



Carl Vinson
Institute of Government
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

NAVIGATING FISCAL CRISIS

Communicating the New Normal

10 a.m. | June 23



WEBINAR SERIES

Presenting today....



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Polling Questions



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NAVIGATING FISCAL CRISIS
WEBINAR SERIES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Identify “best practice” messaging techniques for communicating during times of fiscal stress

Examine content and design components for crafting a Budget in Brief

Discuss requirements for and strategies to implement public participation in the budgeting process



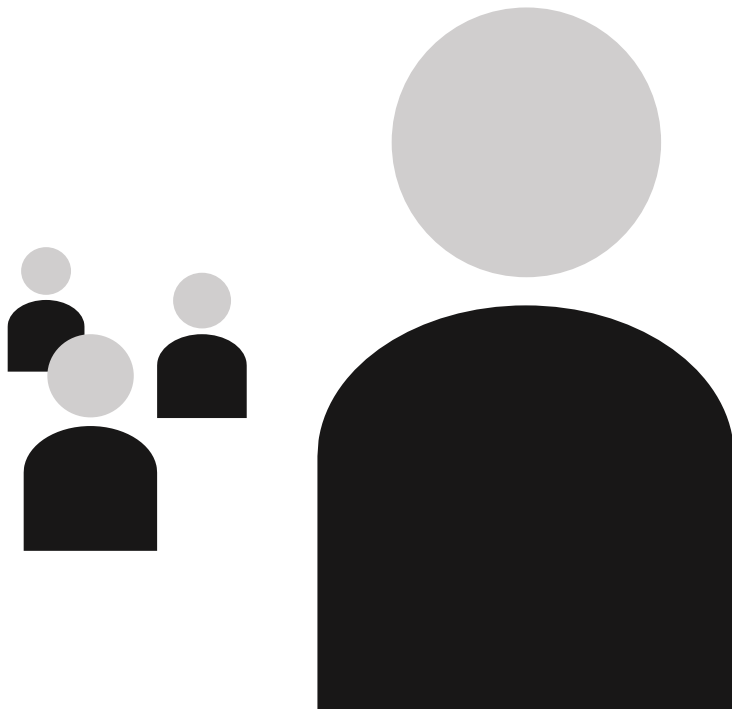
Communicating During Times of Fiscal Stress



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KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Journalists, Employees, and the Public



Your communication techniques . . .

will be similar among target audiences, but with a few key differences

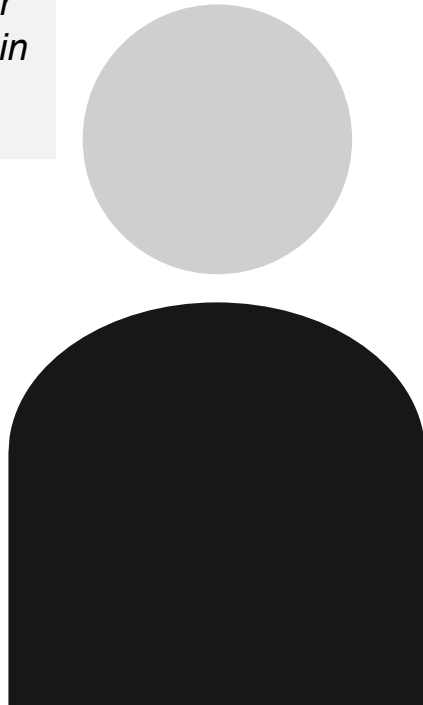
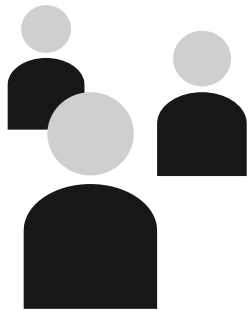
if successful, can lead to employees and the public being your strongest advocates



EXPLAINING THE BUDGET

Budgetary and Service Decisions

Will I continue to receive services or have to pay more in taxes?



