



Small, Medium, Large Virtual Roundtable Summary Notes March 23, 2020

Small Firm Virtual Roundtable

- Firms quickly putting policies in place regarding telework
- How to address admin staff and people who aren't set up to telework (think about projects that haven't gotten to: project descriptions, organize server files)
- How to speed up VPN access especially for CAD and specialized software to use remotely
- Communicate with staff on regular basis to keep everyone in contact and alleviate anxiety, use of Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WebEx to facilitate communication
- How would field staff be viewed as essential services
- Construction sites taking precautions to keep people healthy
- Many states still recognizing engineering as essential services when shutting down sectors
- Allow for personal laptops to access office VPN or only company-provided laptops
- Concern about viruses/malware accessing company servers through firewalls with personal laptops
- Can use business insurance for cash outlay on setting up remotely, check with insurance company on guidance
- Setting up calendar options for people to sign up if need to be in office to process essential business functions (mail, checks, etc.); make sure to be in compliance with public health guidelines
- How do you handle employees health insurance if furloughed or laid-off, one suggestion to keep paying benefits (health ins and other benefits) but not wages
- Talk to banks and insurance companies as procedures are put-in-place and what steps are needed when situations arise
- Concerns about clients working in a timely manner regarding processing payments; firms collecting AR
- Projects that haven't been started probably won't be
- Real estate sector already slowing down and anything that relies on financing uncertain

Medium Firm Virtual Roundtable:

- What percentage of folks can take paid leave at the same time (about a third said one participant)
- How many folks are using their lines of credit currently
- How to best cut expenses
- Need to still get invoices out and get paid
- Treatment of exempt vs. nonexempt employees
- Already a slow down in processes (client approvals, permits), poses a continual risk
- Some silver linings: schools unoccupied for rest of year – can move on design/construction while unoccupied
- Much less traffic, so same thoughts for roadways
- Firms reaching out and doing work for existing health care clients to help prepare their infrastructure for any surges
- How long to maintain benefits for furloughed employees
- How negative would you allow employees to go re: PTO

- One firm mentioned having done 'recession scenario planning' – helpful now, reducing fixed costs
- Should firms engage in work they may never be paid for (worded differently on call/'working for free'... see retainer reference below)
- Actions around new college graduate hires
- Use for more IT Forum-type interaction

Large Firm Virtual Roundtable:

- Some firms seeing upswing in environmental work around workplaces
- Is this covered by existing insurance, given the COVID-19 threats, maybe not
- Firms are still doing construction inspection and engineering – Pennsylvania has said construction not an essential service/is this happening elsewhere/doesn't seem to be
- Some clients (water/waste-water treatment) do not want consulting engineers visiting due to risk of spreading virus to operators (clients)
- A best practice is giving employees letters/proof from company that they are an 'essential service' in case they are stopped while out working/on sites
- ESRI has a map of health care facilities nationwide that some may find useful
- What is the policy/formation/function of firms that have their own COVID-19 task forces to guide internal operations
- Importance of making sure employees are not stressed and isolated
- Like above comment, should firms ask for retainers... A/E firms generally do not do this (except international work), but should they in this uncertain environment when they need to pay employees/make payroll