



from your Associate Director

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Impact of COVID-19 on Townships

MANY OF YOU HAVE SEEN technology start and continue to change the day to day operations of Township government over the past few years. Additionally, some have remained committed to not giving in to email, websites, downloads, and all forms of electronic communication to conduct business.

Since the beginning of my tenure at TOI (2005), I have worked on many projects aimed at introducing technology to the members of the organization. All our introductions to change involving web-based services have been incremental only. We have always tried to provide a slow transition offering both old and new forms of communication and services.

Fast forward to March 2020, the recent pandemic has only contributed to the necessity of advancing the available technology used today to perform the operation of township government. Forced availability and compliance is what I like to call it.

I can remember that when I started working for the association the website had just been created. This being, 2005, I was forced to learn new software that provided access to posting documents and limited links to documents and services we were trying to provide in a “one stop shop” environment. These were the days of the flip phone and number entry to send text messages. I remember that the available graphics and options to make links available were limited and we were forced to size pictures into required pixel parameters, just to name a few of the requirements to get a single document accessible to the limited members that utilized

the internet to search for information. This has evolved into online purchasing of TOI publications, as well as, registrations for education programs and the annual conference. The past few years have seen over 50 percent of the conference registrations completed online. All our publications are available online and have seen an increase in traffic as well.

TOI has had one single objective regarding technology—that we provide both digital access as well as printable paper to those who prefer to submit written materials. The late great TOI bookkeeper Joann Cooper always checked me in place on providing ample access to everyone. This has remained the focus of all our programs services and publications to all of you our members.

In 2018 and 2019, I met with various divisions and discussed the options of delivering programs remotely or online to members who were interested in the program but unable to travel to the locations where they were provided. The use of ZOOM MEETINGS or FREE CONFERENCE CALL.COM or remote meetings were not even part of that discussion. There was an overall interest, but valid hesitation on how the members would participate and receive such an online platform of services.

In 2016 we introduced webinars (TGEN Lunch and Learn) to our members, and we have had a consistent increase in viewership and participation. The program was receiving great feedback as many of the participants are individuals that have not attended a regional event or the annual conference.

After March 15, 2020, the requirement for our programs to go completely electronic became a necessity. We had no way of providing in person events to our members. The Association meeting planning environment was greatly impacted with hotels closing and event space prohibiting large gatherings. Kristen Ball, TOI's Meeting Planner, has kept us up to date on all activity related to availability, as well as options to hold face to face meetings.

Everyone embraced the idea, calculated our reaction, and put a plan in place. TOI had NEVER participated in ZOOM or platforms that allowed video access to participants. Our first ZOOM call had over 150 people

Your assistance is needed ...

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Your assistance is much appreciated!

participating and it was well organized. I was simply amazed at how easy it was for everyone to access and learn from the virtual event. Since this first event we have upgraded with the support of TOIRMA to host ZOOM WEBINAR events and we had over 90 participants in the first full education program event on June 17, 2020.

President Danny Hanning commented that *“We need to recognize township’s who have stepped up and provided innovative services virtually to our residents across townships in Illinois. With virtual technology people are still able to get face to face interaction with the help of the internet. 30 years ago, the reaction to this pandemic would have been very different. The divide would have been more detrimental. Together our townships have met this pandemic head on. In short, when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.”*

The key is that we all did this together. You met the call and we provided the service to continue to offer programs and services related to your duties and responsibilities as elected township officials in Illinois. The entire state and communities across the globe have been forced to utilize technology to keep business going.

Technology has provided a forced conformity that although challenging it can be done and at times very efficient. The question before everyone is how far do we continue to let it evolve, resisting change taking a back seat to developing efficient and effective services through technology availability. Townships have met that challenge across Illinois. I could hardly say “ZOOM YOGA” with a straight face and townships and communities have provided classes of all types to senior township programs. We showcased in last month’s *Perspective* magazine the many ways township government has met the pandemic head on in providing more and improved services to township residents.

The question before our Board, Education Committee and staff now is how to maintain the momentum of learning, innovation of programs and enthusiasm of our members as we move to Phase 4 and Phase 5 of the Governor’s plan to return the state to normal operations.

The entire TOI team is working on providing you the members everything we have in the past only improving what that is. The team is looking at all possibilities regarding November and will be making final

decisions soon on what and how-to deliver outstanding programs to all of you our members. What this may involve is some slight changes to the way you access the programs but please rest assured that the intent, information and delivery of the program will remain the same as outlined in the goals and objectives of the organization.

The association is making final decisions late in the summer on scheduling plans for the fall conference. We will update everyone on our website at; Facebook and your email address if current in the membership database.

The key to remember is that the change although incremental is necessary to provide services and information to your electors the township community. Also, that we all will be fine, and will benefit greatly from working together. Your patience is appreciated.

Importance of email notification

As many of you received the notice of Governor Pritzker’s recent approval of HB 2096 via email, also we mailed the notice, as well as the Frequently Asked Questions to the clerks we had no email address on record. These notifications are imperative to our ability to communicate with recent developments related to the administration of township government, legislative alerts and overall news items related to your responsibilities as a township official.

The Association has been working on a database management update for the past year. Our new Association Management Software (AMS) system enables TOI staff to improve communication and streamline services provided to the membership. TOI staff have been diligently working on updating all member profiles to include correct e-mail addresses. We still have several members with no email on file. If you are not receiving email communication from the TOI office and would like to be added to the distribution list, please contact our office.



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