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## Coates' Canons Blog: Working With Community Partners on COVID-19 Response

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Even in ordinary times, and especially during times of emergency, no single organization has all the power, resources, or authority required to solve a public problem.

Right now, local governments are hard at work developing community-specific responses in keeping with state and federal directives. These community plans can and should involve nonprofits, faith-based organizations, philanthropies, and the private sector – and not just in terms of limiting their operations in order to “flatten the curve” of contagion. Some of these organizations may be looking to the local government for assistance and support, as described in Tyler Mulligan’s recent post about emergency loans. But local governments should be thinking about collaborating with these other organizations in order to increase the impact in and support for the community.

Read on for some examples of why local governments might benefit from collaborating with area nonprofits, in particular. Some can be accomplished while practicing social distancing.

### Why might local governments want to collaborate with nonprofits during an emergency?

- **To use the pre-existing relationships that the nonprofits have with their client groups.** Specific populations might best trust the nonprofits they know and rely on, rather than the governmental entity that is unfamiliar.
- **To identify physical spaces that could be used for service provision.** The meeting spaces, kitchens, shelters, or even parking lots of nonprofits could be useful in meeting the emerging needs in the pandemic.
- **To contact specific populations that might experience unique risks.** Outreach efforts could be fine-tuned to meet the needs of the homeless, immigrants, the elderly, etc. Nonprofits might hold critical information about the existing or emerging points of vulnerabilities with these populations
- **To employ the existing communications infrastructure of nonprofits for disseminating timely information.** Keep the nonprofits informed, and ask them to share key information through their social media and other outlets. Provide your information in formats that are easy to forward or reproduce.
- **To access language interpreters.** Nonprofits that work with immigrant populations – no matter what kind of service they provide – likely have bi-lingual staff and volunteers.
- **To harness the power of volunteers.** Nonprofits know how to train and manage volunteers. Many have existing volunteer structures that could potentially be deployed for services in support of response to Covid-19.

### How can local governments collaborate with nonprofits right now?

Information sharing is one of the easiest ways to work together. In addition, working across organizational boundaries to disseminate critical information can be relatively simple and extremely helpful in your community.

This is a time for creative problem-solving as our communities address intervention and response efforts. What else have you done or can you do now to build collaborative relationships with the nonprofit community? Please share your successful strategies for working across organizational boundaries in the comments below. If a collaborative effort was less than successful, please share what you would advise another community to do differently if they tried something similar. If you would rather share directly with me, please feel free to do so ([margaret@sog.unc.edu](mailto:margaret@sog.unc.edu)) and I can share a follow-up summary.