

The Infor logo, consisting of the word "infor" in white lowercase letters on a red rectangular background, is positioned in the top left corner of the page. The background of the entire page is a photograph of a large, ornate, light-colored dome with a central circular skylight featuring a red star with the letters N, S, E, and W.

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Ensuring community business continuity in times of disruption for state and local government

Public Sector

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These are unprecedented times for government operations. We have not experienced such disruption before. In addition to the global pandemic, other factors such as civil unrest and a rapidly declining economy are impacting state and local government operations. All levels of the government have been affected, from policy making, to emergency response, to the delivery of basic services. The effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 and ensure a safe community has taken priority over the delivery of government services.

The confidence in the government depends on its continued operations. Citizens expect water taps to be on, signals working, and someone at City Hall answering the phone. However, the individuals that work for our government agencies are just as affected by this disruption as the rest of the citizenry. So, how do governments keep the lights on, while maintaining the safety of their employees and systems? Even more importantly, how do they manage all this over the short term, as they also prepare for the eventual recovery of public safety and what might happen in the future?

The impact of a pandemic on government operations

These are certainly challenging times for our country and governments. The global pandemic has disrupted all facets of life, in all areas of the country. At the core of the response, government agencies have been tasked with protecting citizens and mitigating the risk of the virus' spread, while still providing critical services. Recent civil unrest has added to the resource impacts of many civil agencies. They are the policy makers, decision-makers, first responders, and core service providers during a time of emergency and will continue to take a central role in the response.

During times of crisis, both governments and citizens are challenged when doing business. Offices may be shut down, services curtailed, and communications slow. Systems are certainly stressed, and resources can become scarce.

Many government agencies have experienced disruptions to their working staff, especially field personnel. Long-term disruptions can actually begin to break down an institution's normal ways for providing services. During all of this, government agencies are still expected to deliver uninterrupted services in both the peaks and valleys of crisis.

A great deal of uncertainty exists in battling this pandemic, and on determining how services will be delivered. Policies are being developed on the fly, with the primary focus on slowing the pandemic and keeping workers and the public safe. Yet remaining at the core, government agencies will still strive to deliver key services to their citizens and businesses.

Different jurisdictions and states are reacting in different ways to maintain services and reduce the risk to workers and citizens. However, some certainties appear to be in the works.

“ At the time of this publication, states have issued stay-at-home orders affecting more than 80% of the US population. Over 55 million students are out of school. However, with its complex federal, state and local system, having a consistent response across states and municipalities has proven difficult. This combined with difficulty in enforcement of physical distancing practices may slow containment.”

**IDC, COVID-19 INDUSTRY IMPACT:
US GOVERNMENT¹**

Revenues will drop. Tax income from entertainment, tourism, and businesses are taking a hit. This may manifest itself downstream, but many government budgets are already preparing with reductions to their funding. However, expenditures will probably stay the same. The delivery of services will not disappear, and in some cases, increase. This will especially be true in social services.

A recent survey from [the National League of Cities](#), of about 2,500 cities, towns, and villages, states that nearly all communities greater than 50,000 in population reported that they will experience a revenue shortfall this year, with 87% of those less than 50,000 in population expecting revenue shortfalls as well.²

Remote employee enablement, which is somewhat the norm for both the private and government sectors already, will continue to expand, with many of these new approaches here to stay. Tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams®, and Cisco WebEx® are being deployed for collaborative meetings, and the move to mobile capability is following suit.





The future will be a balancing act. Budgets will need to be addressed, but the ability to bring in additional revenue via taxes or sizable federal or state financial assistance will be challenging. Many agencies will be forced to furlough or reduce staff, without decreasing the quality of service delivery. Governments can set the stage for recovery and future growth by lowering the regulatory burden on businesses. Enabling businesses to sustain their operations and maintain employment will be key. Governments will need to deploy strategies that allow for business to be conducted online, not in-line.

Prepare for tomorrow's recovery

At a strategic level, government agencies can take steps to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on operations and reshape their processes across different departments to enhance the citizen and employee experience. Here are some strategic factors to consider:

Organization—Do you fully understand how your departments are organized? Which ones will be highly impacted going forward, and which ones are in more of a support role? Executives will need to evaluate departmental roles in dealing with this pandemic, and how they will be positioned for recovery and future growth.

“ The government is going to need to stay agile. Of course, many of these decisions are being made at the state and local level based on their own circumstances.”

DEBRA KNOPMAN, PRINCIPLE RESEARCHER,
FORMER VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR, RAND
INFRASTRUCTURE, SAFETY, AND ENVIRONMENT,
RAND CORPORATION³

Resources, people, solutions—As part of continuity planning, an organization will need to take stock of resources, personnel, and even technical solutions that can be used to further service delivery. What type of equipment and vehicles are needed for services, and what are the priorities? What skills are needed to keep these running and how will supply chain needs be impacted? This is especially important for emergency services.

Ongoing communication—Agencies should implement an up-to-date communication plan for constituents to notify them of altered or delayed services and provide public education. When doing so, it is important to be cognizant of relevant data and privacy policies.

