

Monroe County Communications Symposium AGENDA

Tuesday, May 13, 2025 – 8:30am – 2:30pm
 Faro Blanco Resort – Compass Meeting Room
 1996 Overseas Highway, Marathon, FL 33050

Time	Topic	Facilitator
8:30-9:30am	Introductions & Icebreaker	All Moderator: Jennifer Lefelar, DOH-Monroe
9:30-10:00am	Emergency Management Overview Including new Monroe County Emergency Operations Center (with media room and messaging capabilities at that facility)	Shannon Davis Weiner, Monroe County Emergency Management
10:00 – 10:45am	Severe Weather Awareness: Tools, Trends & Public Outreach Discussion	Jon Rizzo, NOAA/National Weather Service
10:45-11:00am	Group Photo and Break	All
11:00-11:20am	Panel Discussion: Getting the Word Out - With and Without Social Media	Alyson Crean, City of Key West Marianne Finizio, CHI
11:20-11:40am	TDC Overview and Public Outreach Strategies	Chad Newman, TDC
11:40am-12:00pm	Working with Monroe County and JIC Overview	Kristen Livengood, Monroe County BOCC
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch and networking	All
1:00-1:30pm	Panel Discussion: AI – Tips and Best Practices for Communications Professionals	Kristen Livengood, Monroe County BOCC Amber Ernst-Leonard, The College of the Florida Keys
1:30-2:00pm	Panel Discussion: Best Practices Working with our Media Partners	Keys Citizen – Chris Seymour Keys Weekly – Mandy Miles US1 Radio – Nick Wright
2:00-2:30pm	Open Floor for Questions and Daily Challenges Brainstorming with the Entire Group	Moderator: Jennifer Lefelar, DOH-Monroe
2:30pm	Adjourn	All



Communications Symposium Meeting Minutes

Date: May 13, 2025

Location: Faro Blanco, Marathon, FL

Time: Symposium commenced at 8:45 AM and adjourned at 2:24 PM

Opening Remarks and Introductions

Jennifer Lefelar opened the symposium with initial introductions and welcoming remarks. All attendees introduced themselves, providing their names, and roles.

Jen shared ice breaker questions for “Would you Rather.” She then reviewed the ground rules for the symposium.

Emergency Management Overview – and New Monroe County EOC

Speaker: Shannon Weiner, Monroe County Emergency Management Director

Shannon Weiner, who moved to the Keys in 2011 and previously worked as an intelligence analyst for the MCSO on anti-laundering and drug trafficking task forces before joining Monroe County Emergency Management (EM), thanked attendees for their roles in emergency management. She explained that, under state statute, there are 67 EM directors, one in each county, who are tasked with mitigating disasters, whether man-made or natural, with plans covering scenarios like pandemics and outbreaks. She emphasized that subject matter experts are expected to respond to emergencies alongside EM, with EMS and fire rescue being critical components.

Key Examples and Processes

- **Screwworm Incident (2017):** A South American bug infected Key deer, leading to a declared State of Local Emergency when it impacted the county.
- **Importance of Emergency Declaration:** Internally, it tracks expenses for FEMA reimbursement; externally, it communicates threats to residents and visitors, urging safety measures.
- **Decision-Making:** The EM Director can recommend protective actions but requires the mayor to issue a State of Local Emergency. The director leads under the Incident Command System (ICS), mandated for all county EMs, with guidance from the Executive Advisory Group (EAG), comprising the administrator, sheriff, mayor, fire chief, and EM director.
- Anyone wishing to tour the facility can contact her or Kristen Livengood (county PIO).

COVID-19 Example

- Shannon highlighted COVID-19 as an atypical emergency due to limited resources, the absence of a trauma center, and restricted access, necessitating tourist closure. The EAG coordinated these actions to ensure safety, underscoring the importance of unified support.

Evacuation and Hurricane Preparedness

- **Why Evacuate?** Storm surge, the primary killer in Monroe due to the island chain’s vulnerability, wind damage to structures, hospital closures, and isolation via 42 bridges delaying resources necessitate evacuation.
- **Hurricane Categories:**
 - Category 1 and 2: Mandatory evacuation for tourists, campers, and visitors.
 - Category 3: Mandatory out-of-county evacuation for all.
- **Special Needs Shelter:** Clients with health requirements can register, with DOH-Monroe facilitating care at FIU.

