

LSC

Commercial District Recovery Guide

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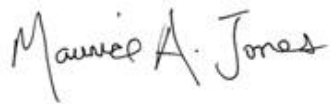
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Foreword

Historically underinvested communities across urban and rural America are facing enormous economic challenges from the fallout of COVID-19. Small businesses, many who have had to shut down temporarily, are at serious risk of closing permanently. These enterprises are the lifeblood of communities, providing critical goods and services as well as jobs to locals. To ensure that economic recovery is inclusive in the COVID-19 era, we created the LISC Commercial District Recovery Guide to support the trusted partners that neighborhood businesses turn to in challenging times. They are critical providers of resources and services, including technical assistance and support for small businesses, especially for those who are most vulnerable to the economic impacts of COVID-19. It is our hope that this resource provides a helpful framework as these groups respond to the shocks they themselves are facing due to the pandemic, and to adapt their service delivery to respond to needs of small businesses.



Maurice A. Jones, President & CEO
LISC





LISC is committed to connecting people, businesses and places to grow inclusive local economies and drive equitable access to opportunity. Leveraging our unique blend of national perspective and local partnerships, our model integrates three core strategies: building and supporting pathways to quality jobs and financial security, fostering local environments where diverse businesses thrive through increased capacity and access to capital and transforming underinvested commercial and industrial districts into generators of inclusive economic opportunity.



U.S. Bank's unified giving and engagement strategy, Community Possible, focuses on closing gaps between people and possibility in the areas of Work, Home and Play. We believe the building blocks of all thriving communities where all things are possible include: stable employment opportunities, a home to call your own, and a community connected through culture, arts, recreation and play.



Streetsense is an experience-focused strategy and design collective that creates brands people love and places people love to be. Powered by in-depth insights and an interdisciplinary approach, we enhance brands and places, drive consumer demand, and foster community.

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Introduction

The LISC

Commercial District

Recovery Guide

INTRODUCTION

The LISC Commercial District Recovery Guide

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

When disaster strikes, local governments, businesses and place-based organizations are frequently the first line of response. The COVID-19 pandemic is no different. The scope and nature of this disaster have created great need for local organizations to highlight collective concerns of small businesses, expand partnerships with the public and private sectors, and to serve as a voice for businesses during recovery.

The LISC Commercial District Recovery Guide will provide place-based organizations and mission-driven intermediary partners focused on community economic development, including Chambers of Commerce, Merchants Associations, Main Street programs, Business Improvement Districts and other non-profit groups, with a curated roadmap for action to support COVID-19 recovery efforts. The guide offers a range of actionable strategies, complemented by best practices from communities across the country, that help address the needs of businesses during both immediate response in the aftermath of the pandemic and during recovery as the nation begins to emerge from social distancing measures and business closure.

ORGANIZATIONAL SHIFT DURING AN EMERGENCY

Over the last 40 years, LISC has mobilized to help hundreds of communities across the country respond to a variety of crises – from environmental disasters to economic downturns and financial shocks. Now we turn our efforts to help the organizations we serve meet the unique needs of businesses during a pandemic that has caused unprecedented and forced closures of businesses across the nation. In our experience, place-based and community organizations are among the most critical partners in emergency management. They are often the face of resource allocation and technical assistance — the first place that residents and businesses turn to when they are in need.

BEST PRACTICE: LISC COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR CHALLENGE

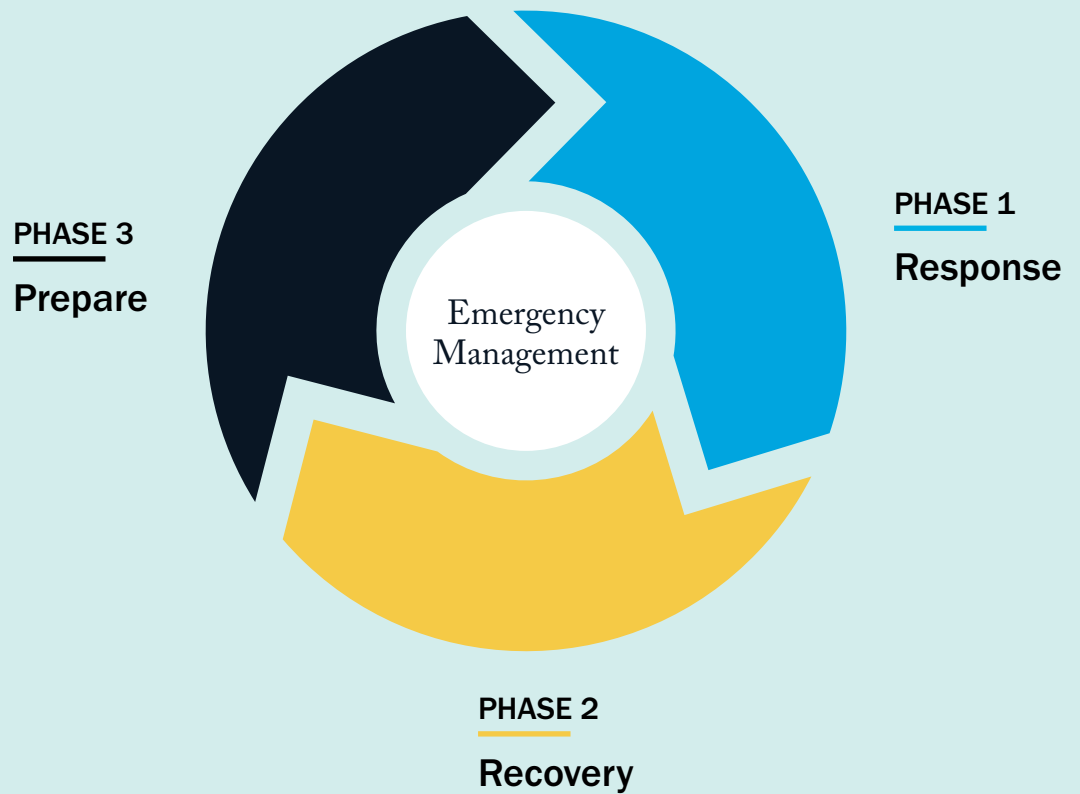
The Commercial Corridor Challenge (Corridor Challenge) is a partnership of LISC NYC, Citi Community Development, and SBS to strengthen and revitalize the streets, small businesses, and community-based organizations (CBOs) that anchor New York City neighborhoods.

Through the program, three CBOs were selected to receive financial and expert technical assistance to carry out early-action interventions that addressed corridor fundamentals, including safety, visibility, and promotion. Midway through the second round of the Corridor Challenge, however, the State of New York announced a stay-at-home order, also known as NYS on Pause, with a mandate that all non-essential workers work from home. The order has immeasurably impacted small businesses along the three commercial corridors. Today, the Corridor Challenge is being re-engineered to directly address impacts of COVID-19.

The ability to pivot immediately from existing projects towards response and recovery activities require grantees, funders and LISC staff to adapt quickly. Each grantee received enhanced technical assistance support to develop new strategies for intervention which included strategies to connect local cab services to businesses in need of delivery, legal technical assistance to business owners, and marketing strategies for businesses that remained open.

Organizations focused on community economic development too often find themselves at the forefront of recovery efforts, and the COVID-19 pandemic is no different. In recent weeks, LISC and its partners on the ground have found ways to pivot resources and funding toward supporting the small business ecosystem that many of our communities rely on.

Emergency Management Typically Covers Three Phases:



While all three phases of emergency management are critical to ensuring sustained recovery and rebuilding of our communities, this guide will narrow its focus on the immediate and long-term actions that should be undertaken following the occurrence of a crisis or disaster.

Industry Trends from COVID-19

Although we cannot be certain about the ways in which our businesses and commercial districts will emerge after COVID-19, there are a number of significant shifts in consumer spending that will undoubtedly change our local business communities and the way businesses function moving forward — from the threat of closure and bankruptcy to both short- and long-term changes in conducting sales and maintaining storefronts.

WIDESPREAD BANKRUPTCIES AND CLOSURES: ESSENTIAL VS NON-ESSENTIAL BUSINESSES

One of the most significant concerns right now is the risk of permanent closure by an unprecedented number of small businesses. McKinsey Business Sentiment Survey from early April found that 25% of respondents were prepared to file for bankruptcy in the next 6 months. Closures are more likely to hit “non-essential businesses” that were forced to close. At the time of writing, GAFO (General Merchandise, Apparel, Furniture and Other) categories, particularly apparel and accessories, have suffered the greatest losses as consumers pull back on most discretionary spending¹. The businesses that continue to show strong performances are those selling goods with inelastic demand (non-discretionary goods such as food at home or groceries) or that have shown flexibility in marketing and delivering products and services.

In addition to the larger format grocery stores, local convenience stores that are considered ‘essential businesses’ by the US government during COVID-19 will likely show strong performances through the crisis if they pivot to providing more household items such as cleaning supplies, toiletries, and multi-pack/ bulk items. These retailers are often the only and/ or closest locations to consumers for food and grocery items.

At district-level, however, the risk of permanent store closures means that there will likely be a **spike in short term vacancies** and an **overall shrinking retail footprint of our commercial districts as retail tenants course-correct**. As such, intermediary groups such as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) will need to be prepared to work closely with landlords to track vacancies, manage the appearance of vacant storefronts, and create a strategic plan for tenant attraction and retention that consider other potential non-retail tenants and uses.

