

A photograph of the Chicago skyline, featuring several tall skyscrapers against a blue sky with light clouds. The image is overlaid with large, semi-transparent geometric shapes: a light blue triangle on the left, a yellow triangle on the right, and a large blue circle at the bottom. The title text is centered over the blue circle.

# Reopening Chicagoland Business

**Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce  
COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force Report**

# A Message from the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force Co-Chairs and the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce President & CEO

Businesses in Chicagoland have a long history of supporting the communities we call home, especially during times of crisis. For more than a century, the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce has served as a trusted and independent voice for local businesses. Over this time, we have worked collaboratively to develop innovations that meet our changing needs while also advocating to ensure the region's long-term economic prosperity. We represent more than 1,000 companies that employ over 400,000 workers and advise thousands of businesses through our Small Business Development Center.

Our goal in issuing this report is simple: to accelerate Chicagoland's economic recovery. Last month, we convened a COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force comprised of 25 business and civic leaders to discuss the logistics and practical issues of reopening our economy, as well as the conditions necessary to do so safely and responsibly. The framework that follows represents the collective wisdom of this diverse group. We sincerely thank all members of the Task Force for their participation, input, and guidance. We also are grateful to Kivvit for their help putting this report together.

The business community's response during these extraordinary times must be flexible, compassionate, and creative. The word that came up most frequently during our Task Force meetings was trust — trust among employees that it's safe to return to work, trust among commuters that public transit is safe to ride, trust that we have clear guidance from public health officials, and trust that testing and PPE are readily available for those who need them. Just to name a few.

This report identifies a series of “must-haves” and action items that will expedite our economic recovery. But COVID-19 isn't the only seismic shift we are grappling with in 2020. The renewed calls for racial equality and an end to systemic injustice sparked by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis have gripped the entire nation. As we work together to rebuild our economy, we must rebuild in a way that works for everyone, especially Black and Brown communities who have long faced economic inequities and disparities that the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated.

How the Chicagoland business community responds to both monumental events matters a great deal. We must do what generations of Chicagoans before us have always done — reinvent our city for the modern age. That is why we are making a Chicago Pledge and committing ourselves to the difficult, ongoing work of building a more inclusive and resilient business community where all residents have equal access to opportunity. We encourage all Chicagoland businesses to join us.

# The Chicago ★ Pledge

Recognizing the profound impact that COVID-19 has had on Chicagoland’s economy, as well as the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on communities of color, we take the Chicago Pledge to:

★ **BUY LOCALLY**

Buy from Chicago-area companies, particularly minority, women, and disadvantaged business enterprises (MWDBEs) and small businesses, which make up the backbone of our regional supply chain.

★ **HIRE LOCALLY**

Hire and recruit locally and forge new partnerships to diversify talent pipelines.

★ **INVEST LOCALLY**

Invest in disadvantaged communities by partnering with community organizations to deliver volunteers and other resources.

★ **LISTEN & LEARN**

Facilitate and promote conversations within our companies and our communities about structural inequalities related to economic opportunity, health care, education, and transportation.

The Chicagoland Chamber is firmly committed to getting people back to work as quickly as possible and accelerating our economic recovery while simultaneously prioritizing issues of safety, trust, and equity. It is our hope that the principles established in this document will offer useful guideposts to deliver on this pledge for our global city — the greatest place to live and work.

Thank you,

**Robin L. Brown,**  
Ingredion Incorporated  
Task Force Co-Chair

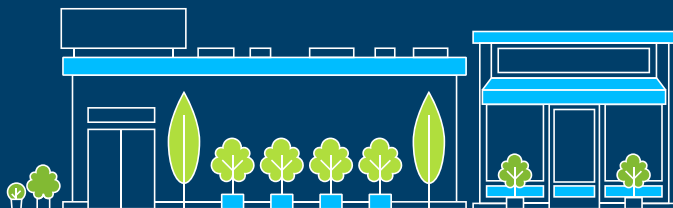
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## Disclaimer

