

MAYOR'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY TASK FORCE

2020



FROM THE MAYOR

The coronavirus pandemic has affected and tested us in many ways. It has impacted us physically, socially, economically, and spiritually. On the economic front, we have felt the pain of lost business, lost jobs, lost income, and lost stability. That pain has been felt especially by our hourly workers, low-wage workers, small businesses, people of color, women- and minority-owned businesses, and businesses in particularly hard-hit sectors like food and hospitality, arts and recreation, and personal care (including massage, nail, hair, and body art services). Yet, amidst the disruption and uncertainty, we have found deep wells of compassion, innovation, and resilience as a community. Organizations have adapted by shifting operations online and reconfiguring physical workplaces, people have adapted by donning masks and providing mutual aid to one another, and our city has adapted by deepening relationships and partnerships across sectors so that we can all move forward – and rebuild – together.

The road to economic recovery and renewal is not an easy one. In many ways, COVID-19 laid bare some of the deep economic challenges already facing Lincoln, from rising underemployment to declining economic mobility. We all – residents, employers, and public and private sector leaders – have a stake in Lincoln’s economic recovery, and we all have a part to play. That is why I convened an Economic Recovery Task Force in May 2020 – to bring together employers and community stakeholders for the purposes of developing recommended strategies by which we all can participate in Lincoln’s economic recovery in the face of COVID-19.

I asked the task force specifically to develop strategies for supporting local businesses and employment and to do so with an eye toward fostering public health, inclusion, and resilience in our community, in recognition of the interdependence of our physical, social, and economic well-being. This aligns with my office’s Lincoln Forward initiative, which is about growing our city’s quality of life by pursuing holistic, inclusive strategies for economic growth and progress.

I am deeply grateful to the task force co-chairs – Angie Muhleisen and Ava Thomas – for leading this effort and demonstrating remarkable commitment to the welfare of this community. I am also very grateful to subcommittee chairs Jasmine Kingsley, Cori Sampson Vokoun, and Maribel Cruz, task force members, policy aide Alyssa Martin, Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development staff, and the many other individuals and organizations that contributed to and informed the work of the task force.

My hope is that this report will serve as a call to action to all Lincolnites. By harnessing our collective energy, we can plant the seeds for a more economically prosperous, inclusive, and resilient future. We can emerge stronger than before. Let’s get to work.



LEIRION GAYLOR BAIRD

MAYOR

TABLE OF CONTENTS

04

Background on Task Force • Composition of Task Force •
Acknowledgments

07

Executive Summary

10

Local Business Strategies Recommendations

15

Local Workforce Strategies Recommendations

19

Local Sector Strategies Recommendations

23

References

BACKGROUND ON TASK FORCE

On May 27, 2020, Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird announced the formation of the Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force, co-chaired by Angie Muhleisen, President and CEO of Union Bank & Trust, and Ava Thomas, President and Publisher of the Lincoln Journal-Star. The group was tasked with developing data-driven, locally informed strategies for supporting local businesses and employment as the local economy begins to recover from COVID-19, while fostering public health, inclusion, and resilience in Lincoln.

The task force was asked to produce a report by August 31, 2020 with recommended strategies for:

- Supporting **local businesses** in adapting their business models and retaining and supporting their workforce through the COVID-19 crisis;
- Supporting **local workforce development** and employment, as many have lost work and income as a result of the COVID-19 crisis; and
- Supporting **local sectors** of the economy and community that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and that contribute to the city's quality of life and competitive advantage.



The task force was composed of 18 individuals appointed by the Mayor. Each individual served on a subcommittee: Local Business Strategies (chaired by Jasmine Kingsley); Local Workforce Strategies (chaired by Cori Sampson Vokoun); and Local Sector Strategies (chaired by Maribel Cruz). The full task force met 3 times and each subcommittee met about 5 times in the period between June 12, 2020 and August 12, 2020.

MISSION

Develop data-driven, locally informed strategies for supporting **local businesses and employment** as the local economy begins to recover from COVID-19, while fostering **public health, inclusion, and resilience** in Lincoln

COMPOSITION OF TASK FORCE

LOCAL BUSINESS STRATEGIES SUBCOMMITTEE

Jasmine Kingsley | Senior Vice President of Legal & People at Hudl
Subcommittee Chair

Wendy Birdsall | President of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce & the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development

Quentin Brown | Executive Director of Educare Lincoln

Dan Marvin | Director of City Urban Development Department

Angie Muhleisen | President & CEO of Union Bank & Trust
Task Force Co-Chair

Bud Synhorst | President & CEO of Lincoln Independent Business Association



LOCAL WORKFORCE STRATEGIES SUBCOMMITTEE

Cori Sampson Vokoun | Vice President of Sampson Construction Company
Subcommittee Chair

Marco Barker, Ph.D. | Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion for UNL

John Croghan | President of the Seniors Foundation Board of Directors & Executive Director of Immanuel's The Landing at Williamsburg Village

José Lemus | Community Organizer with Civic Nebraska & Collective Impact Lincoln

Susan Martin | President/Secretary-Treasurer of Nebraska State AFL-CIO

Kim Russel | Founder & CEO of Russel Advisors; retired CEO of Bryan Health



LOCAL SECTOR STRATEGIES SUBCOMMITTEE

Maribel Cruz, Ph.D. | Director of Leadership Consulting with Talent Plus, Inc. & President-Elect of The Angels Theatre Company Board of Directors
Subcommittee Chair

Matt Bavougian | Owner of Onyx Piercing Studio & Owner of Body Art Compliance

William Cintani | CEO of Mapes Industries, Inc.

Shannon Harner | President & CEO of HomeServices of Nebraska

Nader Sepahpur | Owner of Yia Yia's Pizza & Beer, MARZ, & AmuManu Ramen Bar

Ava Thomas | President & Publisher of the Lincoln Journal-Star
Task Force Co-Chair

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

STAFF SUPPORT

Alyssa Martin | *Policy Aide to Mayor Gaylor Baird*

Dylan Wren | *Workforce Administrator, Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Board, City of Lincoln*

Pat Haverty | *Vice President of the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development (LPED)*

Luke Peltz | *Director of Business Development for LPED*

Bryan Seck | *Director of Workforce Development for LPED*

Christina Oldfather | *Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship for LPED*

Kaylie Hogan-Schnittker | *Director of Talent Strategy for LPED*

Marguerite Himmelberg | *Director of Client Solutions and Workforce Development for Southeast Community College*



Many people contributed to the work of the Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force beyond the individuals named here. The task force is grateful to all those who helped support and inform this effort, including over 265 organizations that responded to a survey put out by the Local Business Strategies Subcommittee, as well as the Bloomberg Philanthropies COVID-19 Local Response Initiative. Special thanks is given to Ann Chang, Graham Pansing Brooks, Matthew Wegener, and Alexandra Martin Kern for their valuable contributions.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The economic and personal impact of COVID-19 has been deeply felt by the residents of Lincoln. In April 2020, the unemployment rate for Lancaster County reached 9.4%, which is the highest that rate has been since at least 1990, when such data started to be collected at the county level [1]. Total small business revenue in Lancaster County has declined by over 50% over the course of the pandemic when compared to pre-pandemic levels [2]. Sectors critical to Lincoln's economy and quality of life have been particularly impacted by COVID-19 from both a revenue and jobs perspective, including the accommodation and food services sector, arts and recreation sector, personal care sector, manufacturing sector, and more. Low-wage workers and residents of color have not only contracted COVID-19 at a greater rate, but they have also lost jobs and businesses at a greater rate [3].