There is no doubt that technology will play a key role in managing the current crisis, as well as setting the stage for recovery and future growth. There are steps that can be taken that will ensure systems and resources are available to manage service delivery and regulatory management.

As the impact of this pandemic became apparent, it was also obvious that some services would simply be not available. For example, in the building and development permit processing and issuance has either stopped or been severely slowed. The construction industry is probably one of the most notable sectors that acts as the canary in the coalmine. The business is capital intensive, places a good deal of confidence in the future, and is very regulated.

“ The success of our rapid pivot to an at-home workforce may provide us an opportunity to take a fresh look at our staffing culture, as well as any future building configurations. [...] Despite the unknowns brought by our current global challenge, the district has been able to provide continuous and uninterrupted service of something essential to all of us: safe and reliable water and wastewater services. At the same time, we are fulfilling our commitment to the health of our employees and customers.”

TOM KENNEDY
General Manager, Rainbow Municipal Water District⁴

Many builders have traditionally gone into a city or county hall to request permits, but the closure of offices has cut off this avenue of processing. Furthermore, projects in process will also be impacted. Inspectors may not be able to maintain the normal frequency of inspections—causing delays. Also, material delivery is being slowed, again resulting in delays. This will almost assuredly require permit and completion timeframes to be extended.





How to ensure process continuity via contactless permitting

- **Move to a virtual environment**—Today’s citizens and businesses expected this before the global pandemic. Many agencies have already begun to move to a digital approach to government.
- **Provide a self-service portal**—This single effort can mitigate the need for large, onsite staffing and can keep the permitting process on track. Many agencies have moved in this direction and have maintained a high level of service and permit issuance. The portal can also serve as a communication channel on policy changes. A very creative example was deployed by a Maryland county that facilitated the application of COVID-19 grant funding by local businesses.

- **Utilize collaboration tools**—A large number of government agencies have adopted tools, such as Zoom, Teams, and WebEx to conduct business internally and with external clients. Another approach to collaboration can mitigate a key bottleneck in the permitting approval process: electronic plan check solutions. These have become popular among building and planning departments, but deployment has accelerated during this crisis. Finally, deploying a mobile capability for inspectors can eliminate the need for office visits, while maintaining full regulatory capacity.
- **Secure cloud based permitting and solutions**—While this would be a longer-term process, it can deliver large scale benefits. Cloud-based solutions would provide fulltime availability, lower hardware and network costs, and mitigate the need for heavy support staffing. Resources can be redirected to more strategic projects.

“ Technology is playing an incredibly important role in government services provisioning in light of physical distancing practices and the need to provide community-based care, ongoing essential services, and implement practices to minimize the spread and exposure to COVID-19. All levels of government are on a rapid learning curve as they try to manage remote workers and new online skills.”

IDC, COVID-19 INDUSTRY IMPACT:
US GOVERNMENT⁵

Innovative ways to maintain quality of life

These are certainly unique times, with new precedents. All facets of life have been disrupted. Governments have largely responded quickly, and in many cases, with innovation and success. Now they must turn to recovery and future service delivery approaches. Many of the lessons learned, and the solutions deployed can provide benefits in “normal” times. The adoption of new remote work policies has the potential to streamline processes, as well as add to quality of life for individuals.

Organizations that show an agility to accommodate new situations and plan for future impacts will set themselves up for success. As can be observed in virtually every news report on the global pandemic, planners use data as the core of their responses and mitigation efforts. This approach can be used for normal business processes as well. Better decision support and increased transparency are supported by cloud-based tools and analytical solutions. Finally, deploying a consolidated, fully connected solution that includes both a self-service portal and mobility with minimal configuration needs will set the stage for optimized permitting and planning services during the current crisis and into the future.

“ I don't think we ever envisioned a scenario where we would be accepting, processing and reviewing permit and planning applications remotely let alone performing virtual inspections all without having to be in our offices or on the job sites. But we have been able to continue to perform all of the normal work responsibilities while allowing for social distancing, when people were nervous about site visits and we wanted to keep our inspectors safe. The portal helped us maintain full business continuity in an environment where many others have just stopped, or are running at a fraction of their regular capacity.”

GARY HESSONG

Deputy Director, Frederick County Division of Planning and Permitting⁶

1 IDC, [COVID-19 Industry Impact: US Government](#), April 2020.

2 National League of Cities (NLC), [Cities Are Essential: Fiscal Impact of the Pandemic Recession on Cities, Towns and Villages](#), May 7, 2020.

3 RAND Corporation, [“The Economic Wallop of COVID-19: Q&A With RAND Experts,”](#) The Rand Blog, March, 16, 2020.

4 Infor, [“Lessons from the wildfire: Rainbow Municipal Water rapidly pivots to all-remote staffing,”](#) Infor Blog, April 7, 2020.

5 IDC.

6 Infor, [“Frederick County maintains business continuity,”](#) Infor Blog, May 12, 2020.

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