

In crisis mode, county ops undergo innovation

by **Charlie Ban**
 senior writer

Dealing with the coronavirus has meant rethinking operations for many counties, from limiting public interactions to “flatten the curve,” rethinking service delivery and assessing personnel.

Hennepin County, Minn. Manager Dave Hough sees a potential for long-term improvement in county operations.

“Right now, we’re trying to determine how we create workarounds and in crisis situations,” he said. “Sometimes you are able to develop new strategies, to innovate in a way that you ordinarily wouldn’t in a non-crisis scenario. Our folks are doing a lot of imagining and innovating to get us to where we’re starting to feel comfortable and confident that we can deliver service remotely.”

Hennepin County has closed 41 libraries, 18 human service satellite offices and six service centers, though some are available for appointments.

“We did that to be proactive because of what we were seeing on the East Coast and the West Coast,” he said. “I wanted to be out ahead of this.”

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Coronavirus: Counties find solutions to monitor symptoms, test for cases

by **Rachel Looker**
 staff writer

With capacity challenges that come with testing for the coronavirus, county officials are finding innovative solutions to safely perform COVID-19 screenings while finding ways to make communities feel safe.

Henderson County, N.C., is one of many counties that established a drive-through screening site for both the flu and COVID-19.

The offsite mobile center, established in a matter of days, is in partnership with Pardee Hospital — University of North Carolina Health, the Henderson County Department of Public Health, Henderson County emergency management, emergency services, EMS rescue squad, Henderson County sheriff’s department and the Blue Ridge Community College.

Patients must be referred to the drive-through site by calling a phone line and completing a screening over the phone with a medical professional who notifies the testing center when to expect patients, according to Henderson County Manager Steve Wyatt. The screening is free for all Henderson County residents.

Patients drive through a series of screening stations including a checkpoint established by the



Medical personnel wait for patients to pull in to be tested for the coronavirus at a drive-through testing facility March 20 at the La Plata, Colo. County fairgrounds. Photo by Chris Neal/Shooter Imaging/for Colorado Public Radio

sheriff’s department.

Pardee Hospital nurses, who are under the supervision of physicians, staff the testing center. All medical professionals wear personal protective equipment.

At the first stop, patients are screened by a physician who asks more detailed questions. Then, nurses test all patients for the common flu. The results

take five to 10 minutes and individuals wait in their vehicles in a parking lot.

“You are in your car,” Wyatt said. “You are driving. You never get out of your car.”

If someone tests positive for the flu, they receive instructions and may receive a prescription for an antibiotic. If they test negative for the flu, they drive to another tent operated by

the Henderson County Public Health Department where they are tested for COVID-19 and given instructions to self-quarantine.

“It’s easy, quick, it’s painless, it’s no charge,” Wyatt said. “We’re able to process a lot of folks quickly without exposing others.”

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Congress passes \$2 trillion relief package

by **Blaire Bryant**

Last week, Congress passed a \$2 trillion relief package designed to further address the economic impact of the coronavirus. The bipartisan compromise bill, the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act” (H.R. 748), which includes a number of key provisions that address many of the topline items of concern for counties, includes

the preservation of health safety net programs and the provision of testing supplies and personal protective equipment.

The bill provides \$150 billion for state and local governments, with \$8 billion set aside specifically for local governments that are experiencing sharp revenue declines as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, the bill will provide direct case payments, loan guarantees for impacted businesses

and more resources for testing and development of vaccines and expands paid leave eligibility and mandates worker protections. Beyond some of the direct economic assistance, the legislation builds upon aid provided to the healthcare field in the earlier bills through the following provisions:

- A \$100 billion fund that will reimburse eligible health care

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County self-monitoring form provides data by measuring rate of illness, tracking symptoms

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The test results take a few days to get back to the health department.

"If you're given the COVID-19 test, we check on you every day, see how you're doing," he said. "Once you get the results, you're counseled and depending on your condition referred to a hospital, but more than likely you're quarantined."

The county is using test kits from LabCorp, a testing laboratories company in North Carolina. Wyatt said completed tests are sent to the company, which has a contractual relationship with the county.

"We're trying to slow the progression of this disease, so it won't overwhelm our local health care capabilities," he said.

For Henderson County, Wyatt said as of March 18, running out of testing kits is not a primary concern.

"We have a stock and we're using them, but they're meant to be used," he said. "I've been

given no indication by our medical staff that we're in danger of running out."

The site opened in the afternoon on March 15 and 29 patients came through the drive-through center. Around 70 patients were tested the following two days.

"We have had a steady stream of patients, but we have not been overwhelmed," he said.

As of March 25, there were two confirmed cases of coronavirus in Henderson County.

"We're able to do mass testing basically, testing on a large scale with minimizing the exposure to others," he said. "We're keeping people out of the ERs, keeping people out of urgent cares, out of doctor's offices."

The site is located behind the Blue Ridge Community College campus, which is closed along with all other community colleges in the state. Wyatt said this provides abundant parking options and allows staff to use facilities on campus.

"Your elected officials have got to understand that time is of the essence," he said. "We don't know what tomorrow will bring, but I'll tell you there's no time to wait because the more you wait, the more in danger you put your local healthcare capacity."

Counties turn to self-reporting

In Eagle County, Colo., Epidemiologist and Deputy Public Health Director Rebecca Larson said with limitations on testing supplies, lab capacity and personal protective equipment, not everyone who has symptoms in the county is able to be tested for the coronavirus.

The county, which as of March 25 had 96 cases, turned to a self-monitoring form that serves as a tool to measure the rate of illness in communities. As of March 25, the form has re-



Medical professionals wear personal protective equipment at a COVID-19 drive-through testing facility March 20 at the La Plata County, Colo. fairgrounds. Photo by Chris Neal/Shooter Imaging/for Colorado Public Radio

ceived over 750 responses.

County residents can complete a Google form online or on a mobile device that asks if the user has pre-existing medical conditions or if they have compromised immune systems. Then, the user checks off their symptoms and adds the date when their symptoms started. County residents can submit their contact information or complete the form anonymously.

"We still need to understand the level of illness in our community, the amount of spread of the illness and also evaluate whether the strategies we put in place such as social distancing are effective in reducing that spread," Larson said.

The submissions from the form are tracked on a webpage that shows live data through graphs that are divided into age groups, towns within the county and number of reported symptoms.

Larson said the county is fac-

ing challenges with limitations on personal protective equipment for healthcare workers to be able to safely perform tests. Additionally, there is an overwhelming number of specimens being sent to both commercial and state labs.

According to Larson, the county follows up with individuals who report having higher risk factors to ensure they are connected to testing and have information about the coronavirus.

"Having something that a community can pay attention to and look at and then on the public health/epi-side for us, early detection and early response are vital to preventing the spread of this virus," she said.

Director of Innovation and Strategy Brandon Williams said when it comes to "flattening the curve" in the absence of testing, it's hard to tell what the curve is without data.

"I think we've got a fight-

ing chance of actually having a better graph of that curve that hopefully will help public health responders and incident commanders get resources and really start planning for the recovery of this," he said.

The self-monitoring form was designed to be simple and completed easily. The form is created using Google's G-Suite platform, according to Williams.

"It was just sitting down and creating a user-friendly form so people can self-report but also feel like they were being heard and contribute to the response," he said.


For other counties and communities throughout the country, Williams said there's no reason to not create a self-monitoring form.

"The upsides are letting the community know that we're all in this and they can see if the social distancing they're practicing is working by watching what's happening here," Chair of the Eagle County Board of Commissioners Kathy Chandler-Henry said.

She added that the form helps bring a sense of calmness to the community.

"People just have a thirst for information that isn't coming very quickly from official channels. This is really quick, it gives them a sense of control, it gives them a sense that the county has a handle of what's going on in the community and because of this tool, we do," she said.

The county created the form as a template that can be easily replicated by other county governments.

"We really hope that that helps others get a better picture on what's happening in their communities," Williams said. 

For more information on the self-reporting form, contact brandon.williams@eaglecounty.us or kathy.chandlerhenry@eaglecounty.us.

SNAP/STATS

APRIL IS NATIONAL PECAN MONTH

State	Pounds produced in 2019
New Mexico	97 million
Georgia	69 million
Arizona	36.5 million
Texas	36.4 million
Oklahoma	4 million



County operations get innovative while facing new world of coronavirus crisis

From OPERATIONS page 1

In making the county work in its current limited public-facing capacity, he hopes at least some short-term operating procedures could find their way to becoming standard if they weather the storm.

“Frankly, these are situations where we can assess and determine the best ways to deliver service so that we could innovate,” he said. “It’s very challenging from the standpoint of not knowing what’s going to happen, but it’s also very energizing.”

Farther north, St. Louis County in Minnesota is accelerating its approach to teleworking, and in the three days leading up to the Board of Commissioners approving a measure allowing county administrators to define and implement strategies, departments worked “aggressively” to prepare guidance, *The News Tribune* reported.

In addition, the county’s human resources department has been retrofitting public-facing facilities, including installing Plexiglas at the cashier window in the auditor’s office.

Kosciusko County, Ind. is hoping to keep offices open, while also trying to reduce public gatherings in its buildings. Commission President Brad Jackson told *The Times Union*

that he hoped people would call ahead and only come into county buildings if they had to.

“We’re not closing, but we are putting restrictions in place and putting counters out in the hallways,” Jackson said. “We’re trying to avoid shutting down by people only coming in if absolutely necessary.”

In dense Arlington County, in Virginia, the county is closing all dog parks, fields and playgrounds, locking them down to prevent spread of the virus. Trails and community gardens are open to individuals only.

Inyo County, Calif.’s tourism office — Explore Inyo County — had an abrupt change in mission, broadcasting on Instagram: “Please go home. Under normal circumstances we welcome tourists with open arms but there is a global public health emergency in progress, and we need to politely request that you return to your primary address — your home.”

It’s with good reason. “Our hospitals, services and supply chains are under immense strain and they simply cannot cope with the extra demands placed upon them by an added influx of visitors to the area. So please go home for the time being and come back to see us when this is all over. Your actions will save lives.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have offered some guidance for how to best limit the spread of coronavirus, but they have mostly remained suggestions. Not in Columbia County, Ga. There, the code enforcement team will be enforcing CDC guidelines, including social distancing of at least six feet and not gathering in groups of 10 or more.

If businesses are not complying, they will receive a citation and run the risk of losing their licenses.

Kleberg County, Texas deputies are enforcing social distancing the old-fashioned way: Ordering groups of 10 to disperse and keeping an eye on groups approaching 10, including inside convenience stores and big box stores, KIIITV News reported.

