

ROAD TO RECOVERY


EMPORIA
Area Chamber & Visitors Bureau

INTRODUCTION

Partners from across the Emporia and Lyon County Community joined forces to strengthen the local economy in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. Road to Recovery has been led by the Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce and Ignite Emporia with the support of the following community partners: City of Emporia, Lyon County, Emporia State University, Flint Hills Technical College, Regional Development Association, United Way of the Flint Hills, Emporia Main Street, Hispanics of Today and Tomorrow, Emporia Arts Center, and numerous business owners and community organization representatives. The Road to Recovery engaged business leaders who shared insights, identified challenges, and built actionable strategies to restore the local economy in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

Seven teams addressed specific industries and sectors working to identify, and help craft solutions that can assist businesses in the Emporia and Lyon County area to emerge from the current COVID-19 crisis. Team discussions will focus on the following components: Restore, Resiliency, and Renewal & Transformation. These findings will help shape a plan for future business resiliency.

This report will focus on the Restore component of the findings of each group. Another report will focus on the resiliency, renewal and transformation components.

The following pages are the findings of each of the seven committees.



Please be advised that some or all the information contained in this document may not be applicable to some businesses or places of work and may not include all information necessary for certain businesses and places of work. Due to unique industry operational factors and associated sub-industries, other trade associations and professional groups may have additional input. As COVID-19 circumstances continue to evolve, so will the public health and safety recommendations and requirements, and as a result this document may not include all current governmental or health expert requirements and recommendations beyond the prepared date. We strongly advise that before implementing any of the practices and procedures contained herein, companies carefully evaluate and consult with their own legal counsel and other advisors regarding the legality, applicability and potential efficacy of this information in their place of business and determine if any other recommendations or requirements may apply to their business.

LEVERAGING STRENGTHS OF ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS:

Educational institutions (Pre-K – Higher Education) are the cornerstone of developing a community's knowledge base, training, and continuity of resources. Healthcare facilities promote and support the overall wellbeing of the community by providing vibrant, affordable, up to date, and comprehensive care. These anchor institutions represent some of the largest employers in the community and keeping them strong will have a major impact on the recovery process.

RESTORE:

Safe Return to the Classroom:

A key element of regaining a regular routine will be finding a way to return to the classroom. Each institution will be guided by federal, state and local requirements and recommendations.

- Consistently meet and/or exceed the protocols and recommendations provided by County Health Officials, State Health Officials, and the CDC.
- Prepare new and innovative methods of curriculum delivery options such as hybrid, remote options, static cohort groups and/or phased cohort groups.
- Maintain rigorous attendance records of individuals in buildings and rooms/offices to speed contact tracing as needed.

Safe Return to local Clinics and the Hospital:

"Elective" services have been restored at Newman Regional Health and the Newman Medical Arts building. Protocols developed over the past few months remain in place with plans to lessen and eventually phase certain measures out while moving through the Governor's planned phases.

- Restore Elective healthcare options following guidelines and best practices.
- Continue cleaning, screening, visitation restrictions, PPE and social distancing protocol.

Confidence in the Sustainability Education:

The goal in building confidence in sustainability rests in the preparedness of institutions to pivot as any situation evolves in the next year or longer. Articulating plans to stakeholders will ensure all parties that institutions are ready to face and handle developments as they come.

- Work collectively on consistent messaging to the community at large.
- Prepare plans for full in classroom return, and articulate plans for possible adjustments.
- Coordinate a timeline of statement release, though unique to each institution, but addressing the same situation, to ensure confidence, when possible.

Confidence in the Sustainability Healthcare:

Newman Regional Health has started a “Re-Establishment of Services Marketing Campaign” articulating the goals and plans moving forward. These plans rely on the proper preparedness of the healthcare institution to meet the ebb and flow of required virus response.

- Emphasize the ability to maintain the safety of patients and visitors.



RESTARTING HOSPITALITY & TOURISM:

Tourism & hospitality are critical components to our community. Both important to our economy and our identity, guests traveling to, or through Emporia will need to feel safe as we move forward. Our hotels, airbnbs, points of interests, and special events must adapt to our current environment in order to serve the travelers that are in Emporia for either work or play.

