

FRATERNITY & SORORITY WILL ENDURE

IMMEDIATE GROWTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
ENTIRE FRATERNITY/SORORITY INDUSTRY TO WEATHER
THE STORM OF COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

A joint statement drafted by
Phired Up & TechniPhi
and
AFLV



Objective

To prepare all key stakeholders to take immediate, consistent and results-producing action in response to the impending membership crisis that has been exacerbated by COVID-19.

The fraternity/sorority industry will be seriously impacted by COVID-19.

This fall, the fraternity/sorority joining experience will not be what we are used to. For many chapters, this spring has already dramatically disrupted the experience of their prospective and new members.

The First Storm

A major storm has already impacted membership in fraternity/sorority life. We first felt its effects in 2017. We know the worst of it is yet to come.

Over the past decade, we have seen:

- significantly decreasing college student enrollment
- a new generation of college students with rapidly changing priorities
- exponential cost increases associated with the college experience
- a reputation that has worsened notably

A New and Serious Threat

Just as the industry was hunkering down to ride out the first storm impacting membership, an intense, unexpected and massive storm emerged with much greater scale. This storm is still growing right now and requires unprecedented action. Its short-term and long-term impacts are still unknown. This is COVID-19.

This convergence of challenges on fraternity/sorority will leave our industry shaken and battered. Students will lose their organizations along with their brothers, sisters, and siblings. People will lose jobs. Organizations will likely close. Properties will be lost. Host universities will be shuttered. It has already started. Certainly the diversity of our organizations means different impacts on differently structured groups, but it is undeniable that our entire industry will experience challenges.

Our industry's response to this threat—your response, as a key stakeholder in fraternity/sorority life—will determine our future. Fraternity and sorority will endure because of the choices we make together right now.

Many new articles, reports, and editorials are coming out daily citing the impact of COVID-19 on higher education. Here is a selection of outside perspectives:

[Presidents Fear Financial, and Human, Toll of Coronavirus](#)

[UW-Madison Estimates \\$100M Loss](#)

[The Great Recession Was Bad for Higher Education. Coronavirus Could Be Worse.](#)

[Coronavirus Upends Colleges' Financial State](#)

[Coronavirus may drive more high school seniors to in-state public colleges](#)

[Why the impact of coronavirus could be particularly bad on college campuses](#)

[What the Coronavirus Pandemic Means for the Future of Higher Education](#)

[For Higher Education, Nothing Matters More Than September](#)

[Five Ways COVID-19 Will Impact Fall College Enrollments](#)

Our Concern

With likely significant declines in university enrollment, questions about whether in-person classes will even happen, fears about limitations to (or disinterest in) large group gatherings and events, months of lost productivity related to preparation for the fall semester, entire recruitment periods being delayed, confused prospective members, scared parents, current members that don't return, completely digital summer orientation sessions (not to mention the negative financial impact to student affairs departments, headquarters, housing corporations, associations, third-party providers, and the very students and families that make up the core economy of the fraternal industry) ...



WE ARE CONCERNED ...

- ... for the students who may not get a chance to join, but who would greatly benefit.
- ... for the chapter leaders who will feel paralyzed and lost in this uncertainty.
- ... for the campus-based professionals who need partners and collaboration.
- ... for the inter/national organizations who will lose significant membership.
- ... for the alumni advisors who won't be able to bandage the bleeding membership.
- ... for the host institutions who will be dealing with their own enrollment and financial crises.

We are concerned for fraternity and sorority.

We know that the leaders of this industry must come together right now—not out of fear, but out of concern—with clarity of purpose. We must lift up fraternities and sororities. We must help quell the negative impact with a unified voice. Our shared purpose must be to mitigate significant membership loss and use this crisis as an opportunity for reinvention to meet the needs of modern students.

We must act swiftly. We must act collectively. We also must make decisions based on good information, not on fear or panic.

Fraternity and sorority will endure. Our industry has endured many moments of crisis in our history. But our past survival has depended on the courageous actions of the people who were called upon to act in those difficult moments. We are those people today.

A note on priorities: The immediate health, safety, and stability of the students, volunteers, professionals (and associated families) that make up our industry are our primary and immediate concern. And, we believe it is our responsibility to look ahead at challenges that may arise down the road. We know that many stakeholders encountering this document may not be ready to think about potential summer/fall membership challenges, because they are focused on other emergencies and crises of the moment. Be where you need to be. We support you. This document will be ready for you when you are ready for it. Please continue to put the humans who make up our fraternity/sorority world first and foremost. And please take care of yourself and each other.



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Guiding Principles

To weather the storm of COVID-19 and its impacts on fraternity and sorority membership, these four principles should guide our collective action.

1. **Act Now**

These are difficult times that require us to lead with empathy in our current circumstances. But we must also think about our future. Now is the time to act. Now is the time to create solutions. Now is the time to reach out to not-yet-affiliated students and incoming students (and parents). Now is the time to take action to ensure our future.