In the midst of this crisis, thousands of Lincolniters are engaged in a process of recovery and renewal. They are wearing masks, washing hands, and practicing physical distancing. They are retooling business operations, lending support to neighbors, and patronizing local businesses. They are reaching out and not letting physical isolation become emotional isolation. They are demonstrating courage, compassion, and creativity in the face of crisis.

The Mayor's Economic Recovery Task Force was not created to solve all the complex challenges created or made worse by COVID-19, or to replace community-led efforts with a set of external, top-down fixes. Instead, the task force was asked to come up with a few recommended strategies, on a short time frame, for supporting economic recovery and renewal from the standpoint of local businesses and employment.

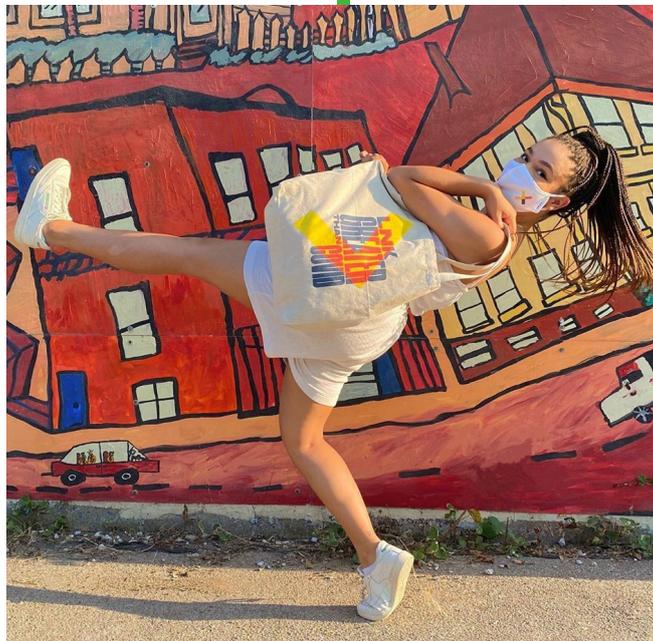


Photo courtesy of Archival (LNK Greater than COVID Campaign)

Rather than displace community-led recovery efforts, the goal of the task force has been to support and augment these efforts, as residents, employers, and public and private sector leaders each have a critical role to play in these complex times.

The following **principles** helped guide the work of the task force:

- **Timely and implementable.** To make this work as meaningful as possible as quickly as possible, the task force focused on developing recommendations that can be implemented and acted upon within a short-to-intermediate time frame. Some recommendations call upon action by residents while others call upon action by employers and private and public sector leaders. Potential implementation leaders are identified throughout the report.
- **Locally relevant.** To ensure recommendations were data-driven and locally sensitive, the Local Business Strategies Subcommittee distributed a survey – the COVID-19 Business Support Survey – to organizations throughout the community to gain a better understanding of opportunities and challenges facing local businesses. The survey had over 265 respondents and results are included throughout the report and in the Appendix. These results directly informed recommendations included in the report.
- **Durable.** Task force members applied a lens of public health, inclusion, and resilience (ability to weather future shocks) to the recommendations included in the report. These principles were baked into the mission of the task force and provide a basis for fostering Lincoln's long-term renewal and economic stability.
- **Asset-driven.** In the spirit of asset-based community development, the task force focused on strengthening and leveraging local resources, knowledge, capacities, and relationships, rather than solely focusing on local needs or deficiencies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local Business Strategies Recommendations

Cultivate Opportunities for Business-to-Business (B2B) Support

Almost 75% of organizations that responded to the COVID-19 Business Support Survey said they were interested in participating in opportunities for direct business-to-business support. We recommend organization of **B2B town halls** or forums in which businesses directly share resources, information, and experience with one another on topics relevant and timely for the business community. Based on survey results, topics should include creating a safe working environment; accessing financial assistance and personal protective equipment; and supporting employee mental health and social connectedness, among others.

Promote Economic Resilience and Inclusion

Evidence shows that we can meaningfully and sustainably grow our community's wealth by strategically **investing in local businesses, small businesses, and women- and minority-owned business enterprises (WMBE)**. To that end, it is recommended that a directory of local businesses be established with information on company services, size, ownership, and type. It is also recommended that the City of Lincoln, employers, and residents target spending toward the businesses mentioned. The City should re-evaluate and revise its procurement policies and practices with an eye toward providing local, small, and women- and minority-owned businesses with greater access to City contracting opportunities. Employers in a position to do so are encouraged to sign a pledge to spend 1% more locally, and residents are encouraged to buy more locally and to prioritize spending at small businesses and WMBEs. In view of the importance of childcare to economic resilience and inclusion, employers are encouraged to continue to provide flexible work arrangements to employees and subsidize or **support employee childcare** where possible.

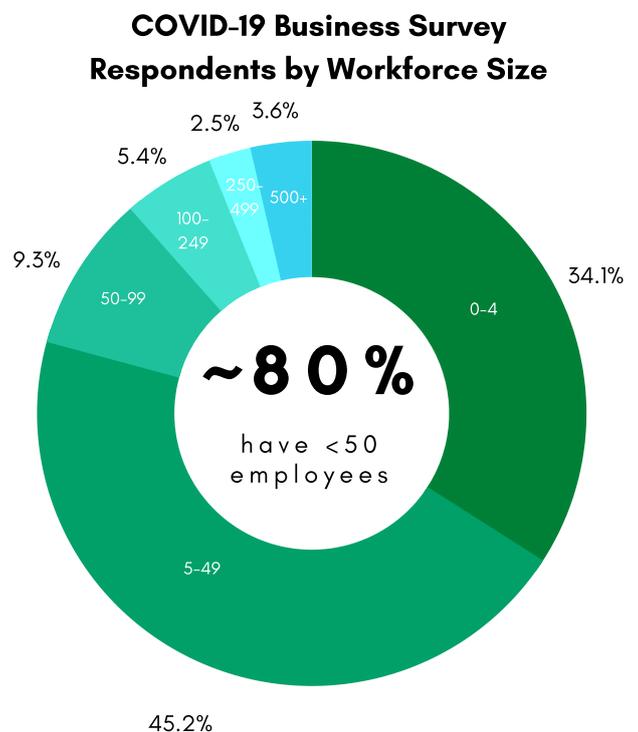
Local Workforce Strategies Recommendations

Connect Employers with Local Workforce Resources and Opportunities

Local resources exist to address Lincoln's pressing unemployment and underemployment challenges, but many of these resources are under-utilized. We recommend that employer participation in existing workforce programs and networks like **NEworks**, **EmployLNK**, and the **American Job Center** be simplified and amplified. Additionally, we recommend that workforce partners prioritize identification of in-demand skillsets and match jobseekers with employment opportunities based on a robust skills analysis. Finally, employers are encouraged to utilize existing resources to revise and simplify job descriptions.

