

## A message from VML Executive Director Michelle Gowdy

*It takes a locality.* This platitude has taken on a new, deeper meaning as we look to our local officials to bear the responsibility of pulling our nation through a health crisis none save our grandparents or great-grandparents have ever known. We now we find ourselves in a situation where it takes a locality (lots of localities) to save lots of lives.

In times of national emergency, information and resources are expected to flow from the top levels of government down. But since COVID-19 first entered the national consciousness to the present day, it has been local and state governments leading the way with the federal government lagging. It is not right that this dynamic should be reversed at this time, and thankfully the federal government seems to be slowly but surely coming around to the severity of the situation. We should be proud that Virginia's local and state leaders have made the hard, unpopular but necessary decisions to mitigate the crises based on the best available information. While these efforts have been at times ad hoc and at other times downright improvised, this speaks to the resiliency and dedication of Virginia's local governments.

I am proud to work on your behalf.

And there is much work being done. Through scores of messages, phone calls and meetings, VML and other local representatives are asking the Governor and the Attorney General to consider easing existing barriers to conducting the business of local governments electronically. I know that many of you are concerned that the routine business of local government – council meetings, budget sessions, elections, etc. – cannot be conducted because it's impossible to adhere to both the pre-existing requirements for those activities and the new emergency orders prohibiting gatherings. As these conversations develop, we will post updates to VML's [Coronavirus Resources page](#) and keep you informed via email and social media. We have also been discussing May elections and the flexibility in timelines that localities are required to adhere to – telecommunications towers, land use approvals, etc.

On Wednesday we had calls with the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Restaurant and Travel Association and others to talk about steps that need to be taken to retain businesses and keep them open. They are working on real-time solutions and we will update you as information becomes available.

But while VML works to make it possible for you to do your jobs, you are the ones doing the jobs! Virginia's local leaders are dealing with circumstances they did not create nor have any control over. What is needed are clear and honest (in many cases, painfully honest) instructions and information to your residents. It is tempting for leaders to want to solve all the problems, make reassuring statements and tell people what they want to hear. We find ourselves, however, in a situation where we must recognize the problem cannot be solved without sounding some alarms and telling residents things they don't want to hear.

But above all else, it is a time for compassion. Everyone – residents, government staff, officials – are anxious. Show your residents that you empathize, that we're all in this thing together and together we will get through it. The best thing people can hear from their leaders about the present is the truth about what's known and what's not known, what's being done and what's being considered. And, of course, reassurances that we will resume our normal lives, albeit smarter, better equipped and more cognizant of what binds us together – what makes our localities places of shared dreams, pride and community – than ever before.

Along with everyone else, VML has cancelled any upcoming in person events and will continue to monitor the situation in hopes that sooner rather than later we can all meet again.

Be well, stay strong and Thank You!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "MG" with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.