

DOWNTOWN & COMMUNITY LEADERS TIPS & RESOURCES

TO SUPPORT THE LOCAL ECONOMY

#SupportLocalSafely | #NCDowntownStrong | #NCSmallBizStrong

Note to Users: The references to companies mentioned herein are not intended as endorsements of services by the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center. However, now, more than ever, is the time to share best practices and borrow from one another to provide resources for our communities.

"Amidst this uncertainty, however, one thing is clear: Main Street organizations have an essential role to play in supporting businesses during this difficult period, and our Main Street leaders will be even more important when fears about the virus subside and we are actively supporting businesses and communities in the recovery process."

~ Patrice Frey, President and CEO of the National Main Street Center



Tips on What You Can Do to Help Small Businesses

Communicate Health & Safety:

- Make sure that businesses are following the [NC Department of Health and Human Services guidelines](#).
- Make sure that you and your businesses are following the [Governor's Executive Orders](#).

Provide Leadership:

- Be a leader in the community and set the example for supporting small businesses.
- Share resources and financial opportunities with your businesses.
 - Encourage businesses to call **Business Link North Carolina (BLNC)** at 800.228.8443. BLNC staff are available Monday through Friday, 8:30 am – 4:00 pm. Se Habla Español. There are Spanish-speaking counselors.
 - Call volume in BLNC is expected to be high, and callers may need to leave a message and await a returned call. Please be patient.
 - BLNC counselors will gather basic information from callers and refer the case to the most appropriate resource – small business experts with the either the Small Business Technology Development Center (SBTDC) or the state's Small Business Center Network (SBCN) -- for assistance.
 - SBTDC and SBCN small business counselors will assess needs – working, for example, to assist with the preparation of any U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loan application.

- Obtain a working knowledge of **Unemployment Insurance System** changes and direct businesses to the following resources:
 - The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) at:
<https://des.nc.gov/need-help/covid-19-information>
 - Website is www.des.nc.gov and the call center is 888-737-0259.
- Direct businesses to **Federal Disaster Loans**

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is known for its flexible and useful lending programs - especially in times of crisis. In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, SBA has redoubled efforts to administer its [Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program](#). Working with state governors, SBA will fund low-interest loans for businesses and non-profit organizations that have been severely impacted by the outbreak. Loans may total up to \$2 million and provide targeted, short-term support to help borrowers compensate for revenue losses caused by the virus. Learn more about the Disaster Loan Program at www.sba.gov/disaster.
- Designate public on-street parking spaces for curb-side pickup for restaurants and retailers in order to increase convenience for customers.
- Dedicate a page on your website where resources can be easily found by your downtown business owners.
 - Example - *Information Clearinghouse – Together, the Rowan County Chamber of Commerce, Rowan Economic Development Commission, and Rowan County Tourism developed a [website](#) that is serving as a clearinghouse for guidance and resources available to workers and local businesses impacted by COVID-19. The groups are committed to keeping the information up-to-date and easily accessible.*
- Research business interruption insurance and disseminate information to your businesses.
- Help business owners find new forms of revenue.
 - Example - *Work with small business owners to help them identify new needs being generated by COVID-19. Are there products or services that are and could be in demand that existing businesses could provide, at least in the short-term? Ask business owners to participate in brainstorming sessions with five other businesses, for example, to discuss potential business opportunities.*

Source: [Hitting the Pause Button on the Economy: Fund Small Business Relief of COVID-19 Now](#)

- Work with property owners to offer free or reduced rent for business tenants for a specified period (or defer it). Business retention is a better long-term economic development strategy than business recruitment.
- Create a low-interest loan program that will get businesses back on their feet.
- Participate in webinars and educational opportunities to help keep businesses informed.

