



# The Future Of India Associations Post Crisis

Whitepaper



# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a massive impact on the association community in India and as a result industry's future landscape is bound to transform.

Every crisis has two sides – a challenge and an opportunity. As such, it's not just a matter of getting the association community engine restarted. But also, the collective association ecosystem must understand what has changed, and what will be the best opportunity for the industry to grow together and become a global force once again.

Now more than ever, it's more important to deliver value to members and ensure that you're keeping up with ROI to stay afloat. While there is so much uncertainty at the moment, there is also a lot of opportunity. What associations do over the next months to position their association could make a huge difference.

On May 5, 2020, India's top association leaders convened online to discuss how to better prepare Associations across India for the challenging future.

## Panel



**Sunil More**  
President at IESA



**Iti Rawat**  
Founder of Women  
Entrepreneurs For  
Transformation



**K Venkataraj**  
Deputy Director of  
SAEINDIA



**Shekhar Sanyal**  
Director and Country  
Head of The IET



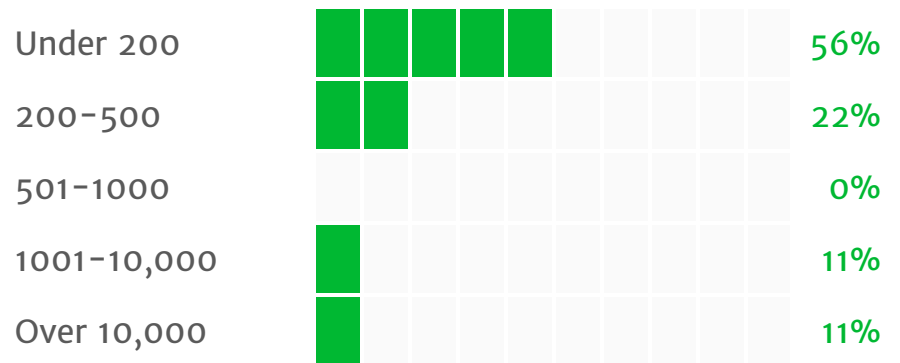
**Gregg H. Talley**  
President &  
CEO of Talley  
Management Group,  
Inc. (TMG)



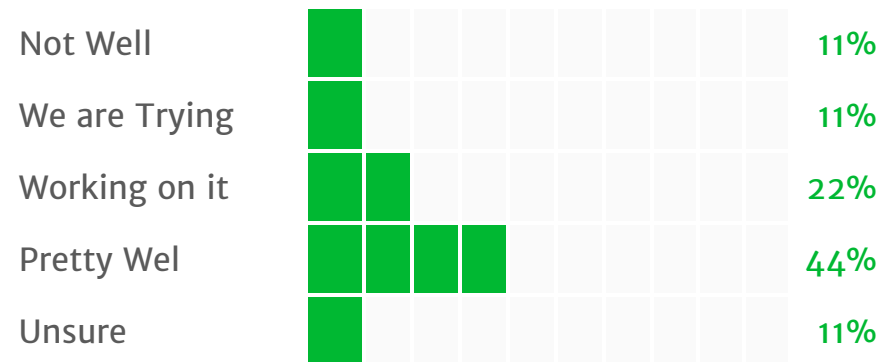
**Eric Schmidt**  
CEO of EventBank

# A Look At The Current State Of India Associations During The Pandemic

How many members do you currently have?



How well do you think your association is handling the COVID-19 pandemic?



Among surveyed associations only

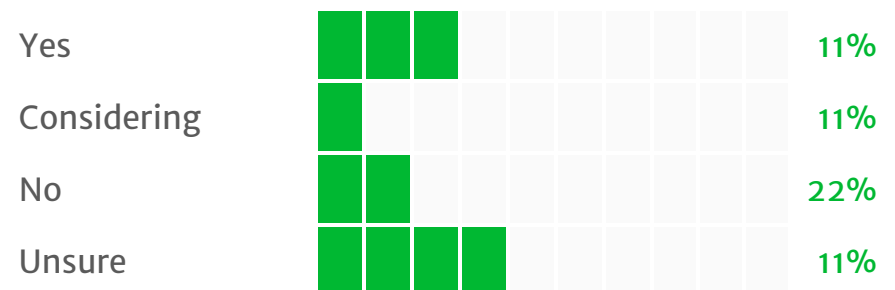
**11%**

has reduced its workforce during or by cause of COVID 19 crisis while

**78%**

has not reduced its workforce

Has your organization implemented any salary cuts as a direct result of COVID-19 or are you considering so?



# What Are The Biggest Challenges India Associations Are Dealing With The COVID-19 Pandemic

One major thing that associations must understand is that this industry is a lagging indicator. Compared to 2020, 2021 is going to be a more difficult hit for associations. The economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic will reach its members – businesses will shut down, companies and individuals will not be able to afford to renew their membership.

2021 will be a bigger challenge and the biggest financial hit for associations so strategies must be focused on this longer term planning.

