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Membership Dues Grants

Bob Harris, CAE

Members have a long-standing relationship with their organizations. The pandemic has caused businesses and individuals to rethink their expenses. Dues may be on the chopping block.

Executive directors are asking how to save members. Delay, waive, or send out dues' renewals?

Ideally, membership is viewed as indispensable. Organizations have had a surge in member calls for assistance in solving problems. Programs and education have increased to meet demand. Advocacy efforts have amplified to address regulatory problems and provide solutions.

Dues Grants

Innovative organizations have found ways to retain members and maintain dues revenue.

Supplier Gifts – Supplier members provide sponsorships. If traditional events such as golf tournaments have been cancelled, they may be willing to redirect sponsorships to membership grants.

Provide the option for them to sponsor three, six, or 12-month dues grants for regular members. Most suppliers agree that supporting the integrity of the membership during this time is worthwhile.

Recognize suppliers who contribute to dues grants. Be cautious about confidentiality, not wanting to disclose identities of members who are suffering or creating a conflict of interest among suppliers.

Foundation Grants – Organizations with related foundations (501c3) may want to make use of the assets. If the mission is narrowly focused on education and scholarship, seek to expand it to include membership grants for those unable to pay dues during the virus.

Broadening of the foundation's purpose may allow contributions for dues payments, employee food and housing insecurities. Collaborate with other foundations to maximize impact.

Member Angels – Not all members have experienced the pandemic equally. While some may be prospering, others are hurting. There may be “angels” among the membership who want to help.

At the Rockport Fulton Chamber of Commerce in Texas they provide an opportunity for members to contribute to other members. Renewal notices invite contributions to the “Chamber Angel Fund.”

When dues are renewed that can “pay it forward” by adding any amount to contribute to the fund. When staff or leaders learn of a member having difficulty renewing, a formula is used for fair and equitable evaluation of situational criteria.

The chamber president and CEO, Diane Probst, CCE, said, “If a member qualifies for the Chamber Angel Fund, our staff will notify the member that their membership has been advanced from the fund. Of course, the member name remains confidential at all times.”

Membership and relationships are critical for associations and chambers. These grants may save a member and protect dues income. Make best use of suppliers, the foundation, and angels during the pandemic.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and tools at www.nonprofitcenter.com.