



GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITIES RESPONDING TO COVID-19

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FOR MAIN STREET ORGANIZATIONS

Social Distancing

The Mississippi Main Street Association (MMSA) recommends that local Main Street organizations adhere to the [CDC's recommendations for large community events](#).

In order to help [flatten the curve](#), Main Street programs should postpone or cancel non-essential in-person meetings and community events and follow the CDC's recommendations for social distancing.

To be clear, Main Street organizations should remain open for business, but should limit personal interaction as much as possible, especially large group gatherings.

Suggestions for operating a Main Street organization while adhering to social distancing recommendations include:

- Communicating with your community members through multiple channels including your website, email, and social media. Email platforms like Constant Contact, Emma, and MailChimp can help organizations simplify communication via email.
- Conducting board and committee meetings via teleconference when possible. Good resources for

audio and video conferencing include Zoom, GoToMeeting, and FreeConferenceCall.com.

Supporting Local Businesses

One of the most important roles a local Main Street organization can do in times like this is to provide support for the small business community. Main Street Directors should use the following recommendations as a starting point for assisting local businesses.

1. Communicate with Your Business Owners

With people shopping and dining out less due to social distancing recommendations, businesses will experience fewer sales and profits. Main Street Directors can serve their business community by communicating important information to local business owners and residents during the coming days.

Ideas for communicating with business owners include:

- Creating a GroupMe for downtown business owners to communicate with each other.
- Encouraging business owners to keep the Main Street organization updated with changes in business hours, additional services, etc.

- Sending a weekly e-newsletter that is just for promoting local retailers. This newsletter could include available products and services, any changes in store hours, expanded services such as pick-up and delivery, and other information that the general public might find relevant.

2. Encourage Additional Business Services

For local retailers, walk-in traffic makes up a substantial portion of their sales. With recommendations for increased social distancing, fewer people will be leaving their homes to go shopping.

One way to help local retailers address this is to encourage them to conduct business over the phone and through their websites, and to consider offering local pickup and delivery services. Retailers could offer virtual shopping experiences via FaceTime. Restaurants should offer curbside pickup and local delivery service for people who want to eat locally, but may not want to dine in.

3. Consider Providing Financial Assistance

Local Main Street organizations should consider how traditional financial incentive programs like façade grants can be tweaked to better support local businesses. One idea includes providing micro-loans to help businesses ride out the crisis. Businesses could use these micro-loans to

offset the cost of picking up a new product line or to provide marketing assistance to businesses needing to promote their products and services. If you want to know what your businesses' needs are, all you have to do is ask your local business owners.

Community Events

With the CDC's recommendations for postponing or canceling in-person events that consist of 50 people or more until at least May 8, local Main Street organizations will undoubtedly have to make hard decisions about community events.

The following information provides guidance for Main Street directors and other community event planners who may have to postpone or cancel an event.

1. Consider alternatives to cancelling an event.

In light of the CDC's guidance for planners of large events, rescheduling events for a later date can be a good alternative to a flat-out cancellation. If you do decide to reschedule your event, use the following suggestions to make the process easier:

- Ask all involved parties (staff, volunteers, city officials, vendors, musicians, artists, contractors, etc.) to reschedule the event, rather than cancel it.

- Make a list of all impacted parties and find out their policy related to cancellations before making a decision. Start with the most expensive liability and work your way down the list. For example, a headlining band may have required a non-refundable deposit, which may be your largest financial liability. Other liabilities may include security, rentals, or advertising. Make the hard decisions first and the others will follow.
- If you are able to reschedule the event, choose a date as far out as possible in order to provide plenty of time for things to return to normal. Currently, the CDC is recommending large events to be postponed until at least May 8, 2020, but that date may be extended based on developing circumstances.
- For events that required advanced payment or ticket purchases, consider offering a coupon code that will be applied to a future event. Instead of a refund, you can issue a credit to be applied to future events, which will provide peace of mind for attendees.
- If possible, offer the event or training online instead of in person. In these times of social distancing, online events and meetings are a great option that can still provide value to event registrants.

Although postponing events is preferable, there are times when cancelling is the best option. For instance, if you have specific cancellation time periods or if you must make pre-purchases within a certain timeframe, it may be best to simply cancel the event.

Seasonal events may also need to be canceled rather than postponed. Crawfish boils are a great example of this due to having to commit to purchasing a certain amount of perishable, seasonal food ahead of time.

