



NAVIGATING THE NEW NORMAL:

A Practical Guide to COVID Response for Small Businesses



TOGETHER
FORWARD®

DATE GUIDE WAS
COMPLETED 8/5/2020
(Following the Initial Response)

DEAR SMALL BUSINESS OWNER,

The COVID-19 global pandemic has been like no other crisis in recent history. A typical natural disaster (flood, hurricane, fire, etc.) is precipitated by a single/series of events, and the recovery and reopening process is relatively linear: a business would ensure their employees/customers were safe, inventory their assets, review damage and assess the plan for reopening/next steps. While immensely difficult, the steps toward recovery are known. With COVID-19 recovery, businesses are reopening slowly as healthcare facilities are building their testing and treatment capacities. Consumer confidence in safety and the economy needs to be restored, and there is possibility that COVID cases will increase again, causing additional or new disruptions until the viral threat has been mitigated. As the business owner, planning for this sustained level of uncertainty can be overwhelming.

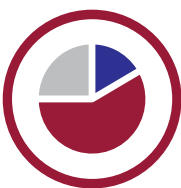
Most entrepreneurs know that a well-conceived business plan is critical to success. In the case of a crisis like COVID-19 when business has been heavily disrupted, it is important to take time to reflect, gather data and best practices and develop new flexible strategies and plans moving forward.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

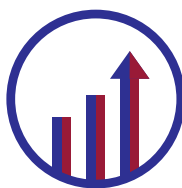
The goal of the guide is to lead you through a planning process in an orderly and efficient manner. We have identified 3 stages you will be traversing as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves. Do not be surprised if you revisit the stages more than once as new information is released and you gain a better understanding of the realities of yourself as a leader, the needs of your customers and employees, and the economic outlook. We recommend noting on the front page when you initially filled out the workbook (likely in Summer or Fall 2020). Then, you can add to your notes as you learn more information, or you can use a clean copy of the workbook if you would like to go through the process again. The stages we have identified in this guide are:

- **REACT:** This section provides you with the opportunity to reflect on the decisions you made in the early stages of COVID-19. By reflecting on these decisions, you can identify what went well, what you learned, and what you would like to implement or improve moving forward.
- **RE-EVALUATE:** This section provides you with an extensive list of best practices that can help you identify areas for improvement.
- **REFOCUS:** In refocus, you will be able to develop a more concrete plan for next steps by identifying areas of strength and weakness and establishing goals you can use moving forward.

Every good business plan takes into consideration several key functional areas. In this guide, within each of the stages listed above, you will see guidance on six topic areas, each identified with an icon:



Financials



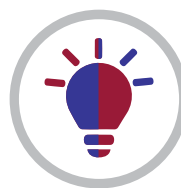
Operations



Employees



**Customers
(Marketing)**



**Products
& Services**



Leadership

You do not need to complete the entire workbook in one sitting. By providing you with opportunities to reflect, review best practices, and formulate your future plans, our goal is to give you structure during an unstructured and chaotic time. If you do choose to complete the workbook in its entirety, you will likely need to revisit portions as information changes, gather additional information from employees and/or stakeholders, and continuously update your goals and priorities as you move forward.

ON STAYING IN BUSINESS

Here in the Small Business Development Center, we have been working with business owners like you who are navigating some of the most difficult and rapidly changing professional challenges they have ever faced. We have heard countless stories of stressors - personal and professional - in the midst of an unprecedented global event.

As a business owner, the process of navigating your health and that of your employees and your customers; making constant and difficult decisions to help preserve the salience of your business; adapting - repeatedly - to constantly changing health and policy standards; altering your business model; regularly monitoring your business' financial situation; personal and professional stressors; and many more factors could all be leading you to question whether you want to stay in business. Because the decision to stay in business involves many factors - including assessing your personal situation as well as financial and legal ramifications - no decisions should be made without consulting with your professional partners, and this decision is generally outside the scope of this workbook.

However, if you are considering leaving your business behind, this workbook can help you reflect on whether your thoughts are based on temporary decision fatigue or a more significant lifestyle choice. By taking time to slow down and consider your options, you have the opportunity to have more informed discussions with your professional partners and to establish a clear exit strategy.

SEEK SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED


As always, if you need assistance with this or any other small business challenge, we encourage you to complete a [business consulting request form](https://wisconsinsbdc.org/centers/) (for businesses in Dane, Sauk, or Columbia counties) - or find your local Center (<https://wisconsinsbdc.org/centers/>) - to connect with one of our SBDC business consultants. Since 1980, the Wisconsin SBDC has been providing one-on-one, confidential, no-cost advising to help small business owners start, grow and succeed. The Wisconsin SBDC knows that your business is your livelihood, and we want to do everything possible to help ensure you have the tools and information you need to succeed.

