

FLORIDA LEAGUE OF CITIES

# COVID-19 Leading from the Front

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## FRONT COVER, CLOCKWISE FROM THE TOP:

**Parkland.** City Manager Nancy Morando reads *The City That Talks* during a virtual storytime.

**Tampa.** The city creates motivational street art to encourage social distancing.

**St. Augustine.** A mask adorns the iconic Menendez statue in front of City Hall.

## AT LEFT:

- 1. **Margate and Coconut Creek.** Margate-Coconut Creek Fire Rescue and Margate Police Department recognize Northwest Medical Center healthcare heroes.
- 2. **Ocoee.** A somber sign of the times greets visitors to City Hall.
- 3. **Wauchula.** Lineman Jacob Bateman encourages residents to stay a safe distance from utility workers.
- 4. **Tequesta.** The village held an Easter Bunny Drive-Thru at Village Hall.
- 5. **Winter Park.** Parks and Recreation team delivers care packages to senior program attendees at the city's community center.
- 6. **Sanford.** Park Division staff make good use of a city pet bandana promotional item.

# The Front Lines of the Pandemic

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Florida municipal officials have remained committed to providing unwavering leadership during this difficult time. On behalf of the Florida League of Cities, I want to thank you for your hard work and dedication.

City officials have faced a multitude of challenges, at city hall and at home. Many of us have staff members, friends or family members who became ill with coronavirus. Some of you have fought the illness yourself and may have lost someone dear to you. My region of the state, South Florida, has been hard hit by the pandemic. I see the pain and the struggles, but I also see the promise of a bright future.

We have adjusted to closed facilities, a home office and government meetings held online. Through the difficulties, worry and grief, you have continued providing the services that are essential for our residents. Now, as some areas are slowly reopening, we will face new challenges.

This publication includes a variety of topics that we hope will assist you as we continue the fight. Articles include taking care for ourselves while we are caring for others, best practices and resources for cleaning facilities, funding options to assist our members, and challenges and solutions for online meetings.

The outreach and engagement provided by cities across Florida to their residents and local frontline workers has shown innovation and a deep sense of concern for those we serve. We have shared some of those efforts in this publication, but we know there are hundreds and hundreds more.

Just as we have in the past, we will get through this time, together. Do not hesitate to reach out to us at the League if we can assist you in any way. And, be sure to check out the League's online [coronavirus resources](#) as we continue to update information on the virus and its impact on the Sunshine State.



**Isaac Salver**  
President, Florida League of Cities  
Council Member,  
Town of Bay Harbor Islands



A woman with dark curly hair is sitting cross-legged on a purple couch, meditating with her eyes closed and hands in a mudra. In the foreground, a young child with curly hair is lying on the floor, focused on drawing with a blue marker. The background shows a bright, modern living room with large windows and a white cabinet.

WELLNESS

# Good Mental Health

Stress is normal, but there are ways to keep worries in perspective

by **Scott Paine**  
**Florida League of Cities**  
with  
**Glenn Smith**  
**Veterans Administration**

**T**he novel coronavirus pandemic has driven dramatic and unprecedented change in all of our lives. While most Americans now recognize the critical and complex role of medical professionals and first responders in dealing with the disease, many are less aware of the wider range of essential services municipalities provide that have their own new challenges and risks. But municipal leaders and municipal employees understand them all too well.

Cities throughout the country are working every day to meet the significant and evolving needs of their residents and businesses. The uniqueness, complexity and severity of the challenges we face, combined with the personal concerns we have in common with every other American, can put enormous strain on public servants, physically, mentally and emotionally.

To gain some perspective and secure some advice about how we best can care for ourselves while caring for our communities, we reached out to **Glenn Smith, Ph.D.**, a **licensed clinical psychologist** with over 30 years of experience dealing with patients who have experienced substantial trauma. He works as **community programs section chief in the Mental Health/Behavior Sciences Service of the Veterans Administration** in Tampa.

We asked Smith if he could apply his experience with trauma patients to the experiences we are facing due to the pandemic. This is what he shared with us:

First, mental health reactions to the COVID-19 crisis are normal. This pandemic has precipitated a time of unprecedented, heightened stress. Additionally, the nature of this crisis has robbed us of many of the ways that we typically manage stress. Common reactions, some of which can be pretty strong, include increased feelings of tension or worry, sadness, heightened irritability, sleep disturbance, lowered energy level, lack of motivation and appetite loss.

Let me say again that these sorts of reactions are common and even normal in the face of such stress. Our bodies have a normal response to stress as a part of the way we're built to survive. Let me explain.

The body has two interrelated but distinct nervous systems: sympathetic and parasympathetic.

The sympathetic nervous system is the one that gets activated during times of perceived threat, like being chased by a dog. The body reacts by increasing heart rate, raising blood pressure, increasing respiration and releasing hormones. At the same time, it shuts off activities such as digestion. This step gives the body more of what it needs to fight or flee – to protect itself – and not waste energy on activities such as digesting lunch. Makes perfect sense, in the short-term, because either we get away from the dog ... or we get bit.

When the crisis ends, the parasympathetic system does a reset and restores the body's function to normal.

For municipal leaders and employees, who must meet the rapidly evolving needs of their communities, the threat isn't over in a matter of minutes. It's been going on for weeks. The body running for such a long period at a heightened state of alert ... of threat ... will have consequences. That's why there is the tension, nervousness, sleep problems and appetite disturbance.

But in addition to the purely physiologic impact of the crisis, there is an added cognitive impact. At the heart of this impact is the issue of control.

I imagine that people responsible for providing municipal public services are used to being able to control the situation or else used to having clear guidance about what they are to do. Right now, they probably feel that they have very little control and very uncertain guidance. Who can blame them? Protecting ourselves and our communities against the coronavirus feels like something "out of control." Moreover, we can't predict or control when this threat will end. In the case of a hurricane, at least one knows that it will be over in a matter of hours. With the pandemic, the duration is uncertain.

In addition to the physiologic and cognitive impact, there is one final feature I want to highlight: coping. For many of us, the COVID-19 crisis has robbed us of many of the strategies that we might otherwise tap to manage stress or anxiety in our lives. We can't go to the gym, distract ourselves by going to dinner or even socialize with friends. We may feel isolated, cut off.

This may seem like a bleak picture, but it's not without hope. There even may be some ultimate positive effects.

Let's take these points one by one and explore the avenues for maintaining our mental health.

## COPING STRATEGIES FOR RELIEVING STRESS

- ▶ **Change of location.** You may not be able to go to the mall, but you can spend time in nature. This can improve attention and emotional regulation as well as reduce feelings of stress.
- ▶ **Social support.** You may not be able to meet with your friend at the gym, but you can socialize with others through social media, sharing a cup of coffee over a video chat. This time can offer the opportunity to vent our emotional concerns and reduce isolation. This action positively impacts stress.
- ▶ **Recreational activities.** Your exercise venue may have to change, but the benefits will be just as real. Consider activities such as yoga, mindfulness breathing and other breathing/relaxation techniques. These can be helpful in “re-creating” your mindset. Virtual visits to places such as museums are possible and stress-relieving, too.
- ▶ **Altruistic endeavors.** The ability to reach out and do for others makes us feel calmer and more in control. Some organizations are using virtual meetings to allow individuals to offer support to each other.
- ▶ **Establish a routine.** As human beings, we are creatures of habit. Establishing a new routine may be necessary but very important for that feeling of control. Plan a consistent time to eat, go to bed, etc.
- ▶ **Stay busy.** Too much free time can unwittingly lead to thoughts that are less constructive. This may be a great time to read a book, take advantage of online training, tackle a home project, play games, maybe even binge watch that series everyone says we should see.
- ▶ **Remember humor.** Humor and laughter are very powerful means of coping, because humor counters sadness, anxiety and fear. Give yourself permission to explore social media for humorous videos and memes or to watch your favorite sitcom.

**First, recognize that the reactions we may be having are typical and “normal.”** Validating our reactions may seem inconsequential, but it can ease the sometimes automatic thought that “I’m crazy for feeling this way.”

**Second, taking physical care of ourselves is going to take on even greater significance.** We need to pay attention to our bodily needs in terms of rest, exercise and sleep. Sleep may be more disturbed, both by the irregular hours people may be working and by stress, but supplementing relaxation strategies may enhance it.

The point is that our bodies are feeling under threat, running from the dog. We need to relax because the sense of persistent threat is draining on the body and also to be able to challenge any sort of negative thoughts regarding control. We should be purposeful in these physical efforts, doing them in small ways throughout the day.

**Third, I’d suggest paying attention to our thinking.** While it is true that there are many things about the COVID crisis over which we don’t have control, that doesn’t mean we have no control. There are challenges residents and businesses are facing that cities can address. More personally, we can socially distance. We can wear masks. We can care for ourselves. We can get out of the house within certain parameters. The idea is to focus on what we can control, not what we can’t.

Part of this involves challenging some of our thinking patterns. Pay attention to keywords in our thoughts and comments like “always” and “never.” Often these indicate that we are focusing on the problem (e.g., “this situation will never get any better”) rather than how we handle it (e.g., “there are some things that I can do”).

Acknowledging the feelings that we are having is important for our thinking. It allows us to own our emotions rather than avoid them. Naming them affords us some measure of control and limits the tendency to go down a path of thinking in more negative terms.

The phrase “new normal” has been used quite a bit in terms of the COVID crisis. This may also apply to the way we revise our coping strategies. We should look at what has worked for us in the past to manage stress and anxiety and modify it as needed in response to present conditions. (See sidebar, left.)

Just as it is important to know how to cope, it is also good to consider some things to avoid. I suggest:

- ▶ **Limit the time spent watching the news.** Staying informed is important, but this need has to be balanced against being needlessly provoked.
- ▶ **Choose wisely your sources of information.** Some sources may be more provocative by intention.
- ▶ **Avoid abuse of substances.**

Care for those around us is yet another important avenue for fostering our mental health. Helping others can be a source of coping for ourselves, something municipal employees are in a unique position to do. Beyond the municipal services people may need, however, we may want to ask, how can I best help meet some of the mental health needs of the residents I serve and of my colleagues, my family and my friends?

Probably the most important single thing that we can do is simply to be present to them. Even virtual contact online can have a powerful impact. Also, actively listening, validating their reactions to things is very important. Remember that we are not there to fix the negative emotions or reactions that they may be having. Those emotions and reactions are normal.

It is OK to feel this way; it's also important to express it. "Better out than in" is an adage that applies. Bringing out underlying feelings and even expressing them through tears is curative.

