



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

IASA SUCCESSFULLY PIVOTS TO FULLY VIRTUAL CONFERENCE DUE TO HURRICANE IDA IN LESS THAN 36 HOURS

DURHAM, NC (September 9, 2021) – IASA’s signature annual event, IASA Xchange™, and its one-day executive education event, OnPOINT, were scheduled to be held in New Orleans, La., between August 29 – September 1, 2021, at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, drawing an estimated in-person audience of 500 (down from pre-COVID levels of up to 2,000 attendees) with an additional 500 attendees online. On Friday, August 27, two days before Hurricane Ida’s landfall, association leaders made the difficult choice to pivot to a fully virtual conference – less than 48 hours before kick-off – due to the certainty of Hurricane Ida’s impacts on New Orleans and the surrounding areas.

Association staff and volunteers planned the IASA Xchange™ event for nearly a year, with the location selected and event and hotel venues under contract for over five years. IASA Xchange™ has traditionally been held as an in-person only educational experience – the preeminent continuing educational event for insurance professionals. In 2020, the event was virtual only, but organizers hoped the 2021 event in New Orleans would be feasible due to new vaccines and other safety protocols. Even pre-COVID, association leaders made the decision that all future events would at least be hybrid – with some virtual component – to remain competitive in the association marketplace and encourage member engagement. Strategically – and supported by lessons learned from COVID-19 over the past 18 months, as well as lingering concerns with limited vaccine eligibility and variants -- the 2021 conference was planned from the beginning as a hybrid event – in-person and virtual.

“We wanted to be sure our members and attendees had options for engagement – online and in-person – even without a pandemic, but also because we were unsure of what the state of COVID-19 might look like in the U.S. during the time our conference was to be held,” stated Kerry Crockett, MBA, CAE, CMP, DES, CEO of IASA. “Never in our wildest imagination did we expect a hurricane – and one as devastating as Ida – would prevent our in-person event in the end. If there’s one thing I’ve learned about event planning, always plan for the unexpected.”

After news of a then tropical depression forming in the Caribbean and tracking toward the Gulf Coast on Thursday, prior to the Sunday start of the event, association leaders monitored the storm’s

developments frequently, inquiring with local event venue leadership teams, including the convention center staff, about potential preparations, accommodations, and impacts. Association staff were already pivoting more attendees, exhibitors, and some speakers from in-person to virtual due to the Delta variant surge in Louisiana, which turned out to be a good position to be in, as this enabled an eventual conversion to a fully online event. With each passing hour leading up to the conference, it became more likely that IASA Xchange™ was going to fall squarely in Hurricane Ida's landfall and eye of the storm, and the reality of a fully virtual event seemed to be imminent.

"What are the odds," Crockett asked, "to plan a conference all year and to have it go head-to-head -- with not one but two strikes by mother nature -- is daunting to say the least. But we were committed to staying the course and doing everything in our power to hold a high-quality event. Fortunately, we had the foresight to strategically plan for a hybrid conference, further supported by the existing COVID-19 climate, so we already had the online technology and infrastructure in-place."

By Thursday night, August 26, Ida was a powerful storm with a more certain destination -- Louisiana, and it was projected to become a powerful Hurricane in matter of days. The conference host hotels and convention center assured association staff that they were prepared to host our event -- with extra food and supplies on-hand and generators for back-up power -- and keep our staff and attendees safe. Despite the almost certainty of Hurricane Ida interrupting the conference at this point, and despite association staff fielding dozens of emails and calls daily about potentially canceling the event, the association was not able to invoke a force majeure cancellation of the event. With the event still proceeding as planned, some association staff and vendors landed in New Orleans on Thursday to begin on-site conference preparation before Sunday's 8am CDT kick-off. Late Thursday night, Ida became a powerful tropical storm. Friday morning, more staff and vendors made their way to New Orleans, as well, with exhibitor and attendees expecting to land between Friday afternoon and Saturday. With hourly updates coming from conference venues and local emergency management agencies between Thursday night and Friday morning, association leaders balanced the task of planning a national event starting in less than 36 hours and navigating conversations with emergency management about weather updates, and countless inquiries from members and attendees about the status of the conference due to Hurricane Ida's imminent arrival.

By 10am Friday morning, August 27, IASA with the latest 8am storm update predicting a Category 3 or potentially Category 4 landfall with its sights squarely on New Orleans, IASA leadership canceled the in-person conference to ensure the safety of the association staff, members, attendees, speakers, exhibitors, and other vendors. Staff and volunteers -- some still on-site in New Orleans -- scrambled to transition to a fully virtual event, while also making plans for their own evacuation from New Orleans to their homes in other states. Over the next 36 hours, the team converted hundreds of registrations from in-person to online, called dozens of speakers to ask about their ability to pivot to a virtual presentation, notified exhibitors that on-site exhibits were canceled, and more. Emergency

communications were distributed to all necessary parties throughout the lead up to the meeting – initially to communicate the changing COVID-19 conditions and safety protocols and then Hurricane Ida status updates – on a daily basis, if not more frequently.

Unfortunately, the worst-case scenario happened – a Category 4 storm, Hurricane Ida, made landfall in Louisiana on Sunday evening, damaging property, knocking out power to over a million people, flooding communities, and sadly injuring and taking the lives of innocent souls. Hurricane Ida is now marked in history as one of the most powerful storms to ever make landfall in the United States, causing damage across the Gulf Coast and upward through the south, mid-Atlantic, and northeast.

In the end, IASA staff and volunteers escaped the worst impact of the storm and pulled off something almost unthinkable – a total pivot from a mostly in-person event with 420 attendees and 60+ exhibitors to a fully virtually event for all attendees. And the overwhelming response, despite all odds, was that the online conference experience was seamless. Speakers delivered riveting content, attendees were engaged, and staff saw the fruits of their labor play out with the best of all outcomes – attendees who received timely, relevant content and were thrilled with their conference experience.

“In our minds, this is better than anyone could have ever expected,” Crockett said. “What more can we ask? Against all odds, the IASA team delivered. I can’t lie though — we’re all looking forward to a much more ‘normal’ IASA Xchange™ conference in 2022 in Baltimore.”

About IASA

For almost 100 years, IASA -- a non-profit 501(c)(3) -- has served as the trusted source for knowledge and innovation that guides the community of insurance professionals. IASA fosters an environment of selfless engagement, inclusivity, and conviction, advancing careers and personal growth for its members and constituents. It produces the best education and learning opportunities in an open and sharing environment through exceptional leadership that promotes excellence, collaboration, innovation, and community engagement. Its community roots, consisting of thousands of members and insurance constituents, in addition to 24 national chapters, runs deep with a mission to accelerate professional growth to shape, influence, elevate and strengthen the insurance industry. Its vision is to be the definitive source of trusted knowledge, credible collaboration, and common business interests, that drives future industry innovation through the practice and alliance of insurance professionals. To find out more about IASA, visit the website at www.iasa.org.

###

Contact: Tracey Gould, M.S. IMC, CPSM
Marketing and Communications Director
tgould@iasa.org