

MAYOR'S TOOLKIT to Help Build Trust with Communities During COVID-19 and Beyond



The COVID-19 pandemic is laying bare that cities are at the forefront of this crisis. The myriad decisions facing local government are non-stop, and with an almost immediate need to fulfill information demands on what actions are being taken to mitigate the impact of the outbreak on citizens. COVID-19 crisis communication is a key piece in the response plan for cities to ensure that the public clearly understands, trusts, and follows guidelines and orders of the municipal authorities. It is critical for enforcing social distancing measures, preventing panic buying and overflowing of hospitals by patients with mild symptoms.

Actions taken during these high-stress situations will determine how communities perceive the effectiveness of measures implemented and largely determine the level of trust under future crisis situations. It is therefore essential for cities to understand how to make messaging genuine and empathetic as they build resilience to withstand and continue to operate under crisis and shock situations.

What is the purpose of this tool?

This readiness self-assessment tool was designed for use by municipal governments as part of IFC's advisory support to clients. It leverages knowledge and experience of IFC's From Disclosure to Development (D2D) program which aims to improve effectiveness of data and information use for the benefit of communities. The tool complements the implementation of guidelines by national regulators and international organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO). This tool identifies 5 areas for deeper consideration by municipal authorities and leaders as they design and execute crisis communication and community engagement response plans. It offers suggestions and resources to cities on best practices for understanding target audiences (including vulnerable communities), effective messaging, preferred communication channels, effective use of data, and tackling misinformation.

Who should implement it?

This tool is intended for municipal authorities, advisors, and civil society partners responsible for the COVID-19 response. Ideally, the team implementing this tool would collect relevant information from the distinct units involved and have an overall understanding of the municipalities' operational systems and structures. In some instances, it may be appropriate for different areas within the municipalities to conduct the self-assessment to help establish if there are different perceptions within the municipality.

What are its limitations?

(a) The suggestions set out below are subject to confirmation that they are in accordance with existing national laws and regulations, especially those related to media and communications. (b) As situations develop rapidly, careful attention needs to be paid to any updates to guidelines issued by WHO and national health authorities. (c) The tool must be adapted to the local context by its users.

Why is community engagement and communication a critical pillar in a response strategy?

Timely, accurate, trustworthy, and sustained communication and engagement are essential components in any disease outbreak response. Municipal authorities are called on to provide transparent and almost real-time information to the public on mitigative and preventative actions throughout the different stages of the response. Coordinated implementation of communication and community engagement strategies between national and local governments, public health experts, and community leaders is paramount in delivering key messages that can help contain disease transmission and provide life-saving information to at-risk population. Proactively communicating and promoting two-way dialogue with communities that are harder to reach (e.g. being offline or in rural areas) can ensure that the community's voices are integrated to the response and can help prevent detrimental behaviors like hoarding, risky health practices, propagation of misinformation, and growing mistrust. It can also help prevent stigmatization of people from areas with high infection rates, or infected individuals within their communities, which can add to the physical, mental, and economic toll of the epidemic. Community engagement and communication are not only critical in the context of the direct epidemic itself but are also required on key public health risk factors that increase alongside the disease—notably gender-based violence and mental health stressors. Municipalities must be aware of how secondary risks are differentially experienced according to gender, age, income, and other determinants of vulnerability.

Where to find international guidelines for planning COVID-19 preparedness and response?

WHO provides [Operational Planning Guidelines to Support Country Preparedness and Response](#) which lay out 8 pillars: (1) Country-level coordination, planning, and monitoring; (2) Risk communication and community engagement; (3) Surveillance, rapid response teams, and case investigation; (4) Points of entry; (5) National laboratories; (6) Infection prevention and control; (7) Case management; (8) Operational support and logistics. WHO offers an [online course](#) on risk communication. [Technical guidance](#) on each pillar is also available. This self-assessment tool builds on the guidance provided for pillar 2: [Risk communication and community engagement](#) to specifically assist municipal-level clients in their COVID-19 containment response.

What are the key challenges cities are facing in community engagement and communications?

Increasingly, the most pressing challenge is the speed at which information (and misinformation) travels and the amount of information consumed by the population. Municipal authorities must be extremely vigilant about coordinating the information they share and how it is received by citizens, as communities around the world become increasingly concerned about the impacts of the outbreak. Lessons from previous epidemics, such as Ebola, highlight that failing to fully engage both men and women, as well as specific at-risk population groups, is a missed opportunity in terms of accessing and sharing information. Furthermore, the public health crisis can strain existing processes and systems that lack flexibility and adaptiveness needed for risk and crisis communication. This can be detrimental to a city's ability to deliver the right message at the right time, through the right and official channels. This also diminishes a city's ability to dispel rumors and mitigate the adverse impacts of misinformation.

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This tool offers a framework for municipal clients to conduct a quick self-assessment (Yes/No) of five essential components pertinent to effective risk communication and community engagement response plans. Resources point to additional information and examples of international best practices.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

YES NO RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

Understanding and Engaging At-Risk Populations



Municipal authorities have identified at-risk populations, including marginalized groups and those in hard-to-reach areas (elderly, refugees and migrants, homeless, people with disabilities, pregnant women, children, rural populations, illiterate, and ethnic minorities.).

