HOW HAVE IDA MEMBERS RESPONDED TO COVID-19 IN THEIR COMMUNITIES?

IDA’s Place Management Industry Benchmarking survey listed seven common COVID responses members have been engaged in during the coronavirus pandemic. Respondents were asked to assign a value to each action they took during the pandemic.

Promoting district businesses that remained open during the pandemic and disseminating local COVID-19 situation updates were the two most common strategies urban place management organizations (UPMOs) deployed to help their communities, and were also considered to be some of the most valuable responses.

Districts that continued or enhanced their clean and safe programs throughout lockdown received overwhelmingly positive feedback with 76% of respondents saying this was highly valued by their stakeholders.

Creating funds for businesses or employees was the least common strategy deployed and also the most sharply divided in terms of value rating. 35% said that this work was not valued much at all while 39% said it was extremely valuable. This separation may be the result of differing levels of available resources to commit to the funds. A commitment of a few thousand dollars compared to a few hundred thousand changes how much impact a fund or other financial assistance programs might have.

Data collection and business surveying as well as hosting community discussions have been met with mixed valuations. However, advocacy itself has been rated as quite valuable. While community discussions and surveys have not demonstrated significant value on their own, they do strengthen advocacy efforts by rallying stakeholders and backing up calls for government aid with tangible statistics.
A number of respondents referenced additional highlight valuable actions not included on the survey, including:

- Adapting public space to create more outdoor room for restaurant reopening.
- Developing positive messaging to boost district morale through these tough times.
- Creating local-specific reopening strategies.
- Hosting virtual or hybrid events to keep the community engaged.
- Adding additional homelessness related services.

**HAS THE PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF UPMOS?**

Now more than ever community stakeholders are relying on place management professionals to keep them informed, serve as a connection between business owners and government officials, and keep an eye on storefronts and properties while the daytime population is absent. 96% of survey respondents said their response to the crisis has earned their organization more community and stakeholder trust. In these challenging times, IDA members have stepped up and shown immense value to their communities.

**HOW IS COVID IMPACTING IDA MEMBERS FINANCIALLY?**

Around 40% of surveyed members anticipate falling short of their budgeted revenue for this year. When asked by how much, estimates ranged between less than 5% to 54% with the majority estimating between 10% and 25%. 51% of respondents are anticipating next year’s budget to decrease.

Many organizations had to make difficult staffing decisions when the pandemic struck. As of mid-June, 26% of organizations already furloughed or laid off staff. No respondents expected layoffs in the next two months, however 9% reported cuts may be necessary if a COVID-19 shutdown continues three more months. If a shutdown continues five additional months or more, 21% said they would need to consider layoffs and furloughs. Some UPMOs are more financially stable in spite of the pandemic, with 43% not anticipating needing to layoff staff for the foreseeable future.

These initial findings are based on 54 respondents throughout the United States, Canada and South Africa.