SINCERELY, *THE TEAM*



TOGETHER
FORWARD®

REACT



In the earliest stages of the pandemic, as we in the United States watched images of a closed-down Wuhan, China, quarantined Italians singing on balconies, revelers in Chicago gathering in bars to enjoy Saint Patrick's Day festivities, and the National Basketball Association making a mid-game decision to cancel the rest of its season, the scope and impact of the pandemic was still difficult to understand. In addition, information was changing on a daily – if not hourly – basis.

In the first few weeks of the crisis, it became clear to business owners that drastic actions were needed in order to meet local, state and federal guidelines and to keep you, your employees and customers safe. As statewide disaster declarations were made, many businesses took action and applied for federal relief through the Small Business Administration (SBA) Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) process, sought to understand new employee guidelines through the Families First Act, applied for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) created by the CARES Act, pursued another type of business loan, or made difficult decisions about employees. Each of these choices has an impact on your business' financial health, stability, and reputation – and likely had to be made with little time to analyze the outcomes.

This section requires you to reflect on the choices you made. It's crucial to understand how you reacted in order to plan for the future. Each functional area will ask you to reflect on the decisions you made, selecting all answers that apply.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this section is to take time to reflect on what happened between March and June of 2020. As you reflect, you will notice that some of the actions you took were intentional and well-planned. Others may be unintentional, or may be more of a result/response to an external factor. This is ok. Be honest in your answers. A thoughtful assessment will lead to better planning in the future. At the end of each functional area, there is space to add additional thoughts.

DIRECTIONS:

Select all answers that apply. This section should take around 30 minutes to complete.

OVERVIEW

Did your business enter March 2020 with a disaster plan in place?

See this page from the Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA](#) for examples of what a disaster plan might include.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, was it comprehensive enough to include a response to a pandemic?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Were you able to follow the plan as the COVID-19 situation evolved?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Some of the plan was usable

REFLECT

If you had a plan in place, was there anything about the plan that you would change now that you are through the initial response stage?



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Good financial management is a building block to any small business. In times of crisis, this becomes imperative. *Please consider your reaction and select all that apply.*

- ☐ Contacted my bank/lender to see how loans would be impacted
- ☐ I don't currently know any lenders
- ☐ Contacted my equity investors to seek advice
- ☐ Reviewed my cash on hand (savings, line of credit, accounts receivable, etc.)
- ☐ Reviewed my financial statements (Profit and Loss, Balance Sheet, Cash Flow, etc.) on a regular basis to understand my financial position
- ☐ Reviewed my credit score and examined my credit worthiness
- ☐ Created a cash flow statement for the immediate future
- ☐ Checked with suppliers to understand, confirm or modify payment terms
- ☐ Evaluated/applied for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) or Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan
- ☐ Evaluated/applied for other loans, lines of credit, or financing
 - ☐ Traditional SBA 7(a) loans and microloans (Kiva)
 - ☐ Small business term loans from banks, credit unions, and online lenders
 - ☐ Business line of credit
 - ☐ Business credit cards
 - ☐ Vendor credit
 - ☐ Accounts receivable financing
 - ☐ Merchant cash advances
 - ☐ Inventory, purchase order, or equipment financing
- ☐ Applied for grants
- ☐ Took out a new credit card
- ☐ Contacted my accountant

- ☐ Filed my taxes
- ☐ Delayed filing my taxes
- ☐ Stopped paying bills
- ☐ Prepaid bills
- ☐ Paid all current bills
- ☐ Increased my payroll costs to cover hazard pay
- ☐ Explored ways to decrease payroll
(putting employees on unemployment, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, etc.).
- ☐ Contacted utilities for payment relief/extensions
- ☐ Negotiated new lease terms or temporary lease relief by contacting my landlord
- ☐ Contacted my attorney
- ☐ Contacted my financial planner
- ☐ I currently don't have an accountant, attorney or financial planner (circle all that apply)
- ☐ Deferred compensation for employees (raises, commissions, etc.)
- ☐ Froze new expenses (planned equipment purchase, advertising contracts, etc.)
- ☐ Moved key documents to the cloud, or already had them stored off-site
- ☐ Moved to Cloud-based software for accounting (QuickBooks, Wave, etc.)
- ☐ Use Excel spreadsheets or desktop software for accounting purposes
- ☐ Made personal financial sacrifices to keep employees on payroll
 - ☐ Reduced my paycheck/draw
 - ☐ Added personal funds to the business
- ☐ Other:

REFLECT

What did you do first in regard to your finances? What information do you wish you'd had? Do you feel confident in your financial management ability?

