



Adapting, evolving, and accelerating
during times of crisis.

3

new event
statuses created

1

week turnaround
to create process form

3

days to launch, implement, and
deploy enterprise-wide training

Unexpected crisis can impact meetings and events on a global scale, creating new standard operating procedures and changing social norms. Having a strong crisis management strategy is critical in ensuring the well-being of attendees and the overall health of the business. By aggregating event insights through integrated technologies, event managers can ensure visibility into the larger program impact during times of crisis.

Anticipating Gaps in Risk Management

Steven Shultz, Head of Strategic Meetings Management

(SMM) at Lincoln Financial Group, understands the value of a centralized risk management process for meetings and events. Over the last several years, Steven has positioned the SMM program as a center of excellence within the Financial Services organization. In early 2020, his team closely examined their predicted budget and meeting spend in anticipation of impending market fluctuations. "We realized, and our leadership was very aware, that we were going to experience a little bit of volatility in the market through the low interest rate environment we were heading into, with that being an election year as well," says Steven. These predictive insights allowed his team to be proactive in tracking their spend and gaining a line

of sight into the budget for 2020. It also armed them with valuable data around the value of those meetings. “We could have those conversations with leadership to really quantify what particular meetings were ‘must-haves’ because they were going to drive sales, which ones were ‘nice-to-haves,’ and which we could potentially look for alternative solutions for,” Steven adds.

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Mitigating Data Gaps to Manage During a Global Crisis

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in late February, the impending economic impact was not immediately visible for many organizations. After the pandemic began to affect daily business, Steven’s team started reevaluating the many domino effects that would inevitably occur across the organization. “We had to hit the pause button and ask a lot of

questions. We needed to really rethink our reporting as well,” he says. Shifting business priorities soon revealed that key data points were missing from their reporting structure. Leadership also wanted immediate visibility into event status updates as they sought to manage risks and cut spend. He explains, “We realized we weren’t capturing if meetings were in a postponed state, meaning we’re going to wait to see how Lincoln approaches this particular pandemic as the dates come closer to activating, or do we need to move this meeting to a virtual experience?”

Steven began ideating solutions to assess and mitigate these data gaps. Reaching out to his dedicated Cvent Client Success Advisor gave him an avenue to find the best course of action. He not only sought technology expertise, but industry insight as well. “I said let me see if there’s anything within your experience and the conversations that you’re having right now to guide me,” he explains. “We threw around a lot of different alternative solutions on how to best capture the new fields, these new data points that we were asked to speak to, and ultimately we landed on creating a new process form.”





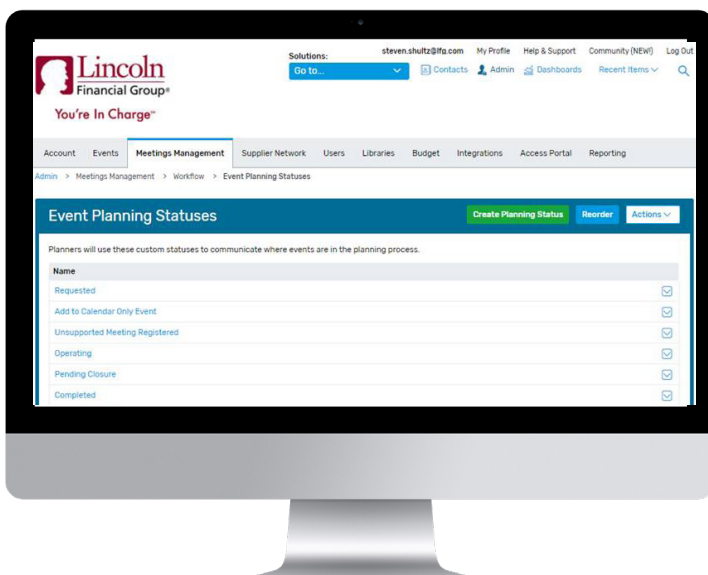
Providing an Enterprise-Wide Risk Management Solution

The newly created Meeting Cancellation and Postponement Management process form gave Steven the flexibility to create a broadly applicable solution that would help manage risk during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. “It gave us the flexibility to not pigeonhole ourselves into this one small, isolated solution,” he says. “As this pandemic expands and forever changes how we go about thinking about our meetings as a whole, we considered how this can adapt with that evolution.” The process form used customized questions and sublogic based on previous answers to streamline the effectiveness of the meeting evaluation.