Upskill and Reskill Lincoln's Workforce

To adapt to COVID-19 and the ever-shifting jobs landscape, continual upskilling and reskilling of Lincoln's workforce is required. Professional development must occur on an ongoing basis. The City of Lincoln should create public **incentives** for upskilling and reskilling workers displaced by COVID-19. We also recommend that workforce partners increase jobseeker awareness of publicly available resources for **professional development**. Finally, workforce partners, in collaboration with employers, should develop a "ready to work" strategy that connects skills-based courses and initiatives with employment opportunities.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Local Sector Strategies Recommendations

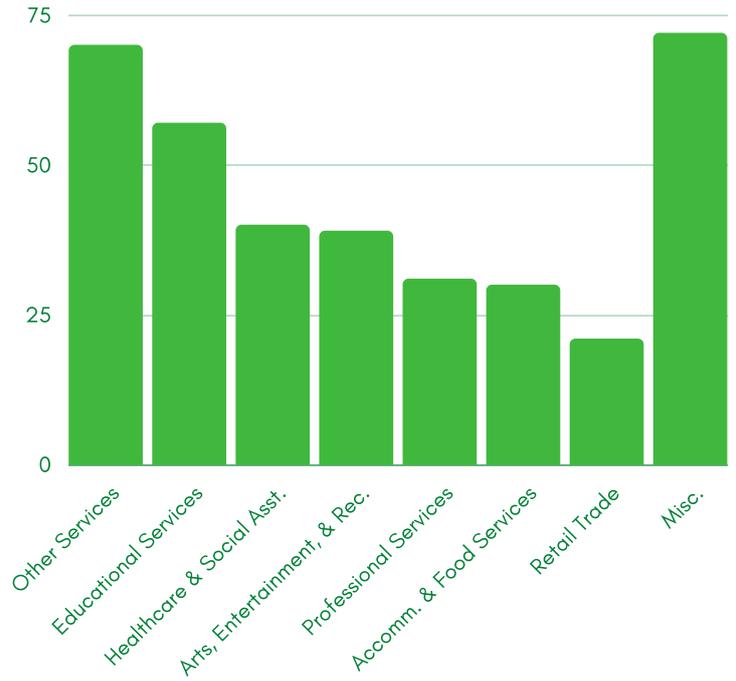
Create a Safe Working Environment and Restore Consumer Confidence

Our public health and economic recovery are closely intertwined – we cannot have one without the other, especially if we want to preserve the strength of those sectors that have been particularly impacted by COVID-19 like hospitality and arts, among others. We recommend an awareness **campaign to highlight businesses** employing commonsense and innovative public health measures. We also recommend strategies to enhance access to **personal protective equipment** (PPE).

Provide Financial Assistance to Impacted Businesses and Invest in New Businesses

In view of the significant financial impact of COVID-19 on existing businesses, we recommend that the City of Lincoln create a **fund to provide grants** to eligible local businesses particularly impacted by COVID-19. Additionally, we recommend creation of a hotline or navigator program to help businesses navigate available financial opportunities. Finally, we recommend that Lincolniters continue to invest in new businesses and support a **culture of entrepreneurship**, as startups play a key role in fostering economic recovery and resiliency.

COVID-19 Business Survey Sectors Represented



To the extent any of the task force recommendations require additional financial investment on the part of the City of Lincoln, the task force recommends that the City of Lincoln advocate for coronavirus relief funding from the state and federal government. The City of Lincoln has a comparative advantage when it comes to distributing funds to local businesses and residents given its relationship to the community and ability to assess local needs. If the City of Lincoln is not able to access coronavirus relief funding from the state or federal government, the City is encouraged to draw upon its own Fast Forward Fund, which was created in 2008 out of surplus special assessment revenue to support economic development-related infrastructure projects. The task force feels it is appropriate, given the circumstances, to dedicate a portion of that fund to COVID-19 related economic recovery and renewal.

LOCAL BUSINESS STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Business-to-Business Support

Economic Resilience & Inclusion

LOCAL WORKFORCE STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Leveraging Local Workforce Resources

Upskilling & Reskilling

LOCAL SECTOR STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Workplace Safety and Consumer Confidence

Financial Support

LOCAL BUSINESS STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultivating Opportunities for Business-to-Business (B2B) Support

Background

In response to COVID-19, many people in Lincoln spontaneously came together to provide direct support to one another, including physical, social, and emotional support. Groups like the COVID Mutual Aid Lincoln/Omaha Facebook group formed (with over 4,700 members as of the writing of this report) [4], and opportunities like NeighborLNK (a program that directly pairs volunteers with persons seeking additional support and companionship as a result of the COVID-19 crisis) emerged [5]. These responses to COVID-19 demonstrate the extent to which the people of Lincoln care about one another and desire to connect and support one another in a direct way. The same principle applies to Lincoln's businesses.

Almost 75% of the organizations that responded to the COVID-19 Business Support Survey indicated that they were interested in participating in opportunities designed to foster direct B2B support. [6]

This data directly informs the first set of recommendations in this report, which involve cultivating opportunities for B2B support. These opportunities will strengthen relationships among local businesses and lead to greater sharing of information and best practices, the benefits of which could extend beyond the COVID-19 crisis. Exposure to B2B support opportunities will also help businesses adapt more quickly to evolving problems such as those posed by COVID-19, as businesses can hear directly from those facing similar challenges within a similar context.

Survey Question: What types of support would be most helpful to your organization?



LOCAL BUSINESS STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultivating Opportunities for Business-to-Business (B2B) Support

Strategy Recommendations

1. Organize Business-to-Business Forums

Relevant business and industry associations, in collaboration with the City of Lincoln as appropriate, should host a series of “B2B Town Halls” or forums in which businesses share their resources, information, and experience with one another. These forums should be organized around topic areas that are relevant and timely for the business community, including:

- Guidance on Creating a Safe Working Environment (ranked as the #1 area in which local businesses are seeking support according to the COVID-19 Business Support Survey)
- Information on Accessing Financial Assistance (ranked #2 in the survey)
- Access to Personal Protective Equipment (ranked #3 in the survey)
- Guidance on Working with Landlords
- Guidance on Supporting Employee Mental Health and Social Connectedness (ranked #5 in the survey)
- Guidance on Modifying Business Models (ranked #6 in the survey)
- Leveraging Technology and Social Media (ranked #7 in the survey)
- Childcare Support for Employees (ranked #8 in the survey)

Forums should ideally involve a participatory component, where business representatives can discuss current challenges and opportunities that they are facing, in addition to a speaking component, where local businesses are invited to share resources, information, and experience with others. Forums should be inclusive, and participation should not be limited to membership in a business association.

