

# Ready, Set, Vaccinate!

## **A Guide for Local Governments on How to Take Control of the Covid-19 Vaccine Narrative in Your Community**

[Support your vaccine operations and communications with Zencity's dedicated bundle of Covid-19 vaccine products and services](#)

# TL;DR

- ➔ **Discourse about Covid-19 vaccines is on the rise:** in November, discourse about Covid-19 vaccines increased by 82% compared to October
- ➔ **Media has the loudest voice and local governments are failing to define the narrative:** City and county platforms are lagging behind media coverage, which drives – and consequently shapes – most of the discourse around Covid-19 vaccines
- ➔ **Vaccine-skepticism is high and puts vaccine operations at risk:** Skepticism, misinformation, speculation, and out-right vaccine rejection is a prevalent part of vaccine discourse. If local governments don't take control of the narrative, vaccine operations are at risk
- ➔ **Local government messaging is a key part of overcoming skepticism; now is the time to take control of the conversation:** With strategic messaging, by understanding resident concerns, and by leveraging the right voices, local governments can succeed in getting their residents fully on board with Covid-19 vaccinations
- ➔ **Read on for Zencity's data-based, actionable tips for leading the Covid-19 narrative in your community**

[Learn more about how Zencity can help you take charge of the narrative here and now!](#)

# Introduction

The Covid-19 vaccine is finally here and local governments have been tasked with a logistical operation of unprecedented scale. As they take on the challenge of vaccinating their communities, many have left an essential piece of the puzzle out of place - communication with residents. Without effective communication, vaccine operations can not succeed.

Conversation around the vaccine and skepticism towards it have both been on the rise now that a vaccine is finally on the table. But for the vaccine to work, it's imperative that a critical mass receive it.<sup>1</sup> If local governments can't overcome their vaccine-related residents' fears and concerns - which are often based on speculation and misinformation - it will be very difficult to get communities vaccinated no matter how smoothly all other facets of vaccine operations are running. The good news is local governments can help reassure their residents and bring them (literally) to the vaccine table with strategic messaging.

At Zencity, we put our technology to the test and analyzed the discourse around Covid-19 vaccines in order to identify what Americans are saying. Part I of this guide explores who's driving the conversation, concerns, and where there's potential for misinformation, as seen in the data.<sup>2</sup> Based on this data and input from public health experts Blaire Bryant, Legislative Director of Health, NACo, and Madeline Cohn, EMS Department, Cameron County, TX, Part II of this best practices guide provides actionable tips to help you rein in the conversation and lead the vaccine narrative in your communities.

“ An ongoing strategy for communications will be critical for a successful vaccination programs



**Blaire Bryant, MPH**

Legislative Director of Health  
NACo

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<sup>1</sup> Lazarus, J.V., Ratzan, S.C., Palayew, A. et al. A global survey of potential acceptance of a COVID-19 vaccine. Nat Med (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-1124-9>

<sup>2</sup> Zencity data analysis is based on 274,000 interactions about Covid-19 vaccinations during the time period of October-November 2020. These interactions represent resident discourse in 157 partner Zencities and Zencounties across 32 states.

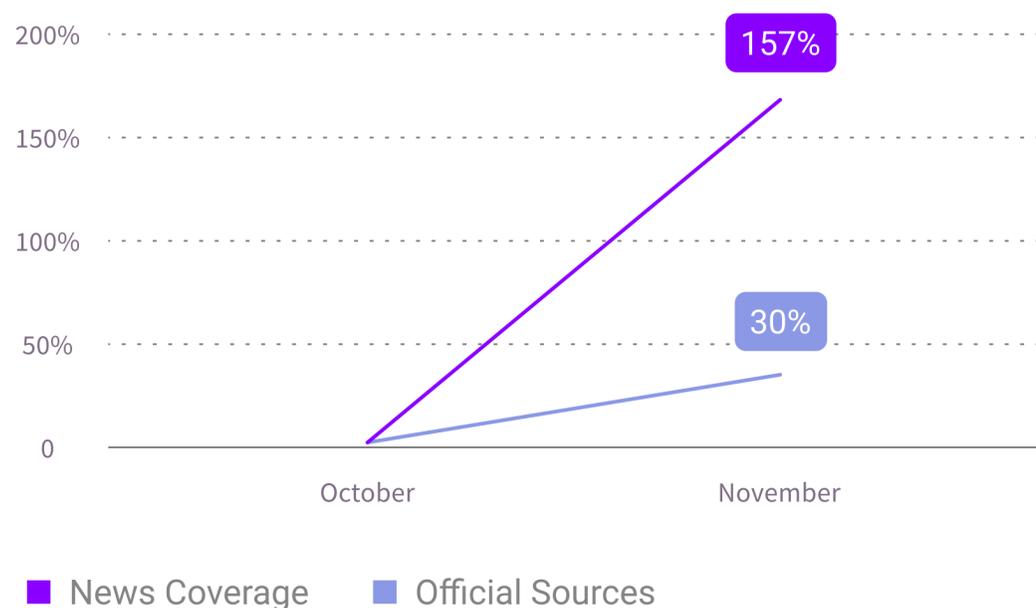
# The Current State of Covid-19 Vaccination Communications