This report was developed by the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce and its COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force. The recommendations offered are based on the data and facts available to us at the time of this writing. The following pages are consultative in nature and intended for general information purposes only. This document is not intended to be, nor should it be interpreted as, legal or entity-specific advice. Businesses should observe all orders and guidelines offered by federal, state, and local government officials and public health authorities. In addition, many trade associations and professional groups have published detailed guidelines that could also be useful to companies as they begin reopening. Finally, companies should consult their own legal counsel and advisors regarding the legality, applicability, and potential efficacy of the information contained in this report for their businesses and worksites.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recently, the Chicagoland Chamber convened a COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force to establish guiding principles, absolute “must haves,” and specific actions that our organization and the business community can take to safely reopen our businesses and get people back to work. We will draw on our core organizational strengths to achieve this, including:

- Advocating for resources, regulatory relief, and clear guidance from city, state, and federal government
- Providing thought leadership to help businesses reopen, including a new webinar forum series “Getting to Phase Five,” which will launch this summer
- Convening, collaborating, and building new partnerships
- Providing resources to small businesses in diverse communities
- Supporting our region’s talent and workforce needs through job training and apprenticeship programs
- Fighting for investments in our infrastructure to ensure our long-term economic prosperity

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**1 | Rebuild trust among employees:** Business leaders should clearly communicate what steps they have taken to protect the health and safety of their employees and be honest with workers about what they currently know — and what they don’t. Achieving this requires communication, transparency, and a two-way dialogue to empower employees to provide their feedback while incorporating best practices.

**2 | Provide flexibility:** As more businesses reopen, business leaders and managers should make good-faith efforts to offer greater flexibility for workers during a very uncertain time.

**3 | Safeguard public spaces and invest in critical infrastructure:** Community assets like public transportation, schools, and childcare centers are key enablers to fully reopening our economy and should be safeguarded.

**4 | Provide clear guidelines and consistent communication:** Businesses need clear direction about reopening procedures, protocols for handling positive tests, and information about where to go for help.

**5 | Support small and disadvantaged businesses:** Supporting minority- and women-owned businesses, and disadvantaged business enterprises (M/W/DBEs), especially within the small business community, is critical to the region’s economic recovery.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## MUST HAVES

*The conditions that must be met before we can fully reopen our economy*

### Clear Guidance for Testing, Contact Tracing, Managing Hot Spots, and Accessing PPE



### Transportation



### Schools & Childcare Centers



## ACTION ITEMS

*Steps the Chicagoland Chamber and the business community will take to get there*

- Press city and state leaders to provide concise and digestible information for business owners
  - Advocate for more accessible testing sites
  - Request city and state assistance in offsetting the cost of testing
  - Push for specific timelines as more employees go back to work
  - Create public-private partnerships to scale up and deploy effective tools and apps to help trace the virus's spread
  - Forge partnerships with our hospital and health care networks
  - Enlist support from large companies to help small businesses and local chambers acquire low-cost PPE
  - Encourage small businesses and nonprofit organizations to use the Chicago PPE Market
- 
- Work with other business groups and the region's transit agencies to survey the business community's ridership demands and support related planning efforts
  - Promote a public awareness campaign with the transit agencies and other relevant groups to educate transit riders and workers on new safety and preventative measures to reduce community transmission
  - Promote alternative mobility options like ridesharing, biking, and scooters, especially in the central business district
  - Work with downtown parking garages to explore flexible parking options, discounted rates, and bike parking
- 
- Facilitate business community support to help schools acquire laptops, tablets, and other remote learning devices for all students, particularly vulnerable or at-risk students who need to self-isolate
  - Advocate for reduced regulatory burdens and accelerate licensing for companies to establish onsite childcare centers
  - Maximize the region's extensive infrastructure to drive greater broadband adoption, working with providers like Comcast and AT&T
  - Provide financial support to help schools and childcare centers reconfigure their physical environments
  - Make employees available (as volunteers) and provide training for teachers to use online teaching methods

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Liability Protection



- Work with our members, the business community, and policymakers to address gaps in existing local and state statutes
- Encourage businesses to review the best practices for mitigating their liability exposure
- Encourage the use of the city's "Be Safe Chicago" online self-certification

## Talent & Workforce



- Refocus the Chamber's existing job training programs to provide employers with training on new safety policies and protocols
- Support city- and state-led workforce efforts to increase our contact tracing capacity

## Small Business Support



- Launch new programs to provide expanded services to distressed businesses

## Regulatory Relief



- Push back against costly mandates like universal testing
- Advocate for balanced regulatory relief regarding the timing and implementation of Fair Workweek rules and new minimum wage requirements
- Advocate for fair property tax reform

