UPTOWN

MASC Municipal Association of South Carolina

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina

Hometown Legislative Action Day
February 5, 2019

HLAD to Focus on Disaster Response, Law Enforcement

Hurricane Florence struck the Carolinas on September 14, moving slowly and bringing destructive flooding to many cities and towns. On October 3, a deadly mass shooting occurred in Florence County, killing two law enforcement officers, wounding an additional seven officers and five others.

While the fall of 2018 brought grave difficulties and heartaches to many of the state's first responders, the upcoming Hometown Legislative Action Day on February 5 will address some of the critical ways cities can respond to these challenges. Attendees will learn about the importance of a crisis communication plan as well as how law enforcement policies help agencies and residents alike.

The day will begin with an address from recently elected Gov. Henry McMaster. Before his election in November, McMaster had already served two years as governor. As lieutenant governor, he ascended to the office to complete former Gov. Nikki Haley's unexpired term when she resigned to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

The Municipal Association's legislative staff will present the legislative priorities for cities and towns at HLAD. These priorities emerged from the Association's efforts to gather input from municipal officials around the state. Following that process, the

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In this ISSUE

Association's board adopted three areas of focus on issues that directly affect all cities and towns: the Local Government Fund, accommodations and hospitality taxes, and law enforcement training.

A panel discussion at HLAD with public safety leaders will dig into the need for a well-conceived crisis communication plan and a prepared staff. These plans, which by definition go into practice in stressful and chaotic situations, can serve to protect impacted residents, foster trust between the responding agency and its constituents, and play a role in liability management.

SC Emergency Management Division Director Kim Stenson will also speak at HLAD, covering the emergency planning and response which have met recent major storm events like hurricanes Matthew and Florence.

Additionally, State Law Enforcement Division Chief Mark Keel will discuss the "best practice era" of law enforcement, a time of tremendous levels of public scrutiny in which carefully crafted policies and procedures, as well as training, play a vital role in agency operations. Policy work, as with crisis communications, can help agencies prevent damaging or expensive mistakes before they happen.

HLAD will take place Tuesday, February 5 at the Columbia Marriott.

Recently elected Gov. Henry McMaster will address HLAD attendees. Photo: Office of the Governor.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute, Advanced Institute and Advanced Continuing Education courses will take place Wednesday, February 6. The preregistration deadline is January 22, and on-site registration will also be available. For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: HLAD).

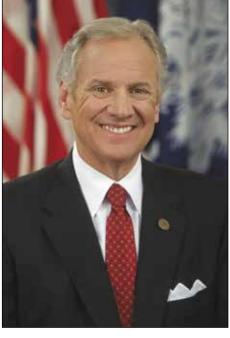# Get set for HLAD with the meeting app

This app connects meeting attendees with the agenda for both HLAD and the Municipal Elected Officials Institute and allows users to set a personalized schedule. Users will also be able to find more information about the presenters and the attendees. The app allows for notifications during the event and for internal social media so you can communicate with others at HLAD.

Downloading the app will work differently this year. Users will need to download Yapp and also follow a link on their phones. Users can send a link to the 2019 Hometown Legislative Action app to their email or phone number from l.masc.sc/2019HLADapp.

NEWS BRIEFS

The National League of Cities named **Town of Lexington** Councilmember Kathy Maness its second vice president at the annual City Summit in Los Angeles. She will serve a one-year term. Maness is a past NLC board member and a past president of Women in Municipal Government, an NLC constituency group.

Members of the **SC Association of Stormwater Managers** recently elected their 2018 – 2019 board of directors. President Sheri Armstrong, Lexington County; Vice President Bonnie Miley, Town of Summerville; Secretary/Treasurer Scottie Ferguson, Pickens County; Member at Large

Brian Bates, Woolpert, Inc.; and Immediate Past President Eric Larson, Beaufort County.

Members of the **SC Business Licensing Officials Association** recently elected their 2018 – 2019 board of directors. President Constance McMichael, Orangeburg County; Vice President Shaun Greenwood, City of Forest Acres; Secretary/Treasurer Pam Davis, Richland County; Members at Large Amyee Rogers, Town of Pendleton; Lakesha Shannon, City of Columbia; Barbara Wooster, Town of Hilton Head Island; and Past President Karen Proctor, City of Lancaster.

Members of the **SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association** recently elected their 2018 – 2019 board of directors. President Gregory Saxton, Town of Awendaw; Vice President

David Seifert, City of Greer; Secretary/Treasurer Annette Moore, Town of St. George; Directors Amanda Childers, Town of Harleyville; Cammie Hayes, City of North Augusta; Erika Moore, City of Columbia; Joel Seavey, City of Clemson; and Past President Carrie Johnson, City of Orangeburg.

