COVID-19 Best Practice Information: SLTT Public Information

Background

- State, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners should work together to release consistent and coordinated accessible public messaging during the response to the 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

- The following is a list of key findings and considerations as they relate to ongoing COVID-19 response operations across the country.

Key Considerations

- SLTT partners should develop strategies for centralized public information and presenting the information in a user-friendly, easily accessible manner. This accessibility would include using plain language and ensuring that all communications are accessible to people with disabilities. See the civil rights bulletin from FEMA Office of Equal Rights for more information on accessible communications.

- Public-facing accessible messaging should account for local community needs and cultural considerations, such as including traditional print materials in multi-language and plain language. Social media materials need to be in multiple formats, including accessible video products.

- SLTT partners can leverage the services of local business and organizations to assist with producing and distributing COVID-19 information for the whole community.

Lessons Learned Related to COVID-19 SLTT Public Information

Website/Online Messaging

- **Potential Best Practice:** Create a separate, dedicated webpage to address issues related to the crisis.[1] To provide easy and intuitive information, state, tribal or territory homepages should provide direct access to or be temporarily converted into a pandemic communications portal.

  - **Mitigating Action/Resource**: Use the website to provide comprehensive information in as transparent a manner as possible and include an "as of" date for posted information.

  - **Mitigating Action/Resource**: Consolidate various government website information into a single location for all COVID-19 related information.

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[1] 2020, The International City County Management Association, https://www.nascio.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/NASCIO_COVID19_PlanningforStateCIOs_v2.pdf

- **Potential Best Practice**: Connect with private businesses, charities, and faith-based organizations to develop factual messaging that can be mutually reinforced across the community.[2]

- **Potential Best Practice**: Develop a social media messaging plan to provide evidence-based information to the public and address misinformation and rumors.[1] FEMA maintains a rumor control page for COVID-19 here.

  □ Facebook outlines steps the company is taking to combat the spread of COVID-19 misinformation here.

  □ The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration released a COVID-19 Response Plan, including monitoring public sentiments via social media to inform messaging strategies.

Multi-Language Strategies

- **Potential Best Practice**: Messaging strategies should be developed to address the language needs of every city, state, tribe, or region. General information is already available in multiple languages from different levels of government.[3] [4]

  □ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) COVID-19 website is available in Spanish, simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean. However, not all resources from the English language website are available in those languages. The CDC's COVID-19 website has also produced accessible videos in ASL and captioning. CDC continues to produce accessible videos. CDC and FEMA are working together to find solutions to providing accessible videos in Spanish-ASL-English for Puerto Rico.

  □ FEMA's COVID-19 website has resources available in 12 languages, as well as accessible ASL videos that include ASL, captioning and voice over.

  □ Department of Health websites for the states of Washington and Iowa have fact sheets in multiple languages. The Washington State Department of Health also has ASL videos for COVID-19. These videos are on the FEMA.gov website.

    - The Ohio Latin Affairs Commission built a website with COVID-19 resources in both English and Spanish and is engaging the Latino community through social media.[5]

  □ The L.A. County Department of Consumer and Business Affairs created a Language Access Working Group to aggregate "frequently asked questions" and translate them into Spanish, Mandarin, Tagalog, Korean, and other languages. The department also plans to host media round tables with foreign language media outlets to address larger community issues, such as access to resources and emergency food supplies.[6]

- **Potential Best Practice**: In cases where information from qualified translators is unavailable for certain languages, or where there is city, state, tribe, or region, specific information to be shared, solicit the

[2] 2020, ICMA, https://icma.org/blog-posts/why-local-leaders-need-make-personal-resilience-plan-during-crisis
[3] 2020 Washington State Department of Health, https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020/FactSheet
[4] 2020 Iowa Department of Public Health, https://idph.iowa.gov/immtb/rh/materials
[5] 2020 Ohio Latino Affairs Commission, https://ochla.ohio.gov/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Resources
[6] 2020, FUSE Corps https://fusecorps.org/2020/04/02/during-the-covid-19-crisis-10-things-government-agencies-can-do-to-protect-the-health-of-their-most-vulnerable-residents/

assistance of local organizations, businesses, and non-profit organizations for support. For example, American Journal Experts (AJE)[7], a translation company, offers COVID-19 translations for free.[8]

Accessible Communications Strategies

- **Potential Best Practice**: Accessible messaging strategies should be developed to address the language needs of every city, state, or region. Messaging is already available in accessible formats from different levels of government.

- **Potential Best Practice:** The National Association for the Deaf worked with LinguaBee to provide free Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) for deaf people going through the Community-Based Testing sites who needed ASL to communicate with testing staff. In addition, a coalition of organizations working on behalf of people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind, including National Association for the Deaf, Hearing Loss Association of America, Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc., Gallaudet, and others have coordinated accessible messaging and communication within hospitals, between doctors and other medical staff for COVID-19. This information is on the FEMA website. In order to provide effective communication access to people with disabilities, jurisdictions should:

  - Produce accessible videos that include ASL captioning and voice over not only in English, but also for Spanish-ASL-English.

  - Ensure websites are accessible to both those who are blind and those who have low vision. Products that contain graphics, maps and other visual information are not accessible to the public who use screen readers and other accessible technologies to access information.

  - Develop and implement guidance on how to produce accessible videos and livestreaming of information. This is important for ensure access to the all communities.

- **Potential Best Practice:** Many state governors and other local officials are using sign language interpreters and Deaf interpreters in their televised press conferences in full view for the public.

Coordination

- **Potential Best Practice**: States and localities are releasing COVID-19 response updates through Joint Information Centers (JICs), which facilitate communication and coordination between agencies and public information officials. For examples of state and local JIC web pages, see Frederick County's here, Florida's here, and Missoula County's here.

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.

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[7] 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.
[8] 2020 AJE, https://www.aje.com/coronavirus