



Leading Inns in a Pandemic

IDEAS GENERATED DURING INN LEADER VIRTUAL SUMMITS AND IDEA SWAPS:

Doing Nothing is NOT an Option

- While doing nothing may seem like the simple path in the short term, coming back from this is much more challenging than to pivot and keep going. Starting up again after a hiatus is a difficult task and your membership roster and leadership pool will be the hardest hit. If you think pivoting is a challenge now, consider how hard it will be to essentially start from scratch in the future.
- Maintain the momentum your Inn has developed. Be sure your Inn is there for members who may be needing their community more now than ever. The mission of the American Inns of Court is an on-going need in our society and your Inn can play a major role in leading the profession through otherwise uncertain times.
- Past experiences- like the great recession- tells us that membership grows during economic uncertainty. The need for networking and career development increases, making the Inn of Court experience highly valued by the profession. While we have never experienced a pandemic in our lifetimes, experience shows that keeping Inn experiences available, even virtually, will be welcomed by the profession.
- Keep going. The members need the Inn as a touchstone of normalcy in an otherwise uncertain world.

Keep Members Engaged

- Begin and sustain frequent and direct outreach using phone calls, emails and newsletters to keep members engaged
 - Serve as an information hub for members and the broader legal community using “Bulletins from the Court” or other communication strategies.
 - Law students and 3L grads are especially stressed right now. Consider ways to recognize their accomplishments and to create opportunities for them in the community. This can be as simple as a call from a member of the Executive Committee or connect them to their pupillage team or other Inn members for help and advice in light of layoffs, furloughs, no summer associate programs, or other recruitment cycles being disrupted.
 - Consider asking pupillage team leaders to call team members for a check-in or have executive committee members call a reasonable number of Inn members to check-in and report back to a designated leader.
- Recruiting new members during lockdown
 - Set up an operating committee with a member from each pupillage team (mixed by member type) to facilitate recruiting and messaging.
 - The website editor Umbraco has been upgraded. Use this free website tool provided to your Inn from the national office to let members (and potential members) know that you are still organizing virtual meetings and offering mentoring opportunities and other ways to engage with their peers and “Legal Legends” in the community.
 - Associates are often not allowed to reapply after their first year of membership (they must roll off for one year to allow for new Associate members). Since they did not have a full year this year, allow Associate members to reapply and do two years of membership in a row.
 - Offer pupil members an extra year of membership after graduation to bridge the gap between graduation and employment since hiring has slowed and school rankings may have been converted to pass/fail.
 - Reach out to pupil and associate members to promote the Inn as a resource for those facing furloughs, job search difficulties, etc.

Keep the Inn Financially Strong

- Many Inns who cancelled their spring meetings during shutdowns are holding surplus funds. Consider using this surplus to maintain member engagement
 - Survey members for how they'd like their portion of a surplus handled (i.e., donation to local charity, contribution to hardship fund, rolled into future dues, etc.)
 - Use surplus funds to donate to community organizations in dire need, with ideas from members for worthy nonpartisan non-profit organizations in your area.
 - Create and fund scholarship programs for law schools for under-represented people or to an HCBU
 - Review your hardship policies to ensure adequate funding and share with all members for transparency.
- Be upfront about dues this year. Work as an executive committee to develop a hardship policy. Your Chapter Relations Director (CRD) can provide example policies.
- Consider if your Inn is financially able to reduce dues for the 2021 Inn year to reflect the meal portion that will not be delivered. Ensure that members know that the \$88 portion of their national dues can be considered tax deductible. Ask your CRD for help with the exact verbiage to use in your member communications.
- Do not waive dues across the board. Research shows that people will use what they pay for, so to ensure member engagement members should be assessed dues to express their on-going commitment to support their Inn. Google “the value of free” for more on the research behind this concept.

Pivot your Meetings

- Host virtual “cocktail hours” for members to connect
 - Provide everyone with the recipe for a cocktail they can all make (e.g., Quarantini [Martini or Mocktail]).
- Plan for social distancing to continue through the fall, possibly the full year. Consider how the Inn can pivot to serve members in this different environment.
 - Ensure mentoring events are planned to assist members.
 - Host a session on job search support and career strategies.
 - Consider presentations on pitfalls and skills needed for remote practice management, client engagement, depositions and court appearances.
 - Structure content to focus on wellbeing and pressures of family obligations in a socially distanced world.
 - Use a “breakout room” feature to create smaller groups (pupillage teams or group mentoring teams)- practice first!
- Partner with approved distance-learning providers to deliver CLEs if your state does not allow virtual CLE programs.
- Partner with an Inn member’s firm, law schools that may have a distance learning platform, or even experienced technology staff who can advise the Inn on effective practices for virtual Inn meetings.
- Consider hosting joint Inn meetings with other legal groups virtually since distance and travel concerns are lifted in a virtual environment.
- Engage members for virtual breakfast, perhaps on a monthly basis, led by a judicial member, to answer general questions about the practice of law; how to do filings, or other helpful timely topics.
- Also consider scheduling meetings in mid- to late afternoon to avoid family or dinner time.
- Teams can take the lead in providing a sense of community and networking opportunities when the full Inn cannot meet in person. This creates a more manageable and more intimate connections.
 - Consider asking small group pupillage teams, or mentoring teams to gather on the night of the meeting in their smaller group at someone’s home, an outdoor park, in firm conference rooms or other facility that allows them to have a quiet space face-to-face that will also facilitate a connection with the host of the virtual meeting. Discussions can occur in the smaller group based on the information shared by the hosted meeting. Provide gift cards to the team leaders to purchase food for the group for the evening.
 - Think about pivoting the experience for members from educational programming to primarily mentoring for the year. Focus on specific activities, mentoring programs for members to engage with a smaller subset of the membership.
 - Get input from experienced members to provide value to younger members as an extension of the Inn’s mentoring program.
 - Consider providing each team with an opportunity for a small group virtual meeting just before or just after the program for a relaxed discussion.
 - Rotate members through groups so that members interact with different people each month.

