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Executive Education Program in COVID Context: Supporting Leaders' Deep Dives into Uncharted Territory

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By Nick Catrantzos

The Center for Homeland Defense and Security (CHDS) [Executive Education Program](#) (EEP) provides tailored homeland security education to government leaders requiring best-in-class subject matter expertise, often on short notice.

In the context of unprecedented demands attending the whole-of-government response to the coronavirus pandemic, the EEP's traditional customers have surfaced new needs. Such needs include:

- deep dives into unprecedented subject matter,
- novel content delivery for executives and staff conforming to social distancing mandates, and
- a turnaround time from request to delivery that now measures in days and hours what was once measured in weeks and months.

How Has the EEP Risen to This Challenge?

The short answer is content on demand. A longer answer is through webinars, videos, and virtual workshops and seminars. For example, when national media first highlighted the impending presidential invocation of the Defense Production Act, government leaders at the state and local levels called on CHDS to fill this knowledge gap. The net result was a rapidly organized EEP webinar on the topic and two other emergency acts. The [National Emergency Management Association](#) (NEMA) hosted the webinar on its platform, while the EEP supplied timely access to CHDS experts via a video conference for over 200 webinar participants. The webinar is available to watch at <https://www.chds.us/ed/items/20594>.



CHDS recently hosted a webinar with the National Criminal Justice Association.

The EEP has also developed pandemic-related webinars with partners such as the International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) and the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA), and has several more planned for national audiences in upcoming days and weeks. The EEP has also connected CHDS faculty, students, and alumni with real-time COVID-19 briefings from national thought leaders and groups like the Rockefeller Foundation, who briefed CHDS on the day they rolled out their National Testing Strategy.

To view more of the EEP's COVID-19 Lecture and Webinar Series, visit the [new EEP website](#).

Changing World, Changing Gauges of Success

The success of the foregoing webinars was as much a matter of timeliness as of content. Thanks to ongoing EEP surveys of national association partners and University and Agency Partnership Program (UAPP) members, the EEP team realized key changes for developing relevant content and answering the needs of the moment:

1. The need for educational content in the homeland security sphere has never been greater, with the issues and challenges confronting leaders changing so rapidly that CHDS instruction must evolve almost daily to reflect the current state of affairs.
2. The emerging trend from surveys conducted by the EEP to-date shows that government leaders are currently placing more of a premium on instructional content from subject matter experts than on informational exchanges with counterparts who are colleagues from sister agencies.
3. Frontline leaders are expressing more interest in horizon-scanning education that gives them a sense of what to expect as they strive to recover from the pandemic. This focus stands in contrast to investing the same time reviewing after-action reporting that they historically valued but now consider retrospective at a juncture when their greater priority is looking forward.



Executive Education
Program Director Dawn
Wilson

Under the COVID-19 circumstances, the EEP is changing gears to better optimize for content delivery that is rapid, virtual, and even asynchronous. Consumers of this educational content place a higher premium on timely delivery than on production value. As a result, an unscripted video presenting relevant, perishable information that may later be revised takes precedence over a polished, peer-reviewed strategy paper that arrives too late to inform local decision-making.

Just-in-Time Meets D-I-Y

In addition to plunging wholeheartedly into the timely delivery business, the EEP re-emphasizes the collaborative nature of its value proposition. As EEP Director Dawn Wilson points out, what the EEP does is more akin to strategic brainstorming than consulting.

While the EEP subject matter experts supply depth that local, state, tribal, territorial, and federal leaders may not have on tap, these experts neither decide or carry out actions – that remain within the sole purview of the leaders they are there to support. It is up to the latter to determine what to do and how to do it – or not.

As David Fukutomi, EEP Deputy Associate Director, has observed, one of the revelations that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light is that there is no single discipline with all the answers.

Consequently, it comes as little surprise that national associations and other EEP customers are eager to collaborate and extremely open-minded, because they admit that they do not possess all the answers themselves. Nor, does any EEP team promise such claims. Instead, as Fukutomi puts it, the EEP serves up “a potluck of best thinking” from which the consumers fill their own plates.

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