¹ McKinsey, 2020. “A Global View of How Consumer Behavior Is Changing Amid COVID-19.” Accessed on April 17, 2020: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/a-global-view-of-how-consumer-behavior-is-changing-amid-covid-19>





CHANGING BUSINESS MODELS

Prior to COVID-19, many brick-and-mortar businesses were already facing a growing existential crisis. On-line purchases have been creeping up for years, and Main Street businesses have always been behind the curve in responding to this growing trend. According to the National Main Street Center², 63% of respondents do not currently have on-line sales capability. Main Street small businesses that started the pandemic without any website or online sales capabilities have been at a distinct disadvantage over businesses that entered the pandemic with some online sales capabilities in place.

² Main Street America, 2020. "The Impact of COVID-19 on Small Businesses" Accessed on April 19, 2020: <https://www.mainstreet.org/blogs/national-main-street-center/2020/04/14/just-released-data-from-the-survey-on-the-impact-o>

As COVID-19 forced consumers to remain at home under state-ordered social distancing measures, their behaviors intensified toward online shopping. According to a McKinsey Consumer Sentiment Survey,³ "Consumers are starting to adopt new behaviors, including shopping on new websites for basics (20 percent), shopping at a new grocery store (16%), adopting curbside restaurant and store pickup (10% and 8%)..." Whether we like it or not, COVID-19 has catapulted many small Main Street restaurants' and retailers' entry to e-commerce and omnichannel customer experiences in order to ensure long-term survival in the market. While the added costs associated with last-mile delivery may cause many to eventually return to physical stores, the flood gates have opened for many customers for whom brick-and-mortar options were preferable to on-line sales. The abrupt switch to virtual solutions for retail will likely drive **growth in ecommerce that will outpace that of physical commerce**. As a result, the role of the physical store in the customer's shopping journey will continue to evolve as retailers find greater value in these places as showrooms, branding platforms, event venues, and fulfillment centers.

³ McKinsey, 2020. "Survey: US Consumer Sentiment During the Coronavirus Crisis". Accessed on April 17, 2020: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/survey-us-consumer-sentiment-during-the-coronavirus-crisis>

As businesses experiment with new concepts and ways of selling in response to loss of foot traffic during a crisis, it is likely that we will also see **innovative models emerge**. For example, some businesses that formerly only offered in-person services (such as salons and gyms) may venture into selling products that align with store services (e.g. at-home spa sets and gym equipment rental). Others may shift product offerings altogether to align with the immediate needs of consumers during a crisis such as the transformation of restaurant spaces into part-grocer.

HIGHER HEALTH AND SAFETY EXPECTATIONS

Following a pandemic, **workplace safety, health standards and measures for commercial businesses will heighten and change in the long run**, whether initiated by authorities or by retailers themselves, to ensure consumer and workplace safety and to rebuild overall customer confidence. This is especially critical for high-touch businesses like restaurants with on-site food preparation and services.

Retail stores and restaurants will have to consider redesigning store layouts to accommodate social distance measures and lower occupancy rates, new sanitation areas, removal of self-serve stations, cashless payment methods, and even contact-free order pick-up stations. In terms of employees, additional procedures will need to be put in place, including wearing face coverings and conducting temperature checks to mitigate risk of virus spread. These requirements will continue to evolve and will be led in part by local municipal and state governments.

COVID-19 Small Business Challenges

Even before disaster strikes, small businesses face a multitude of challenges — from making payroll to rising rents and fierce market competition. These issues become amplified during a crisis. This pandemic has resulted in the closure of non-essential businesses, rise in unemployment rates at levels not seen since the Great Depression, and a concurrent decrease in discretionary spending. In the immediate term, small businesses are faced with the following significant challenges:

LIMITED TO NO CASH FLOW RESERVE

During a disaster event such as COVID-19, sales revenues may slow or be completely halted, depending on whether the business is an essential or non-essential business. Salons and specialty beverage stores, for example, have been forced to close during COVID-19 and will need an injection of capital to bridge the gap in revenue. This is true for small businesses and even more so for minority-owned businesses.

The Truth About Small Business Cash Flow

In 2016, JPMorgan Chase conducted a survey of nearly 600k small businesses that found that **half of all small businesses have a cash flow reserve of 27 days**. Twenty-five percent (25%) have less than 13 days.

Minority businesses that did not have an existing relationship with banks and SBA lenders have faced difficulties in accessing emergency capital and getting any reliable financial advice. Early surveys and reports suggest that 90% of small businesses of color have been excluded from SBA's Paycheck Protection Plan. Many minority business owners, particularly immigrant entrepreneurs for whom English is their second language, have also been unable to access accurate information, relying heavily on secondary information in the popular media.

Summary of CARES Act

In March 2020, a \$2 trillion federal stimulus package was passed to offer help to millions of American small businesses affected by the pandemic. The bill included cash grants, low interest loans, limited payroll offset money and a variety of enhancements to unemployment insurance and paid leave affecting small businesses.

While federal funding is critical, it will also be quickly depleted and distributed unevenly across the country. As such, it is important to consider local and alternative sources of funding to sustain the recovery of small businesses in the long-term for your district. For strategies, refer to the section ['Access to Capital'](#).



CHALLENGES MEETING FIXED EXPENSES

As a result of store closures and slowing businesses, many retailers are unable to pay rent. In a poll conducted in April 2020 by Alignable, a small business social networking company, about 30% of more than 1,000 respondents reported making no rent or mortgage payment in April while 20% said they had made only a partial payment. While some local governments have declared moratoriums on eviction of commercial tenants (including San Francisco, LA, and States of Oregon and NY), without early intervention and negotiation with landlords, retailers may risk losing their brick-and-mortar storefronts.

LONG TERM PREPAREDNESS

What characterizes resilient companies is often preparation before a crisis. These forward-thinking businesses typically have stronger balance sheets, the swift ability to cut operating costs, and effective action in implementing a business continuity plan.

However, as it turned out, many retailers lacked business continuity plans and were unable to quickly adapt to changing circumstances during COVID-19. As consumer behaviors and attitudes continue to shift in an accelerated manner, individual businesses and commercial districts as a whole will need to engage in scenario planning to account for potential future changes and their repercussions across the commerce landscape.



Phase 1

Response

PHASE 1

Response

COVID-19 is unlike other natural disasters, where the incident, an earthquake, hurricane or other natural disaster, occurs over a short duration of time and the destruction is often physical in nature. In those cases, response and recovery can begin immediately and often in tandem. Owing to the unique circumstances of this crisis, some businesses have been deemed “essential” and remain open, albeit in a different capacity, while others have shuttered entirely.

According to a recent survey by Main Street America (MSA), **nearly 80% of respondents have suspended storefront operations as a result of the health crisis**. MSA conducted the online survey during the week of March 25 to April 6, 2020. More than 5,850 small business owners responded, of which 91% of respondents reported owning businesses with fewer than twenty employees.

As an intermediary, your role is focused on serving as the conduit for information. This involves leading and supporting outreach efforts, the coordination of resource distribution, and ensuring that your businesses have the most up-to-date information they need to survive the pandemic.

The following strategies and tools should be undertaken immediately during a crisis or disaster to stabilize the commercial district and local businesses.

OUTREACH



Establish a business contact list



Identify an accessible platform/tool to communicate with key stakeholders



Coordinate resource and information tracking with municipal agencies, economic development organizations, local chambers, merchants associations, and other local and regional leaders



Curate, publish, update, and crowdsource a list of relevant resources and information Data Collection



DATA COLLECTION

- ✓ **Build partnerships with other organizations to conduct surveys and assess the changes in the district**
- ✓ **Use existing communications tools to market surveys widely**
- ✓ **Review other available data sources to track changes in the state, city, and district implementation**

IMPLEMENTATION

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ **Reframe existing business support programs to help businesses develop a disaster response business plan**
- ✓ **Partner with established Small Business Development Centers, local anchor institutions, and business consultants in your district to provide free and confidential business planning advice**
- ✓ **Establish a district-wide crowdsourcing fund to redistribute back to businesses in your area**
- ✓ **Set up informational sessions to teach business owners how to leverage crowdsourcing platforms**
- ✓ **Run a promotional campaign to help raise awareness of existing crowdsourcing funds established by individual businesses.**
- ✓ **Set up an easy-to-navigate loan/ grant program to get capital quickly to businesses**

RETAIL SALES / MARKETING



Organize webinars to educate business owners on how to sell online and/ or set up sale of gift cards



Train business owners on how to claim their Google business listings



Communicate changes in business operating hours and methods of sales and deliveries



Keep your district top of mind through authentic marketing in partnership with local businesses

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



Educate tenants on issues of rent relief/ deferment and connect them with legal counsel



Step up efforts to clean and sanitize public surfaces and streets



Preparing customizable posters and pamphlets that can be used in educating business employees on new sanitation and safety standards



Leverage relationships with local artists to create murals and public art on boarded up storefronts



Secure the district with regular safety patrols



Partner closely with homeless services



Outreach




MAINTAINING COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Opening communication lines with business owners and property owners is critical during a crisis to ensure the **timely dissemination of accurate information**, to enable stakeholders to **reach out and support each other**, to **collaborate and share** resources, and most importantly, **to track business operations, performance, and needs**. This is where advance planning comes into play, building a business contact list BEFORE the crisis.

Checking In With Stakeholders

When conducting initial outreach following a disaster, ensure that your messaging and tone reflect sincerity and understanding during a time of crisis. It is important to ask stakeholders what support they may need in the immediate term, focusing on the health and safety of business owners and their employees.

If a business contact list exists for the district, there are a number of technology applications and tools that place-based organizations can quickly adopt to get stakeholders on the same page. Depending on the size and scale of your communities and districts, you may choose one or more of the following tools to better communicate with stakeholders.