## Mental Health & Wellness



- Promote wellness and mental health programs to our members and the business community
- Disseminate free resources to employers about mental health and stress management

## Investing in Our Infrastructure



- Advocate for the full \$8.5 billion investment in modernization at O'Hare Airport
- Encourage the federal government to provide additional CREATE funds to maintain and enhance our place as the nation's premier distribution and logistics hub
- Push the city of Chicago to accelerate zoning and planning approval for major projects like the 78, the Obama Presidential Center, ONE Central, Lincoln Yards, and the Michael Reese Hospital site development, as well as for companies seeking to build data centers in Chicago
- Encourage the use of P3 agreements to leverage private capital while reducing risk to the public sector

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Chamber's COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task force is a cross-section of Chicagoland's business community whose members represent a diversity of views and business sizes. This group met three times in May and will continue to discuss the needs of the business community as circumstances evolve. We know that this is uncharted territory for all our businesses, and we are still learning together, but we quickly agreed on some guiding principles to consider as more businesses and stores begin to reopen.

**Rebuild trust among employees:** Non-essential employees who have been working remotely, as well as those who may soon be called back, need to feel confident that they can safely return. For that reason, transparency and setting the right tone at the outset is vital. Business leaders need to clearly communicate what steps they have taken to protect the health and safety of their employees — and be honest about what they currently know and what they don't. Many businesses across retail, office, and industrial sectors have taken effective steps to safeguard their workplaces, such as implementing new operating protocols to reinforce social distancing and making PPE and other supplies available to workers. Some of those best practices and other related resources are offered at the end of this report.

**Provide flexibility:** As more businesses reopen, business leaders and managers should make good-faith efforts to provide greater flexibility for workers during this very uncertain time. Employees who have had the good fortune to work remotely may be reluctant to return (especially vulnerable or at-risk workers) even when permitted to do so, and reasonable accommodations should be made for them wherever feasible. For many other businesses, remote work is simply not an option. In those cases, wide-ranging steps should be taken to protect onsite employees.

## **Safeguard public spaces and invest in critical**

**infrastructure:** Beyond the workplace, other conditions must be met to keep employees healthy as they begin returning. This includes ensuring that critical infrastructure like public transportation, schools, and childcare centers have been outfitted with the necessary safeguards and operating procedures to limit community transmission. This also requires careful demand planning and coordination on the part of the business community to ensure that our region's transit, school, and childcare systems can prepare.

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*Transparency and setting the right tone at the outset is vital. Business leaders need to clearly communicate what steps they have taken to protect the health and safety of their employees — and be honest about what they currently know and what they don't.*



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**Provide clear guidelines and consistent communication:** With an onslaught of guidance coming from local, state, and federal governments, helping businesses understand and implement that guidance is essential. The Chicagoland Chamber continues to disseminate critical information for businesses of all sizes and sectors. However, there remains widespread confusion among business owners, especially small businesses, about their responsibilities when an employee tests positive and where they can go for help. According to a recent survey of Chamber members, 48% reported the need for reliable information concerning the ongoing pandemic and 66% want clear guidance from public health officials prior to returning to work. Communicating that guidance (which is constantly changing) in a simple and digestible fashion is a crucial step as we seek to safely reopen.

**Support small and disadvantaged businesses:** COVID-19 and the recent unrest in the Chicagoland area have been especially devastating for small businesses, which are the backbone of our supply chain. That's just one reason we need to do all we can to make them more resilient. Over the last several months, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the Chicagoland Chamber has fielded thousands of calls and emails from distressed small business owners seeking assistance. A disproportionate share of these inquiries has come from minority-owned businesses, which is consistent with the alarmingly lopsided impact of COVID-19 on communities of color. Supporting M/W/DBEs, especially within the small business community, is critical to the region's economic recovery.



# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

Beyond the practical and logistical guidance that businesses need, other unresolved issues are impacting all businesses — regardless of their size or industry sector. The following areas were deemed by the Task Force as essential to reviving our economy.

### CLEAR GUIDANCE FOR TESTING, CONTACT TRACING, MANAGING HOT SPOTS, AND ACCESSING PPE

The lack of a coordinated national strategy for efficiently testing and tracing the spread of coronavirus is largely responsible for the shelter-in-place orders that were implemented across the country earlier this spring, including here in Illinois. Other countries that prioritized testing and tracing early were able to flatten their respective curves much quicker than the U.S. and emerge from their quarantines sooner.