The **Municipal Association of SC** announced several staff changes. Meredith Houck, formerly the creative services and website manager, is now the communications manager; Tigerron Wells, formerly the government affairs liaison, is now the director of governmental affairs; Tony DesChamps, formerly the senior SCMIT claims adjuster, is now the SCMIT claims analyst; and Charlie Barrineau joined the staff in December as the field services manager for the coastal region.

Call for Achievement Award Entries

The Municipal Achievement Awards give cities and towns the chance to make headlines for the good work they are doing. Residents rarely learn of the remarkable work local governments and city staff must do every day to keep a city running smoothly. The Association's Municipal Achievement Awards bring attention to these accomplishments.

The program recognizes excellence in local government programs, shares ideas among peers, and reminds residents and businesses of the value they derive from their city or town.

Every city has an award-worthy project to enter in the Achievement Awards competition. It may just take a bit of collaboration to discover it.

Discover a winning Achievement Award entry

- Request that departments list municipal projects they are most proud of completing.
- Hold an internal competition for departments to compete to be the city's Achievement Award entry.
- Ask "What city project has made the biggest impact on residents?"
- Review previous Achievement Award winners at www.masc.sc (keyword: achievement awards).

The awards entry form is available at www.masc.sc. The submission deadline for the 2019 awards program is February 13. The designated city contact person for each entry will

receive a receipt-confirmation email by February 18.

Municipalities with a population of 20,000 or less can choose to compete in either a population or subject category. Municipalities with a population greater than 20,000 must compete in one of the five subject categories.

As part of the competition, cities participating in the subject categories must make an oral presentation to the judges on March 4 or 5 in Columbia at the Municipal Association's office. Association staff will assign presentation times after all entries are received.

The Association will recognize award winners at the Annual Meeting Awards Breakfast held in Greenville on July 20, 2019.

For more information about the 2019 Achievement Awards, contact Meredith Houck at 803.933.1215 or mhouck@masc.sc.

Make a New Year's Budget Checkup

For cities and towns that begin their fiscal year on July 1, January marks the midpoint of their budget year. That means January is the right time to conduct a thorough budget review.

A mid-fiscal-year review alerts city officials of any budget adjustments:

- Council gets the chance to assess the accuracy of the revenue projections and expenditure estimates that were included in the budget.
- Officials are able to evaluate if adequate resources are provided in the budget to reach the council's goals.
- Council has the opportunity to make adjustments to the budget if needed.

In most cases, council should expect that half (or less than half) of budgeted regular and fixed expenditures have been made at the midpoint. The same for regularly collected revenue, such as utility payments and hospitality taxes. Expect revenues for property taxes, business license taxes and other major sources of revenue to be low at midyear because payments are due in the third and fourth quarter of a fiscal year that begins on July 1.

The midpoint of the fiscal year typically provides council with enough data to identify trends that may call for adjustments. For example, a change in the cost of energy or the price of fuel for one month may not reveal a trend. But six months of increases or decreases may help inform budget modifications.

A midyear budget review also gives council a chance to evaluate the city's finances. Is the budget allowing the city to reach its goals? Can those goals still be met by the fiscal year's end?

What if the midyear review signals the need for spending changes?

Council must adopt a revised budget ordinance in order to amend the annual budget. That ordinance must be read no less than twice, with each reading separated by at least six days. If a city has established a procedure for adopting ordinances that requires additional readings, then council should follow this procedure.

Council should conduct a public hearing on the revised budget ordinance before adoption. The city should advertise the hearing the same way that notice was provided for the budget public hearing, as required by SC Code of Law Section 6-1-80.

11 Graduate From MCTI

Eleven officials graduated from the SC Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute's fall 2018 session. The institute is designed to provide municipal clerks and treasurers with the skills critical to their professions. The institute is offered in a series of six half-week sessions. Each year, two half-week sessions are offered: one in the spring and one during the fall.

The graduates are Janice Alonso, City of Columbia; Renee Caviness, Town of Irmo; Rebekah Hayes, City of Bennettsville; Colleen Jolley, City of Folly Beach; Courtney Liles, Town of Sullivans Island; Gregg Miller, Town of Lyman; Jennie O'Shields, City of Newberry; John Rabon, City of Cayce; Tracy Rabon, City of Lancaster; Petra Reynolds, Town of Kiawah Island; and Lori Sondov, City of Greenville.

Cheraw and North Augusta Join Main Street South Carolina

Main Street SC has welcomed the Town of Cheraw and the City of North Augusta into its program. These communities join 18 existing participants from around the state.

Main Street SC is the state affiliate of the National Main Street Center, which began nearly 40 years ago when the National Trust for Historic Preservation explored the composition of downtowns across the country. It discovered that downtowns were struggling in four key areas: organization, promotion, design and economic vitality, and so it developed the Main Street Four-Point Approach. This approach focuses on locally-driven, incremental change.

Main Street SC encourages downtown revitalization through economic development within the context of historic preservation. The primary purpose of a local Main Street program is to ensure the long-term success of its downtown by creating, educating and training a comprehensive, professional, volunteer-based downtown revitalization organization.

