



NADO Members Share how they Continue to Provide Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic

On Friday March 20, 2020, NADO members were asked to participate in a brief survey to help us understand how your organizations are serving your regions during the COVID-19 Pandemic. We appreciate all the responses that we have received, especially given the many challenges you are faced with at this time. The information you have provided is being used by our staff to create content and resources to share with members as well as inform our advocacy efforts.

NADO and NADO Research Foundation staff continue to advocate on your behalf, connect you with each other, and collect the latest information and best practices from RDOs to share across our membership. We launched the [RDO COVID-19 Resource Center](http://www.nado.org) on www.nado.org. The page is being updated daily as we learn about more relevant and valuable resources for you.

At this time, we have received 59 responses, which accounts for 16% of NADO members. As promised, we want to share a summary of your responses.

With regard to **how you are responding to the immediate needs of communities**, many that have RLFs said you are looking at ways to help small businesses, including allowing deferred payments for up to 6 months, looking into lowering interest payments, and creating emergency loan funds. Many of you are getting information out to stakeholders via dedicated resource pages on your websites, increasing your messaging via social media, and continuing to be the convener of local governments. Many are using video platforms for meetings with staff and boards. A number reported their offices were open with limited staff. As expected, remote work situations are challenging due to bandwidth issues, lack of technology (laptops and software), and lack of access to files remotely. Many of you are looking at creative ways to continue services, especially those that do meals on wheels programs.

The **federal funds you plan to use/are using to provide emergency assistance** in your regions includes EDA (in general as well as RLF specific); USDA (IRP and RMAP); CDBG; FEMA; CDFI; SBA microloan, 504, disaster funds; OAA and HHS. A couple are reaching out to their states for assistance and one mentioned using its own loan fund.

Additional federal resources identified as needed to provide assistance in your regions included loan funds for small and micro businesses (perhaps in the form of grants vs loans); funds for social service programs (childcare, meals for elderly, homeless, UI); funds for first responders; funds to hire staff at the EDD to help manage programs once anticipated federal assistance arrives; and broadband funds. There were several comments about the need to reduce/eliminate federal bureaucratic red tape with grant applications, and to make sure that EDDs were included as a logical partner for disbursing federal funds to local businesses, nonprofits and other organizations. Many mentioned the importance of making sure rural communities are not forgotten.

Regarding your daily operations, all respondents said you are still open for business but in modified formats: some are 100% remotely working; some are a blend with staff whose jobs allow working from home, others have staggering schedules for staff to be in the office. Those that are still working in the

office said it is closed to the public and staff are social distancing and offices are frequently cleaned and sanitized. A number mentioned the challenges of inadequate internet. Some were waiting for governors to allow public meetings to be conducted via video conferencing. Many said they are using all sorts of platforms for virtual meetings (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Webex, Google biz, regular conference calls, etc). Almost all have some sort of regular staff contact – calls, video, etc. Communications with the general public were being accomplished through social media, constant contact messaging, robocalls, word of mouth, calls, email, website updates. One member shared they have created a COVID-19 PTO account-staff that can't work during the last 2 weeks in March can charge time there and not to personnel time off.

Responses to the questions about **challenges to program and service continuity** focused largely on staff: not enough prior to the pandemic and expect an increased need for more staff once new funds are available; stress on staff trying to juggle work responsibilities with childcare; concern about staff catching the virus, or impact on staff if a family member gets it; staff that could work at home can't because of bandwidth issues. Information overload was mentioned, as well: many of you feel challenged with sharing the most appropriate information with your communities. Several expressed general concern about rural communities and regions as a result of rural hospital closures, lack of medical personnel, perception that COVID-19 is more of an urban problem. The challenges of community engagement in a time of social isolation and distancing, self-quarantining, and shutdowns was expressed. Most were concerned about resources, both what is available now and when supplemental funds might come available and would there be enough.

In response to our question about **what information and resources you will need from NADO and the Research Foundation going forward**, advocacy was mentioned with great frequency. EDA funds to EDDs, getting money to rural communities, getting funds to help small local businesses, and relaxing bureaucracy associated with grant seeking/awards were all mentioned. In addition to information about financial resources to individuals, businesses, cities/counties, you also requested a list of states that have eased restrictions on public meetings, ideas on community engagement from a distance, best practices for remote team/employee management, suggestions on how to move into the economy that will emerge post COVID-19, share how EDDs are continuing to provide social services during the pandemic (what is working and lessons learned). But mostly they want NADO to continue advocating as always for rural regions and EDDs. Several respondents suggested NADO host a clearinghouse of info on www.nado.org; we have established the [RDO COVID-19 Resource Center](#). We will continue to update the Center daily with relevant and timely resources.

If you have not yet completed the survey, but want to share your thoughts and experiences with us, [you can access the survey here](#).

As always, please reach out to [NADO staff](#) with any questions or for additional assistance. Be sure to follow *NADO News* and our social media channels ([Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)) for more information and updates.