One major challenge associations are facing now is the availability of funds and lack of cash flow. Over 50 percent of Indian organizations have seen the impact on their operations and nearly 80 percent have witnessed decline in cash flows, a survey from Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) said. A significant 53 percent of Indian businesses indicate the marked impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business operations even at early stages.

*The biggest challenge is to keep the interest of the community of Members active. In these difficult times, when business has taken a massive hit, priorities are different. Members constantly look for information on business continuity, various regulations of the Government to ensure safety etc. Sometimes it becomes difficult to cull all the information which is accurate and to the point.*

**Subramanian Pallavoor,**  
Indian Cutting Tool  
Manufacturers'  
Association

*Adapting to online sessions. Our work involves social contact, group work, training. So handling all these activities online is a huge challenge.*

**Preethi Rajagopalan,**  
Creative Movement  
Therapy Association of  
India

In addition, all businesses are struggling with employee engagement. Staying at home means many employees may feel dis incentivized and may be less productive in their work. This can be very damaging to a business in a time where innovative ideas are needed as quickly as possible. Associations should focus on continuing to communicate with their employees by starting and ending the day with a video chat. Reach out to your employees individually and be flexible and open to feedback.

There are similar challenges of communication with members during this time. It is important to reach out to members to get their feedback on what challenges they might be experiencing and their perception on what the future holds. Through this, we can connect the dots backwards and gauge the impacts the customers will face and find solutions. There will also be challenges in transitioning members back into live events. After a long period of quarantine, large gatherings may cause feelings of anxiety or fear. As you move into this transition, communication is, again, a key strategy.

### **Explore This Topic Further:**

**[3 Challenges, 1 Solution: How India's Associations Can Double Membership Growth](#)**

# How Can Associations Provide Value To Members

Another challenge that associations are facing is how to provide value to members in the increasingly online-centric world. With the infinite amount of information available on the internet, webinars can feel repetitive and indistinguishable from other educational sources. Associations aim to provide knowledge to communities but now must transfer this onto an online platform.

Associations can differentiate themselves from the rest of the market by focusing on the application of this knowledge. Educate your members on how this knowledge applies directly to them and how it can be used in the changing environment. For example, a webinar on technology should be focused on the impacts of technology and the applications of this technology to a specific career or interest.

Members will also derive value from the online community. In a time where social interactions are limited, it's important that your members continue to feel a sense of belonging. Make your webinars interactive and encourage questions. Start online forum discussions. Building up trust now with your members will set you up for success in the future. If your association does not yet offer a community platform, this may be the time to invest in one. EventBank has just launched a community engagement solution along with their membership and event management features.

*We are looking at knowledge-building and increasing our member base by reaching out to new people.*

**Preethi Rajagopalan,**  
Creative Movement  
Therapy Association of  
India

*Our Association worked on 3 platforms; namely, (1) Interacting with members through emails, news dissemination and direct calling (2) Organising webinars on various subjects including state and future of industry, sales and marketing ideas for the new normal, taxation issues, Government advisories, safety measures, new products, new technologies, new processes etc. (3) Interacting with Government and other like minded bodies for redress of issues concerning the industry.*

**Sunil More,**  
Indian Exhibitions,  
Conferences and Events  
Services Association

Community platforms will heighten your ability to foster communication between members, receive member feedback, and ensure that members feel connected.

For members who are not adept with technology, it will be difficult to continue to connect with them. Reach out by phone or email, send information through the mail, and communicate with members individually. Ensure that your online platform is easy to use and give your members access to webinars on-demand so that they don't have to watch them live. Show you care and do your best to continue to communicate!

Overall, there is not one single solution to providing value. The importance lies in communication with members and innovation ideas. Use data and surveys to understand what members are going through and identify their challenges, needs and wants to develop new value opportunities. It could also be useful to consider collaboration with other entities, perhaps competitors, to accomplish something unique and better. Associations must innovate new solutions to get through this time.

# Pivot To Online Events

Associations must understand the different types of webinars and the disadvantages and opportunities of an online platform in order to best reach their members and come out of the crisis stronger. Different types of webinars offer different value to members.

There are three categories of webinars. One is webinars on general recent trends, which can generate a broad viewer base and provide educational value. Webinars can also deep dive into particular areas. These provide more value because they are something that members may not be able to find elsewhere. Finally, webinars can also bring in an expert on a certain subject matter for a discussion. This type of webinar is the easiest to monetize – people are more likely to pay for a speaker that they would otherwise not be able to hear from. When curating webinars, associations should ensure that they are offering a unique value to members aligning with their mission.

Webinars in general are much more difficult to monetize than live events. At this early stage, focus on ensuring that members are getting value for their money and feeling as though they have a community. Over time, associations will gain a better understanding of the webinar audience and what content people will be willing to pay for. Associations can introduce subscription models or premium options. However, for the time being, associations must keep their focus on retaining and communicating with their members.