REFLECT

Were you pleased with the response of your professional partners (accountant, bookkeeper, banking partner)? *If yes, why? If no, why not?*



OPERATIONS

TECHNOLOGY

- ☐ Updated website to reflect any changes (business hours, product offerings, delivery options, etc.)
- ☐ Updated Google/Yelp and social media sites
- ☐ Added shopping cart to website
- ☐ Moved data to a cloud-based service with offsite backups (OneDrive, Sharepoint, Box, etc.)
- ☐ Reviewed whether backups exist for our email systems (Office 365 and Gmail, for example, do not back up email automatically)
- ☐ Established additional security measures, such as VPN or secure remote access to desktop computers
- ☐ Considered remote workers' home cybersecurity and addressed vulnerabilities
- ☐ Utilized downtime to enhance or streamline processes
- ☐ Made new software purchases
- ☐ Made new hardware purchases
- ☐ Other:

SUPPLIERS

- ☐ Reviewed supplier changes and how changes impacted the business
- ☐ Looked for alternate suppliers
- ☐ Obtained new suppliers or new product offerings for items I've never needed before (i.e. PPE)
- ☐ Contacted suppliers to touch base/seek advice
- ☐ Cancelled pending orders
- ☐ Placed new orders
- ☐ Other:

EQUIPMENT

- ☐ Determined if my equipment would be affected
- ☐ Looked at how equipment could be repurposed
- ☐ Made new purchases
- ☐ Other:

OFFICE AND CUSTOMER-FACING PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- ☐ Reviewed/revised/added cleaning protocols
- ☐ Added signage to reflect new hours/processes
- ☐ Added signage for employees with new directions/processes
- ☐ Added or removed furnishings
- ☐ Made new purchases due to updated business processes or sanitation guidelines (i.e. upgraded HVAC systems, Plexiglas shields, hand sanitizing stations, etc.)
- ☐ Removed samples, testers or other items that customers could handle
- ☐ Considered the long-term reduction of the business' physical footprint as more employees transitioned to working from home
- ☐ Other:

PROCESS

- ☐ Established new processes (cleaning, check out, employee safety, block scheduling of employees, changes to use of shared spaces, etc.)
- ☐ Created training for new processes
- ☐ Revised training on old processes
- ☐ Established new distribution methods:
 - ☐ Added online sales
 - ☐ Added curbside pick up
 - ☐ Added delivery (by your staff or a third-party vendor)
- ☐ Other:

RISK MANAGEMENT

- ☐ Contacted Insurance provider about business interruption insurance
- ☐ Other:



EMPLOYEES

- ☐ Communicated your plan to the employees in person, as a group or individually
- ☐ Communicated your plans to the employees in writing
- ☐ Reduced employee hours or pay
- ☐ Reduced pay of top leadership
- ☐ Laid employees off
- ☐ Furloughed employees
- ☐ Let employees go
- ☐ Created a workshare plan (<https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/uitax/workshare.htm>)
- ☐ Rescinded pending job offers (full time, part time, interns)
- ☐ Froze all new hiring

- ☐ Cancelled contracts with independent contractors
- ☐ Hired new employees
- ☐ Onboarded and trained new employees
- ☐ Added new contractors to fill gaps
- ☐ Transitioned employees to remote work
- ☐ Clearly expressed expectations for employees after transitioning to remote work
- ☐ Created new procedures in reaction to COVID-19
- ☐ Updated employee handbook with any procedure changes
- ☐ Trained employees on new work procedures
- ☐ Employees embraced change
- ☐ I worry employees aren't working as hard from home
- ☐ Cross-trained staff members
- ☐ I couldn't have gotten through the initial stages without my employees
- ☐ Some/all employees disappointed me or let me down when I needed them most
- ☐ I realized that I have skill gaps on my team
- ☐ Workplace culture was negatively affected
- ☐ Workplace culture was the same or improved
- ☐ Offered employee assistance to those needing it (mental health, wellness, schedule flexibility, etc.)
- ☐ Other:

REFLECT

What helped your employees be successful during this time?

What were challenges?



CUSTOMERS/ MARKETING

- ☐ Communicated operational changes to your customers via (check all that apply):
 - ☐ Website
 - ☐ Newsletter
 - ☐ E-mail
 - ☐ Social media channels
 - ☐ Phone calls
 - ☐ Store/office signage
 - ☐ Advertising (newspaper, bill boards, etc.)
 - ☐ Video walkthroughs or business updates
- ☐ Quickly provided regular operational updates to customers
- ☐ Provided B2B transparency through microsites or data dashboards (i.e. preventing spread across customer journeys, clarity around inventory)
- ☐ I believe my brand value since the beginning of this crisis has:
 - ☐ Increased
 - ☐ Decreased
 - ☐ Stayed the same
- ☐ Made sure all communication was consistent with our brand
- ☐ Continued to meet brand promises (excellent service, honest, etc.)
- ☐ Changed the tone of our messaging/advertising to reflect the times
- ☐ Kept marketing strategy the same as pre-COVID
- ☐ Stopped marketing all together
- ☐ Shared the impact coronavirus was having on the business with customers
- ☐ Set new customer expectations (lower inventory, slower response time, changes to process during reopening, etc.)
- ☐ Hired professional marketing assistance to craft messages
- ☐ Created a new or updated marketing/communications plan
- ☐ Added new marketing channels (online, pay per click, etc.)