RESTORE:

- All hotels, airbnbs, points of interest and attraction, and special events must return; not to normal, but to a new normal.
- Travelers and guests will need to “trust” Emporia as a “safe & clean” destination
- We must recruit the business traveler back to Emporia to stay as they travel and do their work.



REBUILDING NONPROFIT, FAITH AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:

Non-Profit/Community Organizations are the foundation of support helping to develop and maintain healthy communities. They provide support for all individuals, focusing on those that may experience barriers to services and need additional supports during or after a crisis. The programs and services provided by Non-Profit Community groups are critical components to the overall health, safety and culture that enhance the collective good of our community and region. Successful recovery by these organizations will be critical to the successful recovery of the full community.

RESTORE:

- Restoring level of services to the community:
 - » How has your audience or services changed or been impacted?
- Adapting services to ensure safety while meeting the needs of our population.
- Ensuring short-term financial sustainability.



REVIVING SMALL BUSINESSES

While the phrase “Small Business” seems like something everyone understands, in reality it covers a wide range of organizations and operations that interact with the community in many different ways. A plan for restoring small business will have some similar overlap but each entity will have to find their unique path forward to stability and resiliency. Industry guidelines and trends will be an important resource and giving each business the time and space needed to adjust will be critical. Below we have outlined additional points of information and guidance as well as steps we should take locally to assist small businesses as they transition to new ways of operation.

RESTORE:

- Existing platforms are available for small businesses for industry best practices per business category. We should encourage small businesses to engage those platforms on a consistent basis (and adjacent business type platforms) to obtain advice on best practices.
 - » <https://www.uschamber.com/reopening-business>
 - » The Governor’s industry specific links: <https://covid.ks.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Business-Guidance.pdf>
 - » www.reopenmainstreet.com
- It is important that any report issued to the public exist in a dynamic platform like a website. Information concerning the Covid-19 pandemic has changed repeatedly for businesses, and static reporting may inadvertently generate information that becomes outdated or runs contrary to current advice.
- Business restrictions that go above and beyond the Governor’s plan need to be clearly stated as city ordinances or health department edicts. Communities in other parts of the nation have struggled to maintain consistency in approaches or have enraged some consumers if business expectations and consequences for not following ordinances were unclear.
- Signs and business information for immediate communication with the public need to be clear and concise.