Link decisions and values

Confirm continuation of services and tax levels

Clarify spending cuts in terms of service levels

Acknowledge possible changes

Assure timely updates and transparency



GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Match the platform to your targeted audience

Deliver content that is factual, concise, and **empathetic**

Speak in terms of solutions

Invite Q&A

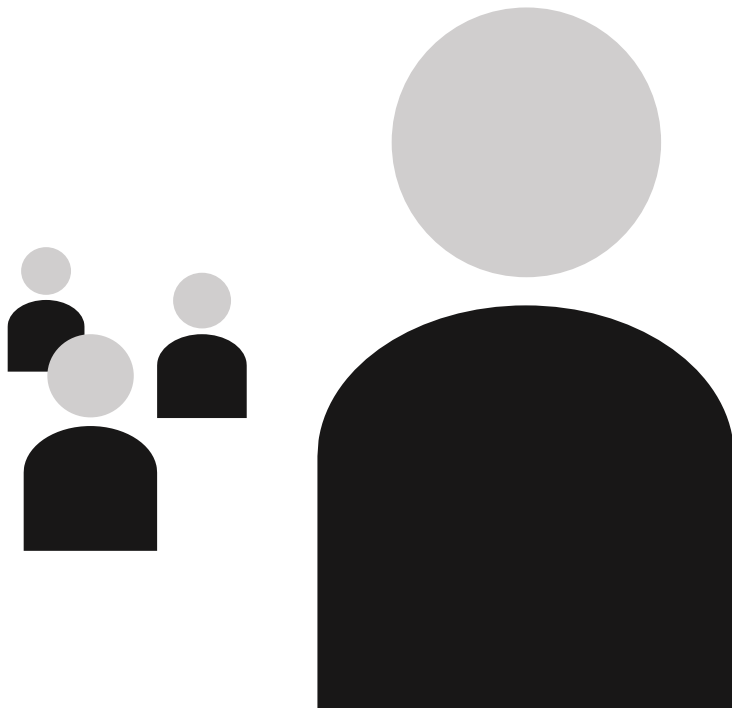
Anticipate and prepare for negative feedback

**STAY
ON
MESSAGE**



COMMUNICATION “DON'TS”

Common Faux Pas



Don't . . .

be evasive or say “no comment”

use jargon or technical terms

speculate on the future

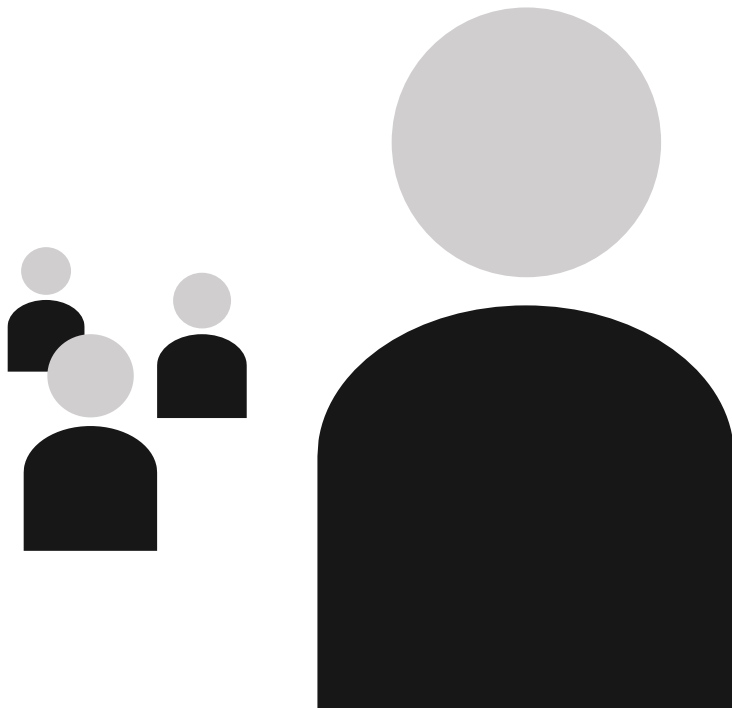
allow a vacuum of information

assume people don't care
because they're silent



TARGETING YOUR MESSAGE

Journalists



Journalists will . . .

want advance notice

report on “pocket book” issues

review budget in full

ask in-depth questions

appreciate graphics



TARGETING YOUR MESSAGE

Employees



Employees need . . .