Of course, if the person we're interacting with has more serious symptoms (e.g., thoughts of harm to self or others) or the symptoms persist, it is best to contact a professional. Resources such as a crisis center or 211 can help.

Finally, I want to say a word about the potential benefit of weathering the COVID crisis. Is there any good that can

come from it? I would have to say that the answer to that question is yes.

I've had the privilege of working with many trauma survivors, including combat veterans. On the face of it, it can be difficult to imagine any good resulting from their trauma. And yet, most have told me that even amid so much horror, they also have experienced a renewed sense of their core values. Things such as honor, duty and comradeship are no longer words. To some degree, I think the present crisis can remind us of some of our core values.

A second positive that might come from this experience has to do with becoming stronger. I'm reminded of when I was a young boy growing up on a working farm. One day a part of the tractor snapped in two. I was upset knowing that I would have to explain to my father how it happened. Fortunately, my grandfather intervened. He took me and the part to the machine shop and welded the two pieces back together.

You would think that I'd be relieved, but I wasn't. When my grandfather asked me why, I told him that I thought that even though he'd welded it, it would forever be weaker ... it would break again. He just smiled and said, "Son, don't you know that when a broken piece is welded back together, it is stronger than it was before?"

I believe this is true of people, too.

Glenn Smith, Ph.D., is community programs section chief in the Mental Health/Behavior Sciences Service of the Veterans Administration in Tampa.

Scott Paine, Ph.D., is director of leadership development and education for FLC University.

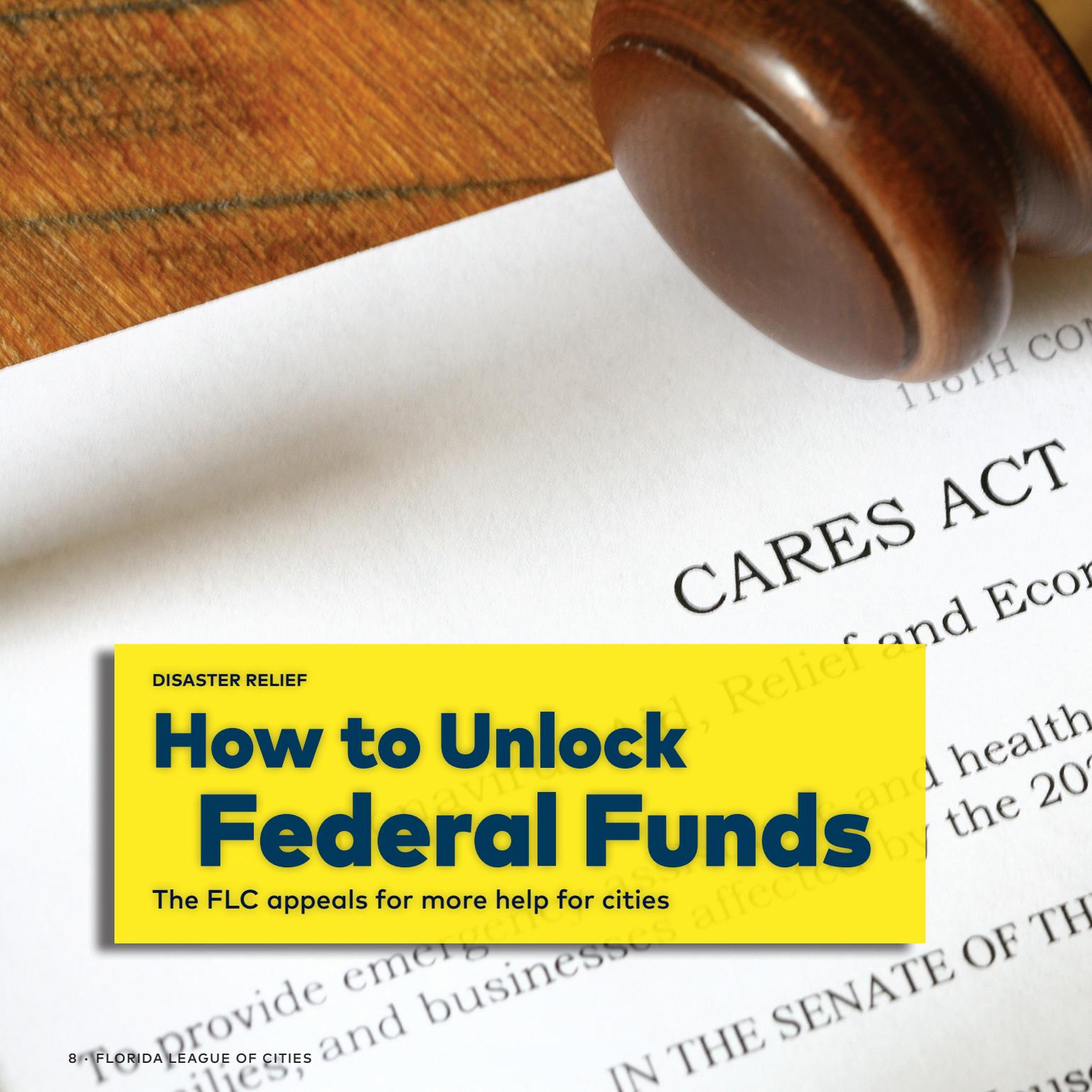
## MENTAL HEALTH TAKEAWAYS

Mental health reactions to the COVID-19 crisis are normal.

Common reactions include sadness, irritability, disturbed sleep, increased tension, less energy and lack of motivation.

Pay attention to what our body needs: rest, exercise and sleep, and focus on things you can control.

Acknowledging our feelings allows us to own, rather than avoid, our emotions.

A close-up photograph of a wooden gavel resting on a white document. The document is titled 'CARES ACT' and contains text related to disaster relief and economic recovery. The gavel is positioned diagonally across the top right of the frame. The background is a wooden surface.

DISASTER RELIEF

# How to Unlock Federal Funds

The FLC appeals for more help for cities



by Michele Cohen Marill

Cities are at the front lines of the COVID-19 response, mobilizing to protect first responders, create testing sites and support residents and businesses. It's a herculean task made more difficult by a shortfall of money and supplies. The **Florida League of Cities** is helping cities tap into existing resources while advocating for more federal and state funding so municipalities can continue working to keep communities safe.

The main relief bill – the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, passed by **Congress** and signed by **President Donald Trump** on March 27 – gives direct federal funding only to local governments of 500,000 or larger, which excludes all but one Florida city (Jacksonville) and 55 of the state's 67 counties. Congress added another infusion of money on April 24, but that money did not include direct relief for cities with populations under 500,000. CARES did boost a blend of other grant programs, which provide additional federal funds for transit, homeless assistance, public health needs, broadband infrastructure and other core functions.

Disaster management always relies on a partnership among federal, state and local governments, but ultimately the response is local, noted **William F. Crozer**, **White House special assistant to the president and deputy director of intergovernmental affairs**, in a conference call for Florida city leaders organized by the League. "We recognize COVID-19 impacts urban, rural and suburban communities alike, and our [emergency response] outreach reflects that," he said.

## HOW TO HELP SMALL BUSINESSES

Small businesses need a lifeline to help them survive closures and restrictions. Here are some resources you can share with them:

- ▶ [Small business loans.](#)
- ▶ [Express bridge loans.](#)
- ▶ [Paycheck Protection Program.](#)
- ▶ [U.S. Small Business Administration debt relief.](#)
- ▶ [Rural resource guide.](#)
- ▶ [Florida Department of Economic Opportunity resource list.](#)



PHOTO@GETTY IMAGES

The League is pushing for a funding formula that likewise addresses the needs of all municipalities. CARES designated about \$3.75 billion, or 45 percent of Florida's \$8.3 billion total allotment, for payments to local governments with a population of 500,000 or more. Because one city and few counties qualify in the state, the actual allocation to local governments totaled about \$2.5 billion, ranging from about \$1 billion for Miami-Dade County to almost \$215 million for Volusia County, the least populous county to receive direct funding.

The remaining \$1.275 billion reverts to the state, and the CARES Act does not require the states to give the funds to other cities and counties. It also doesn't require counties to share their funding with municipalities within their boundaries. The League, with the **Florida Association of Counties**, has asked **Governor Ron DeSantis** to pass on COVID funds to cities and counties below the 500,000 threshold. The League also is strongly advocating for more federal funding to help cover severe losses projected in sales tax and other revenue.

### 'DON'T LEAVE ANY STONE UNTURNED'

The CARES Act funds can be used only for necessary expenditures incurred due to response efforts, such as public safety and health activities, testing and personal protective equipment.

"The plain letter of the statute is that it can't be used for lost revenues," Crozer said.

The League asked **Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin** to provide as much flexibility as possible when defining the

eligible response activities. On April 22, the U.S. Treasury put out [guidelines](#) that include expenses related to food delivery for residents, improving telework capabilities for public employees and care for homeless populations to mitigate COVID-19 effects. The guidelines also included expenses associated with economic support, such as grants to small businesses, as a necessary expenditure.

Yet the CARES Act also beefed up some grant programs that offer broader reimbursement, although cities will have to navigate some bureaucratic hoops. The League is analyzing the funding language and will provide updates and links on its [website](#).

"Don't leave any stone unturned. There are a lot of pots of money in the CARES Act," advised **Amber Hughes, senior legislative advocate** for the League. "Make sure that if you meet the qualifications, you do your best to access that money."

One significant source, a \$2 billion supplement to Community Development Block Grants, is available to cities of 50,000 or more in metropolitan areas, as long as they spend 70% of the funds to benefit low- and moderate-income people (those earning up to 80% of the area's median income).

Current grant-holders will receive extra funds proportional to their FY2020 allocation, which they can use toward their COVID response, including constructing or repurposing buildings for clinics or testing facilities, purchasing supplies or providing testing or diagnosis. The secretary of the **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development** has

discretion to allocate another \$2 billion to state and local governments, including those that aren't current CDBG recipients. An explanation of the HUD COVID-19 response is available [online](#).

HUD also has an infusion of new money for homeless assistance grants: \$2 billion for existing grant-holders and \$2 billion for state and local governments, to be distributed through a formula still being developed.

## MAKING UP FOR LOSSES

Some grants compensate for losses due to COVID-19. For example, the **Federal Transit Administration** is providing \$22.7 billion to large and small urban areas and \$2.2 billion to rural areas, which can be used to maintain transit services and reimburse costs, such as lost revenue from making fares free and pay for transit employees placed on administrative leave during reduced operations. (For more information, [click here](#).) The FTA has extended deadlines for some existing grants and broadened rules to allow cities to use federal formula funds for emergency-related expenses, such as personal protective equipment.

