

HELPFUL TIPS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS

As small businesses begin to reopen to the public across the nation, they will not only need to adhere to local and state guidelines for reopening, but also adjust basic operations to address changes in consumer psyche that may shift shopping habits and perceptions of safe shopping. The following is a set of tips and resources for Main Street programs and other community leaders who will serve as an important source of information for small businesses seeking guidance and clarity during a reopening period.



1. Understand local, state, and federal guidelines for reopening. While there will be much consistency between states, we fully anticipate each state may have particular nuances that will need to be communicated to your small businesses. Read through your state and local reopening guidelines as they are released. [Here is an example](#) from Sandy Springs, Ga.

2. Survey your residents about their shopping preferences. While your state may have “reopened,” your consumers’ response is a big unknown at this time. Will they shop the same way? Have they become dependent upon delivery and pick-up, and thus those access alternatives should remain as part of business operations? How will they feel about shopping in close proximity to other shoppers? What social distancing protocols should you put in place as you reopen?

3. Engage with local public health officials on guidance they could provide to small business owners. While it is unlikely the CDC and/or OSHA will develop a national “safe business certification,” you may consider working with local and state officials to develop a set of recommendations in addition to state guidelines.

Other ways to engage with your public health officials

include asking them to host a webinar reviewing the state guidelines with a Q&A session; having them review any additional recommendations you are encouraging your small business owners to consider; or offering them a temporary or full-time board seat to provide guidance and support to your board of directors.

4. Adjust community events as needed to ensure community health. Special events are also an important form of social engagement, but should be carefully considered given recommended large group gather guidelines and any local consumer safety concerns. Activities that can be managed by closing streets or leveraging park spaces, riverfronts, etc. with egress/ingress locations to control for density, may be needed in early recovery stages to effectively position districts as safe gathering places. As you analyze whether to cancel or continue programming, it is important to consult your local officials, work with your boards, and follow local and state guidelines. At first, virtual events, or even social media campaigns focused on fostering trust and safe shopping may be better options.

Special events are also an important form of social engagement. For example, to meet consumer demand for social engagement safely, some cities are closing down downtown streets on Sundays to allow

for safe walking, running, and biking. Places like Duluth, Minn., have used this strategy to [give residents safe recreation options](#), while featuring downtown as the community’s focal point.

5. Develop a recovery plan as an overlay to your current work plan. While you may be “reopened,” returning to normalcy will remain a challenge in both the short- and mid-term. As such, reliance on activities that were part of your plan in January will need to be reconsidered. As an example, data from [The Impact of COVID-19 on Small Businesses Survey](#) demonstrated that two-thirds of small business respondents did not have an active e-commerce presence. Rather than focus on hosting a large special event, perhaps shift resources and capacity to Economic Vitality assistance in developing a downtown e-commerce platform. You could also launch trainings by area e-commerce and social media marketing specialists or connect small businesses to needed resource providers and other tools.

Any recovery plan should be informed by first-hand, primary inputs:

- a. National trends that may impact your downtown. (Eg. Levels of remote work; new e-commerce shopping habits; or impact of public space for recreation.)

- b. Consumer preferences and safety concerns through a resident survey
- c. Local and state guidelines that provide guidance on reopening
- d. Discussions with your local business owners. What questions do they have? What assistance is needed in recovery?
- e. Your existing Transformation Strategies

6. Formalize any helpful tips, recommendations, etc. into a reopening guide or kit that can be shared with your small business owners. Downtown Lansing, Inc., has developed a [“Building Customer Trust Kit”](#) that highlights safety, selling, and promotional tips for different business segments, like restaurants, service operations, retailers, and civic and arts organizations.

7. Finally, be prepared to frame expectations to consumers and key stakeholders. Shopping experiences will be different in the near-term. There may be queuing to get into stores, limitations on occupancy in restaurants, new technology glitches with touchless payments, and business owners who elect to stay closed for personal and consumer safety concerns.