advanced knowledge of impact

in-depth information

responses to **all** questions

explanations of how leadership is mitigating negative impact(s)



DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE

Select
a **key person**
to be the primary
Communicator

Choose
a Communicator
your target
audience knows

Choose
a Communicator
your target
audience respects

Choose
a Communicator
who speaks
with confidence

Ensure
that **everyone**
is on the
same page

Update
talking points
when necessary



WEBSITE PLATFORM



Dedicate a portion of your website to the budget



Tier information from highlights to details



Provide a brief message from your government representative



Post links to the complete budget and the Budget in Brief



Display key graphics and budget highlights



Include Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



PRINT PLATFORM



Craft your message so that it's easy to read



Ensure your words and images align



Incorporate white space by keeping your words and images to a minimum



Display data using complementary colors



Make content more effective by using more images than words



Utilize online graphic design resources



SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM



Use it to expand your audience



Use it to direct people to your website



Write posts with context in mind



Keep public officials on the same page



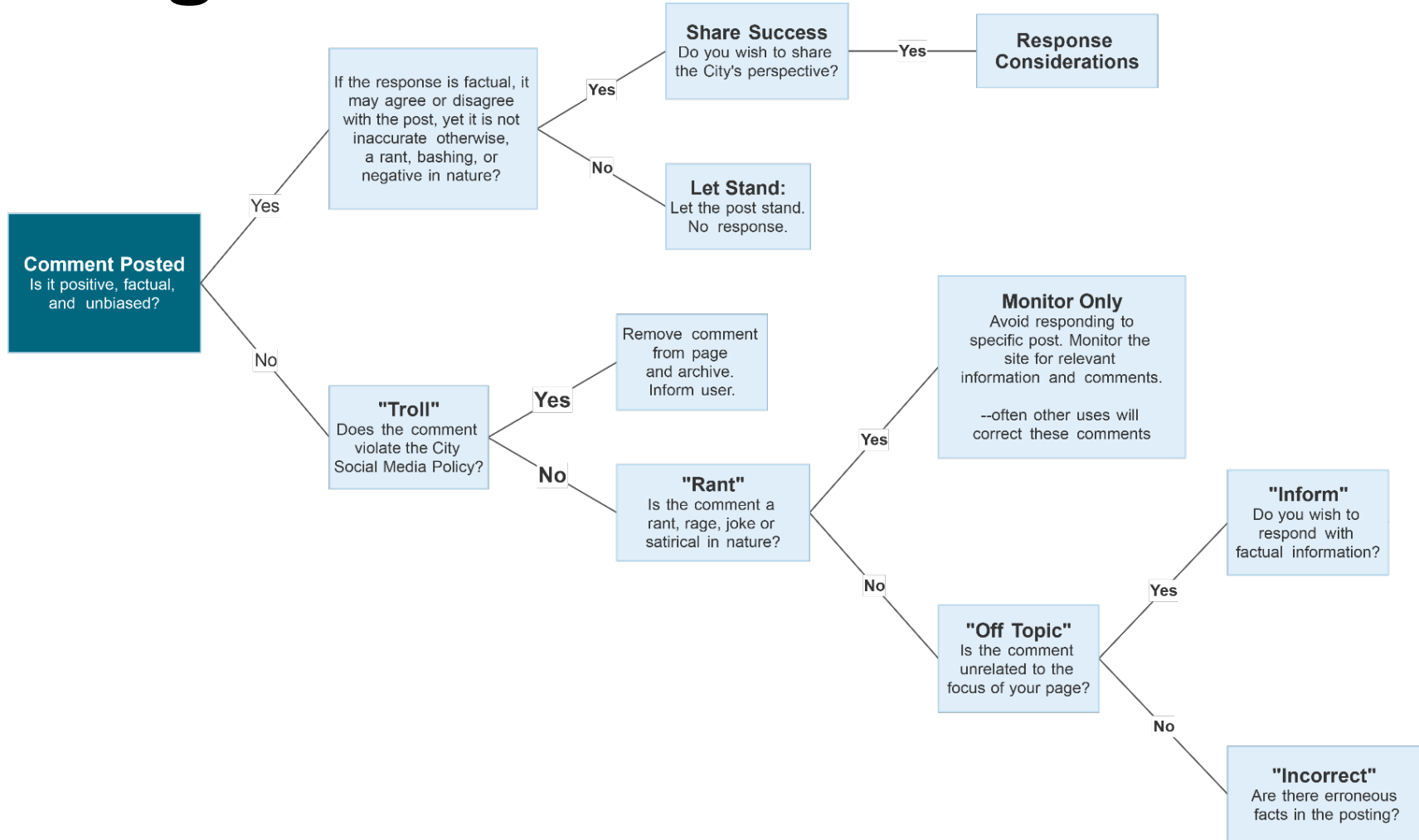
Consider advertising on Facebook and Instagram