2. Share B2B Support Information Broadly and through Multiple Channels

Those involved with organizing B2B Town Halls or forums should ensure that information from these events is distributed through means designed to reach the most organizations possible (whether through email, website, text, or non-traditional means). Additionally, local businesses are encouraged to share their existing assets by contributing to a policy bank or document repository made publicly available for other local businesses to utilize.



LOCAL BUSINESS STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Promote Economic Resilience and Inclusion

Background

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed and magnified issues that already existed in Lincoln, including issues surrounding economic resilience and inclusion. From a business perspective, COVID-19 has had an especially devastating impact on locally owned businesses, small businesses (<50 employees), and women- and minority-owned businesses (WMBEs) [7]. The implications for the local economy are significant, as it is these businesses that tend to generate the most local jobs, local wealth, and opportunities for residents. Studies have consistently shown, for example, that local businesses recirculate a greater share of every dollar in the local economy [8]. A study conducted in Portland, Maine found that every \$100 spent at a locally owned business tends to generate an additional \$58 in local impact due to recirculation (when local businesses earn more, they spend more locally) [9]. By comparison, \$100 spent at a representative national chain store was found to generate only an additional \$33 in local impact. The authors of the study concluded, based on these findings, that a 10% shift in consumer spending in Cumberland County from national chains to locally owned businesses would result in an additional \$127 million in local economic activity and 874 new jobs generating over \$35 million in wages. Investing in WMBEs likewise yields substantial benefits for the local economy, especially in times of economic stress. As one study noted, although WMBEs were more likely to close during the Great Recession, they served as engines of economic recovery. Nationally, WMBEs added 1.8 million jobs from 2007 to 2012, while non-WMBEs lost jobs during this period [10].

We all can promote economic resilience and inclusion by deploying our individual and collective spending power for community benefit. That means spending more locally and prioritizing spending at small businesses and WMBEs.

Additional strategy recommendations in this area relate to childcare. ***Childcare has become increasingly fundamental to Lincoln's economic resilience and inclusion.*** Compared to the national average, Lincoln has an unusually high number of children with all parents in the workforce (meaning that both parents work in a two-parent family and the sole parent works in a one-parent family). In Lincoln, 75% of children under 6 years of age have all parents in the workforce, as compared to a national average of 66.7% [11]. In addition, the cost of childcare has come to represent an increasingly significant proportion of Lincoln working parents' income. In 2019, the annual cost of care for an infant in a childcare center in Nebraska was more than resident tuition and fees at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (\$10,793 compared to \$8,978) [12]. COVID-19 has only exacerbated these challenges, illustrating the extent to which Lincoln's economy depends on adequate access to affordable childcare. Unfortunately, the burden of COVID-19 related childcare struggles has not been borne equally. Surveys have shown that a disproportionate share of the childcare burden is falling on women, minorities, and low-wage workers, threatening to undo years of progress toward equality of workforce participation [13].



LOCAL BUSINESS STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Promote Economic Resilience and Inclusion

Strategy Recommendations

1. Establish a Local Business Directory

Local business associations, in collaboration with the City of Lincoln as appropriate, should compile a directory of businesses whose principal place of business is in Lincoln/Lancaster County, along with other relevant information including: company services; company size (0-4 employees, 5-49 employees, 50-499 employees, 500+ employees); company ownership (locally owned, women-owned, minority-owned, disabled-owned, veteran-owned, immigrant- or refugee-owned); and company type (benefit corporation or otherwise).

2. Target Spending to Local, Small, and Women- and Minority-Owned Businesses

The City of Lincoln should revise its procurement policies and practices with an eye toward providing local businesses, small businesses, and women- and minority-owned businesses (WMBEs) with greater access to City contracting opportunities. The City should:

- Partner with relevant business and industry associations to provide training opportunities, capacity-building, and technical assistance to businesses on how to navigate the City's procurement process and best compete for City contracts, building on the City's efforts to advise businesses through the Procurement Technical Assistance Center;
- Have departments adopt internal metrics and goals with respect to procurements from local businesses, small businesses, and WMBEs;
- Revise administrative procurement policies and guidelines to maximize access to opportunity and reduce potential barriers for vendors, such as those posed by unnecessary vendor experience requirements; and

- Convene a working group to evaluate whether changes to the procurement sections of City Charter and/or City Municipal Code should be made to best promote economic resilience and inclusion, including whether the City should adopt a percentage-based preference policy or any other statutory policy designed to enhance access to City contracting opportunities (to the extent legal and advisable).

Local organizations are encouraged to examine who they are purchasing from and commit to purchasing more from local businesses, including especially small businesses and WMBEs. Organizations with the wherewithal to do so should commit to a goal of purchasing 1% more from local businesses. Organizations that commit to and are demonstrated to have achieved this goal should be recognized for their contributions to the community.

Residents are encouraged to buy locally to the extent feasible and to support small businesses and WMBEs. Public and private stakeholders should continue to promote buying local and bring attention to businesses with which residents may not be aware, as well as businesses whose actions demonstrate a positive commitment to the public health and welfare of Lincoln.