## Discourse about the vaccine is on the rise, and the media has the loudest voice

Over the past month, as it became clear that Covid-19 vaccines would soon be available, interest in vaccines spiked, demonstrated by an 82% increase in vaccine-related conversations from October to November. The data clearly shows that media and other non-governmental sources are the driving forces behind this spike as news media coverage about vaccine-related developments increased by 157% in just the course of a month.

On the other hand, official, government led communications - like city and county Facebook pages and Mayor's twitter accounts - had a difficult time catching up with the rising public interest in Covid vaccines: official communications on the issue of Covid-19 vaccines increased by only 30% in November.

### Increases in discourse volume (October to November)

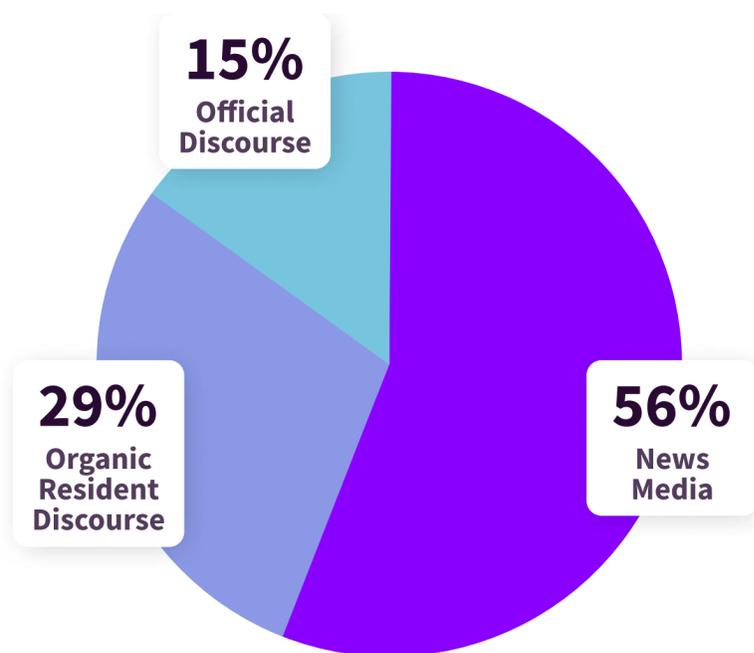


While interest in Covid-19 vaccines spiked due to increased media coverage of the topic, official city platforms lagged behind and were unable to meet the interest with official information.

[Learn more about how you can rein in the vaccination conversation in your community](#)

## Public conversation on Covid-19 vaccines is being driven and shaped by non-government sources

As a result, of all the vaccine-related discourse we analyzed, 56% of the interest was generated by news coverage, while 28% of the discourse on Covid-19 vaccines was organic resident discourse on Twitter. **Only 15% of all discourse on Covid-19 vaccines was generated by official sources.**



Public conversation and the narrative around Covid-19 vaccines at this crucial stage is being driven by non-government sources and organic resident discussions, rather than official information-channels.

For example, in one Zencity county, the County's planning for vaccine distribution was reported in the media before any official communication was made on this issue by the County itself - which means residents had limited information on which to base their response and the County had little control over the shape of the conversation.

[Check out our best practices for effective messaging during the coronavirus crisis](#)

# Vaccination skepticism is on the rise and Americans are expressing resistance, fear and distrust

“ One of the biggest challenges we are facing is communicating ... The skepticism and hesitancy around the vaccine [will be] a barrier to achieving the vaccination rates that will help us move past this emergency.