- Shelters: In-county options include Key West High School, Sugarloaf School, Marathon High School, and Coral Shores High School; out-of-county options include FIU for special needs and E Darwin Fuchs Pavilion in Miami Fairgrounds. All shelters are pet-friendly, requiring pre-registration at monroecountyem.com.
- Boating Community: Key West High School serves liveboards, with Marathon High School as a potential option for Boot Key residents.
- Re-entry: Monroe residents can re-enter with color-coded stickers (e.g., pink for Lower Keys, available at City Hall or tax collector offices) to expedite the process.

COAD and New EOC

- COAD: Community Organizations Active in Disaster, started post-Irma in 2017, assists with unmet needs.
- Marathon EOC: Opened in 2024, this facility withstands a 500-year storm with 220 mph wind resistance, funded by county grants and legislative appropriation, located on airport property.

Survival Tips

- Shannon outlined three steps: make a plan, build a kit, and listen to trusted resources. Sign-up is available at monroecountyem.com or via the hotline at 800-955-5504.

Questions and Answers

- RHN Query on Facility Closures: Shannon advised joining Kristen Livengood's BOCC distribution list and monitoring JIC press releases and social media for consolidated closure information.
- Countywide Coordination Call Access: The call is limited to partners, elected officials, and COAD members to manage information flow, focusing on weather threats.
- Transportation Concerns: Free transportation is provided by City, County, and Miami-Dade, stopping at all bus stops or on hail, ensuring no one lacks evacuation options.

NOAA Florida Keys National Weather Service

Speaker: Jon Rizzo

Jon Rizzo outlined the National Weather Service (NWS) mission to provide weather, water, and climate data, forecasts, warnings, and decision support for life and property protection. As a science-based agency, NWS collects data from various sources, including buoys and models, to create probabilistic forecasts.

Key Points

- NWS operates 24/7/365, encouraging debriefs for new leadership.
- Hurricane season runs from June 1 to November 30, with a peak on September 10 and high activity from August 10 to November 10. Year 4 since the last May out-of-season system aligns with a one-in-four-year trend.
- Forecasting accuracy has improved, with a smaller cone of error in 2024 versus 2004, though each cyclone is unique. Irma, a Category 4, was Category 1 in Key West and Key Largo, dispelling survival misconceptions.
- The Situation Overview slide in Jon's Tropical Cyclone Briefings is critical. This slide is usually used in press releases issued by county PIO, Kristen Livengood.
- Misinformation: Fake NOAA logos and content pose risks; only trusted sources should be used.

Panel Discussion – Getting the Word Out with and Without Social Media

Speakers: Alyson Crean and Marianne Finizio

Alyson Crean (City of Key West PIO)

Alyson recommended turning off social media comments to control information accuracy, emphasizing relationship-building and using platforms like the Community Key West Facebook Group for communication sharing.

1. Speed:
 - Timeliness is critical. Rapid response is necessary to shape the narrative before misinformation takes root.
 - Internal communication structures must be efficient to ensure PIOs are quickly informed and empowered to act.
 - The goal is to “get out in front” of a situation.
2. Accuracy:
 - Do not guess or speculate—only release verified information.
 - If the facts are not known yet, state that clearly. As updates come in, share them promptly.
 - Best Practice: Turn off comments on official posts to help maintain accuracy and reduce the spread of misinformation.
3. Transparency:
 - Be open about what is known and unknown.
 - Acknowledge evolving situations and remain accessible for follow-up updates.
4. Follow-Up:
 - Consistent messaging builds public trust and credibility.
 - Cultivate relationships with local media to support accurate reporting.
 - Correct misinformation swiftly by communicating directly with media contacts if needed.
5. Embracing Social Media:
 - Despite its challenges—unchecked rumors, on-the-scene videos, sensationalism—social media remains a vital tool for public communication.
 - When managed strategically, it offers a fast, targeted way to reach large audiences effectively.