CARES grants of about \$10 billion are available to support the continued operation of commercial and general aviation airports and recoup some lost revenue. Existing grants, such as the Airport Improvement Program, shift to full federal funding with no local match. (For more information, [click here](#).)

The **Justice Department** has \$850 million in extra money to dole out to state, local and tribal governments that received money from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance

Grant program in FY2019. Cities can apply for reimbursement for expenses related to COVID-19 that include overtime costs, personal protective equipment and inmates' medical care. (For more information, [click here](#).) The deadline for applications is May 29.

The **U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development** program has \$25 million more for Distance Learning and Telemedicine grants and \$100 million more for the ReConnect program that supports broadband infrastructure. (For more information, [click here](#).)

Local governments also can receive [reimbursement](#) for 75% of expenses related to emergency response from the **Federal Emergency Management Agency**, which also has \$100 million more for [Assistance to Firefighter Grants](#) to hire or protect emergency responders.

The **Florida Division of Emergency Management** is also providing COVID-related supplies and working with local emergency managers to adapt hurricane evacuation and shelter plans to accommodate social distancing and other COVID-19 protections, said **Executive Director Jared Moskowitz**. (For more information, see pages 27-29.)

The League advises cities to carefully document all COVID-related expenses and revenue losses, as well as the expenditures of grant funds. Meanwhile, the League continues to advocate for cities to receive more aid and provides up-to-date information as it becomes available.

"We are working around the clock to figure out what we can do to help on all fronts," said Hughes.

Michele Cohen Marill is a freelance writer.

## FEDERAL AND STATE ASSISTANCE TAKEAWAYS

The federal government has not included direct relief for cities with populations under 500,000. It has boosted other grant programs.

The Florida League of Cities is pushing for a funding formula that addresses the needs of all municipalities.

Carefully document all COVID-related expenses, revenue losses and the expenditures of grant funds.

Cities of 50,000-plus in metro areas can access a \$2 billion CDBG supplement if they spend 70 percent to benefit low- and moderate-income people.



SUNSHINE LAW

# Public Meetings Move Online

Virtual gatherings still must meet legal requirements



by **Rebecca O'Hara**  
**Florida League of Cities**

**F**lorida is known for its sunshine, both overhead and imbued in its open meetings laws.

The Florida Constitution provides that “all meetings of any collegial public body ... at which official acts are to be taken or at which public business is to be transacted or discussed, shall be open and noticed to the public.” Chapter 286, Florida Statutes, known as the “Government in the Sunshine Law,” implements this constitutional mandate and further provides:

- ▶ That all meetings of any board or commission of any state agency or local government shall be open to the public.
- ▶ Reasonable notice of such meetings shall be provided.
- ▶ The minutes of such meetings shall be promptly recorded.

Notably, neither the Florida Constitution nor Chapter 286 authorize or prohibit attendance at or the conduct of public meetings via remote electronic technology.

Over time the Florida attorney general has issued opinions construing Florida’s open meetings laws to require the physical presence of a quorum to hold a meeting at which official acts are to be taken. The attorney general has also opined that participation of a board member by remote electronic technology is permissible only in “extraordinary” circumstances when a quorum of board members is physically present at the meeting.

As the community spread of COVID-19 became a reality in Florida, it became apparent that governmental entities would have difficulty conducting public meetings following these requirements while adhering to state and federal public health directives on social distancing and public gatherings.

The **Florida League of Cities**, along with others, requested that **Governor Ron DeSantis** take emergency action to create an exemption that would allow local governments to hold meetings via remote technology and waive the necessity of a physical quorum.

## VIRTUAL MEETINGS

On March 20, the governor issued Executive Order 20-69 which suspends requirements that a quorum be physically present and that a local government body meet in a specific public place. It also authorizes local government bodies to use communications media technology (CMT) such as telephone and video conferencing.

Notably, the order does not waive any other requirement under the Florida Constitution and the Government in the Sunshine Law. The order was to be effective until May 8, 2020, but the governor recently extended it with Executive Order 20-112, which provides no expiration date.

The order does not specifically address whether it also applies to meetings of various boards and advisory bodies of a local government, although the use of the term “local government body” suggests that may have been the intent.

The order does not waive any quorum or other requirements that may be imposed by a local ordinance or charter.

While the authority granted by the order is broad, a public meeting conducted via CMT must still comply with the requirements of Chapter 286, including provision of reasonable public notice, a meeting that is open to the public, prompt recording of minutes and a “reasonable opportunity to be heard” to members of the public. A municipality should consult its municipal attorney for guidance on how to address these and other legal requirements.

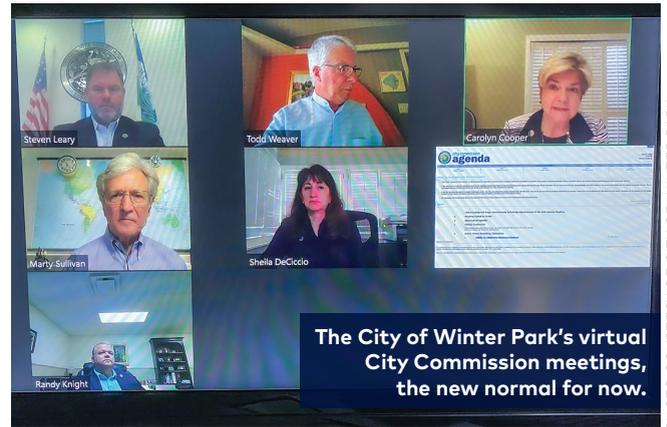
## TYPES OF MEETINGS COVERED

Numerous questions have arisen about the scope and application of the order. Many questions have been about the types of meetings covered.

The order does not differentiate between types of public meetings, so it potentially applies to all public meetings and not just meetings held for emergency purposes or COVID-19 issues.

What about quasi-judicial proceedings? A quasi-judicial proceeding is when a government body applies the law to a specific set of facts to determine its decision. Quasi-judicial proceedings are most commonly encountered by local governments when dealing with land-use approvals.

A quasi-judicial proceeding is subject to certain procedural and substantive requirements that are relevant



to constitutional due process, judicial standards of review and evidentiary considerations. These substantive and procedural requirements require careful consideration by a municipality even under normal circumstances. It may be particularly challenging to accommodate these requirements at a meeting conducted via CMT. As such, many municipalities were postponing meetings on quasi-judicial matters and are now carefully considering future options for handling these matters as the State of Emergency has been extended.

## CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL MEETINGS

The most common challenge for municipalities considering CMT is handling public participation and comment.

Municipalities are approaching this issue in several ways, depending on the CMT platform used for the meeting and other local considerations and constraints.

- ▶ Some municipalities require submission of written or email comments before the meeting.
- ▶ Some allow a method for leaving phone or video comments.
- ▶ Others arrange for “real-time” phone or video participation and comment.
- ▶ Still others have chosen to use a combination of methods, such as providing a physical location with video access for members of the public to use. One person at a time uses the video access while adhering to social distancing protocol.

Municipalities should work closely with their attorney, their clerk and IT professionals to determine the most suitable methods for their circumstances.

The use of CMT for public meetings requires careful preparation, coordination and patience with inevitable technical difficulties that will arise. Municipal officials can help mitigate some common frustrations with CMT by being aware of noise in their immediate surroundings and muting themselves when not speaking, as even paper shuffling can interfere with the reception for listeners.

Whatever a municipality decides about CMT for public meetings, the provisions of transparency and public access are paramount.

For additional information about Executive Orders 20-69 and 20-112 and CMT public meetings, visit the Florida League of Cities' Coronavirus Resources webpage at [flcities.com/coronavirus-resources](http://flcities.com/coronavirus-resources). See page 40 for a comprehensive list of those resources.



Rebecca O'Hara is the deputy general counsel at the Florida League of Cities.

## VILLAGE OF TEQUESTA TIPS FOR HOLDING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

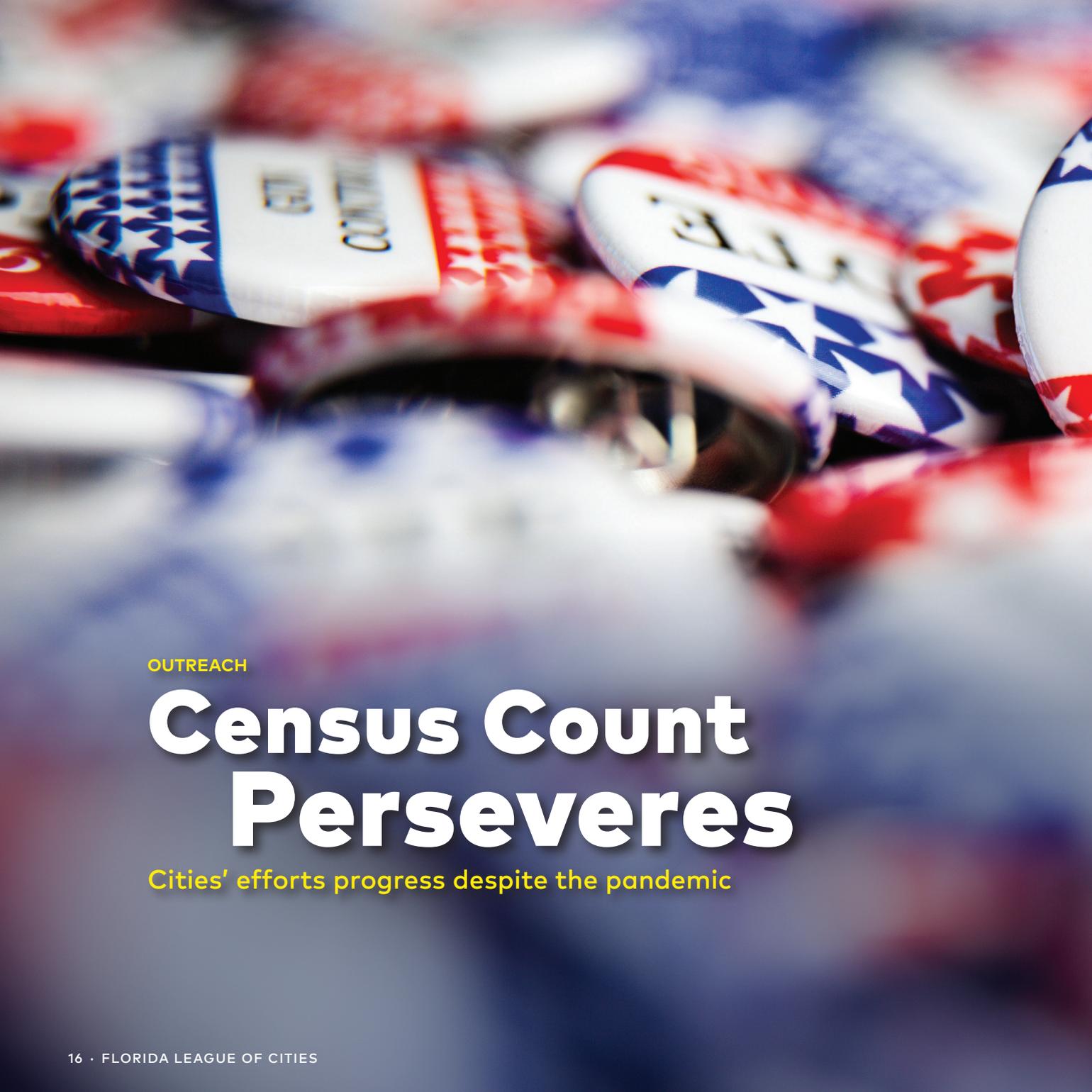
- ▶ When Sunshine Law requirements for quorum and meeting location have been relaxed, have your municipal attorney prepare a resolution adopting policies and protocol for use of communication media technology to conduct public meetings. ([Click here](#) to read Tequesta's resolution.)
- ▶ Communicate with all participants (council, manager, attorney and other staff) prior to the actual meeting, inclusive of a test run.
- ▶ Prepare a document to be read at the beginning of the meeting outlining meeting flow. For example, the document can address the order that council will speak and when public comment will be taken.
- ▶ Use a member of your IT staff who is fully proficient in the media platforms to serve as the "gatekeeper" and troubleshooter.
- ▶ If using Zoom ensure that members of the public are muted until the mayor calls for public comment and disable the ability for members of the public to share their screen.
- ▶ If using Facetime Live or Zoom Chat, have staff write down the comment quickly before it leaves the screen.