Applying to become a participating community requires a core of historic or older commercial and mixed-use buildings which represent the local architectural heritage. The core may also include compatible infill development.

The City of North Augusta's program is known as North Augusta Forward. The Main Street SC onsite visit revealed a tremendous level of support for the program, according to Jenny Boulware, Main Street SC manager.

North Augusta Forward Executive Director Avery Spears-Mahoney said, "With the positive growth North Augusta is experiencing, the timing could not be more appropriate for redevelopment in our downtown area. Downtown revitalization directly aligns with North Augusta Forward's vision to become the 'community of choice' to live, work and play within the River Region. Downtown is the heart and soul of any community; it is what makes a place unique. North Augusta is ready to maximize downtown's potential in creating a gathering place and hub of economic activity."

The Town of Cheraw anticipates hiring a director within the coming months. For years, the town worked to revitalize downtown with tools like facade grants and beautification projects.

"Despite these efforts, downtown still had problems with unsightly buildings and vacancies," Town Manager Mike Smith said. "Cheraw Town Council members have determined that it is going to take a committed effort to become a vibrant downtown. As a result, the Town Council voted to seek membership into the Main Street SC program."

While town officials recognize that Main Street SC's assistance is invaluable, they also realize this is just the beginning of a long-term commitment. "When a community is ready for Main Street, as North Augusta and Cheraw are, our economic development program works," Boulware said.

Results of Main Street's comprehensive effort include new businesses; job growth; facade renovations and restorations; tourism-building special events and festivals; and streetscape and infrastructure improvements. All of these contribute to a renewed confidence in downtown.

By using Main Street SC expertise and resources, downtowns gain a practical, adaptable framework tailored to local conditions. With a focus on design, local economics, community branding and partnerships, the approach sets up the framework for a successful revitalization process.

"In other words," Boulware said, "Main Street SC offers a roadmap for locally driven prosperity."

Applications for the Aspiring Main Street level are due September 1 annually with admission to the program on January 1. Cities interested in joining Main Street SC can contact Jenny Boulware at jboulware@masc.sc or 803.354.4792.

Georgia Avenue in downtown North Augusta provides part of the route for the city's Christmas parade. Photo: Wilson Studio.

Vendors line the sidewalks for the Town of Cheraw's Market on Market. Photo: Town of Cheraw.

Accommodations Tax FAQs

What is the difference between the state accommodations tax and the local accommodations tax?

State Accommodations Tax

The state accommodations tax is a mandatory 2 percent charge applied to all accommodations statewide. Accommodations are defined as "the rental or charges for any rooms, campground spaces, lodgings, or sleeping accommodations furnished to transients by any hotel, inn, tourist court, tourist camp, motel, campground, residence, or any place in which rooms, lodgings, or sleeping accommodations are furnished to transients for a consideration." The SC Department of Revenue collects these dollars and distributes them back to cities and counties by a formula based on the location of the short-term rental.

Local Accommodations Tax

County and municipal governments may impose a local accommodations tax by ordinance adopted by a positive majority of the entire governing body. The cumulative rate of the tax may not exceed 3 percent. A county government may not impose an accommodations tax exceeding 1.5 percent within a municipality without consent by resolution of the municipal council.

Who approves accommodations tax expenditures?

State Accommodations Tax

A municipality receiving more than $50,000 in revenue from the state accommodations tax must appoint an advisory committee to make recommendations for how the revenue generated from the accommodations tax should be spent. The advisory committee consists of seven members, with a majority being selected from the hospitality industry of the municipality or county receiving the revenue. At least two of the hospitality industry members must be from the lodging industry, where applicable. One member must represent the cultural organizations of the municipality receiving the revenue.

The advisory committee submits written recommendations to the municipal council at least once annually. The report addresses how to spend the portion of accommodations tax revenue that remains after allocations are made to the general fund and the tourism and promotion funds. The municipal council may accept, reject or modify these recommendations.

The council must submit an annual report detailing use of the state accommodations tax proceeds to the state Tourism Expenditure Review Committee. TERC is an 11-member committee that reviews the tourism-related expenditures funded with state accommodations tax revenue.

Local Accommodations Tax

There is no requirement for an advisory committee for local accommodations tax expenditures. The municipal council is solely responsible for approving local accommodations tax expenditures unless otherwise established by the council.

Are there restrictions on the use of the accommodations tax revenue?

State Accommodations Tax

Yes. State law is very specific about how cities and counties can spend state accommodations tax revenue. The first $25,000 is deposited into the local governments' general fund, 30 percent of the balance must be allocated to a special fund for the exclusive use of tourism advertising and promotion, and the remaining balance must be used for tourism-related expenditures as defined in SC Code Section 6-1-530.