They also updated their prescribed event planning status options to meet the changing criteria of the crisis. “We had our normal operating, pending closure, and cancellation statuses, but we didn’t have anything for that grey area,” Steven explains. He notes that previous policies for postponed meetings included simply waiting for new dates before moving them through the system. To account for meetings that may be pending due to crisis like COVID-19 or potentially shifting to virtual, they ultimately created three new event planning statuses that could be applied through the form.

Quickly and efficiently instituting the process form within Cvent allowed Steven’s team to design, test, and present the solution to leadership in a matter of days. Since the department provides enterprise-wide support, ensuring broad usability was key. With leadership’s input on how to best adopt the solution for future state, they were able to launch and implement the form across the organization in less than a week. “We invited everyone on a WebEx call and we were able to deploy training, all of which happened in a three-day span. That was thanks to having the Cvent toolkit at our disposal,” Steven says.

The effects of the process form were almost immediately visible in different areas of the business. “We looked across Enterprise, Marketing, Legal, and Procurement, and they were being asked for a much larger picture so business decisions could be made in fast, effective, and strategic manner that could be rolled out across the enterprise,” Steven notes.



He says they were able to successfully apply the appropriate messaging by working closely with their marketing team and Cvent, offering clear context around how the solution fits within the larger organizational strategy. By leveraging Cvent as a single source of truth, he was able to automate data processes and reporting within platform to efficiently manage risk for the business.

Evolving Meetings and Events Program Success

Steven automated planner emails for weekly process form updates to maintain visibility into meeting scope and spend as the economic climate changes. He says presenting clear and synthesized data will be vital as bookable space becomes an issue for late 2020. "Understanding where we are from a postponement standpoint, cancellation standpoint, virtual, etc. will be key for us," he adds.

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-Steven Shultz, Head of Strategic Meetings Management



By turning to the tools already available in his Cvent instance, he created a seamless solution with minimal effort and maximum impact to the business. "I think the benefit to the Cvent platform is that you're able to adapt and evolve with the times," he says. "The more we can protect that data integrity within that Cvent ecosystem, the nimbler we can be when situations like this evolve and I think ultimately it's going to change the way that we look at meetings in the future."

In managing during times of crisis, Steven understands the need for quick pivots. However, he stresses the importance of a measured response over knee-jerk reactions in crisis situations. "Strategy over just reacting is the biggest lesson learned," he says. "I think you want to utilize the resources you have, and that's the benefit we've had through Cvent and the buy-in through our leadership." By relying on his own administrator skills, Steven is able to adapt and evolve his program in lockstep with the rapid changes brought on by the crisis. "Really understanding that technical standpoint makes you very nimble and fast at making decisions," he insists. "I think Cvent over the years has really developed out the training program, and the Cvent Certification is a great addition to really test your knowledge. It allows you to be a better administrator and a better service to your organization."

A Strategic Partnership for an Accelerated Future

Through measured processes and strategic solutions, Steven reinforced the value of the SMM program within Lincoln Financial Group. He notes it was never a question of if, but rather how the team would successfully adapt to meet the demands of the crisis. "Leadership turned to us and said, 'I know you can automate this through your system. Figure out a way to make it happen, because I know Cvent has the solution,'" he explains. Given his close partnership with Cvent over the last seven years, Steven was able to configure the solution and provide the needed data points to support the broader crisis management strategy. "The thing we keep going back to throughout this whole experience is that Cvent has become our center of excellence that allows us to do that pivoting and make those changes," he adds.

Weathering unexpected challenges is not new to Lincoln Financial Group. "We're fortunate to work for a company that's been through twenty-one recessions in its 115-year history, so pivoting and adapting hasn't changed," he says. What has changed is the technology capabilities within the larger tech stack, something he believes every organization should have at their disposal. He adds, "If you don't have these tools, now is the best time to start doing your research and grabbing into a center of excellence that allows you to evolve, grow, and develop. You'll be better off for it."

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Steven sees a new normal in the near future for his own organization and the industry at large. He is optimistic that meetings and events will ultimately bring people together as never before. While he says Lincoln Financial Group is working to pivot select meetings and events to virtual as part of the larger program mix, he is positive the value of in-person events will remain as strong as ever. "I think when we come out of this and we're able to be within the confines of one another's company again, you can't mistake the power of face-to-face meetings," he insists. "In times like these, when you come out the other side, we're going to be better for it."