

# COVID-19 Community Innovation Stories, Week of June 22, 2020

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In the face of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the country is seeing innovations in communities that highlight the best of human ingenuity. We highlight these stories to show how many are helping those around them, and prompt everyone to think about how they can help others.<sup>1</sup>

## Building Employee Skillsets

A community college in Indiana partnered with technical skill development companies to offer free online classes to help unemployed or furloughed residents gain new skills in relevant sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as manufacturing, business, and cybersecurity. Students can work at their own pace making the courses more accessible.<sup>2</sup>

## Employee Well-Being

As the line between the beginning and end of workdays becomes blurred for many teleworkers, a travel company gathered information about whether employees are overworked or distracted by constant chat or email messaging throughout the day. To gauge the well-being of their employees, the company surveyed employees about their productivity at home, held town halls, and launched tools for two-way communication between employees and company leadership during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

## Migrant Worker Protection

In Quebec, Canada, a vegetable farm hired a private nurse to conduct daily checks on migrant workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 and are in isolation. To contain the outbreak among workers, leadership reorganized

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 2020 Government Technology, Indiana Community College Offers Free Classes to Residents, <https://www.govtech.com/education/higher-ed/Indiana-Community-College-Offers-Free-Classes-to-Residents.html>

<sup>3</sup> 2020 Everbridge Coronavirus: The Road to Recovery Symposium, Human Resources: The Pandemic Response and the Future of the Workplace, TripAdvisor



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the farm into hot, neutral, and cold zones, modeled after hospitals and long-term care homes. The farm has arranged for the arrival of a public health mobile unit to test workers for potential exposure.<sup>4</sup>

## Addressing Health Disparities

### Data-Driven Resource Allocations

Black physicians in Florida engaged with the media to present [COVID-19 racial data](#) highlighting disproportionate effects of the disease on minority communities. As a result, these efforts gained support for opening more walk-up test sites in African American communities throughout the state and the expansion of testing eligibility criteria.<sup>5</sup>

### Information Access in Underserved Communities

In Annapolis, Maryland, residents created a social media support group called [“Se Fuerte Annapolis”](#) to help Spanish-speaking communities connect with COVID-19 information and resources. Additionally, the county health department created videos featuring trusted county and church leaders to address literacy barriers and increase the accessibility of information for the immigrant community.<sup>6</sup>

### Public Messaging in Underserved Communities

In New York City, artists and graphic designers created and donated dozens of COVID-19 posters to residential buildings in underserved communities, including senior residences. The posters communicate safety measures (e.g., wearing masks, washing hands, and practicing social distancing) through colorful, relatable, and upbeat messaging. These efforts were replicated across the U.S. For example, in Oklahoma, brochures geared toward the Cherokee Nation framed exercising COVID-19 precautions as an act of respect and protection for elders and the community. In Washington, D.C., similar brochures and posters were distributed in bags of free groceries within public housing communities.<sup>7</sup>

## Information Access for Public Transit and Testing Locations

A web mapping service expanded its current features to provide the public with information about COVID-19-related restrictions, disruptions, or schedule changes for public transit. Alerts can identify potential COVID-19-related

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<sup>4</sup> 2020 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Montérégie farm struggles to contain COVID outbreak among migrant workers, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/foreign-workers-farm-infected-covid-19-1.5607320>

<sup>5</sup> 2020 Public News Service, Task Force Seeks to Address Racial Health Disparities Amid COVID-19, <https://www.publicnewsservice.org/2020-05-14/social-justice/task-force-seeks-to-address-racial-health-disparities-amid-covid-19/a70201-1>

<sup>6</sup> 2020 Capital Gazette, Sick, scared and stranded: Vulnerable Hispanic immigrants in Annapolis battle coronavirus with few social supports, <https://www.capitalgazette.com/coronavirus/ac-cn-coronavirus-latino-hispanic-community-annapolis-20200612-33i6hmdifzamdbesbfcq7bq4u-story.html>

<sup>7</sup> 2020 U.S. News, Designed to Save Lives: Artists Craft Coronavirus Messaging for Underserved Communities, <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2020-06-11/artists-help-craft-coronavirus-messaging-for-minority-communities>

checkpoints along a highway. The service plans to incorporate information about eligibility for COVID-19 testing locations, displaying whether reservations are required or whether sites perform a limited number of tests per day.<sup>8</sup>

## Expanding Meal Distribution Services

The international humanitarian agency [CARE](#) reinvented its [CARE Packages](#), which provide monetary assistance or meals and essential supplies. CARE delivered 175,000 packages with meals to families in the Bronx and Harlem in New York, marking the first time the agency delivered domestic relief since its founding. In partnership with the [National Action Network and other service organizations](#), CARE has also created employment opportunities in aid distribution for workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>9,10</sup>

## Utility Company Preparations for Natural Hazards

### Monitoring Employee Health

Electric utility companies prepared to keep employees at staging areas safe during the hurricane season through continuous employee testing. A power company in Florida staffed medical personnel at daily operations and storm response sites to monitor crews.<sup>11</sup>