Among surveyed associations

**68%**

of them had to cancel 10 or less events while only

**11%**

saw 50 or more events canceled.



# India Membership Model

## The Challenges

Another change that we may see occurring is a shift from the lifetime membership model used by associations in India. Customers pay once for their membership, and then associations generate their regular revenue through events. Indian associations originally shifted towards the lifetime model because it was easier than having to manually track down members for reoccurring membership payments.

The lifetime membership model has a couple disadvantages. For one, it means that associations must generate value for their members year on year to fulfill this lifetime membership payment. However, unlike a recurring membership model, they are not receiving a recurring cash flow from membership payments. Their only membership income is from new memberships which makes it more difficult to budget and hinders their cash flow during a time of crisis such as this one. Without income coming in from events, many Indian associations are struggling to generate revenue. Indian associations that are too dependent on membership revenue are passive and lacking the cash flow to innovate new ideas.



All-in-One Platform



Event Management



Email Campaigns



Metrics & Analytics



CRM



Task Management



Finance & Invoicing



Community Management



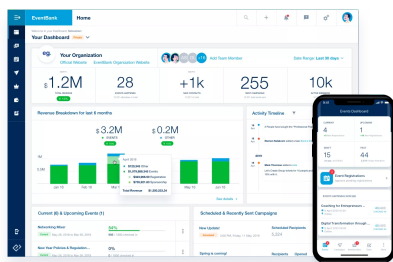
Mobile Apps

## The Solution

# Association Management

With the rise of **Association Management Software**, this may be the time to shift away from lifetime membership models. Association management software ensures that associations can easily track their consumer base and automatically collect reoccurring membership payments. Platforms such as [EventBank](#) use automation to generate invoices, remind customers to renew their memberships, and store customer information. The event industry was the first to get hit by the pandemic and will be the last to get out, so associations must quickly evaluate how they can re-evaluate their membership and revenue models to stay competitive. An implementation of association management software may be the key in doing so.

An **Association Management Company**, like [Vraata](#), has association professionals that can support Indian association in all areas of their management and program delivery. Their experience covers professional societies and trade associations in a wide range of industries. From governance and strategy to program review and implementation to virtual event design and pricing, Vraata has the knowledge and ability to help your association achieve its mission in these challenging times.



## Post COVID-19 Projects For Association

There are so many other revenue sources that associations can take advantage of, including conferences, exhibitions, trading programs, publications, and study reports. The more of these an association has, the less they depend on membership and the more vibrant they are compared to those where membership is a major revenue source. In addition, associations can also consider new membership models. As we have transitioned digitally, we've seen a rise in subscription models rather than member model, in which the membership model is more permanent with a different level of benefits than subscription models have. Membership baskets are another option, in which members pay one fee and have access to multiple associations. Associations could also offer general information from one sector to all members and then charge extra for information outside of this specific sector. All in all, associations must be innovative in order to retain and grow their membership base in a profitable way.



**Virtual Conferences** – Mix and match of online and face-to-face events



**Increase Events** – Increase the number of webinars on subjects very close to core purpose



**Connect** – Appoint a Digital Connect Consultant or recruit one



**Technology** – Staff should be digitally skilled, more online approvals, association, event management, venue sourcing software. There is going to be an increase in demand for virtual training for skill building, knowledge acquisition and technology adoption. A shift to a digital first world with virtual formats and online engagement will become the new normal.



**Offering** – Stick to core purpose, anything we offer should be very close to the shared purpose



**Revisit Charges** – Rethink membership fee, sponsorship fee, registration fee for conferences



**Social Contribution** – Associations should work with organizations and colleges/universities on skilling the students as good number of organizations are on hiring freeze/hiring deferment



**Frugal spending** – Associations will not be able to survive just by their symbolism and tokenism, instead they would need to act on what they stand for and be consistent with what they commit to do. I would suggest a 25% cut as benchmark



**Analysis** – Analyse members, analyse sponsors, analyse market



**Documentation** – Surveys, SOPs, by-laws, agreements anything that has to be reported to BoD or AGM

## Conclusion

Past success won't guarantee the success in future for any association unless the fundamental shift needed to operate successfully post COVID-19 is fully understood. The associations need to revisit and redefine their role, organizational structure, cultural norms and internal processes aligning with the stated purpose to effectively serve and create value for its members and stakeholders. The internal processes so defined should be agile enough to respond swiftly and effectively to the changing needs of the industry and its members.

The success mantra for the associations in future will be, clarity on the purpose of its existence, value focus, collaboration, access to talent, adoption of digital technology, virtual professional engagements and concern for human being and the planet at large.

Optimism and courage are the two qualities needed more than ever for the associations to make the decisions that will shape the next normal.

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*The Future for India Associations Post Crisis: Rethinking Membership* event held last May 5, 2020 was in partnership with **Vraata Association Management Excellence**. You can access the recording of this event here: <https://youtu.be/sPENqPfREDY>