Thanks to decisive leadership by local and state health authorities, we have seen the level of testing dramatically increase — but this is only a start. Months into this pandemic, there is still widespread confusion among small (and large) businesses about what to do when an employee tests positive for COVID-19. One Chicagoland Chamber member — a bakery and café owner with multiple locations in the city — had one employee (who was not customer-facing) who tested positive. Due to the lack of clear guidance and protocols about what to do, even after reaching out to public health officials, this business owner took the extraordinary step of closing that location for two full weeks out of an abundance of caution while staff went into quarantine. This resulted in a dramatic loss of revenue and wages for the owner and employees.

Even today, the situation for small businesses remains confounding. The Chicagoland Chamber continues to field calls daily from small business owners about what they should do, or where their employees should go for testing. These small business owners do not have time to sift through government websites, some of which offer conflicting guidance. They need simple, concise, and digestible information. For our part, the Chicagoland Chamber has hosted dozens of webinars and virtual information sessions to help business owners understand their options. We will continue to do this.

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*Thanks to decisive leadership by health authorities, we have seen the level of testing dramatically increase — but this is only a start.*

While larger companies generally have more resources for testing and tracing, they are also facing challenges — particularly those with hundreds or thousands of employees. For them, the price of testing and retesting can quickly become cost-prohibitive, with little relief in sight. The business community and state and local governments should work collaboratively to find creative solutions to help offset the cost of testing for all employers, which will help reduce community transmission while enabling people to get back to work. Despite these challenges,

many employers have begun to implement strong testing protocols or have issued useful guidance for other employers to consider, including CBRE, Clayco, Colliers International, Siemens, Target, and Transwestern. (See the Resources section at the end of this report for more details.)

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

Effectively tracking and tracing the disease is also critical to containing the coronavirus. South Korea, often regarded as a success story for managing their local pandemic, uses real-time contact tracing technologies and text messaging to determine who is at risk, who needs to be tested, and who should self-quarantine.

We've also seen the use of new technologies to help track the spread of COVID-19. Closer to home, U.S. companies are deploying their resources to help. One of the most visible examples is the recent collaboration between Google and Apple, which uses Bluetooth-enabled contact tracing technology to inform users whether they have been in close contact with someone who tests positive. Salesforce has also deployed a solution that is gaining traction in several states, including Massachusetts. While these tech giants work through privacy considerations with local and national governments, this effort offers an innovative approach that should be further explored.

Beyond technology, the human approach to tracing remains an important element. The city of Chicago launched a \$56 million grant for community-based organizations to implement a "Contact Tracing Corps," which provides funding to hire and train 600 individuals to conduct case investigation of community-based COVID transmission. This type of activity will help prevent the spread of the virus and has been widely used in other public health emergencies.

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**The business community and state and local governments should work collaboratively to find creative solutions to help offset the cost of testing for all employers, which will help reduce community transmission while enabling people to get back to work.**

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To carry out this program, the city of Chicago is working closely with community health partners Howard Brown Health, Rush University Medical Center, University of Chicago Medicine, and the Sinai Urban Health Institute. Their work is focused on efforts including: preventing and mitigating transmission of COVID-19, providing an "earn-and-learn" model for a community-based workforce to promote pathways for careers, and investing in the city's Contact Tracing Corps to hire and train individuals to conduct case investigations of community-based transmission.

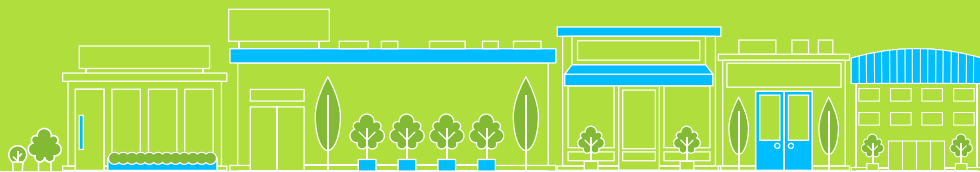
Governor Pritzker's recent Executive Order requires Illinoisans to wear a "face-covering or mask when in a public place where they cannot maintain a six-foot social distance." This applies to anyone over the age of two years old "who is able to medically tolerate a face-covering or a mask." But obtaining PPE, particularly for non-essential workers, has been a persistent challenge for businesses.