## VIRTUAL MEETINGS TAKEAWAYS

For public meetings, Executive Order 20-69 (recently extended by Executive Order 20-112), suspends requirements that a quorum be physically present and a local government body must meet in a specific public place. It authorizes local government bodies to use communications media technology (CMT) such as telephone and video conferencing.

Virtual public meetings must still provide reasonable public notice, be open to the public, offer a prompt recording of minutes and provide a "reasonable opportunity to be heard" to members of the public.

The order does not waive any quorum or other requirements that may be imposed by a local ordinance or charter.



OUTREACH

# Census Count Perseveres

Cities' efforts progress despite the pandemic



by William Powell and Andrea Robinson  
U.S. Census Bureau

**T**he impact of COVID-19 has been devastating across the nation, and the concept of normal is ever-evolving. With so many uncertainties in the world today, one thing that is certain to continue is the *2020 Census*.

Regardless of the pandemic or unforeseeable problems that may arise, the U.S. Constitution mandates that a count of everyone living in the United States be conducted every 10 years. While the 2020 Census is well underway and households can self-respond online, by phone or by mail, the Census Bureau is not immune to the effects of COVID-19.

To protect the health and safety of its employees and the public and to fulfill the constitutional mandate, the Census Bureau is adjusting its operations including “non-response follow up,” which deploys census takers into the field to knock on the doors of households that have not self-responded.

The Census Bureau continues to monitor the coronavirus situation and coordinate with federal, state and local officials. However, as it stands today, the bureau hopes to

send census takers out in the field starting in mid-August. If things go as planned, the self-response phase will be extended until October 31, giving state and local governments time to motivate their residents to respond.

Because census data determines how billions in federal funding is distributed each year for the next 10 years, state and local governments are finding creative ways to motivate their residents to be counted in the 2020 Census in the virtual world that many local governments are operating in. Some city and county officials across Florida are hosting 2020 Census town halls via videoconferencing platforms to increase their response rates, many of which continue to lag behind the national rate.

While COVID-19 has confined people to their homes, technology has made it easier for residents to fulfill their civic duty in completing the 2020 Census. It also provides a platform for leaders to engage their constituents and encourage participation in the 2020 Census.

Colleges, nonprofits organizations and other entities that have a vested interest in securing federal dollars for local

community-based programs, such as Miami-Dade College and Opa-locka Community Development Corp., are employing social media campaigns on platforms such as TikTok, Facebook and Twitter to encourage self-response. For example, a community group in Orlando recently hosted a Facebook Live event with a community leader. The group has a reach of over 11,700 predominately Hispanic/Latino members.

To assist with social media outreach, the Atlanta Region's Census Media Team has created a *toolkit* that contains graphics, flyers, messages and other items that its partners can use on social media platforms to continue spreading reminders to their communities and hyperlocal neighborhoods about the 2020 Census. The team has produced videos of some elected officials that they can use on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and on their websites. The toolkit is great to use during this time of social distancing. It allows municipalities and local partner organizations avenues to remind residents to complete the census in the comfort of their homes.

Also, the Atlanta Region Census Team is spreading the message in media markets throughout Florida. Since March 31, team members have appeared in newspapers, on radio and in television markets in Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, Pensacola, Port St. Lucie, Sarasota, Tampa and Alachua County.

**Assistant Regional Census Managers Marilyn Stephens** and **Manuel Landivar** are speaking with reporters and announcers about the census process and encouraging people to respond.

William Powell and Andrea Robinson are media specialists for the U.S. Census Bureau Atlanta Regional Office, which serves Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and South Carolina. They coordinate all external media activities for the bureau and are responsible for establishing partnerships with local media and keeping the public informed and updated on the bureau's operations.

## CENSUS DATA AND DATES

by Lynn Tipton  
Florida League  
of Cities

As this special report is distributed, Florida's response rate is 54.1%. The national response rate is 56.3%.

With the outreach calendar stretched into the fall, cities have these dates to remember:

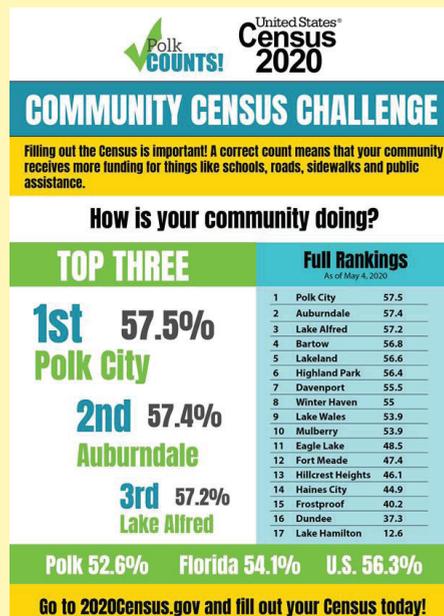
- ▶ **Mid-August 2020:** Field staff will start door-to-door follow-up visits for non-responding households (moved from June).
- ▶ **October 31, 2020:** Self-response deadline (moved from August 1).

Consider these communications tips:

- ▶ In every outreach effort, promote the online option at [2020census.gov](https://2020census.gov). From a phone, tablet or computer, it has never been easier to answer the survey.
- ▶ In your outreach efforts, remind residents that all information is confidential.
- ▶ Share the Census Bureau's phone number: 844.330.2020.

There are multiples ways your city can connect with residents about the census:

- ▶ Use neighborhood digital platforms, such as Nextdoor.



As of May 4, 2020. Challenge figures are updated weekly.

COURTESY OF THE CITY OF BARTOW

- ▶ Use city and neighborhood newsletters.
- ▶ Use utility bill stuffers, mailed and digital.
- ▶ Use creative ideas to encourage responses. Some elected officials are using their social media accounts to promote responses by holding challenges by zip code or within an official's district versus other districts.
- ▶ Ask civic leagues and other associations within your city to include census promotion on all digital communications, especially those that provide their materials in multiple languages.
- ▶ Keep a Census 2020 reminder physically prominent on city kiosks and near the essential service locations visited during the quarantine.

Some specific examples from Florida municipalities:

- ▶ The cities in **Polk County** receive their weekly completion rates with a challenge to see who comes in at the highest rate each week; data is supplied through the county's complete count committee. An example shared by the **City of Bartow** is featured (see graphic, left).
- ▶ The **City of Miramar** sent emails to over 87,000 residents. To follow up, it has city employees calling residents from a list of 16,000 telephone numbers. Miramar is also putting census messages into the food

boxes of local food drives and is using radio spots to reach those without internet and television access.

- ▶ If **Port St. Lucie** residents snap a photo of their confirmation of filling out the census and email the photo to the city, they are entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift card. Four winners are selected each week until October. Non-winners are automatically entered into the next week's drawing.

COURTESY OF THE CITY OF PORT ST. LUCIE

To hear more about Miramar's and Port St. Lucie's census outreach projects, [view](#) a recent FLC webinar in which they presented their programs. The segment on the census starts at 53 minutes.



Lynn Tipton is the director of FLC University at the Florida League of Cities.

## CENSUS TAKEAWAYS

Census data determines how billions in federal funding is distributed for the next 10 years.

The census outreach calendar has been delayed. The bureau hopes to start face-to-face contact in mid-August.

There are low-cost, easy and timely tools to help remind residents to take the survey.

Find community partners to help spread the message, especially in hard-to-reach population centers.

MAINTENANCE

# Cleaning Up Coronavirus

Advice for local governments  
on avoiding contamination



**M**any local governments are prioritizing the cleaning of their facilities from coronavirus, as one of the ways the virus is transmitted is by touching contaminated surfaces then touching one's eyes, nose or mouth. Cleaning crews should practice social distancing and follow guidelines from the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, the *Environmental Protection Agency* and the *Occupational Safety and Health Administration*, said **Jonathan Jaramillo**, risk and safety consultant at the **Florida Municipal Insurance Trust**. The **Florida League of Cities** is the administer for the FMIT.

"It's imperative that we remain calm and take appropriate measures to help reduce the spread of infection," Jaramillo said. "Following factual and reputable guidance provided by the CDC, EPA and OSHA can help us in reducing the spread."



Here are suggestions for steps that cities can take to make the cleaning process as safe as possible:

**Develop your plan.** Evaluate your workplace to determine what kinds of surfaces and materials make up that area. Frequently touched surfaces and objects like light switches and doorknobs will need to be cleaned and then disinfected to further reduce the risk of germs.

Your plan should include how to maintain a cleaning and disinfecting strategy after reopening. Find additional information at the CDC's website on [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#).

**Implement your plan.** Read all manufacturer's instructions for the products you will use. Put on gloves and other required personal protective equipment to clean and disinfect.

