

COVID-19 Changed Everything: How did Scottsdale Respond?

Scottsdale city staff have remained on the frontlines throughout this ongoing public health emergency. With a thoughtful and coordinated response, Scottsdale has confronted this crisis and continues to work through constantly changing circumstances and challenges. The city is fortunate to have received one-time federal resources through the CARES Act, meaning many of the highlighted pandemic services did not come from the general fund.

This report is a short summary of the way the City of Scottsdale reacted, responded and is rebuilding as we remain in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of how it evolves in the months ahead, the city is ready to handle it with the flexibility and strength we have developed since March 2020.

Caring for Vulnerable Citizens

The pandemic affected everyone – but the public health crisis rapidly created severe personal and family impacts in the form of job loss and housing uncertainty for many in the community. Scottsdale’s Human Services team, assisted by other city departments and partner organizations, stepped in to care for people in our community.

Here are just a few of their efforts:

- In Fiscal Year 2020/21, the team at Scottsdale’s Vista del Camino Community Center managed six COVID-19 rent and mortgage programs, qualifying more than 500 households for over \$3.8 million in emergency assistance.
- The team also managed six utility assistance programs, through which residents who fell behind on utility payments received nearly \$790,000 throughout the fiscal year
- In addition, they provided a full array of assistance programs, including help finding jobs for those who lost work as businesses closed. After coming to the center feeling stressed and frustrated, this resident got the help he needed through the Vista Career Center – afterward, he left this voicemail:



“Just got hired for a really good job. I wanted to call and say thank you for all your help and support and everyone that works in that building has been great. I cannot thank you enough.”

- Senior citizens in Scottsdale were among those most affected – with higher levels of vulnerability to COVID-19, many rapidly became isolated and lost access to vital services. Senior Center staff quickly worked to provide meals and home wellness visits and went even further, creating ways for seniors to connect with others through group phone calls, virtual programs and daily exercise videos to keep seniors active.



Supporting the Business and Social Infrastructure of the Community

Lockdowns and restrictions, while necessary to control the pandemic, were immediately and especially impactful on small restaurants and shops which comprise most of the 16,000 businesses registered in Scottsdale. The city created a handful of different programs in partnership with other organizations to promote and assist small businesses and arts organizations so they could weather the storm and continue to serve their vital roles in the community. Here are some highlights:

over
1,000
hours



over
400
businesses

Scottsdale launched the Small Business Assistance Center on April 7, 2020. This virtual “one stop shop” for businesses seeking support programs and resources was created and administered by Economic Development and additionally staffed by five employees redeployed from other departments. The center is still operating and has provided more than 1,000 hours of assistance to more than 400 businesses.

200
businesses &
organizations



over
625K
dollars

Scottsdale also created a Small Business Reimbursement Program through which businesses can be reimbursed for supplies and equipment required to safely operate – nearly 200 businesses and organizations received more than \$625,000 in reimbursements and assistance.



150
free banners
to businesses

Scottsdale Good to Go! During the initial stages of the pandemic, **the Economic Development department partnered with the Scottsdale Area Chamber of Commerce to provide free banners to 150 businesses**, providing immediate high visibility for those able to remain open to serve the community.

over
\$1.1
million



A variety of different **arts and culture non-profit organizations serving Scottsdale were awarded grants totaling more than \$1.1 million** to support safely reopening to provide programs and services for the community.



Serving on the Frontlines Throughout the Pandemic

This report proudly highlights many ways the City of Scottsdale served the community during the pandemic. In dozens of areas city staff pivoted to serve in new ways – the situation demanded creativity and flexibility.

As important as it is to recognize these accomplishments, the bulk of the city organization simply continued to serve 24/7 on the frontlines without much fanfare. Scottsdale Fire and Police, Water, Solid Waste, Parks, Building Safety and many other city operations did not change what they did – they simply continued to do it, day after day, despite the danger and fear that COVID-19 brought.