Become proficient with its use **before** a fiscal crisis occurs



Using a Decision Tree



Crafting a Budget in Brief



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PROVIDING A BUDGET IN BRIEF

Purpose and Design



Developed for public consumption



Intended as a supplement to the main budget



Designed using highly summarized and condensed content



Recommended by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)



PROVIDING A BUDGET IN BRIEF

Benefits

Easily understood

Relatively little extra work

Increases public knowledge

Improves transparency
and accountability

Limits

Static in nature

Requires some effort

Lacks some context

Can lead to more questions
from the public

Trading off accessibility for detail / context



PROVIDING A BUDGET IN BRIEF

What to Do

Be concise and think “highlights”

Focus on what the public is interested in

Partner with PIO for help in creating and advertising

Create a professional look

Make the information easy to understand

Limit narratives and focus on graphics

Provide access to the complete budget for in-depth information



PROVIDING A BUDGET IN BRIEF

What NOT to Do

Don't attempt to summarize the entire main budget

Don't overload with numbers by adding too many charts, tables, and other forms of data display

Don't use multiple paragraphs to explain data

Don't fill white space by adding too many graphics

Don't try to make the document look "cute." Keep it professional.

Don't use a lot of jargon or technical terminology



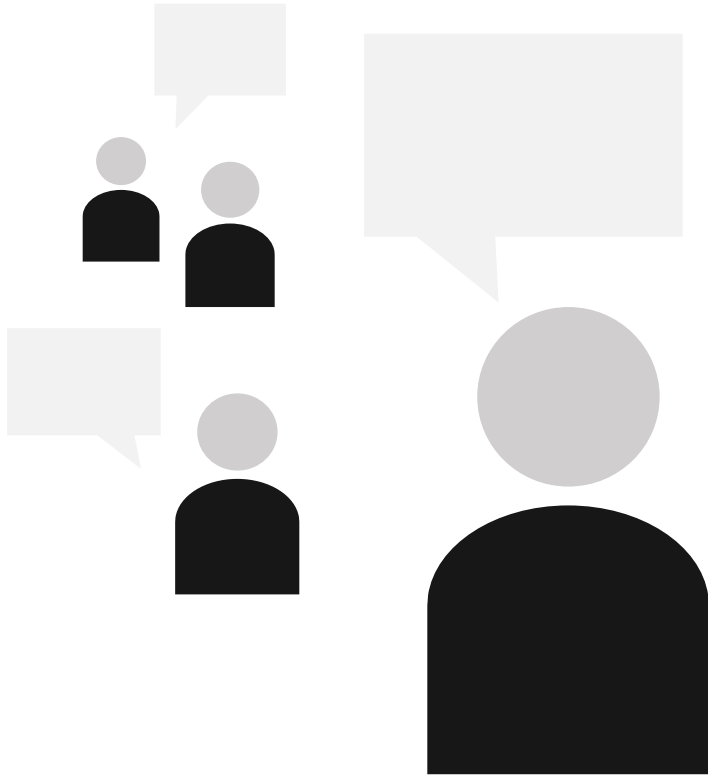
Public Participation in the Budgeting Process



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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

What it IS in the Budget Process



A process that allows stakeholders to provide **meaningful** input into budgetary decisions