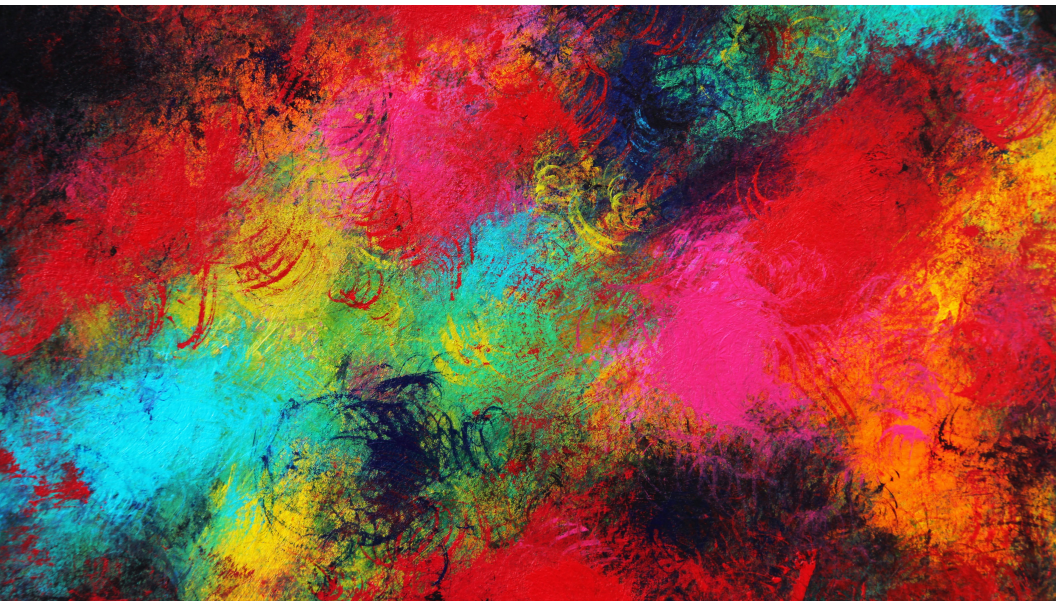
PROTECTING ARTS & CREATIVE ECONOMY

Protecting the arts and creative economy are vital to our community's wellbeing. The creative arts community enriches our life for children of all ages with educational opportunities, presenting art forms, and promoting artists events.

The Emporia Arts & Creative Economy were all closed down during the pandemic. The Arts community pivoted and continued virtual performances by various artists, virtual exhibits, music and drama.

RESTORE:

- Online events will be necessary until the public feels safe going out in crowds.
- Community confidence to attend events needs to be restored.
- Health and safety protocols such as social distancing, hand sanitizing, wearing masks and other precautions for safe operating need to be strictly followed.
- Local arts and creative community need to continue to collaborate.



ASSESSING KEY INDUSTRIES

Industry and manufacturing are a critical aspect to our community offering most of the jobs for our region. They are the backbone of our local economy. The rapid development of the goods our industries provide enables our community to produce a wide variety of consumer goods that are used all over the world. The essential food and agricultural businesses; meat processing, pet nutrition, bakery and soybean mill operation were operating at or near full capacity during the stay at home order. Fabricators, Manufacturers & Distributors experienced a dramatic drop in sales, which resulted in significant reduction in staffing. The diversified basic industries lessen the economic impact on our area. We all profit as a community and thrive through our industries and manufacturing successes.

RESTORE:

- Consumer confidence needs to be restored for those fabricators, manufacturers & distributors to increase sales, production, and hiring back the employees.
- The lessons learned in health and safety protocols of social distancing, hand sanitizing, wearing masks and others for safe operating by essential businesses can be shared with reopening businesses.
- Actions speak louder than words. Demonstrated compliance with social distancing, staff using masks, and 'over the top' visually apparent hygiene practices.
- The need for skilled workers still exists. An emphasis for upskilling for the unemployed is needed in skilled professions.
- Putting people back to work needs to be the highest priority.
- Employee confidence will also be a key factor. Ensuring employees feel safe everyday by taking proper precautions before, during and after each shift.

PREPARING VITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Economic infrastructure are basic services that represent a foundational tool for the economy of the Lyon County region. Both “hard” and “soft” infrastructure are important, and this committee focused on the safety, health, and technology when reviewing the Road to Recovery.

RESTORE:

- Restoring the quality of life to our community such as opening parks and other green spaces.
- Adapting services to ensure safety while meeting the needs of our population.
- Adapting the usage of public buildings to mitigate the spikes and to minimize disruptions to our everyday services, such as having locations for the general public to access wi-fi to work and go to school.



WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Over the past few months we have learned that things change quickly and sometimes easy solutions are in front of us but never crossed our minds. Listed below are a few of those items. If you have a new best practice let us know! If you would like to learn more about any one of these aspects, please reach out to us. We would be happy to give you more detailed information.

- Add a phone line (or 2) to accommodate the increased calls. Also consider adding auto hold.
- Scheduling appointments to meet with customers and clients. This could be even in groups.
- Offer flexible work hours as employees return.



PREVIEW: RESILIENCY, RENEWAL AND TRANSFORMATION

Recognizing the complexity of this journey ahead of us, we encourage all businesses to follow best practices as well as getting input from their customers, and the general public. It is critical that we protect the well-being of our workforce and communities in the Lyon County area, but it is also imperative that we approach our moving forward with careful operational considerations. All indicators would suggest that social distancing is likely to persist throughout the next twelve to eighteen months until there is an available vaccine.

SOURCES

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (www.osha.gov)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

National Institute for Occupational Safety and health (www.cdc.gov/niosh)