Name of Tool	Best For
 WhatsApp group chat function	Small groups (<15 stakeholders) Live updates and crisis communication
	Mid-size to large groups Live polls and updates, and crisis communication Interacting with stakeholders and disseminating information to large groups
 FACEBOOK private group function	Mid-size to large groups Live updates and crisis communication Interacting with stakeholders and disseminating information to large groups
	Weekly or less frequent distribution of information via e-mail Passive/ one-way communication
	Weekly or less frequent distribution of information via text messaging Passive/ one-way communication

BEST PRACTICE: DOWNTOWN COS LOCAL BUSINESSES FACEBOOK PRIVATE GROUP (COLORADO SPRINGS, CO)

The Downtown Partnership of Colorado Springs created a private group on social media platform, Facebook, as a resource center for downtown businesses to “share information, exchange ideas, and promote healthy dialogue to creatively market businesses” during COVID-19. Group membership is exclusive to downtown street-level restaurants, retail, gym and salon business owners.

[Click here for more information.](#)

The aforementioned tools require access to the Internet via smartphones and/or computers. For districts with stakeholders that skew older, these options may not be viable. As such, it is also important to consider other means of communication, including daily phone calls to stakeholders and in-person check-ins if it is safe to access your district.

For communities with stakeholders whose first language may not be English, it is important to ensure that the selected communication tool has built-in apps for translation, or that alternative communication channels are created in other languages. At a time of crisis, it is especially important to ensure our vulnerable and minority groups are not left out of the conversation and are instead empowered to share information and seek resources and support.

PROVIDING UP-TO-DATE RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

A plethora of technical assistance and funding programs have been formed in response to the crisis — and it can sometimes feel as if they change daily. These resources are typically related to addressing near-term survival needs and will inevitably change on a regular basis as some sources are exhausted and others created through new initiatives. It is important to help direct your businesses and stakeholders to the most up-to-date and relevant information — whether you are responsible for collecting and maintaining this information or not. Reach out to municipal agencies, economic development organizations, local chambers and merchants associations to coordinate rather than duplicate efforts. If other higher capacity organizations are maintaining this information, use your communications apparatus to direct businesses to their websites and portals.

BEST PRACTICE: PRACTITIONERS AND LEADERS SHARING INFORMATION — NYC BID LEADERS

The executive leaders of business districts across the City of New York banded together quickly via a Facebook Private Group forum to share resources and templates, including printable posters for businesses to place at registers to encourage customers to stand back from cashiers. This initiative enabled members to share daily updates on funding opportunities and regulatory policies, troubleshoot issues together, and exchange best practices in real-time. The invite-only group proved there is only strength in collaboration during a crisis.

If you do find it necessary to maintain this information, begin by establishing a list of trusted sources for funding and resources beginning with Federal, State, County, and Municipality agencies. Local lenders and banks, as well as major philanthropic foundations may also be relevant to track in your district. Once a list of trusted sources has been defined, assign a designated staff person / volunteer to track updates daily via a Google Sheet, or any other cloud-hosted document that can easily be accessed by multiple owners. To crowdsource other resources beyond those on your list, consider setting up a dedicated email address that stakeholders may send and forward resources directly to, or host a Google Form on your organization's website that enables others to submit information on resources through a standardized form that can be linked to your existing Google Sheet tracker.



Best Practice: DOWNTOWN SYRACUSE (SYRACUSE, NEW YORK)

The COVID-19 Resources page on the Downtown Committee of Syracuse's website is organized by type of resources available: Operational, Financial, Technical Assistance & Advice, Employees. A direct line of contact to the BID is also published on the site for those interested in providing information to other available resources.

[Click here for more information.](#)



What kind of information should you be sharing?

- *Federal, State, County and Municipal Resources*
- *Grants*
- *Technical Assistance offered by local stakeholders*
- *Strategies for safety and hygiene practices*

Trade Associations are an excellent resource for practical advice and guidance. Their mission is to ensure their members have critical information during crises, and very frequently they make this information available to non-members during disasters.

- **National Restaurant Association** created a **bilingual COVID guide** for restaurant owners and operators offering guidance on prevention and monitoring.
- **U.S. Chamber of Commerce** has prepared easy to use **communication toolkits** and social media graphics that offer practical guidance for small businesses on how to keep businesses and customers safe.
- **The Food Industry Association** has prepared a series of **guides** that offer recommended protocols for cleaning and disinfecting, helping workers get to and from work safely, etc.
- **Food & Beverage Issue Alliance** has prepared a series of **resources** that offer recommended protocols for protective equipment at work, screening employees for COVID-19 symptoms, etc.

BEST PRACTICE: LISC BOSTON (BOSTON, MA)

The LISC Boston Office updates a resource list of grant and loan opportunities for businesses in the Greater Boston area, including Federal, State, and Regional funding sources.

[Click here for more information.](#)

BEST PRACTICE: NORTH RIVER COMMISSION (CHICAGO, IL)

Beyond providing real-time updates on COVID-19 business resources on its website, the North River Commission also sends weekly emails to stakeholders on mailing lists, highlighting changes to existing resources and providing updates on new resources.

DO SOMETHING, BE PROACTIVE

This may seem obvious but **engaging in any type of collaboration during times of crisis is critical to keeping spirits high**. It is times like this when people need to see more action, less talk. The ideas are endless. The National Main Street Center maintains a roundup of good ideas on their blog which might serve as inspiration.



Data Collection



CONDUCT A DISTRICT SURVEY

A crisis may impact businesses in your district in a variety of ways, so it is important to accurately and continually assess the situation in order to be able to craft relevant assistance and recovery programs and to better allocate funding and resources. This data collection will be the beginning of an on-going effort to track the impact of the pandemic on your business district.

To conduct an assessment of your district quickly, a short survey requiring no more than 10-15 minutes of a respondent's time should be disseminated at regular intervals (once a week, biweekly, monthly – depending on pace of policy changes and extent of disaster event). Questions should be tailored by audience and should assess the disaster event's magnitude of impact on the Physical Environment, Business Environment, Market Demand, and Adaptive Capacity – key elements of the Commercial DNA framework created by LISC. Factors such as jobs/ employment, business sales, business operations (store hours), supply chain, real estate (no. of requests for rent relief), retail confidence, products and services should be measured through the surveys. See page 21 for sample survey questions.

If your group lacks capacity to conduct a survey on your own, build partnerships with other resourceful organizations (Chambers of Commerce, Small Business Development Centers, Merchants Associations) that may already be collecting this information and use your existing communications tools to direct your stakeholders to those surveys. By being partners and supporting the marketing of existing surveys, you will be able to access the data being collected through the surveys to help guide response initiatives and efforts.

For communities with stakeholders whose first language may not be English, it is important to ensure that surveys published online are available in multiple languages. Where possible, print and distribute surveys to make sure these less active minority groups such as street vendors are counted and empowered to share information and seek resources and support.

Name of Tool	Best For
 Google Forms	Mid-sized groups (<500 stakeholders)
 SurveyMonkey	Large groups and tracking response over time

POTENTIAL SURVEY AUDIENCES

Business Owners

Street Vendors

Property Owners

Customers

Potential survey questions might include the following. Please note that questions that are multiple choice, rather than open-ended will likely garner a higher response rate and can be more easily turned into charts and infographics that can be used for other purposes.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Basic Details

- What is the name of your business?
- What type of business are you?
- How should we contact you for details about funding / resources?
- Where is your business located?
- Do you own / lease the space?
- How many years have you been in business at this location?
- How many gross square feet is your business / operation located in?

Business Operations

- What is the current status of your business — open / closed / only take-out and delivery?
- Have you reduced/maintained/increased your operation hours?
- Have you adapted your business model to the current situation? If so, how?
- How has business operations been impacted?
- Have you had any disruptions in your supply chain? If so, how?

Business Finances

- How has — or how do you anticipate — your company finances will be impacted?
- If conditions do not improve, how long will you be able to keep your business running?
- Have you applied for/or received emergency loan or grant assistance?
- What percentage of net revenue would you estimate your business has lost?

Workforce

- How has your workforce been impacted?
- How many Full-Time Equivalent Employees have been let go?

Customer Confidence

- How long do you believe your personal / household finances will be impacted by COVID-19?
- How do you anticipate your spending habits will change across different categories?
- When social distancing orders are lifted, how long after will you anticipate going back to shop in stores?

BEST PRACTICE: COOL SPRING DOWNTOWN DISTRICT BUSINESS IMPACT SURVEY (FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA)

The multiple-choice survey released by Cool Spring Downtown District was targeted at business owners and included **key background questions** such as location of business, type of business, no. of years in operation, size of retail space, total no. of full-time employees (that enabled the BID to determine share of responses from small / medium / large business), and any recent e-commerce capabilities. The survey, hosted on website Survey Gizmo, also required respondents to self-report level of impact to the overall business, business operations, operating hours, supply chain, workforce, and company finances.

[Click here for more information.](#)

BEST PRACTICE: CITY OF BOSTON SMALL BUSINESS SURVEY (BOSTON, MA)

City of Boston Mayor's Office of Economic Development released weekly surveys, since the start of the State's lockdown, to identify changing needs of the business community. Hosted on Google Forms, the survey includes questions that **assess changes to overall business, operating hours / store closures, workforce, business continuity plans, and company finances**. In addition, the survey also assessed level of participation in Federal and local grant programs.