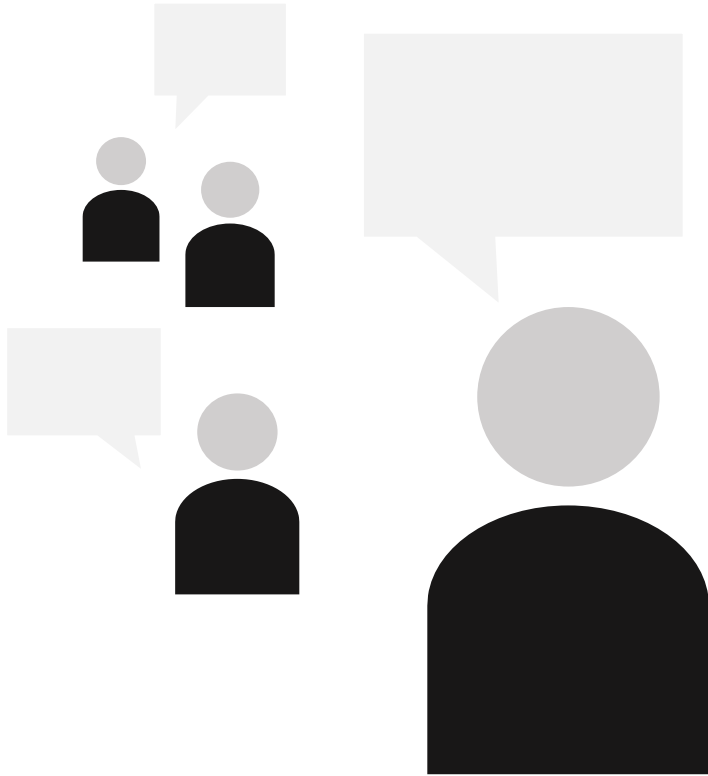
An opportunity for government to ensure that financial decisions reflect public priorities

A recommended practice by the GFOA



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

What it ISN'T in the Budget Process



Government information sharing

A means for the public to make final budgetary decisions

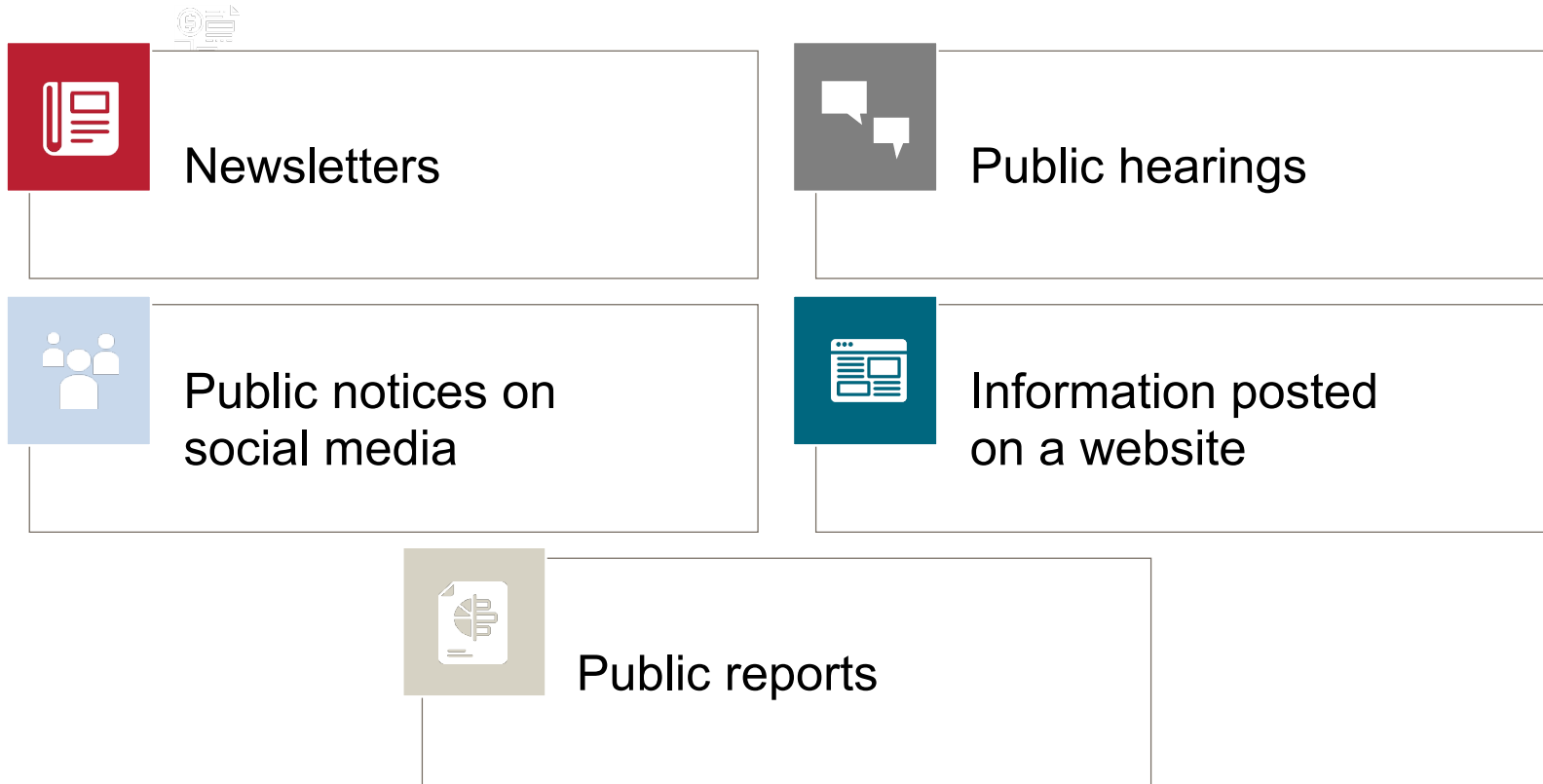
A method for public input to take precedence over policies, ordinances, state and federal laws, and previously contracted obligations

