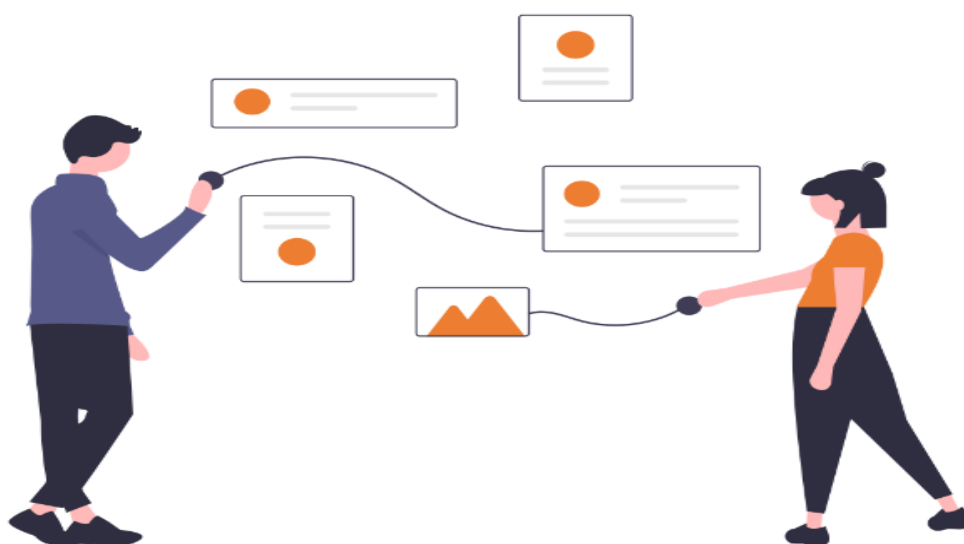


# TPG Pulse For Associations

In Partnership with The Canadian Society of Association Executives

VOLUME 6, JULY 6, 2020

## Four Months In: How Canadian Associations are Coping During COVID 19



By Geoffrey Thacker  
The Portage Group

“While the pandemic and the restrictions that came with it forced many associations to rethink the way they engage with members, it also presented an opportunity for associations to step up and demonstrate value to members”

The TPG Pulse for Associations is a publication series focused on providing information, insight and tracking of the impact of COVID 19 on the association sector.

This edition of the Pulse highlights the key findings from the June Pulse Survey, which was completed by 311 Canadian associations and other nonprofits between June 3 and June 11, 2020.

This Pulse has been developed in partnership with The Canadian Society of Association Executives.

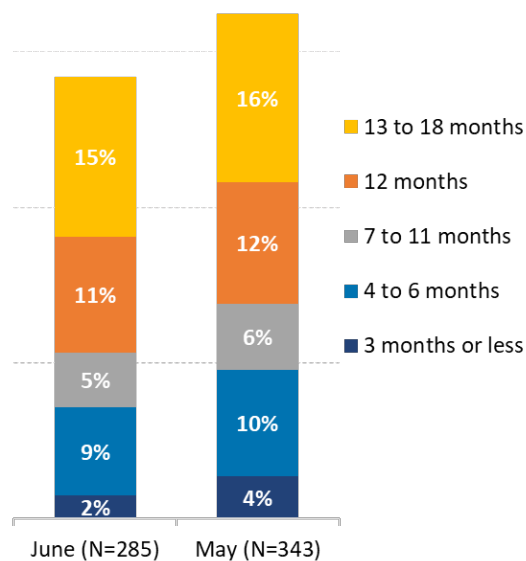
# Updated Financial Impact of COVID 19 on Canadian Associations

At the time the survey was conducted at the beginning of June, there had been a number of changes in Canadian jurisdictions related to COVID 19 since the previous survey was conducted in early May. Most notably:

- Most regions of the country had begun easing restrictions by allowing slightly larger gatherings and many businesses to re-open. With a few exceptions (notably Toronto), those that hadn't begun the process had at least announced the dates for some easing of restrictions.
- Additionally, in mid-May, the federal government had announced a 12-week extension to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) program.



## Financial Viability Under Current Conditions



As outlined in the May 2020 Pulse, the early financial impact of COVID 19 on Canadian associations has been severe. Early data (May 2020) indicated that almost one in three (32%) associations could remain viable for 12 months or less. In the June survey, this number has trended down slightly to just over one in four (27%) associations.

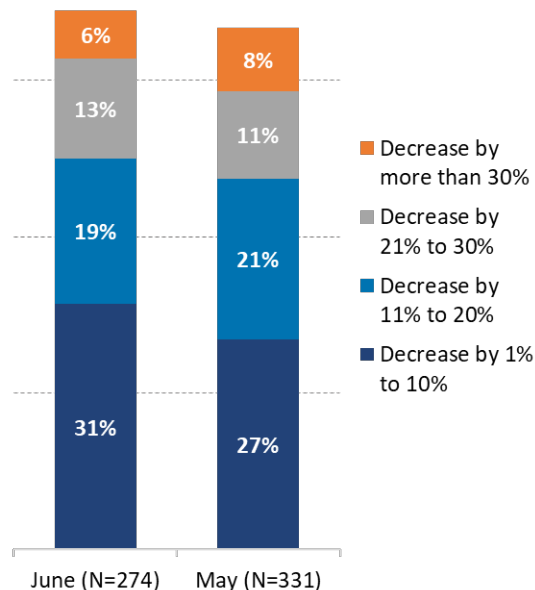
While the small shift may point to a modest improvement in the outlook for the sector, it should be noted that the difference falls within the margin of error. This benchmark will be measured again in the July Pulse to confirm whether the outlook is changing or not.

# Anticipated Membership Changes - Updated

Compared to planned membership levels before COVID 19, just over two in three associations (69%) are anticipating a decline in membership in 2020 because of COVID 19. The outlook has not changed since this was first assessed in May.