[Click here for more information.](#)

Other Useful Data Sources

- **District Pedestrian Counts:** Daily / weekly change in overall foot traffic
- **State Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics:** Month-by-month change in overall unemployment rate and total population, labor force total population
- **Real Estate Industry publications:** Trends in leasing



A pedestrian and bike counter placed curbside to measure traffic and activity in a neighborhood in Copenhagen, Denmark.



Implementation

Access to Capital

LISC COVID-19 Resources and Rapid Relief and Resiliency Fund

In addition to organizing and hosting a comprehensive [list of funders](#) that are accepting applications from nonprofit organizations, businesses, and workers (by state), LISC has also launched the [LISC Rapid Relief and Resiliency Fund](#) to assemble and deploy resources to its local partners, small businesses, and residents hit hardest by COVID-19. The Fund will deliver operating capital, emergency subsidies and IT support, as well as technical assistance, to keep LISC partners and their communities strong and functioning through this unprecedented situation.

In addition to federally supported grants and loans, businesses will need to find other ways to access quick capital during a crisis. This may include traditional sources such as community banks, private investment, equity partnerships, and loans / lines of credit from friends and family. Regardless of the source of capital, businesses will require technical assistance to develop a disaster response business plan to use in soliciting new capital and to assure investors that the capital will be responsibly and wisely spent.

As such, your organization should reframe any existing business planning programs to reflect the immediate needs of local businesses during a crisis or, if your organization does not have the know-how, capacity and resources to provide technical assistance, work closely with established Small Business Development Centers, local anchor institutions, and business consultants in your district to provide free and confidential planning advice to business owners via printed guides or webinars.

BEST PRACTICE: DOWNTOWN DENVER PARTNERSHIP (DENVER, CO)

Downtown Denver Partnership worked with Kiva, a crowdsourced loan platform, and the creators of the Dining Bonds Initiative (a savings bond program that allows customers to purchase a “bond,” often a gift card / voucher, at a value rate to be redeemed for face value at a future date) to host an informational webinar on creative financing through crowdsourcing.

[Click here for more information.](#)

BEST PRACTICE: CHHAYA COVID-19 RELIEF FUND (QUEENS, NY)

Chhaya Community Development Corporation and grantees of the Commercial Corridor Challenge set up a crowdsourcing fund to help raise \$50,000 to provide direct cash assistance to community members struggling in the district. The organization selected to use the GiveLively platform to start the crowdfunding campaign, accepting a range of dollar amounts from a large variety of donors.

[Click here for more information.](#)

As intermediaries, your organization may want to consider establishing a district-wide crowdsourced fund to redistribute back to businesses in your area, setting up informational sessions to teach business owners how to leverage available crowdsourcing platforms, or setting up a collective promotional campaign toward helping raise awareness of the myriad crowdsourcing funds that have been set up by individual businesses.

Name of Platform	Description
	Unlike the other platforms, Kiva crowdsources 0% interest loans (in increments of \$25 or more) to small business owners who could not otherwise access traditional loans, which are contingent on preexisting capital. These loans will be repaid by the recipient and then used by lenders to fund new loans, donate or to withdraw.
	Smaller targets that may be easily met as the platform operates on an all-or-nothing model . However, if your project is successfully funded, Kickstarter collects a 5% fee and payment processing fees (between 3-5%).
	Unlike Kickstarter, Patronicity allows partial funding so that if the goal is not reached, funds can still be disbursed towards the project. Rolling funds distribution is allowed before the campaign ends. In addition to enabling crowdfunding, Patronicity provides program management and individual project coaching to each campaign in a given program. Fees have also been waived for non-matched crowdfunding campaigns that launch prior to May 15th.
	Most effective for short-term fundraising (1-2 months) as the platform operates on a subscription service at \$179 per month. Donors may also be given the choice of Equity (\$50k—\$10m funding goal) or Rewards (raise funds from the public by selling products, pre-orders, or merchandise & services).
	In addition to having a 0% platform fee and providing donor protection guaranteed, GoFundMe has also created a Small Business Relief Initiative to help small businesses that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and empower their communities to rally behind them. As part of the Small Business Relief Initiative, GoFundMe, Intuit QuickBooks, Yelp, GoDaddy, and Bill.com have each donated to the Small Business Relief Fund, which will issue \$500 matching grants to qualifying businesses that raise at least \$500 on GoFundMe.

BEST PRACTICE: LISC LA KIVA ACCELERATOR FUND (LOS ANGELES, CA)

The LISC LA Kiva Accelerator Fund is a \$150,000 fund supported by Farmers and Merchants Bank, City National Bank, and First Bank. The fund was designed to help keep local food businesses open during “Shelter in Place” orders in California, via a matching campaign and 0% interest loans. Borrowers can apply to be endorsed by one of 22 LISC LA Kiva Trustees to receive \$1 to \$1 matching funds. LISC Trustees will then provide businesses with the technical assistance and strategic planning they need to navigate the difficulties of owning and operating a small business under the new regulations imposed by the pandemic.

[Click here for more information.](#)

If your organization has experience in running loan or grant programs, and has procured additional funding toward disaster management, consider setting up an easy-to-navigate financing program to offer immediate help to businesses.

The grant or loan program should, first and foremost, serve to get capital quickly to businesses through a simple online / contact-free application and disbursement process. Terms and eligibility of the program should also encourage application by women and minority-owned businesses and complement those of other funding programs to ensure that capital is distributed equitably. Where possible, programs should prioritize spending on services provided by local businesses and organizations. While flow of capital is critical, technical assistance and support should also be made available to applicants to ensure that funds are quickly and effectively used to respond to the crisis. You should also consider ways to utilize your application forms to collect more data from your local businesses, including the amount of capital reserves they had going into the pandemic as well as whether they have already accessed other recovery funding from other sources.

BEST PRACTICE: ROCHESTER’S KEEP IT LOCAL, COVID-19 INNOVATORS GRANT PROGRAM (ROCHESTER, MN)

The City of Rochester provided grant funding to help Rochester-based small businesses and organizations that are helping each other respond and adapt to COVID-19. The program, complementary to funding provided by the SBA Emergency Loan Program and other State assistance programs, capped grant amounts at \$2,000. Funds were allowed to be used in contracting multiple service providers for a single project.

The program web page clearly delineates timeline of application reviews, evaluation criteria (Project Viability, Likely Long-Term Impacts of Project), and provides a list of service providers that applicants may use toward a funded project.

[Click here for more information.](#)



BEST PRACTICE: FORGIVABLE LOAN PROGRAM (MEMPHIS, TN)

The Downtown Memphis Commission provided forgivable loans of up to \$20,000 to assist existing downtown businesses impacted by COVID-19, particularly those that are in serious jeopardy of permanent closure. Maximum loan amounts were further tiered by average yearly gross sales of each business (for example, if an applicant's average yearly gross sales fall below \$250,000 then forgivable loans are capped at \$5,000). Across all applicants, loans will be forgiven if businesses stay open for two years after receiving the loan and may be used for operational expenses & rent, fixed assets, and debt restructuring.

The program is clear in prioritizing applicants that have operated a business in the Central Business Improvement District (at a ground floor location) for a minimum of 12 months preceding the application submittal date.





U.S. Bank Foundation-LISC Grant Programs

U.S. Bank Foundation committed \$500,000 to the LISC Small Business Relief fund to support relief efforts in Twin Cities, Chicago, Duluth, San Diego, and Phoenix. The funds will meet the immediate needs of local businesses, build the infrastructure needed to advance long-term recovery efforts, and ensure that our most affected neighborhoods receive help during this challenging time. In addition to providing grants to individual businesses, the funds will support place based non-profit partners who will focus on helping businesses tap into the resources they need so they can recover, keep employees, and bring jobs back after recovery. Additionally, the grant supported the creation of the LISC Commercial District Recovery Guide and a three part webinar series that will outline recovery strategies for business districts.

PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ESTABLISH ALTERNATIVE SALES REVENUES

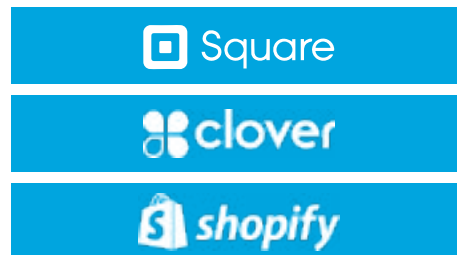
In the first few weeks of COVID, most retail transactions quickly shifted online or became contactless. Moving to e-commerce, however, is not easy and many businesses have no idea where to begin with selling products and services online. To narrow this gap in information and expertise, intermediaries should consider organizing webinars, in partnership with or with the resources provided by online and social media platforms, to educate business owners on how to sell online.

The type of e-commerce platform or tool that a business should adopt will vary depending on the business' existing capacity and resources, and staff expertise.

Name of Tool	Description
 <p>Online Marketplace</p>	<p>Most applicable to retailers that sell General Merchandise, Apparel & Furnishing goods and pre-packaged food. The platforms are best suited for retailers' first-time entry into e-commerce. Retailers can set up their own online store websites and use embedded tools such as inventory management and sales analysis.</p>
 <p>Social Media</p>	<p>Most applicable to retailers that sell General Merchandise, Apparel & Furnishing goods and pre-packaged food. Businesses will have to host products in a catalog with Shopify or BigCommerce platforms in order to be able to sell via Facebook or Instagram posts and stories.</p>
	<p>Applicable to restaurants. These platforms allow restaurants to offer online delivery without third party fees and are often already integrated with Point-of-Sale Systems such as Square or other delivery apps such as DoorDash and Postmates. Platforms charge a low monthly subscription fee and fixed flat rate fee for third party delivery is also available through the platform. By using this alternative, restaurants are able to maintain their own brand and customize user experience and track their own loyalty programs and customer rewards.</p>
	<p>Most suited to businesses with graphics and marketing capabilities. Web hosting sites that enable retailers to set up their own online store website and manage online business using functions provided for inventory management and sales analysis.</p>

Unfortunately, service businesses that are wholly reliant on in-person foot traffic are often significantly disrupted by a disaster event. Take for example a pet grooming business or a salon. For these types of businesses, it is important to consider supplementing cash flow with the sale of gift cards that can help ensure future store visits and sales. As intermediaries, you should support such efforts by pulling together a list of resources that may be distributed to help businesses in your district. In fact, many of the following platforms listed below have created individual 'How-To' guides that businesses can follow to set up gift card sales.

