Are our sponsored research staff positioned to send out grants and contracts?
- Have our funding agencies announced deadline or other changes?
- Must we postpone human subjects' research? What will be the impact on our funding commitments?

**Admissions
offices**

- Should we delay admission confirmation deadlines?
- Will students be reluctant to commit to us? If so, what assurances can we provide?
- Will we be able to honor promised financial aid packages?

Business officers

- How will the stock market affect our endowment distributions?
- How will cash flow and budget commitments be impacted?
- Do we have credit lines established?
- What are our anticipated revenue losses from event closures and goods and services reductions?
- Do we have longer-term plans in place for cost reduction and additional revenue generation?
- Can our campus and physical assets be utilized to support broader community and healthcare needs during the immediate crisis?

**Communication
professionals**

- Do our stakeholders know where to find official communication about our response and plans?
- What information do our stakeholders need and what is the best way to communicate with them?
- How can we ensure consistent messaging?
- What communications are needed for individuals with a disability or those not proficient in English?
- What will the press want to know? How can we ensure that our internal community receives information before those "on the outside" learn about it?

Stakeholder Group

Concerns

Human resources professionals

- How do we keep our people safe?
- Have we defined essential and non-essential personnel?
- Are strong remote work policies in place?
- Which staff and faculty are positioned to work productively off-site?
- Will pay continue for non-exempt employees who cannot continue to work?
- Will legislative changes require new leave options?
- Have we communicated necessary benefits information to faculty and staff?
- Will layoffs or furloughs be necessary? How will we assess this and who will be on point to notify those affected?
- What are the possible long-term impacts of layoffs given the otherwise strong employment environment? Will cutting staff now make it challenging to recruit them back?
- Do we have adequate mental health services for our faculty and staff?
- Do our health plans offer telemedicine options? If so, how will we alert employees who may not be aware of them?
- What strategies will we employ to reduce anxiety and maintain reasonable levels of productivity?
- Is any training necessary for personnel?
- Are payroll staff positioned to perform their responsibilities off site?
- If employees do not have direct deposit, will they be able to obtain their pay?
- Will hardship withdrawals be permissible under the terms of our retirement plan?
- Should I be making changes to my investments?
- What should be our message to employment candidates and new hires?
- Do we have updated employment policies and procedures to document our applicants?
- Will our on-site student health clinic continue to offer services to students?

Development officers

- Will donors delay their philanthropy given stock market trends?
- Will donors redirect their giving to respond to emerging needs in my community?
- How should market conditions affect our investment and distribution approach?

Event planners

- What events are scheduled and when?
- Do we have the means to contact event attendees regarding changes or cancellations? Will we offer refunds?
- When can we resume scheduling activities?
- How can we stay connected to alumni and donors?
- Is there Event Cancellation Insurance in place to help mitigate losses?

Stakeholder Group	Concerns
Vendors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will I get paid? • Is it prudent to provide goods and services for which I may not be paid promptly? • What do vendor contracts say about service continuity and performance guarantees? • What data do I need to continue providing services?
Employment candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the job I applied for still open? • Will my interview continue as planned? • If my interview is moving from in-person to online, do I have access to the platform that will be used?
New hires who have not yet started	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is my new job still available? • Will my start date be delayed? • How will I get new employee training and onboarding? • If my job is now to be done remotely, how do I access equipment and systems? • How do I sign up for benefits and ensure that I get paid?

How We Can Help

Times of disruption can challenge even the most effective organizations. As you work through issues related to COVID-19, Segal consultants are available to support you in key areas, including:



Incident and disaster response policies



Leadership advising and support



Business continuity process design



Healthcare coverage, mental health support and other employee benefit issues



HR support



Safety



Remote work design guidance



Academic program assessment and planning



Payroll and compensation continuation



Paid time off and absence management



IT security and data integrity



Vendor management and support



Risk mitigation



Legislative tracking



Strategic HR and crisis communications



Insurance brokerage and risk management



Infrastructure management



Legal compliance requirements



Additional Resources

Segal has a wide array of COVID-19 resources available on our [website](#).

[American College Health Association's Brief and Resources \(3/5/20\)](#)

[Guidance from the CDC for the Higher Education Community](#)

[Guidance from the CDC for Employers](#)

[Guidance from the CDC Regarding Travel](#)

[US Labor and Employment Checklist](#)