

HENNEPIN COUNTY

BUSINESS DISTRICT COVID RESPONSE TOOLKIT

VERSION 1.0

CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:
THE MUSICANT GROUP



Overview

These are challenging times. The spread of the COVID-19 virus and our society's efforts to contain it have affected our main streets and their small businesses especially hard. Into this breach this rapid response toolkit has been crafted to support commercial districts and help their small businesses navigate and survive the repercussions of COVID-19.

The toolkit offers specific and creative ideas for businesses, processes and actions for those ideas, and resources and tips for how to overcome obstacles. As the societal situations are constantly changing the toolkit will be released in iterative versions to remain relevant. As such we've created [a short survey](#) for those involved with business districts, BIDs, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies and small businesses to fill out and guide future toolkit editions.

Thank you to everyone out there who is supporting small businesses during this difficult time.

COVID 1.0 Edition:

Businesses in my downtown are struggling to survive and need to find ways to generate sales.

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General Resources

Community Supported Businesses and Downtowns

Create a subscription model to support your small businesses and entire downtowns

For many businesses that can still operate, especially restaurants, take out and delivery has not yet provided enough sustainable revenue.

Taking inspiration from Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), creating a subscription-based way for your community to rally around individual businesses provides them with more substantial upfront revenue and ongoing certainty of activity.

Further, individual businesses could be clustered into CSD's where people can buy subscriptions/shares in several businesses - granting them a rotating array of ready to eat dishes, specialty foods, gifts, classes, and more.

Your downtown is the heart of your community, a CSB/CSD can be a powerful tool to unlock how much your community really cares.



Photos sourced from communitycrate.com

Process/Action:

- Put a call out to businesses about this model and if they want to do their own or participate in a downtown-wide CSD
- Work with merchants to identify what they could deliver on a weekly or monthly basis
- Create the subscription bundles, consider: length of time, frequency of delivery/pick up, and size of order, size of household
- If a CSD is pursued, create clear processes and tracking for flow of funds
- Promote! With a heavy focus on how the “community supported” and highlighting every vendor involved

Resources/Tips on Obstacles:

- [Barn2Door](#) is a software to manage CSAs that can be used to support CSBs and CSDs
- [Community Crate](#) is an example being done in Helena, MT

Messaging:

- Our main street businesses are the heart of our community. We as a community need to come together to support them
- Keep our cash within our community. Redirect online purchases to Community Supported Businesses and Downtowns the places that bring us together survive and thrive

Pop-Up Drive-in and Bike-In Movie Theaters and Concerts

Repurpose large underused parking lots and streets to host outdoor drive-in movies and concerts with food delivered from local restaurants

The classic drive-in movie provides the perfect setting for COVID-safe entertainment that can support multiple downtown businesses.

Collaborate with shuttered theaters, music venues, and/or parks and rec departments who have blow-up outdoor screens, projectors, and audio equipment to create drive-in facilities within parking lots or closed off streets.

Tickets can be sold by local theaters or arts groups with snacks and meals ordered and safely delivered to car windows.



Photo sourced from KUTV.com

Process/Action:

- Contact local movie theaters and/or arts groups to source the movie rights and sell tickets online
- Secure a large parking lot or vacant lot in your downtown, or close a street
- Partner with local restaurants to provide in-car dining options
- Secure micro-radio audio capabilities
- Be ready to jump-start cars that may run out of battery power during the showing
- Rules that have been established by other theaters who have recently started offering drive in services include:
 - People must stay inside their vehicle
 - One person is allowed to leave their vehicle to pick up food and only 10 people are allowed in the concession line at a time, six feet apart.
 - Customers take their trash with them
 - Restrooms are available, if absolutely needed, but there is a process.
 - Concessions must be ordered online
 - Block off two out of every three parking spaces for cars and bikes to space properly
 - Plan for volunteers to help direct attendees, remind people about distancing rules, and coordinate vendors on site.

Resources/Tips on Obstacles:

- [Utah Pop Up Drive-in Theater](#)
- [FanFood App](#): One option for contactless delivery

Messaging:

- Fun, safe, and supporting our small businesses
- Movies in the Park(ing lot)
- Permitting processes and fees should be expedited and reduced to allow these events to occur and provide much needed revenue to small businesses and arts groups

Provide Technical Assistance for Businesses to Establish E-commerce and COVID-safe Operations

Help businesses make the transition to offer online sales and fulfillment

While e-commerce was already a fast growing pattern of retail business, its importance skyrocketed during the COVID pandemic. Many small brick and mortar businesses have not made the full transition to omnichannel - or the combination of an in store offering with online sales.

A full omnichannel sales system can handle traditional in store purchases, delivery to the customer, and order at home and pick up at the store.

Many small businesses need help making this transition ASAP in order to survive this crisis and to adapt to customer preferences that may be long-lasting shifts.



Process/Action:

- Send a survey to your member businesses to gauge their use of e-commerce technology, business needs, and any best practices they can share with fellow downtown merchants. Alternatively, proactively reach out to businesses who are not operating online to assess the best next steps
- Find e-commerce consultants (or other business owners) who can set up these systems quickly for other merchants
- Provide grant or matching funds to subsidize the investment in this technology for small businesses
- Create a platform for peer support via messaging apps like google chat, slack, or even basic email threads
- Promote the businesses that offer online fulfillment
- Send a call for volunteers with experience in e-commerce to offer technical assistance if funding is not available for consultants

Resources/Tips on Obstacles:

- [Tech for America](#): free web development and e-commerce support for small businesses
- [Catch a Fire](#): matching non profits with experienced tech-savvy professional volunteers
- [Square](#): in store and e-commerce payment system
- [Shopify](#): e-commerce platform, offering 90 day free trial during COVID

Messaging:

- Send a call out to your community for volunteers
- Our small businesses, as the heart of our community, need our support in order to survive this tumultuous time

General Resources

The best of what we have found to help you navigate this transition

Business Support

- [Open To Business - Hennepin County:](#)
 - An existing program that provides free consulting, low cost financing, and grants to small businesses and communities to support entrepreneurship
- [Streetsense Toolkit:](#)
 - A toolkit to help restaurants and bars relaunch during the pandemic

Placemaking and Design

- [Placemaking for Main Streets Toolkit - The Musicant Group:](#)
 - A step by step guide to generate positive social and commercial activity for any type of commercial center. With its focus on process, it provides useful frameworks that can help navigate this time of COVID and afterwards.
- [Friendly Storefronts Toolkit - The Musicant Group:](#)
 - A step by step guide to transform storefronts into activity centers that support businesses and community life. Similar to the Main Street Toolkit, its focus on process makes it relevant for these times of COVID and afterwards.