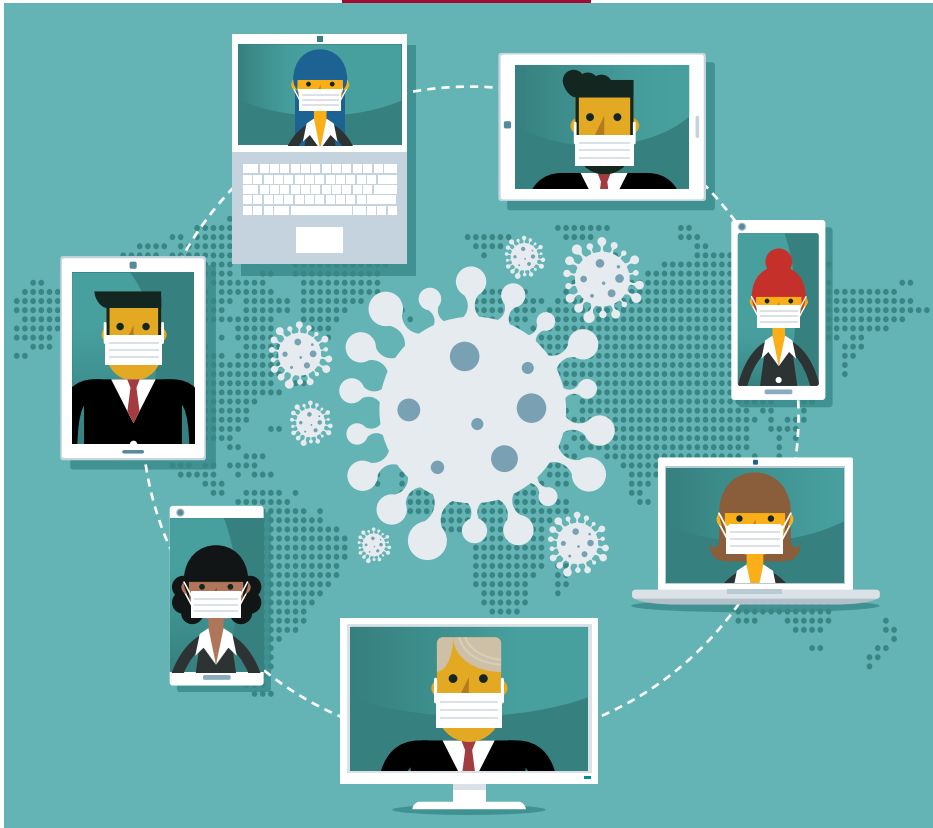


# Trustee Insights

COVID-19



## Leading a Coordinated Community Response

How boards and executive teams facing COVID-19 can build and strengthen partnerships

BY WARREN FORGEY, ERIC FISH  
AND RICK SMITH

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has overwhelmed many hospital and emergency response systems across the nation and around the world. Crisis teams and efforts are in full swing. In the wake of the outbreak, the board of

trustees at Schneck Medical Center in Seymour, Indiana, understood that it had to bring its community together to anticipate, plan and minimize the impact of COVID. And given the high degree of fluidity of the situation, the board felt it had to actively tune into real-time information from the entire community to

inform decisions it must make.

To tackle this health crisis — one of immense proportion — and flatten the curve, our leadership team believed the best approach was to develop a community management strategy: a coordinated approach to dealing with the crisis. Our primary focus, of course, was and is the safety and well-being of the citizens of our community.

### Coordinated Community Management Driven by Health Experts

In addition to ensuring the community had the resources it needed to respond most effectively and was informed on effective transmission mitigation strategies to keep residents safe, our team believed it was critical that the response to the COVID-19 outbreak be led by health experts. Our duty to those we serve is to lead this effort and share our health care expertise and experience, fight misinformation, and educate the public about the facts of COVID-19 and how it is transmitted to mitigate its spread. Our board of trustees governance structure, which includes seats for county officials, provides an avenue for receiving and disseminating health care communications with the county.

Schneck's executive team, which we [Warren and Eric] lead, implemented the strategy and initiated a twice-weekly community confer-

ence call to keep valued stakeholders informed about the medical center's response to the coronavirus situation. The virtual meeting also is an opportunity for the stakeholders to provide updates, share best practices and ask questions of our executive team and other subject matter experts.

Our goal is to keep our community safe by keeping them informed during these unprecedented times. It takes an entire community working together with one shared mission: to flatten the curve. The medical center and our community are fundamentally interconnected and must fight this battle together.

### Engaging the Entire Community in a Unified Response

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Regular participants on the community conference calls include doctors, one of whom is an infectious disease specialist and can speak to the critical importance of safety precautions and guidelines and address COVID-specific questions. Also participating are school and long-term care administrators; community, church and industry

leaders; emergency management personnel and administration; public health officials; and local media.

An average of 60 people are on each call. Participants have already formed their own internal high-functioning teams to respond to and manage the crisis, and are working aggressively to stop the transmission of the virus. The goal of these calls is to actively engage the entire community in coordinating a unified response to this global pandemic.

The group discusses the most up-to-date coronavirus statistics from the local, state and national levels; the most current scientific data; and supply and workforce challenges. Each participant shares best practices and lessons learned during the pandemic.

Since Schneck serves a four-county region, it also is important for our board of trustees to include leaders from our market area. One participant on the call is a school administrator from a neighboring county. She has found the call and the information shared to be so valuable that she started a similar weekly conference call in her community — to further share best practices and

lessons learned with others.

As executive leaders, we have been inspired by the strength, compassion and determination that has resulted from our partnership with the community. Moving forward and planning for the complicated return to normal — a normal that looks unlike any in the years preceding COVID-19 — we will continue to provide the information, tools and resources necessary as we remain vigilant against virus resurgence and forge a better state of health in the communities we serve.

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*Please note that the views of the authors do not always reflect the views of the AHA.*