- ☐ Connected individually with key customers
- ☐ Asked customers to follow on social media for updates
- ☐ Reviewed data analytics
- ☐ Revised return policies
- ☐ Conducted a customer survey or sought customer feedback
- ☐ Responded to customer requests in a timely fashion
- ☐ Told customers how to best support the business
 - ☐ Asked them to buy a gift card
 - ☐ Asked them to support a Go Fund Me/Kickstarter campaign or KIVA loan
 - ☐ Asked them to order take-out or make online purchases
- ☐ Other:

REFLECT

What customer feedback did you receive during this process?

REFLECT

What role did marketing/communications play in your response?

What was/was not successful about your efforts?



PRODUCTS/SERVICES

- ☐ Created new offerings in response to customer requests (i.e. manufacturing PPE or hand sanitizer, converting restaurant menu to carry-out family comfort meals, offering grocery items as takeout add-on, bundled products for special occasions, etc.)
- ☐ Created staff tutorials/features to showcase business expertise
- ☐ Offered sales and promotions
- ☐ Discontinued offerings
- ☐ Reduced offerings
- ☐ Added online option of services
- ☐ Leveraged products or services to support the community (i.e. donating food)
- ☐ Repurposed equipment to support product demands (i.e. using manufacturing equipment to build PPE)
- ☐ Branched out to new business areas (online events, training, customized or themed kits, etc.)
- ☐ Continued to offer same services with added health/safety protocols
- ☐ Other:

REFLECT

What changes did you make to your products or services that you feel were critical to the survival of the business? Do you expect that these changes will be permanent, or are they a reflection of the current circumstance?



LEADERSHIP

- ☐ I was able to make decisions quickly and decisively
- ☐ I had difficulty making decisions; I felt paralyzed
- ☐ Decisions were made with facts and data
- ☐ Decisions were made with emotions
- ☐ I sought council from experts (accountant, attorney, industry peers, etc.) while making decisions
- ☐ I'm pleased with how I reacted
- ☐ I'm unsure if I made the right decisions
- ☐ I am ok with ambiguity
- ☐ I need all of the facts before I can make a decision
- ☐ I was comfortable responding to employees' emotions/experiences
- ☐ I was able to provide employees with a mantra/vision early in the crisis to help them respond
- ☐ I empowered my employees to make decisions
- ☐ I made all of the decisions
- ☐ I burnt out quickly
- ☐ I was able to keep my employees motivated
- ☐ I created opportunities for celebration with my employees
- ☐ I took a long time to communicate
- ☐ I communicated efficiently and effectively
- ☐ I stopped doing self-care practices in order to support the business
- ☐ I introduced a community support element of the business
- ☐ I established partnerships with other businesses or community organizations
- ☐ Other:


REFLECT

Was there a key moment when you, as the leader of your business, realized it wasn't going to be business as usual? What reaction did you have during this time? What did you do?

What feedback did you receive from employees? What did you learn about your default way of making decisions? Are your decisions typically based on facts? Emotions? Do you respond quickly, or wait a long time to act? How comfortable are you making a decision when you don't have all of the information available?

Did the experience of leading through COVID-19 cause you to identify any gaps in knowledge, skills, or abilities that you may have? How can you fill these gaps through training, partnerships, or hiring new employees?

RE-EVALUTE



The world after COVID-19 will not be exactly the same place as it was before. Even as many "normal" operations resume over time, other business processes may be changed forever, and some businesses will emerge doing different work than they were before.

One significant challenge of this crisis is that the recovery process may not be linear. There are still many questions about how quickly businesses will be able to reopen to full capacity based on the status of the virus and the progress made on testing, tracing and treatment. We also have yet to see how consumer behaviors and priorities may change over time.

In Section I (REACT), you were asked to reflect on your initial decisions. As with many decisions that needed to be made in the earliest stages of this crisis, you may have had to "build the plane while you were flying it," including signing bank documents that did not yet have full government guidance, shutting your doors early in the best interest of your employees, or sending out customer messaging without being able to provide full directions for the future.

In this section, we will examine each functional area of business and review a selection of best practices to consider as you work toward making new plans for your business. It will be helpful for you to think about your business model pre-March 2020 and your Section I (REACT) responses as you revisit or learn for the first time helpful business planning components. Having this core knowledge will assist you in making future plans in Section III (REFOCUS) and considering needed pivots as things continue to shift and change.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this section is to understand best practices around each functional area of business planning. With this knowledge, you will be able to see areas of strength, areas for improvement and ways to plan for an uncertain future.

DIRECTIONS:

Each functional area will include a set of select best practices. These best practices are based on our 40 years of experience in the Wisconsin SBDC, working directly with clients and utilizing business planning tools. This list is not meant to be all-encompassing. However, it should help generate ideas and spur your thinking toward new goals and solutions.