Communicate with Businesses:

- Use a multi-faceted approach to regularly communicate with businesses.
- Be safe but be present. That means being seen in person and virtually, even as one engages in social distancing, not necessarily every day, but perhaps every two to three days.
- Assign businesses to your downtown board and committee volunteers, in order to check on the businesses in the district. Make sure you are following the recommended guidelines for social distancing and taking into consideration the board members that are in vulnerable groups.
- Survey small businesses to better understand their needs.
 - Example - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AvlChamber-COVID>
 - Example - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TransylvaniaCOVID19>

Communicate with the Community – Make it EASY to Support Local Businesses

- Compile (and frequently update) a list of local businesses offering online shopping and share it widely via website(s) and social media. Ask volunteers to help you keep this updated.
- Compile (and frequently update) a directory of restaurants providing take-out and delivery services and share it widely via website(s) and social media.
- Make videos to help promote takeout service offered by local restaurants.
 - Example - Video from Belmont, NC -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qu0So_4n4I
- Share web and social media posts from local businesses through your social media outlets.
- Write and share stories about the businesses in your downtown. Create a personal connection to encourage the community to support their neighbors in this time of need.
- Share the commitment businesses are showing to protect public health and the safety of customers, staff, etc., and the actions they are taking to do so.
- Promote locally sourced products and local supply chains on web and social media platforms.

Provide Technical Assistance

- Work one-on-one with businesses that may need assistance to increase their online presence through their website, social media, email newsletter, etc. Also, help businesses as needed update their [Google My Business](#) profile.
- Work one-on-one with businesses to use technology (e.g. FaceTime, Skype, Facebook Live, and others) to have live, face to face, interactions/events with customers for buying/selling, responding to inquiries, conducting meetings, etc.
- Work one-on-one with businesses to livestream educational programs, fitness training, music and art lessons, gallery tours, and more.

- Work one-on-one with businesses to provide social activities/interactions with and between customers (e.g. a brewery offering a virtual version of its trivia nights or a salon previewing new trends, styles, and techniques).
- Work one-on-one with professional and service businesses to offer virtual services such as telemedicine, counseling, and other appointments/consultations.
- Organize a website through which interested businesses can sell their gift cards/certificates to generate additional cash flow.
 - Example - [#AshevilleStrong](#) established to help western NC businesses sell gift cards. FAQs section has a video on setting up a site in a few hours.
 - Example - #LoveHendo and [LoveHendo.com](#) established to support small businesses in Hendersonville and Henderson County, NC.

Resources:

- [Hitting the Pause Button on the Economy: Fund Small Business Relief of COVID-19 Now](#) – by Recast City, 03/15/2020.
- Resources for Small Businesses from [Co Starters](#).
- <https://www.independentweststand.org/4-resources-small-businesses-coping-coronavirus-outbreak/> - by Independent We Stand, 03/17/2020
- [How to Rescue Main Street from Coronavirus Before It's Too Late](#) – by Economic Innovation Group, 03/18/2020
- [Small Business Task Force Unveils \\$300B Billion Emergency Coronavirus Relief Package](#) – by U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship, - 03/19/2020
- Creating a YouTube channel to talk about products, tell stories about the business, etc.
(<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/1646861?hl=en>)
- National Main Street Center - [COVID-19 Main Street Resources](#)
- National Main Street Center - [COVID-19 Main Street Checklist](#)
- NC Restaurant & Lodging Association - [COVID-19 FAQ for Restaurant & Hotels](#)
- Microsoft – Currently offering a free version of [Microsoft Teams](#) that allows users to schedule video calls and conferences with no limit on the number of participants.
- Google – Providing free access through July 1, 2020, to its advanced [Hangouts Meet](#) video-conferencing capabilities to all G Suite and G Suite for Education customers.
- ShopLoyal™ (shoployal.com) – App that allows merchants to recognize customer loyalty by providing a higher level of customer service, VIP offers, personalized treatment, real time two-way messaging, and more. Merchants register with ShopLoyal and pay a monthly subscription fee to use it. The company offers a 60-day free trial. Shoppers can download the app for free.

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