

# PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR PRIVATE MEETINGS, EVENTS AND GATHERINGS IN HOTELS

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY:  
Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau and  
Cambridge Office for Tourism



## OBJECTIVE

The objective of this document is to provide a path forward for determining informed State and Local guidelines for maximum capacities of private meetings, events and gatherings in hotels. These recommendations demonstrate how hotels plan to adhere to, if not exceed, State and Local safety protocols in Massachusetts while enabling hotels to maximize revenue generation and increase staffing to service larger groups. This proposal has been thoughtfully vetted and produced by a committee of hotel, tourism and hospitality professionals that worked in concert with the Massachusetts Health Council to craft guidelines to protect public health. This proposal is respectfully submitted for your consideration to assist our industry that has been decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic free fall.

## BACKGROUND

Tourism is the third largest industry in Massachusetts, accounting for 240,000 jobs and providing \$40 billion in direct spending annually, and \$1.6 billion in total State and Local tax revenue. Occupancy Tax revenue alone totals \$513M in the Commonwealth. To bring the numbers into a more local focus, the hotel and hospitality industry in Greater Boston / Cambridge provides 140,000 jobs, \$22.6 billion in direct spending, \$840M total State and Local tax revenue along with an additional \$318M in Occupancy Tax annually.

The tourism and hospitality industries directly employ one out of every ten Massachusetts residents. Tourism represents the most diverse workforce in the Commonwealth with the lowest barrier to entry and ample opportunity to advance. This industry has consistently provided revenues that support the infrastructures of our cities and towns and has consistently received little investment from the State to maintain our industry's future. We have included data in the attached appendix relating to the negative impact to the hospitality industry in Boston as provided by Pinnacle Advisory Group.

As we find ourselves in phase 2 and on the verge of phase 3 of the reopening of Massachusetts plan, many of our hotels are still closed. While hotels were approved for opening as of June 8th the critical absence of Meeting and Event business as a contributor of business certainty is needed to reopen these facilities. Without a certain and critical path forward on this front our future remains very uncertain.

Now we are asking for a fair evaluation of our industry guidelines and restrictions so we can begin the long process of rebuilding in the most competitive market our industry has seen in decades, if not in history.

## BACKGROUND CONTINUED

The committee has done its homework, and what follows is the result of those efforts. We ask your consideration on the guidelines for capacities for private meetings, events and gatherings in hotels and that you consider the effect it will have not just for hotels, but for so many other industries and people of the Commonwealth. This pandemic has negatively impacted economies worldwide, but none worse than that of the United States, and few states worse than Massachusetts. The economic impact of tourism in Massachusetts is substantial and merits strong consideration.

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## PROPOSAL

We propose that hotels may commence hosting private meetings and events in Phase 3 of the Commonwealth's Reopening Plan at 40% of the stated fire code occupancy per function room, with 6-foot spacing, not to exceed 100 guests. In the later part of Phase 3, progress to 60%, per function room, with 6-foot spacing, not to exceed 250 guests, based on positive performance against the state-wide COVID-19 metrics.

A private meeting and event is defined as an event at which the host (Planner) controls and maintains the attendee list via advance registration.

## MEETING AND EVENT PLANNER RESPONSIBILITIES:

Planner will provide language in registration portal outlining expectations as it relates to attendees adhering to the safety guidelines

- Planner is encouraged to use technological solutions where possible to reduce person to person interactions (e.g. online registration)
- Planner must submit the following to the venue prior to the meeting or event:
  - List of all vendors, address, primary contact, name and office and cell numbers
  - Delivery and pick up schedule for all vendors
  - Number and size of delivery trucks if venue requests
- Follow all existing state guidelines as listed below
- Follow all venue safety guidelines
- Encourage attendees to practice stationary seating– staying in the same seat for the duration of the meeting/event
- All meeting and event attendees will be responsible for assessing and attesting to their personal health before attempting to attend a meeting or event and if symptoms appear to remain home.
- Notify event/meeting planner and property security should there be a change in health status during the meeting or event.
- Must wear masks except when dining and where an individual is unable to wear a face covering due to medical condition or disability
- Must wash/sanitize hands frequently as advised by WHO, CDC, state and property guidelines.
- Must maintain social distancing practices while moving about the meeting/event space.