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

Thankfully, Chicago companies are doing their part to help. For example, companies like Beam Suntory and Koval Distillery, best known for their whiskey, liqueurs, and spirits, have begun producing alcohol-based sanitizer for first responders, essential businesses, and the general public. Several other local companies have also pivoted their product and service lines to help fill critical gaps in the supply chain.

Chicago-based Rheaply recently partnered with the city of Chicago to launch an online PPE marketplace to provide small businesses, community-based organizations, and not-for-profits with access to critical PPE such as face coverings, protective shields, and hand sanitizers from verified sources. This is a step in the right direction and the Chicagoland Chamber is committed to driving greater adoption and use within the marketplace.



### ACTION ITEMS

- Press city and state leaders to provide concise and digestible information so business owners know where to send employees for testing and what to do in the case of a positive result.
- Advocate for more testing sites that are convenient and accessible to all businesses, particularly small businesses.
- Request that the city and state assist in offsetting the cost of testing.
- Push for specific timelines as more employees go back to work.
- Create public-private partnerships with state and local governments, as well as tech companies like Google, Apple, and Salesforce, to scale up and deploy effective tools and apps to help trace the virus's spread while being aware of data privacy concerns.
- Forge partnerships with our hospital and health care networks to help the business community access useful toolkits for reopening and provide guidance for managing infection "hot spots."
- Enlist support from large companies to help small businesses and local chambers acquire low-cost PPE.
- Encourage small businesses and nonprofit organizations to use the Chicago PPE Market.

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

### TRANSPORTATION:

#### Getting Employees to Work Safely

Since the onset of this crisis, Chicago's transit agencies have experienced a precipitous decline in ridership. According to the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), the system has experienced a 78% overall decline in ridership compared to 2019, with the biggest dips hitting Metra and CTA, which saw a drop in ridership of 96% and 88%, respectively. For their part, Metra, CTA, and Pace have taken extraordinary steps to protect riders and transit employees, including: implementing routine deep-cleaning procedures on vehicles and at stations, adopting rear-door boarding on buses, and waiving fare collections to limit operator-passenger interaction.

But as businesses begin to reopen, where do things stand for commuters? To date, the CTA has encouraged riders to limit their use of bus and rail to essential trips only, such as medical appointments or commuting to work. Because the very concept of “rush hour” will make social distancing practically impossible, managing the new “peak ridership” times will require an open and continuous dialogue between the business community and the transit agencies.

Chicagoland employers understand that staggering employee start times, as well as bringing employees back in groups (e.g., Group A works onsite one week, Group B works onsite the next week, and so on) may be required to ensure maximum social distancing in the workplace. Both tactics would simultaneously reduce the burden on our transit infrastructure and lower the likelihood of a commuter rush. In San Francisco, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) is encouraging employers to stagger their start times, thus avoiding the typical morning and evening commuter rush. This is something that employers in the Chicagoland region should seriously consider.



The very concept of “**rush hour**” will make social distancing practically impossible. Managing the new “peak ridership” times will require an open and continuous dialogue between the business community and the transit agencies.

Relatedly, flexible work arrangements, such as limiting the number of days an employee is required to be onsite and allowing employees — especially more vulnerable individuals like older workers or expectant mothers — to telework will also reduce the strain on our transit system. Before calling people back to work, employers should assess their total workforce to see how different segments of their employees may be at risk. Demonstrating flexibility and a desire to provide reasonable accommodations is crucial not only to protecting employees, but to reducing the burden on our transit system and thus reducing the risk for widespread community transmission.



# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

Many businesses, however, are not conducive to remote work. For example, restaurants and bakeries may require a full complement of servers, bartenders, chefs, and hosts to operate — whether they have one customer or 50. Companies that can function with remote staff should consider allowing more employees to work from home during Phase 3. This will give our transportation agencies additional time to assess the overall impact on the transit system and make the necessary adjustments as more businesses reopen.

Our Task Force also pointed out that we may see an increase in mode shift — that is, we may see regular transit riders opting to drive or utilize rideshare options like Uber and Lyft if their jobs require them to be onsite. As a result, both Uber and Lyft have taken steps to support their drivers and customers; for example, Lyft is pausing the use of shared rides and providing PPE and cleaning supplies to drivers at no cost. Uber has taken similar steps to ensure driver and rider safety. Moreover, these companies have been providing free transportation for frontline health care workers to get to/from work, as well as providing free meals via Uber Eats to first responders and health care workers.

