

# Practical Advice for Transitioning to Recovery

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## Practical Advice for Transitioning to Recovery

Once a disaster strikes, chances are you are being pulled in multiple directions and uncertain where to devote attention first with limited time available for research. The disaster response phase can be overwhelming and emotionally draining for leaders who are not only worried about their families and homes but also their communities.

It is important to realize that you and your community are not alone in the response and recovery efforts. Economic developers and other community leaders who have been in your shoes have shared their knowledge of what has worked, recommended strategies to employ, and offered support for other disaster affected communities.

The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) has worked with and spoken to impacted communities around the globe to gather a collection of resources to help communities through the four phases of a disaster. A vast array of practical information for communities working to rebuild resilient economies following disasters is located on IEDC's managed website, Restore Your Economy, [www.restoreyoureconomy.org](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org).

During this difficult period, IEDC has created a short list of strategies for your economic development organization (EDO) to consider implementing as your community transitions from the response to recovery stages. In this paper are short summaries of each strategy, with links to websites and publications that include additional information and resources.

### Establishing a Business Re-entry System

The storm has passed and now it is time to allow citizens back into the community. Many communities have found it beneficial to use a tiered re-entry system to allow for an orderly return of citizens. Through the tiered re-entry system, businesses critical to the response and citizen recovery are allowed early access to the community to allow for surveying damage and reopening. Best practice examples of tiered re-entry programs are located online

at [www.restoreyoureconomy.org/preparedness/business-re-entry-system/](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org/preparedness/business-re-entry-system/). Learn more about re-entry systems on page 48 in the *Leadership in Times of Crisis Toolkit*, which is also available for download at [www.restoreyoureconomy.org/toolkit/](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org/toolkit/).

### Set up a Business Recovery Center or Case Management Program

One of the barriers that businesses -- especially those without insurance -- can face in returning to operations is a lack of understanding of the resources and services available. They may get lost in paperwork. Local leaders and volunteers at a business recovery center (BRC) or as part of the case management team can assist these small businesses to identify the resources needed to return to operations. The level of assistance an individual business will require varies by their disaster impact and preparedness activities.

A business recovery center is a one-stop-shop where businesses can learn and apply for federal, state and local resources and services following a disaster. Focused solely on the needs of businesses, the BRC is held in a location separate from the local Emergency Management Center or FEMA disaster recovery center to lessen the confusion of individuals seeking social services. The BRC is typically organized and led by a local EDO. An eight-step guide to setting up a BRC with resource links can be found online at [www.restoreyoureconomy.org/recovery/business-recovery-center/](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org/recovery/business-recovery-center/). Learn more about identifying a location for a BRC on page 48 in the *Leadership in Times of Crisis Toolkit*.

The case management approach provides assistance to businesses on their turf. This more personalized approach is where services and resources are brought to the business instead of depending on the business to come to the BRC. A case management approach can be similar to a business retention and expansion (BRE) program. This hands-on approach works well in smaller communities where it can be difficult to reach a more centralized BRC. Additional information including three case examples is located on pages 65-67 in the *Leadership in Times of Crisis Toolkit*.

All leaders and volunteers staffing the BRC and case management program should consider the mental health of those business owners they are assisting. It is recommended to have a mental health professional available to business owners at the BRC or as part of the case management program.

## Communications During Transition

Communicating both externally and internally in response to a disaster can be overwhelming. Often, questions are asked without the information readily available. If not done already, one or more spokespeople should be identified to communicate with stakeholders, businesses, and the media from the EDO for consistency of the messages. When communicating with local businesses, several tools can be used including text messages, social media, blogs, and web portals as well as traditional standbys of the newspaper, radio, television stations, and calling on the telephone. The BRC should also have a hotline for businesses to call to receive counseling, particularly when they are unable to travel to the physical location. Several communication approaches are highlighted in Chapter VII: Crisis Communication in the [Leadership in Times of Crisis Toolkit](#).

