



## MEMORANDUM

April 6, 2021

TO: Council President Tom Hucker, and Members of Montgomery County Council

FROM: Melissa Pace, Chair, Connect Montgomery Alliance and Managing Director,  
Montgomery College Television

SUBJECT: FY22 Operating Budget Testimony

As the current Chair of the Connect Montgomery Alliance (CMA), I have the distinct pleasure of representing a uniquely collaborative and dedicated working group of communications decision-makers and professionals from across the County. The CMA members, previously known as the PEG Network, come together as separate organizations, sharing human and technical resources, for the advancement and common good of our residents, business owners, non-profits and other agencies. I am writing to ask you to please preserve the funding that you have provided to us in the past so we can continue to serve the very critical communications needs of the County in the future.

As you are aware, the CMA is guided by the County Cable Communications Plan which is funded by the non-tax revenues collected through the franchise agreements with Comcast, Verizon and RCN. Among many other initiatives, the Cable Communications Plan provides for public, educational, and government access, outreach and programming. This includes communications, production, cable channel and social media staff at the County's Office of Public Information, County Council, Office of Broadband Programs, Technical Operations Center, Montgomery College, Montgomery County Public Schools, Montgomery Community Media, and municipal partners.

During the pandemic and subsequent crises, the staff from the Connect Montgomery Alliance were the very experts you and the other leaders of our County relied upon to stand up emergency communications vehicles rapidly, creatively and professionally. From live video to social media posts, in English and six additional languages, the CMA partners rose to the challenge at a break-neck pace to ensure the Council, County Executive, and Mayors could communicate with constituents, the Superintendent could advise parents, MCPS and college students were aware of changes for online learning, and residents voices would continue to be heard amidst digital and racial inequity.

Alliance members sprang into action to fill the void of local news and critical information pertaining to the Coronavirus and its wide impact on our collective goals, stakeholders and

audience. In order to be more inclusive, CMA members increased the use of open and closed captions and added onscreen translations. These tactics drove social media engagement and expanded accessibility. We will continue this effort in earnest for FY22, expanding partnerships and extending reach to more culturally diverse groups.

The CMA team worked diligently to make sure constituents could participate fully and safely from home. There was a 100%+ increase in live virtual meetings, and live weekly County health official updates became the norm along with many other Facebook Live events.

Council and committee sessions saw exponential viewer growth. A Town Hall Meeting on January 20, 2021, for example, had over 1,600 participants. Many public hearings with Zoom-enabled testimony were at capacity with 35 speakers. MCPS saw their YouTube watch time skyrocket 121,909 hrs., up 315%, with new subscribers up 510%. MCPS Continuity of Learning-Virtual Conversations on 3/28 & 4/29 had 64,608 & 27,967 views respectively. With this success, we anticipate providing these services in the future, even after Coronavirus is contained.

Montgomery Community Media's local election coverage, and adapted series *Small Business Network Helps Businesses Cope*, plus *SBN en Español* & others contributed to a **217%** increase in new [www.mymcmedia.org](http://www.mymcmedia.org) web users, and 2.5 million page views in 2020. Likewise, Montgomery College Television has seen YouTube video views surpass 9 million and now has over 19,000 subscribers. Last year's Commencement celebration videos yielded 65,577 total views. MCPS-TV created a successful multiplatform, multilingual messaging strategy with the school system to distribute 12,538,000+ "Grab and Go" meals at 80 sites.

The impact of the CMA outreach is measurable and meaningful. By April 17, 2020, the CMA collaborated to create a new cable outlet – Corona Montgomery Channel 10 – featuring curated programming from all the County partners in one location, with a companion website for those who do not subscribe to cable. This 24/7 cable and web-stream targeted underserved audiences. In less than the first three months, Corona Montgomery aired **304** hours of COVID-related programming. A total of **630** different videos were aggregated from dozens of hyper-local sources, featuring **99** videos in a total of **7** languages. The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) bestowed a Gold CASE Accolade Award for this outstanding "Communications Pivot" during the pandemic. CASE Awards judges cited the effort as "a brilliant use of a public institution's network to benefit the community."

New programs were created for these unprecedented times, for example:

- *Well-Being & Families* (MCPS-TV) features three new video series to support mental health, totaling 110 videos (28 in Spanish) 41,474 views to date.
- *What's Happening MoCo* (County Cable Montgomery) includes 20+ podcasts with Council guests, County businesses, and covered topics such as suicide prevention.
- *Studio 501c3* (Montgomery Community Media) invites nonprofit guests to discuss food resources, social services, literacy, arts, homelessness, housing, health, to name a few.