Marianne Finizio (CHI VP Community Relations)

Marianne, the face of CHI with three centers (including a new Key Largo site), uses grassroots methods, Nextdoor, five Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Club’s Happy Dollars, and community organizations like COAD and the Upper/Lower Keys Community Resource Coalitions. She also highlighted the 2025 United Way Resource Guide and the developing Conch Republic/Access to Care app.

Questions and Answers

- Nestor (Homeland Security): Advocated for consistent, professional social media posts, citing Key West Police Department’s approach.
- Nancy (Public Library): Noted not all use social media, suggesting broader messaging.
- Adam (MCSO): Supported turning off comments to manage disinformation, with sharable posts.

TDC Overview and Public Outreach Strategies

Speaker: Chad Newman, TDC

Chad Newman, a Screen Actors Guild member and TDC Film Commissioner since 2018, outlined the mission to ensure visitor revenue. The board includes President Kara Franker, with a marketing team led by VP Heidi Barfels, PR Director Mary Haven, and Sr. Director Jonell Modys. Funded by tax revenues, TDC has undergone changes, including risk assessments and new agency advertising with Starmark.

Key Initiatives

- Pillars: Destination stewardship with a 2023 handout, “The Value of Tourism,” showing \$3.5 billion in visitor spending (43% increase since 2019).

- Crisis Management: Collaboration with Monroe County EM and an annual Hurricane Preparedness Workshop on May 29 via Zoom.
- Community Involvement: Partners can join media/sales missions, industry newsletters, and a 3-year Strategic Plan Survey open to residents, with focus groups encouraged.
- Legislative Concern: House Bill 7033 threatens tourism promotion, with Colorado's TDC dismantling as a cautionary tale. TDC funds beach cleaning, e.g., Smathers Beach.

Questions

- A query on 100% tariffs on foreign film production suggested potential revenue gains, with Chad noting California's \$20 million incentive for "Bad Monkey" as a contrast.

Working with Monroe County and JIC Overview

Speaker: Kristen Livengood

Kristen Livengood, Monroe County PIO, introduced the JIC WhatsApp (email PIO@Monroecounty.gov to join, avoiding memes) and the main landing page at <http://Monroecounty-fl.gov/1236/Joint-Information-Center> (<http://monroecounty-fl.gov/1236/Joint-Information-Center>), a one-stop shop for updates on schools, garbage, hospitals, and weather. Alert Monroe sign-ups are at <http://www.monroecountyem.com/alertmonroe>, and EOC tours can be arranged with her.

Feedback

- Adam (MCSO) praised the JIC website and rumor control section, recommending its use.

Panel Discussion – AI Tips and Best Practices for Communications Professionals

The panel, using a ChatGPT-created flyer, discussed AI as a starting point for tasks like drafting press releases, summaries, and graphics (e.g., Canva, TikTok). Options include ChatGPT (\$20/month), Perplexity (free), Claude, and GrammarlyGo.

Best Practices

- Fact-check, avoid sensitive data, match agency branding, and beware of hallucinated facts. AI amplifies, not replaces, PIOs.

Questions

- Nancy (Journalist): Raised concerns about AI's impact on writing integrity, advocating double-checking.
- CFK Query: No known policy exists that keep college students from using AI; AI can enhance vocabulary but requires quote verification.

Panel Discussion – Best Practices Working with Media Partners

Speakers: Mandy Miles (Keys Weekly), Nick Wright (US1 Radio), Chris Seymour (The Citizen)

Overview

- Mandy Miles: Editor since 1998, values local news and collaborative relationships.
- Nick Wright: 2 years at US1 Radio, focuses on credibility with timed broadcasts (e.g., 4:30 AM–9 AM, noon updates).

- Chris Seymour: Long-time editor of The Citizen, credits partners for continuity.

Q&A and Tips

- Updates via text or email with high-resolution photos (1MB+) are preferred. Deadlines vary (e.g., Keys Weekly Monday noon, US1 Radio ASAP). Relationships and accuracy are key, with local media prioritized. Press release should not be more than one page long.

Media Panel email addresses:

- Mandy Miles <Mandy@KeysWeekly.com>
- Nick Wright <nwright@islandprep.org>
- Chris Seymour <cseymour@keysnews.com>

Open Floor

Recommended Professional Organizations, Trainings, and Conferences

- NIOA, PRSA, FAPIO, FBI/FEMA courses, and LinkedIn newsletters were shared for WhatsApp.