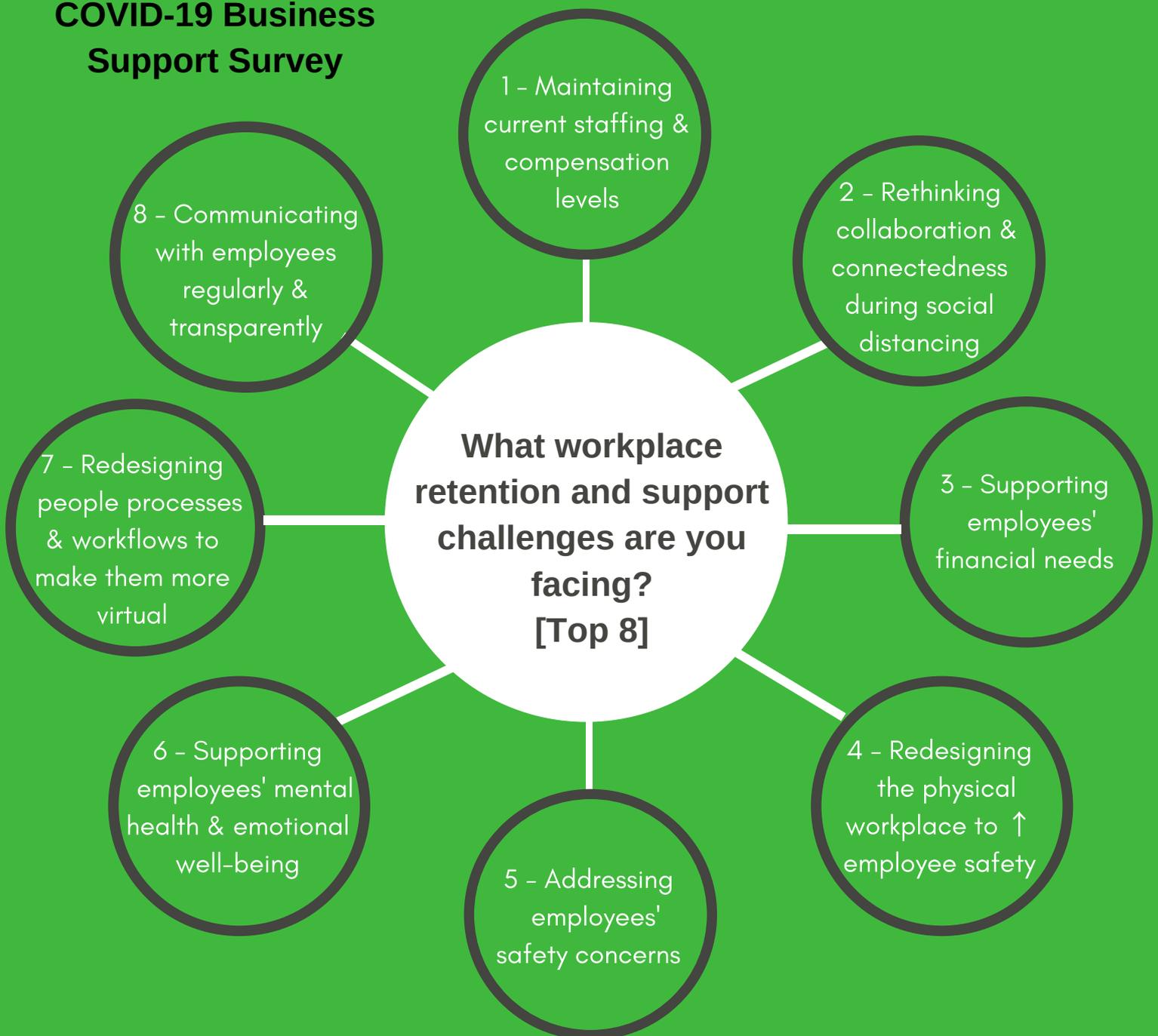
3. Increase Access to Childcare

Employers are encouraged to:

- Continue to provide flexible work arrangements to employees where possible;
- Subsidize employee participation in local childcare programs if feasible (assuming available funding); and
- Extend COVID-19 related paid family leave if feasible (assuming available funding).

Assuming available funding, the City of Lincoln should provide grants to businesses for the purpose of subsidizing employee childcare or extended COVID-19 related paid family leave.

COVID-19 Business Support Survey



Actions companies are taking to support employees during the pandemic

(In order of reported frequency)

- Providing more flexible work options to align to new way of working
- Placing greater care and emphasis on how/what is being communicated to employees
- Adjusting leave policies to incorporate COVID-19 related leave
- Offering increased financial support to employees
- Redeploying employees who have no work into new roles or assignments
- Offering increased mental health support to employees
- Providing reskilling training for employees that may be left with less work
- Offering increased childcare support to employees
- Enhancing employee safety
- Providing teleworking supplies

LOCAL WORKFORCE STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Connect Employers with Local Workforce Resources and Opportunities