## SOCIAL DISTANCING SET UP

Hotel meeting and event facilities must comply with the following distancing rules for providing meeting and food and beverage services to assure effective compliance with social distancing requirements. Adherence to appropriate fire code occupancy as outlined above and depending on current re-opening phase.

- Seating must be positioned to maintain at least 6-foot distance from all other seats and any high foot traffic areas (e.g. routes to bathroom, entrances, exits)
  - The size of a party seated at a table cannot exceed 6 people
  - 66" Round Table: 3 people
  - 72" Round Table: 4 people
  - 6-foot schoolroom table - 1 person
  - 8-foot schoolroom table - 2 people
  - Theatre style: minimum 6 feet between chairs (on all sides)

## SOCIAL DISTANCING SET UP CONTINUED

- Establish directional hallways and passageways for foot traffic if possible, to minimize contact (e.g. one-way entrance and exit to meeting and event space). Post clearly visible signage regarding these policies.
- Prohibit lingering in common area (e.g. bathrooms) and ensure social distancing in common areas by marking 6 feet spacing with tape or paint on the floor and signage
- Bathroom capacities should be a posted occupancy with social distancing parameters incorporated and if needed monitored by the hotel for capacity
- Improve ventilation for enclosed spaces where possible (e.g. open doors and windows). Property based HVAC system details available upon request.

## MEETING AMENITIES

- Pens and writing pads available upon request
- Sanitize pens before and after each meeting; individually packaged pens and writing pads are preferred
- Single use items whenever available

## HOTEL STAFFING & OPERATIONS

The Proposed Guidelines for Private Meetings, Events and Gatherings in Hotels follows the industry guidance developed by the state of Massachusetts, which is based upon Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Massachusetts Department of Health (MADH) guidelines for COVID-19, Massachusetts Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MAOSHA) statutes, rules and standards.

- All hotel staff will always wear face coverings
- All hotel staff must wash their hands frequently and servers must wash their hands or apply hand sanitizer between each table interaction
- Stagger work schedules and staff meal and break times, for hotel staff and vendors, regulating maximum number of people in one place and ensuring at least 6 feet of physical distancing
- All customer-facing workers (e.g. servers, houseman) must minimize time spent within 6 feet of customers
- Servers should avoid touching items on tables while customers are seated to the extent possible and dedicated staff should remove all items from the table when customers leave.
- Designate assigned working areas for hotel employees where possible to limit movement throughout the meeting and event space and limit contact between hotel employees (e.g. assigning zones to servers)

## HOTEL STAFFING & OPERATIONS CONTINUED

- Supply hotel employees at workplace location with adequate cleaning products (e.g. sanitizer, disinfecting wipes)
- Provide training to hotel employees, which may vary based upon brand, on up-to-date safety information and precautions including hygiene and other measures aimed at reducing disease transmission, including:
  - Social distancing, handwashing, and requirement and proper use of face coverings
  - Modifying practices for serving to minimize time spent within 6 feet of customers
  - Self-screening at home including temperature or symptom check
  - Reinforcing that staff may not come to work if sick
  - When to seek medical attention if symptoms become severe
  - Which underlying health conditions may make individuals more susceptible to contracting and suffering from a severe case of the virus
- Limit visitors and vendors on site; shipping and deliveries should be completed in designated areas
- Ensure hotel employees do not share equipment to the extent possible (e.g., cooking equipment, trays, etc.)
- Verify that dishwashing machines are operating at the required wash, rinse and sanitize temperatures and with appropriate detergents and sanitizers.
- Follow all requirements of the Department of Agriculture's Food Code regulations, even when altering from normal types of food delivery.
- Close or reconfigure hotel employees common spaces and high density areas where hotel employees are likely to congregate (e.g. break rooms, eating areas) to allow 6 feet of physical distancing; redesign work stations to ensure physical distancing (e.g. separate tables, stagger workstations on either side of processing lines so hotel employees are not face-to-face, use distance markers to assure spacing including in the kitchen area)
- Meeting and Event facilities must screen workers at each shift by ensuring the following:
  - Hotel employee is not experiencing any symptoms such as a fever (100.4 and above), cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat.
  - Hotel employee has not had 'close contact' with an individual diagnosed with COVID-19. 'Close contact' means living in the same household as a person who had tested positive for COVID-19, caring for a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, being within 6 feet of a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more, or coming in direct contact with secretions (e.g. sharing utensils, being coughed on) from a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, while that person was symptomatic
  - Hotel employee has not been asked to self-isolate or quarantine by their doctor or a local public health official
  - Hotel employees who are sick or feeling ill must be sent home
  - Anyone showing signs of illness may be denied entry