We also anticipate that, as employees return to work, many will choose to drive in order to avoid using public transit. This may be a particularly attractive option for older or more vulnerable employees with underlying health risks. In the downtown business district, local parking garages like Millennium Garages (managed by Chicago-based SP+) have offered reduced parking, 24-hour access, and enhanced sterilization and cleaning protocols for payment kiosks, elevator banks, and other surfaces to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Some commuters may shift to driving over the next few weeks, and steps like these will ease the burden on them and the public transit system as a whole.

We understand that more drivers will directly impact congestion, particularly in the city's central business district, and we will closely monitor this situation. But if we create staggered return schedules, allow continued remote work, and provide close coordination with local transportation authorities, we can ensure that the overall system can help people get safely back to work.

## ACTION ITEMS

- ▶ Work with other business groups and the region's transit agencies to survey the business community's ridership demand and support related planning efforts.
- ▶ Promote a public awareness campaign with the transit agencies and other business and transit groups to educate riders and workers on new safety and preventative measures that will help reduce community transmission.
- ▶ Promote alternative mobility options like ridesharing, biking, and scooters, especially in the central business district.
- ▶ Work with downtown parking garages to explore flexible parking options, discounted rates, and bike parking.

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

### SCHOOLS & CHILDCARE CENTERS:

#### Supporting Kids & Parents

Schools are a critical part of the health equation within Chicagoland. It will be very difficult for parents to return to work while students (especially very young students) are still at home. Similarly, thousands of families depend on schools to provide critical meals — they are a vital source of daily nutrition and sustenance for many students. That is why we must have a collective plan for safely reopening schools (pre-K through 12th grade) on time as well as ensuring access to affordable childcare options.

We recognize the daunting task ahead for school districts, teachers, and parents. But keeping schools closed indefinitely — or until a vaccine is widely available — would be impractical for students and parents alike. The question then becomes: How do we protect the health and safety of students and educators, including teachers in more vulnerable health groups, amid a public health environment that still demands social distancing and other protective measures?

Mayor Lightfoot’s plan for reopening the economy rightfully refers to childcare as “an enabler to return to work.” This is the best way to meet the learning and developmental needs of students while allowing parents to get back to their jobs. To help schools reopen, the CDC established several actions that will help reduce community transmission at schools. Given that each school and each student population is different, establishing some set of minimum requirements based on CDC guidance could help school officials and parents better understand what conditions need to be met on the ground in order to reopen.



**Elsewhere, other countries are beginning to resume classes, and we can learn useful lessons from them as we look ahead to the fall. Some examples include:**

- **In China**, students must undergo temperature checks before entering the building.
- **In Australia, Hong Kong, and Japan**, schools have brought back their students in staggered stages (e.g., only coming into class on certain days of the week and using distance learning the other days).
- **In Taiwan**, students are required to wear face masks.
- **In Germany**, school hallways are now one-way systems, similar to what many grocery stores have been implementing in their aisles in recent weeks.

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

The corporate community has an important role to play in helping school administrators and teachers reopen their classrooms on time, and the business community can have a substantial impact in making schools safer. We should continue to work closely with school officials to better understand their unique needs and help develop creative solutions.

Supporting the needs of young people goes beyond the classroom, though. As part of Illinois' guidelines for entering Phase 3 of the Restore Illinois framework, the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) recently issued guidance for day camps seeking to reopen. This is an important step to reopening our economy, given that thousands of families depend on these summer programs to keep their kids busy and learning when they are not in class.

Childcare centers are equally critical. As of this writing, there has not been significant transmission of COVID-19 in childcare settings, according to Governor Pritzker. And with childcare centers now being allowed to reopen as part of Phase 3 (albeit with capacity limits), this will no doubt alleviate the burden on parents who need that access.

In coming weeks, we will learn a great deal about the trajectory of current infection rates and the efficacy of safeguards that schools in other countries have adopted. Reopening classes and other childcare options are vital to reviving our economy and getting people back to work, and the business community remains committed to supporting these efforts.

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*Supporting the needs of young people goes beyond the classroom.*

### ACTION ITEMS

- Facilitate business community support to help schools acquire laptops, tablets, and other remote-learning devices for all students, particularly vulnerable or at-risk students who need to self-isolate.
- Advocate for reduced regulatory burden and accelerate licensing for companies to establish onsite childcare centers.
- Maximize the region's extensive infrastructure to drive greater broadband adoption, working with providers like Comcast and AT&T.
- Provide financial support to help schools and childcare centers reconfigure their physical environments.
- Make employees available (as volunteers) and provide training for teachers for online teaching methods.

