

COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Government Engagement with Citizens

Background

- The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected communities around the world, leading to fear of illness, lost wages or employment, food shortages, and mental health challenges.¹ In the United States, a survey of several thousand individuals revealed common health, financial, and social concerns.²
- This document discusses the methods through which jurisdictions have been assessing constituent needs to inform response efforts and identify relevant pieces of information to share with their communities.
- The following is a list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing COVID-19 operations across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute and should not be considered as guidance in any way.³

Key Considerations

- Many state and local governments have consolidated COVID-19 updates, resources, and help request forms on their webpages for convenient access. To ensure accessibility across all communities, some sites include language translations and phone numbers to call for further assistance in navigating the resources.
- Governments can use different survey methods, such as online forms, phone calls, and virtual town halls to assess constituent needs to better formulate outreach and response plans.

Lessons Learned Related to Supporting Individual and Family Needs

Information Hubs

- **Potential Best Practice:** Many state and local governments have created online resource hubs for their constituents to easily access COVID-19 updates and resources.
 - The Office of the Governor of Louisiana has a COVID-19 Resources [webpage](#) to address concerns related to food insecurity, health insurance, unemployment, and other challenges. The page also provides a

¹ 2020 Statista, Main Worries or Concerns About the COVID-19 / coronavirus pandemic in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and China 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1107986/main-worries-and-concerns-about-the-covid-19-corona-pandemic/>

² 2020 JAMA, US Public Concerns About the COVID-19 Pandemic From Results of a Survey Given via Social Media, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2764368>

³ This document contains references and links to non-federal resources and organizations. This information is meant solely for informational purposes and is not intended to be an endorsement of any non-federal entity by FEMA, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, or the U.S. government.



FEMA

state COVID-19 hotline for mental health and substance abuse counseling services and links to a [website](#) where volunteers can sign up to participate in Louisiana’s response efforts.

- The Office of the Mayor of Seattle’s COVID-19 Resources for the Community [webpage](#) offers six language translations (i.e., Amharic, Chinese, Korean, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese) for representation among constituents and features a variety of topics, including healthcare and hygiene, immigrant community support, childcare and education, and domestic violence.
- South Carolina developed a [website](#) that consolidates updates and information relating to COVID-19 response and reopening, organized by topics: Citizen Information (e.g., food assistance, testing sites, employment opportunities), State Response (for challenges that impact the state’s workforce), Protection (for reopening and long-term mitigation), Governance (for state and local challenges in economic revitalization), and Resources (for guidance on federal assistance funds). There is also a section for spotlighting businesses.
- **Potential Best Practice:** In Maryland, the Governor’s Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing has posted COVID-19 American Sign Language (ASL) video updates of press conferences, as well as answers to frequently asked questions through ASL videos, on their [website](#).⁴

Requests for Assistance

- **Potential Best Practice:** An online request form helps officials directly assess the needs of their constituents. These forms may also feature helpline phone numbers to increase accessibility for individuals who lack reliable internet or need assistance navigating the webpage.
 - The District of Columbia provides its residents with an online COVID-19 Support Hub, where individuals can complete a form requesting assistance in procuring food, hygiene and pediatric products, and necessary prescription medications. The [webpage](#) provides a phone number to call for those who need help completing the online form.
 - In New York City, residents can create an online account to request food delivery assistance if they indicate they are unable to obtain food for medical, physical, or financial reasons. Orders are delivered within three days of the order date and each delivery contains three days of food with a limit of 18 meals per delivery. Residents can also call 3-1-1 for help navigating the [webpage](#).

Surveying Constituents

- **Potential Best Practice:** Round Rock, Texas, has surveyed over 1,200 residents about their households’ main concerns, how residents have assisted others in their communities, and what kind of information residents find most helpful for the local government to share. The results of the survey are published on the city’s [website](#), and the city has also included “What we heard” and “What we’re doing” sections in response to highlighted concerns.
- **Potential Best Practice:** The Kaua’i, Hawaii, District Health Office (KDHO) conducted door-to-door and phone Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response survey to understand the impact of COVID-19 on households in Kaua’i. Data will be used to meet immediate needs of families.⁵

⁴ 2020 Maryland: The Governor’s Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak, <https://odhh.maryland.gov/coronavirus/>.

⁵ 2020 State of Hawaii Department of Health, Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on Kauai Households, <https://health.hawaii.gov/kauai/files/2020/04/Kauai-COVID-19-CASPER-Preliminary-Report.pdf>

- Survey teams used adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and practice social distancing when conducting household surveys.
- Teams surveyed households about their knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to the pandemic, as well as the financial and mental impact of COVID-19.
- **Strength:** A research firm has offered free survey [tools and tips](#) for local governments to engage with communities to better adapt outreach and response based on community needs.⁶

Virtual Town Halls

- **Potential Best Practice:** Many cities have held virtual town halls for communities to learn about the resources and assistance available for residents during the pandemic.
 - Olympia City Council in Washington State hosted a series of weekly virtual town hall meetings to discuss financial resources for individuals and local businesses, housing and homeless services, and rental and mortgage relief. During the meetings, the public submitted questions in real time through a moderator.⁷
 - In Austin, Texas, the COVID-19 Response Alliance Virtual Town Hall Meeting focused on a discussion of community needs, e.g., health, employment, mobility, internet connection, and an interactive workshop where participants collaborated to match existing resources with rapidly developing needs.⁸

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov.

⁶ 2020 NRC, Coronavirus: Free Survey Tools for Critical Local Government Response, <https://www.n-r-c.com/coronavirus-local-government-response-survey-questions/>

⁷ 2020 City of Olympia, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information, <http://olympiawa.gov/news-and-faq-s/covid-19-info.aspx>

⁸ 2020 Austin Technology Council, Austin COVID-19 Response Alliance: Virtual Town Hall Meeting, <https://www.austintechnologycouncil.org/event/austin-covid-19-response-alliance-virtual-town-hall-meeting/>