## HOTEL STAFFING & OPERATIONS CONTINUED

- Strongly encourage hotel employees who test positive for COVID-19 to disclose to the employer for purposes of cleaning/disinfecting and contact tracing. If the employer is notified of a positive case at the workplace, the employer should notify the local Board of Health (LBOGH) where the workplace is located and work with them to trace likely contacts in the workplace and advise workers to isolate and self-quarantine
- Notify hotel employees that they may not work if they test positive for COVID-19 (they should be isolated at home) or are found to be a close contact of someone with COVID-19 (they should be quarantined at home)
- Testing of other staff may be recommended consistent with guidance and / or at the request of the LBOH. Post notice to workers and customers of important health information and relevant safety measures as outlined in government guidelines
- Post notice to workers and customers of important health information and relevant safety measures as outlined in the Commonwealth's Mandatory Safety Standards for Workplace
- Hotel employees who are particularly high risk to COVID-19 according to the Centers for Disease Control (e.g. due to age or underlying conditions) are encouraged to stay home or arrange an alternate work assignment
- Hotel employees are strongly encouraged to self-identify symptoms or any close contact to a known or suspected COVID-19 case to the employer

## OVERALL HYGIENE PROTOCOLS

- Ensure access to handwashing facilities on site, including soap and running water, and allow sufficient break time for workers to wash hands frequently: alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol may be used as an alternative
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol should be made available at entrances, exits and in meeting and event space
- Post visible signage throughout the site to remind workers and attendees of hygiene and safety protocols
- Self-serve, unattended buffets, topping bars, drink stations and other communal serving areas must remain closed
- Condiment and similar products (e.g. salt, pepper, and salad dressing) should not be pre-set on tables and should instead only be provided upon request either in single-serving portions (e.g. individual packages or cups) or in serving containers that are sanitized between each use
- Utensils and place settings must be either single-use or sanitized after each use; utensils should be rolled or packaged. Tables should not be pre-set to reduce opportunity for exposure
- Tables and chairs must be cleaned and sanitized at the end of each meeting or event (end of the day)

## CLEANING & DISINFECTING

- Clean commonly touched surfaces in restrooms (e.g. toilet seats, doorknobs, stall handles, sinks, paper towel dispensers, soap dispensers) frequently and in accordance with CDC Guidelines
- Keep cleaning logs that include date, time and scope of cleaning
- Conduct frequent disinfecting of heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, elevator buttons, staircases)
- Implement procedures to increase cleaning/disinfecting in the back-of-house. Avoid all food contact surfaces when using disinfectants. Food contact surfaces must be cleaned and sanitized before use with a sanitizer approved for food contact surfaces. Non-food contact surfaces must be frequently cleaned
- Each property will adhere to their own brand standards regarding increased frequency of cleaning and disinfecting for both front and back of house with EPA registered chemicals proven effective in preventing the transmission of COVID-19.
- All furniture and equipment inside meeting room sanitized before and after every meeting or event