Review the content in the context of your business model prior to COVID and your initial reaction (Section I). Seek to gain an understanding of your next steps, noting short term and mid-range changes you intend to make to improve your business practices. Highlight or otherwise note areas that you would like to implement or improve as you are reading. At the bottom of each section, you will see a place to note some of your ideas. For each box, you have the opportunity to:

1. List changes you may want to implement or improve
2. Indicate whether that change requires an idea you need to think about, research and review, or if it is an action you can take now:
 - a. **IDEAS** should end in a question mark (i.e. "How can I better leverage technology?" or "should we hire a new supplier?")
 - b. **ACTIONS** are to-do items. You can use these in a number of ways.
 - i. In some cases, ACTIONS mean simply completing a task (i.e. purchase accounting software because you need a way to track your finances).
 - ii. In other cases, your IDEA might require completing a number of information-gathering action steps to move forward. For example, if you were considering creating an online store, your action steps might involve talking to a technical professional about the best platform/technical capability, taking photos of inventory to be posted on the site, and establishing COVID-friendly processes to distribute purchases (curbside pickup, delivery, etc.).
 - iii. Finally, once you know which direction your IDEA will go, you will determine what ACTIONS need to happen to move forward.
3. Guesstimate a timeframe for the decision or action – is this something you can complete right away? In 30 days? 60 days? 90 days? More than 90 days?

You will be able to use these notes in Section III: **REFOCUS**.



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Many business owners are not confident in their financial management abilities. However, good accounting practices and financial management are the cornerstone to business success, and a key source of data in the decision-making process. By having clear and well-organized financial statements, you can more quickly observe trends (i.e. a decrease in customers, or increased demand in a particular area) and predict where changes need to be made.

Business owners should:

- ☐ Establish a working knowledge of financial management (profit and loss, cash flow/cash management and asset/liability)
- ☐ Be aware of key metrics for your industry (inventory turnover, sales volume, etc.)
- ☐ Purchase and implement financial management software (QuickBooks, Fresh books, etc.)
- ☐ Develop a basic knowledge of accounting/bookkeeping
- ☐ Establish clear accounts receivables
- ☐ Establish clear customer communication/feedback processes
- ☐ Develop an annual budget
- ☐ Hire a bookkeeper or Accountant for guidance (payroll, tax advice, financial statements)
- ☐ Identify a banking partner (for deposits, credit card processing, loans, lines of credit, etc.)



Select Financial Management Best Practices are available on our website: sbdc.wisc.edu/covid-19/response-resources.

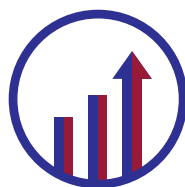
Topics include:

- Understanding Key Financial Terms
- Understanding the Principles of Cash Flow Management and How they Apply to Your Business
- Considerations when hiring an Accountant
- Choosing accounting software
- Understanding your risk tolerance and deciding when to take on financial risk

NEXT STEPS

(i.e. hire an accountant, convert to Quickbooks online, etc.)

	Idea vs. Action	< 30 Days	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	> 90 Days
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



OPERATIONS

Operations are the building blocks of how your company completes work. Typically, topics include business processes, inventory control, supply chain, IT infrastructure, risk management, and so on. Business owners should consider the following best practices for your business:

- ☐ Capture policies and procedures in writing (cash management, sales, equipment usage, etc.)
- ☐ Identify legal assistance (contracts, mergers, HR needs, liability waivers, etc.)
- ☐ Update Information technology (IT) as appropriate:
 - ☐ Develop a cybersecurity policy for employees
 - ☐ Purchase up-to-date software with security features
 - ☐ Secure cloud-based data storage
 - ☐ Select an IT professional to assist with technology needs

- ☐ Manage suppliers and inventory:
 - ☐ List key vendors with contact information and terms stored in the cloud
 - ☐ Identify alternative vendor options in case of supply-chain disruption
 - ☐ Purchase software or establish a system to track inventory and other business assets
- ☐ Reduce Risk:
 - ☐ Review business, liability, and specialized insurance annually, with documents stored in the cloud
 - ☐ Identify an insurance professional for guidance (insurance contract guidance)
- ☐ Maintain Equipment:
 - ☐ List key equipment with full details (make, model, year, etc.) and store the list in the cloud to make it accessible in the case of damage or theft
 - ☐ Identify (as needed) tracking software for asset management
 - ☐ Identify service providers who can repair equipment
- ☐ Secure Physical Location:
 - ☐ Keep a copy of the lease, landlord contact information, repair policies and contact of repair company stored in the cloud
 - ☐ Establish safety protocols, especially around equipment, COVID health protocols, and dangerous environments
- ☐ Consider whether your business could run in a smaller footprint if employees work from home
- ☐ Keep up-to-date with regulations:
 - ☐ Keep a copy of all licenses and requirements stored in the cloud
 - ☐ Understand & respond to new COVID-related regulations around reopening and employee/customer safety as defined by OSHA, the Centers for Disease Control, and other federal, state, and city requirements



Select Operational Best Practices are available on our website:
sbdc.wisc.edu/covid-19/response-resources.

