COVID – What has Stuck Around OWEA Besides the Virus

Presenter: Elizabeth Wick, OWEA WEF DELEGATE
OWEA Background

- Founded in 1926
- Over 2,000 members
- Divided into four sections, each with their own governing structure
- Office based in Columbus, Ohio with 3 F/T staff
- In 2021 more then 92 contact hours were offered for operators between the state and sections
OWEA Background - Conference

• Currently OWEA has a joint conference with OAWWA - One Water
  • 2014
  • 2018
  • 2021
  • 2022 and beyond

• In 2020, OWEA was scheduled to have their own conference and due to COVID-19 it was cancelled with very few financial repercussions
OWEA Background - PPP

• OWEA received two rounds of Paycheck Protection Program funding.

• This funding aided in covering staff salaries.

• Both rounds of funding were fully forgiven.
Summary of COVID Changes

• Cancelling/Delay of in person classes
  • Ohio was shut down concerning meetings for part of 2020 and various infection control protocol was implemented by venues per state/local orders.

• Addition of online learning options
  • Ohio has some of the stricter EPA contact hours rules.
  • Go To Webinar is what is used for “live” webinars and requires a polling element and attendance tracking.

• In 2021, the One Water conference was in person and had an online presence
  • Conference Tracker is used for “on demand” conference.

• Online meetings – ZOOM has become our standard vs. conference calls
Evaluation of Changes

• Virtual
  • After trial and error, we settled on that no event or meeting will last more than 2.5 hours.
  • This meant EC meetings needed modified.
  • We became very strategic in what was offered virtually from a CHs standpoint.
  • Virtual content isn’t the same as in person.
What “Stuck”

• Flexibility
• Online Learning
• Communication
• Partnerships
• Financial
• Contract Review
Flexibility

• Our staff and Executive Committee became very comfortable with the unknown.
• We all learned to pivot.
• We learned to trust each other more.
• We discovered it’s okay to modify things while they are in motion.
Online Learning

• OWEA is now in its second year of monthly webinars with plans to continue.
• These are offered at a very low cost ($15 each for members).
• We also offered package options which were appealing to municipalities.
  • Bulk discount
  • 6 month
  • 12 month
• Great opportunity to engage sponsors as presenters.
• Profitable
• Makes OWEA more competitive
Communication

- No full EC discussion is done via conference call any longer. Zoom is now used for a better and more productive experience.
- We have had positive feedback from volunteers and EC members on moving shorter meetings to a virtual option and eliminating travel time.
- We continue to communicate with attendees as needed. We provide COVID protocols as requested.
Partnerships

• Due to COVID OWEA developed much stronger partnerships.
  • Ohio EPA
    • The Ohio EPA leaned on OWEA for communications to members and for information.
    • OWEA also surveyed members at OEPA’s request.
  • Governor’s Office
    • Worked together on COVID surveillance.
  • OAWWA
    • Shared best practices on virtual learning.
  • Vendors
    • Business is given to those who worked with us.
Financial

- COVID made the need for a large reserve VERY OBVIOUS.
  - This resulted in hard conversations and decisions concerning the budget.
- For the first time in recent history the budget team produced a balanced budget for 2022.
Contract Review

• While we have always carefully reviewed contracts, we now require a COVID clause that allows for a transfer of deposits and liabilities to a future date

• A long standing partnership with a conference center that was used for workshops was ended due to lack of flexibility concerning COVID rescheduling
Summary

• COVID created many challenges for MAs, but also opportunities.
• We are much better prepared when there is another COVID like event
• OWEA is actually in a better place financially than Pre-COVID.