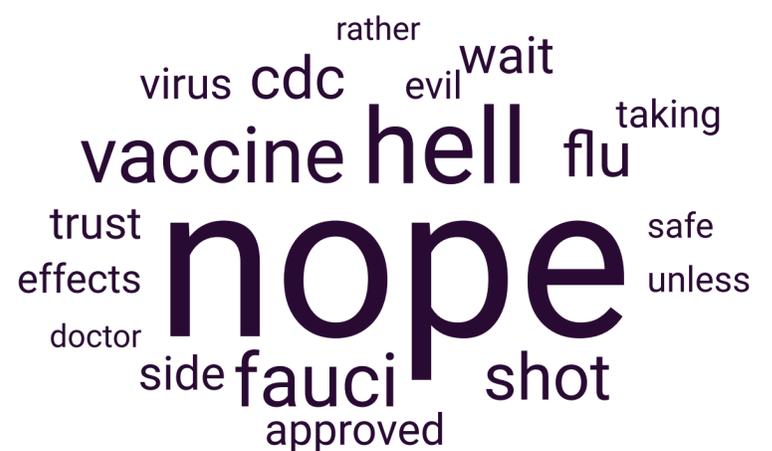
**Blaire Bryant, MPH**

Legislative Director of Health  
NACo

A review of online commentary from many cities and counties shows that wariness of the Covid-19 vaccine is substantial, and a prominent strand of vaccine rejection certainly stands out.

For example, in one Zencounty, the County's vaccine distribution plans were reported by the media before any official communications were issued by the County itself - which means residents had limited information on which to base their response and the County had little control over the shape of the conversation.

A deeper dive into the discourse provides useful insight into some of the top, common concerns residents expressed about the vaccine. Understanding these concerns gives local governments important insight into the conditions under which willingness to take the vaccine may improve.



## The top concerns seen in our data are:



### 1. Development & manufacturing speed

Residents indicated concern that the vaccine process was rushed and that vaccine approval was politically or financially motivated



### 2. Being a guinea pig

Trepidation was expressed around the vaccine's newness and a lack of information about side effects. Additionally, certain populations have reason to be extra vigilant when it comes to new vaccines.



### 3. Fear of mandatory vaccinations

Misinformation about vaccine mandates and requirements was extremely prevalent in Zencity's data and a major painpoint. Grievances about personal freedoms have been central in Covid-19 discourse from the start, and the possibility of vaccine mandates has been a major source of opposition.

[Find out more about what your residents' top vaccine concerns are with a Zencity demo](#)

# Tips for How Local Governments Can Overcome Skepticism & Take Control of the Vaccine Narrative in their Communities

While local governments are laying the complex groundwork essential for vaccine operations, residents are forming their own opinions about getting vaccinated. Although one of the key responsibilities that has fallen on local governments in tackling the pandemic is sharing effective and reliable information with their communities, and taking immediate action around the issues that concern their residents - news media is the primary driver in shaping these opinions. As a result, many resident opinions are trending towards negative.

**But local government organizations still have the power to shift the conversation - and must do so - for vaccine efforts to succeed.** Through cross-agency alignment and strategic messaging and communications, you can take control of the narrative in your community.

In addition, Zencity's technology is here to help. By automatically tracking and analyzing hundreds of public channels at once from sources like social media, 311, local news sources, and more, you can:

- Stay on top of your residents' Covid-19 vaccine discourse and top concerns
- Stop the spread of misinformation in its tracks
- Understand, in a nuanced way, what may be confusing or causing fear for your residents – from policy to messaging
- Identify the leading channels for communicating with residents
- Measure and track the effectiveness of your messaging and communications
- And more

“ Zencity has been very helpful in data management. Our number one media source for resident activity is the local news channel and there's a lot of negative sentiment around it which can be challenging. At the same time, it's incredibly helpful to see this negative sentiment and now we can change it. We take the data to inform a press release and then our County Judge will elaborate on said data at a monthly press conference. All of the topics discussed at press conferences are completely determined by what we see our residents are talking about most.



**Madeline Cohn**

EMS Department  
Cameron County, TX

[See how Zencity can work for you with our complete bundle of Covid-19 vaccine- support services and products](#)



## Tip #1: Be proactive & be first

Communicate early and be transparent about vaccination distribution plans. Our data clearly shows that cities and counties that were early and active in discussing their plans for vaccine distribution, and were transparent and forthcoming in their communications, had higher positive sentiment, less vaccine skepticism, and less vaccine-refusal than local governments that did not take the lead in communicating.