2. **Permission to Innovate**

The reality of this moment is that recruitment is going to look different, whether we like it or want to admit it. Permission has to be granted at all levels for us to do this in a new way. Let's remove roadblocks and create new solutions to meet this moment and ensure our long-term success. And let's NOT create more roadblocks for students who want to join our organizations.

3. **Don't Compromise What Matters**

We should double down on our expectations of health, safety and well-being. Let's double down on our desire to help the right students find the right chapter experience for them.

4. **Moving Forward Together**

We are all in this together. This industry is dependent upon our ability as key stakeholders with varied opinions to work together, out of an abundance of care, to address what lies ahead.

Fraternity and sorority leaders throughout the industry should respond, right now. These are our ...

UNDERSTAND AND COMMUNICATE THE REALITY

Fewer people will join our organizations this year. How many fewer will be based on what we do next. College enrollment dips, economic concerns, new social norms and fears around group gatherings, fewer in-person classes, and more factors will certainly impact our industry. Our window of opportunity to adapt, respond, and change is very small. We must be honest about this challenging reality and communicate it to those we lead and influence.

GIVE PERMISSION FOR INNOVATION

Students are smart, responsive, resilient, and creative. They must be at the center of our solution. This generation wants a modern fraternal experience. This generation is also perfectly built to be empowered to save fraternity, sorority, and higher education itself. Now is the time for all high-level industry leaders to:

1. clearly give students permission to invent solutions
2. stay out of students' way and give them space to innovate
3. make student leaders' roles easier by understanding what matters to them and helping them solve their problems

The last few decades of appropriate health and safety focus have unintentionally trained too many students that they don't have power, authority, or permission to solve problems. We must be unequivocal in our empowerment of student leaders.

REMOVE BARRIERS TO JOINING

Creating an easy path for the right students to find, join, and engage with fraternities and sororities should be a focus for every leader in the industry. This requires a critical analysis of barriers (seen and unseen) that currently may impede students from having the chance to consider membership (and chapters from having the chance to consider potential members).



Some barriers include:

- Financial barriers
- Process-oriented barriers
- Policies that impede thoughtful students from finding safe and healthy fraternity/sorority experiences
- Structure, rules, regulations, economics

We must quickly and critically analyze and reconsider all of these issues. This might require modified policies for when students can join and/or live in chapter facilities. This might require new dues and fees models that provide economic accessibility. This might require a short-term approach followed by new long-term models. We must remove barriers to membership that might worsen the already significant challenges faced by the industry.

TEACH DIGITAL MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT TECHNIQUES

Digital recruitment sounds futuristic, but many organizations have used these principles and tactics for years. There are resources available and forthcoming to help students, volunteers, and professionals navigate this new digital joining landscape. We must advocate for modern techniques for attracting, selecting, and securing new members.

CENTRALIZE LEAD GENERATION AND STORYTELLING

The two biggest ways inter/national organizations, communities, and councils can support chapter growth is through lead generation (getting more people to indicate interest in sorority and fraternity life) and a clear, compelling narrative about

1. the value proposition of fraternity/sorority
2. the expectations of what it means to be a member of a fraternity/sorority.

We can't leave this entirely in the hands of undertrained, underfunded, underprepared students who have many other priorities in their daily lives. This is central to our industry's health right now. We must help centralize the process of lead generation and storytelling for our industry,

organizations, communities, councils, and chapters.

ADDRESS AFFORDABILITY IMMEDIATELY

The cost of membership has been a problem for years. The economics of our industry over the past several decades has resulted in inflated dues, fees, and hidden costs thrust upon students (and their families). Addressing this massive challenge will not be easy, especially as many work hard to maintain staff, programs, and membership benefits that have become expected. But this will continue to linger as the biggest weight around our industry's neck until we creatively seek new financial models. We must address affordability both in the short term and the long term.

DEPLOY ASSETS TO TOP PRIORITIES

Direct volunteers, professionals, and student leaders to prioritize two things for the short term: membership growth and health/safety. Headquarters staff and volunteers, campus-based professionals, and students should know that for right now our entire fraternal community is focused on a) proactively and creatively attracting, selecting, and securing more of the right people for our organizations, and b) operating responsibly within the "non-negotiables" of health, safety, and maturity. The very future of fraternities and sororities depends upon it. We must deploy all available assets to focus on responsible membership growth.

CHALLENGE THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM OF JOINING

Events, rounds, informationals, house tours, bid day, "Meet The Greeks," rush week, in-person PNM orientation, traditional structure—tradition itself—all of these "conventions" of the fraternity/sorority joining process must be deprioritized.

Our top joining process priority as industry leaders is simple and clear. Actively create trust-filled, relationship-building moments between current members and potential members however makes sense in today's world.

Fraternity and sorority is a relationship business. People join people. We must create new ways for those relationships to form and take shape. We must challenge the conventional wisdom related to the joining experience and allow for innovation to flourish.



