

## FROM THE DIRECTOR



When the Division of Local Government Services (DLGS) first contemplated issuing a regular newsletter this winter, we never imagined we would begin doing so in such a different environment from the one in which we began to write.

Over the intervening months, our state and local governments have faced a combination of health, operational and fiscal challenges of a magnitude beyond our previous collective experience. Even the simplest of ordinary operational processes has been complicated by the pandemic and the strictures necessary to effectively curtail its spread. Yet the business of local government has continued – services continue being provided and local quality of life is maintained. Each day, officials and front-line workers have responded with an unfaltering dedication to the communities they serve. As local units navigate this period of uncertainty, the Division remains committed to providing support, information and guidance. We aim to facilitate implementation of solutions that work for you today and ensure your local unit's long-term fiscal and operational health for the future.

In this climate of uncertainty, one way the Division can best aid local units is to improve information sharing and transparency. We issue this first edition of the DLGS Newsletter with that in mind. We hope that the resources, updates, staff profiles and articles provided are of interest and value to you in this first and future editions.

*Melanie R. Walter*

## LOCAL ASSISTANCE BUREAU

As we mobilize in response to COVID-19, it is increasingly clear that our economy and budgets have been affected in unprecedented ways. Once we emerge from the immediate crisis, as you weigh your recovery options, we strongly encourage you to incorporate shared services and regionalization into your thoughts about how to continue to provide integrated, efficient, and high-quality local services.

DLGS Local Assistance Bureau (LAB), in collaboration with the State's Shared Services Czars, stand ready to provide shared services and consolidation assistance to towns considering shared service and regionalization opportunities.

To setup a LAB consultation, contact: [localassistance@dca.nj.gov](mailto:localassistance@dca.nj.gov) or call (609) 292-6858.

For Shared Services inquiries, contact: [sharedservices@nj.gov](mailto:sharedservices@nj.gov).

## LOCAL FINANCE AND EGG NOTICES

Municipal officials are reminded that the Division continues to issue Local Finance Notices, EGG Notices, and Operational Guidance addressing the ongoing public health and recovery issues, as well as more conventional budgetary and operational matters. Recent publications provide financial and budget strategies to inform fiscal recovery planning (LFN 2020-11) and operational strategies to assist in general recovery efforts (LFN 2020-12). These Notices and guidance documents are available on the Division's website at:

[https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/dlgs/resources/local\\_fin\\_notices.html](https://www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/dlgs/resources/local_fin_notices.html)

<https://www.nj.gov/govconnect/news/general/>

## MEET THE DIVISION

Many of you know **Melissa Ford** as the Budget Examiner for all of New Jersey's Fire Districts.

Melissa is always willing to help when Fire Districts need advice. She often provides guidance regarding capital appropriations, special meetings, and special elections. Melissa enjoys helping fire districts navigate the budget and financing processes and has been glad to present on these topics at the annual fire conference in Wildwood over the past few years. Melissa also lends a helping hand in the municipal budget preliminary and self-exam process.

Melissa, who has been with the Division for 13 years, earned her Bachelor's Degree in Accounting from Drexel University and is a Certified Tax Collector. Prior to joining the Division, she was the Borough of Rumson's Tax Collector, Assistant to the CFO, and Payroll Clerk.

Something you might not know about Melissa is that she is an accomplished equestrian!

She is a true team-player, dedicated to both the Financial Regulations team internally and the Fire Districts she supports.

## CERTIFICATION UNIT

### Webinars for Continuing Education

Licensed municipal officials are rising to the challenge of providing socially-distanced continuing education head-on by transitioning to the use of live webinar sessions. Although this is a relatively new educational tool, it has provided a vital means of reviewing the latest trends and providing important updates to licensed officials.

Advanced meeting technology enables webinars to be engaging, allowing for polls, quizzes, and other interactions that enhance audience participation. Much of this technology allows for participant access without having to download special software or applications. Many platforms have high participant limits, allowing greater access to continuing education opportunities. These benefits allow for greater accessibility regardless of geographic location or travel capabilities.

The Division has been working closely with licensed officials and providers to authorize conversion of previously approved courses to webinar formats, to approve new remote learning opportunities, and to ensure webinars are leveraged to provide the greatest benefit for participants in these sessions.