Closing

Attendees were encouraged to complete evaluation. The meeting adjourned at 2:24 PM.

2025

Name	Organization	
Danette Baso Silvers	NAS Key West	
Megan Bosi	Keys Health Ready Coalition, Inc. AND Monroe County Homeless Services Continuum of Care	
Julie Brown	Florida Department of Transportation	
Alyson Crean	City of Key West	
David Dipre	Florida Fish and Wildlife	
Amber Ernst-Leonard	The College of the Florida Keys	
Marianne Finizio	Community Health of South Florida, Inc. (CHI)	
Mary Haban	Visit Florida Keys; The Monroe Country Tourist Development Council	
Amy Halstead	Rural Health Network of Monroe County FL	
Wyatt Ingram	Coast Guard Sector Key West	
Maryanne "MAJ" Johnson	Guidance/Care Center Inc.	
Chip Kasper	NOAA/National Weather Service	
Alison Kerr	Florida Department of Health in Monroe County	
Nancy Klingener	Monroe County Public Library	
Jennifer Lefelar	Florida Department of Health in Monroe County	
Adam Linhardt	Monroe County Sheriff's Office	
Kristen Livengood	Monroe County BOCC	

Name	Organization	
Brad Lutz	Lower Keys Medical Center/Keys Medical Group	
Shannon McCully	Key Largo Wastewater District	
Mandy Miles	Keys Weekly	
JoNell Modys	Visit Florida Keys/Monroe County TDC	
Mary Moeller	Monroe County Fire Rescue	
Michelle Nevel	Keys AHEC Health Centers	
Chad Newman	TDC	
Stefanie Peel	Islamorada, Village of Islands	
Tiffany Pellicier	United Way of Collier and the Keys	
Linda Pirozek	Womankind	
Jon Rizzo	NOAA - National Weather Service	
Cali Roberts	Womankind	
Liam Rodriguez	FWC	
Ben Sankor	Coast Guard Sector Key West	
Chris Seymour	Keys Citizen	
Rachel Spencer	Monroe County School District	
Oleg Sokolov	Homeland Security	
Michael Stapleford	Magnum Broadcasting, Inc. Keys Talk 96.9/102.5 FM; Party 105.7 FM; Yacht Rock 93.7 FM	

Name	Organization	
Nick Wright	US1 Radio News - Florida Keys Media	
Nestor Yglesias	Homeland Security Investigations	
Mimi Young	Layton	

ORDINANCE NO. 020 - 2025

AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS (BOCC) OF MONROE COUNTY, FLORIDA, AMENDING SECTION 23-200 TOURIST DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF THE MONROE COUNTY CODE, TO REVISE PROVISIONS TO SPECIFICALLY INCLUDE LOCAL ADVERTISEMENTS THAT PROMOTE TOURISM BY ADVISING OF THE ECONOMIC AND OTHER BENEFITS OF TOURISM IN ACCORDANCE WITH § 125.0104, FLORIDA STATUTES; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING FOR THE REPEAL OF ALL ORDINANCES INCONSISTENT HEREWITH; PROVIDING FOR INCORPORATION INTO THE MONROE COUNTY CODE OF ORDINANCES; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

WHEREAS, Monroe County Code (MCC) Section 23-200 sets forth the tourist development plan and the authorized uses of tourist development tax (TDT) revenues; and

WHEREAS, the County contracts with 3406 North Roosevelt Blvd. Corporation d/b/a Visit Florida Keys (VFK) for the provision of operating an executive office for the Tourist Development Council (TDC) and tourism promotion in accordance with Monroe County Code Sections 23-199(d) and (e); and

WHEREAS, in an effort to promote tourism locally and educate the community on the economic benefits of tourism, advertisements have been published in local newspapers as well as online and in social media posts; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners finds that advising and educating the local community and general public on the benefits of tourism promotes tourism in accordance with F.S. 125.0104; and

WHEREAS, advertising the positive impacts of tourism not only educates the local community which may result in more favorable reception of visitors, but it also can be a persuasive factor for visitors and potential visitors to travel and return when considering meaningful travel that has positive effects on the economic vitality of the Florida Keys and Key West community; and