Planning future meetings

- Consider developing and communicating a “Plan A” and a “Plan B” for the upcoming Inn year. Continue to revise and update the plan as more state and federal decisions are made about group gatherings. Contact your CRD for a sample copy of a “Plan A” & “Plan B.”
- Some Inns are adding a “Plan C”, which is a blend of in-person and virtual meetings for 2020.
- Another approach is look at the simplest solution. For some Inns, this may be the decision to simply go 100% virtual for the year regardless of changing social distancing rules, as it is the path of least resistance. Volunteers are stretched, so keeping the most adaptive plan means less work for all.
- Expect the best, plan for the worst.
- Survey members about their comfort with virtual meetings and meeting in person, and survey again when you are closer to meeting dates. Ask your CRD for sample survey questions.
- Consider partnering with a local bar association to set up a virtual program—they're in the same boat.
- Research CLE approval requirements for online or alternative delivery methods in your state.
 - Survey members about what topics are most critical to them right now and adapt accordingly.
- Adapt your mentoring program to assist members at different career stages.
 - Examples:
 - Younger members coaching more senior members on the use of Zoom and other technology, operating from a virtual office, etc.
 - More senior members mentoring younger members in dealing with changes in the legal landscape, conducting depositions, etc.
 - Members generally providing support to colleagues during a stressful period
- Use virtual meeting tools to full advantage.
 - Watch the [“How to Create and Host a Virtual Inn Meeting”](#) recording available from the National organization.
 - Integrate social/networking time into a meeting by using “breakout rooms” for pupillage teams to gather and network prior to the presentation. Breakout rooms can also be used to facilitate ‘table’ discussions during a presentation, with a member reporting out to the full meeting once everyone is brought back into the main meeting.
 - Use a polling feature to bring member opinions into the presentation.
 - Manage conversations and Q&A using the moderator’s control of the mute and unmute function.
 - Assign team members to different tasks to support the presentations (e.g., running slides, monitoring the questions or chat box, managing questions, unmuting, etc.)
 - Do a “dry run” with the team to test equipment, meeting platform, etc.
 - Use “Quick Hits” or “Mentor Moments” to provide short take-aways from each online session. This is a great way to involve judges and Masters of the Bench.

PROGRAM TOPICS GENERATED DURING THE VIRTUAL SUMMITS SESSIONS AND IDEA SWAPS:

- Making a difference: Invite members to share their non-partisan charitable organizations that the Inn or individual members can support that would make a difference in the local community. Provide for each person 5-10 minutes to explain the organization, its significance to the individual and how others can help.
- Election Law in 2020
- “From the news” The practice of law as depicted in recent nightly news programs
- 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment
- COVID-19 and the Triggering of Force Majeure
- Evolution of Law Firm Business Models
- Business Continuity Planning
- Integrating In-Person and Online Tools in practice
- Remote Technology in the Courtroom
- Arbitration and Mediation in Lieu of Litigation
- Online Dispute Resolution
- Ethical and Security Considerations with Online Tools
- Overcoming Challenges, Lawyer Wellbeing, and Work-Life (or now Home-Life) Balance
- Confidentiality Considerations: Home Participation in Court-Related Events
- Virtual Icebreakers: Ask members a poll question at the start (make it fun, silly, and relevant). For example, list song titles and ask, “What is the theme song of your life right now?” or “What song is getting you through these days?”.
- View from the Bench on COVID-19
- The Constitution and States/Municipal Legality of Shutdown Orders.
- “Mentor Moments”: Pre-recorded interviews with local legal legends answering the same set of questions such as, “What do you think makes a good lawyer?” or “What career advice would you impart to a new lawyer?” Inns can then splice the respondents so each question/response is condensed. This can also build content as part of the virtual meeting experience.
- Not COVID-19 or pandemic focus: Focus on changes the practice/courts have made, what changes may be the new way of doing things in the future, how to best adapt to these new business practices, and tools/tips/tricks/helpful insights.