Local Accommodations Tax

Local Accommodations Tax proceeds must be used for tourism-related projects and programs as defined in SC Code Section 6-1-530.
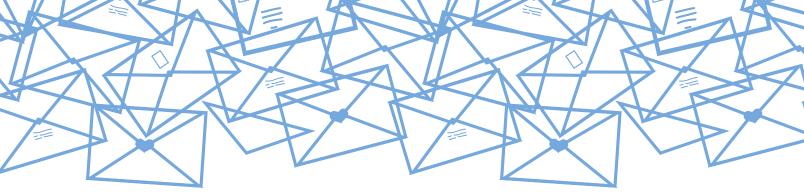
Learn more about South Carolina regulations for short-term rentals at www. masc.sc (keyword: short term rental).

Acceptable tourism-related expenses

As defined by SC Code Section 6-1-530:

- **Tourism-related buildings such as civic centers, coliseums and aquariums.**
- **Tourism-related cultural, recreational or historic facilities.**
- **Beach access, renourishment, or other tourism-related lands and water access.**
- **Highways, roads, streets and bridges providing access to tourist destinations.**
- **Advertisements and promotions related to tourism development.**
- **Water and sewer infrastructure to serve tourism-related demand.**

Funds can also be used for operation and maintenance of the above items, including police, fire protection, emergency medical services and emergency-preparedness operations.

Setting up U.S. Postal Service Cluster Box Units

Because of significant growth taking place in many parts of South Carolina, the U.S. Postal Service is working with builders, developers, municipalities and counties to coordinate the most efficient, cost-effective type of delivery for customers.

The USPS considers many factors when determining the type of mail service to provide to an area, including customer convenience, aesthetics and efficiency. Because central delivery is the most cost-effective method, the USPS prefers to use it whenever appropriate. The USPS determines the type of delivery to be provided before many residents move into a development, so it consults with the developer rather than prospective residents before making the decision.

The USPS has discretion to establish a service known as Cluster Box Units in new areas. It decides to install CBUs after determining that this type of delivery is the most efficient in the specific situation.

CBUs also provide unique advantages to postal customers, including:

- Protection of both incoming and outgoing mail from theft – CBUs are locked and vandal-resistant.
- Potential reduction of home burglaries – the unit shows no buildup of mail as do other types of boxes.
- Centralized delivery sites equipped with a customer mail collection slot.
- Decreased fuel consumption, improved air quality and reduced traffic congestion.
- Decreased costs for developers and homeowners.
- Increased sense of community for homeowners and sense that the mailbox is a protected, monitored territory.
- Reduction of dog bites for letter carriers.
- Improved neighborhood appearance.

The USPS encourages local governments to include a brief statement of the portion of the Postal Operational Manual covering centralized delivery in subdivision regulations. For additional information, contact Wayne McCall at dwayne.mccall@usps.gov.

MEO Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

Testyourselfmonthlyquiz

True or False: Each mill of property taxes charged generates one dollar in property tax revenue per one thousand dollars in assessed value (1/1000 = $1).

Answer: True

Municipalities collecting property taxes must set an annual tax or millage rate. A mill is a unit of measure equal to 1/1000th and is expressed decimally as .001. Each mill of property taxes charged generates one dollar of property tax revenue for the municipality, and conversely one dollar of tax liability for the property owner per $1,000 in assessed value of taxable property.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. Elected officials who complete all of the required coursework graduate from the institute and are eligible to participate in the Advanced Institute. The next in-person courses, held February 6, will be MEO Sessions A and B. The next Advanced MEO Institute sessions also on February 6 will be "Advanced Municipal Economic Development" and "Public Safety Policy and Administration."

Answering the Call for Help

The Hartsville Fire Department combats flooding in the aftermath of Hurricane Florence.
Photo: City of Hartsville.

It's no secret that when disaster strikes, cities and towns are eager to help their residents and sister municipalities around the state. Last year's dual disasters, Hurricanes Florence and Michael, proved South Carolina cities are strong. Even so, failure to have properly-executed mutual aid agreements and procedures in place before an event can undermine cities' cooperative strengths, leaving municipal officials scrambling to find help when they need it most.

Mutual aid agreements cover many services

For years, emergency services have relied on local mutual aid from their neighbors to ensure adequate response to incidents that grow beyond their resources. Fire departments routinely require help from their neighboring departments. Police departments and sheriff's offices routinely call on their counterparts for backup.

Mutual aid is no longer just a function of emergency services, however. A variety of entities coordinate statewide mutual aid agreements, allowing public safety, utilities and public works to seek help from cities and towns from anywhere in South Carolina.

Mutual aid must be coordinated

The SC Emergency Management Division coordinates a statewide mutual aid agreement that includes nearly any type of aid a jurisdiction might need. Through the Statewide Mutual Aid Support System, cities and towns may request help directly from another jurisdiction or rely on a county EMD or the SCEMD to coordinate assistance to address nearly any need. The SMASS also allows cities and towns to send assistance to their neighbors. Participation in the SMASS is voluntary.