As the community transitions to the recovery phase, an EDO should continue to have a unified communications strategy for outreach activities including communicating with businesses for retention and expansion, petitioning the state and federal government for assistance, and marketing the fact that the community is open for business. Aspects to consider as part of the post-disaster communication strategy can be found online at [www.restoreyoureconomy.org/recovery/developing-a-communication-strategy/](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org/recovery/developing-a-communication-strategy/).

## Develop Lists of Resources

Disasters often cause physical and emotional damage to a business. Economic development organizations can serve as a liaison to assist businesses in identifying the support they need.

As businesses and government agencies are no longer able to remain in their pre-disaster location, they will be in search of usable space. These may include vacant storefronts, office and industrial buildings, and even

trailers on land cleared for future development. With a list of available vacant spaces available in the community, an EDO can assist a business to find a temporary location until their pre-disaster location is safe to return to operations. A temporary location will limit the interruption to the business and assist in decreasing the number of lost customers.

It is human nature for people to want to support their fellow businesses in the recovery process. One way to connect local businesses leaders is to create a message board for impacted businesses to post items they are in need to return to operations and for fellow businesses to post items they can donate or lend. The businesses should include their contact information to help coordinate the exchange of items.

A list of licensed and/or credentialed local companies that can assist with repairs offers multiple benefits. This list not only assists in preserving jobs in the community during a difficult time but also allows local businesses to participate in their own community's cleanup and response process. Economic developers can work with the local companies to assist in their ability to obtain supplies and expedite the permits needed for contracts.

### From the Field: Recommendations from Kirstie Smith

Kirstie Smith is the Communications Director at the Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce in Joplin, Missouri. The City of Joplin was hit by an EF-5 tornado on May 22, 2011.

1. Have one accurate, complete list of all the businesses that are open in the community regardless of membership in the chamber.
2. The EDO or Chamber's social media profile is a good, credible, and verified source to keep businesses and the public informed.
3. Long-term partnerships and a commitment to the ultimate goal are key to successful recovery efforts. Leverage partnerships beyond the community, county, and state borders within your region for recovery.
4. After the initial contact with an impacted business, conduct status checks on a regular basis to support them on their path to recovery. Contact all businesses not in the affected area within the region after those in the impacted zone. They may be experiencing indirect impacts from the disaster.
5. To maintain some sense of normalcy and to give kids a place to go while their parents assist with the recovery efforts, have the schools re-open on schedule and/or create special programs for children until schools re-open.

## Putting Businesses Back to Work

As businesses emerge from the disaster and prepare to reopen, they are in need of workers and customers. Workers can face several barriers to returning to work. The faster public transportation returns to operation, the sooner workers who depend on it can return. Parents rely on schools or daycares to supervise their children while they are working. If these are not operational, a sharp increase in childcare demand can result in workers having to stay home as supply cannot meet demand. The community should work with non-profit and religious organizations to identify potential shelters for those unable to return to their homes and to return schools to operations.

Sometimes businesses are open, but where are the customers? A web page and social media campaign announcing businesses that are open can drive customers back to local stores, restaurants, and service providers. Once businesses are open that can provide the bare necessities, the community can in some cases choose to provide vouchers to be used in local businesses instead of distributing food and supplies. Vouchers will create a boost to the local economy and support the community's businesses.

## Assessing Disaster Impacts

While some businesses will come to a business recovery center, other businesses will choose to try to recover on their own. Understanding the impacts of the disaster on all businesses and their requirements to reopen will assist the community with its plans for recovery. A public meeting is an opportunity for business owners to share their experiences and find support in the community. One way to do this is to conduct a grassroots campaign. Send out a team of individuals to the business owners to conduct a paper survey and inform them about the services offered. An electronic survey is not recommended as connectivity may be limited following the storm. Chapter VI in the *Leadership in Times of Crisis Toolkit* provides guidance on the types of post-disaster impact studies, the timing for the analysis, and a process for conducting a study.

Following a disaster, communicating with business owners can be challenging. Some owners, including some in vital tourist areas, may not have returned to the community. Telecommunication systems can experience technical difficulties, limiting the availability of electronic communications. Continuously updating social media and local news stations are a good strategy to keep businesses and visitors informed of the support services available during the recovery stages.

