



Main Street 
FORWARD

PLANNING FOR RECOVERY GUIDE

May 2020



INTRODUCTION

Downtowns and urban commercial districts across the U.S. won't recover from the economic impacts of the global pandemic simply by way of government proclamations to reopen or marketing campaigns to bring customers back downtown. A return to bricks and mortar shopping, and other downtown activities, like getting a haircut, participating in a fitness class, eating in a restaurant, and attending a special event will all be greatly dependent on having an informed and strategic recovery plan. Your Recovery Work Plan will position your organization with a road map, a leadership position in the recovery, and an opportunity to secure implementation resources through advocacy.

The following graphic highlights the overall approach to crafting your Main Street *Forward* Recovery Work Plan. Since it is difficult to predict the timeline between reopening and a more settled new normal, we recommend that you initially look at your plan as a 90-day period for activities in all Four Points of the Main Street Approach that will aid in your district's recovery efforts. After the initial period, reevaluate based on remaining needs and a fresh look at your recovery inputs.



PLANNING FOR RECOVERY: AN OVERLAY TO THE MAIN STREET APPROACH



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STEP 1: THE INPUTS

Recovery must start by gathering understanding from several "inputs" that help to inform a thoughtful and strategic response to the lifting of business restrictions in your community.

A. Resident/Consumer Recovery Survey

Human psyche regarding responses to shopping downtown will be influenced by both personal and environmental conditions, which lead to habit formation. For example, have you grown used to being able to swing past your favorite downtown restaurant and have them bring your food out to your car? Have runs through the downtown and your local park taken the place of a treadmill at the gym? Research suggests that, on average, it takes 66 days for people to form a new habit, but it can range from as few as 18 days to 264 days. As such, we should anticipate that our shopping, working, and social interactions have been deeply influenced at both the conscious and subconscious levels.

To help you in this effort, we have created a [local resident survey](#) designed for your use and adaptation, to better understand current and likely consumer attitudes toward shopping and social engagement. We suggest that you use a survey platform like Survey Monkey and engage social media, local partner organizations, and the media to distribute the survey link. Analyze the responses for key trends that help you to better understand shopping needs, concerns, and opportunities that can be addressed through your Main Street *Forward* Recovery Work Plan.

B. Business Recovery Interviews

The attitudes of small business owners have also changed, so the support they need in a recovery will depend on a number of factors. These could include their feelings about existing safety guidelines, employee safety, consumer safety, liability issues, and business model shifts, such as increases in e-commerce, delivery, and pick-up strategies.

To assist you in better understanding small business needs, concerns, and potential opportunities during recovery, we have developed a [sample set of questions](#) to ask a subset of your small business owners. We recommend an interview format as you can dive deeper into your understanding of issues, which, due to the amount of survey data available, is likely more informative at this point. Be sure to also consider interviewing a highly representative sample of your businesses. For example, select 10 businesses that represent a variety of length of time in business, diversity in gender, age, and ethnicity, as well as diversity of business types.

C. Existing Transformation Strategies

One of the fundamentals that remains part of previous work plan efforts is the need to be market-based. As you consider your recovery activities, be thoughtful about activities that can support your selected Transformation Strategies. For example, if your district's market niche was geared to support residents downtown, be sure to direct additional resources and activities that are recovery-related in support of your primary targets and the small businesses that further strengthen those markets. For some districts, shifts due to COVID-19 may cause you to rethink your initial Transformation Strategies. More details on understanding your market and developing Transformation Strategies can be found [here](#).

D. National Trends

On a more macro level, no rural or urban district resides in a bubble. We are deeply influenced by trends at the national level; some will quickly go away, while others may be more rooted, to which commercial districts will need to adapt. In either case, as the proverbial saying goes, "when one door closes, another one opens." While there will be closures and changes in our normal operations, there will undoubtedly be opportunities more suited to changes in our district conditions. Thus, as you review your current market conditions, consumer, and business responses, do so with a lens of how more macros shifts in consumerism and other societal norms will influence your districts' recovery. For example, how might a more permanent number of people working from home influence a downtown largely dependent on the office worker sector? What happens with office real estate, fast casual dining, etc. as a result? Your Main Street *Forward* Recovery Work Plan may lead to a recruitment strategy geared toward new retail niches in office furniture and home décor/home technology.

E. Local, State, and National Guidelines

The last input as you are designing your Main Street *Forward* Recovery Work Plan is to consider any restrictions and guidelines imposed at each policy level that may impact your activities. For example, if guidelines on gatherings of more than 10 people are in place or occupancy levels in retail and restaurants, more considerations will be needed as to any special event plans or even short-term design assistance programs for store layouts.

STEP 2: RECOVERY WORK PLANNING

Given current conditions, the following planning process can be conducted in a virtual format over a series of webinar “meetings.”

- /// **Webinar 1** - Facilitated meeting with Board and staff to review the survey and recovery interview findings. Dialogue about their meaning, how it relates to national trends, and local reopening guidelines. (1.5 hours)
- /// **Webinar 2** - Facilitated meeting with Board and staff to evaluate current workplan for activities that should remain short-term to address COVID-19 recovery, and then construct key goals within each of the Four Points. These goals will serve as the framework for Four Points meetings. In addition, review any known activities by partner organizations. (1 hour)
- /// **Webinar 3** - Facilitated meeting with Organization group (this may be a committee, task force, loose cadre of individuals) to review activities identified as relevant given COVID-19 recovery and address new activities conforming to the goals identified by the Board. (1 hour)
- /// **Webinar 4** - Facilitated meeting with Promotion group (this may be a committee, task force, loose cadre of individuals) to review activities identified as relevant given COVID-19 recovery and address new activities conforming to the goals identified by the Board. (1 hour)
- /// **Webinar 5** - Facilitated meeting with Design group (this may be a committee, task force, loose cadre of individuals) to review activities identified as relevant given COVID-19 recovery and address new activities conforming to the goals identified by the Board. (1 hour)
- /// **Webinar 6** - Facilitated meeting with Economic Vitality group (this may be a committee, task force, loose cadre of individuals) to review activities identified as relevant given COVID-19 recovery, and address new activities conforming to the goals identified by the Board. (1 hour)
- /// **Webinar 7** - Facilitated meeting with Board, staff and Committee/Task Force Chairs to review finished “Recovery Dashboard” and discuss advocacy messaging and metrics. (1 hour)