Cities and towns with SMASS agreements in place can seek assistance in two ways. First, in the most common method, they may ask for assistance directly from another jurisdiction or through its county EMD. For small jurisdictions without staff, the county emergency management office is the best way to seek assistance.

For incidents that overwhelm a jurisdiction and perhaps its county emergency office, local officials may ask SCEMD to coordinate the response. SCEMD coordinates statewide responses from the state emergency operations center in West Columbia, where it gathers a variety of state agencies with disaster response capabilities. Agencies such as the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control, SC Department of Transportation, SC National Guard and many others maintain a 24-hour presence at the emergency operations center until a disaster concludes.

This coordination of efforts ensures state and local officials are aware of changing conditions that might affect their response to disasters. It also ensures resources are allocated to properly address needs as they arise around the state.

Mutual aid comes in all shapes

In conjunction with local and state emergency management officials, the SC Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network coordinates a voluntary mutual aid system for water and wastewater utilities. SCWARN requires participating agencies to adopt a mutual aid agreement which allows them to request and provide

City of Lancaster crews work to clear debris in Chesterfield after Hurricane Florence. Photo: Town of Chesterfield.

assistance for water and wastewater emergencies.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Florence, SCWARN coordinated responses to several wastewater emergencies, including in the Town of Loris, where a sewer trunk line collapsed. City of Camden crews assisted the City of Chesterfield to reroute a sewer line damaged by water that overran the bridge to which it was attached. The City of Columbia, meanwhile, helped restore the Town of Cheraw's water supply.

The SC Association of Municipal Power Systems, a Municipal Association affiliate organization, is another mutual aid coordinator. As a benefit for its members, SCAMPS coordinates an in-state mutual aid assistance network made up of its 21 municipal electric utilities. Not only do SCAMPS members provide assistance to their in-state neighbors, but they also travel all over the Southeast when needed. In the aftermath of Hurricane Michael, six SCAMPS cities

sent crews to Albany and Thomasville, GA, to help restore power to those stricken municipalities.

SCAMPS members are also part of the Southeastern States Compact mutual aid network and a national mutual aid network coordinated by the American Public Power Association.

Mutual aid is a critical part of preparation

Preparation for potential disasters is always a moving target for cities and towns. Ensuring facilities and personnel are prepared is an ongoing process which changes with environmental and economic conditions and resource availability.

Along with assessing physical preparation for disasters, cities should include adopting a mutual aid agreement, reviewing it periodically and keeping it up to date as key aspects of their planning. This makes mustering assistance and procedural actions easier to execute once a disaster strikes.

Additionally, executing mutual aid agreements before disaster strikes is financially important for cities and towns. These agreements make clear what expenses and liabilities each jurisdiction will incur. Jurisdictions without mutual aid agreements in place cannot seek reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for expenses that might otherwise be covered.

Municipalities prepare for disasters and help others when they need it, and mutual aid agreements make strong South Carolina cities and towns ready to respond.

Rock Hill gave assistance to Albany, GA after Hurricane Michael through the SCAMPS mutual aid network. Photo: City of Rock Hill.

Communications

Communicating in the Crisis

The question is never "if," but "when." Every city will face a crisis, maybe one that's unprecedented. Residents will want information, and the local media will likely be on scene demanding answers.

It's going to be a difficult, possibly painful time for city staff, but there are many steps to take before, during and after that can make the process smoother and help everyone stay calm.

Before the crisis
Designate a capable media contact. Ensure that all city officials know to refer questions to this person.

Ideally, this person is accessible, well-spoken and knowledgeable. The person should also have regular contact with the media, which builds trust, and should cultivate a reputation for providing responses within a reasonable timeframe. Reporters are well aware of who has good information. Like everyone else, they have less time to get answers during a major breaking event.

Even when multiple sources are providing information, ideally as part of a formal crisis communications team, ask all media queries to flow through one contact who can ensure all questions are answered accurately and consistently. The contact should not be a police or fire chief who will face other critical roles in a disaster. Also, keep alternates in place for when the main contact isn't available.

Make sure everyone who will be part of crisis communications has current contact information.

This can include a list of crisis team members and alternates with phone numbers. It can also include necessary passwords for the city website and social media accounts.

Consider preparing a "dark website."

This is a prebuilt webpage which can take over for your website or become prominently displayed on your website during a crisis. It allows the city to take charge and make itself the best source of up-to-date information. It also helps

the city address rumors or inaccurate information.

Prepare and rehearse.

Problems often become emergencies because there was no planning ahead for the possibility of an emergency. Running dress rehearsals for events like natural disasters or other life-threatening events can help city officials think through issues and see where procedural problems could bubble up.

Once the crisis begins

Keep employees in the loop.

The best policy is to get information to city staff and council before it's released to the media, or at least at the same time. If the situation warrants, city leaders should call a staff meeting or conference call to provide the information which will allow staff to work effectively.

Give a statement.