Useful resources for businesses using point of sale systems with in-house gift card programs:



Businesses that don't operate a point of sale system with a gift card program will need to consider other options such as:



BEST PRACTICE: SHOP LOCAL PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN (DOWNTOWN PITTSBURGH)

Beyond supporting the set-up of gift card services, Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership (PDP) has leveraged funding from local partners to help businesses reward customers that continue to spend money on local goods and services through purchase of gift cards. In doing so, PDP matched 25% of any gift card purchase amount up to \$100.

BEST PRACTICE: SUNNYSIDE SHINES VIRTUAL MARKET (QUEENS, NY)

In April 2020, Sunnyside Shines organized a virtual crafts market via Facebook and Instagram Live to enable customers to shop with local vendors selling handmade, artisanal products such as jewelry, scented soaps and candles, and personal care products. Each vendor was given an opportunity to present their favorite merchandise during the Live events. Transactions and product reservations were conducted at each vendors' own websites.

PROVIDING MARKETING SUPPORT

As more businesses in your district divert sales online or switch to omnichannel business models, it is important to communicate the changes to your customer base through periodic newsletters, social media posts, push notifications on your district app, and other existing communication channels. The key to being successful during this very difficult period is to remain top of mind through the authenticity of your content.

First and foremost, help businesses in your district heighten their visibility on Google. In many cases, customers may not know what businesses have remained open or how they can continue to patronize their favorite local businesses who may be selling on-line. Now, more than ever, maintaining updated information online is critical so make sure businesses claim their Google business listings so that they can continue to update and share their status. Here is [guidance from Google](#) on how to claim a business listing.

In addition, be sure to also track and publish changes in business operating hours and methods of sales and deliveries on your organization's web page. Use any of the previously mentioned communication and survey tools that you may have adopted to track these changes amongst business owners.

BEST PRACTICE: LITTLE TOKYO (LOS ANGELES, CA)

The district of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, CA relied heavily on crowdsourced information from neighbors and local business owners, and compiled on a cloud-based Google sheet, to track changes in store operating hours, modes of sale across a range of retail categories, including website links for online sales and gift cards.

[Click here for more information.](#)

BEST PRACTICE: DINING AT A DISTANCE (BUFFALO-NIAGARA, NY)

Visit Buffalo Niagara curated an online interactive restaurant guide with Dining At A Distance, a website established to aggregate restaurants and farms that are operational during the COVID-19 crisis. The website tracks changes in restaurant businesses and their operations – opening hours – and services – delivery/ take-out/curbside – with direct links to their web sites.

Other types of content you may want to post across your marketing channels should leverage the assets, personalities, and goodwill that made your district successful in the first place. As the situation changes, don't forget to work closely with business owners to determine what types of content they may willing to contribute and what might align closely with their products, services, and brands.



#LoveLT is a marketing campaign established by Little Tokyo Community Council to encourage community support for small businesses in the commercial district of Little Tokyo, Los Angeles. During COVID-19, the campaign, which is used across social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, focused its efforts on sharing information with customers regarding store operational changes and product promotions, and encouraging consumers to engage with individual businesses on their respective social media channels amidst store closures.

Different Types of Content to Market Your District

Demonstrations + How-To's By Local Businesses: Leverage your local businesses' expertise for anything from cocktail-making to book readings to create content for your district's social channels. While the content may serve to boost marketing for these businesses, it will also share helpful information and tips to improve people's lives.

Give Back to The Community: Highlighting the work that your local businesses are doing to support your community during the pandemic will be well received online. Community kitchens, Supporting Local Charities and People in Need, Legislation Efforts, etc. are all great content opportunities.

Reminder/'Throwback' Videos: Create a simple video walking through your district and let your stakeholders know that you are thinking about them and their families and can't wait for them to return. This is a great, straightforward strategy for reengaging with your loyal customers and visitors.

Customer Polling + Opinion: Don't assume that every guest is ready for the same collective experience, use online polling and guest feedback to float changes in your district before going back to business-as-usual. Use real time feedback to evolve your offerings.

Special Events: Create a digital happy hour, provide live-streamed entertainment or even broadcast the sunset from your districts. These are all great content for your social channels and serve as reminders to your customers and visitors of what they love about your district in the first place.

BEST PRACTICE: DURHAM FROM THE HEART (DURHAM, NC)

Downtown Durham Inc. established two virtual program series that bring the district's beloved art, entertainment, and wellness experiences to its customers at home. The series, named Durham from the Heart and #ddiPublicSpaceProject were posted publicly on Instagram and Facebook weekly and included live performances by Durham musicians, dance sessions by local trainers, and painting classes by local artists.

SUPPORTING COMMERCIAL TENANTS SEEKING RENT RELIEF

Many landlords may be willing to forego rent during a crisis, often in exchange for nothing more than an equal extension added on to the back end of the lease. The prevailing attitude has been that it is better to have a paying commercial tenant for the long term rather than let a disaster event put the venue out of business completely.

From a leasing perspective, real estate advisors are finding that it can take months to re-lease a space. In addition, as retail spending and demand has also slowed, it may take longer to lease than it did just a few weeks ago. Furthermore, landlords may have to give tenant improvement allowances, free rent and pay commissions on a new lease. Thus, it is often the best long-term solution for all parties involved to come to terms on some form of rent relief. While every landlord is different, it is important for tenants to clearly communicate with landlords in the district throughout a crisis.

Toward this, intermediaries should help prepare boilerplate letters that tenants, especially ones whose first language may not be English, may use in communication and negotiation with landlords.

As intermediaries, you may also consider playing a role in advocacy and education around issues of rent relief and rent deferment. Understandably, some of your key stakeholders may be landlords themselves so it is important to tread the matter carefully and connect tenants instead with the right resources and partners during the crisis period, including legal counsel.

BEST PRACTICE: TEMPLATE OUTREACH LETTER TO LANDLORD

SOURCE: ICSC 2020

Tenant's Guide to Rent Relief

Exhibit "A"

Template – Landlord Letters

(Date)

VIA EMAIL ATTACHMENT ONLY

Landlord

Landlord Address

Re: Coronavirus - Lease for (DBA name or Tenant Name) located at (address)

Dear [Landlord],

I'm writing because I need to discuss the impact that the national coronavirus crisis is having on my business at your earliest opportunity.

As you know, many states, [including xxxx,] are now requiring certain businesses to close on an indefinite basis. There is talk that a nationwide shut-down of basically all non-essential businesses may be required in order to slow the spread of the virus as much as possible. It is not known how long these partial or full shutdowns may last.

Consumers are paying attention and staying home for work, school, and meals. These changes had already significantly impacted our revenue and our ability to retain good workers even prior to the mandated closures. There is now essentially no revenue coming into the store(s).

I value our relationship and have been a reliable tenant. These are extraordinary times, but we know there is an end to this. In the meantime, we're all being asked to do what we can to protect the health, safety and welfare of our communities. I believe it is in both of our interests to work together in good faith and negotiate a reduction or abatement of rent for this crisis period. I have some ideas that I would like to share with you and am hopeful we can work together.

This is an urgent request. Please reach out to me at (phone) or (email) and let's discuss.

Sincerely,

(Tenant)

BEST PRACTICE: COVID-19 PRO BONO COLLABORATIVE (BRONX, NEW YORK)

The Jerome Gun Hill BID, in partnership with private law firms, local institutions, and Start Small Think Big, a business development non-profit organization, formed a volunteer collective to provide pro-bono emergency response legal services to help small business owners survive COVID-19. Remote legal and financial clinics and one-on-one sessions were conducted to provide support on applications to the COVID-19 stimulus package and other related legal issues.

MAINTAINING AND SECURING YOUR DISTRICT

While it is important for individual businesses to take their own measures to clean, sanitize and maintain storefronts, at the district level, your organizations' cleaning and beautification teams should step up efforts to ensure robust sanitation of public surfaces and streets. Despite a fall in foot traffic during any crisis, this effort is critical to setting the stage for local businesses to easily return to operations later and for the eventual 're-opening' of the district. In addition to following public health guidance on cleaning and disinfecting public spaces and sidewalks, intermediaries should also guide individual businesses in their sanitation efforts by preparing customizable posters and pamphlets that can be used in educating business employees on new sanitation and safety standards.

Often, crises and disaster events result in businesses boarding up their storefronts to protect them against perceived uptick in crime and to prevent loss of merchandise. In response, intermediaries should leverage relationships with local artists to use boarded up storefronts as a canvas for murals and public art.

Beyond soap and water strategies, your organization may also need to take additional measures to secure the district through regular safety patrols and, where needed, partner with homeless services to support vulnerable populations in your district during the crisis.

BEST PRACTICE: ARTIST-GROWN MURAL

Local artist, Sara Erenthal, created storefront window art for vacant ground floor retail spaces in Flatbush, Brooklyn that closed as a result of COVID. The murals were completed with nominal donations.