## BOSTON LODGING MARKET RECOVERY

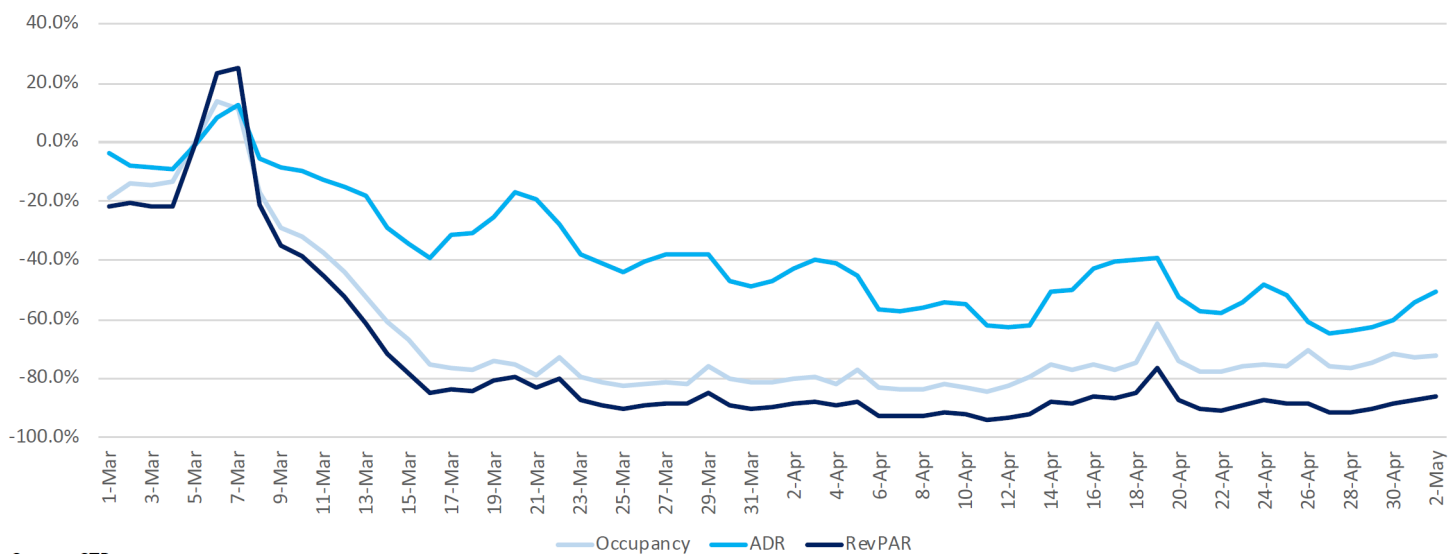
Why will the recovery be slow?

- 40% of the convention room nights were cancelled as of April 21; potentially more to follow. Convention and group demand in the City accounts for approximately 30% of total lodging demand.
- International travel accounts for about 18%-20% of lodging demand in the City. International visitation will be significantly reduced in 2020.
- Our world renowned medical facilities drive significant lodging demand. These facilities are taking care of Covid 19 patients, and not providing the services that bring visitors with medical needs to the City.
- MIT, Harvard, and other institutes for higher education generate meaningful lodging to the City – there is still uncertainty regarding how these schools will re-open in the fall; distance learning or back to campus.
- Major events – the Boston marathon, the Red Sox, major concerts, July 4th at the Hatch Shell, etc. have been cancelled or postponed for 2020. The events bring in lots of visitors to the City.
- That leaves corporate and leisure demand. Massachusetts was hit hard from the virus with delayed re-opening. This factor, coupled with a challenged economy will substantially impact lodging demand in 2020, with an anticipated slow recovery in 2021.

\*Information from Pinnacle Advisory Group

## Boston MSA Lodging Market

Daily Performance, % Change YOY  
March 1 to May 2, 2020



Source: STR

\*Information from Pinnacle Advisory Group

