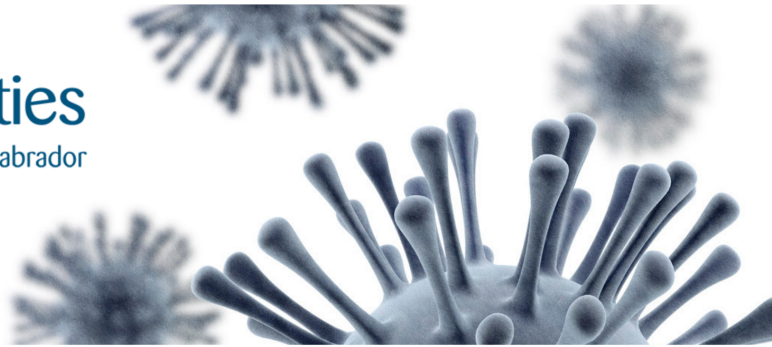




COVID-19



REGIONAL CONFERENCE CALL SUMMARY – ROUND TWO

MNL coordinated a second series of regional conference calls from April 1st to 3rd for members to share information, ask questions and comment on best practices as we move through this difficult time.

The calls were chaired by MNL CEO, Craig Pollett. In total, 217 people participated in the six calls; 123 municipalities were represented.

Craig Pollett opened the calls by providing an update on MNL activities since the last round of calls and key outcomes. MNL is hosting a COVID 19 web page [here](#). It includes a section for [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#), generated from our calls and the MNL COVID19 [email](#). These FAQs are kept up to date as new information arrives. MNL prepared a [report](#) from our last round of calls. MNL is working with its partners to get answers to your questions.

Based upon MNL's requests, the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment (MA&E) provided guidance on:

- Municipal offices;
- Council meetings;
- MOGs and the provincial gas tax;
- Audit deadlines;
- States of Emergency;
- Emergency responder infectious control; and
- Working from home (ATIPPA).

MNL is still working on answering questions associated with:

- Managing essential workers;
 - Managing potable water supplies; and
 - Extra funding for municipalities.
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Next steps for MNL include:

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- Continuing advocacy and communications efforts;
- Working on service agreements and supports through the MNL Advantage program;
- Holding webinars on specific topics like business continuity plans and emergency plans;
- Holding webinars with key MNL partners and membership service providers;
- Continuing to participate in PEOC daily briefings to share important info with MNL members;
- Exploring ways for MNL to assist municipalities within each region to collaborate or share services;
- Following up on other questions raised during the round two calls.

COMMON THEMES



Financial Sustainability and Taxation

- Municipalities are concerned about their financial sustainability moving forward. At the time of the calls, municipalities became aware that they were not eligible for business supports under Federal aid packages. Other sources of revenue are necessary, as municipalities cannot rely upon residential and commercial taxation. Already, tax deferrals, discounts and interest-free options are underway.
- There are ongoing calls for sharing and researching taxation approaches beyond initial short-term, interest-free deferrals (e.g. tax forgiveness).
- Given that resident employment income and local business health directly affect municipal revenues, towns are anxious to remain up to date on emergency income replacement and recovery-period plans (e.g. status of employment insurance “top-up” employment programs typically offered each fall; tourism and other sector-specific response updates).



Municipal Operations

- The Remaining concerns of many towns (i.e. public works staff and close-quarters essential work) are expected to be addressed in forthcoming MA&E guidance.
- Some troubleshooting is still required to secure communications and to remain compliant with ATIPPA under working from home set ups.
- Many immediate PPE issues are now addressed, but procurement troubleshooting continues. Most communities are now aware of and have registered their interest in designated essential supply channels (for immediate supplies, via FES - (709) 729-1608, and longer-term via MNL Advantage procurement).
- There is ongoing interest in sharing staffing procedures/approaches, especially as difficult decisions regarding lay-offs, reduced hours and other cost-cutting are made in weeks to come.



Waste Management

- Garbage collection practices must be revisited as towns grapple locally with what have to be considered COVID-19 contaminated waste streams. Clear guidance is urgently needed (e.g. Is waste collection included as an “essential service” for purposes of PPE access? How to handle breaking garbage bags? Waste site maintenance? Recyclables backlogs?).
- Accounts continue of improper waste disposal and consequent sewer system issues.



Drinking Water

- Additional PWDU guidance is to be sought from MA&E to address dispensing stations both as public facilities needing enhanced sanitation, and as gathering places where distancing and other user direction and reminders must be provided.
- Questions about chlorine supplies procurement and provincial water testing were raised.



Employee Safety and Labour Responsibilities

- **Municipalities implemented recommended strategies to ensure staff safety (i.e. work-from-home arrangements, distancing and enhanced sanitation/disinfection in remaining on-site activities) and, in many cases, availed of new e-means of operation (e.g. implementing electronic payments; engaging remote system support service providers like Telus or Telelink; exploring Facebook Messenger as a free platform to handle Council's public meetings and private Facebook groups to facilitate networking and support community organizing).**
- **Attention is turning to regional response coordination. In some cases, municipalities are revisiting regional emergency plans. In others, they are working from joint council networks or direct outreach to neighbouring towns and LSDs. Arrangements to share essential staff in the event of illness/isolation are being pursued.**
- **Councils are facing payroll-related questions (e.g. how to handle a worker on self-isolation?) and essential staffing decision-making. Additional guidance is needed.**