Best Practice: MEATPACKING DISTRICT (NEW YORK, NY)

The Meatpacking District commissioned local New York-based artists to paint murals on all stores in the district that were boarded up during COVID-19. Using the BID's assessment funds, selected artists were paid nominal fees to quickly turn over murals within 24-48 hours in quick response to the extreme actions taken by individual businesses.

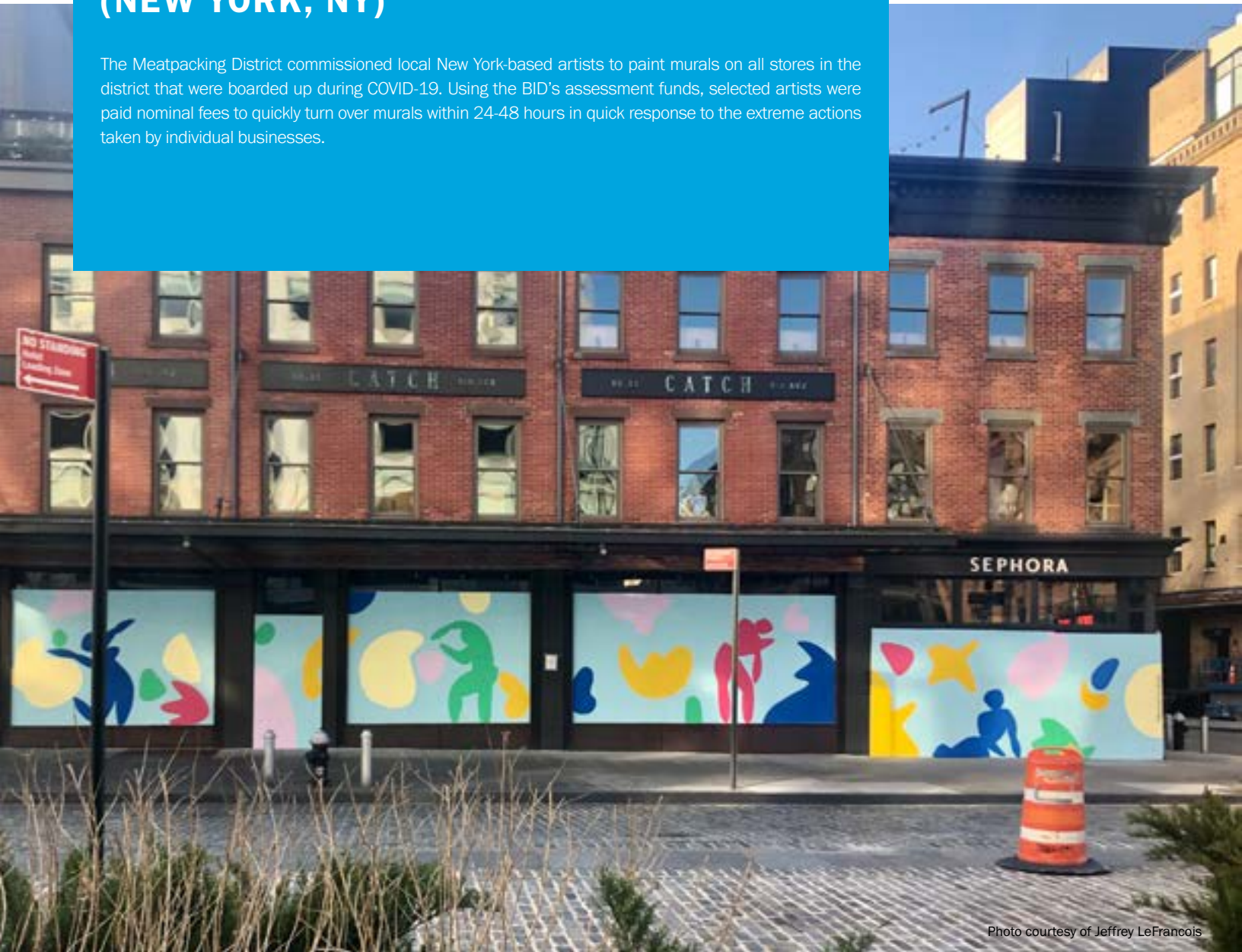


Photo courtesy of Jeffrey LeFrancois



Phase 2

Recovery

PHASE 2

Recovery

Following the initial response, commercial district leaders will need to pivot and plan strategically to ensure long-term restoration and resiliency of businesses. Recovery focuses on the return of essential government and commercial services, critical infrastructure, individuals and families to a functional state. The following represents a comprehensive set of tools and actions that may be undertaken as a district emerges out of a disaster or crisis.

Often this process begins with ensuring efforts are made to communicate the economic impact of the crisis on the local business community and to make the case for federal support, grant funding, and philanthropic dollars – either as a direct recipient (though federal funding often comes with compliance requirements that preclude low-capacity organizations) or through secondary local partners. Following which, intermediaries will need to communicate that their districts are once again ‘Open for Business’ and in need of significant help and resources.

OUTREACH



Work with local media outlets to share your district’s story



Assign / hire a disaster recovery coordinator



Form or participate in a district-wide recovery team



Rebuild with local partners and anchor institutions



Fundraising for Recovery

- ☐ Set up a donation page on your website
- ☐ Organize a virtual fundraising gala event or concert series
- ☐ Seek grants or donations from philanthropic foundations
- ☐ Prepare a pitch presentation to make the case for funding
- ☐ Apply to, or support others apply for, Federal grant and loan programs

DATA COLLECTION



Conduct comprehensive assessment of damage / impact to the district to make the case for funding

IMPLEMENTATION



Increase and redirect resources to sanitation and security efforts in your district

- ☐ Increase daily sanitation efforts at high-traffic areas
- ☐ Heighten public safety patrol efforts and coordinate closely with local police to ensure social distancing guidelines are followed
- ☐ Create social distancing wayfinding and signage
- ☐ Install more trash and recycling stations along sidewalks/ at public spaces



Adapt the public realm for social distancing

- ☐ Demarcate curbside pick-up/ delivery parking zones
- ☐ Expand public sidewalks and areas for pedestrian circulation



Provide guidance to businesses on new workplace safety guidelines and ways to adapt commercial space for social distancing

- ☐ Provide financial support and technical assistance for tenant improvements
- ☐ Ease regulatory framework for outdoor dining



Fill ground-floor commercial vacancies

- ☐ Conduct a market assessment to determine new latent demand for various use groups
- ☐ Create a post-COVID strategic action plan to guide tenant attraction/ retention efforts





Outreach

WORK WITH THE MEDIA

As your district emerges from the crisis, it is important to leverage any existing relationships with local media outlets and to build new ones to get the word out about the needs your district may have to fully reopen and to return to some sense of normalcy. Media has the power to form and alter opinions. As such, the kinds of stories that appear in the media – whether on television, radio, newspapers, magazines, or social media outlets – about your district will play a critical role in regaining consumer confidence in your district and to garner support that you may need towards full recovery.

In telling your district's story with local media, focus on creating visually compelling narratives. Reporters and journalists want to see and feel the changes that are taking place in your district through photographs, videos, infographics, and even sound bites. This will be especially important when they themselves may still be unable to visit your district due to social distancing measures.

As previously mentioned, the types of content you may want to work on publishing with local media outlets should leverage the assets, personalities, and goodwill that has made your district resilient through the crisis. Be ready to help keep attention on the immediate and long-term needs of your district and be prepared to tell that through personal stories and pay homage to milestone events.

Finally, be sure to link any published content to your organization's existing social media outlets to keep your most loyal customers and stakeholders updated on recovery progress and to sustain an ongoing conversation. Consider developing a hashtag (i.e. #YourDistrictRecovery #YourDistrictRebuild) to track and crowdsource other personal stories in your district or to kickstart a popular media campaign for recovery.

BEST PRACTICE: LISC COVID-19 RECOVERY FUND & PAY IT FORWARD LIVE (NATIONAL)

LISC is offering critical relief and resiliency building support to small businesses who don't have access to flexible, affordable capital in historically under-served places like Downtown Buffalo. As part of this initiative, Verizon is highlighting and bolstering efforts through their inaugural "Pay It Forward Live" online concert series. During each concert, the local community is encouraged to tweet the name of their favorite small business with the hashtag #PayItForwardLIVE. Each tweet with that hashtag will bring \$10 toward the Verizon Small Business Recovery Fund, which will provide grants to small businesses during this time. Verizon has committed to donating up to \$2.5 million to the fund, based on the number of #PayItForwardLIVE tweets.

MARKET THE RE-OPENING OF THE DISTRICT

Ramp up communication efforts around new procedures and changing operations and policies. Once a back-to-business date has been ordered by your State / municipality, create new content with a 'Coming Soon' message to let visitors know when your district will be back in business. Be sure to coordinate closely with local business owners to ensure accuracy of your content and messaging.

Among key messages that your organization will need to market at a district-level include:

- *Inform customers of all of the measures the district and its individual businesses are taking to stay safe*
- *Remind customers that responsible dining in the district is the new normal. Maintain a positive stance and actively communicate guidelines for groups and occupancy and encourage restaurants to post these guidelines in common areas within each business.*

At individual business-level, encourage your district stakeholders to do the following:

- *Clearly communicate hours, new store policies, and operational changes*
- *Communicate new and unique offerings, creative approaches to a new normal and steps taken to provide added social connection via digital platforms*

BEST PRACTICE: EL CAJON BOULEVARD BOULEVARD (SAN DIEGO, CA)

El Cajon Business Improvement Association worked closely with a local sign maker to create new storefront signs that indicate to local customers which businesses along the corridor are open and available for take-out and delivery. Banners were provided to merchants at no cost.