- **WHO** [COVID-19 RCCE Guidance - Annex 1A](#)
- **UN Statement** [Persons With Disabilities](#)
- **WHO, IFRC, OCHA** [COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement](#)
- **CDC** [Guideline for homeless service providers](#)
- **IASC** [Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak](#)
- UN Women [Women and COVID-19: Five things governments can do now](#)

Municipal authorities have assessed target populations' level of literacy, accessible and trusted communication channels, and cultural/beliefs nuances.

Municipal authorities have determined the target populations' perceptions of COVID-19 risk: what people know, how they feel, and what they do in response to the outbreak.

- **UNFPA** [COVID 19: A Gender Lens. Protecting sexual and reproductive Health Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality](#)
- GBV Guidelines [COVID-19 Resources](#)
- The Lancet [Ebola Response and Community Engagement](#)

City has established an interactive consultation framework between the community, local leaders, and other response actors

Effective Messaging



Leadership is actively involved in delivering messages that are clear, regular, and actionable. Messaging prioritizes building trust, demystifying health and safety information, and how to seek government assistance. Messages are honest and empathetic. Information and data are transparent.

- **PAHO** [COVID-19 Guidelines for communicating about coronavirus disease 2019](#)
- New York Times [A German Exception?](#)
- New Zealand [Unite against COVID-19](#)
- Bloomberg Harvard [City Leadership Initiative](#)

Authorities honestly communicate what is known, what is unknown, and what is being done to get more information, with the objectives of saving lives and minimizing adverse consequences.

- World Bank [Korea's response to COVID-19](#)
- [President Obama to mayors: "Speak the truth. Speak it clearly. Speak it with compassion."](#)

Messaging is constantly updated in line with the evolving dynamic of the outbreak. Real-time information is made easily available.

- Real-time Dashboards [City of Boston](#) and [Austin](#)
- New Zealand [Data on COVID-19 - Ministry of Health](#)

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

YES NO RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

City makes use of public messages and infographics by the WHO. Information is presented in simple, visual ways that minimize speculation and avoid over-interpretation of data.

- WHO [COVID-19 Infographics](#)

Municipal authorities tailor interventions and information to local context and ensure all engagement is culturally appropriate (language, norms, beliefs, age) and empathetic to help the uptake of messaging in order to change behaviors. Messages are tailored by population group when relevant (e.g. women, elderly, youth).

- The Refugee Response [basic facts and safety information about COVID 19 in Burmese, Karen, Nepali, Kinyarwanda, Arabic, Swahili](#)

City follows best risk and crisis communication practices from WHO (e.g. A/B testing as a message testing strategy, preventing stigma).

- WHO [Country and Technical Guidance](#)
- WHO [Social Stigma Associated with COVID-19](#)

City has adapted existing coordination and clearance mechanisms to ensure messages are aligned with national public health guidelines and directives.

- Asian Scientist Magazine [How Singapore Is Taking On COVID-19](#)

Effective Channels for Outreach



Municipal authorities have identified, engaged and partnered with trusted networks to disseminate information (community-led organizations, religious leaders, women's networks, business associations, youth groups, among others).

Communication officials have mapped out intermediaries of information (infomediaries) and key influencers (such as religious and civil society leaders, celebrities) to ensure effectiveness of risk communication and community engagement efforts.

- [Message from the Pope](#)
- The Guardian [The UK's leading game makers are inserting public health messages into popular titles](#)

Levels of ICT penetration among at-risk populations have been assessed.

City has established partnerships with technology companies to leverage their support for COVID-19 response

- For example:
- free SMS messages by local mobile operators
 - search engine prioritizing search results with information from national/local health authorities

Municipal authorities have identified the most trusted channels to deliver information. An appropriate combination of offline and online channels is being utilized (Offline: SMS, radio, TV, newspapers, flyers, religious and community leaders. Online: COVID-19 website, messaging services such as WhatsApp, video services such as YouTube and TikTok, social media, mobile apps, newsletters).

- IFRC [How to Use Social Media to Better Engage People Affected by Crises](#)
- CivicReady [8 Best Practices for Emergency Communications on Social Media](#)
- Politico [Finland Taps Social Media Influencers](#)
- WHO [WHO Alert on Whatsapp](#)
- TikTok [Tiktok Response on COVID-19](#)
- Massachusetts state government [COVID-19 Text Message Notification System](#)

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

YES NO RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

Channels for two-way communication— such as hotlines and websites—with citizens have been established. City leaders should use interactive formats when feasible and regularly monitor feedback.

- New York City [COVID-19 website](#)
- [Coronavirus in US Cities: Residents' Key Concerns](#)
- Forbes [Data Algorithms Are Being Used](#)

Municipal authorities and leaders have explored creative ways to package key messages (e.g. art, music, humor, theater)

- [Liberia President Weah sends message of solidarity in coronavirus tune](#)
- [Ugandan musicians Bobi Wine & Nubian Li](#)
- [Vietnam, Ministry of Health COVID-19 Song](#)

Using Data Effectively



Municipal authorities collect relevant data on a daily basis. Key datasets for public communications include but are not limited to: number of tests performed; number of confirmed cases; number of deaths; number of people recovered; patient information: age, gender, underlying health issues; number of hospitalizations; ICU beds used and available; levels of critical equipment, protective gear, medications, medical staff.