### Proactive and transparent communication with residents about the vaccine drives more positive sentiment

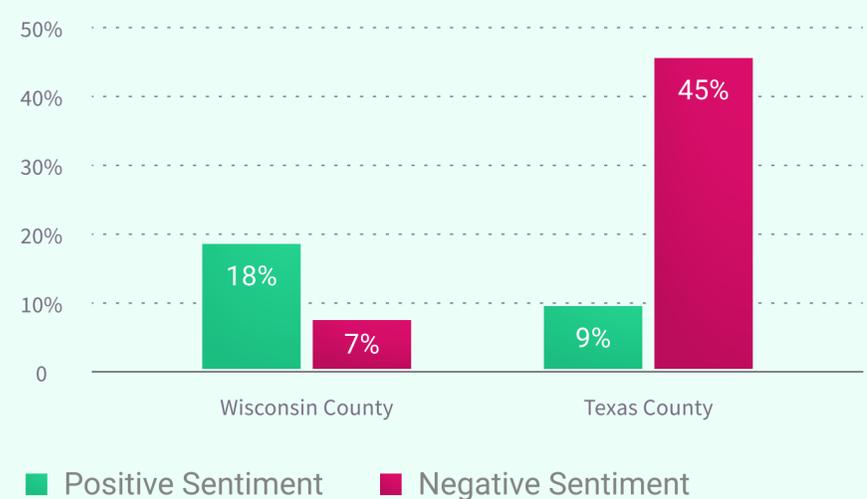
### Case Study

The Health Department of one Zencounty in Wisconsin accounted for 73% of all communications on a future Covid-19 vaccine, providing ongoing updates on the progress of vaccine manufacturing and distribution.

As the central source of information, the County's Health Department served as a central platform for residents to voice their doubts and worries, allowing the County to respond to concerns as they arose. Consequently, official communications on preparations for the Covid-19 vaccine generated almost 3X higher positive sentiment than negative.

By contrast, a Zencounty in Texas had its vaccine distribution planning reported on by the news media and not by the County itself. The response was decidedly negative (45% negative sentiment, compared to 9% positive).

Proactive Communications by City VS. Media Coverage



## Tip #2: You know your residents best: leverage trusted voices

The speaker is often just as, if not more important than the message - which means who delivers your official communications and on what channels is of the utmost importance. The data shows that one of the key ways to alleviate fears and reassure residents about the safety of the vaccine is by leveraging trusted voices. This is particularly true when reaching marginalized and vulnerable communities.

“ One of the main things we should be doing right now as local government officials is planning how we're going to communicate factual information to the medically vulnerable, the marginalized, and the populations with vaccine hesitancy and medical mistrust.



**Blaire Bryant, MPH**

Legislative Director of Health  
NACo

On the ground, what we've seen work well so far in Covid communications is collaboration with elected officials, faith leaders, local doctors, community workers, and well-intended residents. You know your residents best - which means you also know who the trusted leaders are in each of your communities. By aligning with them, you can help reach all of your residents with the same, strategic, local government driven communications. Effective messaging emphasizes safety, features the voice of trusted experts, and highlights participation by high-profile figures - down to live streaming vaccinations.

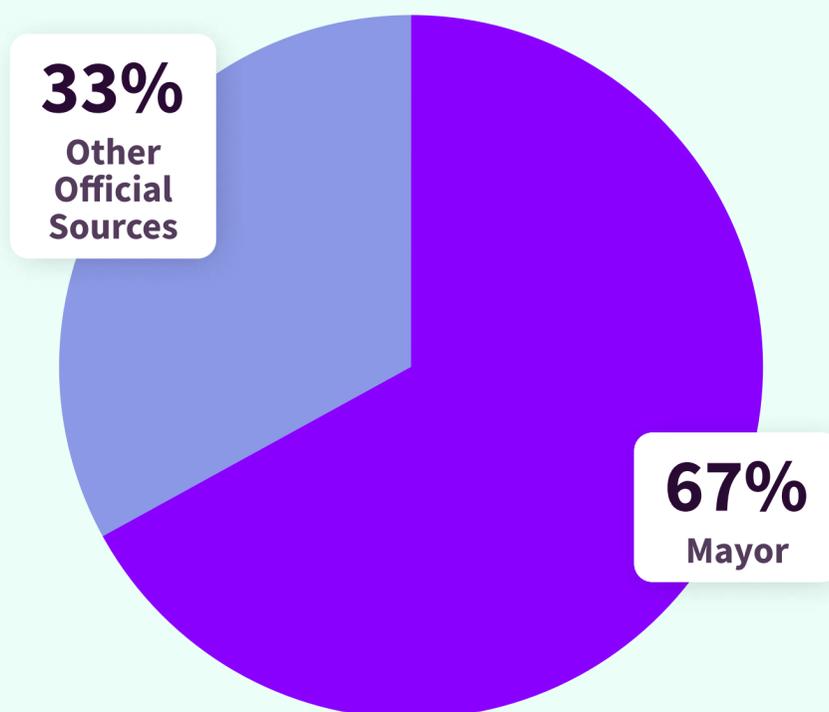
[Discover which channels are driving discourse in your community](#)

## Tip #2: You know your residents best: leverage trusted voices

**Leverage the voices of public figures and particularly mayors, who stand out as trusted information sources on Covid-19 vaccines for community members**

**Case Study**

The data has consistently shown the prominence of Mayors as sources of information on Covid-19 throughout this pandemic. This has remained true in the context of the vaccine as well, with Mayors making up 67% of all official communications on this topic. As such, it appears that reliance on updates and information provided by Mayors is prominent, and should be considered when designing a communication strategy around vaccines.