Gwinnett County, Ga.’s local emergency order extended some tax and licensing deadlines, but temporarily authorized establishments licensed to sell beer and wine on premises to sell unopened bottles of beer and wine for take-out consumption off-premises throughout the duration of the declared local emergency.

In Broome County, N.Y., the Office for Aging is branching out to the other end of the spectrum. As private childcare centers suspend their operations and schools close, the

county is offering free daycare to children of county employees, in kindergarten through fifth grade, at a senior center. The district attorney’s office will use school resource officers to ensure the safety of the children at the center. County Executive Jason Garnar told WBNG News that the move is essential to keep the employees in the county working and providing essential needs.

As most non-essential work is contracting elsewhere nationwide, Gaston County, N.C. is hoping to lean into the punch with more than \$6 million in “shovel ready” projects aimed at bolstering jobs during the economic contracting coming from so many idled workers, *The Gaston Gazette* re-

ported. The Board of Commissioners moved up the timeline for several projects to begin in early April, Chairman Tracy Philbeck said, to keep as many people working as possible on major capital improvement projects.

The Capital and Relief Expansion (CARE) plan includes \$2.7 million the county had already allotted for structural updates that will bring county buildings in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, \$2 million for county parking lot improvements and \$2 million to build the Child Advocacy Center.

The Brewster County, Texas commissioners voted to close hotels, RV parks, campgrounds and short-term rentals. **CN**

WIR conference canceled; watch for alternative plans coming soon

With the ongoing spread of coronavirus cases and in the interests of county officials and residents, NACo Western Interstate Region (WIR) leaders made the difficult decision to cancel the WIR conference, originally slated for May 13-15 in Mariposa County, Calif. WIR leadership and NACo staff will explore potential alternative options to cover some of the topics that were to be discussed at the conference.

On March 13, Mariposa County declared a public health emergency, which canceled all gatherings of 250 people or more. Additionally, on March 19, California Gov.

Gavin Newsom signed an executive order requiring all individuals to remain at home, except when absolutely necessary. The order allows employees of 16 critical industries defined by the federal government to continue working. Those who already registered for the conference will be refunded automatically with no further action required.

Registrants who paid by

NACo will announce plans for the NACo Board of Directors meeting.

credit card can expect a refund on the same card, while those paying by check will receive a new check for the full amount sent to the check issuer.

Tenaya Lodge will automatically refund housing deposits as well, but please be patient as they work through hundreds of reservations starting next week.

In the coming weeks, NACo will announce plans for the WIR Board of Directors meeting and election of WIR officers as well as plans for a digital alternative to the NACo Board of Directors meeting that typically takes place in conjunction with the WIR conference. **CN**

WORD SEARCH

SUSSEX COUNTY, Del.
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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C	W	E	S	H	L	P	O	P	U	L	A	T	I	O	N	Z	U	T	A
E	R	S	R	P	C	T	R	M	A	R	B	L	O	D	D	N	T	L	B
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- AIRPORT:** Delaware Coastal Airport is owned by the county.
- ATLANTIC:** The county is bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean.
- BIDEN:** Former Vice President Joe Biden owns a beach home in the county.
- CRABS:** Tourists and locals stop by the many crab shacks located in the beachside communities in the county.
- DOLPHINS:** Cape Henlopen State Park, located in the county, is a great spot for dolphin-watching, especially in the summer.
- DUTCH:** Dutch settlers established a trading post in the county in 1631.
- EMERGENCY:** The county opened a \$13 million state-of-the-art emergency operations center in 2008.
- GEORGETOWN:** The county seat.
- MILES:** The county is 950 square miles.
- PEACHES:** The county (and the entire state) was once known for plentiful peach crops until disease wiped out the industry.
- PIZZA:** Pizza lovers stop by Grotto Pizza, founded in 1960 along Rehoboth Beach's boardwalk.
- POPULATION:** About 200,000 people live in the county.
- POULTRY:** The county is the birthplace of the broiler chicken industry.
- SUSSEX:** Founded in 1683, the county was named for Sussex, England.
- THREE:** Sussex County is one of only three counties in the state of Delaware.

Coronavirus: Counties move to protect elderly, vulnerable residents

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

In a world where now seemingly every public surface can transmit the coronavirus, a combination of fear and caution has kept many people at home. For the elderly and people with compromised immune systems, groups that have made up the lion's share of COVID-19 fatalities, that caution has cut some off from the outside world, particularly if they don't have relatives nearby.

Before California Gov. Gavin Newsom's statewide stay-at-home order, Ventura County issued its own order, applying specifically to older residents, telling those 75 or older, or 70 and older with compromised immune systems, to stay home and limit visitors.

Across the country, the closing of many senior centers only exacerbates the problem, potentially saving lives at a cost of face-to-face contact with friends, but counties are trying different strategies to keep vulnerable residents connected.

In Lewis County, N.Y., they are getting visits from teachers bearing supplies.

The county's department of social services and Office for the Aging have teamed up with the Strong Schools, Strong Community program, which gives teachers whose schools have closed a new purpose during



Staff members from the Orange County, N.C. Department on Aging perform curbside lunch delivery at the Seymour Center. Photo by Janice Tyler

the pandemic.

The idea popped into Social Services Commissioner Jennifer Jones's head March 15. By March 17, her department had a system in place to start taking requests and distributing them.

"We've got teachers, we're paying them, but there are no students," she said. "Teachers are empathetic and our thought was many times they're likely to know who they're delivering to, so this made a great match. And they've already passed background checks."

The volunteers do grocery

shopping, medicine pickups at pharmacies and other important errands. Though the social services department advertises a 3-5-day turnaround, the first few days have seen much quicker results.

"They're eager to help," Jones said. "They've done their part in spreading the message of social distancing and now they are doing what it takes to make that possible for people who need supplies."

It's not just for older residents — Jones said a mother with a newborn requested diapers,

which in turn led to her staff helping her husband, who had just lost his job, file for unemployment benefits.

"This is also a way to free my employees up to do their jobs and socially distance themselves," Jones said. "This is something we'd want to do anyway, but these teachers and support staff have helped us do more."

Down the coast in New Jersey, all residents previously enrolled in Camden County's nutrition program automatically started receiving home-delivery of meals.

In Illinois, shuttles once used to take seniors out into the world are being repurposed to bring them supplies. Piatt County Public Transportation, Piatt County Services for Seniors and Faith in Action will work together to deliver groceries on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and items from pharmacies on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Ridership had dropped to 21, from a typical 275 a day, freeing up vehicles for these deliveries.

The closure of senior centers across the country has created a social void, one some counties have tried to relieve with an increase in telephone reassurance calls to seniors' homes. To the delight of Janice Tyler, director of the Orange County, N.C. Department on Aging, 21 people joined the ranks of the 15 volunteers who had been

making the calls in less fraught times.

"We already had a robust program, but people really stepped up when demand for the service increased," she said. "The training was done in about two hours."

Those new recruits augment a number of other programs in place. Orange County is one of many that has an active Seniors and Law Enforcement Together program, which pairs sheriff's deputies and police officers with local seniors, nominally to protect them from victimization.

"Now they're calling them, and on some occasions, doing drive-bys, waving, saying hi, talking from the driveway," Tyler said.

Orange County has also moved its "Seymour Tech" technology classes to a distance-learning platform using Zoom's web conferencing service. The county's two senior centers serve roughly 700 people daily, so Tyler knows there's a big hole to fill and while they can provide many of the same services, the social atmosphere may be lacking. She sees that every day.

"When people line up in their cars for lunch, they're trying to talk to each other from their windows," she said. "Basically, any way to see other people, they're doing it. But they're doing it from a safe distance." **EN**

Congress passes relief package to help offset economic impact of coronavirus pandemic

From **CONGRESS** page 1

providers for health care-related expenses or lost revenues that are attributable to coronavirus. Eligible health care providers are defined in the bill as public entities, Medicare or Medicaid-enrolled suppliers and providers, and other health care facilities. NACo will look to HHS in the coming days for further guidance on access to these funds.

- In addition to the supplemental funding in the first relief package for health centers, the bill would provide \$1.32

billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 for supplemental awards for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19 in these facilities. These services would be administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration.

- Protection for payments to hospitals serving the uninsured and underinsured with the delay of statutory cuts to Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital payments until Nov. 30, which would help hospitals that are serving the medically indigent and underinsured make up for revenue losses and

continue to provide high quality care to all patients, especially during this time of crisis.

Congress also passed, and the president signed March 18 a second multi-billion-dollar emergency aid package, titled the "Families First Coronavirus Response Act" (P.L. 116-127) with bipartisan support. The bill includes five key provisions:

- Free coronavirus testing regardless of insurance status
- Food assistance for women, children, seniors and students
- Increased federal funds for local Medicaid programs to support treatment and services

for COVID-19 patients

- Unemployment aid
- Paid and sick leave provisions for employers

President Trump signed the first \$8.3 billion emergency supplemental appropriations package (P.L. 116-123) March 6 that includes comprehensive resources to enhance the national response to coronavirus, as well as key provisions to support state and local efforts to address cases of the illness. As passed, the legislation specifically includes funding to support prevention, preparedness and response efforts, funding

for research and development of coronavirus vaccines and diagnostic tools and a funding boost for Community Health Centers, many of which are county owned and operated.

Following the passage of this third and latest supplemental package, Congress will look to a fourth package that will build upon economic support and relief funds previously passed. **EN**

Blair Bryant is a NACo associate legislative director for Health in the Government Affairs department.

County jails, court systems brace for potential coronavirus spread

by **Rachel Looker**
staff writer

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, county jails and detention centers are reducing jail populations and suspending visitations to protect incarcerated individuals while court systems are making changes to protect members of the community.

In Chatham County, Ga., Jail Administrator Todd Freesemann said jail staff are following some of the guidelines from the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which manages a nationwide correctional system of 122 prisons. The Bureau of Prisons has suspended social visits and facility transfers for 30 days, and suspended legal visits for 30 days, instead allowing confidential legal calls and reviewing in-person visits on a case-by-case basis.

The Chatham County Jail has a population of around 1,700. As of March 25, there were seven confirmed coronavirus cases throughout the county.

To prevent the spread of the virus in the jail, the Chatham County Sheriff's Office has enhanced the health screenings of inmates before they enter the facility by screening individuals for influenza-like symptoms and asking about recent travel. Freesemann said correctional officer staff have also been told to stay home if they are sick.