Crises, especially law enforcement crises, often involve sensitive subjects and require a thoughtful, careful response. There is often a natural tendency to avoid being forthcoming in order to protect victims and investigations. Without real information, rumor and speculation can thrive.

With a genuine effort at keeping people informed, the city can position itself as the best source of information. Residents want communication that is complete, up to date and honest. Consider including background information; a sense of how the city will proceed, investigate or track the situation; and information on how residents will be impacted by the crisis.

Comments like "no comment" or "we have no information," are not helpful statements, so don't use them.

When the public reads or hears "no comment," they can easily assume the city has something to hide. Going ahead with the information that can be reasonably released, even when the whole story isn't available yet, helps to maintain trust. These statements can help officials avoid "no-commenting" to the media in a developing situation:

"I don't have an answer for that yet. We've just learned of the situation and are working to get more complete information."

"We're still in the process of bringing the situation under control, so I cannot speculate on the cause of the incident."

"We're preparing a statement/putting together information on that now. I should have something to give you shortly."

Use restraint. Avoid discussing currently unknown issues and sensitive information. Don't speculate, accept blame or make promises.

This is the flip side of being forthright. Everyone who speaks on behalf of a city should be ready for anything they say to appear in print or broadcast. Act as if everything is on the record and don't ask to go off the record.

Constituents might demand immediate fixes like government action or payments, but don't make any affirmative statements prematurely. Any liability will take time to determine. City officials, including elected officials who feel pressure to get things done, should not immediately make promises, especially since the city may not even be the responsible party.

Make sure communication is serving the public interest and is appropriate to the situation.

The safety and well-being of the people involved is the top priority. Once these needs are met, face the public and face the facts. Never try to minimize a serious problem or smooth it over in the hopes that no one will notice. The long-term health of the city or town depends not only on an official resolution of a crisis, but also on an effective resolution in the court of public opinion. It's also important to avoid blowing minor incidents out of proportion or allowing others to do so.

After the crisis

Be ready to give updates as needed.

Expect the story to have legs for some time after the initial crisis has passed. Residents and news outlets will have questions about long-term impacts, the ongoing safety of those involved and any investigations or criminal charges to come out of the event.

Debrief city staff on communications efforts.

Assess whether media was available and prepared. Is there a better process for handling questions? Were the channels of communication with the public adequate? Talking about these issues honestly and working on areas of needed improvement will improve the city response to the next crisis.

Communication is Key to Legislative Success

The first year of a two-year session begins January 8, when legislators return to Columbia to do the people's business: funding state government and passing laws that govern the state. The 2018 elections in South Carolina brought little change to state constitutional officers but did bring some new faces in the House of Representatives. There are 17 new House members for the 2019 – 2020 session and one new senator. Since the election, two vacancies have occurred: one in the House and one in the Senate.

With both the old and new faces at the State House, the need for local elected officials to keep open lines of communication with House and Senate members does not change.

The Association's advocacy handbook, *Raising Hometown Voices to a New Level of Influence*, outlines the basics of communicating with a legislator in easy-to-read bullets and tips for success. The biggest takeaway is the importance of establishing a relationship with the local legislative delegation before asking for something.

"Establish the relationship and keep in touch even when you don't need anything," said Casey Fields, the Municipal Association's manager for municipal advocacy.

"Involve your legislative delegation in events in your hometown. Invite them to attend council meetings, ribbon cuttings and other special events," she said.

The advocacy handbook outlines the basics of successful communication with a legislative delegation. Review the free handbook online at www.masc.sc (keyword: advocacy handbook) for details on each basic step to making contact with legislators.

- Don't be a stranger.
- Remember you serve the same people.
- Know both sides of your issue.
- Understand the legislative process.
- Express your opinion.
- Stay on message.
- All politics is local.
- Timing is everything.

So how should local officials make contact and make it effectively? "Do it early and often," Fields said. "Make it personal. Be accurate and make your point. Don't exaggerate and be sure of your facts. Always give the local angle and include examples of how a particular issue helps or hurts your city or town."

Form letters don't work, and in-person meetings and phone calls are always best. If you can't make it to Columbia, write a letter. Social media gives you another valuable platform for saying thank you to your legislators.

Fields also reminds local officials that hundreds of other people are also contacting this same legislator.

"Always follow up with your legislator," Fields said. "If you meet at the legislator's home or local office, write a follow-up

letter. If your legislator requested additional information, provide that information as quickly as possible. We follow the motto of being 'honest brokers of accurate information,' and always seek to provide information quickly and efficiently."

The Association's advocacy team is always interested in hearing what local officials are learning from conversations with their local legislative delegations. "It helps us tremendously to get the intel local officials are hearing at home," said Fields.

Finally, Fields said never be afraid to ask for action. "If you are talking about a specific bill, ask if your legislator will vote no or yes. Be honest, be accurate and be efficient. These tips and your winning personality will always prove effective in communicating with your legislative delegation on behalf of your city or town." Fields said.