2. Check your event insurance policy.

If you carry event insurance (which you should), check your insurance policy to make sure it would cover any repercussions that may occur as a result of the coronavirus. These repercussions may include, but are not limited to, lower attendance, loss of revenue, and liability for potential exposure to the coronavirus at the event.

Another consideration is whether the insurance policy is able to be extended to a future date, in the event of a reschedule. Your insurance agent should be able to provide you with guidance on this.

3. Get the word out as soon as possible.

Although you don't have to include all of the details in your first point of contact, you should post a clear and concise

message via email and all of your social media outlets as soon as a decision is made.

Assure your audience that everyone associated with the event will be contacted with more details as they unfold. This sends a confident message to your audience that you are being proactive and are aware of everyone's individual circumstances. You may post that the event has been cancelled, or you may post that the event will be rescheduled for a later date.

4. Communicate refund policies for all of your audiences.

The best way to decrease hesitation about upcoming events is to create a clearly stated refund policy for your events. We recommend offering a 100% refund policy for the time being.

Once an event has been cancelled or rescheduled, let ticket holders and vendors know how they can obtain a refund. Consider a time period during which attendees and vendors may request a refund and let them know the best way to request a refund (email, telephone, in writing, etc.). Another option is to offer a credit for the next event in lieu of refunds. This will help minimize revenue loss while encouraging attendance for the next event. Also, don't forget about your sponsors.

Chances are that you may have already spent or designated the funds that they have donated to you for the event. Consider asking them to allow you to apply their sponsorship to the event when it is rescheduled, either later in the year or for the next year's event.

5. Make sure that all of your messages are updated.

Update your website, take down old event posters, update community calendars, change your social media events and posts. Consider making a graphic just for the change that people can share on social media.

To streamline communication for event cancellation or rescheduling, you may consider setting up an email dedicated to the event where all questions and concerns can be directed. Clearly communicate to your staff who is responsible for checking and responding to these emails. This gives your attendees confidence in your ability to respond quickly and you won't have to worry about losing an email in the mix of the ones that you get every day.

6. Take proper precautions when planning future events.

No doubt many of you are planning for events that have not even been launched yet, such as summer concerts and festivals. For these events, proceed cautiously and

keep in mind all of your options as you plan. Clearly state your ticket and refund policy, should you have to cancel the event in the future.

If you do not already do so, consider using a ticket platform like Eventbrite or something similar to manage your tickets and attendees so that you ensure a strong database for communication purposes should your event have to be altered or cancelled.

Additionally, in planning these future events, you will inevitably have to consider down payments or deposits. Be sure to review these carefully and be aware of every aspect associated with them before you do so. With the nature of the future being unknown at this time, this will give you the ability to plan ahead without fear or hesitation.

FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

For local retailers and service providers, walk-in traffic makes up a substantial portion of their sales. With recommendations for increased social distancing, fewer people will be leaving their homes to go shopping.

Local businesses can continue to provide important products and services to the community by implementing the following recommendations:

1. Communicate with your customers.

Business owners should communicate a consistent message through as many channels as possible. These channels include their business website, email, social media, and more traditional means, such as radio and print advertising. If you intend to offer additional services or change your business hours in any way, let your customers know in advance.

2. Consider offering additional business services.

One way that local retailers can address their customers' desire to limit personal interaction is by offering the option of conducting business over the phone and online. Consider offering virtual shopping experiences through platforms like Facetime. Retailers should offer local pickup and delivery services whenever possible. Restaurants

should consider offering curbside pickup and home delivery service for people who want to eat locally, but may not want to dine in.

3. Publicize your commitment to public health.

Local businesses should communicate to their customers the efforts they are taking to follow the [CDC's recommendations for cleaning and disinfection](#). Businesses should sanitize frequently touched surfaces (door handles, counters, credit card machines, pens, menus, sink faucets, etc.) at least daily.

If possible, install a hand sanitizer dispenser at the entrance to your business and encourage patrons to use it upon entry and before exit. In addition, ensure that your workers do not show up to work when they are exhibiting symptoms of sickness.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Mississippi Main Street Association has created a website with resources and guidance related to the response to COVID-19. For more information, visit

www.msmainstreet.com/coronavirus

In addition, MMSA will be sharing information on its social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) platforms:

@msmainstreet

MEDIA CONTACT

For media inquiries, please contact MMSA Director of Communication and Marketing, Jeannie Zieren, at

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