In addition to providing more soap and signage about proper hygiene, the jail has taken efforts to reduce the traffic coming in and out of the facility.

Volunteers who work with inmates are no longer visiting the jail. Local attorneys and the public defender's office are doing more video and telephone communication with inmates, Freesemann said.

The county already has a separate building for video visitations. Freesemann said on March 18 (prior to the county having any confirmed cases) that if an individual tested positive for the virus in the county,

the visitation building would close and visitations would be suspended. The jail has an online service for visitations if necessary.

"The big thing I've been trying to do is make sure that we limit the traffic," Freesemann said. "We do the best we can to isolate should it [the coronavirus] come into the facility so we're available for the community, especially for those violent offenders that are going to need a place to go."

Freesemann said the sheriff's office is considering giving court dates for misdemeanor offenses instead of booking an individual into the jail.

"We haven't implemented that fully yet," he said on March 18. "We've discussed it, but it's really just trying to limit the amount of traffic in and around the jail so that we don't bring anything in."

Freesemann said if an individual tests positive for the virus in the jail, they would be isolated from contact and medical staff would be required to wear personal protective equipment when dealing with the patient. The medical staff includes an infection control prevention nurse.

He said the biggest threat of spreading the virus in the jail is anyone who is arrested entering the facility.

"We don't know their history," he said. "We're dependent on them to answer questions on what their possible exposure was and so I think it's critical in that screening process that ... our health care staff try to get an accurate picture of what risk someone may have been exposed to."

In Los Angeles County, Sheriff Alex Villanueva said the county's jail population

has been reduced by around 600 people to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Some of these individuals were granted early release.

Villanueva said he is also directing local agencies to cite and release individuals instead of making arrests. He added that if an individual shows any symptoms prior to arrest, they will be directed to seek medical clearance before being brought to the jail.

Throughout Los Angeles County, the average number of arrests per day is 300. This number has now shrunk to 60 arrests per day, according to Villanueva.

"Our population within our jail is a vulnerable population just by virtue of who they are and where they're located," he said during a March 16 press conference. "We're protecting that population from potential

exposure."

As of March 18, there were no confirmed cases of coronavirus for any individuals in custody in Los Angeles County, although some were in quarantine.

Across the country in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, a collaborative effort among the court, the county prosecutor, the county public defender's office, the defense bar, the sheriff's department and the county executive's office is working to prevent the spread of the virus in the county jail.

The court says the jail population has decreased by around 400. The county is expediting cases and releasing some individuals on bond reduction.

These efforts are to ensure the sheriff's department has space to care and quarantine an inmate if he or she tests positive for the coronavirus. It also helps reduce the number of inmates in enclosed spaces and helps with social distancing.

The court has cancelled jury trials for at least the next month and is holding Saturday hearings and arraignments to expedite the process.

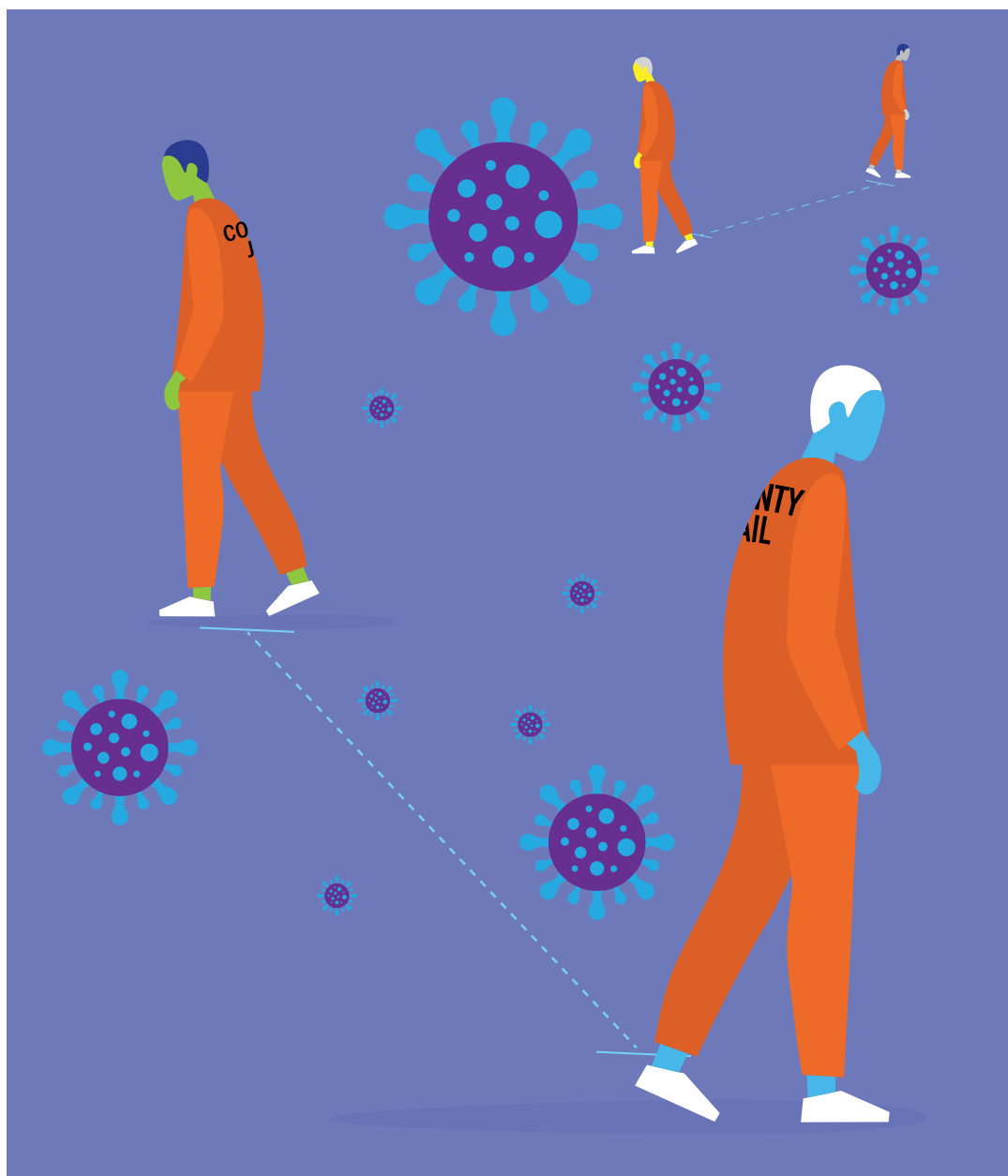
In Bexar County, Texas, District Court Judge Ron Rangel also suspended jury service in the county through April 16.

Rangel described the jury room as one of the biggest congregations of individuals coming together in one place.

"We typically receive 600 summoned members of our community every day and they're in there at one time," he said. "By limiting their contact, the hope is that we'll remove the opportunity for the virus to be spread so easily."

Rangel encouraged individuals who are sick to contact the court before appearing. He said the courts will make reasonable accommodations to reschedule appearances and hearings.

In the courthouse, "we're definitely concerned about public health and public safety," he said. "That's our first priority." **CN**



Counties plan for election changes amid COVID-19 outbreak

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Administering an election during a global pandemic is likely a first for most county officials.

With the uncertainty of COVID-19's long-term impact throughout the country, counties are grappling with election-related challenges ranging from shortages of poll workers to providing additional voting options and keeping polling locations clean.

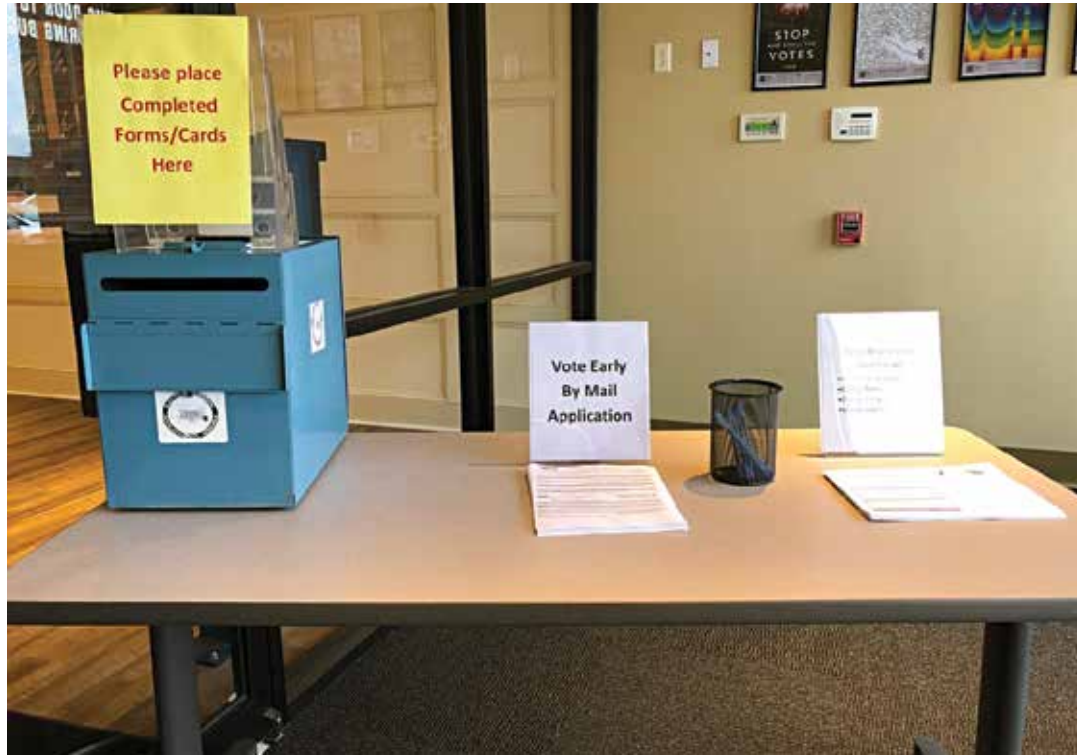
Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Connecticut and Indiana have already rescheduled their primaries because of the coronavirus pandemic, according to *The New York Times*.

On Tuesday, March 17, despite the COVID-19 outbreak, four states were set to hold elections. Voters in Arizona, Illinois and Florida cast their ballots, but officials in Ohio made the last-minute decision to postpone the election until June 2.

In Shelby County, Ill., County Clerk and Recorder Jessica Fox said all locations on Election Day had signage posted suggesting curbside voting, especially for those who were sick.

The county was short on election judges in some precincts, she said, but all of the polling locations remained opened as originally scheduled.

