

# Leadership for Livable Communities in the Era of COVID-19

**Project impacts.** Over the past couple of months, the Local Government Commission has increased its organizational efficiency and implemented measures to reduce health risks across the organization and all of our projects, including shifting most of our 2020 events and community-engagement activities to interactive virtual events, such as the Statewide Energy Efficiency Forum planned for June. The biennial California Adaptation Forum that was slated for August will be pushed to 2021.

We're also looking at potential program opportunities to help local governments adjust to "new normal" behavioral changes and economic factors in ways that align with sustainability initiatives.



**Current estimates indicate that, over the next two years, government revenues will drop by several billion dollars across our state's 482 municipalities.** Acknowledging these severe, short-term and long-term fiscal implications, the LGC will continue working with local leaders to explore best practices to close budget shortfalls, streamline services, assess cost-benefit options, implement new tools and efficiencies to reduce costs, and forge regional collaborations.

The LGC is also identifying key budget and stimulus priorities that are mutually reinforcing across climate, social equity and economic recovery in the hopes that the massive stimulus investments made can improve long-term community resilience.

**Our mission.** Our goal is to be clear-eyed about the current reality and the long-term impacts, but pragmatically optimistic about our ability to respond. We remain confident in our ability

to support local leaders through this difficult time and help position communities to be more resilient coming out of this crisis, just as we have done throughout our history to address the major challenges of the day.

**Solutions for a resilient future.** Difficult situations and systemic disruptions can provide a rare opportunity to gain insights and develop new approaches. That's why we're pushing for stimulus investments in projects that address public health, climate and social-equity needs, including affordable infill housing, critical transit projects, bike-and-pedestrian infrastructure, broadband deployment, teleworking and telehealth programs, zero-emission vehicle fleets and infrastructure, urban greening and better access to healthy, local food.

Given the long-lasting economic impacts we're likely to face, we must all be much more strategic and creative with our investments and our core principles, focusing on high-priority projects that achieve multiple economic, social and environmental benefits.

As leaders, our first responsibility is to ensure the health, safety and well-being of our staff and the people and businesses within our communities. Already, many of us are doing that in innovative, new ways that wouldn't have been possible before this disruption.

As we forge through this time together, we have the opportunity to learn from each other and extend that creativity to ensure our communities' long-term resilience and prosperity.



Kate Meis

Kate Meis | Executive Director



## LGC @ Work

The Local Government Commission acted rapidly and decisively to respond to public health and safety guidance from state and county government. Starting the week of March 9, all staff members were given the option to work from home. Our office was completely closed the morning of March 17 and all staff were successfully transitioned to remote work.

Our leadership and program teams are now conducting video meetings at least once a week, and staff members are organizing and engaging several wellness activities, including a weekly wellness newsletter, video coffee-chat hours on Monday mornings, skill-share lunch sessions led by different staff on Wednesdays and morning meditation on Thursdays.

We've also produced *Best Practices for Virtual Engagement*, a summary of key considerations and specific guidance for virtual engagement, with the hope of supporting our members and partners in creating effective virtual engagement during this unique situation — as well as in better times to come.

**Next steps.** Like other businesses and organizations, we are also now looking ahead to evaluate the safest ways to reconfigure our office setup and procedures for the time when we can physically "re-open" and be together in the office again.

**For more info:** [lgc.org/resource-library](https://lgc.org/resource-library)

# Make the most of the new normal

The precariousness of public health and economic prosperity in America has long been a concern for those in the livable communities movement, and the pandemic has brought those issues into sharper focus for the entire country.

We already knew that the zip code of a neighborhood is a strong predictor of health outcomes. These inequities have grown exponentially with over 30 million people put out of work almost overnight.

Just as the pandemic casts a spotlight on underlying economic inequities and food and housing insecurities, it also reminds us of other global crises, such as the same scope and sense of urgency to act on climate change.

While the immediate focus during the pandemic is first and foremost on protecting public health and well-being, there will also be lessons learned and opportunities from the “new normal” contractions for community growth and reinvention.

As remedies are developed for workers and businesses during our long, gradual recovery, it’s imperative that we create more resilient jobs and equitable development, and invest in helping industries become cleaner and more resource-efficient.

While we work to minimize the immediate pain, we can also look simultaneously toward sustaining some of the new habits that people are now practicing – without the social and economic burden currently attached to them.

As local governments assess budget contractions, capital improvements, transportation infrastructure and other plans, they should prioritize efficiencies that support economic recovery and environmental leadership, and take advantage of existing state funding programs to continue critical climate-resiliency work and optimize our return on every dollar spent.

# Reimagine Opportunities for Green Recovery

Here are a few areas where we can reimagine opportunities that foster a more sustainable, resilient recovery:

**Sustain and expand remote work, education, health and civic engagement:** Invest in equitable broadband access and computer-equipment lending, and work with large employers, hospitals and schools to expand remote programs.

**Expand water and energy programs to reduce utility bills:** Use existing financing mechanisms and utility rebates to expand programs to increase efficiency, water-reuse and renewable-energy measures. The opportunity to retrofit empty commercial and municipal buildings is particularly timely during the stay-at-home mandates. Local leaders should also consider prioritization of small and medium-sized businesses and marginalized communities to increase recovery capacity.

**Develop green workforce training programs:** Invest in green, innovative, entrepreneurial and inclusive workforce training to get people back to work and accelerate clean, resource-saving economic-development opportunities, including jobs in energy and water efficiency and upper watershed restoration for wildfire prevention, carbon sequestration and water-supply reliability.

**Increase access to healthy, local food:** Establish a “food recovery to food security” network with restaurants, catering companies, grocery stores, local food banks, schools and other community food hubs to reduce food waste and address food insecurity. As many as one in four children were food-insecure even before the pandemic hit, and food deserts were widespread across this country in both urban and rural areas.

**Maintain clean-air improvements through investments in transit, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure:** Enhance accessibility and effectiveness of car-light lifestyles through investments in transit, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and zero-emission vehicles. Completing existing backlogs of shovel-ready ADA-compliance and complete-streets projects could create a significant number of new jobs and could be completed with

shorter timelines, given the reduced traffic in many regions during the pandemic shutdown.

**Invest in urban greening:** Increase access and availability of parks and open space for community use and public health (as deemed safe and appropriate by health officials) by increasing investments in open space, urban greening and other multi-benefit resilience measures, especially in marginalized communities.

**Streamline permitting and reduce or eliminate fees for infill and transit-oriented development:** In response to the increased urgency of affordable housing needs and the opportunity to encourage car-light lifestyles cities should reassess their permit process and fee structure to increase climate-friendly affordable housing (infill, transit-oriented housing).

**Support long-term community-resilience planning to reduce future shocks:** Expand Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) programs to train residents in climate resilience and disaster-response skills. Create pathways for jobs by allocating resources to community-ambassador positions that support emergency communications and neighborhood-level preparedness and recovery.

**Local leaders can support these measures through existing funding and financing programs** such as Pay as You Save and Property

Assessed Clean Energy Financing; Energy Savings Performance Contracting; Cal Recycle’s Food Waste Prevention and Rescue Program; the Active Transportation Program; Low Carbon Transit Operations Program; Low Carbon Transportation Investment programs such as the Clean Mobility Options Voucher Pilot Program; Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program; CNRA’s Urban Greening Program; and the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program. For more info on available funding and assistance:

**Fundingresource.org**