### Social Distancing At Worker Lodging

A major energy company will reduce the size of base camps that lodge workers into multiple smaller staging areas. Instead of the typical buffet-style meal accommodations, Meals will be boxed and distributed so that workers can practice social distancing while eating. Workers may also receive meals from curbside or delivery services from local restaurants.<sup>11</sup>

### Social Distancing During Operations

Utility damage assessors, who usually travel together in two-person crews, are operating with one person in a vehicle and another working remotely to document findings. One utility company in Jacksonville, Florida deploys trucks from the homes of utility workers, rather than having workers coming into the office to receive deployment assignments.<sup>11</sup>

## Remote Assessments and Inspections

### Natural Hazard Damage Assessment

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<sup>8</sup> 2020 Government Technology, Google Maps Will Soon Show Pertinent COVID-19 Alerts,

<https://www.govtech.com/analytics/Google-Maps-Will-Soon-Show-Pertinent-COVID-19-Alerts.html>

<sup>9</sup> 2020 National Action Network, NAN Distributes 65,000 Meals in Harlem & the Bronx with CARE and Hutchins Family Foundation, <https://nationalactionnetwork.net/newnews/nan-distributes-65000-meals-in-harlem-the-bronx-with-care-and-hutchins-family-foundation/>

<sup>10</sup> 2020 CARE, Five Ways You Can Help, <https://www.carepackage.org/>

<sup>11</sup> 2020 Utility Dive, When storms collide: Utilities' new approach to hurricane restoration in the age of COVID-19, <https://www.utilitydive.com/news/when-storms-collide-utilities-new-approach-to-hurricane-restoration-in-th/578976/>

## COVID-19 Response: Community Innovation Stories

To prepare for conducting post-disaster damage assessments, a power company in Florida installed two unmanned drones in structures that can withstand winds of up to 150 mph. The power company pre-programmed drones assess equipment two miles beyond an operator's line of sight.<sup>11</sup>

### Natural Hazard Preparation Assessment

The Los Angeles Fire Department recently announced that it will begin using drones to conduct brush clearance compliance checks on residential areas to allow inspectors to maintain social distancing. The drone pilot will follow predetermined flight paths to avoid privacy violations. If drone imaging reveals brush has not been cleared at a residence, the department will proceed with onsite inspections.<sup>12</sup>

### Restaurant Health Inspection

To manage limited resources and address safety concerns from health inspectors, local health agencies in Virginia have been prioritizing in-person inspections for restaurants that have a greater number of risk factors or an older customer demographic. For lower priority establishments, inspectors conduct “temporary inspections” by calling restaurant owners with questions about their operations and educating them about new COVID-19 safety protocols. Local health agencies have also conducted inspections via video calls, where possible.<sup>13</sup>

## Adapting Hospital Operations for Patient and Employee Safety

### Interior Redesign

To promote social distancing and minimize contact between COVID-19 positive patients and healthy individuals, hospitals have removed furniture in lobbies and hallways and established separate COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 pathways inside the hospital.<sup>14,15</sup>

### Remote Health Assessment

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Houston Methodist Hospital increased its remote surge capacity by setting up 128 beds as virtual intensive care units that provide a high-resolution full 360-degree view of patients in their rooms. As a result, healthcare workers were able to monitor patients without actually entering the room. Nurses staff the hospital's virtual command center 24/7.<sup>14</sup>

### Automation and Artificial Intelligence to Support Operations

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<sup>12</sup> 2020 KTLA 5, LAFD using drones to determine brush clearance compliance amid coronavirus pandemic, <https://ktla.com/news/lafd-using-drones-to-determine-brush-clearance-compliance-amid-coronavirus-pandemic/>

<sup>13</sup> 2020 Government Technology, Virtual Health Inspections Another Facet of Pandemic Life, <https://www.govtech.com/health/Virtual-Health-Inspections-Another-Facet-of-Pandemic-Life.html>

<sup>14</sup> 2020 Everbridge Coronavirus: The Road to Recovery Symposium, Road to Recovery for Health Systems: An Executive Perspective, Houston Methodist Hospital

<sup>15</sup> 2020 Community Impact Newspaper, Sugar Land, Missouri City medical providers innovate in response to ongoing coronavirus pandemic, <https://communityimpact.com/houston/sugar-land-missouri-city/health-care/2020/05/22/sugar-land-missouri-city-medical-providers-innovate-in-response-to-ongoing-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Learn more at [fema.gov/coronavirus/best-practices](https://fema.gov/coronavirus/best-practices)

## COVID-19 Response: Community Innovation Stories

Houston Methodist Hospital has implemented various technologies to support both patients and employees. These include an artificial intelligence-powered symptom checker to triage those who may have COVID-19 concerns; an automated system to sample employees for COVID-19 surveillance; and chat bots to operate phone lines for recruiting appropriate donors for COVID-19 therapy trials.<sup>14</sup>

## FEMA's Best Practice Initiative

There are extraordinary efforts nationwide to support personnel and resource needs to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. FEMA is working to highlight these efforts and encourage everyone to think about what they can do to be a part of providing solutions to help. Visit <https://www.fema.gov/coronavirus/best-practices> for more information.

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](mailto:fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov).

For more information on how to help during COVID-19, visit [FEMA's website for information on donations and volunteering](#).

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