Topics include:

- Reducing Cybersecurity Risks
- Staying Updated on Current COVID-19 Health & Safety Regulations, Reopening Guidelines
- Exploring moving products online
- Establishing alternate suppliers
- Hiring a lawyer

NEXT STEPS

(i.e. create a cybersecurity plan)

	Idea vs. Action	< 30 Days	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	> 90 Days
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



EMPLOYEES

Employees are the backbone of any organization. Most small businesses do not have a HR director. Every small business should take the following steps to support the training and success of their employees:

- ☐ Keep updated documentation in the cloud:
 - ☐ Update organizational chart
 - ☐ Collect employee contact and emergency information
 - ☐ Update job descriptions
 - ☐ Keep signed copies of employee contracts and other documents for easy access (W-4's, employee resume, employee reviews, list of employee responsibilities, etc.)
- ☐ Develop an employee handbook that outlines policies and procedures, employee expectations, training, diversity and inclusion statement and key safety information

- ☐ Establish a working knowledge of:
 - ☐ Unemployment options (layoff, furlough, work share, etc.)
 - ☐ Basic employment law and worker's rights
 - ☐ Department of Workforce Development rules
- ☐ Identify an HR professional to assist with questions, such as an attorney or HR firm
- ☐ Establish clear policies surrounding remote working opportunities and expectations
- ☐ Provide cross-training for employees, especially around critical business functions
- ☐ Establish hiring and onboarding processes/develop online options for hiring and onboarding processes
- ☐ Establish a clear feedback and evaluation processes – including a way for the employee to provide feedback to their supervisor

Select Employment Best Practices are available on our website:
sfdc.wisc.edu/covid-19/response-resources.

Topics include:

- Sample organizational chart
- Sample employee handbook
- Information about employee rights
- Information about unemployment
- Writing clear job descriptions

NEXT STEPS

(i.e. create an organizational chart, develop a handbook, etc.)

	Idea vs. Action	< 30 Days	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	> 90 Days
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



CUSTOMERS/ MARKETING

Your customer's lives have changed as well. Going to the store or a restaurant is no longer a simple process, as your customers will have to weigh their health and safety against the need for your products and services. Consumer confidence has been eroded, and you will have to work to restore it. In this restoration process, it is important to revisit why people or companies purchase from you, and how they like to learn about your products and services.

- ☐ Know what your customers perceive as your greatest benefit. Clarify:
 - ☐ Your Unique Value Proposition
 - ☐ Your product/service - what you sell
 - ☐ Problem(s) your business solves
 - ☐ Why customers shop with you
- ☐ Define and describe your current target market:
 - ☐ Customer demographic information
 - ☐ Customer psychographic information (priorities and motivations)
 - ☐ Size of target market
 - ☐ Geographic region (if relevant)
 - ☐ Total market size
- ☐ Establish purchasing process (in person, online, phone, etc.)
- ☐ Clarify your brand:
 - ☐ Brand elements (logo, colors, etc.)
 - ☐ Brand promise
 - ☐ Brand story
- ☐ Understand how your customers prefer to receive information (website, third party sites, social media, advertising, etc.)
- ☐ Create a marketing/communications plan



Select best practices around customers and marketing are available on our website: sbdc.wisc.edu/covid-19/response-resources.

Topics include:

- Understanding your target market
- Understanding customer psychographics through an empathy map
- Establishing your brand
- Developing a marketing/communications plan (sample template)
- Understanding consumer confidence

STEPS TO TAKE

(i.e. email my customers)

	Idea vs. Action	< 30 Days	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	> 90 Days
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



PRODUCTS/SERVICES

Many businesses had to make changes to their business models for a variety of reasons – store closures, changes in regulations, disruptions to supply chains, etc. Given that both you and many of your competitors made changes, it is important to revisit your value proposition – what differentiates your product or service from competitors – to see how you compare to your competitors and to make decisions about what changes you plan to keep in place long-term.

- ☐ Know which industries you are in; this knowledge helps you understand industry trends, etc. (i.e., hospitality, food and beverage, manufacturing)
 - ☐ Identify the best sources of information about your core industry
 - ☐ Identify key trends
 - ☐ Identify key professional organizations for your industry
 - ☐ Identify membership benefits for key professional associations
- ☐ Suppliers/Vendors
 - ☐ Identify key suppliers
 - ☐ Identify any new suppliers in the market, and explore their terms
 - ☐ Explore whether you can optimize your supply channels or distribution locations
 - ☐ Review whether there have been changes in demand (increase or decrease) that need to be addressed
- ☐ Explore opportunities to add products or services
- ☐ Evaluate risks associated with current products or services (i.e., product liability, out of style or off trend, new players, altered product offerings or delivery methods)
- ☐ Evaluate Your Competition:
 - ☐ Identify competitors
 - ☐ Explore competitors' business-model changes since COVID-19 began
 - ☐ Define your competitors' value proposition
 - ☐ Clarify your points of competition (price, location, quality, etc.)
 - ☐ Creating a competitive analysis

Select best practices around products/services are available on our website: sbdwisc.edu/covid-19/response-resources.

For this section, topics include:

- Researching your industry
- Seeking alternate suppliers

STEPS TO TAKE

(ie join a trade association, etc.)

