

Medium Firm Roundtable Notes

April 17, 2020

Best Practices for working from home

- A few firms may allow employees to 'self select' to work from home after restrictions lifted
- Discussion of whether folks are using their own equipment beyond laptops at home (mostly yes, including monitors, and employees are responsible for their own high-speed internet)
- Employees need to resolve own internet/connection issues (and not charge time to overhead to deal with these!), not IT staff responsibility
- Laptops can also plug into smart TVs if folks don't have monitors
- Staff that may find it most difficult to work from home are young engineers that need mentoring and supervision to accomplish work – harder to ask questions the same way as can in-person
- Some employees are refusing to do on-site visits if they feel unsafe – particularly for health care facilities
- Share documents on Teams for everyone to see
- Firms have a Crisis Management Team that review cash level, staff morale, firm culture, etc and present in all weekly staff all hands
- Share certain scenario planning items with staff: planning for future
- Have a few people share each week at all staff meeting what working on since aren't together in office
- Encouraging staff to keep to a certain schedule for defined work times
- Reaching out to field staff for a direct check-in

PPP Guidance Discussion/Advocacy

- Documentation for loan forgiveness to include tracking client stopping projects, economics within state at time of loan, notate firm situation within management meeting minutes
- Congress is looking at adding additional funds to program and also include funds for hospitals, state and local agencies
- Another option is Main Street Lending Program – any firm with up to 10K employees but there is no forgiveness aspect to it
- Our industry needs to continue communicating our safety aspect that is critical to infrastructure, not just for bridges but roadways too

Firms are preparing for the future

- Renegotiating leases for more favorable terms and reviewing office spacing in case more people want to work from office, realizing the office won't look like it did 6-8 weeks ago
- Bringing back people in shifts and not all at once to have them feel safe in the office, will look at cleaning the office more thoroughly
- Looking at scenario planning for the next year, work with local futurist for strategies

Project/Business Impact

- Depends on state what kind of construction sites are essential (VT is tough, MA – especially Boston and Cambridge are limiting what's essential)
- Mass. DOT requiring temperature checks and self-certified affidavits regarding those working on sites; on MBTA site was closed for two weeks due to consultant having exposure and not sharing
- MIT study out leading to belief that virus may be contained in sewers, leading some to limit site activity regarding opening sewer ('manhole') covers
- It is hard to get PPE gear in Mass., elsewhere

- Discussion of how state/local government work will decline (particularly 6 or so months out) due to lack of tax/revenue collection that they will be experiencing, there is concern about backlog
- Some land development work shutting down (TX) due to concern over funding
- Firms are making cuts to discretionary and other spending, examples given 401(k) match, benefits cuts:
- Other actions in a new recession environment: cross-training employees, offering new services, having more client conversations, investing in marketing and training, making go decisions on 'fringe' RFQs, working harder at collections
- May need to work with state and local leaders on economic development initiatives

Humanitarian efforts by A/E/C industry

- Firms have made donations toward providing meals to local hospital workers
- Encouraged staff to donate blood and to local food bank

Other items

- Looking at other opportunities to expand services to clients
- Connecting with research community to take back ideas/thoughts to clients (wastewater, healthcare)
- Looking at ramping up marketing efforts by expanding services and working with clients to provide additional opportunities they may not be able to do now.
- On the positive, this experience has brought some good changes for firms: older employees getting more comfortable with technology; better electronic invoicing; creation of telework policy; understanding and participation in lobbying and government affairs; staffs are growing closer and communicating well; folks are working across service lines and geographies to keep projects moving and folks billable/engaged; more trust in employees, increasing owner and managers' "mindset of accountability and trust"

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