It’s never been more important to communicate good, sound information. The National League of Cities hosted a webinar with Hud Englehart, the former Chief Communications Strategist for the governor of Illinois and an adjunct professor of crisis communications in Northwestern University’s Medill graduate school of journalism, to help local leaders convey their messages effectively as we handle the coronavirus outbreak.

Here are some key points:

• **You need to start with what people need to hear, not with what you need to say**
  - There are facts and there are myths; we must make sure that we dispel myths in a way that’s convincing and compelling.
  - **Data supports stories, not creates them.** Having data is not the same as having information.
  - **Transparency is critical,** we must reveal the process so people following along can understand.
    - This includes revealing our sources, which must be **nonpartisan and scientific.**
      - “I read an article from the Washington Post/watched a segment on Fox News…” vs. “A doctor at the CDC/NIH/WHO said…”

• **We have to become comfortable with the fact that we don’t have all the answers.**
  - We need to make sure we’re communicating, but the questions won’t always be in our wheelhouse.
  - **We must correct errors as they come in.** With Coronavirus, information is changing rapidly.
    - The truth is more important here.
  - **Under normal circumstances,** revelation and admission are difficult.

• **You need a Chief Skeptics Officer**
  - This is someone who will
    - authenticate our sources, dig for answers, report the facts, and keep the record straight.
  - They need latitude to ask ugly questions, speak truth to power, because the press/public will

• **Tone and demeanor are extremely important.** Become combative or raise fear and people will act accordingly.
  - We need people to do things and not just hear them. **Conveying calm can prevent hysteria.**
  - Avoid weaponizing coronavirus in a partisan manner
    - it undermines the message that is critical for people to act upon.

• **Embrace technology!** We don’t have any choice but to do so.
  - Many feel social media is inaccurate, which brings us back to making sure your content is sourced and cited, non-partisan, and that it treats an adult audience like adults.

Englehart says that in the coronavirus crisis, we have made the right decision on what to protect: public health. Following his key points by focusing your messages on what people need to hear, making sure that they are full of sourced and cited information, they are non-partisan and convey calm, and reach people where they are, local leaders can save lives.