"We were able to cover the majority of the vacancies that



In Douglas County, Neb., a self-service area in the lobby of the elections commission office allows voters to complete early voting applications and drop off forms in a secure box without coming into contact with any county employees.

we had come about," Fox said. "We had a positive experience here all things considered."

Further south in the state in McHenry County, Ill., polling locations were outfitted with hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes. Clerk Joe Tirio said the elections went "remarkably well."

"We had low turnout, but we had every polling place open and opened on time," he said.

Tirio said close to 100 poll workers called out sick leading up to the election, but resources were moved around to keep locations open.

"We had the remaining judges who really just saw this as a nearly military-type commit-

‘We have faith.
Our poll workers
and polling places
have been excellent
community
partners through
all the years.’

ment to their community and they were going to be out to make sure that the vote happened," he said.

A week before the election, Tirio said he discussed moving polling locations that were based in senior communities to ensure the safety of high-risk individuals. He suggested other counties do the same to ensure communities that house those who are more susceptible to catching the virus stay safe.

Prior to holding any election during the coronavirus pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends election officials encourage voters to use voting methods that minimize direct contact with others and reduce crowd size by using such methods as mail-in voting, early voting and drive-up voting.

The CDC also encourages poll workers to stay home if they feel sick, frequently wash

their hands, clean frequently touched surfaces and disinfect voting-associated equipment.

Additionally, poll workers should ensure bathrooms are supplied with soap, water and drying materials and provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer to use before and after touching a voting machine, according to the CDC. Election officials should utilize social distancing strategies by increasing the distance between voting booths and reminding voters to leave space between themselves and others.

Douglas County, Neb. Election Commissioner Brian Kruse is taking these precautions ahead of Nebraska's May 12 primaries.

Kruse said the elections office is still open to serve the public, but the election commission established a self-service station in the lobby vestibule before entering the office. The county has early voting applications for voter registration and a secure box where voters can drop off forms and other items. The office also established a drive-up drop box in the parking lot.

"So far, it's been working quite well," he said.

Kruse said they are encouraging early voting and will be sending out early voting request postcards to all voters in the county — which is not typically done for primary

elections. Voters who sign and return the postcard will get a ballot by mail.

In Nebraska, state law requires voters to request a ballot. In a county the size of Douglas County, voters cannot automatically mail ballots or have a by-mail election, according to Kruse. As of March 20, Douglas County had twice as many early voting requests than in the 2016 and 2018 statewide primaries, he said.

"We have an early vote request list and so we try to utilize that, but in these extraordinary times, voters who are not on that list will now get this postcard," he said.

Kruse said currently, the biggest challenge he is facing is the unknown with poll worker shortages and changing of polling locations. The county has moved away from in-person training for poll workers with all poll workers completing training online.

"We have faith. Our poll workers and polling places have been excellent community partners through all the years and we're hoping that they will come through again," he said.

If necessary, Kruse said they may have to utilize smaller staffs at some of the county's 222 polling locations and 237 precincts.

"Our preference in Douglas County would be five [poll workers]," Kruse said. "The good news is we have about two months before the elections, so we're brainstorming on possible other ways to attract poll workers."

The question remains if the coronavirus pandemic will impact voter turnout in Douglas County.

"It could be lower because of the pandemic, but on the other hand it could be higher because there's so much awareness about a by-mail election and sending voters an early voting request card and all of the media and social media," he said.

Kruse said anyone in Nebraska is able to request an absentee ballot to vote.

"We would just highly, highly encourage everyone to consider voting that way," he said. **CN**

..... ON THE MOVE➔

NACo STAFF

- **Mark Ritacco** has joined NACo as deputy director of government affairs. He spent over a decade working in both the U.S. House, Senate and on political campaigns and most recently served as director of strategic initiatives for Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), where he directed the senator's appropriations and workforce development work. He earned a degree in government and politics from the University of Maryland, College Park.



Ritacco

Coronavirus: Census Bureau pauses field operations, extends completion deadline



By Mary Ann Barton
editor

To slow the spread of coronavirus among workers and the public, 2020 census field operations are suspended until April 1 and the deadline to complete the census is now extended to August 14, the Census Bureau announced Friday.

The Census Bureau began dropping off packets in rural areas March 15, but that operation is also on pause at least until March 29, said Tim Olson, associate director of field operations for the Census Bureau, in a March 20 call with the media.

"We want the public to know the health of our staff and the public is of utmost importance," he said. "We are carefully monitoring the situation and are following guidance of state and local authorities."

"The way we conduct the census is the vast majority are going to self-respond," he said, noting "but when it comes to completing the census, there is that door-to-door counting of households that have not responded. We're monitoring this on an hourly, daily basis in terms of moving forward."

The Census Bureau has also dipped into a \$2 million contingency fund to do more advertising to get their message out, said Ali Ahmad, associate director of communications at the Census Bureau.

"The U.S. Census Bureau is actively working with contractors to update, expand and upgrade its campaign in line with the evolving situation," Ahmad said.

The 2020 Census sent out census questionnaires (or letters asking households to respond online) March 12-20 to each home in the country. As of March 20, 18.6 million households have responded, according to Albert E. Fontenot Jr., associate director for Decennial Census Programs.

Each home can respond online (at 2020Census.gov), by phone or by mail.

The 2020 Census counts every person living in the United States and five U.S. territories. The census provides critical data that lawmakers, business owners, teachers, and many others use to provide daily services, products and support for you and your community. Every year, billions of dollars in federal funding go to hospitals, fire departments, schools, roads and other resources based on census data.

With billions of dollars in federal funding being apportioned each year based on decennial census results, an accurate, complete count is crucial to county governments.

During the pause in field operations, the Census Bureau will continue to evaluate all 2020 Census operations.

Here's a timeline of what to expect:

- March 16-24: Households will receive a second reminder letter to participate in the census.
- March 26-April 3: Households will receive a reminder postcard to respond.
- April 8-16: Households will receive a third reminder letter and paper questionnaire.
- April 20-27: A final reminder postcard before census enumerators follow up in person.

In late May, census takers around the nation will begin visiting households that have not yet responded to the 2020 Census to help complete the count.

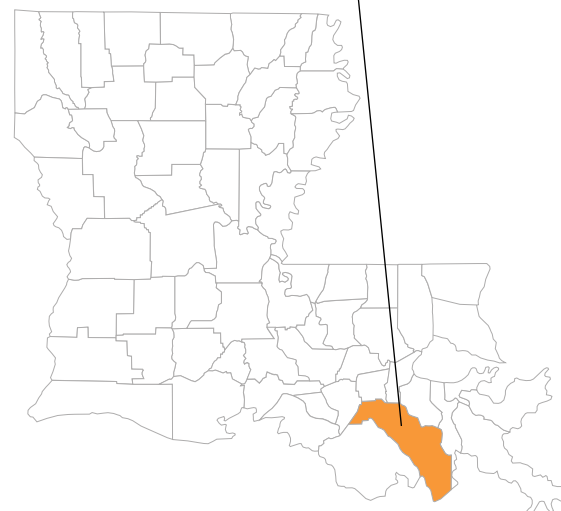
The public is encouraged to respond to the 2020 Census online using a desktop computer, laptop, smartphone or tablet, and can also respond by phone or mail.

For all other Census Bureau household and economic surveys separate from the 2020 Decennial Census, Bureau personnel will begin using phone calls instead of in-person visits. In the limited number of instances where an in-person visit is necessary, the Census is working closely with public health authorities to ensure each visit is accomplished safely.

The U.S. Census Bureau has created tailored videos and language guides for completing the census online. **CN**

GET TO
KNOW...

Lafourche Parish, La.



Welcome, Lafourche Parish, La.

Lafourche Parish is located in southeast Louisiana and is bordered by the Gulf of Mexico. The 1,469 square-mile parish has a population of more than 96,000.

The parish has three incorporated municipalities including Lockport, Golden Meadow and the county seat of Thibodaux. Known as the "Sportsman's Paradise," the parish is a natural habitat for wildlife including deer, alligators, fish and shellfish.

In the early 1700s, French, Spanish, English and German-speaking families settled in the area. The cultures, customs and heritages from the descendants of these early settlers were joined by the Acadians, who were expelled from Nova Scotia, and merged to form the "Cajun Country" region.

A distributary bayou of the Mississippi River is frequently used as a point of reference with today's residents referring to locations as "up to the bayou," "down the bayou" or "across the bayou."

The Parish's motto is "Feeding and Fueling America" because of its major industries including agriculture, livestock and oil and gas.



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Saving Lives. Restoring Economy.

Editor's note: This op-ed was first published in The Hill, a news website based in Washington, D.C.

by **Matthew D. Chase**
NACo CEO/Executive Director

Saving lives while restoring the economy is our mantra of the day. As Congress assembles a massive, third supplemental aid package, we, as a nation, must balance the dueling objectives of being laser-focused in our public health fight against COVID-19 while simultaneously confronting the unprecedented, immense shock to our national economy and the daily lives of all Americans.

On the frontlines of this pan-

demic, America's 40,000 county elected officials, nearly 1,000 county-supported hospitals and 1,900 local public health authorities are addressing the very real issues of COVID-19 preparedness, mitigation and response. We are grappling with test kit access, workforce capacity and safety, data reliability and real-time information sharing for critical decision making. As W. Edward Deming famously stated, "You can't manage what you can't measure."

Even as federal policymakers turn their full attention to the real, complex web of economic challenges, we must also ensure that state and local officials have the essential, life-saving tools and capacity – equipment, experts, funding and policies – needed to protect the American public. As a nation, we are already far behind the eight ball and every day and every dollar counts in our fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

In recent years, I've made two main observations in every public speech: (1) Smart nations, corporations, commu-

nities and even families and individuals impose self-discipline, especially financially, during the best of times to prepare for the worst of times and (2) Underneath the glowing national economic indicators of strong GDP growth, modest wage increases and record-low unemployment, America's counties were *oddly* enough confronting record-high, crushing demands on our safety net services.

While there will be plenty of time for Monday morning quarterbacking and investigations of our national decision-making and preparedness, we must ensure, right now, that our state and local public health providers have the resources, flexibility and cooperation to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. We're already short staffed and under-resourced. Our local public health workforce has been gutted since the last economic recession in 2008, with nearly one-fourth, or 60,000, fewer public health professionals at the local level, according to the National Association of

City-County Health Officials.