Top 10 keys for corresponding with your legislators

1. Spell the name correctly.
2. Do not send a form letter — personalize it, and preferably write it by hand.
3. Make sure you have the correct addresses:
   - Office in Senate (Gressette Building) or House of Representatives (Blatt Building).
   - Office in the legislator's district.
   - Home.
4. Address the legislator as Senator or Representative _____, not by the first name. If you are on a first name basis with your legislator, add a P.S. with a personal note using the first name.
5. Identify where you live. This will let the legislator know you live in his district.
6. In a very clear, concise manner, explain what you are requesting.
7. Briefly describe why you want your legislator to support your issue or budget request.
8. Ask how your legislator will vote on your request.
9. Thank your legislator for considering your request and the work your legislator is doing for the district.
10. Indicate that you look forward to seeing your legislator in the near future.

Getting Social with Resident Engagement

What comes after "Follow Us on Facebook?"
Social media for organizations progressed from a novelty to a must-have in less than 20 years. Even so, the days of establishing social media channels for their own sake are over, and city officials need to ask what they hope to accomplish, as well as whether they are reaching their target audience appropriately. Reflecting on these issues can be valuable when creating accounts and when auditing existing social media efforts.

Time sensitivity and responsiveness

While cities can schedule regular posts with social media management platforms like Hootsuite, residents often appreciate receiving late-breaking information that can't be planned. Common updates for cities include traffic problems, disaster notifications, or parks and recreation schedule changes. Remember that social media communication goes both ways: cities can get out information and residents can talk to city officials. Have a plan for social media managers to give timely responses as appropriate.

Responding to negativity

Social media can bring out the worst in some people, and angry residents can relish the opportunity to air their grievances with local government. The way the city responds can easily become counterproductive if a situation is not handled thoughtfully and realistically. Have policies in place, and find ways to give answers without feeding negativity. Also, be sure to document any significantly confrontational exchanges, especially when deleting comments based on a social media policy. Learn more about official policies at www.masc.sc (keyword: developing social media policy).

Misrepresentation

Social media users will sometimes fraudulently create content appearing as if it comes from an official city source. Some in the audience will accept whatever the false message is at face value. Cities should get verification for their accounts from the platform when possible and be on the alert for any rogue content that needs to be reported.

A Day in the Life of a

Public Information Officer

Communications

Don't expect a city's public information officer to follow a strict schedule for the day — or even the next hour. News breaks, a social media feed blows up, reporters call for interviews, and soon the items on the PIO's calendar are scrapped in favor of pressing developments to address.

Consider Seth Duncan, the assistant town manager of Batesburg-Leesville, who counts public information officer among the job responsibilities he juggles. A little more than a year ago, a call from the state health department late in the afternoon confirmed a case of West Nile virus in the Lexington County town. Duncan got busy. Within an hour, he prepared a news release and compiled an information packet to be hand-delivered to more than 1,000 homes and businesses the following morning.

"I am proud of that moment because I had very few details or first-hand knowledge of West Nile virus to go on, so I had to study and write quickly to provide the public with a clear understanding of the dangers and proper response procedures," he said.

Communications officers in cities and towns, large and small, around South Carolina have similar stories of instances where they had to quickly react to keep the public informed. But while the daily schedule for a PIO is never set in stone, they say that's part of the job's appeal.

"I like that I'm never quite sure what my day is going to be," said Katie Quinn, the communications manager for the

Katie Quinn, communications manager for the City of Rock Hill, worked closely with reporters during the BMX World Championships.
Photo: City of Rock Hill.

City of Rock Hill. "Being a PIO requires a great deal of flexibility. Most days, my to-do list ends up with more items added than get crossed off. You just have to do the best you can, delegate when possible, prioritize and reprioritize as new things pop up. The city's tagline is 'always on,' and that definitely applies to this job."

Quinn said most of her workdays start with checking local news websites to keep up on any coverage related to the city. She and her two-member staff manage the city's website and social media, and she is the main point of contact for journalists, often connecting them to appropriate

staff members for interviews. The public information staff is responsible for the local visitor website, video projects including recording and airing city meetings, creating publications, organizing press events and managing the Rock Hill brand.

Communications professionals also take on roles of marketing city events. For example, when Rock Hill hosted the 2017 UCI BMX World Championships, much of Quinn's time for the year and a half leading up to the event was devoted to marketing and communications. Now, her office is overseeing the branding and marketing for the new, free fixed-route bus system that will launch in April 2019.

Like other PIOs, Quinn is constantly checking and responding to email and city social media accounts. This is certainly true for Duncan in Batesburg-Leesville.