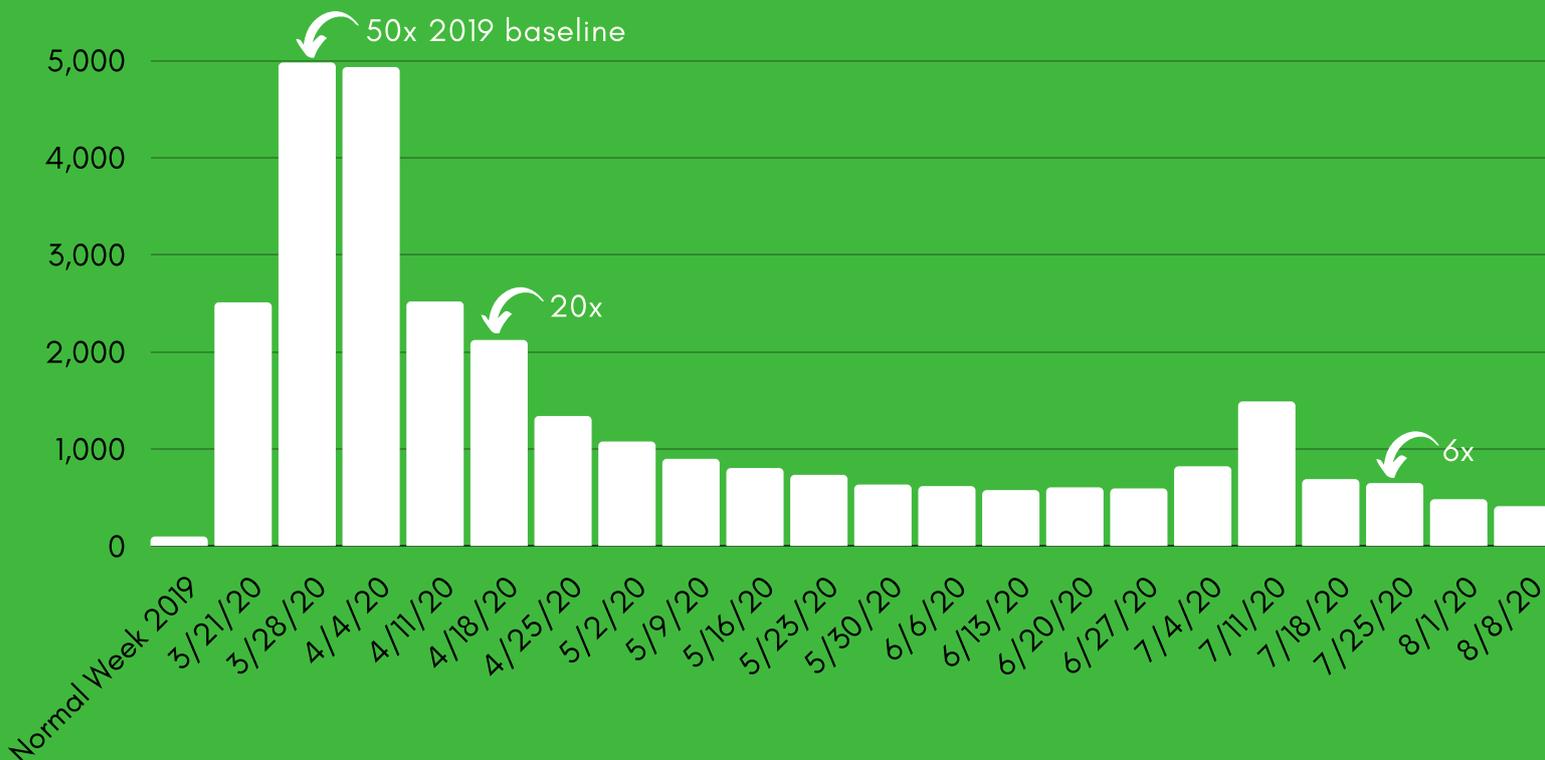
Background

In Nebraska, initial unemployment claims are filed with the Nebraska Department of Labor through an online portal referred to as “NEworks” (networks.nebraska.gov). **As of the writing of this report, over 30,000 Lancaster County residents have filed an initial unemployment claim since March 21, 2020** [14]. For context, in March–August 2019, approximately 2,100 residents of the Lincoln metropolitan statistical area filed an initial unemployment claim [15]. The majority of COVID-19 related claimants come from the service, hotel, and restaurant industries [16].

The people filing these claims generally want to work but may not be familiar with the employers and industries that are currently hiring. Conversely, employers are not familiar with the newly available workforce in terms of their skills and fit for in-demand positions.

In Lincoln, there are several key resources available to jobseekers and employers, but they are not as utilized as they could be: **NEworks** (the portal mentioned above), which contains job postings and information to help with reemployment; the **American Job Center (AJC)**, a one-stop-shop for jobseekers and employers – with multiple workforce development agencies on-site – that provides employment assistance and incentives for job training; and **EmployLNK**, a coalition of workforce development agencies in Lincoln that serves as a single point of contact for businesses to interact with workforce agencies serving 5,000+ Lincoln residents.

Lancaster County Initial Weekly Unemployment Claims



LOCAL WORKFORCE STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Connect Employers with Local Workforce Resources and Opportunities

Strategy Recommendations

1. Increase and Simplify Employer Participation in Existing Workforce Programs and Networks

Workforce development agencies, in collaboration with relevant business and industry associations and the City of Lincoln as appropriate, should increase employer awareness of NEworks, EmployLNK, and the American Job Center (AJC), as well as make it easier for employers to post jobs on NEworks and participate in AJC programs like subsidized on-the-job training and work experience. Employers ought to be aware that there are programs that provide incentives for them to hire workers who are ready, willing, and able to learn a new industry and/or trade. Lincoln employers are encouraged to share information about job openings with EmployLNK to ensure the widest distribution possible (in addition to posting jobs on NEworks).



Photo of Lincoln Drive Through Career Fair, courtesy of the Lincoln Journal-Star (pictured: Iyonna Clay with Equus Workforce Solutions and the American Job Center)

2. Identify In-Demand Skillsets and Match Jobseekers with Opportunities Based on Skillsets

Workforce development agencies located at the American Job Center should collaborate with employers to identify skillsets needed in local employers' industries. Agencies are then encouraged to assess jobseekers to match skillsets from in-demand careers to skillsets intrinsic of the available workforce. Skillsets could include communication, flexibility, decision-making, commitment, innovation, leadership and other such generalizable skills needed by employers. Additionally, agencies could share groups of jobseekers possessing relevant skillsets with hiring employers.

3. Revise and Simplify Job Descriptions

Employers are encouraged to review and revise current job descriptions to eliminate industry jargon and unneeded basic qualifications, as well as review job titles to ensure people are not dissuaded to apply. Organizations such as the Lincoln Human Resource Management Association (LHRMA) or Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) could assist in this effort to help businesses tailor job descriptions to people that do not have previous experience in the industry but have a strong work history. Businesses are encouraged to consider redeploying people within their industry such as housekeepers and servers being re-trained as temporary caregivers to assist in staffing needs for COVID-19.

LOCAL WORKFORCE STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Upskill and Reskill Lincoln's Workforce

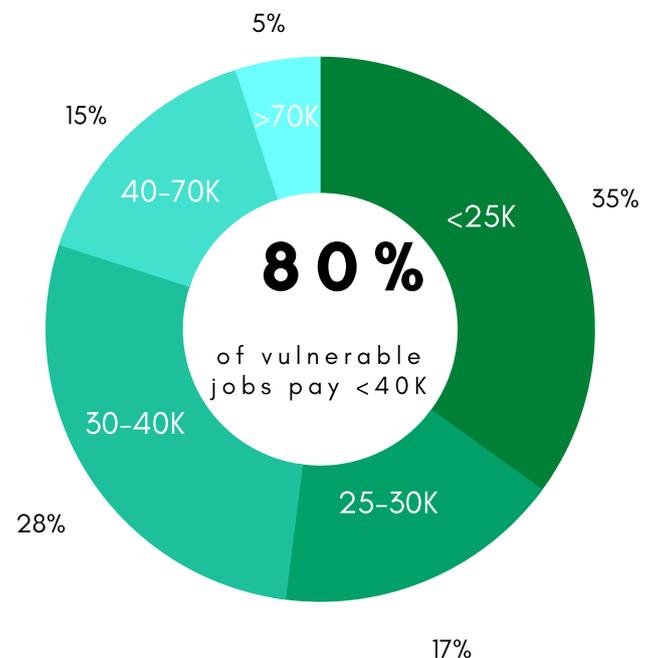
Background

Prior to COVID-19, Lincoln was dealing with issues of underemployment (with an unusually high percentage of people in Lincoln working multiple part-time jobs), stagnating incomes for the majority of Lincoln households, declining economic mobility for middle class workers, and an increasing “skills gap,” or gap between the skills residents have and the skills local employers need [17]. In other words, before COVID-19, many people in Lincoln – particularly residents of color and residents with low and middle incomes – were struggling to gain access to opportunities for economic stability and advancement. To put it into national perspective, a recent analysis by the Brookings Workforce of the Future Initiative ranked Lincoln 328 out of 380 metropolitan statistical areas in terms of the number and dispersion of “vulnerable” jobs located in our area (defined as jobs that pay less than the median wage, adjusted for location, and do not provide health benefits) [18].

COVID-19 has magnified many of these challenges. For example, economists evaluating the Lincoln metropolitan statistical estimate that **80% of jobs vulnerable to lay-off or furlough due to COVID-19 pay less than \$40,000 a year** [19]. And this burden of job loss is disproportionately borne by Hispanic and Black workers according to the data [20]. People who were economically vulnerable prior to COVID-19 have become even more economically vulnerable.