Each year, we kick and scream to federal policymakers that we need a stronger federal-state-local partnership, and even broader community collaboration, for public health preparedness, mitigation and response. Unfortunately, local officials have been forced to play more defense, rather than offense, in this space. Rather than support the broader capacity of public health services, the nature of federal and state policy and budget fights has forced us into narrow, siloed responses, typically crisis by crisis... HIV/AIDS, Ebola, Zika, H1N1, opioids, and now, COVID-19. We're now living with the consequences.

With our 3.6 million public servants, county governments are working overtime to protect, prepare, inform and comfort the American public. But it isn't easy. Even before this pandemic, our budgets and staffing were already stretched to the max. Child welfare caseloads were skyrocketing, especially demands on foster care, due

to the opioid crisis. Substance abuse, also led by the opioid crisis, emerged as the number one cause of accidental death nationwide, with over 70,000 deaths each year. Mental illnesses, with the persistent lack of attention, funding and treatment facilities, accounted for nearly 70 percent of our 750,000 local jail inmates each day. And the number of incarcerated females, including many mothers, spiked in the past two years, again related to the plight of our dueling "have-have not" societies.

The slow nature of the American response is unacceptable. People will die unnecessarily. Families and individuals will suffer, financially and emotionally. Companies and industries will be destroyed or set back years. And taxpayer dollars will be wasted. But we can still mitigate the damage if we stay focused on our core objective: *stopping the spread of COVID-19!*

San Diego County, California

See *SAVING LIVES* page 16

NACo 2020

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Week of May 11, 2020

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Orange County/ Orlando, Florida

Sheltering homeless residents key in counties' coronavirus fight

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

When all health signs point to COVID-19, the first recommendation people get is to isolate themselves and avoid infecting others.

What if they don't have a home where they can do that?

The coronavirus poses a unique challenge to people who are homeless and the counties who serve them.

For shelters, like those in Multnomah County, Ore., reacting to the coronavirus brings up the issue of capacity.

"It's pretty difficult because it's not easy to get six feet of space around every bed," said County Communications Coordinator Denis Theriault. "Then you start thinking about trading the six feet of distance between beds for six feet of distance between those with symptoms and those without."

The county convened its public health department, human services personnel specializing in homeless programming and the county's shelter operators on Feb. 28, when Oregon's first positive test for COVID-19 was confirmed.

"We started passing out masks at the shelters, reinforcing messaging about hand washing, just trying to get as much out there about this virus that we could," Theriault said.

And the county held off on closing two of its seasonal shelters, which usually open only for the winter. That helped absorb some of the capacity consequences once the shelters added buffers around beds.

At least one person living in a Pierce County, Wash. shelter has tested positive, *The News Tribune* reported.

In Orange County, Calif., a shuttered juvenile correctional facility was reopened to serve as a shelter for older homeless people who haven't shown any symptoms.

Many counties provide hotel vouchers for homeless people with health sensitivities, and Hennepin County, Minn. Manager Dave Hough has seen

the attitudes of hotel managers change dramatically recently.

"We found that our hotels two or three weeks ago weren't too receptive to this, but they're begging right now because of the economy," he said, estimating that he had signed \$1.5 million in leases over the prior two days. "We're trying to get seniors and other vulnerable individuals who have compromised health systems out of those shelters to get them away from congregate living situations into a single-occupancy unit with a bathroom."

The Hennepin County Board of Commissioners had approved \$3 million for hotel vouchers for the homeless during the coronavirus pandemic. Mecklenburg County, N.C. has leased an entire 123-room hotel for 60 days specifically to house at-risk homeless people. San Diego County, Calif. has more than 1,300 hotel rooms.

Multnomah County had a similar strategy — keeping higher-risk people out of shelters, until a motel owner evicted several women whose stays had been funded by the Portland-Multnomah County Joint Office of Homeless Services. Multnomah County Commission Chair Deborah Kafoury issued an emergency declaration requiring hotels to accept guests whose payments were subsidized by the county or a county contractor.

Hough estimated that Hennepin County funds beds for roughly 1,000 homeless people each night but acknowledged that some don't want shelter. To reach them, the county's homeless "navigators" are going to encampments to inform the people living there about the virus and how to protect themselves.

But Hough also sees a challenge in both serving the homeless and protecting the rest of the population, and holes that must be filled in.

"We've closed the libraries, but when the shelters clear everybody out at 7:30 a.m., they're usually heading to the library," he said. "Where do

they go if the central library is closed? Are they practicing social distancing? Probably not."

A little under half of Multnomah County's homeless population, as of the last point-in-time count in 2019, were unsheltered.

The county created a laminated information card with information about COVID-19 — how to prevent its spread, recognize the symptoms and help treat them — and worked with 14 different organizations to distribute them among the unsheltered population. Within five days, they distributed more than 1,700 cards.

"They're not seeing so many folks who are incredibly ill, but they're giving them information," Theriault said. "The virus is most likely to transmit in a closed, congregate space," so unsheltered homeless are somewhat safer, but they are also seeing fewer people every day.

That said, a homeless person living in an encampment in Santa Clara County, Calif. died of COVID March 16.


With many Americans living paycheck to paycheck, along with many nonessential businesses shutting down and idling employees, financial stresses are adding up for people at risk of transitional homelessness.

Several governors have issued moratoria on eviction hearings, some open ended, some tied to a specific date and some depending on emergency declaration. California Gov. Gavin Newsom allowed counties to pause evictions, and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office will not enforce them.

Some states, including Georgia and Pennsylvania, have declared states of judicial emergency, and if counties close their court facilities, that will delay eviction hearings.

Other counties have issued their own moratoria, many times ahead of their state. "This is a tough time. Businesses are being challenged, and renters are being challenged because they can't go to work," said Clackamas County Chair

Jim Bernard, days before Oregon Gov. Kate Brown declared a statewide moratorium. "We

ask that business owners and property owners not evict people." 

PROFILES IN SERVICE

CINDY BULLOCH

Board Member

Assessor

Iron County, Utah



Bulloch

Number of years involved in NACo: Eight

Years in public service: 14

Occupation: Assessor/appraiser

Education: Studied agribusiness policy at California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo, Calif. Currently studying business at Western Governors University

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner:

Sandra Day O'Connor, Margaret Thatcher, William Shakespeare

A dream I have is to: Qualify for and run the Boston Marathon

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: Hike the Grand Canyon, rim to rim.

My favorite way to relax is to: Go for a run or go on a hike.

I'm most proud of: Every one of my eight grandchildren.

Every morning I read: Too many emails.

My favorite meal is: Ahi tuna with brussels sprouts and a sweet potato.

My pet peeve is: People who park in the handicap parking spots and bullies.

My motto is: "You bring your own weather" and "Change does not happen in your comfort zone."

The last book I read was: *Talking to Strangers* by Malcolm Gladwell

My favorite movie is: *The Green Mile*

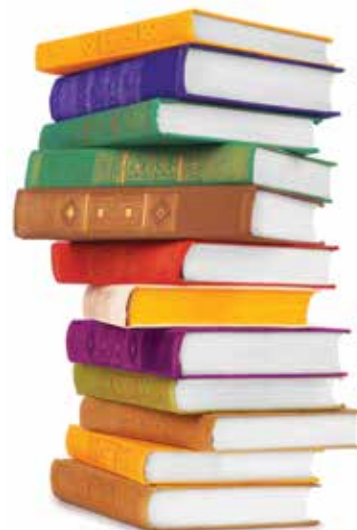
My favorite music is: Varied — classical, show tunes, country, hip-hop, '80s rock, pop.

My favorite U.S. president: Abraham Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: The connections are invaluable — connections with elected officials from across the country, congressional members, legislative staff and industry leaders make us all better representatives for our constituents.

The hardest thing I've ever done is:

Re-learning to read after surgery to remove a brain tumor in my 30s.



NACo resources help county leaders respond to the pandemic

NACo is compiling resources to help county leaders respond quickly to COVID-19 in hopes of saving as many lives as possible.

The COVID-19 resource hub, www.naco.org/coronavirus, aggregates all of NACo's work on the pandemic, along with other trusted sources of information.

In addition, you can subscribe at <https://nac.real-magnet.land/covid-19> to receive email updates as information is added to the hub.

NACo's County Explorer (<https://ce.naco.org/>) is now tracking county policies in response to the pandemic, specifically county emergency declarations, county and state nonessential business closures, county and state "shelter in place" or "safer at home" policies and FEMA major disaster declarations, by state.

The County Explorer database already includes more than 800 county-level indicators to help local leaders make decisions for their communities. NACo has grouped together key datapoints and maps related to the crisis for counties to easily access and assess residents' risk levels, including population level, percent of population 65 years of age and older, child food insecurity rate, primary care physician ratio, the number of hospitals, county-supported local health departments and the number of nursing homes and nursing home residents.

NACo's COVID-19 hub is telling the county story and emphasizing the need for strong federal-state-lo-

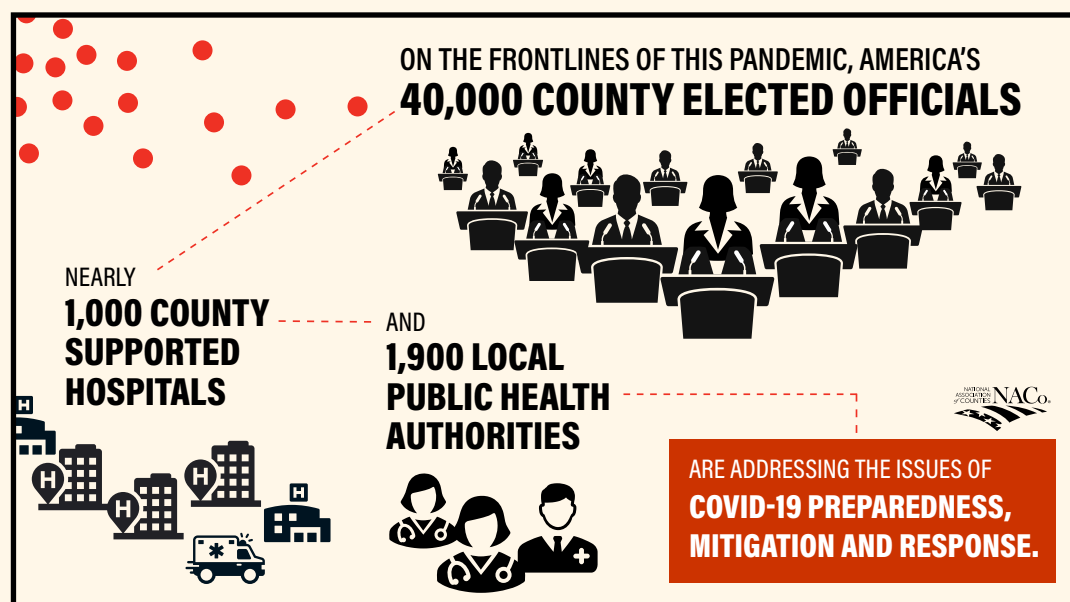
cal partnership, including stories from *County News* and other publications featuring county-associated authors.