- *Outlook Montgomery* (Montgomery College Television) examines today's issues: eviction, transportation, and policing to LGBTQ rights, healthcare jobs, economic recovery and scams and more.
- *Let's Talk!* (Montgomery College Television) is a partnership with MC Equity & Inclusion to bring a dialogue to topics ranging from *Say Her Name* and *STEM For All* to LGBTQ and Disabilities inclusion. MC 's efforts yielded a global CASE Platinum Awards Honorable Mention for Best Practices in Diversity.
- *#See Me Montgomery* (Montgomery Community Media) is an award-winning series with 77 stories of residents speaking intimately on race in order to promote better understanding. MCM also created 42 videos for Black History Month this year.

To ensure that residents are aware of this important and thought-provoking content, CMA created a sustained marketing effort with the intent to grow our reach and engage the public. The Alliance prioritized awareness and outreach through coverage of topics and events on multiple platforms. We chose to reflect the County's key priorities and engage residents on monthly campaigns. Specifically, CMA partners focused on creating paid and organic (unpaid) videos and social media to support emergency COVID-19 health and public safety messaging, racial equity and social justice, access to and donations of food, economic development, census, early childhood and education, environmental sustainability, and Vision Zero.

Ads drive viewers to visit [www.ConnectMontgomery.com](http://www.ConnectMontgomery.com) landing pages for additional resources and curated CMA videos on topics such as these paid ads (October 2020 to May 2021):

- Election Information/Voting During COVID-19
- Flu Prevention
- Pedestrian Safety
- Food Insecurity (English and Spanish)
- Celebrating Safely during COVID-19
- Shop Small, Shop Local
- MLK Day of Service
- Mental Health
- COVID-19 Vaccine Info (English and Spanish)
- Women's History Month
- COVID-19 Scams
- MCPS Reopening of Schools
- Upcoming: Earth Day/Green County, Digital Equity/Internet Access, Vaccine Update

Some highlights from these campaigns:

- The Spanish COVID-19 playlist on the Connect Montgomery YouTube channel currently has 65 videos with 70,390 views.
- Food Insecurity playlist has 20 videos with 7,404 views.
- Connect Montgomery reached 100,000+ residents via Facebook ads in 4 weeks, with engagement of nearly 21,000 (1/27/21-2/23/2021)

- On one day Thursday, March 4, 2021 the CMA COVID Vaccine ads generated 61 clicks through to the Montgomery County Vaccine page in English and 71 click throughs to the County vaccine page in Spanish.
- The first two phases of the CMA outreach effort had a reach of 369,370 and yielded 1,833,521 impressions, with 23,604 clicks.

The CMA anticipates that the Digital Equity ads that promote affordable internet access, will drive more potential participants to the County's webpage, and we plan to support the Emergency Broadband Benefit to be added to our messaging plan very soon. CMA has also invited Youth Media partners to create video training to help parents, grandparents, or elderly neighbors learn to safely use smart phone apps, computers, the internet, wifi and social media. CMA members are also strategizing the best ways to serve as a resource to President Biden's digital inclusion interests and the possibility of rewriting the Communications Act. We are very focused on racial equity in addition to pandemic communications.

For the CMA to continue growing our impact in FY22 and beyond, we have committed to the creation of an "Impact Manager" to assist the team in executing our digital media and marketing strategies and tactics. Similar to a communications manager, we expect the contractor to have a focus on digital/social media, outreach and implementation, and to provide measurable results. For FY22, CMA leaders will be reallocating a portion of the approved Cable & Communications Plan funding to procure a contractor for 20 hours per week. We aim to prove the investment is worth it by reaching more diverse audiences and building metrics. Once we have the track record of success, CMA will request an enhancement for consideration to fund the contractor at 40 hours in the future. Several work samples follow this memorandum.

With a flat year-to-year budget from the Cable Communications Plan, the CMA hyper-local, award-winning programming will continue to provide critical value to the residents, businesses, and non-profit partners of our county. Our Corona Montgomery cable channel and companion website bring high priority messaging to those who may not otherwise receive this content. CMA partners bring key issues – such as racial equity - to the forefront to generate discussion and understanding. We hope you agree that the CMA has demonstrated rapid innovation and goal-oriented collaboration in response to the pandemic and needs of our leaders to communicate urgently, accurately and often.