First, clean the surface with soap and water. Then, disinfect using an EPA-approved disinfectant. Always follow the directions on the label. If an EPA-approved disinfectant is unavailable, you can use one-third cup of bleach added to 1 gallon of water, or 70% alcohol solutions to disinfect. Do not mix bleach with other cleaning and disinfection products.

**"Now is not the time for home remedies and personal preferences," Jaramillo said. "Some folks prefer the smell of ammonia while others like bleach. These popular cleaning chemicals interacting with each other can create a fatal atmosphere."**

When disposing of cleaning and waste, use double-lined trash bags.

**Maintain and revise your plan.** Continue to modify your plan based on updated guidance and your current circumstances. Continue routine cleaning and disinfecting.

Make long-term changes to practices and procedures. These could include reducing the use of porous materials used for seating, leaving some doors open to reduce touching by multiple people, opening windows to improve ventilation or removing objects such as coffee creamer containers in your common areas.

**The CDC guidance is fluid, Jaramillo said. "As we begin to understand more about COVID-19, there may be some changes to your procedures."**

## RESOURCES FOR CLEANING

**Mike Matheny, principal/manager at Synergy Companies – FMIT Turnkey Recovery Program Managers,** suggests accessing the following resources:

- ▶ **Synergy Invitation For Bid (IFB).** If your local government is considering contracting these services, this is an example of a request for proposal for disinfecting service with necessary federal contract language. This document includes sample procurement language for bid packets that Synergy has been administering for governmental entities in accordance with industry standards, with protective language to hold the contractor responsible and in line with federal procurement guidance.

**"There may be some language or talking points that can be found under 'General Terms & Conditions' that you could pull from to develop a bulleted list to support required procurement processes and contractor safety/performance guidance," Matheny said. (Access that information on p. 2 in the "Submittal Instructions" as well as on pp. 4-5.)**

- ▶ **Restoration Industry Association's Recommended Procedures for Restoration Contractors Assisting Clients with COVID-19 Concerns.** This document includes environmental disinfecting guidance (industry standardization). It provides a basic overview presented by RIA's Advisory Council that is used to hold contractors accountable to industry standards and processes, for example. In accordance with FEMA contracting guidance, these described services as outlined should be procured on a fixed or square footage rate and **not time and material**, Matheny said.

As a general red flag, any contractor providing square-foot pricing below \$0.25 or above \$0.50 for disinfecting areas (fogging/gas application) along with cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces should be further scrutinized, he advised.

Require contractors to comply with general insurance requirements including an errors and omission coverage form with the general liability policy. Contractors also should have a proper worker's compensation and environmental endorsement rider to safeguard those who are performing bio-hazmat (pandemic) services.

**"Public entities could find themselves caught up in particular legal exposure – as the contracting agent – should they hire a contractor that runs into problems," Matheny said. These problems could include service issues, cross-contamination of the virus within the community, worker exposure, OSHA compliance and disposal of items in compliance with the EPA.**

- ▶ **Coastal Technical Services' Covid 19 Sanitization.** This white paper includes coronavirus sanitizing talking points to protect against secondary damages to electronics and/or equipment during contractor service applications/methods.

**"We are starting to see damages affecting information technology and electronics after some of these widely used disinfecting applications have been performed without proper methods to protect surrounding property," Matheny said. "We are also seeing damage to horizontal surfaces to include paper products, flooring and chrome surfaces in some of the cases that we have been brought in to help mitigate."**

- ▶ **Synergy's What Civic Leaders Need to Know (General COVID-19 Response & Recovery Summary).** This high-level educational resource was distributed in support of the presidential declaration of a national emergency and in accordance with FEMA public assistance guidance.
- ▶ **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Eligible Emergency Protective Measures.** This fact sheet contains exact FEMA guidance from the Department of Homeland Security in administering eligible tasks for public assistance (funding reimbursement).
- ▶ **Public Assistance: Non-Congregate Sheltering Delegation of Authority.** This fact sheet includes exact FEMA guidance from DHS specific to approved funding of non-congregate sheltering that many have found necessary to provide.

## CORONAVIRUS CLEANING TAKEAWAYS

Cleaning crews should practice social distancing. They should wear gloves and other required personal protective equipment.

They should follow guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Disinfect surfaces with a disinfectant that is registered with the EPA and that has claims regarding the human coronavirus and SARS-associated coronavirus.



RECOVERY PLANNING

# Life After COVID-19

Local governments to look at HR, budget and adaptation

by Robert E. Lee  
Florida Gulf Coast University

Toilet paper, arguably the greatest invention of all time and one that has maintained its basic form and availability for several decades, has suddenly become a rare commodity as elusive as the Florida panther. Nothing speaks to the notion that “change is inevitable” more than seeing the surreal pictures of grocery store shelves with no toilet paper.

COVID-19 has resulted in numerous “toilet paper-like moments” for Florida local governments as forced closures and mandatory distancing have created service challenges unlike any in recent history.

Much has been said and already written about the evolving impacts this tragedy has had on our daily lives. Unlike a hurricane or most other disasters, there isn’t a reliable projection of an ending to this pandemic. For the last couple of months, we have been told we might die if we go outside! This isn’t something that most humans can just turn off when government officials say it’s suddenly OK to get back to normal.

So, what should Florida local governments anticipate? Most have started their budget process for the next fiscal year. What should they be considering that differs from their previous analysis and performance rubrics that were in use just months earlier?

### EMPLOYEE CONSIDERATIONS

It’s not just a cliché that employees are local governments’ greatest asset. Even jurisdictions that contract out most of their services have a core group of employees who manage these service agreements.

We all know that local governments are the branch of government that is closest to the people and these services touch all of the senses of citizens every day. What then should local governments be doing with, and for, their employees in response to COVID-19 and the social distancing constraints?

First, we must recognize that no two local governments are the same. Each has its own internal culture and ideologies. Each determine services based upon, among other things, their community’s demographics, history, geography, economic base and local political preferences. This is the essence of Home Rule. No one template can provide the applicable direction for all communities.

However, it’s this uniqueness that creates the greatest opportunity for each community to respond to and prepare for the future.

Involving your employees in service delivery decisions will provide valuable insight into what and how services are being provided and how best to provide them. Reassigning employee duties to “fit” the current and evolving needs of a community is an opportunity that may have been more constraining pre-COVID-19, as “no degree of urgency” existed.

Many employees are stressed over possible job loss and may be dealing with the job loss of their spouse. Asking them for help in determining service levels, and assigning them work accordingly, can be a sign that your city “really does care” about them and strongly believes they are the government’s greatest asset.

### FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

You don’t have to look too far back in history to a time when local governments were hit with significant losses in financial revenues. The recession of 2007-09 resulted in employee layoffs, deferment of capital projects and fiscally unsound reductions in fund balance that, in some cases, still has not been fully replenished.

Similar concerns exist with today’s COVID-19 circumstances, particularly with state entitlement revenues such as sales taxes and fuel taxes and more localized revenues such as tourist/bed taxes. Even user fees involving types of activities such as those in parks and recreation are impacted. While these generally are not one of the major revenue sources for local government, they add to the collective losses of revenue that will need to be accounted for.

Each local government should strive to maintain a “structurally balanced budget” that ensures reoccurring revenues and reoccurring expenditures are balanced while maintaining sufficient reserves and fund balances. Local government officials should accept and plan for probable reductions in revenue levels and discuss and revise fiscal policies that are congruent with the lowering of expectations.

For those entering a new collective bargaining process, now is not the time to increase benefits in costly areas such as pensions or health insurance, no matter what the actuarial reports are suggesting. Remember, these reports

are mere assumptions based on past experience.

Planned capital projects, including partnerships and interlocal agreements, should also be re-evaluated. For example, if your city was planning to construct a new building, is it really needed now? If the answer is yes, should workstations be re-designed for the post COVID-19 era? Now is not the time to be among the hopelessly complacent, existing only to react to the crisis of the day.

### ADAPTING AND COLLABORATING

There is a quote, sometimes attributed to Charles Darwin, that says, “In the long history of humankind (and animal kind too) those who learn to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.”

Collaborating and adapting to change is on the forefront of what local governments do routinely. Participating in state and regional professional associations, maintaining



meaningful relationships and dialogue with local groups and citizens, and re-evaluating plans and policies have been essential in navigating constant change.

With deliberate consideration of reality, COVID-19 circumstances may provide service delivery opportunities not previously considered and provide strategic rationale for elected officials who must make difficult decisions that

were too political to consider even six months earlier.

Florida local governments have a lot of practice when it comes to responding to disasters. They are uniquely qualified to respond to this pandemic too!



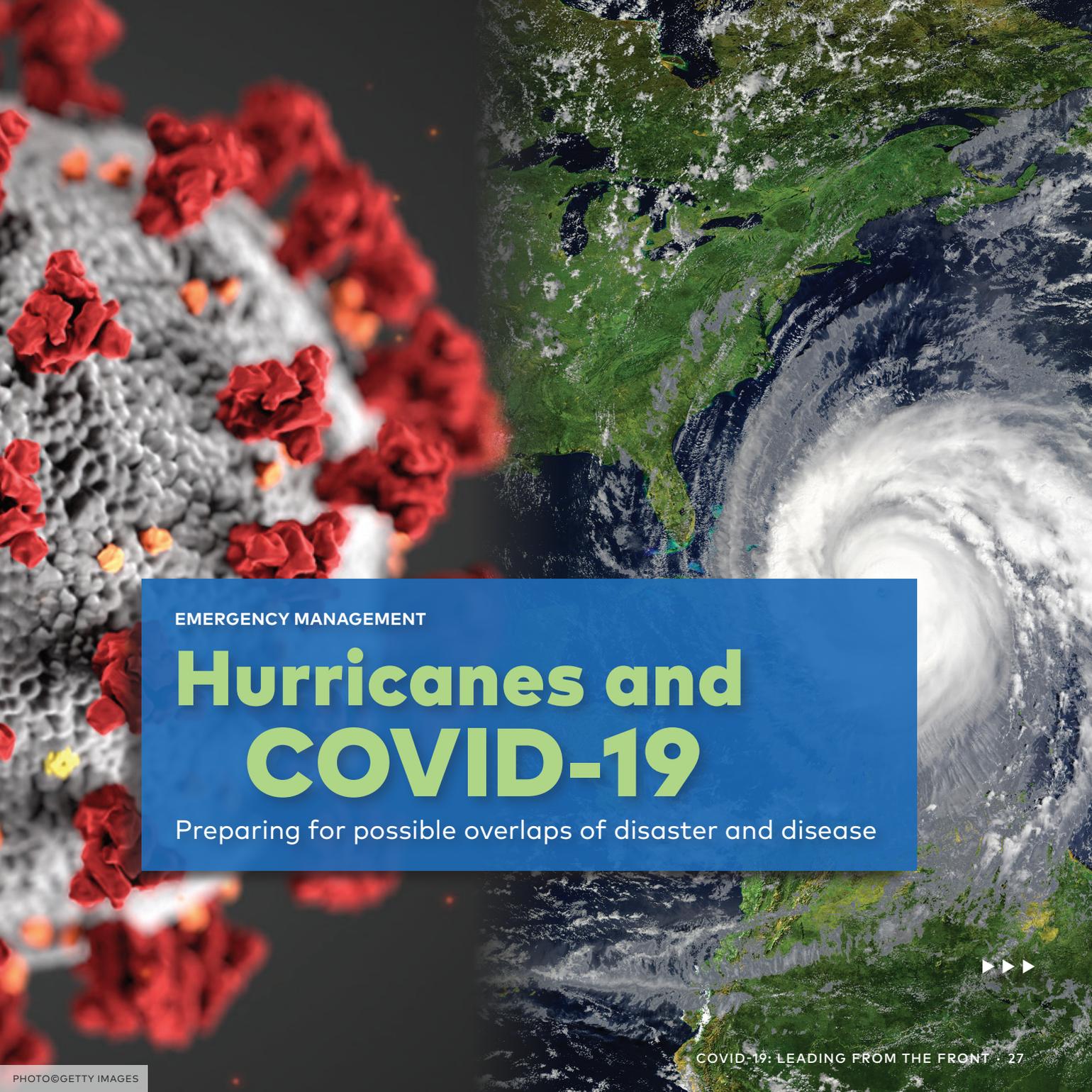
Robert E. Lee, D.P.A., is Master of Public Administration program coordinator and assistant professor at Florida Gulf Coast University and is executive director of the Center for Florida Local Government Excellence.