Applications to provide webinars are reviewed individually. Any sponsors interested in hosting a webinar session should consider the following:

- 1) Webinars should be live sessions, as opposed to previously recorded.
- 2) Attendance must be tracked.
- 3) Course completion certificates shall be provided to participants.
- 4) Course evaluations should be made available.
- 5) The amount of instructional time should align with the number of hours of continuing education for which the session was approved.
- 6) Consideration should be given to the various tools that can be utilized to ensure and verify audience participation, as discussed above.

Applications to the Division for webinars may be submitted in the same manner as in-person sessions, but should provide additional detail regarding the matters addressed in these guidelines. Existing forms for individual and sponsor agreements should be utilized:

[Continuing Education Sponsor Agreement](#)  
[Continuing Education Individual Agreement](#)

There are various free platforms available for hosting webinars, such as Google Classroom. Zoom, a popular meeting application, is available for free, but users should be mindful that this version only allows for 40-minute sessions, while longer sessions require the purchase of a subscription. Paid applications include Livestorm, which allows for enhanced interactions, recording, data tracking and analysis, and relative ease-of-use, Zoho Meeting, which is cited for its registration, pre-session notifications, polling, and dial-in features, and GoToWebinar, which permits phone access, easy registration, and a high limit on the number of attendees.

## GOV-CONNECT NEWS

### E-Government for Government (EGG) Expansion

The business of technology is ever-evolving. To improve our technological outreach, and in response to popular demand, the Division has expanded its GovConnect News system to include new recipient categories.

GovConnect News provides up-to-date, priority information to local officials, including advising them when new guidance is posted, summarizing important notices, and advising about newly enacted legislation, DLGS news, and changes to or upcoming important deadlines.

Now, Municipal Clerks, Tax Collectors, Chief Financial Officers, County Chief Financial Officers, County Clerks to the Boards of Chosen Freeholders, Mayors, Business Administrators, Public Works Managers, Qualified Purchasing Agents, and Municipal Auditors will all be able to access this important system.

Officials who hold one of these roles and who are not yet registered may contact [EGG@dca.nj.gov](mailto:EGG@dca.nj.gov) to initiate the signup process. The clerk or administrator of the local unit will be required to authorize access in the form of a resolution of appointment or similar documentation upon your registration.

## UTILIZING DATA IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Data collection and analytics are important tools municipal officials can use to assess management and resident-services activity. Effective utilization of data leads to sound business decisions. This article provides examples related to Finance, Public Works, Utilities and Public Safety. Tracking multi-year revenue and appropriation metrics allows finance departments to measure fiscal trends over time under different economic conditions. This data is critical to accurate budgeting, particularly in times of fiscal stress. Local units should review historical data, evaluate present conditions, and adjust to ensure realistic revenue and appropriation projections. For example, in our current climate, revenue from interest on investments may decline and uniform construction code fees are down. Parking and hotel taxes are also lower than in prior years. Appropriation deferrals or the issuance of debt may provide short-term relief during a crisis, but their future impacts should always be considered.

Public works departments can use analytics to track road paving, repairs, snow plowing and trash collections. Data can be used to design procedures and optimize processes. It can also be a valuable communication tool if used to provide the public with important information about disruptions including road closures, or publicizing statistics that reflect continued infrastructure investment. Utilities can also benefit from increased data gathering. Updating meters facilitates fairer and more accurate billing. Meter analytics can also inform preventative maintenance and rate policy, and provide vital information about water usage, leak detection, and water use trends that may ultimately lead to greater water conservation.

Many local units have already hit upon one highly-effective use of data – public safety. Broader data-sharing across local unit departments can enhance existing efforts in this regard. Information such as structure type, age, and location can assist in preventing fire or hazmat situations. The Tax Assessor will likely be able to provide this information to fire and code officials. Ensuring public safety personnel are informed in advance about the environment they will enter in, can improve overall safety.

Municipalities should consider the following before taking the leap into data and analytics:

- 1) Which services or functions could be improved by using analytics?
- 2) What data will best inform the status of current operations?
- 3) What methods are available for collecting data?
- 4) How does a local unit create enthusiasm for analytics?
- 5) What policies, procedures, and systems need to be developed for tracking and storing data?