ASSIGN A RECOVERY COORDINATOR AND FORM/ PARTICIPATE IN A DISTRICT-WIDE RECOVERY TEAM

Before your organization takes steps toward disbursing funds and resources for recovery, consider a) assigning/ hiring a disaster recovery coordinator and b) assembling a committee that is designated and empowered to serve as leaders of the recovery efforts in your district.

If your district is large enough that it requires a dedicated manager for recovery, the coordinator position should be structured as a part-time / full time paid position for managing recovery efforts and initiatives across the district, especially in monitoring efficacy and impacts of programs and reporting for any federal funding requirements. The individual filling this role should have experience convening and interacting with a range of cross-sector partners, demonstrate good problem-solving skills, and be ready to multi-task. This role may be funded by philanthropic or federal funds from US Economic Development Administration, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and US Department of Labor.

The recovery team, on the other hand, should serve an advisory role to provide oversight to the district's recovery coordinator. The team should be well-represented by a cross-sector of local stakeholders including elected officials, city agencies / partners, social service organizations, community development financial institutions and banks, anchor institutions, and key property and business owners.

Initially, you will need to establish a platform for communication among members of the recovery team, determine regular intervals for convenings and, most importantly, set priorities for the district before deciding on types of funding to pursue.

COVID-19 Municipal Resource Guide

Bloomberg Philanthropies prepared a guide for The United States Conference of Mayors which outlines actions that cities need to take to maintain fiscal order and make the most of federal dollars during COVID-19. The [resource](#) includes a section on assembling a recovery team as well as an oversight checklist that teams should refer to control procurement procedures and establish audit protocols.

LISC Toolkit for Local Governments

LISC has launched a toolkit for local governments as they work towards revitalizing business ecosystems in unprecedented times. The [toolkit](#) includes seven areas of recommendation that governments should focus on to support their small business communities. Use this resource as a guide in your recovery efforts with your local government.

REBUILD WITH LOCAL PARTNERS AND ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

There is often strength in numbers. As your district rebuilds, consider collaborating with other trusted partners who are located in or align with your district to pool together resources to benefit the district as a whole. Following other disaster events in the past, key partners in and outside of the public sector, including anchor institutions (for example, hospitals, colleges, museums, conservancies), major employers, and philanthropic organizations have stepped forward to provide a range of support towards rebuilding of local economies.

Anchor Institutions' Contributions to Building Inclusive Small Business Ecosystems

LISC and Forward Cities, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, prepared a [report](#) that explores how different types of anchor institutions are leveraging their unique assets and place in their communities to foster an environment in which small businesses can grow and thrive. The report includes several case studies and a high-level roadmap that anchor institutions can follow to deepen their contributions to their local small business ecosystems and community stakeholders.

The kinds of support they might be able to provide include:

- *Financial (for example, gifts, grants, or loans)*
- *Technical Support/ Services (for example, business development and training, community healthcare services, legal and accounting advice, data collection)*
- *Capital (for example, donation of personal protective equipment and sanitation equipment)*



FUNDRAISING

To bridge the gap in funding that occurs if Federal funds are not distributed to place-based organizations like yours, consider near-term fundraising through private gifts, donation campaigns, or events. Recovery efforts, as described in the Implementation Section below, are far-ranging and can be costly. You will likely need to supplement grants and loans with alternative sources of revenue. If your district is large and already relies on more than special tax assessments and grants, this strategy should not be unfamiliar.

Set Up a Donation Page: To collect donations from the public, consider setting up a donation page on your website and reward / incentivize donors with simple gifts that reflect your district brand and that are tiered by amount of donation. For example, start with a simple tote bag for nominal donations of up to \$25-\$50 and reward donors with a basket of sponsored goods from various retailers in your district for donations exceeding \$1,000.

BEST PRACTICE: MYRTLE AVE BROOKLYN PARTNERSHIP (BROOKLYN, NY)

Myrtle Avenue Brooklyn Partnership expanded its options for public donations on its website to include a Neighborhood COVID-19 Response Fund. Tote bags branded with adjacent neighborhood names 'Clinton Hill', 'Fort Greene', 'Myrtle Avenue' and printed books with collections of local stories designed by students at local arts college, Pratt Institute, are among rewards that the BID is distributing to donors based on various donation amounts.

Organize a Virtual Fundraising Gala: If your organization has internal event planning expertise or local partners who are ready to support your efforts, consider organizing a virtual fundraising gala event or concert series that is safe and accessible to attend. With Facebook and YouTube Live, you have the ability to broadcast your event to registered attendees. Admission to the event should be charged and all proceeds from ticket sales should go toward funding your recovery efforts. This endeavor will require significant time and resources to successfully execute. Furthermore, a strong program for your event/ concert with popular performers should be arranged and well-promoted to attract ticket buyers. Lean heavily on brand sponsorships and corporate donations to keep costs low.

Reach out to Philanthropic Organizations: Beyond public donations, your organization should also leverage any existing relationships with philanthropic foundations to pursue funding opportunities (whether through grants or gifts) for recovery efforts.

Prepare a Pitch Deck: Unless the foundation has previously invested in your district or has a strong understanding of your district's role and immediate needs, you will need to be armed with up-to-date data and information to make a pitch presentation. The following section details the kinds of data you should be collecting to measure impacts that your district has sustained and to make the case to potential funders.



Data Collection

MAKE THE CASE FOR FUNDING

As you begin your outreach to potential funders and investors, and start (or support others) applying for federally supported recovery grants and loans, you will need to build a market-supported case and establish priorities and guiding principles for using the funds. This means that, in addition to continually measuring changes in the business environment and consumer market through surveys (as laid out in Phase 1: Response), your organization will need to be prepared to perform a comprehensive damage assessment after the pandemic. Similar to data collection in the Response Phase, if your organization is unable to conduct this assessment alone, build partnerships with other resourceful organizations (Chambers of Commerce, Small Business Development Centers, Merchants Associations) that may already have assessment tools and templates you can use, or seek the help of consultants. Any assessment you conduct should not duplicate but instead supplement efforts by other local organizations. By partnering and using another more established organization's templates and tools, you will be able to streamline data collection and better make direct comparisons between different neighborhoods and districts that have used the same templates.



The following is a selection of key data points that you will need to collect to conduct a comprehensive district assessment. For a full list, refer to LISC resource, ‘Preparing a Commercial District Diagnostic’.

Business Environment

Indicator	Source
# of closed businesses	Field Observation
Reasons for Business Closure	Merchant Survey
# of Bankruptcy Filings	US Courts
Storefront Vacancies	Field Observation
Tax Revenue Loss (e.g. sales, property, employment)	State Department of Taxation and Finance
Job Loss	State Department of Labor, Merchant Survey
Business Relocation	Merchant Survey

Physical Environment

Indicator	Source
Public Infrastructure (e.g. graffiti and vandalism, trash)	Field Observation, BID Clean and Safety team reports
Property (e.g. graffiti and vandalism)	Field Observation, Property Owner Interview
Public Transit Ridership	Local Transit Authority

Market Data

Indicator	Source
Self-reported customer spending	Customer Survey, Merchant Survey
Customer Sentiment	Customer Survey

Adaptive Capacity (i.e. Regulatory Framework, Resources, and Organization Capacity)

Indicator	Source
Share of resources dedicated to response and recovery efforts	BID Financial Report
Regulatory and policy changes	Local department of city planning, municipal ordinances, and zoning codes

EDA CARES Act Recovery Assistance

The CARES Act Recovery Assistance is an agency effort to assist communities impacted by COVID-19 by providing a wide range of financial assistance that may be used toward economic recovery planning, preparing technical strategies to address economic dislocations, preparing and updating resiliency plans and implementing entrepreneurial support programs, among other eligible uses. The CARES Act provided EDA with \$1.5 Billion to remain available until September 30, 2022 and as part of its solicitation of applications, EDA will evaluate the extent to which a proposed project responds to needs caused by COVID-19. A comprehensive assessment of damage in your district is therefore critical to building the case to EDA and other funders as they begin to redirect resources to places most in need.



Implementation

Even as many customers may crave social connection and a return to normalcy, for a period of time following any crisis, spending and demand will likely be lower than under normal circumstances. A recent study which surveyed 2,200 US Adults in April 2020 found that 20% of consumers said they wouldn't feel comfortable going out to eat at a restaurant or cafe for more than six months, 19% said they would feel comfortable in the next three months, and only 6% said they would in the next month³. As such, it is important for your district to quickly adapt and create safe public and commercial spaces to begin reconvening in and to always communicate collective preparedness.

SETTING THE STAGE

Your district will need to elevate sanitation and security efforts across your public realm. Dedicating more resources and manpower to this effort will be critical in building back customer confidence. Before the pandemic, a twice-a-day cleaning schedule of public spaces and plazas in your district may have sufficed, however, customers today will want to see more cleaning efforts being carried out, especially in high touch areas where furniture and seating is provided. If your organization has a safety brigade, increase their patrol efforts and coordinate closely with local police to increase security personnel presence in high-trafficked areas. Their role when your district re-opens should pivot to ensure visitors are following social distancing protocols and mitigating anyone creating an unsafe experience.