To adapt to these challenges and pave the way for a more prosperous, resilient, and inclusive future, public and private sector leaders should focus on continually upskilling and reskilling Lincoln’s workforce. The old model of “learn, earn, retire” no longer applies; now, workers must “learn, un-learn, re-learn” and repeat to stay relevant. Some workers will need to transition to different occupations and industries to have a shot at economic stability and mobility in a post COVID-19 world. While it is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive response to these complex challenges, the following strategy recommendations focus on supporting employer-provided professional development opportunities, increasing jobseeker awareness of publicly available resources for professional development, and developing “ready to work” strategies that help connect skills-based courses and initiatives with employment opportunities.

COVID-19 Vulnerable Jobs, by income band ('000) (Source: LaborCUBE; MGI analysis)



LOCAL WORKFORCE STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Upskill and Reskill Lincoln's Workforce

Strategy Recommendations

1. Create Public Incentives for Upskilling and Reskilling Workers Displaced by COVID-19

The City of Lincoln should designate funds for incentivizing companies to (i) hire and train qualified residents whose jobs were displaced as a result of COVID-19 (a “reskilling incentive”); and to (ii) advance low-wage and low-skilled employees into higher positions within the company (“upskilling incentive”). The reskilling incentive could be modeled, as appropriate, off the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit, and the upskilling incentive could be modeled, as appropriate, off the City of Birmingham’s Talent Acceleration Program.

2. Increase Jobseeker Awareness of Publicly Available Resources for Professional Development

The American Job Center should create an awareness campaign of available services and careers and provide on-site and place-based services to increase jobseeker awareness of local services and careers. Where appropriate, the AJC should provide referrals for additional services such as rent and utility assistance or culturally specific services. Additionally, workforce development agencies, in collaboration with education partners and the City of Lincoln as appropriate, should compile an online database of available online courses and virtual offerings designed to promote the development of an individual’s employment-related skills and capabilities. This database should include a breakdown of skills and capabilities by sector as well as an identification of free or reduced-price offerings.

3. Develop a “Ready to Work” Strategy that Connects Skills-Based Courses and Initiatives with Employment Opportunities

The American Job Center, Southeast Community College, and workforce development agencies should develop a “ready to work” strategy focused on skill development to identify organizations or independent instructors who offer or can develop courses for high-demand work areas (e.g., trade or technology) or in general skills areas (e.g., communications or customer service). These courses should be offered remotely, but also in ways that would reach populations and communities often missed – low-income residents, communities of color, and residents with limited English language proficiency. These courses should ideally connect directly to ongoing employment opportunities and include descriptions of career pathways or ladders that are easily understandable to a person without previous experience in the industry. For example, in healthcare, courses to develop Certified Nursing Assistants could identify a pathway to Registered Nurse. One illustration of an effective “ready to work” strategy is the Lincoln Manufacturing Council’s six-week night class, which gives participants an understanding of manufacturing and culminates in a manufacturing jobs fair for participants [21].

4. Create a Career Advisor Program

In the long term, the City of Lincoln, in collaboration with the American Job Center, EmployLNK, and employers, should develop a career advisor program to assist jobseekers in finding the right pathways for them and to assist employers in finding well-suited candidates. Lincoln could benefit from having certified, trained career advisors help facilitate strong matches between jobseekers and employers. Career advisors would ideally be representative of the community and bring a diversity of experiences and perspectives with them.

LOCAL SECTOR STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a Safe Environment and Restore Consumer Confidence

Background

COVID-19 has had the greatest impact on sectors of the economy and community that rely most on in-person gatherings and close physical contact, such as accommodation and food services, arts and recreation, sports and leisure, personal care, long-term care, retail, and manufacturing, among others. Economists evaluating the Lincoln metropolitan statistical area predict that by the end of 2020, the accommodation and food services sector will suffer up to a 34% loss in GDP, the arts and recreation sector will suffer up to a 24% loss in GDP, the administrative and support services sector will suffer up to a 20% loss in GDP, and the manufacturing and transportation sectors will suffer up to an 18% loss in GDP [22]. The data also shows that job losses will be concentrated in these sectors [23].

The best way to revive these sectors and the local economy is to restore consumer confidence by reducing the incidence and spread of COVID-19 in our community through widespread adoption of personal protective measures.

The data has become increasingly clear – the combination of proper mask-wearing, proper handwashing, use of more efficient and robust air cleaning systems inside facilities, and physical distancing can significantly minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people’s lives and livelihoods [24]. For example, a recent Goldman Sachs study estimated that a national mask mandate would prevent a 5% loss to US GDP by avoiding the need for more stringent health measures, not to mention save many lives [25]. To put it in more concrete terms, according to a report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, vigilant mask wearing likely spared 139 people who attended a hair salon in Missouri from contracting COVID-19 even though they interacted with two hair stylists later confirmed to have COVID-19 during the time of interaction [26]. None of the 139 people ended up showing symptoms of COVID-19, and the CDC concluded that proper mask wearing on the part of stylists and customers likely prevented any transmission from occurring. Finally, according to the COVID-19 Business Support Survey, the #1 type of support Lincoln businesses are seeking is clear guidance around how to create a safe environment for employees and customers. The recommendations in this area are intended to provide clear guidance and amplify best practices.



LOCAL SECTOR STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a Safe Environment and Restore Consumer Confidence

Strategy Recommendations

1. Create an Awareness Campaign to Highlight Businesses Employing Commonsense and Innovative Public Health Measures

Task force leaders, in collaboration with the City of Lincoln as appropriate, should create a campaign along the lines of the City of Durham's "Back on the Bull" campaign that promotes getting Lincoln back to business by positively emphasizing the precautions businesses have taken to advance public health and safe operations. The campaign should ideally include the following elements:

- Printable posters for businesses around proper mask-wearing and safeguarding public health;
- A health and safety checklist that provides clear and simple guidance to businesses on how to operate safely - at a general level - and that serves as a certification for businesses committed to protecting public health (like a "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval");
- A public database of businesses that have adopted the health and safety checklist, so residents are aware of which businesses have committed to these actions;
- For businesses seeking more sector-specific guidance, a database of COVID-19 related written policies and practices employed by local businesses, broken down by sector; and
- Stories highlighting the innovative strategies and successes of local businesses when it comes to public health and safety.

