

# Communications Advice

## Pointers for communities trying to navigate through crisis interactions

**F**irefighters, Police, EMT, and other first responders were on the front line every day of the pandemic. Meanwhile, behind closed doors local officials fought on a second front to communicate the important precautions and assistance available to the members of their communities.

**We spoke with communications experts around the state who provided tips and advice for managing crisis situations.**

### Think Outside the Box

These are unprecedented times, so municipalities have to be creative and think outside of the box in order to reach their residents. Our municipality established a special phone number and email specifically for residents who might need help in response to the challenges surrounding the COVID-19 restrictions. This initiative also allows the township to collect information from residents, businesses, nonprofits and religious institutions that want to help during the crisis. Township staff have been working diligently to connect residents in need with volunteers who can provide assistance.

Township staff have also been in regular contact with all the essential restaurants, convenience stores, liquor stores and grocery stores in Evesham Township to catalogue the business that are still open to serve our residents. The township has been able to promote this information through our social media so residents know where they can still meet their essential needs while also supporting our local businesses.

Through the use of “#eveshamstrong” we’ve encouraged residents to share photos of the ways they’ve been practicing social distancing.

We’ve also published regular photos of Public Works employees and police officers still out on our streets performing their regular duties, just to let residents know that the municipality is still providing all their essential services.

—Zane Clark, *Director of Public Information/ADA Coordinator, Evesham Township*

### Be Agile

It’s important to be agile, inform, show compassion, keep the goal in mind, and use different methods of communication in order to reach the greater community.

—Sondra D. Roberts, *Communications Director, Office of the Mayor/Office of Communication, City of Newark*

### Ask for Help

Ask for help. This crisis calls for seven days a week, around-the-clock communications and one person or even two people cannot do it alone.

We try to share links to information from the State of NJ information hub: covid19.nj.gov, Union County and federal resources including the CDC, WHO and White House rather than creating content ourselves. It definitely saves time.

If it helps, pull information and use anything you like including photos and graphics from our COVID-19 Resources page at [cityofsummit.org/coronavirus](http://cityofsummit.org/coronavirus) or [CityofSummitNJ](https://www.facebook.com/CityofSummitNJ) on Facebook.

—Amy Cairns, *Chief Communications Officer, Summit*

### Practice Patience, Be a Team

Be patient with the public—and your colleagues. Teamwork is never more important than during emergencies, especially one as unprecedented as the COVID-19 pandemic. Share your skills with co-workers to help ease stress and keep morale high.

When you’re preparing copy, think as a member of the public. For example, the Township recently added two new resources on our website to help residents help themselves. The first is an “at a glance” contact sheet with numbers highlighting where to get help for emergencies, which department would handle the concern or question.

The other is a new “How Do I...” tab serving as a navigational tool to bring the public to the page they will need.

And finally, where possible, use links to information from the state agencies overseeing the pandemic.

—Joseph A. Giorgio, *RMC, Hanover Township Business Administrator/Municipal Clerk, Public Information Officer*

### Engage from Every Angle

Use as many different platforms and mediums as you can. Not everyone is on social media and some people really rely on website information that they can keep going to.

Keep updating everything as much as possible because information is changing what feels like every second.

—Lindsay DeAngelis, *Assistant to the Business Administrator and Human Resources Manager, Long Branch*

### Provide Consistent, Timely, and Accurate Information

When communicating to the public a consistent flow of timely and accurate information is key. Your community members need to know where exactly they can go to access information.

We found it was very helpful to create a “mini-site” for all COVID-19 related information so our residents didn’t have to dig for it elsewhere. We were also diligent about updating the site on a daily basis so our residents knew that we were presenting the full picture to them, including the town’s numbers of positive COVID-19 cases.

It’s also very important to utilize your social media platforms to ensure that you reach different audiences.

—Tara Berson, *Public Information Officer, Township of Middletown*

### Centralize Information

My advice for other communities, especially during the Coronavirus Pandemic, is to have a centralized source of information, especially during an emergency, where relevant information is shared multiple times a day to keep the public educated and informed.”

—Michael Carelli, *Assistant to the Administrator, Oakland*