The resource hub also includes case studies of local counties and how they have managed:

- Containment measures
- Community mitigation
- Ramping up health services
- Preparing local jails and justice systems
- Providing housing
- Caring for children and families
- Protecting county employees

NACo is also collecting resources that its partners are offering to aid county efforts, including from the County Tech Xchange, Nationwide, Esri, Witt O'Brien's, Thomson Reuters, Comcast and Broadnet.

Share what your county is doing to stem the coronavirus outbreak by responding to this quick, five-minute survey at <https://www.naco.org/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-county-response-efforts-survey>.



HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



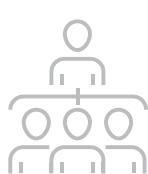
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MONEYMATTERS

Fiscal First Aid: Recovering from Financial Distress

by **Shayne C. Kavanagh**
Senior Manager-Research, GFOA

The public safety concerns that the COVID pandemic raises are top of mind for local government officials, and with good reason. Another consequence of the pandemic is the financial consequence for local governments. Unlike recessions, which can be thought of as a steep hill downward, COVID, thus far, seems more like going off a cliff.

Given the prolonged interruption to normal economic activity that many public health and economic experts expect, an extended economic recession seems likely even when the threat to public health subsides. As leaders in Washington, D.C. work to develop strategies to stimulate the economy, provide resources to help counties and other local governments through this difficult time and limit the lasting damage from this recession, all local governments must also take action to address what they can do at a local level.

To help local government deal with the tenuous financial situation, GFOA has provided a program called Fiscal First Aid: Recovering from Financial Distress. This program was actually created more than 10 years ago to help local governments deal with the 2008 Great Recession. It was extremely popular at the time and we have even heard from a number of veteran GFOA members that they have dusted off their copies of the Fiscal First Aid material and are using it now. As counties work to deal with the public health crisis, they must also take action to deal with the economic and fiscal crisis that is shaping up from loss in revenue and increase in expenditures.

What is financial recovery and fiscal first aid?

Financial recovery is the process of recognizing, arresting and reversing a pattern of financial decline. Fiscal first aid

refers to retrenchment tactics that can be used to stabilize financial condition. This stability builds stakeholder confidence in the recovery process and buys time to develop and enact more comprehensive financial recovery strategies.

There are three essential stages in the recovery model.

Bridging: In the bridging stage, the government must get through the immediate crisis and create breathing room to make more sustainable reforms. Bridging includes:

- Recognizing that financial distress exists and convincing a critical mass of stakeholders of the same;
- Diagnosing the causes of distress;
- Applying fiscal first aid tactics to stabilize the situation; and
- Developing a recovery plan.

Reform: The government carries out the short-term recovery plan and develops and implements long-term therapies in the reform stage. Reform includes:

- Developing long-term financial strategies and
- Starting a formal long-term financial planning process.

Transform: In the Transform Stage, the government institutionalizes long-term financial planning and becomes more resistant to future financial distress and adaptable to a changing environment.

What is the GFOA financial recovery web site?

The site at www.gfoa.org/fiscal-first-aid contains the following:

- **A 12-step process for financial recovery:** The web site breaks down the three stages of recovery described above into 12 detailed steps.
- **Catalog of fiscal first aid techniques:** The site highlights the most and least recommended techniques for providing short-term relief for financial distress.
- **Catalog of long-term treatments:** A number of strategies to improve financial condition



over the long term are discussed.

- **Diagnostic model:** A full, ready-to-use diagnostic model is available to help find causes of financial distress that you can address.

What should you do right now?

Local governments are now in the bridging phase that we described earlier. Below are the most important parts of the bridging phase to get started with.

Get your mind around the basics of the problem. Of course, no one can predict exactly what is going to happen to your revenues and expenditures, but there are some questions you can answer now, such as:

- Which revenues are most vulnerable and least vulnerable? For example, property taxes will not be hit as quickly or as hard as a hotel tax or sales tax. Understanding the relative vulnerability of your major sources helps you understand your overall risk.
- What services are critical for the public safety response and which are not? This gives you an idea of where you might expect increased costs and where costs can be cut.

Form a team. Dealing the financial downturn will likely require some far-reaching strategies. Having a team that can help think these through is critical for the following reasons:

- You will need support to get the strategies done.
- You will need help thinking through potentially unforeseen and unintended consequences of cost cutting measures.

Slow the flow of cash out of your doors. Cash is king during a financial crisis. Local governments need to make sure they have enough cash on hand for essential services. Thus, one of the first things local governments should do is slow the flow of cash out the door. There are a number of tried-and-true retrenchment techniques that can improve cash flow during difficult times. You can get a catalogue of these techniques at www.gfoa.org/fiscal-first-aid.


Develop a culture of frugality and make smart choices about future investment. In a situation of severe financial distress, everyone needs to understand that every dollar counts. Applying some of the retrenchment techniques described at www.gfoa.org/fiscal-first-aid can help, but it is also important that the leaders of the recovery process apply frugality to themselves and their own immediate staff. If the leaders and/or their closest colleagues are spared what everyone else is asked to endure, then the recovery process loses credibility.

Leaders must also be ready to prioritize spending using data on what will be most effective and cut where necessary so that the county can

still continue to fund essential projects that both deal with the current crisis and allow the organization to emerge without taking too many steps backwards. Even in times of recession, few governments benefit from entire across the board spending freezes or indiscriminate cuts to all new projects. Governments must continue to invest in critical infrastructure that will support recovery.

Develop a cash flow analysis. Cash flow is a measure of the difference between cash sources and uses and is a key indicator of an organization's fiscal health. Cash flow analysis takes on renewed importance in a financial crisis. Cash is critical for short-term operations. It pays the salaries and buys the equipment that produces public services. A balance sheet may carry plenty of assets, but without cash a government is effectively bankrupt. Governments in a financial crisis should develop cash flow models that allow the organization to pinpoint its current cash position and provide insight into future position. GFOA is working on instructional videos for developing your own cash flow analysis. It will be posted on www.gfoa.org/fiscal-first-aid when it is ready.

Conclusion

The financial downturn caused by COVID is concerning and local governments have not had to contend with a financial downturn for over 10 years. For some local governments, this may mean there is no institutional memory on how to respond. Fortunately, the GFOA fiscal first aid model has preserved and updated that institutional memory for the current crisis. 

GFOA is working to update resources so they are most relevant for the current unprecedented environment. We will post resources as they become available. For more information please visit www.gfoa.org/fiscal-first-aid. For questions, please contact research@gfoa.org.

BRIGHT IDEAS | GWINNETT COUNTY, Ga.

Mobile Recreation Center Gets Community Moving

PROBLEM:

“Play desert” areas lack opportunities for physical activity for at-risk youth and other members of the community who face higher risks for health conditions.

SOLUTION:

Create a mobile recreation center that brings physical activity opportunities to areas throughout the county and helps promote healthy habits.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

“We’re going to play.”

The phrase can be seen on the back of a former home-delivered meals box truck driving throughout Gwinnett County, Ga. Now a recreation center on wheels, the truck is no longer providing food but instead hula hoops, jump ropes and other play equipment to county residents.

The unit is known as “Be Active Gwinnett,” which launched as part of the Live Healthy Gwinnett initiative. The mobile recreation center has visited more than 200 sites and served 15,000 participants.

The unit visits housing authorities, apartment complexes, childcare facilities, faith-based facilities, new home developments, schools, camps, parks, afterschool programs, libraries and community events.

“We set up everything whether it’s on grass or asphalt — a parking lot can be blocked out for us,” said Carion Marcelin, coordinator for Live Healthy Gwinnett. “We make it happen with whatever space that we have available.”

Activities within the unit include obstacle courses, broad jump, agility hurdles, giant tunnels, pop-up soccer, jumbo stacks, parachutes, flag football, junior golf and “bubble soccer.”

“We have this awesome game that’s similar to Quiditch if you’re a fan of Harry Potter,” Marcelin said.

Although the 437-square-mile county has an extensive park system with more than 10,000 acres and 50 parks and recreation facilities, studies found that 20 percent of county residents get no leisure time physical activity, according to the 2013 Gwinnett County Health Department’s Community Health Assessment.

“We have a very diverse resident base here in the county, so not everyone is aware or embedded in that traditional park and recreational sense of coming to a park or playground or rec center or a gymnasium,” said Lindsey Jorstad, outreach manager for Gwinnett County Department of Community Services.

Be Active Gwinnett aims to promote healthy habits and decrease childhood obesity.

“That’s where we saw the value of eliminating these play deserts and bringing traditional play-to-learn activities to them and building that trust with residents who might not have accessed our programs in

‘We’re just trying to get people active... We’re helping connect them to other resources that are available within the county.’

the past,” Jorstad added.

Be Active Gwinnett Program Supervisor Heather Shipman said the mobile unit also visits senior centers. Residents initially are “a little bit wary about getting up and moving, but once they see us having fun they’ll join in and have a good time,” she noted.

The program launched in August 2018 with part-time staff and interns. The county’s health and human services department donated the box truck to use as the mobile recreation unit and the county paid to add graphics to the outside of the truck.

Last year, Be Active Gwinnett brought on a full-time, dedicated supervisor. The county has

also added a second vehicle, a van, to its fleet.

Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation partnered with Eastside Medical Center, a private hospital system in the county, to launch Live Healthy Gwinnett after the county’s overall obesity rate reached 26 percent. Live Healthy Gwinnett focuses on four areas of wellness: Be Active, Eat Healthy, Get Checked and Be Positive.

The initiative holds other events such as community health fairs, preventative screenings on the local level, a “yoga in the parks” series and others.

“We’re just trying to get people to be active,” Shipman said. “When we’re out there, we’re helping connect them to other resources that are available within the county.”


Marcelin said many families who come to one program follow the initiative to other events.

“It’s that continuing growth of making sure families consistently show up every single

month and they’re coming out and they’re being active, and they see all of the programs that we offer for their young children and for themselves as well,” she said.

Shipman and Marcelin emphasized that it is easy to replicate a similar program by using volunteers and little equipment.

“There’s so many things you can do if you don’t have the actual vehicle,” Marcelin said. “You can borrow items and just get started that way and still get that movement going in your county.”