Half (50%) are predicting a drop in membership of up to 20% while only a handful (6%) are expecting losses of greater than 30%.

## Anticipated Change in Membership for 2020



## What are associations doing about pending membership losses?

One month later and there has been no change in the portion of organizations providing relief to members by way of reducing membership fees (10% in June vs. 9% in May) or allowing members to defer dues (27% and 28%, respectively).

Among those allowing deferrals, 59% are allowing members to defer payment for between 3 and 6 months.

The average decrease in dues among the 29 associations adopting this measure was 45%.

## Changes to Member Recruitment

For many associations, the rise of the pandemic brought with it new challenges in recruiting members. For some, the main issue is that traditional in-person methods of recruiting are no longer possible while for others the main challenge is the hardship their members and prospective members are facing due to business slowdowns and/or layoffs. Just over one quarter (26%) of respondents who have members indicated that they have made changes in how they recruit members.

Those who have made a change were asked to provide a brief explanation of the changes. Among the 66 respondents who provided an answer, the most common response (13 respondents) was that they had paused their recruiting efforts for the time being.



"We are offering free trials and free access to different services for a limited time to non-members to try to give them easier access and exposure to the Association and its programs. We will then follow up after the trial period with an invitation to join.

**National Professional Association  
CEO in Quebec**

Lowering the membership 'wall' for non-members to access some or all programs was also commonly cited as a recruitment method. The approach allows associations to demonstrate value and build brand equity. Most who are using this approach indicated that they will follow up with those who use the services when the time is right.

Another common theme was virtual outreach and/or engagement such as webinars, formal and informal video conferencing sessions or online information sessions. For some, these were new offerings while for others, it entailed repurposing existing education and/or content to be offered through new, virtual delivery channels. In addition to these "direct connection" channels, several organizations indicated they had increased their social media presence.

A few organizations have decided to offer free or discounted membership for up to one year to new members.

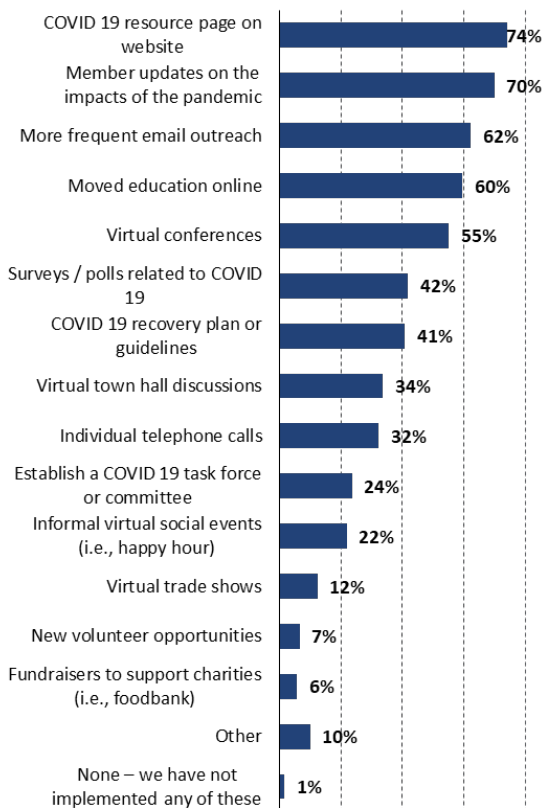
Finally, a handful of respondents indicated that they have shifted to a more personalized and direct approach by reaching out by phone and/or email.

## Member Engagement

While the pandemic and the restrictions that came with it forced many associations to rethink the way they engage with members, it also presented an opportunity for associations to step up and demonstrate value to members by becoming both a key information hub as well as a guiding voice to help members navigate the significant challenges of this unique period. Virtually all respondents (99%) indicated that they had implemented at least one form of member engagement during the COVID 19 pandemic.

A significant majority of associations implemented pandemic specific resources as a way to engage with their members. Three quarters (74%) of respondents indicated that they added a COVID 19 resource page to their website while seven in ten (70%) provided member updates on the impact of the pandemic. These were the top two resources implemented. Other pandemic specific resources were considerably less common. Four in ten implemented surveys / polls related to COVID 19 (42%) and COVID 19 recovery plans or guidelines (41%) while only one quarter (24%) formed a COVID 19 task force or committee.

## Resources or Initiatives Implemented to Engage Members



Note: N=292

Just over six in ten (62%) indicated that they have initiated more frequent email outreach to members, making this another common measure associations implemented to engage members. The more personal approach of making individual telephone calls was only implemented by one third (32%) of associations.

The final major category of engagement measures has been to move in-person meetings/events online. Moving to online education (60%) and virtual conferences (55%) top the list in this area with over half of respondents implanting these changes. One third (34%) implemented virtual town hall discussions while 22% implemented informal virtual social events and 12% are offering virtual trade shows.

# Supporting Associations Retooling to Thrive

Through the coming weeks and months, TPG and CSAE will be collecting data, and providing information, insight and guidance where we can. We'll do this by publishing a series of free resources that track the impact of COVID 19 on the association sector and that delve into how associations are adapting, retooling, and refocusing not just to survive, but hopefully to thrive, in our new reality. You can find other recent resources and information on upcoming initiatives [here](#).

For more information please contact [research@portagegroup.com](mailto:research@portagegroup.com) or [info@csae.com](mailto:info@csae.com).

## About The Portage Group Inc.

The Portage Group is a full-service consulting firm serving the association sector. TPG is the official research partner for the Canadian Society of Association Executives.

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## About Canadian Society of Association Executives

CSAE is Canada's only member-based not-for-profit organization committed to delivering the knowledge, resources and environment to advance association excellence.

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