	Idea vs. Action	< 30 Days	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	> 90 Days
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



LEADERSHIP

Managing and leading a business is hard work. Leadership and management are terms that are often used interchangeably, but they are distinct skillsets that should be used in different scenarios:

MANAGEMENT is beneficial for situations in which you need to make quick decisions (i.e. a disaster scenario), follow rules or regulations needed for your industry, provide quick turnaround for a department by closely monitoring output, or consider how to best allocate resources (time, money, staffing).

LEADERSHIP is focused on setting the tone for the organization and motivating the team. Leaders constantly seek feedback and believe in two-way learning. Leadership is a give-and-take process; leaders set big goals and help enable their team to work toward those goals autonomously. Leaders focus on the people within the organization.

Leading a business requires the ability to understand both the core products and services and the key functional areas of business. Strong leaders also are able to develop relationships with their employees, communities, and stakeholders and hone their skills over time. Leadership traits include:

- ☐ Knowing when to delegate
- ☐ Making difficult decisions when needed to preserve or advance the organization
- ☐ Demonstrating emotional intelligence
- ☐ Establishing basic financial literacy
- ☐ Demonstrating industry awareness & involvement
- ☐ Peer networking
- ☐ Identifying gaps in your knowledge, skills, or abilities and filling those gaps by hiring staff with that expertise, forming partnerships, or building your own knowledge
- ☐ Switching between current concerns and future focus

Select leadership best practices are available on our website:
sbdc.wisc.edu/covid-19/response-resources.

For this section, topics include:

- Crisis management
- Leadership (general)

NEXT STEPS

(i.e. attend a leadership class, find a peer group, etc.)

	Idea vs. Action	< 30 Days	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	> 90 Days
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	I A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

REFOCUS

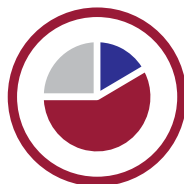
The world will look different than it did before COVID-19. Businesses have to continue to adjust with additional restrictions on their operations. As the international economy will restart at different times, it is likely that movement of goods and international travel will remain slow for a while.

Employee safety will need to remain top-of-mind for employers – whether that looks like flexible work policies, continued work-from-home (likely with an increase in cybersecurity measures), staggered shifts, providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), or implementing processes to help decrease contact and respond to incidents. This could include bigger-picture thinking, such as reconsidering how physical office spaces are configured or revisiting how the hiring and onboarding process might be more technologically driven.

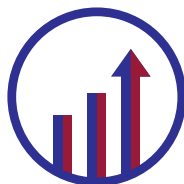
This uncertainty may also cause you to examine the long-term viability of your business as it looked in January of 2020. You may pivot or cease operations all together. There is no wrong answer. The volatility of COVID-19 has had repeated, variable impacts on both individuals and businesses.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this section is to understand your short-term goals as you navigate unforeseen challenges. For some, the next decisions will be obvious. For others, they will be more complex. This section will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses and use that information to prioritize action steps from Section II: REACT. Remember to consider each of the functional areas represented by the icons below as you complete the rest of this section.



Financials



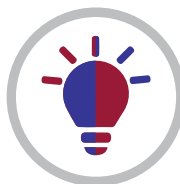
Operations



Employees



**Customers
(Marketing)**



**Products
& Services**



Leadership

STRENGTHS

Your operations are successful based on your many strengths. These strengths have allowed you to persevere during this difficult time and thrive under optimal circumstances. As you consider the many directions your business could go next, leaning on your strengths is one way to prioritize and achieve your goals.

DIRECTIONS

- **List all of your strengths.** Examples of strengths may include strong partnerships, good customer service, quality products, etc. Once you've made a full list of your strengths, highlight 3-5 that you feel are core competencies. Those are strengths that you can always rely on – whether or not circumstances are ideal. Examples: an excellent product design, great location, top-notch customer service, etc.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

WEAKNESSES

No company is perfect! A weakness in your company is defined as the things you don't do well but generally have the power to change if given the right resources – time, money, or expertise. These weakness can hold your business back, or they might make things difficult under optimal circumstances. During times of crisis, weaknesses are often exposed in ways that are detrimental to operating.

DIRECTIONS

The first step is to identify weaknesses. You might have identified some problems when completing Section I: REACT. List all of your weaknesses, placing them in one of two columns below:

- **Column A** is for weakness you can fix now. Those are the problems you know how to fix, and you have the resources to take care of them. *Example: you don't have enough employees to cover an evening shift; and therefore, you are losing sales. That is a weakness you could fix by hiring a part-time person to cover a few hours, as long as you have the budget to do so.*
- **Column B** is for weaknesses you can't fix now. They are the problems you don't know how to fix and/or you don't have a resource you need to make the fix. Those weaknesses will take time to rectify. *Example: you don't have an e-commerce website, and you don't have the funds, expertise, and time to complete it.*

Weaknesses in either column may become next steps, or they may impede the completion of next steps. By understanding your weaknesses, you can determine what you can focus on right away (Column A), and what projects you may need to delay because your weaknesses will impede you in completing your goal (Column B). For new initiatives, fixing a weakness may become an initial task in working toward that larger goal.