A replacement for expertise and objective data



PUBLIC INFORMATION SHARING

Common Methods



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

One-Way

budget hearing (if public comments are heard)

survey

- phone
- paper
- web
- social media

Interactive

town hall or community meeting

focus groups

neighborhood council

budget advisory board

budget simulations



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

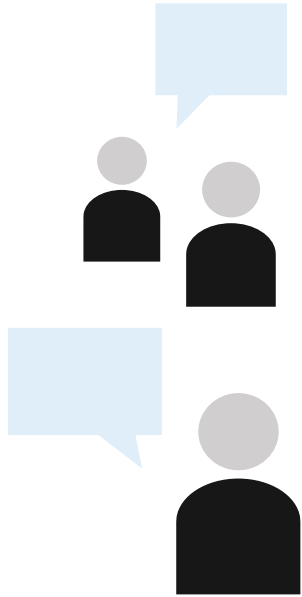
Types of Public Participation Methods Used in GFOA Cities

Method	Number	Percent
Public hearings	180	98.4%
Public comments at regular meetings	154	84.2%
Citizen advisory boards	88	48.1%
Surveys	85	46.4%
Internet feedback	76	41.5%
Visits to neighborhood associations	57	31.1%
Visits to local civic clubs	47	25.7%
Neighborhood focus group	40	21.9%
Mail-in coupons	1	0.5%



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Challenges



Lack of citizen interest

Ensuring participation is reflective of the community

Time for the participation event(s) and education

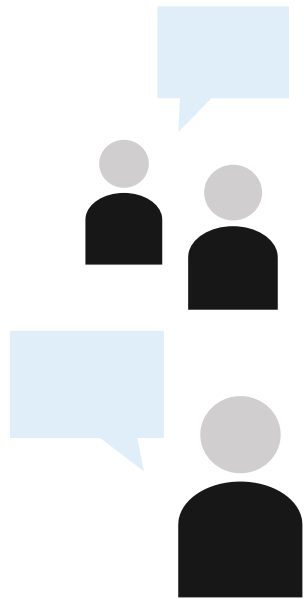
Resources to hold public participation event(s) and to process event information

Being receptive to what you hear at participation events



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Benefits



Improves resource allocation decisions

Increases legitimacy and trust of government decisions

Grows department performance

Enhances fairness and justice

Increases accountability to the public

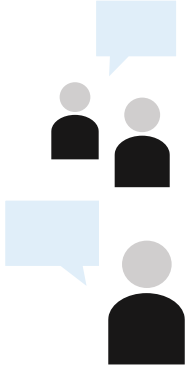
Serves as a budget and financial education forum