WHEREAS, other destinations, such as Pinellas County, have also launched similar campaigns which emphasize visitor spending as both an economic driver and tax saving to the local residents; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with the limitations of F.S. 106.113, which prohibits local government or persons acting on behalf of local governments from expending or authorizing the expenditure of public funds for political advertisement or any other communication sent to electors considering an issue, referendum or amendment that is subject to a vote of the electors, a reference to this statutory provision will be included to ensure compliance in the event that any issue, referendum becomes subject to a vote of the electors; and

WHEREAS, This Ordinance proposes to revise MCC Section 23-200(a)(1)(a.) to modify the language as set forth below;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF MONROE COUNTY, FLORIDA:

SECTION 1: Section 23-200(a)(1)(a.) shall be revised to read as follows: (Note: ADDED LANGUAGE IS NOTED IN UNDERLINED TEXT AND DELETED LANGUAGE IS NOTED IN ~~STRIKETHROUGH TEXT~~):

(a) *Authorized uses of revenue.*

(1) The first two cents of the four-cent tax shall be spent:

- a. To promote and advertise Monroe County tourism in this state and nationally and internationally; however, if tax revenues are expended for an activity, service, venue, or event, the activity, service, venue or event must have as one of its main purposes the attraction of tourists as evidenced by the promotion of the activity, service, venue or event to tourist. This includes to promote and advertise county festivals, tournaments, races and other tourist-related activities that have as one of its main purposes the attraction of tourist as evidenced by the promotion of the festival, tournament, race and tourist related activity to tourist. It also includes to promote county tourist-oriented cultural events such as visual and performing arts, including but not limited to theater, concerts, recitals, opera, dance, and art exhibitions that have as one of its main purposes the attraction of tourist as evidenced by the promotion of the cultural event to tourist. Local advertisements that promote tourism by advising of the economic and other benefits of tourism are permissible so long as the limitations imposed by F.S. 106.113 are adhered to.

SECTION 2: SEVERABILITY. If any portion of this ordinance is for any reason held invalid or declared to be unconstitutional, inoperative or void, such holding shall not affect the remaining portions of this ordinance. If this ordinance or any provision thereof shall be held to be inapplicable to any person, property or circumstances, such holding shall not affect its applicability to any other person, property or circumstances.

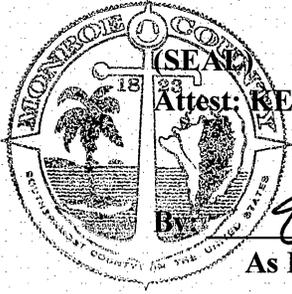
SECTION 3: CONFLICT WITH OTHER ORDINANCES. All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repealed to the extent of said conflict.

SECTION 4: INCLUSION IN CODE OF ORDINANCES. The provisions of this ordinance shall be included and incorporated in the Code of Ordinances of County of Monroe, Florida, as an addition or amendment thereto, and shall be appropriately renumbered to conform to the uniform numbering system of the Code.

SECTION 5: TRANSMITTAL AND EFFECTIVE DATE. This Ordinance shall be filed with the Department of State and shall be effective as provided in section 125.66(2), Florida Statutes.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of County Commissioners of Monroe County, Florida, at a regular meeting of said Board held on the 10th day of September 2025.

Mayor James K. Scholl, District 3	<u>Yes</u>
Mayor Pro Tem Michelle Lincoln, District 2	<u>Yes</u>
Commissioner Craig Cates, District 1	<u>Yes</u>
Commissioner David Rice, District 4	<u>Yes</u>
Commissioner Holly Merrill Raschein, District 5	<u>Yes</u>



Attest: KEVIN MADOK, Clerk

Kevin Madok
As Deputy Clerk

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF MONROE COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: *James K. Scholl*
Mayor

MONROE COUNTY ATTORNEY
APPROVED AS TO FORM
Christine Limbert-Barrows
CHRISTINE LIMBERT-BARROWS
SR. ASSISTANT COUNTY ATTORNEY
DATE: 8/21/25

FILED FOR RECORD
2025 SEP 24 PM 12: 04
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MONROE COUNTY, FLA