2. Promote Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

In response to concerns around access to PPE, business and industry associations, in collaboration with the City of Lincoln, should promote PPE access through traditional and non-traditional means, including by:

- Promoting LNKPPE.com through email, text, traditional media, and social media, as appropriate; and
- Providing opportunities for direct mask delivery to businesses and residents (e.g., by installing mask kiosks or promoting "Drive Thru Mask Fairs")

Top 3 Protective Measures Adopted by Local Employers according to the COVID-19 Business Support Survey

- 1 Increasing or creating hand sanitation stations
- 2 Limiting visitors to the workplace
- 3 Limiting in-person meetings and/or the size of in-person meetings

LOCAL SECTOR STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

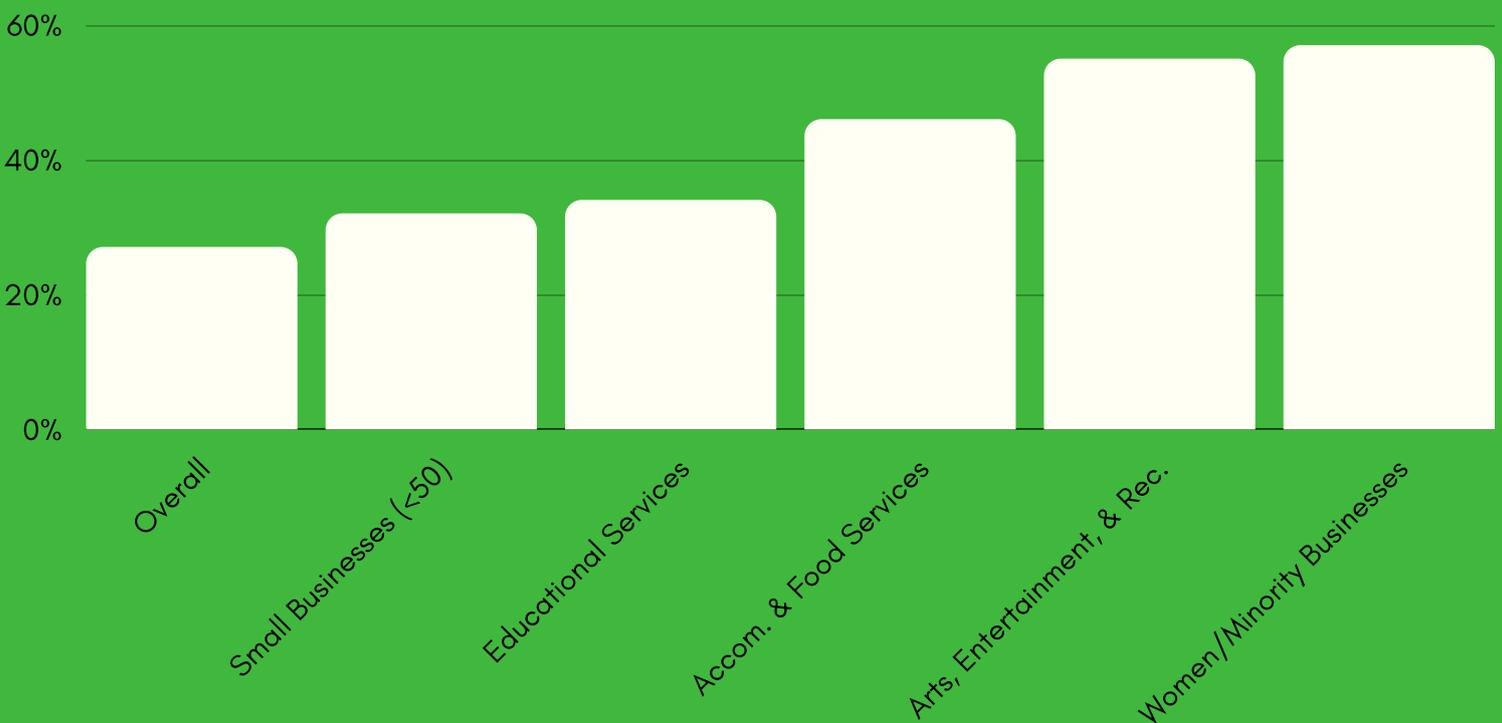
Provide Financial Assistance to Impacted Businesses and Invest in New Businesses

Background

While many businesses have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 from a financial perspective, some businesses have been impacted more than others. Small businesses (<50 employees), women- and minority-owned businesses, and businesses in especially hard-hit sectors (e.g., accommodation and food services, arts and recreation, etc.) have been particularly negatively impacted by COVID-19. The COVID-19 Business Support Survey distributed by the Local Business Strategies Subcommittee bears this out. According to the data, 27% of survey respondents overall reported experiencing a 50%+ decline in revenue since March 2020.

When the respondents are broken down by size, ownership, and sector, the results become more pronounced, with 32% of small businesses (<50 employees) reporting a 50%+ decline in revenue since March 2020, 57% of women- and minority-owned or led businesses reporting a 50%+ decline in revenue since March 2020, 46% of accommodation and food service businesses reporting a 50%+ decline in revenue since March 2020, 55% of arts and recreation businesses reporting a 50%+ decline in revenue since March 2020, and 34% of educational services businesses (e.g., childcare providers) reporting a 50%+ decline in revenue since March 2020, among others.

COVID-19 Business Survey: Percent of Businesses Experiencing a 50%+ Decline in Revenue since March 2020



LOCAL SECTOR STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide Financial Assistance to Impacted Businesses and Invest in New Businesses

Strategy Recommendations

1. Create a Fund to Provide Grants to Eligible Local Businesses Particularly Impacted by COVID-19

Assuming available funding, the City of Lincoln, in collaboration with local businesses and other relevant community partners, should create and administer a fund to provide grants to small local businesses. Only local businesses that have experienced a 15% or more decline in revenue due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have 50 or fewer employees, and have \$1 million or less in annual gross revenue should be eligible. Grant decisions should be made by a committee that includes public and private stakeholders, and prioritization should be given to:

- Businesses that have or are reconfiguring their business models to retain hourly workers, adapt to COVID-19, and otherwise remain open after the crisis;
- Businesses that are minority-owned, women-owned, disabled-owned, veteran-owned, immigrant- or refugee-owned, and other diverse enterprises;
- Businesses that are vital anchors in their neighborhoods and communities, which may include consideration of years of operation and community-facing services; and
- Businesses in sectors that have been particularly impacted by COVID-19, including, but not limited to, accommodation and food services, arts, entertainment, and recreation, personal care, retail, and childcare providers.

Grants should be eligible to be used for operating expenses. Grants should be conditioned on a commitment by businesses to use their best efforts to retain employees (if applicable), as well as on participation in relevant workshops and trainings and B2B opportunities.

2. Help Businesses Navigate Available Financial Opportunities

In service of helping businesses navigate available financial opportunities and the sea of information that is currently out there, the City of Lincoln, in collaboration with local businesses and other relevant community partners, should develop a financial assistance hotline or financial navigator program. Hotline staffers or navigators should be equipped to provide up-to-date information on available loan and grant opportunities, as well as referral to experts who can assist with application processes and specialized questions.

3. Continue to Invest in New Businesses and Support a Culture of Entrepreneurship

COVID-19 has impacted both existing businesses and new businesses. It is important that public and private partners continue to invest in entrepreneurship and emerging businesses in addition to supporting established businesses, as new firms help drive economic growth and the creation of new jobs, as well as foster the sort of innovation that is key to Lincoln's economic recovery and renewal. Public and private stakeholders should strengthen their participation and investment in startup accelerators like NMotion/gener8tor as well as in mentorship and educational platforms like the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center for Entrepreneurship and the Southeast Community College Entrepreneurship Center.

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