“I’ve seen the transition from ‘OK they’re not always excited about getting physically active’ but then they come out there and we make it fun and they will continue those healthy habits later in life,” Shipman said. 

Gwinnett County’s Be Active Gwinnett initiative is the recipient of a 2019 NACo Achievement Award in the Parks and Recreation category.



Kids at the Villas Del Camino Apartment Complex play outside as part of the Be Active Gwinnett initiative in Gwinnett County, Ga.

the HR DOCTOR

With Phil Rosenberg

Phil Rosenberg

When there is an administrative challenge, the best approach for public servants begins with a review of the symptoms or issues, followed by at least a preliminary diagnosis of what's behind those symptoms, then a treatment program to rally the staff to attack and defeat the problem. This also involves reassuring residents and other stakeholders that things are being done responsibly, assertively and with the proper degree of seriousness.

The COVID-19 pandemic is as much a management problem as it is a medical problem. You cannot fight a major critical event without understanding it, relying heavily on the expert advice of a diverse body of advisors. Displaying bravado and promising that the problem will go away is unacceptable. You cannot fight successfully if you have not laid the foundation for victory by thoughtful preparation, anticipating unexpected horrors and on-going communications. You can't fight any major battle in wartime or virus time without strong consistent and truthful leadership.

The primary job of a great leader is to be a dealer in hope — to offer colleagues and the community a sense of understanding of the fears and actions of citizens in time of crisis.

The great leader learns to control uncertainty by using understanding and confidently applying a sense of responsibility and hope. Uncertainty is an infectious coequal partner of the actual crisis itself. Spreading uncertainty, expanding fear and unleashing evils like racism or sexism by blaming certain groups or individuals, races, genders, etc. is the tactic of those "spoilers" intending to hurt people, silence opposition or create rather than control uncertainty. These tactics of bullies, criminals or autocrats generate fear that injures us and our institutions and ultimately us as indi-

Managing the Unmanageable



viduals, family members and citizens.

I dictate this brief article in the parking lot of a supermarket at 7 a.m. — opening time — to pick up groceries (not including a hoard of toilet paper). I arrived to learn the store now opens at 8. The line outside includes people wearing gloves and masks and generally doing their best to keep away from their fellow humans. The uncertainty induced by changing processes or practices with no warning further supports the sense of uncertainty and shaking of stability which is often at the root of why people hoard toilet paper and look suspiciously at their fellows.

It does no good to dwell on what we should have been doing all along and what the neglect of our preparation duties has been, but it would be a shame not to take the steps that we can, now.

When the preparation for crisis management does not happen effectively, it leads to trouble and, in this case of a serious virus outbreak, increased risk of death or prolonged illness. If we had anticipated the

capacity needed to muster and rapidly deploy infection tests kits and protective equipment, our ability to gather the medical intelligence needed for an immediate assault and pushback of the invading virus would have occurred much quicker than it is even now.

When these critical ingredients to combating the COVID-19 outbreak are weak or lacking at the federal level, the opportunity and the burden quickly shifts to America's most effective levels of government — counties. Unclear federal leadership leads to a shifting of responsibility, perhaps without clear authority, to local officials to step in and act. They create the policies, take the risks and communicate hope to people in a way designed to calm frayed nerves, support and assist science, and help the country recover and learn from the experience. They end up being asked to create local solutions to a worldwide crisis.

There is another very serious disease spreading along with the virus — the widespread psychological disruption, loneliness and depression which

occurs when uncertainty runs rampant and our stability is shaken. The millions, especially senior citizens, who live alone far from family or not in touch with them are particularly vulnerable. Those dependent upon stock market investments to realize their retirement dreams watch in a mixture of horror, sadness and fear as the value of their savings declines precipitously. The at-risk group includes employees who fear layoffs, furloughs, cuts in benefits or pay, all the while working overtime while doing work in more dangerous environments, such as health care and public safety professions. Local governments by now should have seen the value of having in place a 24/7/365 Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Like other protective measures, a great EAP can be a critical resource. Consider partnering with a neighboring agency to share the costs and the benefits of such a program.

Social distancing restrictions will help. However, social distancing without also suggesting "social media distancing" in-

creases an already too familiar and growing human problem... isolation and reliance upon unproven "facts" and theories. While there are clear advantages to social media, including the capability to convey information about services and support, the balance between our humanity and our technology is a point worthy of a national dialogue once COVID-19 is defeated.

Teleworking is another tool with many benefits, especially, when social disruptions keep the kids out of school suddenly. But it opens concerns about cyber-security. Many government agencies rely on a two-level security protocol for data protection, recognizing that uncertainty and unrest are an open invitation to individual or group hackers. The result may expose sensitive agency data and the content of employee personal data to "hijacking." Technological security devices, such as encryption "fobs" are in very major short supply. The result is that teleworking, like other innovations, works best when it is planned for in advance rather than slapped together without prior training, equipment and leadership.

Of course, the medical issues surrounding COVID-19 are absolutely critical but they must be partnered with effective and sustained leadership based on a fundamental crisis management principle whether in business, government or in our private lives: "Tell the truth; tell it often; and keep telling it!"

The pandemic we are now facing should remind us of the crucial importance of the role of local government.

America will prevail over COVID-19. So, very likely, will you and I. However, the price will be many thousands of victims of this virus who would likely not have been victims had we been prepared for early and aggressive intervention. Hail to local government leadership which we hope will double down on the importance of prevention and preparation and not allow the preparation imperative to fall on ears deafened by complacency or arrogance. **CN**



School Resource Officer Deputy Jim Williams hands out a bagged lunch to a student in Marshall County, Ala. Photo courtesy Marshall County Sheriff's Office

ALABAMA

The **MARSHALL COUNTY** Sheriff's Department school resource officers are **providing lunches** to 160 students throughout the county during the coronavirus pandemic through the Sacks of Love program. The outbreak has closed schools until April 6, according to WAFF. Local church groups donate and pack the food and school resource officers provide the deliveries to families.

CALIFORNIA

Supervisors in **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** are establishing **urban agriculture incentive zones** that provide county residents with a tax reduction to set up a small farm on their property, according to Patch Media. To obtain the tax reduction, landowners must enter into a contract with the county that states they will dedicate their land for five years for agricultural use. The goal is to increase farming opportuni-

ties, improve access to healthy foods and support local businesses.

SAN MATEO COUNTY is partnering with grocery rescue and redistribution programs to ensure **excess food in the county is not wasted**, *Half Moon Bay Review* reported. Supermarkets, grocery stores, wholesalers and caterers in the county generate 36 million pounds of excess edible food each year, according to San

Mateo County's Office of Sustainability. The programs use county funding to purchase additional vans and hire drivers to assist in food collection. The partnerships are in response to a new Senate bill requiring municipalities to have a place to divert food from landfills.

County officials in **SANTA CLARA COUNTY** launched a **coronavirus pandemic response program** to distribute food and mobilize volunteers,

KTVU reported. Along with the San Jose mayor and a group of Silicon Valley business leaders, the county created the Silicon Valley Strong program which includes an online resource hub where volunteers can sign up to distribute food or make donations to support small businesses and low-income residents.

FLORIDA

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis activated the Florida **Small Business Emergency Bridge Loan Program** to help businesses during the coronavirus pandemic. The program provides short-term, interest-free loans to small businesses impacted by COVID-19. Up to \$50 million has been allocated for the program. Small business owners that have between two and 100 employees can apply for short-term, interest-free loans up to \$50,000.

IDAHO

Commissioners in **ADA COUNTY** have **passed a sexuality and gender identity non-discrimination ordinance**, KTVB reported. The ordinance applies to unincorporated areas of Ada County outside city limits. The goal of the ordinance is to ensure all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are afforded equal opportunities for employment, commercial property and the use of public accommodations.

ILLINOIS

The **LA SALLE COUNTY** board needs to adopt **fraud and ethics policies** to continue receiving state grants. The new condition is to ensure the money received from grants is not put at risk. The ethics policy states employees should

not engage in political activities or accept gifts from "prohibited sources," according to Shaw Media. The new policy requires the county creates a mechanism to report abuse anonymously and training to recognize it.

INDIANA

In **HANCOCK COUNTY**, the prosecutor is **filing charges against those who overdose** in the hopes of getting more people treatment and stopping the revolving door of the addiction cycle. The crime for overdosing is possession of a controlled substance, Fox59 reported. When police respond to an overdose and the person is sent to the hospital, officers will determine if there is probable cause and if a judge agrees, the person will be arrested. Treatment services through probation will be offered if an individual pleads guilty.

MARYLAND

The **BALTIMORE COUNTY** Council approved a bipartisan bill to create a **registry of private security cameras**. The bill creates a voluntary camera registry for property owners. The program maps where cameras are located to identify security footage where crimes take place, the *Baltimore Sun* reported. The council encouraged all property owners to register their cameras and submit contact information to participate in the program.

MINNESOTA

A new dispatch mapping tool in **STEARNS COUNTY** is providing the **location of all automated external defibrillators (AEDs)** located in the county. More than 500 defibrillators are located throughout Stearns County, 5 EYEWIT-



GEORGIA

The **HALL COUNTY** landfill will **no longer be accepting sludge**, a byproduct of the wastewater treatment process, leaving municipalities without a place to take the waste. The sludge must be tak-

NESS NEWS reported. The Sheriff's Office worked with Advocates for Health to replace bad batteries and ensure all AEDs were working. The tool allows dispatchers to let callers know if there is a defibrillator nearby.



• **ST. LOUIS COUNTY** is holding an **online real estate auction** for 90 tax-forfeiting properties. The online auctions allow more people to participate from outside the state. A change in state statute allows greater flexibility and efficiency in public land sale procedures, according to *Duluth News Tribune*. The goal of the auctions is to return the properties to private ownership. The county sold four of 18 properties in its first pilot online auction.

NEBRASKA

• Almost 2,000 of the state's 11,000 county-system bridges are **structurally deficient**, but the Nebraska Department of Transportation's Transportation Innovation Act is helping fix some of those bridges.

A state statute back in 2016 allocated \$40 million for this program, with money spread out over each year until 2023, with the state and county splitting the construction costs 55/45.

The program has helped repair or replace over 250 bridges

from a wastewater treatment facility to the landfill to be dried out before being mixed with garbage, the *Times of Gainesville* reported. The process to dispose of the sludge is costly to the county. Photo by Scott Rogers, The Times of Gainesville

NEBRASKA

• As counties continue to operate under social distancing directives, **LINCOLN COUNTY** will be a canary in a coal mine, **holding meetings open to the public via video**, the *North Platte Telegraph* reported. The board will use technology that allows the public to make comments live.