### From the Field: Recommendations from Tish Williams

Tish Williams is the Executive Director of the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Hurricane Katrina and the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill greatly affected Hancock County.

1. Devise a public/private partnership to chart the course and set funding priorities.
2. Work directly with state agencies and the Governor's office to establish your organization as an authority on matters related to disaster recovery.
3. Work regionally or be the region's resource for recovery programs.
4. If you do not already have an agency focused on housing development, establish a Housing Resource Center to get people back in their homes to re-establish the population, labor market, and customer base for businesses.
5. Establish marketing tools to rebuild your housing market and community.
6. Create the organizations to apply for, accept, and manage funds for loans and grants for local business and industry. This may include establishing a 501(c)(3) and a community development financial institution if you do not already have one. These organizational structures will allow your organization to be eligible for federal and state grants that will provide the funding you will need to expand your capacity and rebuild your county's economic structure. Work with state agencies to provide re-capitalization grants for businesses.
7. Establish events to help bring visitors to your area to create a customer base for small businesses.
8. Use your Chamber of Commerce to communicate to stakeholders about opportunities for rebuilding and recovery.
9. Focus on catalyst projects to spur investment.
10. Consider establishing a downtown incubator or accelerator to give businesses a way to re-establish.

## Emergency Financing for Businesses

Many small businesses run tight budgets with limited to no funds reserved for a rainy day. Despite having commercial insurance, a business may discover that they did not have adequate coverage for the damage or business interruption caused by the disaster or a delay in receiving payments from their insurance carrier or other long-term financing sources. Immediately following a disaster, small businesses need capital to cover their recovery expenses even when the doors are closed. Communities have responded by providing emergency grants and loans to jumpstart their recovery.

A gap or bridge loan provides small businesses with low interest and/or no fee interest loan with flexible terms to provide the financing needed to assist with their costs immediately following the disaster. Some states including Florida and Louisiana offer these loans to local businesses. If your state does not offer a program, local cities, counties, and regions can create programs for their local businesses. Economic development organizations can talk with local banks to develop solutions for small businesses to have access to capital. Gap and bridge loans are discussed on pages 68 – 73 in the [Leadership in Times of Crisis Toolkit](#).

Economic developers can work with local foundations to make grants and loans to small businesses to help small businesses to return to operations. As a 501(c)(3) organization, a foundation can accept donations on behalf of the community to support the local economy's recovery. Their experience and structure in grant making can assist in expediting the development of a fund to provide grants. The [Case Studies in Small Business Finance Following a Disaster](#) briefing paper provides six examples of programs communities and foundations have developed to provide access to capital for small businesses. Learn more about establishing a business recovery fund on page 51 in the [Leadership in Times of Crisis Toolkit](#).

## Accessing Federal & State Resources

Federal and state governments have a range of resources to support local leaders in their economic recovery. Conducting outreach to federal and state representatives within the region can provide information on the

resources available for local businesses. These representatives may have an interest in participating or providing resources for the business recovery center, a public meeting with local businesses and case management program. Following the recent winter storms, IEDC created a list of [U.S. government agencies](#) that EDOs should consider for disaster recovery and preparedness resources. The [Federal Disaster Recovery Funding: Minimizing Roadblocks to Maximize Resources](#) report provides descriptions of the requirements for federal programs and the guidelines for requesting waivers for disaster-impacted states and communities.

## Additional Resources for Recovery

As a community moves along its roadmap to recovery, there will be additional challenges including addressing blight and redevelopment opportunities, economic diversification, and infrastructure recovery. A list of resources by topic is available online at [www.restoreyoureconomy.org/resources/topic/](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org/resources/topic/).

Many economic developers have shared their disaster recovery experience and advice. A series of recorded web seminars is located online at [www.restoreyoureconomy.org/resources/learn/webinar-archives/](http://www.restoreyoureconomy.org/resources/learn/webinar-archives/).

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