"My typical day usually starts at o-dark-something," he said. "My phone is the first and last thing I see each and every day. Before my feet touch the floor I check my town email, review the town's social media accounts and try to get a sense of how my morning might start. After this I head to the office where I try to arrive 30 or more minutes before the rest of our town hall staff. I use this quiet time to respond to overnight emails, social media posts and put out any fires that may be raging. From there the day can go in a number of different directions, but typically I have time to work on special projects, assist departments

(Left) Batesburg-Leesville Assistant Town Manager Seth Duncan appears as Forrest Gump for the town's Halloween celebration. Photo: Town of Batesburg-Leesville. (Right) The City of North Charleston's Ryan Johnson appears on ABC News 4's Lowcountry Live! Photo: City of North Charleston.

heads, deal with personnel issues and other tasks."

In McCormick, Police Chief Bo Willis also serves as the department's public information officer. He said the media relations and communications part of his job has changed tremendously in the years he's been with the department.

"When I first started, there was no Instagram, no Facebook, no LinkedIn. There was just the newspaper and the radio stations. Radio used to be one of my favorite outlets for getting stuff out, but the radio is not into local news anymore," Willis said. "Now we have social media, and we have to keep an eye on that all the time. We monitor it because people will put out whatever they want. I need to have a grasp of what's out there and if they say something wrong, I correct it, tactfully. I try to make everyone stay informed and up to date."

Ryan Johnson, too, said his job as the North Charleston PIO is a balancing act — combining the planned initiatives the city needs to push with monitoring and reacting to the news and social media channels.

"Truthfully, any of it can change at any point," Johnson said. "You never

know what you're going to be doing. There can be some new, exciting thing to get out in the public, and conversely there's undoubtedly something negative you have to respond to."

He said a challenge for PIOs in local government is figuring out ways to engage the city's residents. For example, he said municipal communications staff can be responsible for reaching out to residents and convincing them of the importance of getting involved or attending a public hearing. It's not always an easy sell.

"We're updating our comprehensive development plan. It's hard to get folks interested in this stuff," he said. "We produce all these nice videos, but getting people interested in municipal topics is a challenge."

Johnson echoed other PIOs on how social media has changed the job and work hours. "People want information when they want it, and you have to provide it to them. You have to be able to adapt. Government was some of the last to adopt any social media. We have to adapt and implement new technologies. We have to know the audience and where it's going. And you have to retain the traditional stuff, too. You have to

reach different people in different forms, broadening the spectrum of ways to convey information."

That's a common comment from municipal communications officers.

Duncan, who estimates 10 percent of his job as the assistant town manager in Batesburg-Leesville is spent on his PIO duties, said the job has grown and changed substantially in his three years.

"At first, the job was to simply update the Facebook page and occasionally write a press release. All of this changed as council began dedicating more and more resources to ensure the town's message was reaching the people," Duncan said.

Today, Batesburg-Leesville uses nearly a dozen different tools to engage residents and build relationships to ensure the town's message breaks through the noise to reach its audience.

"The job is more than just playing on Facebook or Twitter," Duncan said. "It's about developing a voice for the community and being able to build trust. A competent public information officer is essential for growing and thriving communities. Ultimately, PIOs help tell the community's story, provide facts and reassure the public during times of crisis."

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Calendar

For a complete listing of the Association's training opportunities, visit www.masc.sc to view the calendar.

FEBRUARY

5 Hometown Legislative Action Day. Columbia Marriott.

6 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Session A and B, Advanced Institute and Advanced Continuing Education. Columbia Marriott. Topics for Session A include an overview of local government planning and zoning; conducting public meetings; and strategic planning. Topics for Session B include municipal annexation; intergovernmental relations; and ethics and public accountability. Advanced Institute Courses are "Advanced Municipal Economic Development" and "Public Safety Policy and Administration." Advanced Continuing Education topics include a more in-depth overview of ethics and the Freedom of Information Act.

12 SCMIT and SCMIRF Fire Arms Simulator Train the Trainer. Municipal Association of SC.

21 SCMIT and SCMIRF Fire Arms Simulator Train the Trainer. Municipal Association of SC.

MARCH

7 SC Association of Stormwater Managers First Quarter Meeting. Seawell's, Columbia.

10 – 12 SC Utility Billing Association Annual Meeting. Embassy Suites by Hilton Charleston Airport Hotel and Convention Center. Topics include communication in the workplace, professional and personal awareness, electronic payment security, ethics and harassment.

13 – 15 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute Spring Session – Year 1, Session A. Hyatt Place Columbia/Downtown/The Vista. Topics include the role of the municipal clerk, records management, interpersonal skills and forms of government.

20 SCMIT and SCMIRF Risk Management 101. Municipal Association of SC.

21 Municipal Technology Association of SC Spring Meeting. Newberry Firehouse Conference Center. Topics include best practices for establishing technology-related polices, SC Law Enforcement Division/ Criminal Justice Information Services updates, disaster recovery and future technology trends.

28 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association Spring Academy. Seawell's, Columbia.

APRIL

3 SC Business Licensing Officials Association Spring Training Institute and Advanced Academy. Seawell's, Columbia.

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