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## **Re-Opening Your Member Association**

Providing Member Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The last few years provided an opportunity to assess the status quo in beekeeping education. The cancellation of events, along with adjusting to online activities forced program leaders to listen to members, conference audiences, speakers, and vendors about how to provide education to the beekeeping and agricultural stakeholder community. For the past two years too many county and state beekeeping associations simply shut their doors, and put the “business closed” sign on their websites and Facebook pages. They ignored their missions and the needs of their community, in hope life would “return to normal.” Shutting down operations, whether a factory, a restaurant, or even an association that provides education and fellowship, takes care and planning to re-open. Ceasing to function makes “resuscitation” tenuous.

Like pollinators, leaders in bee clubs and state associations must listen to their members, and adapt to both environmental and member changes. Good leaders realize their member associations’ mission is to ensure their members want to:

- be a part of their association
- have the opportunity to be involved in the club’s activities
- to give and receive education, and
- connect with others.

Leaders in county and state associations have to adapt to serve their members and meet their mission. Industry, restaurants, and member associations that did adapt over the past two years have created processes that allow them to expand their services to their members and the community. Adaptation means listening to all of your members and how to serve them no matter the weather, distance, or health crisis (at the individual, county, or national level). Even if your member association is now starting to meet in person, your meeting site may be blocked due to flooding from a recent week of rain. If you have been providing online educational speakers the past two years, it is easy enough for leaders, members, and the speaker to provide the presentation in spite of the flooding, as you already have the tools, and the members have adjusted to a virtual meeting.

The new status quo for a sustainable member association will be one where bee clubs are fully serving the needs of all of the members, and the community. The new status quo is serving the members where they are: at the member meeting venue or at home.

Early in 2020 LEAD for Pollinators planned a leadership conference that transitioned to a virtual conference featuring 24 speakers and serving individuals in 17 states and Canada. We received positive feedback from our speakers and audience. They were pleased with our transition to virtual. The event conveyed the education, we interacted with our audience, and everyone was safe. We paid our speakers, while reducing our costs by not having to pay travel, hotel, and meal expenses. Listening to your audience and your members is vital to serving them and your association's mission. Integral to that provision of service is adaptation.

Delivery of member association education has changed, and must continue to evolve going forward. Eventually the local membership has heard every speaker in their area, and even many speakers at the state level. Good speakers excite an audience to think, laugh, and utilize skills or information learned during a presentation. By changing the status quo, (and accepting the status quo must change) bee club program committees now have access to national and international speakers online.

Even when we return to on-site events, audiences will demand quality and diversity in topics, speakers, and cost. Quality speakers can be provided easily via the internet, without the speaker having to travel, and without incurring travel expenses to the club. As we try to return to on-site activities, some speakers may not want to travel for a variety of reasons, as they can readily provide a presentation via an internet connection. Speakers can interact with an audience via the internet. Even in large halls *on-site*, a moderator circulates to hear the questions from the audience, similar to the Zoom "chat," or onsite where the audience comes to a microphone to talk to the online speaker. Speakers will be relieved to not have to spend energy and time travelling to and from an event. Member Associations and conferences will save money on travel, hotel, and food costs for speakers. If your event has not paid speaker fees and travel costs, read "The Value of A Good Speaker" in the March 2021 American Bee Journal (and start paying speakers!).

The return to large venues, conferences, fairs, and more will be slow for many groups. The full audience may not return for a while, and member association education leaders will have to re-evaluate how to meet their mission. We have to adapt like pollinators. To provide education we have to forego "the way we have always done it." Leaders must be open to new ways to communicate, to share, and to listen and learn from their members and each other.

Program Committees must learn to plan and implement hybrid conferences and monthly member meetings. For those members who are unable to attend a meeting due to weather, work, or illness, they could still attend online as long as we also make on-site meetings accessible *online* as well. We can provide national and international speakers on-site, but online also, saving travel costs and time, for the speaker, and the meeting and event planners.

Speakers will be asking for the online option. Members will expect online options. Audiences will appreciate a national or international speaker "brought in" to an event online, with breakout sessions for a more personalized educational experience. Audiences will appreciate their own reduced travel costs through online participation in an event.

Event planners will reduce their costs and yet increase the value of their event with diverse speakers on-site and online, including diversity of interaction to meet the needs of this new speaker and audience experience.

It is a new education and event planning world. Help ensure your association provides a value added experience that your members find through your association. The new normal will have to offer both on-site and online education and member service access. Embrace it. Revive your local and state member association through fully serving the education of your members, and plan hybrid member education.

*Michele Colopy is the Executive Director of LEAD for Pollinators, a nonprofit providing leadership, education, action, and development to support the health and sustainability of honey bees, native pollinators, and the keepers of the ecosystem. Learn more at [www.leadforpollinators.org](http://www.leadforpollinators.org)*

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