Gov. Pete Ricketts granted a temporary waiver of the Open Meetings Act to enable state and local boards, commissions and public bodies to meet through May 31 with the help of video and audio technology. The order said that public meetings can be by video or telephone conference or "other electronic communication so long as there is made available at such meeting access to members of the public and to members of the media."

es through the county since 2016, ABC News reported.

NEVADA

The **NYE COUNTY** Commission is hoping to **curb hemp cultivation** by pulling back definitions in zoning laws.

Those new definitions effectively outlaw growing any crops for sale on suburban estates and rural estates 1 and 2 zoned properties, which essentially bars those landowners from growing for farmers markets or small-scale sales, the *Pahrump Valley Times* reported.

The commission initially considered a bill that would limit crops on the aforementioned zoned lots, including hemp and, as originally proposed, vegetables and fruits as well, but adjusted it to protect small-scale growers using the terms "subsistence farming" and "commercial farming."

OHIO

The number of drug overdoses is prompting **FRANKLIN COUNTY** to consider **opening a second morgue**.

Between Jan. 31 and Feb. 9, Franklin County has experienced almost 30 deaths due to suspected opioid overdoses, Coroner Anahi Ortiz told ABC News, including 10 overdose deaths on one day.

"It's straining our capacity," Ortiz said. "We've had to switch the freezer over to a cooler in order to accommodate more [dead bodies] in our facility. And we have several times been to the point where we're thinking of calling for a temporary morgue."

The coroner's office has also asked hospitals to hold on to bodies while the office contin-

ues to process overdose victims.

UTAH

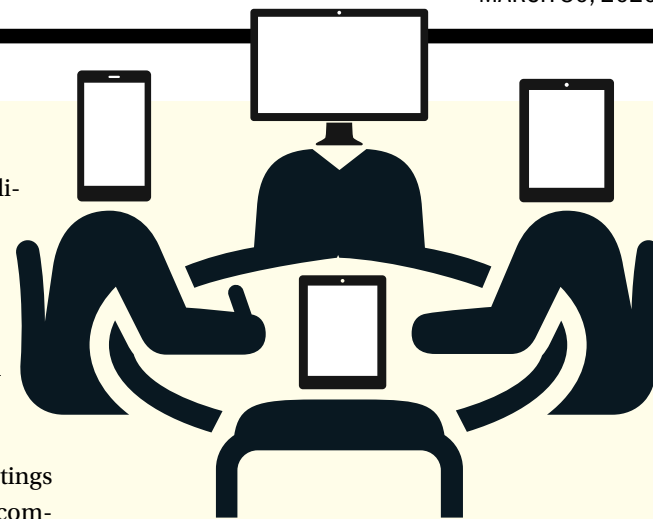
• Members of the **SALT LAKE COUNTY** Council now have **naloxone kits** in case they come across a resident having an opioid overdose.

The allocation was prompted by County Mayor Jenny Wilson's experience seeing someone on the streets in mid-overdose. While she did not have any naloxone on her, a bystander did, and used it while Wilson called for paramedics.

"I don't know if I could live with the guilt if she hadn't been there because I would not have been able to save that life," Wilson told the council. "I don't know what I would have done. Would I have called 911? Yes. Did I? Yes. But I wasn't in a position to save his life."

The county's Behavioral Health Services department briefed members on how to administer the lifesaving treatment, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported.

• As housing costs increase in the Heber Valley, the **WASATCH COUNTY** council is considering a new program to provide **affordable housing for essential county employees**. The Shared Appreciation Mortgage program may help sheriff's deputies, public works employees and others obtain housing. The county would subsidize the cost of the housing by being co-owners through a shared appreciation mortgage program. When the home is eventually sold or refinanced, the county is owed a share of equity proportionate to the percentage originally



contributed by the county. The employee can request that the county contribute anywhere between 5 - 18 percent toward the home during application. The homeowner would have to maintain employment with the county and the property must be within 20 miles of the employee's office, KPCW News reported.

VIRGINIA

In hopes of **slowing residential growth** in rural areas, **STAFFORD COUNTY** supervisors are considering downzoning nearly 90,000 acres of agricultural property.

The Board directed county staff to draft a proposed ordinance changing the density

in agricultural parcels to one home per 10 acres from the current one home per three acres. The Planning Commission would then vote on it.

County officials told the *Free-Lance Star* that property values should remain unchanged until the next round of property assessments in 2022.

The 89,707 acres of land with the agricultural zoning makes up roughly 54 percent of total land in the county.

News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have an item we should consider? Contact us at cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.



MOORE COUNTY, N.C.

The Moore County, N.C. Board of Commissioners adopted its county seal on Jan. 4, 1977. The seal, designed by county resident John Foster Faulk, who lived in Southern Pines, was presented to the board during a special ceremony. Faulk designed the seal for the country's bicentennial celebration in 1976. During this year, the county celebrated its 192nd birthday.

The symbols featured in the seal represent a variety



of aspects of the county's heritage, geography and economy. Images that encompass the seal include a wheel of progress, pottery, education, a horseshoe, a pinecone, a golf tee, a tobacco leaf and a peach.

If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Rachel Looker at rlooker@naco.org.

NATIONAL COUNTY GOVERNMENT MONTH TAKES ON NEW MEANING AMID CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

by NACo President
Mary Ann Borgeson

There is no clearer demonstration of this year’s National County Government Month (NCGM) theme — Counties Matter — than the public health emergency we are facing across the country. More than ever, our residents are seeing firsthand the essential functions counties perform.

During the month of April, we have an opportunity to reinforce the message that counties provide indispensable services and help our communities stay healthy and safe.

My term as NACo President has focused on how counties can support older Americans and their caregivers. Because people over 65 are more vul-

nerable to COVID-19, counties are taking extra precautions to protect them. We should highlight how counties are serving this population by:

- Safely delivering meals through nutrition programs
- Providing support services and resources to caregivers
- Protecting elderly Americans from predatory scams that are escalating in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak, and
- Preventing the COVID-19 spread while also implementing creative strategies to protect older Americans from the harm of social isolation.

While many of the NCGM events you planned can no longer take place in person, we encourage you to continue to highlight how your county is keeping your residents safe.

There are many ways to show that counties matter — even in the absence of large gatherings and in-person meetings.

With children home from school, NACo’s civic education resources provide opportunities to inform young people about county government and have fun at the same time.

Developed in partnership with iCivics, the “Counties Work” online educational game and the downloadable “My County Works” activity book for young children are great activities individuals can enjoy from their homes.

The game educates students (and adults) about local government functions by letting them run their own county. Along the way, they will learn about the many services pro-

vided by county departments while having to balance citizen requests and budgets.

The “My County Works” activity book offers hours of education and entertainment for elementary students. Both resources are free and accessible at NACo.org/iCivics.

Inform residents of how they can help from home and what communities or businesses in your county they can offer aid to. Many volunteer programs are struggling to meet new demands and are modifying their practices to comply with social distancing.

Keep the public informed of what’s happening on the front lines. Stream meetings over your social media outlets and other digital platforms.

Some counties roll out a

“County Fact of the Day” or key statistics that represent county departments, such as public health, public safety, human services and public works. A media resources kit and social media strategies along with many other resources are available at NACo.org/NCGM.

Counties are on the front lines delivering services to our residents, especially during this critical time. NCGM is an opportunity to show gratitude to county employees risking their well-being.

During this challenging time, I am inspired by the countless acts of tremendous leadership and public service counties, parishes and boroughs across the United States are demonstrating every day. Keep up the great work and stay healthy. **CN**

From SAVING LIVES page 8

was among the first counties to declare a public health emergency for COVID-19, back on February 14 — Valentine’s Day. Far from the national media

spotlight, the county Board of Supervisors and county public health officials worked together with federal and state partners, based on years of experience, to prepare and respond quickly. Unfortunately, the county had


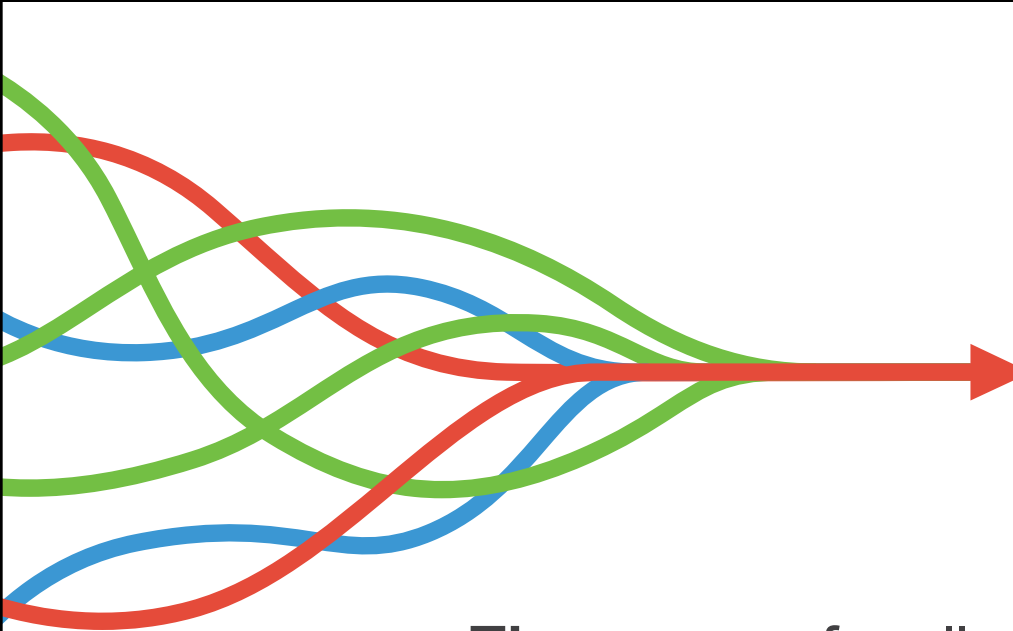
learned some harsh, tough lessons previously, including from the deaths of 28 residents from a Hepatitis-A outbreak in the local homeless population a few years back.

Now, we as a nation must

learn and adapt in real-time from our current emergency. We need to stay focused on curbing the spread of COVID-19, even as it crushes our global and national economies.


Just like the characters

in *Game of Thrones*, we wasted our summer days to prepare for winter. We must now take action together, including as we prepare for a potentially powerful coronavirus resurgence this fall.




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