PARTNER OR PERISH

Now is the time for partnership. Set the politics of the industry aside for a few years. If we do not choose to partner, there will be no recognizable industry to serve, no jobs to have, and no politics to negotiate in the future. After all, despite our varying positions on particular topics, we are a small group of caring humans who are being personally impacted by all of this. We need to care for each other. We need to share the spirit of interfraternalism in our interactions. This is an opportunity to transform our industry's interpersonal culture into a more caring, more loving, and more empathetic culture. This set of recommendations offers a single strategy that we are asking everyone to promote. If we can partner around this plan in the short term, we can weather this storm. We must work together right now for the future of fraternities and sororities.

THERE IS STILL TIME TO MAKE BIG DECISIONS

During this uncertain time, there may be an instinct to regain control by making major decisions to cancel, delay, or defer joining processes. It's a completely understandable instinct, but it's important to understand the unintended consequences in taking a premature action, especially one which would add another barrier to joining. We don't need to panic right now; we just need to be flexible and adaptable with a solution-oriented mind. Don't make decisions with incomplete information and try to get comfortable with the gray area we all need to navigate through at this moment. We must use good information, patience, and adaptability to make big decisions about the structures, plans, and processes that influence fraternity/sorority joining.

NON-NEGOTIABLES

We all must name our collective and easy-to-understand non-negotiables of what we will not accept in fraternity/sorority and in the joining process. When we have named our non-negotiables, we can stay out of the minutiae of the joining experience and stay focused on the things that matter most right now.

- The health, safety, and well-being of all students must take precedence over everything else.
- The fraternity/sorority experience and the experience of joining must be safe, inclusive, healthy, and a benefit to each student's academic experience.
- Fraternities, sororities, and individual members must follow local, state, and federal laws.
- We will not accept new member experiences or chapter experiences that are physically or emotionally dangerous.
- We will not accept physical or sexual assault in our fraternities and sororities.
- We will not accept drugs and alcohol in the joining process.
- We will not accept dishonesty in the joining process.
- We will not accept discrimination in the joining process or in chapters.

We must name our non-negotiables and allow our members to operate creatively within them.

INSPIRE A HOPEFUL FUTURE

Much of our attention will be on the challenges we face, the crises of the day, or the emergencies of the moment. The leaders of our industry must consistently share promises of a hopeful future with sorority and fraternity members. This generation of students was already dealing with extraordinary levels of anxiety, pressure, and fear. Their worlds have been upended again. We must be solution oriented. We must be hopeful. We must help sorority and fraternity members see the positive future they're helping to build.

We know you are concerned too. We know you, alone, don't have the power to address all of this. We know you'll try your best to help. We also know you might not fully agree with these recommendations. We hope you will receive them in the full-hearted spirit they were written. We are concerned, yet we are hopeful. We believe in our industry's collective ability to overcome any obstacle.

Fraternity and sorority will endure. We must take this moment seriously. We must serve our students and ensure the future of our organizations for future students. Now is the time to act, innovate, and respond. **Fraternity and sorority will endure.**



Authorship

This document is being authored in partnership by Phired Up & TechniPhi and AFLV with input from as many key industry stakeholders as possible. We want input from students, volunteers, and professionals who care about the future of fraternity/sorority life. Not all input will be included in final recommendations, but all input will be valued for its contribution to the collective dialogue around this issue.

ABOUT PHIRED UP & TECHNIPHI

Phired Up & TechniPhi help fraternities and sororities grow. The company's products, services, and brands are creating the future of fraternities and sororities by transforming the way people join. The company delivers relationship-focused, data-driven, results-producing technology, education, and strategy solutions for every aspect of the pre-member experience from first-impression through initiation. The Phired Up & TechniPhi teams have been focused on fraternity/sorority membership growth since 2002. More than half of the fraternity/sorority industry actively utilizes Phired Up's & TechniPhi's products and services to help students find fraternities and sororities each year. Learn more at phiredup.com.

ABOUT AFLV

AFLV (Association of Fraternal Leadership & Values) exists to accelerate progress in fraternity/sorority communities through change-enabling experiences.

Guiding all that we do, AFLV will use these fundamental principles as our operating system:

- Challenge conventional wisdom to discover new solutions to critical problems.
- Be entrepreneurial, maintaining nimble operating practices that enable it to invest in emerging opportunities and address unmet needs in the fraternity/sorority industry.
- Model best-in-class experience design and execution.
- Actively commit to providing inclusive and accessible experiences.
- Work to develop better organizations by developing better individuals.
- Prioritize time and resources to support the people and initiatives most likely to affect systemic change and sustainable progress in the undergraduate fraternal experience.
- Make fiscally responsible decisions.

AFLV has close to 300 campuses regularly engaged and more than 4,000 fraternity and sorority members at our experiences each year. Learn more at aflv.org.