Funding the CMA partners budgets will enable us to continue to meet or exceed crisis communication needs, while also expanding audience engagement goals in FY22 and beyond.

cc: Connect Montgomery Alliance members

- Montgomery County, MD – Donna Keating, Barry Hudson, Sonya Healy
- Montgomery Community Media – Nannette Hobson
- Montgomery County Public Schools – Dr. Dick Lipsky
- City of Rockville – Kathy Dantzler
- City of Takoma Park – Alvaro Calabria
- Montgomery Municipal Cable – Melissa Aymold

## What residents are saying (Sample comments from our ad posts)

### A vaccine success story comment on vaccine ad

**George Candler** My wife and I (85 & 90 years old) just received our first shots after waiting for about a month after registering with the sign-up list. We were invited to schedule an appointment at the high school in Rockville or at Quince Orchard and we chose the latter. It was a wonderful experience for us because we were treated so well. We were taken by wheelchairs to each station instead of having to use our walkers to make this rather long trip. The setup there was so well organized and the attendants were so considerate made the whole experience nothing less than awesome! Thank you Montgomery County and especially the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Parks personnel for making it so! ❤️

### A question on our Mental Health Resources ad

**Leila Khalife** Can someone give me a web on line thank you in advance

**Connect Montgomery** Leila Khalife for mental health resources click on the Learn more button above. Here is the link to preregister for the vaccine and they will contact when it is available- <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/vaccine/>

**Leila Khalife** Connect thank you Montgomery

### In response to our Celebrating Safely during COVID ad:

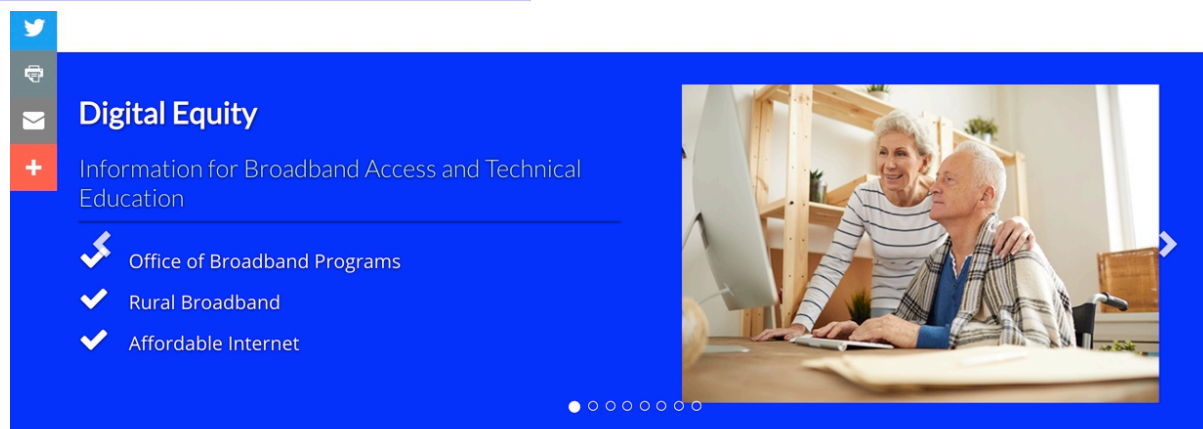
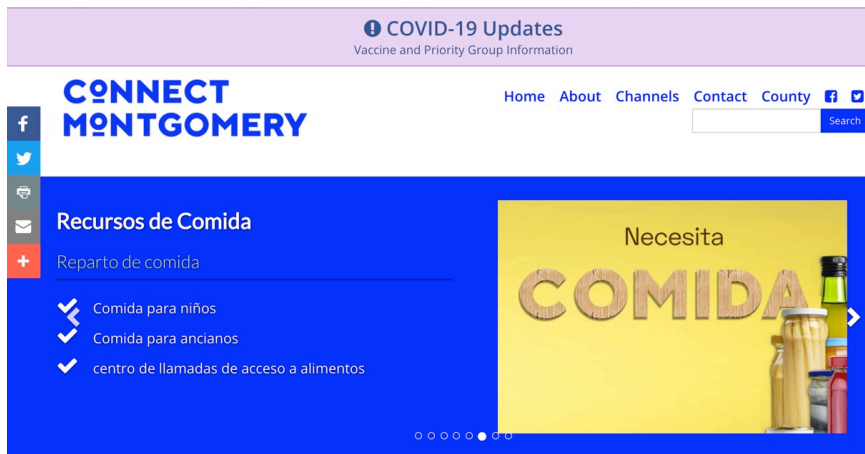
**Patricia Toombs** Eight members of my family are planning a cozy outdoor get together next weekend. We will wear our masks ,use hand sanitizer and practice social distancing. 🧐 👍 🧼

### A comment on one of our ads about voting:

**Hugh Fraser Clayton** I dont trust the USPS or ballot drop boxes.

**Connect Montgomery** Visit the Montgomery County Board of Elections' website for more information on how to drop off your ballot safely. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Elections/index2.html>

## Sample [www.ConnectMontgomery.com](http://www.ConnectMontgomery.com) homepage screenshots



## Current Ads as of March 2021 - Three examples

### 1. Beware of Vaccine Scams

**Co Me** Connect Montgomery  
Sponsored · 🌐

Vaccine scammers are preying on residents by asking them for personal information and money. Know how to protect yourself and your identity.