Column A - Weaknesses You can Fix Now	Column B - Weaknesses You Can't Fix Now

NEXT STEPS

At the end of each business focus area in Section II: RE-EVALUATE, you completed a NEXT STEPS list. Revisit those pages and highlight 10-12 you feel that you can work on. Place each of those topics in the chart below.

Decide if this is an **idea** you need to think about, research and review or if it is an **action** you can take now. As a reminder, an **idea** is something that ends in a question mark, and an **action** requires you to do something.

Determine if you have any strengths that will help you with the goal. Decide if you have any weakness that will deter or delay you from taking action.

Finally, decide if you can delegate this next step to someone else.

(i.e., convert to Quickbooks online, explore a new market, provide training to employees, etc)

	Idea vs. Action	< 30 Days	30 Days	60 Days	90 Days	> 90 Days	Strengths to help?	Weaknesses that hinder?	Can delegate?
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> I <input checked="" type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> I <input checked="" type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> I <input checked="" type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> I <input checked="" type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> I <input checked="" type="radio"/> A	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Review the information and prioritize. Here are some key questions to ask yourself as you decide what steps to prioritize higher:

- *Why did you select these next steps?*
- *What is reasonable given your resources?*
- *Is there a next step that is aligned with one of your core strengths?*
- *Are there next steps that will be a problem to complete based on a weakness you've identified?*
- *Should solving a weakness become a next step?*

COMMUNICATING THE NEXT STEPS

NEXT STEPS become your company's goals. A list of goals might be a good fit for your process. A good best practice is to convert your **NEXT STEPS** to **SMART** goals. Below are some tips for working with the **SMART** goals template. **SMART** is an acronym that means:

S-SPECIFIC M-MEASURABLE A-ACHIEVABLE R-REALISTIC T-TIME BOUND

Define the goal in a few sentences. Describe how you are going to measure your achievements (benchmarks, sales, time, units, etc.) Make sure that you are being realistic. It is not motivating or productive to set goals that are completely out of reach or that ignore your financial realities – goals should also reflect your financial goals and support your overall budget.

As you look forward, it can also be beneficial to categorize each goal as *essential (E)*, *important (I)*, or *desirable (D)* for the success of your business. This will help you determine which goals need to be modified or moved if you have to change your plan midway through the year. Finally, discuss when you (or someone in your organization) will accomplish the goal. If you don't put a deadline on the goal, it isn't likely to get done.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The coronavirus crisis has acted as catalyst for entrepreneurs. The impact of the crisis has varied for each business and industry. For some, recovery will be a long road. For others, COVID-19 spurred needed technological upgrades or new ways of thinking. Some changes made were permanent, and others will end when there are fewer public health risks. For some business owners, this crisis may have provided you with the chance to implement your disaster preparedness plan, and for others, the crisis may have highlighted the fact that you did not have a plan in place. After thinking through your business in a variety of ways, you may feel energized to move forward, or you may be ready to close or sell the business. These answers are personal, and there is no wrong answer.

Section III: REFOCUS helped you write your ideas down. This should give you the opportunity to chart your next steps, or to formulate more specific questions about your business' future that you can discuss with your SBDC consultant or professional service providers. These next steps could take a variety of forms. One thing that is certain is that in entrepreneurship, learning and readjusting are a constant. As always, we are here to help you however we can.

THROUGH THE SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER, YOU CAN:

- Request a no-cost consulting appointment (for businesses in Dane, Sauk, or Columbia counties): sbdc.wisc.edu/about-us/free-small-business-consulting or find your local Wisconsin SBDC Center here: <https://wisconsinsbdc.org/centers/>
- Develop a personal learning plan as you explore our upcoming classes: sbdc.wisc.edu/about-us/upcoming-classes
- Review our archive of COVID recovery tips and resources: sbdc.wisc.edu/covid-19

IN ADDITION TO SBDC SUPPORT, OTHER NEXT STEPS COULD INCLUDE:

- Forming partnerships with other business owners to strengthen your support system
- Building out your team by hiring specialists *(i.e. hiring a technology professional to assist you with creating your e-commerce store)*
- Creating or revisiting your crisis plan *(see crisis planning on the resource page)*
- Meeting with your professional partners (accountants, lawyers, HR firms, cybersecurity or marketing professionals, etc.) to seek consultation for decisions
- Revisiting your current business plan, or writing one for the first time
- And many more.

This guide was developed to support businesses in a wide variety of industries and who are in various stages of the business-planning process. It should serve as a way to reflect on your experiences, structure your thinking, and point you toward your next steps in the short term. As always, the process of running a business will require adjustments, new ideas, and outside expertise, but it is our sincere hope that this workbook is a place you can return as your plans evolve.



TOGETHER
FORWARD®