Reduces the “free lunch” perception



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Design Considerations



Ensure a diversity of opinion and broad spectrum of participation

Identify what group might be most affected by budget decisions

Solicit public input at the beginning of the budget process or at the evaluation stage

Can be government-wide or focus on one program/department

Incorporate public input into the decision-making process

Communicate how public information will be and was used

Get support from elected body and senior management



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

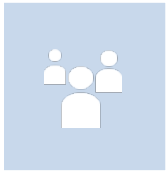
Considerations During Times of Fiscal Stress



Legitimacy of decisions is never more important



Solicit public input for priorities for reducing expenditures or increasing revenues



If the budget is already passed, participation can be used if major budget changes are needed mid-cycle



At a minimum, keep the public informed over the fiscal year



CONCLUSION

Communicating the New Normal

Communicate the budget by linking decisions with your community's values

Deliver content that is factual, concise, and empathetic

Understand the nuances of each communication platform to maximize its potential

A Budget in Brief can be an excellent communication tool during fiscal stress

Public participation can increase legitimacy of the government and budget if done well



Questions?



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REFERENCES and RESOURCES

People and Organizations

People

Courtney Alford-Pomeroy, Carl Vinson Institute of Government:
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Christy Fricks, LickSkillet Public Relations: www.lickskilletpr.com

Jeff Montgomery, Athens-Clarke County: Jeff.Montgomery@accgov.com

Roger Nielsen, Carl Vinson Institute of Government: nielsen@uga.edu

Organizations

Government Finance Officers Association: www.gfoa.org

Institute for Public Relations: <https://instituteforpr.org>



REFERENCES and RESOURCES

Further Reading

Guo, H. and M. Neshkova. 2012. "Citizen Participation in the Budget Process: When Does It Matter Most?" *The American Review of Public Participation*, 43(3) pp. 331-346.

Hatcher, W. 2015. "The Efficacy of Public Participation in Municipal Budgeting: An Exploratory Survey of Officials in Government Finance Officers Association's Award-Winning Cities," *Public Administration Quarterly*, 39(4) pp. 645 – 663.

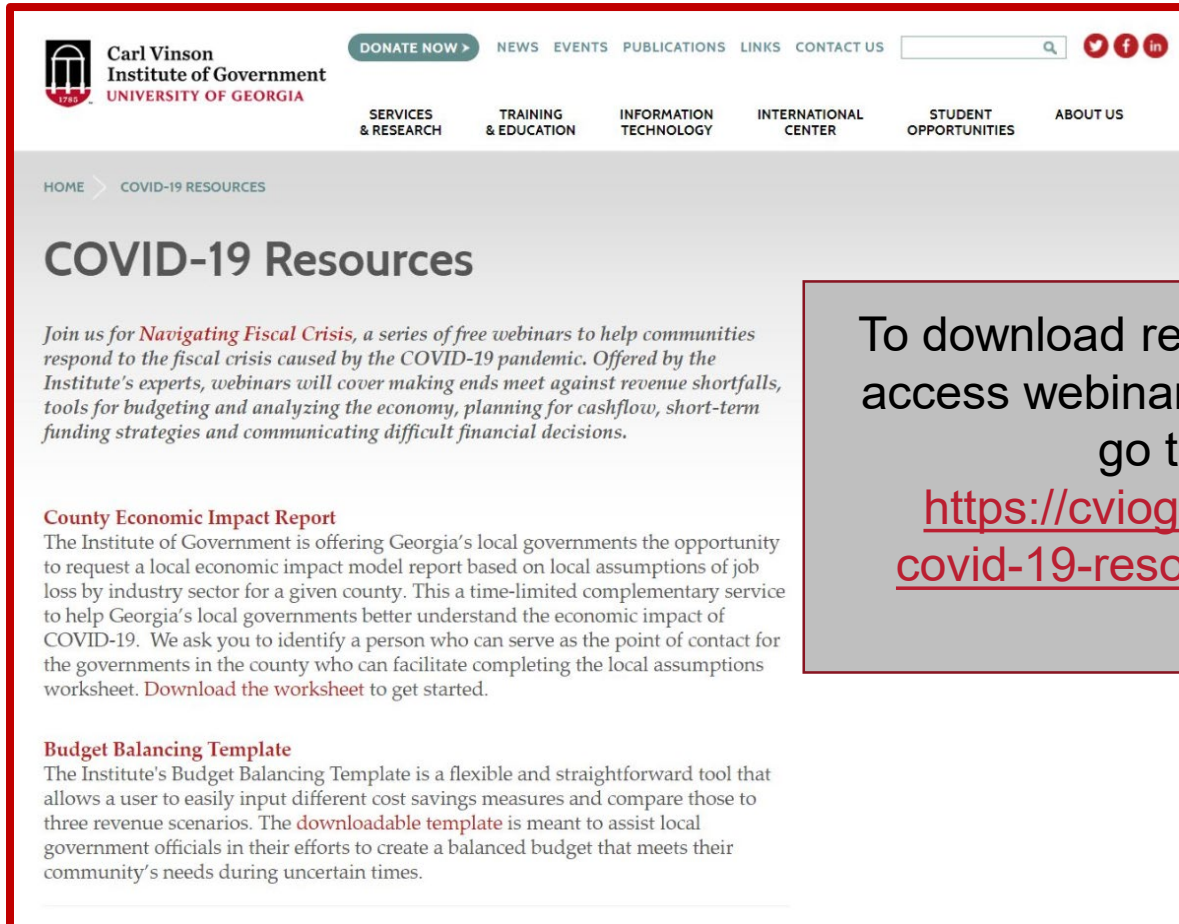
Innes. J. and D. Booher. 2004. "Reframing Public Participation: Strategies for the 21st Century," *Planning Theory and Practice*, 5(4) pp. 419-436.

