

# EDRP LEADER SERIES



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*Economic development organizations have been busier than ever since the economy turned upside down in March. How are leading EDOs meeting the challenges covid-19 brings to their businesses, communities, and organizations? This brief is the first in a series featuring responses from members of IEDC's Economic Development Research Partners (EDRP) program.*

## Reopening

After two months of social distancing and varying state restrictions on the economy and public life, “reopening” is the topic of the moment. This brief addresses “reopening” in three ways: reopening or restarting a community’s economy; reopening community businesses; and reopening EDO offices.

**Reopening or restarting a community’s economy.** Some EDOs are launching local stimulus initiatives to restart community economies.

For example, in early June, the **Greater Ft. Lauderdale Alliance** and the Broward community will launch iLoveLocal2020, a 90-day strategic campaign to provide an economic stimulus to businesses in Broward County (<https://ilovelocal2020.com/>). iLoveLocal2020 will help restart Broward County’s economy with a “Buy Local” campaign, a community collaborative engaging businesses, chambers, nonprofits, educators, cities, the arts community and other organizations. They will work cooperatively to promote safe work environments, instill consumer confidence to jumpstart local consumer spending and to

sustain local businesses while promoting Broward County Certified Small Businesses as new sources for products and services. iLoveLocal2020 is a community-wide collaborative initiative of Six Pillars Broward, the community’s long-range strategic visioning initiative for economic development in Broward County.

**Invest Atlanta**, the economic development authority for the city of Atlanta, has put together a five-part reopening plan that is part local stimulus and partly a strategy realignment:

1. **Establish a "Buy Local" campaign, on a large scale.** Local businesses have pivoted to making products that are now in greater demand, and are securing new contracts with the city’s largest companies, said Nathan Regan, the agency’s senior VP of economic development. For example, a distillery began making hand sanitizer which it now sells to Delta Airlines. Invest Atlanta would like to develop a way to encourage the city’s Fortune 500 companies to buy a percentage of their product from local sources.

2. **Pivot its recent economic mobility work to sectors that will be relevant post-COVID.** Invest Atlanta is in the final phase of a year-long economic mobility study, which would guide a new economic development strategy for the city.
3. **Establish an Economic Recovery Task Force.** Invest Atlanta currently has a steering committee for economic mobility efforts, which may shift to focus on recovery efforts all while ensuring economic mobility practices are still being pursued.
4. **Exploring working with CDFIs** to make a larger impact on getting working capital into the hands of the business community.
5. **Expand its aftercare program and small business loan department.** Invest Atlanta retooled its Economic Opportunity grant fund (formerly used for business retention and expansion activities) into a small business loan program, the Atlanta Recovery and Relief Fund. Invest Atlanta is also launching a PACE (property assessed clean energy) initiative that targets industrial property owners to make improvements related to water conservation, renewable energy installation, etc.

**Reopening community businesses.** Many EDOs are providing specific, practical guides to help businesses figure out how to restart and maintain operations safely. All recommend complying with state and local standards as a baseline, then figuring out how that applies to different types of businesses.

Chambers and EDOs have organized industry sector meetings to discuss impacts, using that information in policy requests as well to determine the types of resources and links they

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provide. As states begin reopening in phases, EDOs are providing critical information to businesses about which regulations apply and how. They also are helping businesses formulate relaunch strategies and messages, providing information via webinars, newsletters and other vehicles. Some are sourcing PPE in

order to provide “starter kits” that help businesses reopen.

In the first week of May, the **Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce** released an [“Open for Business”](#) guide (PDF), which includes the best available information and practices obtained from local, state and national experts to help businesses operate safely during covid-19. Topics addressed include creating a “return-to-workplace” plan; maintaining a safe and healthy workplace; guidelines regarding the use of personal protective equipment; and industry- and workplace-specific guidelines.

(The Tulsa Chamber is also a key partner in the Mayor’s Economic Recovery Advisory Committee, which aims to develop guidelines for safely reopening the Tulsa economy during the coming weeks and months, and to identify what the Tulsa-area business community needs to do to drive a stronger post-pandemic economy. Many members of the committee also serve on the chamber board.)

The **Little Rock Chamber of Commerce** released [“Relaunch: A Quick Reference Guide”](#) (PDF), a document informed by public relations and marketing agencies to guide businesses in communicating their relaunch message. Topics include “the new normal” for shopping and retail; maintaining safety and social distancing on the job; and how public relations, marketing and advertising (via both traditional and social media) need to adapt.

In collaboration with **Grow Great Falls**, The **Lake Superior Community Partnership** published a [COVID-19 Business Restart Toolkit](#). Topics covered include regulatory considerations, instilling safety and confidence; marketing and promotion; human resources

management; finances and reporting; industry specifics; and additional forms, template and resources.

The **Greater Des Moines Partnership** recently launched [DSM Forward](#), a compilation of playbooks devoted to helping businesses and industries prepare for next steps related to economic recovery. Playbooks are available both by industry (e.g., agriculture, childcare, education, arts and culture, gyms, hotels, etc.) and by business function (e.g., finance, HR, IT, etc.).

The **Ames Chamber of Commerce** compiled a [Re-opening Business Resource Guide](#) that highlights best practices to follow when re-opening a business to the public.

**EDO reopening.** All but one economic development organization interviewed for this series began working remotely in mid-March. As of mid-April, one organization had returned to the office. Most of the remaining organizations had not identified specific dates to return to offices, but were considering it for anytime from early June through the fall.

The **Tulsa Chamber** has targeted the Tuesday after Memorial Day as the soft start for reopening the office; however, team members will be allowed to make decisions based on their personal circumstances (e.g., underlying health conditions for self or family member). Team members will stagger their time in the office, at least initially, so everyone isn’t there at the same time. Staff will complete a questionnaire daily about their health, and PPE will be available (including gloves, masks and hand sanitizer). Conference rooms will be kept closed, at least initially, and meetings held virtually for the foreseeable future.