

COVID-19 - Communications Outline: 3/19/20

Background

The COVID-19 spread throughout the United States has resulted in the declaration of a national emergency, with many local jurisdictions in California declaring a local emergency/local health emergency. Extraordinary measures are being recommended or required in order to slow the spread of the virus, including closing schools, restaurants, bars, houses of worship, businesses, etc. “Social distancing” and “sheltering in place” have become commonplace. These extreme steps will have immediate consequences for many aspects of our society for the coming several weeks at a minimum. Many impacts could be felt through the rest of the year and beyond.

Goals

- Generate confidence among all audiences/stakeholders that the agency is aggressively addressing the issue, anticipating impacts and coordinating with other agencies
- Convey the importance everyone plays to slow and eventually control the spread of the virus
- Share information about local impact and appropriate actions

Key Messages

- The [agency name] is taking seriously the impact of COVID-19 in our community/district/etc.
- We have worked closely for weeks with [list agencies] to prepare plans and ready all affected systems
- Our website provides the best available information about what each segment of our community should know and do [or direct to other agency websites]
- We ask everyone to come together to help all get through this crisis, especially those who are most vulnerable: let’s see an outbreak of kindness (list examples: help take care of neighbor’s children, share supplies, form neighborhood groups to share information/supplies, reach out to seniors, etc.)

Audiences – initial (depends on agency; expand based on those who may be affected)

- City Council, Board of Supervisors, Board, Trustees, etc.
- Agency Management Team
- Agency employees
- Agency employees with children
- Agency employees infected
- Agency board/commissioners/appointed officials
- Agency residents/customers/ratepayers – drill into segments of those your agency serves and create messages/tactics to reach each:

- Seniors, those with underlying conditions
- HOAs
- Parents
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- Senior centers or places where seniors gather, live, etc.
- Health care industry: hospitals, clinics, etc.
- Chamber
- Other business groups, eg. downtown organization
- Visitor/Convention bureau
- Hotel GMs
- Schools: public and private
- Transportation systems that residents/workers may use
- Faith leaders

Communications Program

Strategic Planning / Messaging

- Update messages daily
- Prepare internal use Q&A to address sensitive issues; provide to elected/appointed officials
- Push updates to all audiences on a regular basis using all available tools
- Conduct daily team call for all communicators available to assist [not business as usual; adopt mindset of EOC/Joint Information Center:

Media Relations

- Respond to media inquiries
- Pitch stories that convey the agency's response
- Consider a "media briefing" [if in area with no major media, conduct for weekly/blogger/online outlets (e.g., not a press conference and targeted only at local outlets)] with agency representatives of the following):
 - Agency – overall response, coordinating with area, regional, state reps.
 - Schools – planning for closure, online learning, school year issue, sanitizing, keeping parents informed, etc.
 - Health/hospital/etc. – have the training and resources (or limited)
 - PD/FD chiefs/sheriffs – first responders are trained, have equipment, will respond
 - Transportation - Sanitizing programs, schedules,
 - Business and Visitor industries – how handling, cancellations, etc.

Internal Communications

- Send message the agency cares and will take all steps possible to address individual needs – children at home, sick family,
- If exposed or infected – steps to be taken, care for the employee and family
- Internal audiences regular email update – daily updates
- Policies for telecommuting, leave, etc.

Community Relations

- Conduct presentation to elected body with update of all actions; share video widely – method to reach media and community; can take place of press conference
- Roles for elected leaders to get word out to their constituencies: social media based on agency's content,
- Drive traffic to web

Website / Materials

- Don't forget translations of all content, including web, materials, social media, videos, etc.
- Flyers
- Children's materials

Visual Storytelling / Social Media Posting / Hashtags / Misc Content

- Daily update of website
- Use all social media channels to reach as many as possible: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Nextdoor – refine content for each v. automatic posting from one channel
- Always use graphic, photo or video with all posts
- Interview/post production w/various agency leaders dealing with issue (ongoing with elected leader/chair, add: public safety chief/sheriff, OEM, etc.)
- Create new hashtag: #Coronavirus[AgencyName]Info or something similar to deliver to just those interested in your area
- Ongoing posts social media – try for 2-3 posts a day; add hashtag to all posts – slice/dice all content to create small bites for social media
- Vary posting schedule to reach different people who are online at different times
- Develop unique social media campaign branded with unique graphics
- Share/retweet other agency social media posts – info from reliable govt sources, neighboring agencies, etc.
- Consider Facebook Live of interview with agency staff and policy leaders, reps from other orgs – include online Q&A