Mergel, I. 2012. "The Social Media Innovation Challenge in the Public Sector," *Information Policy*, 17 pp. 281-292.

There are extensive literatures on crisis communication and on public participation in government budgeting. What is presented here is just the beginning. Web searchers will also provide a wealth of articles to review.



INSTITUTE of GOVERNMENT RESOURCES



The screenshot shows the website for the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia. The header includes the logo, the name of the institute, and navigation links for 'DONATE NOW', 'NEWS', 'EVENTS', 'PUBLICATIONS', 'LINKS', and 'CONTACT US'. There are also social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Below the header, there are menu items for 'SERVICES & RESEARCH', 'TRAINING & EDUCATION', 'INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY', 'INTERNATIONAL CENTER', 'STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES', and 'ABOUT US'. The main content area is titled 'COVID-19 Resources' and includes a breadcrumb trail 'HOME > COVID-19 RESOURCES'. The text describes a series of free webinars titled 'Navigating Fiscal Crisis' and lists three resources: 'County Economic Impact Report', 'Budget Balancing Template', and a link to download resources and access webinar recordings.

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HOME > COVID-19 RESOURCES

COVID-19 Resources

Join us for *Navigating Fiscal Crisis*, a series of free webinars to help communities respond to the fiscal crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Offered by the Institute's experts, webinars will cover making ends meet against revenue shortfalls, tools for budgeting and analyzing the economy, planning for cashflow, short-term funding strategies and communicating difficult financial decisions.

County Economic Impact Report
The Institute of Government is offering Georgia's local governments the opportunity to request a local economic impact model report based on local assumptions of job loss by industry sector for a given county. This a time-limited complementary service to help Georgia's local governments better understand the economic impact of COVID-19. We ask you to identify a person who can serve as the point of contact for the governments in the county who can facilitate completing the local assumptions worksheet. [Download the worksheet](#) to get started.

Budget Balancing Template
The Institute's Budget Balancing Template is a flexible and straightforward tool that allows a user to easily input different cost savings measures and compare those to three revenue scenarios. The [downloadable template](#) is meant to assist local government officials in their efforts to create a balanced budget that meets their community's needs during uncertain times.

To download resources and access webinar recordings, go to <https://cviog.uga.edu/covid-19-resources.html>



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