Community Initiatives

- **Municipalities continue to monitor and distribute the best-available COVID-19 information to residents by all available means, including clarifications respecting physical distancing (e.g. discouraging vehicle-based meetups) and special local service provisions (e.g. stores with new order and pick-up services, senior/vulnerable resident arrangements). Local initiatives are focusing on support to families, including games and contests to build community spirit.**
- **Some ongoing challenges still exist in the interpretation and reinforcement of COVID-19 information. While towns continue to focus on validated sources, additional questions are being asked now (e.g. Can the virus be caught a second time?)**
- **There are fewer accounts of residents not respecting self-isolation requirements. However, remaining episodes include fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) employees claiming "essential worker" status (e.g. industrial staff in the O&G and mining sectors). While the intent of current public health directives is clear and**

does not exclude these workers from self-isolation requirements during their times at home, targeted communications addressed to this loophole-seeking behaviour are needed.

- Numerous towns have experienced ongoing calls from local residents asking that council members or staff undertake the reporting of individuals not complying with quarantine or self-isolation. The towns are refusing to do so but suggest additional communications on the topic would be appreciated.



Positive Response to MNL Member Communications

- Municipal leaders in all regional calls expressed their support for MNL's initiatives, including the regional calls and other communications.

Labrador (24 participants; 11 municipalities/Inuit Community Governments)

- Cartwright remains in the locally declared SOE as provided for by their approved Emergency Plan. Their declaration was submitted to FES but had not received a response as of call time.
- Accepting the MA&E position that pandemics fall outside the local emergency response authorities provided for by current legislation, Labrador community leaders stressed the need for measures in lieu in order to control travel and transmission in Labrador given the existing, low levels of enforcement capacity there and the need for solutions suited to varied local circumstances.
- The special considerations of Labrador municipalities and their unique dealings with cross-border traffic with Quebec (Western Labrador and the Straits), mineral sector workers (especially in Western Labrador) and airport-related challenges throughout the region (especially respecting small aircraft traffic) were highlighted.
- Essential travel between communities occurs regularly in some areas to access limited services and retail facilities (e.g. Labrador Straits, including across Quebec border checkpoint there).
- The Combined Councils of Labrador convened a recent call with Labrador MP Yvonne Jones, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, to answer federal program questions and bring outstanding community concerns to her attention.

Northern (14 participants; 9 municipalities)

- Information-sharing regarding the Red Cross role in aid of area emergency response, planning and humanitarian supports is of interest.
- First responders are being sub-divided into teams, in some cases providing for a special response group of younger, single firefighters as a risk-limiting measure.
- A growing need to publicize mental health resources and supports was noted.
- Some remaining concerns were expressed about upcoming Come Home Year celebrations and similar local events not yet cancelled.

Central (55 participants; 32 municipalities)

- More guidance for holding public council meetings was requested.
- Many municipalities have moved to online banking. However, problems were identified with some banking institutions.
- Several municipalities are calling for Federal Gas Tax funding to be used for municipal operations rather than just capital
- Municipal leaders are wondering about whether to call and hold parades to acknowledge essential workers
- Municipalities continue to communicate with residents through social media, and through video messaging
- Requests came forward for information regarding whether provincial government programs and summer employment programs will be going ahead.
- Mention of innovative approaches to engaging communities and promoting community spirit (I.e. Front-yard ice sculpture contest; Botwood Boys and Girls Club Boredom Blasters)

Avalon (51 participants; 30 municipalities)

- Ongoing PPE supply issues are a concern for municipalities.
- Municipalities discussed the cost of purchasing money orders through the post
- Municipalities are offering tax relief to businesses
- Some municipalities are noting that shed parties continue. They want guidance on how to address these gatherings.
- Other municipalities noted concerns over drinking water, particularly chlorine stores and storage.
- A call for clarity on the use of the Federal Gas Tax for municipal operations was requested.

Eastern (36 participants; 18 municipalities)

- The topic of regional response committees emerged.
- Queries from several municipalities regarding the potential use of the Federal Gas Tax Fund and the importance to lobby for wider operational scope for its use
- Concerns were expressed about holding community parades
- Several municipalities are using Facebook Messenger to hold public forum meeting space.
- Outside workers are not often able to practice social distancing. More guidance is required for this group of essential employees
- Municipalities report collaborating with their regional health authorities and local health care teams.
- Leaders are worried about the tourism sector in their communities and how best to support businesses that are struggling or are not open.

Western (37 participants; 23 municipalities)

- Although layoffs among recreation staff have already occurred in several towns, larger municipalities are considering additional layoffs among their remaining staff complements now that it has been confirmed that they are ineligible for the current federal wage subsidy program.
- Concerns were raised about critical comments made by government staff regarding best efforts of local fire departments
- Questions were raised about the status of capital works funding applications and tenders already in the system.
- One municipality noted a new operational practice for the COVID period: the implementation of a local actions timeline logging everything the Council and staff are doing day-by-day – useful for later review/planning and even public health contact tracing purposes.
- Ramea, Burgeo and two area LSDs have implemented a regional response committee in part to address common challenges with the ferry service restrictions affecting their communities.
- The Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) was highlighted as another organization already lobbying on behalf of Indigenous operators in the region.

In closing MNL urges you to be vigilant, keep the lines of communication open with your residents, council and neighbouring communities, listen to the public health authorities and take care of yourselves. Remember we are all in this together and MNL is here to support you.