

Coronavirus Local Response Initiative Session Three “Learning as Fast as You Can and Creating a Basis for Hope”

This handout reviews key points from session three of the Coronavirus Local Response Initiative for city leaders, drawing on the work of Juliette Kayyem, Herman B. “Dutch” Leonard, Arnold M. Howitt, David Giles, and Jorrit de Jong.

Resilience

1. *the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress*
2. *an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change*

—*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

FOSTERING RESILIENCE

The work you do to foster and build your city’s resilience now—even as the crisis unfolds—is essential for establishing the rational basis for hope. **Resilience is not an outcome, but rather a process** your city is already engaging in every day. Instead of using the passive “be resilient,” for this unprecedented moment, we may want to invent an active form of the word—the verb “to resil.”

Whether you are trying to figure out a new mechanism to deliver the necessary services the city was providing prior to this crisis or looking for a way to respond to an emergent need, here are a few key considerations on how to “resil”:

1. No one is coming to save the day. In a way, everyone everywhere has the same problem, but, in another sense, no other place has exactly the same challenges you have. You have to organize locally and quickly, develop strategies and processes to identify and deal with the sequence of challenges confronting the community, and waste no time in responding to them.
2. Work closely with local leaders who know their neighborhoods, the people, and the key resources they rely on. Building credibility in the midst of a stressful event may prove difficult; recruit the help of those who already have it.
3. A bottom-up community *organizing* approach is generally preferable to a top-down or expert-led community *planning* approach.
4. Put in place leaders and processes that embrace a highly adaptive approach that allows them to master, in sequence, a series of very different challenges.
5. Identify and establish strong working relationships with outside agencies (in the governmental, nonprofit, foundation, and corporate sectors) that can provide not just funding and physical resources but also training, advice, and assistance in planning and organizing.

6. The people in your community are your strongest asset for a resilient response. Keep an ear to the ground and jump on good ideas. Invite participation and do not underestimate how ingenious and eager to help people are. Your role is to facilitate innovation and help people with solutions to emerging problems get the resources they need to scale them up.

METRICS FOR THE “NOW” NORMAL

Wherever you are in the outbreak locally, the big-picture numbers look bleak at the moment. There is no such thing as a “safe county.” You may reasonably wonder if it is possible to extract a hopeful narrative from a pandemic still in exponential growth, but that is precisely the task before you.

The basic elements you will use to construct a narrative of hope are simple. New cases and deaths are just one part of the story. Every day, it is also your responsibility to tell people in plain language:

- What we’ve done since yesterday. *How are we better prepared to respond to the crisis today than we were at the last briefing?*
- What we are doing today. *What are we doing to help our neighbors right now?*
- Where we are heading tomorrow. *What are the challenges we anticipate and how will we rise to them?*

The things you are doing (and have done thus far) to respond are just a piece of the picture you want to draw for the public, however. You also want to remind people of what is not wrong. Build a “dashboard of hope” that points to the things that are running and functioning well in the “now” normal, for example:

- How many volunteers have provided meals for frontline workers?
- How many bags of groceries have been delivered to senior citizens?
- How many local businesses are hiring?
- How much money has your local COVID-19 relief fund raised?
- Etc.

This crisis is not just medical, and neither is the response. Work to get an integrated view of what is happening in your city, point people towards opportunities to help, and share the good news along with the bad.

Set the expectation that there won’t be a moment when your city simply switches back on, but rather that you will move forward together in incremental stages.

Invest in a robust public health response that will help ensure a steadier and speedier path forward.

We do not know what the “new normal” will look like, so we have to help our communities and one another live and lean into the “now” normal.