**SCAM ALERT**

**Never give out your SSN over the phone**



MONTGOMERYCOUNTYMD.GOV  
**SCAM ALERT | Never give your SSN over the phone**

LEARN MORE

**Co Me** Connect Montgomery  
Sponsored · 🌐

Posting your COVID-19 Vaccination Card gives scammers the info they need to steal your identity or recreate your vaccine ...See More

**SCAM ALERT**

**Don't post your vaccination card!**



MONTGOMERYCOUNTYMD.GOV  
**SCAM ALERT | Don't Post Your Card**

LEARN MORE

👍 🤔 Dan Holmes and 7 others 14 Shares

Link to Campaign Landing Page- <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/PEG/focusareas/avoiding-scams.html>

2. *COVID Vaccine Info* - Currently running in both English and Spanish and soon to be in French.

These ads connect residents directly to the Montgomery County Vaccine page in the corresponding language.

**Co Mo** **Connect Montgomery**  
Sponsored · 🌐

Who can be vaccinated? When will it be your turn to get it? Where will you go? How many doses will you need?



**Co**

All you need to know about the COVID-19 Vaccine.

**Mo**

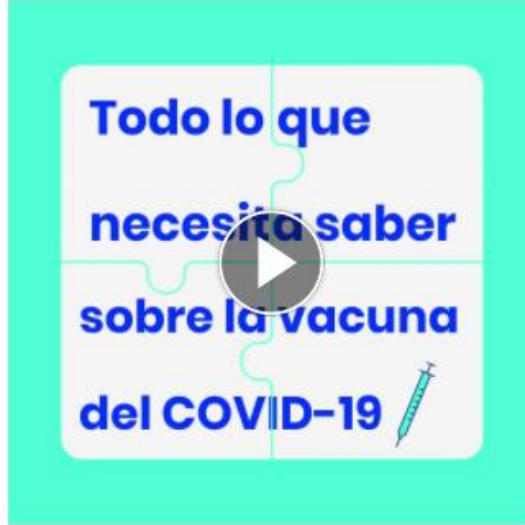
BIT.LY  
**Visit the COVID-19 vaccine website**

LEARN MORE

👍 🤔 😞 Napole... 262 Comments 100 Shares

**Co Mo** **Connect Montgomery**  
Sponsored · 🌐

¿Quién puede vacunarse? ¿Cuándo sera su turno? ¿Donde hay que ir? ¿Cuantas dosis son necesarias?



**Todo lo que necesita saber sobre la vacuna del COVID-19**

MONTGOMERYCOUNTYMD.GOV  
**Visite la web de vacunación del COVID - 19**

LEARN MORE

👍 ❤️ Adela Sanchez and 5 o... 8 Comments

3. *Women's History Month*- Highlighting Remarkable Women making a Difference in Montgomery County This campaign features:

- Dr. DeRionne Pollard
- Katie Ledecky
- Nancy Navarro
- Dominique Dawes
- Avery Smedley
- Nancy Dacek



The image is a screenshot of a Facebook post. At the top, the profile picture is a pink circle with 'Co Mo' in white, and the name is 'Connect Montgomery' with 'Sponsored' below it. The post text says: 'To mark Women's History Month, Connect Montgomery is commemorating by highlighting women making a difference in our county.' Below the text is a video player with a purple and pink background. The video title is 'Katie Ledecky' in large white letters, with 'Olympic Gold Medalist' in smaller pink letters below it. The video shows a woman (Katie Ledecky) wearing a blue sweatshirt and a colorful medal ribbon. In the bottom right corner of the video frame is a logo that says 'Outstanding women of Montgomery County' with a female symbol icon. Below the video frame, there is a grey bar with the text 'MONTGOMERYCOUNTYMD.GOV Outstanding women of Montgomery County' and a 'LEARN MORE' button. At the bottom of the post, there are reaction icons (thumbs up, heart) and the text 'Jacqueline Centeno Street...' and '3 Shares'.

**Connect Montgomery**  
Sponsored

To mark Women's History Month, Connect Montgomery is commemorating by highlighting women making a difference in our county.

**Katie Ledecky**  
Olympic Gold Medalist

Outstanding women of Montgomery County

MONTGOMERYCOUNTYMD.GOV  
Outstanding women of Montgomery County

LEARN MORE

Jacqueline Centeno Street... 3 Shares

Link to Campaign Landing Page- <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/PEG/focusareas/womens-history.html>

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