There are few specific statistics or accomplishments that illustrate this work, but these city leaders offered these thoughts about the unwavering commitment of city employees:



“Throughout the pandemic, the Scottsdale Police Department continued to serve the community with excellence and compassion. I am profoundly grateful to our tireless and committed sworn and professional staff for their efforts during this unprecedented time in our history. We were creative and innovative in providing personnel safety through technology where possible, and by making sure protective equipment was there for those working face-to-face with the public. It was far from easy - the pandemic brought increased stress on the community and our staff - but we persevered through the professionalism and commitment of our team.”

Jeff Walther, Police Chief

“While many city operations were able to shift to telework, Scottsdale Water continued to serve the community with more than 200 frontline workers, treatment operators, lab technicians and support staff. These professionals treated, tested and delivered an average of over 71 million gallons a day of clean, safe drinking water and collected, treated, and recycled over 23 million gallons a day of sewage. This frontline service allowed residents and customers to shelter and work from home without a worry about their water and wastewater systems.”

Brian Biesemeyer, Scottsdale Water Executive Director



“The reality is you can’t perform maintenance on a fire truck, pick up the garbage, fix potholes or repair traffic signals by telecommuting – we’ve got well over 200 field employees in Public Works, including Solid Waste, Fleet, Facilities, and the field crews in Transportation and Streets, who came into work every day from day one of the pandemic. Despite all the challenges - the team never missed a beat. Demand for many of our services increased but we continued to provide the great service our customers have come to expect.”

Dan Worth, Public Works Executive Director

“I am immensely proud of the men and women of the Scottsdale Fire Department for continuing to care for our citizens and visitors with the highest degree of professionalism despite the threat of exposure and illness to themselves by this dreaded disease. Scores of our staff have contracted the virus in the course of their duties – and we all remain vigilant to maintain our capabilities in serving the community.”

Tom Shannon, Fire Chief



Supporting a Healthy Scottsdale as We Build a More Resilient Community

Even as we remain fully committed to confronting the ever-changing threats and challenges brought by COVID-19, we are equally committed to taking immediate lessons learned to building a stronger and more resilient city organization so that we can continue to provide Simply Better Service for a World-Class Community. Here are some of the ways we are doing it.

- **Scottsdale’s Emergency Management team has coordinated the city’s comprehensive COVID-19 response since March 2020.** Managing resources and people from across the city, Scottsdale’s Emergency Manager and his cross-departmental team tackled early supply chain challenges, ensured efficient access to vaccines for essential employees and continues to manage logistics, operations and planning to mitigate the consequences of the virus within the community and on city operations. This comprehensive “all-hazards” emergency management strategy ensures the community remains safe and resilient as we continue managing through the pandemic.
- **A healthy Scottsdale starts with you.** From the earliest days of the pandemic, the city’s flagship communication campaign encouraged safe practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Among the most visible efforts were hand sanitizer kiosks that were placed throughout Scottsdale Fashion Square during the 2020 holiday shopping season.
- **Information Technology was a crucial city operation as hundreds of employees and business processes had to be reimaged and redeployed – quickly.** Working remotely was required of many staff and made possible through rapid redeployment of resources and technology. Within a week’s time, IT expanded the backend solutions needed to support 1,000 additional remote workers, including the city’s call center and 911 services. IT also launched widespread adoption of remote work and collaboration software to enable teams to stay connected and move the city forward as a substantial amount of work transitioned from onsite to remote.
- **The city is investing to make its public buildings safer.** Many city facilities are being equipped with a combination of ultraviolet and ionization technology systems that can kill airborne viruses and improve indoor air quality. This advanced technology is already at work in major public venues like WestWorld’s Tony Nelssen Equestrian Center and the Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts, and systems are planned for many other public facilities.
- **The City Clerk’s Office developed innovative ways to ensure civic engagement continued, safely.** By quickly shifting to a virtual environment with electronic and telephonic public participation, the required City Council meetings were able to continue in a pandemic safe environment. New processes were also developed, tested, and implemented to create a hands-free depositing of legal documents and candidate nomination petitions with the City Clerk’s Office.



An Ongoing Battle

City emergency plans had always included contingencies for a global pandemic, but with no recent experience to tap, nothing anticipated the true magnitude of the situation. COVID-19 is first and foremost a public health emergency, but it quickly also became a logistical emergency, and a deeply impactful socioeconomic and political crisis. It touched every part of the community and changed every facet of city operations.