"When Consumers Say They'll Feel OK About Dining Out and Other Activities". Accessed on April 17, 2020: <https://morningconsult.com/2020/04/10/consumer-expectations-normal-activities-comfortable/>

To complement heightened efforts by your staff to clean public areas, encourage visitors to the district to also clean up after themselves by placing signage to that effect, as well as more trash and recycling stations along sidewalks and in public spaces. This will lessen the chance of infection between your cleaning staff and visitors.

In addition to cleaning, set the stage in your public realm for visitors to maintain the recommended 6' distance between individuals and groups. Use smart social distancing wayfinding and signage to encourage responsible behavior among district visitors when they return and leverage your brand identity when creating the wayfinding and signage. Consider the following low-cost and tactical options to help customers acclimate to the districts' response to the "new normal":

Floor Stencils/ Chalk Spray Paint: Help users of public space feel more comfortable by using floor stencils and removable chalk spray paint to paint circles on the ground (on sidewalks or plazas) to allow visitors to choose their spot at a safe distance from other patrons. Help businesses similarly establish these kinds of markings in and around their businesses.

Social Distancing Flags: For lawns and grassy areas, plant flags in the ground to stake out space on the lawn.



ADAPTING THE PUBLIC REALM

If customers in your district primarily arrive by car, or if your district restaurants continue to rely heavily on delivery drivers, consider designating delivery / pick-up zones where food or groceries can be brought to parked vehicles. Work closely with the Department of Transportation to audit on-street parking spaces in the district and select suitable streets and parking areas to demarcate for delivery pickup so that drivers have clear direction about where they can or cannot wait while picking up food. Think about high traffic streets and areas where neighborhood goods and services are co-located, including near pharmacies and grocery stores, and consider placement accordingly. To demarcate these zones clearly, design and install monument, directional and parking stall identification signs.

BEST PRACTICE: BELLEVUE CURBSIDE FOOD PICKUP ZONES

The City of Bellevue (Washington) implemented four temporary parking zones in the district of Old Bellevue and on 108th Ave NE that were designed to help restaurants and their customers during COVID-19. New signs placed in front of dining establishments allowed customers to park for three minutes while they pick up orders to-go. These zones may be requested by Bellevue restaurant owners or managers via the Transportation Department.

[Click here for more information.](#)

If your district experiences a high amount of daily pedestrian traffic, or if your district does not have wide enough sidewalks for pedestrians to stay 6' apart, you will want to get creative about giving pedestrians more space to enable social distancing. To alleviate this condition and create a safe pedestrian experience post COVID 19, consider the following tactics that expand spaces for pedestrian circulation:

- **One-way sidewalks:** Institute single direction flow of pedestrians on each side of a street. This lowers the count of pedestrians on the sidewalk at any given point. Friendly enforcement will be required to ensure the success of this strategy as humans typically choose the most convenient pathways to their destinations.
- **Reclaim parking spaces:** Work closely with the Department of Transportation to audit on-street parking spaces in the district and select suitable ones to reclaim as extended sidewalks. These extended sidewalks will enable lines to form outside retail stores and/or accommodate outdoor restaurant seating thereby increasing their occupancy within safe distance guidelines. Reclaimed parking spaces may also change by times of day/ days of week, depending on its co-location with different retail tenants. For example, parking spaces near restaurant clusters in your district should be used as extended sidewalks on weekends (Fridays-Sunday).



On-street parking as expanded sidewalks in London, UK.

PROVIDING GUIDANCE ON WORKPLACE SAFETY

Within individual storefronts, businesses in your district will need to adopt additional measures to protect the health and safety of both their employees and customers. As intermediaries, take the lead by educating business owners on any new guidelines established by official sources such as the FDA, CDC or the Department of Health through distribution of printed and digital pamphlets. Among new measures that must be taken, face masks will be required for retail employees, food servers, and customers, maintaining at least 6 feet of distance between employees and customers, and placing alcohol-based hand sanitizers near the cash registers to encourage hand hygiene.

For some tenants, however, the biggest barrier to implementing new workplace safety guidelines will be procuring Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for employees. If your district is home to manufacturers, distilleries and craftsman, work closely with these stakeholders to pivot their production lines to produce PPE (i.e. masks, shields, hand sanitizer, disposable nitrile gloves, etc.) for other retail and restaurant tenants in the district. Incentivize this pivot in manufacturing by purchasing goods in bulk – either locally or from other sources - on behalf of district tenants to redistribute on an as-needed basis.

Sample Guides for Workplace Safety:

FDA

CDC

PROVIDING GUIDANCE ON DOING BUSINESS

Similar to setting the stage in the public realm, individual businesses will also need to adapt their commercial spaces. With many uninfected people re-entering the market, there will likely be a real psychological (and clinical) impetus to continue with social distancing best practices. As intermediaries, take the lead by educating business owners on best practices through distribution of original guidebooks or trade industry resources in various languages. If your district is home to immigrant-owned businesses, it is especially important to also provide one-on-one technical assistance in preferred languages to ensure equitable distribution of information.

Best practices to include in your guides and resources:

- **Restaurants:** Re-arrange and remove tables to ensure 6' separation between all table groups, provide clear and ample circulation space for servers and staff, open adjustable windows to improve air flow, install free-standing no-touch hand sanitizer stations for guests and staff, install self-bussing stations
- **Retail stores:** Institute one-way aisles, introduce store entry reservation / appointment processes, limit customers in stores

Streetsense Restaurant Relaunch Toolkit

Streetsense Restaurant Relaunch Toolkit details specific business operations strategies for restaurant and bar owners to undertake in the response and recovery phase.

SUPPORT TENANT IMPROVEMENTS THAT REINFORCE SOCIAL DISTANCING

In addition to preparing for the lower store traffic and seat counts, tenants may need to make more permanent changes to their commercial spaces to accommodate health and sanitation concerns as well as potential long-term shifts in customer preferences. To support these vital changes, your organization should provide financial and technical resources to retail stores and restaurants in your district through grant or loan programs. In fact, if your district already has a Tenant Improvement or Storefront Improvement Program in place, restructure it to allow improvements that align with new health and workplace safety codes, social distancing measures, and other regulations that arise as a result of the crisis.

Types of Improvements to Fund

- Building out / designing new storage space
- Installation of sneeze guard
- Bathroom improvements and installation of touchless bathroom fixtures
- Installation of automatic doors
- Design and installation of on-site order pick up shelving station
- Replacing storefront with take-out windows



As with all effective tenant or storefront improvement grant and loan programs, your organization will need to build into the program a technical assistance component that partners closely with professional and licensed consultants who can provide expertise in interior design, planning, and architecture. Other things to consider in designing the program include:

- Applicant eligibility — property owner, tenants;
- Priority businesses (based on magnitude of COVID-19 impacts on business sales)
- Eligible improvements — structural, utility, and code compliance work, and equipment installation;
 - Building out / designing new storage space
 - Installation of sneeze guard
 - Bathroom improvements and installation of touchless bathroom fixtures
 - Installation of automatic doors
 - Design and installation of on-site order pick up shelving station
 - Replacing storefront with take-out windows
- Funding amount and structure — loan, forgivable loan, reimbursable grant, matching grant



Although restaurants will need to reduce seat counts indoors, there may be an opportunity to make up for that loss outside the four walls of the business. To enable outdoor restaurant seating, your district should work closely with respective city agencies to ease permitting processes and fees during the recovery phase. Common issues that small businesses face with such municipality permit programs include lack of understanding of local zoning code, complex application procedures, and high permit application fees.

As such, to help address some of these challenges, your organization should analyze all underlying codes and ordinances that impact feasibility of outdoor restaurant seating to create a map visualizing all streets / areas in your district that are eligible for permits. This map should be accompanied by:

- Template construction drawings and seating arrangements (and other required technical documentation) that applicants can adapt and use for various locations across your district (depending on sidewalk widths)
- A step-by-step guide for permit applications
- Translated guides and application materials

Once a permit has been issued, however, procuring additional tables and chairs may still be difficult for smaller businesses so consider issuing grants to successful applicants to purchase outdoor furniture from pre-approved list of vendors / retailers in your district — closing the loop on the local economy.

If restaurants are already located adjacent to plazas that are managed by your organization, or by a partner agency such as the Public Works Department or Department of Transportation, work to assign dedicated outdoor tables and chairs in these public spaces to nearby restaurants so they can expand capacity for customers. Simple stickers / decals with store logos may be used to assign seating to each adjacent restaurant.

FILLING VACANCIES

The reality is that it won't be business-as-usual for a long time following the crisis and not all tenants are going to return to your district in the same ways, if at all. Just as recessions weed out waning business models, the urgent and rapid shift to e-commerce and home deliveries and virtual social scenes during COVID-19 will change human habits and the structure of society to be even more digital than they were before the crisis. As such, your organization will need to plan ahead to allocate resources toward strategic tenant attraction and retention that is informed by a strong understanding of the changes occurring across industries and markets.

If your organization has a robust market research and analysis team, get to work on quantifying changes across retail, restaurant, office, and housing in your district and the regional market. Otherwise, consider enlisting the support of a market research consultant to lead this work toward forming a strategic action plan for your organization. This plan will help guide decisions about the kinds of tenants you retain or pursue — retail, restaurant, office, housing — based on how much latent demand there is, and the regulatory and policy strategies you will have to undertake with City partners to realize that plan following the pandemic.



NEXT STEPS

LISC RAPID RELIEF AND RESILIENCY FUND

The LISC Rapid Relief and Resiliency Fund was launched to assemble and deploy resources to its local partners, small businesses, and residents hit hardest by COVID-19. The Fund will deliver operating capital, emergency subsidies and IT support, as well as technical assistance, to keep LISC partners and their communities strong and functioning through this unprecedented situation.

LISC

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