



Program Announcement

Advice for Local Governments in This New Normal

March 25, 2020

Unprecedented times call for unprecedented actions. Experts are saying this “new normal” will last for weeks to come at minimum. How can your government adapt at a time when technology is moving front and center within your daily operations?

To respond to the crisis, Sustainable Jersey is offering support by 1) providing recommended strategies to help municipalities engage the public in virtual environments, 2) updating our online database of applications, platforms and systems available on the market, including those offering free use during this crisis, 3) offering coaching for the implementation of new remote systems and procedures, and 4) scheduling a virtual “happy hour” so municipalities can share best practices. See details below:

Recommended Strategies:

The following are some strategies geared to grow your communication reach and expand your engagement with residents:

- Expand your database of residents receiving your **municipal email or SMS notifications**. Utilize your community networks. For example, ask those already registered to provide the sign up link to 5 neighbors; ask faith based and civic leaders to send the sign up link to their lists.
- Make sure you **know the location and needs of your most vulnerable residents**. Sign them up for NJOEM's [Register Ready](#) or your own municipal database of at-risk populations. Utilize your community networks to help identify those residents. Call on senior center, homeless shelter, and food bank managers; and civic and faith-based leaders, to name a few.
- Use social media to **keep in touch with residents**. Host a [Twitter chat](#). Use Facebook to create fun polls or ask residents about their most creative ways that they are keeping themselves occupied while quarantined.
- At times when you are needing to make difficult decisions on discontinuing programming or rescheduling community-wide events, consider **engaging your community in the process** through a simple poll, survey, or citizen engagement platform. See the “Resources” section in our [Improve Public Engagement in Municipal Government action](#) for ideas.

- Now is a great time to **review the communication channels** your municipality uses. Consider surveying the public to find out where they get their news and information from and develop a municipal communications plan that aligns with such methods. Our [Municipal Communications Strategy action](#) is chock full of resources to assist in this planning.
- **Virtual and teleconference meetings** are an option as you determine how to move forward with public meetings of the governing body and appointed boards. Governor Murphy signed a [recent law](#) which enables local governments to do so during a public health or state of emergency. NJ Division of Local Government Services has comprehensive guidance on remote public meetings for [governing bodies](#) and [planning & zoning boards](#).
- **Creating new policies and expectations.** All of these new processes will require proactive thought to make sure they are implemented in a way consistent with state law and your own local goals. Make sure to take the time out to bring key local stakeholders together to discuss and decide how best to collectively move forward, with buy-in from all parties. Many in local government are not used to working remotely or through an online means, so extra support for staff might be needed.

Online Database of Available Technology Tools for Local Governments:

Visit Sustainable Jersey's [PIE Solutions Catalog](#) for a list of almost 100 platforms and tools to help keep your citizens engaged and municipal functions up and running. As we learn about tools providing *free* services for municipal governments during this time of crisis, we are adding them to this list and highlighting them yellow.

Municipal Tech Coaching:

Sustainable Jersey is now offering technical assistance to local governments looking to implement on-line strategies for engaging the public, providing critical information, and holding public meetings. Specifically, we are matchmaking tech-savvy coaches (volunteers and staff) with local governments looking for advice on which tool to use, help with specific questions, or general help on how to get started with any of these strategies. Please [use this form to request assistance](#). Sustainable Jersey coaches are available to help you however we can. If you are tech-savvy and would like to volunteer your time to assist with such requests, [complete this form](#) to sign up.

Virtual “Happy Hour” (April 1, 4:00pm):

We are inviting municipal staff and elected officials to an informal online discussion about adapting to the current climate of remote technology. Whether it's interactive engagement on social media, or setting up virtual public meetings, or online platforms to collect feedback from residents; much of these have never been used before by municipalities. Let's help each other through this new (temporary) normal! Share best practices and lessons learned from your own municipality, or ask advice from your colleagues as your town is learning its way. Register [here](#).

And lastly, Sustainable Jersey will soon be announcing modifications to our 2020 certification cycle in order to accommodate green teams that have seen an interruption in the implementation of actions or challenges in receiving the necessary information to complete certification reports.

In solidarity,

The Sustainable Jersey Team