## Tip #3: Understand resident concerns, correct misinformation & curb speculation about vaccine procedures

Effective messaging doesn't just share information about the vaccine and vaccination procedures, it also directly addresses resident concerns head on. According to our data, one of the top drivers of negative sentiment for residents is mandatory vaccines. Address mandatory vaccines, address and correct misinformation, and stay on top of resident responses to your communication so that you can ensure your messaging is effective.

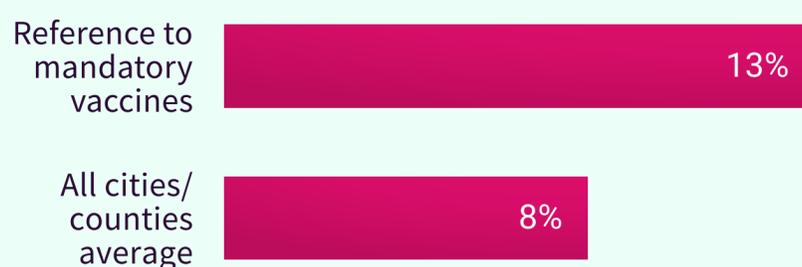
[Find out if speculation around mandatory vaccines is a barrier to getting vaccinated for your residents](#)

### Curb speculation about mandatory vaccinations from the start

Case Study

In our data, the communities where there was speculation about mandates had **above average negative sentiment and more frequent calls for refusing the vaccine**. Unsurprisingly, where vaccine mandates were part of the public conversation, official communications were lower than average.

#### Negative Sentiment on COVID-19 Vaccines



“ The media is the loudest voice for vaccines and the vaccination campaign ... We're focusing on a very strong public information campaign to quell the misinformation, manage rumor control, and make sure everyone has all of the facts.



**Madeline Cohn**

EMS. Department  
Cameron County, TX

## Tip #4: Hit everyone, with all the (same) facts. Every. Single. Day.

One of the most important elements of effective communications is unified messaging. Especially at a time like this, when resources are particularly slim and different jurisdictions have different communications capabilities, the less that the wheel has to be reinvented, the better and the less room there is for misinformation.

Intergovernmental partnerships are critical for ensuring synced messaging and overcoming staffing challenges (on the ground and in communications). Cross-department, agency, and jurisdictional cooperation is imperative to ensure that residents receive the same, carefully crafted messaging particularly when it comes to vaccine procedures and facts. When we say, hit everyone with the facts daily, we therefore don't just mean residents - we also mean all of the county departments, all of your jurisdictions, all of your community organizations. Share information, share it regularly, and share it broadly to ensure that everyone is communicating the same unified message.

“ A city-county partnership is essential in terms of messaging. Make sure your state, your city, or your county all are on the same page and are sharing the same talking points. Pool your resources together. Make sure your communications are being well placed. By working together you can reach a wide range of your population.



**Madeline Cohn**

EMS. Department  
Cameron County, TX

Zencity's award winning AI technology can help you guide the conversation around vaccinations within your community by understanding what your residents are saying in real time. [Find out more](#)

# Covid-19 Vaccine Support Bundle

Laurel

Take control of the conversation by understanding what your residents' are really saying about vaccines with Zencity's cutting-edge AI technology. Zencity's full package of products and services dedicated to supporting your Covid-19 vaccination strategy includes:



A **Covid-19 Vaccine dashboard** to track your community's vaccine-related discourse in real-time



**24/7 alerts** about spikes and trends in vaccine-related discourse



Two **surveys** dedicated explicitly to understanding your residents' thoughts on the vaccine and to measure cooperation levels



A tool for **benchmarking** your vaccine trends to trends in similar cities and counties across the United States

In an effort to support local governments as they tackle the biggest immunization campaign in US history, our complete support package is available at a **25% discount** until December 31st.

Zencity's team of experts is here to help you ramp up in a matter of days and the package is eligible for support funding.

[Speak to our team about how Zencity can assist you in your Covid-19 vaccine efforts today](#)