- **Johns Hopkins University** [COVID-19 Resource Center Global real-time data](#)
- Canadian Government [COVID-19](#)

City has established partnerships with entities that are collecting data that cities can't or have resources to deploy applications that serve cities' goals.

- E.g., location data from mobile operators
- Mobility data from Google
- Economic activity data from credit card or mobile payment providers (M-Pesa, MasterCard)

City has a virtual control center with a capacity to integrate and analyze the data to inform decision making and provide evidence-based messaging. In smart cities, command and control centers can be used to provide COVID-19 response.

Municipal authorities publish key data for public use on a daily basis in open formats, ideally via APIs. Published patient case data is anonymized to prevent from individuals being personally identified.

- **Open Data Institute** [Data and Public Services Toolkit](#)
- [Basics of API](#)
- New York Times [How much should the public know about who has the coronavirus?](#)

Municipal authorities have established regulations and policies that safeguard privacy of health and safety information. COVID-19 patients' data is fully protected, in accordance with national regulations and international best practices.

- Germany [Guidance on Employee Data Protection and COVID-19 Issues](#)
- EU [European Data Protection in Times of Pandemic](#)

Data is visualized and contextualized to present risk and crisis response to populations in a clear, actionable way.

- [How design can stop the spread of the coronavirus](#)
- [Visualizations of COVID data and research](#)
- [Top 35 R resources on Novel COVID-19 Coronavirus](#)
- UK Government [Public Health England](#)

Municipal authorities support the use of open data by citizens, academia, and businesses to spark innovation and catalyze collaborative co-creation of public-private solutions (e.g. mobile applications to help people locate pharmacies with masks in store).

- **World Bank** [Raw data and relevant open data sets](#)
- Colombia National Government [CoronaApp Colombia](#)
- IADB [Conector Digital](#)
- IHME [Hospital Resource Use Projections](#)

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

YES NO RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

Misinformation



Municipal authorities and leaders have coordinated communication and community engagement plans that can help prevent an ‘infodemic’ (excessive amounts of information, making it difficult for communities to identify key and real messages through the noise).

Municipal authorities and leaders are aware of what audiences are worried about, do not understand, or require more information about and make a deliberate effort to address these gaps.

Municipal authorities and leaders have established mechanisms to fact-check, track rumors, conspiracy theories, misinformation, and disinformation that are circulating to assess what has to be addressed, corrected, and/or reported to pertinent authorities.

Municipal authorities and leaders provide feedback mechanisms for citizen participation to dispel rumors, answer questions, and disseminate correct information.

• New York Times [WHO Fights a Pandemic Besides Coronavirus: An ‘Infodemic’](#)

• BBC [Coronavirus: How bad information goes viral](#)
 • Pennsylvania Real-Time news [Coronavirus myths debunked](#)

• WHO [WHO: Myth Busters](#)
 • Digiphile [Help contain the viral “infodemic” with good information hygiene](#)

• [IFCN Fact Checking Organizations on Whatsapp](#)

List key action items as a result of this assessment

Action Item	Responsible Department/Individual

Do you want to request IFC assistance?

YES NO

For additional resources and a list of Sustainable Infrastructure Advisory Services [click here](#).

For additional support with addressing identified areas of weakness, IFC clients can request assistance to:

CITIES REGIONAL LEADS:

- Africa [Daniel Shepherd](#)
- ECA [Patrick Avato](#)
- LAC [Kristtian Rada](#)
- Asia [Aurelie Chardon](#)

SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE ADVISORY:

- Global [Alla Morrison](#)
- Global [Michelle Jacome](#)
- LAC [Fernando Ruiz Mier](#)
- LAC [Amanda Diaz](#)



List of Sustainable Infrastructure Advisory Services:

Services to support cities to optimize their communication practices, data management and improve trust in government:

- **Mapping of target audiences and networks of infomediaries** and assessment of their information needs
- **Collection of specific information** (i.e. impact of COVID-19 on different community groups) using existing and new data sources/partnerships
- **Messaging using targeted online and offline communication channels** (i.e. prevention, treatment, services, recovery, policies, etc.)
- **Strategies to address dangerous misinformation**
- **Advice on data management systems** (such as a virtual control room for COVID-19 response)

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Asia [Aurelie Chardon](#) 

Sustainable Infrastructure Advisory:

Global [Alla Morrison](#) 

Global [Michelle Jacome](#) 

LAC [Fernando Ruiz Mier](#) 

LAC [Amanda Diaz](#) 

For additional resources please refer to the **COVID-19 COMMUNITY IMPACT HUB**



Communities in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. The collection of curated materials found here aims to guide the private sector, governments, and civil society in advancing their understanding of potential community impacts, prevention, and recovery measures.

commdev.org/covid19