## RECOVERY PLANNING TAKEAWAYS

City leaders should include their employees in service delivery decisions as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted to gain valuable insight into how best to provide those services.

It is important to plan for probable reductions in revenue levels and revise fiscal policies to correspond with lowered expectations.

Planned projects, including interlocal agreements and partnerships, should be carefully re-evaluated.

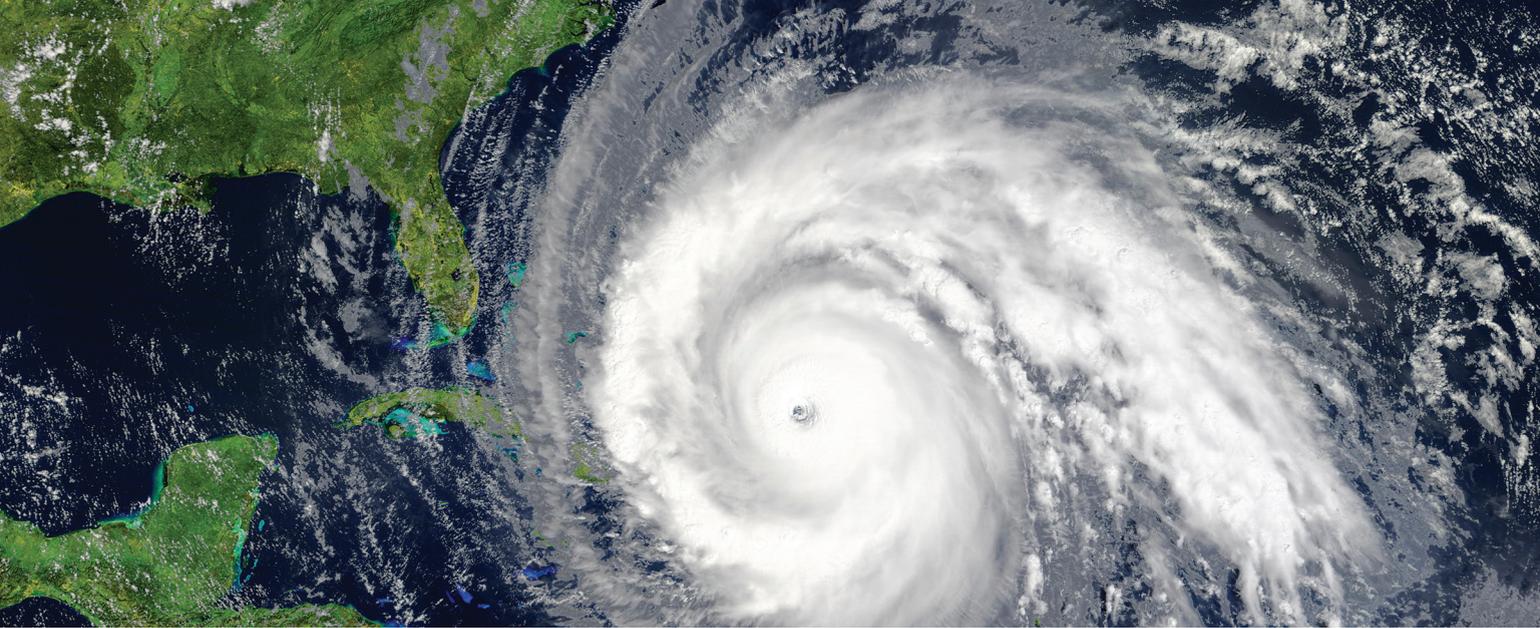


EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

# Hurricanes and COVID-19

Preparing for possible overlaps of disaster and disease





by Joy Dickinson  
Florida League of Cities

**H**urricane season begins June 1, and cities are still weighed down with the responsibilities that come with being on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic. However, city leaders are beginning to think ahead about hurricane preparation and potential evacuations of residents who may be unemployed and/or showing symptoms of COVID-19.

This year is predicted to be the fifth consecutive year of above-normal hurricane activity. Even if the pandemic wains soon, it may resurge in the fall, when the number of hurricanes usually increases.

Many cities are financially strapped due to fewer tourists and decreased revenues during the pandemic. Also, many haven't been fully reimbursed by the **Federal Emergency Management Agency** for previous hurricane expenses.

Cities aren't the only ones looking at their bottom lines. Residents need to purchase supplies for hurricane preparation and may need money for gas, food and hotels if they have to evacuate. To address these issues, cities can communicate with residents now about the importance of planning for these expenses.

"Evacuation expenses can be very taxing on individuals regardless of the pandemic and higher unemployment rates,"

said **Taylor Matheny, managing director for Synergy Companies – FMIT Turnkey Recovery Program Managers**. "This further shows the importance of individuals having dedicated disaster funds, much like cities and states do." (To access tips for residents about evacuations, [click here](#).)

Keep in mind that in an evacuation, residents might be fearful of going to shelters due to being told to stay away from others during the pandemic, said **Richard S. Olson, Ph.D., professor and director of the Extreme Events Institute and International Hurricane Research Center** at Florida International University in Miami. "Share an explicit plan with the public and the media, preferably with video or photos, to demonstrate how shelters will be set up to accommodate them if needed ...," Olson said. Also, address "how social distancing – if the [governor's executive] order is still in place during a hurricane's approach – will be maintained."

One of the issues that keeps city leaders awake at night is how to prepare shelters for social distancing, if needed, and the arrival of patients who may be displaying symptoms of coronavirus. "... [Y]ou don't want to ever go down in history as a city that actually created a coronavirus hotspot by mis-managing a shelter," Olson said.

**U.S. Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott** have sent a letter to FEMA requesting guidance for local and state government

about preparing for a hurricane while social distancing measures are in place. “With hurricanes, early planning and preparation is key, and while officials are currently focused on the pandemic, we must start thinking about June 1,” the letter said. “We ask that you take into account how to properly evacuate and shelter those who either have, or are suspected to have, the coronavirus in the event of a storm. Consistent and sound guidance will be crucial to saving lives during a natural disaster.”

FEMA is working with all partners including the **Florida Division of Emergency Management** and the **Red Cross** to adjust its plans for feeding and sheltering residents while addressing COVID-19 concerns. Policies are being changed and written, according to **Jared Moskowitz, executive director, FDEM**, who spoke on a conference call with **Florida League of Cities** members. Options could include stay-at-home orders or putting up residents at hotels, Moskowitz said. Once the policies are finalized, they will be distributed to cities. (For information previously published by the League about engaging residents in hurricane preparation, [click here.](#))

Following the guidance from FDEM, as well as local/state health organizations, will be critical, Matheny advised. “This will likely result in less capacity per shelter, which is why it is important for cities to start considering additional shelter sites now, prior to hurricane season,” he said.

Shelters will need to ensure there are public health/medical staff members present to screen and test people for coronavirus as they arrive, Olson said. There will need to be logistics, transport and counseling support to let them and their families know their options, he advised. “This problem, however, is enormously complicated by the fact that a lot of people may

be infected and test positive but be without symptoms – a scary stealth characteristic of this virus.”

Cities should prepare “sick” shelter sites to keep symptomatic individuals apart from non-symptomatic individuals, Matheny advised. “One approach to this method would be to screen all individuals who wish to be in a shelter at a single designated gateway,” he said. “Shelter attendees are screened at a central site, then given their shelter assignment based upon screening – sick versus well.” Cleaning and sanitation guidelines for shelters are being developed by the Red Cross.

Emergency operations centers also should follow the most recent guidelines from FDEM and local/state health organizations, Matheny said. With the current social distancing requirements, this would include “proper distancing between workspaces, staggering workstations, front-facing cubicles rather than face-to-face cubicles, etc.,” he said. “This could even require cities to identify an alternative EOC site to make accommodations.”

Municipalities also need to consider what type of help they might need after a hurricane, Matheny said. “Cities should be encouraged to reach out to neighboring cities and counties for a ‘strength in number approach’ and should consider partnering with nearby municipalities,” he said. “Oftentimes surplus resources and equipment go unused whereas they could benefit another municipality if properly pre-planned.”



Joy Dickinson is an assistant editor at the Florida League of Cities.

## HURRICANE PREPARATION TAKEAWAYS

Cities can remind residents to plan for expenses that could be involved in preparing for a hurricane and a potential evacuation.

To address residents' fears about going to a shelter during a pandemic, you can share your shelter plan, preferably with videos or photos.

To accommodate social distancing and those who are sick, consider the need for more shelter sites now.

Follow the most up-to-date guidelines from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Florida Division of Emergency Management and local/state health organizations.

A hand holding a smartphone is the central focus, with several white-outlined social media icons floating around it. The icons include speech bubbles with text, hearts, and three dots, representing various digital communication and social media concepts. The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting a public or community setting.

