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ENGAGING PUBLIC OFFICIALS: COVID-19 CRISIS

During the COVID-19 crisis, YMCAs remain committed to serving communities. Even as capacities are limited or facilities remain closed, Ys are doing essential work across the country. It is critical to engage public officials in the work that Ys are doing to respond to this crisis. This supplement to the Engaging Public Officials Toolkit contains suggestions and opportunities for this moment.

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CONTINUE TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS

Much of the federal COVID-19 relief efforts will flow through the states, making state and local relationships especially important for Ys. Strong relationships can help create a supportive environment for the Y, especially when we know that local and state policymakers will have to make critical budget decisions in the coming year. This can help protect the Y from repeal of tax exemptions for the nonprofit sector or elimination of social service contracts.

Plus, with so much variation in state-level policies and guidelines, it's important for Ys and alliances to be working closely with state and local leadership and health departments as economies reopen.

ILLUSTRATE COMMUNITY BENEFIT DURING THE CRISIS

Illustrating the Y's community benefit as a nonprofit is always important, but the Y's work looks different during this crisis. Be prepared to educate public officials about what the Y is doing to support the community. Consider developing a COVID-specific community benefit statement or set of data points illustrating the work Ys have been doing as well as the severe effects of the crisis on your organization's staffing and budget.

Where is existing relief helping, and where does your Y still need additional support to continue serving the community?

Y Example: The State Alliance of Michigan YMCAs added an [interactive map](#) of the COVID response services available at Michigan Ys to its alliance website!

HERE FOR YOU WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH

As COVID 19 continues to disrupt our every day lives Michigan YMCAs are responding in three main areas:

- 1) providing much needed childcare to essential staff and their families,
- 2) increasing access to food for children who would normally rely on school breakfast and lunches,
- 3) promoting mental and physical wellness through programming, outreach, and donation drives.

For more information on what the YMCA is doing in your area, please click on the blue marker in the map and scroll down.

For additional support contact the following organizations:



PUBLIC OFFICIALS CAN HELP CONNECT CONSTITUENTS TO SERVICES

Public officials are looking for resources they can share with their constituents about support services and volunteer opportunities available during quarantine. Share information about what is available at your Y so they can help amplify the message.

Best practice: Provide an easy-to-share graphic with program details, such as [this one](#) from the YMCA of Houston shared by TX State Rep. Ana Hernandez.

INVITE PUBLIC OFFICIALS TO YOUR Y

The Engaging Public Officials Toolkit includes advice for inviting elected officials to your YMCA, and these tips can be modified for the COVID-19 crisis.

Consider inviting public officials to participate in crisis relief efforts such as blood drives and volunteer opportunities. Senators and U.S. Representatives are in their districts during recess in August and October. State and local governments may also be on a reduced schedule, allowing public officials to engage in the community by volunteering.



In the invitation and during the visit, tell the elected official(s) you invite about the work your Y is doing through this crisis, as well as your Y's needs. Where is existing relief helping, and where does your Y still need additional support to continue serving the community?

If an in-person visit is not feasible, consider inviting officials to a virtual facility visit, virtual tour of your emergency child care program or something similar!

SHARE WHAT YOUR Y IS DOING

Many elected officials do not understand the scale of essential services Ys are providing during this crisis. You can help to counter this by finding ways to tell and illustrate your Y's story on your website, through media coverage, on social media, etc.

Examples from Ys:

- YMCA of Greater Boston gives a [behind the scenes view](#) of their feeding program and encourages giving.
- YMCA of Centre County posts daily [photo updates](#) of their feeding program and highlights volunteers and partners making donations.
- Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA shares [media coverage](#) of the services it is providing.

In your posts, you can tie your updates to advocacy asks by using #Relief4Charities!

PLUG IN TO ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

Y staff, board members, volunteers, and members are all invited to join the [YMCA Advocates Action Network](#) to stay up-to-date with federal advocacy opportunities as the crisis evolves. Plus, the Y-USA Government Relations team can provide assistance with state grassroots campaigns if needed. The GR team may also be able to arrange a virtual meeting with congressional staffers to share your Y's story.

PARTICIPATE IN TELEPHONE TOWN HALLS

Many members of Congress are holding virtual town halls to comply with social distancing. Check your legislators' newsletters and social media pages to see if they are hosting a telephone town hall soon, and if so, submit a question about the needs of local nonprofits!