COMMUNICATIONS

# Creatively Connecting

Social media takes center stage to keep residents informed and encouraged

by Kara Irby  
Florida League of Cities

In a time when people are scared, anxious and more than likely glued to their devices, municipalities are using social media and digital communication to reach their residents. Whether to keep them informed, encouraged or entertained, cities across the Sunshine State are getting creative to make the COVID-19 messages clear and engaging.

### TIKTOK

The **City of Tampa** took to TikTok, a video phone app that has garnered the attention of younger audiences in recent years, to get the message across about the importance of staying home and practicing physical distancing.

“We realized how important it was to get this information to our younger generation,”

said **Jeremy Rex**, the city’s **senior designer and digital strategist**. “While they may not be as likely to develop a severe illness from the coronavirus, they can still contract it and pass it on to those they love or those that are at a higher risk.”

The video, which features the city’s communications strategist, gives young viewers seven steps for staying safe during the pandemic. Those steps include disinfecting everything from light switches to doors knobs, staying 6 feet apart and stocking up on essential supplies but not hoarding them. The video ended up being one of Tampa’s most viewed TikTok stories since the city launched its account in February.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF TAMPA

## SOCIAL MEDIA

The **City of Gainesville** created Captain Quarantine for its young and young-at-heart residents. Pictures of the endearing circular character can be spotted on social media and posters around the city, encouraging residents to “Keep their Distance” and “Be a Superhero, Stay home.” **City Manager Lee Feldman** said they came up with the cartoon to “inject a little levity into the situation.”



The **City of Mount Dora** shared a moving video with its social media community simply titled, “We Miss You.” In it, colorful shots of packed city streets from the past are juxtaposed with “business closed” signs and currently empty downtown scenes. The city’s Facebook page also features videos sharing which local businesses are still operating by taking orders on the phone and online.

In its social media campaign on Facebook and Instagram, firefighters in the **City of Lakeland** held signs to encourage residents to stay home.



The **City of Mulberry's** social media accounts are filled with images of acts of benevolence from public officials and teachers holding up signs to congratulate their graduating students. They also provide a notice that unemployed citizens can pick up printed copies of the reemployment assistance application from the Mulberry Public Library. “Copies are available on the front door,” the post reads.

## WEBSITES

Municipal websites also are being used as important one-stop shops for information for their residents. Cities should ensure that they are sharing reliable information and the websites are visually appealing, said **Todd DeAngelis, director of communications** for the **City of Parkland** and president of the Florida Municipal Communicators Association. A specific page related to COVID-19 content can link to other important resources such as the local Department of Health’s website or information on relief programs from the local, state and federal levels.



The **City of Milton** has done exactly that. A visit to the city’s website features a can’t-miss header advertising specific information on COVID-19 in their community. The updates page provides administrative notices, helpful CDC guidelines as well as the latest action taking place at the county level.

The **Village of Tequesta** also offers a robust COVID-19 page for its residents. It includes links about upcoming food drives, a FAQ page and a space where community members can recognize 2020 high school graduates.

The **City of Tallahassee** created a landing page under the campaign #TLHCanDo. There, residents can find tons of at-home activities such as an online story time, information on making homemade masks and a host of virtual tours and tutorials.

## HALLANDALE BEACH USES TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Even in 2020, there are some Floridians who'd rather not log in, tweet or scroll through a timeline. The **City of Hallandale Beach** recognized this and set up a landline and AM radio station to keep those community members informed. By turning their radio stations to AM 1620, Hallandale Beach residents can hear emergency updates. They also can call a Senior VIP listen line to hear city news in English and Spanish. Messages are updated regularly and include a range of topics from face mask do's and don'ts to announcements about virtual city commission meetings.

### PUBLIC ACCESS CHANNELS

The **City of Coral Gables** and other Florida cities are using their public access channels to share important information. Communities are using these channels to air public meetings and one-on-one interviews with first responders about their efforts to serve the community in the age of the coronavirus.

### ZOOM

The now-popular web-based tool Zoom is being used by some cities to ensure citizen access to their meetings. Public meetings that have now gone virtual feature elected officials in tiny boxes reminiscent of the Brady Bunch intro.

There is a risk of so-called "Zoom Bombing" by hackers and those who desire to create dysfunction. To protect these important business sessions from "party crashers," meeting moderators can create a waiting room to screen guests and immediately turn off the share screen function in the meeting.

### PUBLIC SERVICES ANNOUNCEMENTS

Public service announcements have been another source

to reach residents. Local officials and essential employees in cities such as **Miami** and **Tampa** use their voices to urge the public to stay home. Tampa's announcement features several first responders repeating the phrase "Stay for me, so I can continue to be there for you."

That's the message many municipalities are sending to their residents, a message of helping each other and considering the health and well-being of not only themselves but their neighbors next door and residents across town. Today, many digital tools are available to cities of all sizes to communicate this message.

"You don't need a big team; you just need creative ideas," Rex from Tampa said.



Kara Irby is a communications specialist at the Florida League of Cities.

## CREATIVELY CONNECTING TAKEAWAYS

Cities are using municipal websites, apps, social media and public access channels to share information.

They are using visual elements such as photos, videos and even a cartoon character.

One city set up a landline with messages and used an AM radio station for those who don't use social media.



## ENGAGEMENT

# Cities Support Residents

Efforts keep communities connected and protected





3

by **Brittni Johnsen**  
**Florida League of Cities**

The normal hustle and bustle of everyday life has come to a screeching halt as the world faces unprecedented and challenging times during the coronavirus pandemic. What hasn't stopped, though, is the work of local governments. Cities, towns and villages are protecting the health and safety of their residents. But they're also working to connect with them, support them and provide them with much-needed assistance.

Here are just some of the ways that cities are accomplishing this.

### RECOGNIZING FRONT LINE WORKERS

While most Floridians shelter at home, healthcare workers, first responders and other essential service employees are still working to serve their communities. And Florida's local governments aren't taking that for granted. To show their appreciation, cities are finding creative and meaningful ways to say "thank you."

The **Village of Wellington** partnered with local schools, the Boys & Girls Club and a pharmacy to collect and deliver thank you cards to staff at Wellington Regional Medical Center and Palms West Hospital. Their goal was to flood the hospitals with gratitude and words of encouragement.

The **City of Coral Springs** brought together local officials and city employees to honor the "healthcare heroes" at Broward Health Coral Springs. While safely practicing social distancing, the group gathered outside of the hospital to cheer on hospital workers and present them with a 15-foot banner to show their appreciation.

The **City of Panama City** put up banners throughout the community that read, "Our Heroes Work Here #PanamaCityStrong." The banners were placed outside hospitals and medical centers, fire departments, police stations, the sheriff's office, the local Department of Health office as well as local schools.

To show their support of those working on the front lines, the **City of Weston** launched its "Shine in White" campaign. Through the duration of Florida's safer-at-home order, the campaign encourages residents and businesses to wear or display white every Wednesday,



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8



- |         |                   |          |                 |
|---------|-------------------|----------|-----------------|
| 1 ..... | Newberry          | 8 .....  | Bunnell         |
| 2 ..... | Coral Springs     | 9 .....  | Wellington      |
| 3 ..... | Port St. Lucie    | 10 ..... | Rockledge       |
| 4 ..... | Miami             | 11 ..... | Fort Lauderdale |
| 5 ..... | Panama City       |          | Oakland Park    |
| 6 ..... | Gainesville       |          | Wilton Manors   |
| 7 ..... | Fort Walton Beach | 12 ..... | Weston          |

whether that's wearing white clothes, displaying a white ribbon on the door or hanging white lights on their homes. The city also incorporated a social media campaign that encourages residents to share their photos and videos using the hashtags #ShineInWhite and #WearWhiteWednesday with messages of inspiration or encouragement.

The cities of **Clermont, DeBary, DeLand, Edgewater, Eustis, Lake Helen, Leesburg, Longwood, Mount Dora, Orange City, Port Orange, South Daytona, Tavares** and **Umatilla**, plus community groups, joined forces for “Bells of Thanks.” At 4:15 p.m. on April 15, they simultaneously rang bells to show their appreciation for those working on the front lines of the pandemic.

## SUPPORTING SENIORS

Several municipalities have created programs and initiatives to support older residents, who are particularly vulnerable during the coronavirus pandemic.

The **City of Miami Beach** partnered with a private clinic to offer in-home testing to residents ages 65 and older. If senior

residents are experiencing coronavirus symptoms, they call the city's customer service center and make an appointment for the in-home test.

Another city working to serve its homebound senior residents is the **City of Miami**. Through its Department of Fire Rescue Community Paramedicine Program, the city launched an in-home COVID-19 testing service for senior citizens who may be unable to drive or arrange for transportation to a local testing site.

The **City of Rockledge** launched a prescription pick-up program to help its senior residents. The city's Department of Public Safety works with all pharmacies within the city limits to provide the new service, which is offered to residents 65 years of age and older or those who have an underlying medical condition. Residents must first contact their pharmacy to pay for the prescription, confirm that they will allow the Rockledge Police Department to pick it up and give authorization for them to do so. Then they call the Public Safety Department to schedule a delivery. Off-duty police officers volunteer to participate in the program so deliveries don't interfere with their on-the-job duties. Gloves and masks are worn. When an officer arrives at a resident's home, they place the prescription at the door, signal their arrival, then step 15 feet away before the resident picks up the prescription. The service is being provided weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Municipalities throughout the state have come up with innovative ways to help residents stay active and healthy while staying socially distant.



The cities of **Mount Dora** and **Cape Coral** hosted virtual 5K races for their residents. Mount Dora hosted its virtual 5K May 1-3. After signing up to participate online, residents choose their own starting line, whether that's in their neighborhood or on a treadmill, and then run, jog or walk the roughly 3.1 miles. Mount Dora encouraged participants to share their runs on social media with the hashtags



#WeRunThisCity and #MountDoraVirtual5K. All participants who logged their time were also sent a medal from the city. Cape Coral's Parks and Recreation Department gave registrants 11 days to run or walk the 5K race and record their results. The first 200 participants to register were mailed an event T-shirt, and all proceeds from the event were donated to a health foundation.

The **City of Port St. Lucie** worked with local fitness experts to create at-home workout videos to help residents stay active while staying home. The videos are posted online and are shared on the city's social media accounts and in the city's newsletter. The city is incorporating this fitness challenge into its larger #PSLFromHome campaign.

The **City of Tallahassee** is working to help residents with another important aspect of their well-being: mental health. **Mayor John Dailey** hosted a discussion with a regional



behavioral health center to discuss the importance of mental health and how to manage during the coronavirus crisis. That conversation served as the impetus for TLHCanDo, the city's ongoing campaign to share ways to stay busy, healthy and mentally fit during the coronavirus pandemic. (For more information on TLHCanDo, [click here.](#))

## OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

In addition to providing new services to residents, municipalities are finding new ways to engage with them.



The **City of St. Petersburg** launched its "Call from City Hall" initiative to connect with residents who may be especially lonely or just

need a little positivity. After filling out a form online, residents can expect to receive a call from **Mayor Rick Kriseman**, **Deputy Mayor Kanika Tomalin** or **Police Chief Anthony Holloway**.



The **City of Kissimmee** shared scenic photos from around the area that residents can use as virtual backgrounds during video conference calls. Just because residents may not be able to explore the city doesn't mean they can't celebrate its beauty.

## FEEDING RESIDENTS AND SUPPORTING RESTAURANTS

The coronavirus pandemic has negatively impacted many residents' access to food due to drops in income, job losses and even food shortages. Local restaurants and businesses have also been negatively impacted by the pandemic, with some having to shut their doors. Municipalities are working to address this issue.



**FEEDING SOUTH FLORIDA**  
**DRIVE-THRU FOOD DISTRIBUTION**  
Friday, April 17, 2020  
9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.  
Mills Pond Park  
2201 NW 9 Avenue,  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33311  
enter from southbound NW 9 Avenue  
INFO: [feedingsouthflorida.org/covid19](https://feedingsouthflorida.org/covid19)

WITH SUPPORT FROM



The **cities of Fort Lauderdale, Oakland Park and Wilton Manors** teamed up with Feeding South Florida to host several food-distribution events. Their goal was to provide healthy and nutritious food to residents most in need. Food was distributed on a first-come, first-served basis to the first

1,000 vehicles. There was a limit of one container of food per vehicle. Residents were asked to place an empty box or container in their trunk that could be filled with food as their vehicle passed through the distribution stations, enabling residents to remain in their vehicles.



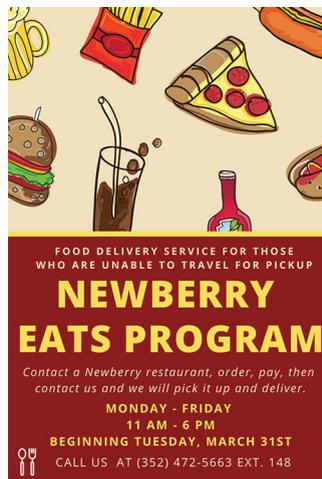
The **City of Crestview** also teamed up with local partners for its Feeding Families Project. The city partnered with Farm Share, a statewide food bank, as well as local churches and nonprofits for the project, which will host several food

distribution events for residents in need. Each distribution event allowed residents to drive up to one of two staging areas where volunteers placed food in each vehicle. Residents were allowed only one food pickup per household.

The **City of Bunnell** organized a food distribution event for its residents. To promote the opportunity, Bunnell called all households within the city that had a utility account and shared event information with them. City officials and

employees distributed hundreds of boxes and bags of food to residents during the event. To receive the food, residents drove up to a designated loading station, popped open their trunks while remaining inside their vehicles and let staff load the food. City employees wore masks, gloves and eye protection as a safety precaution. In addition to the drive-through distribution event, the city also coordinated the delivery of nearly a hundred bags of food to residents at the Belle Vista Apartments, the Family Life Center and Project Warm.

The **City of Gainesville** hopes to help residents in need and local restaurants through its Feed GNV pilot program. In partnership with the Greater Gainesville Chamber of Commerce, the program provides financial support to local restaurants while simultaneously helping residents access nutritious meals. Through the program, the city purchases 75 to 80 meals a day from participating restaurants, providing financial support to owners and their employees. Those meals are picked up by or delivered to GRACE Marketplace, a local homeless shelter, which hands them out to residents on its campus. The program provides meals for lunch and dinner, which are free for residents.



FOOD DELIVERY SERVICE FOR THOSE WHO ARE UNABLE TO TRAVEL FOR PICKUP

**NEWBERRY EATS PROGRAM**

Contact a Newberry restaurant, order, pay, then contact us and we will pick it up and deliver.

MONDAY - FRIDAY  
11 AM - 6 PM  
BEGINNING TUESDAY, MARCH 31ST  
CALL US AT (352) 472-5663 EXT. 148



The **City of Newberry** is also working to help residents and local restaurants through "Newberry Eats," the city's new food-delivery service. Provided by the Parks and Recreation Department, this free service allows residents to support local restaurants without ever leaving their home. They simply contact a restaurant to order and pay for their meals, then they contact the city, whose staff picks up the order and delivers it right to residents' homes.

## ENTERTAINMENT TO BEAT BOREDOM

Being cooped up at home can easily get boring. Luckily for their residents, municipalities are offering them fun, safe ways to stay entertained while at home. Some examples follow.

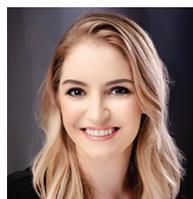
The **City of Lakeland** created a video to share activity ideas for residents to expand their horizons while also staying safe. The video includes ideas such as exploring the city’s 266 miles of sidewalks, taking advantage of free content available online from the Lakeland Public Library, watching online virtual tours from museums around the world, trying do-it-yourself projects and more. [Click here](#) to view the video.



The **City of Sunrise** is offering residents ways to stay entertained while staying at home with their “Stay and Play” initiative. Every week, the city shares daily activity ideas for residents of all ages. Activities have included ideas from art projects and photog-

raphy challenges to meatless Monday recipes and Earth Day celebrations. Residents can view the weekly activities [online](#).

The **Fort Walton Beach Public Library** offers residents a digital storytelling service to keep them engaged while at home. A few times a week, library staff members read from a children’s book that the library broadcasts through Facebook Live. Residents are invited to tune in live or watch the recorded video later. The videos can be viewed on the library’s [Facebook](#) page.



Brittni Johnsen is the media relations coordinator for the Florida League of Cities.

## HURRICANE PREPARATION TAKEAWAYS

Cities are finding creative, meaningful ways to thank essential service employees.

Several created programs to support older residents.

Many are helping residents be active and also stay entertained at home.

Cities are addressing residents’ access to food and the economic needs of local businesses.

# Coronavirus Resources and Information

Visit the [Coronavirus Online Information Center](#) on the League's website for a robust and comprehensive resource where you will find hundreds of documents, resources and news articles to help you keep your community safe. The webpage is updated frequently.

We've included links to [Governor Ron DeSantis' Executive Orders](#) and Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act [information](#).

The webpage also includes numerous examples of emergency declarations, ordinances and municipal COVID-19 webpages that can be used as samples for your city's coronavirus response plans.

You will find the following sections covered:

- ▶ [State + Federal Resources](#): Helpful links to state and government agency websites and documents related to COVID-19.
  - ▶ [Local Government Resources](#): Tools and resources to help local governments respond to the spread of COVID-19.
  - ▶ [Funding + Technical Assistance](#): Funding and technical assistance opportunities to help cities and local businesses recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - ▶ [Municipal COVID-19 Webpages](#): A collection of webpages Florida's cities have created to keep residents updated on the latest COVID-19 developments in their communities.
  - ▶ [Municipal Ordinances/Policies](#): Examples of ordinance/policies Florida's cities have issued to help keep residents safe and stop the spread of COVID-19.
  - ▶ [Municipal Emergency Declarations/Orders](#): Examples of emergency declarations and orders Florida's cities have issued to help keep residents safe and stop the spread of COVID-19.
- ▶ [Municipal Utility Information](#): Examples of relief measures Florida's cities and municipal utility providers have taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - ▶ [Municipal Relief Programs](#): Examples of relief programs and initiatives Florida's cities and counties have created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - ▶ [COVID-19 Survey Reports](#): Analysis reports of COVID-related survey results from the FLC Center for Municipal Research Mini-Survey and Quick Survey Series, and the National League of Cities.
  - ▶ [Recent News](#): News articles updated on a regular basis from local, state and national media outlets related to COVID-19.
  - ▶ [COVID-19 Print Resources](#): Posters and handouts that can be printed and distributed/displayed to help raise awareness of COVID-19 and how to prevent the spread of the virus.
  - ▶ [Additional Resources](#): Resources, hotlines, videos and helpful links related to COVID-19.

The League soon will be launching a Coronavirus Economic Recovery webpage featuring federal, state and local information for cities to help their communities recover from the pandemic.

## GET THE LATEST COVID-19 NEWS DELIVERED TO YOUR PHONE

To keep Florida League of Cities members updated with the most current news on the coronavirus, we are sending text message updates on important developments and new resources to help keep you and your community safe.

To sign up for these text alerts, text FLCCV to 855.218.0584. You may opt out at any time.



# Stay Home. Be Well.

#StayHomeSWFL



Kevin Anderson  
CRA Commissioner  
Councilperson (Ward 4)  
City of Fort Myers

#StayHomeBeWell



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRIC BROAD



## McGough Nature Park Virtual Tour

Largo.com/360Tour

Explore 360° views of all of McGough!



## OLDSMAR ASSISTANCE HOTLINE



813-749-1181



INFORMATION@OLDSMARLIBRARY.ORG



### ABOVE:

- Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency.** CRA Commissioner and city Councilperson Kevin Anderson in "Stay Home. Be Well." campaign.
- Bay Harbor Islands.** Safer at Home campaign.
- Oldsmar.** Mayor Eric Seidel repurposed the library into an assistance hotline.
- Tamarac.** City Fire Rescue delivered masks and gloves to nursing homes.
- Largo.** Communications put together a sunup-sunset time lapse at McGough Nature Park.
- Palm Beach Gardens.** Police and Fire Rescue organized a parade to thank hospital workers.
- Miami Beach.** The city received thank yous from local children.

### BACK COVER:

- Clermont.** Chief Charles Broadway donates blood during a drive hosted by the Police Department.
- Fernandina Beach.** Mayor Johnny Miller handing Wanda Lanier, executive director of the Barnabas Center, a check while maintaining social distancing.
- Temple Terrace.** Encouraged by Vice Mayor Andy Ross, the Temple Terrace Arts Council repurposed old campaign signs into thank yous for the city's essential workers.
- Coral Gables.** A "Stay at Home" message from the city's public servants.
- Fort Walton Beach.** A first responder birthday parade.
- Cocoa.** The mayor wearing a face mask at a meeting.
- Destin.** The city partnered with restaurants and nonprofits to host a food drive.
- Eustis.** The city showed appreciation for frontline workers during the "Bell of Thanks."



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