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

### LIABILITY PROTECTION:

Many businesses are concerned about their exposure to legal liability as they navigate the maze of local, state, and federal guidelines to implement operations for reopening. They need clear and consistent guidance, and businesses acting in good faith should not be subjected to frivolous liability suits.

Businesses will quickly face a barrage of questions. *Is my business liable if a customer alleges they contracted COVID-19 at my place of business? What if an employee with one of my suppliers tests positive and files suit?*

State and local statutes should be amended to provide businesses the protections they need to operate without the constant fear of opportunistic lawsuits. Already, we have seen the issue of liability protection become a key point of negotiations at the federal level, and several cities and states have addressed the issue legislatively or through executive order. Here at home, Governor Pritzker has sought to ensure some level of protection by providing legal immunity for health care workers through executive order. The Illinois General Assembly also recently passed legislation to provide for a rebuttable presumption that an essential business worker contracted COVID-19 at the workplace that can be rebutted by a defendant business so long as the business can demonstrate their workplace followed proper public health and CDC guidelines.



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*Here at home, Governor Pritzker has sought to ensure some level of protection by providing legal immunity for health care workers through executive order.*

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

To be clear, protections should not be extended in cases of malfeasance, negligence, or wrongful acts. We also readily acknowledge that proving the cause of COVID-19, in most cases, will be exceedingly difficult. While legislative changes may be necessary to address gaps in current statutes, the simplest assurances that state and local governments and public health officials can provide to businesses are clear, consistent, and practical guidelines. Until then, the following list outlines basic principles that businesses should consider as they seek to mitigate liability exposure.

### A LIABILITY CHECKLIST FOR BUSINESSES

- 1 Senior leadership should model flexibility and foster a community of wellness and awareness. Consider the development of written principles to help guide decision-making.
- 2 Communicate and train employees on the employer's expectations and protocols.
- 3 Designate a point-person (other than immediate supervisors) to receive complaints and suggestions to ensure consistent messaging and response.
- 4 Train HR personnel on harassment, retaliation, and leave policies, and develop protocols for handling reports of positive tests and exposure.
- 5 Treat accommodation requests or unsafe workplace complaints fairly and consistently, plan ahead to handle accommodation requests where possible, and always document your process and resolution.
- 6 Ensure that medical information is kept confidential and maintained separately from regular personnel files, and adhere to other privacy-related requirements.
- 7 Follow evolving CDC, OSHA, and local and state guidelines; institute and monitor appropriate cleaning and disinfecting protocols; and constantly survey your workplace for social distancing compliance.
- 8 Adhere to ADA, OSHA and WC record-keeping requirements.
- 9 If possible, restrict visitors for the time being. If visitors are necessary, communicate your expectations and protocols and continue to apply CDC, OSHA, and local and state guidelines.
- 10 Regarding product liability protections, review your insurance policies, talk to your insurance broker, and review your supply chain and supply chain contracts.

The city of Chicago has launched “Be Safe Chicago,” an online self-certification process to help businesses and employers ensure they are operationally compliant with the city’s standards for reopening.

### ACTION ITEMS

- Work with our members, the business community, and policymakers to address gaps in existing state and local statutes.
- Encourage businesses to review the checklist outlined above.
- Encourage the use of the city’s “Be Safe Chicago” online self-certification.



# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

### TALENT & WORKFORCE:

Since 2018, talent and workforce training has been a core part of the Chicagoland Chamber's programming agenda. In 2019 and with funding from DCEO, we launched an Employer Training Program that has provided 2,200 incumbent workers across more than 80 companies with critical skills training. We also launched an apprenticeship program with City Colleges of Chicago and One Million Degrees — modeled after the Chicago Apprentice Network championed by Aon and other major corporations in the region — to help diversify talent and recruiting pipelines for employers.

Workforce training investments are more important than ever. The governor's longstanding commitment to building the future workforce is even more resonant today. Our regional economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and recent social unrest will largely depend on our ability to quickly respond to the changing needs of employers through workforce training and adjustments required in this new environment. The Chamber has pivoted quickly to provide virtual trainings on new safety policies and protocols so employers can better ensure physical distancing while reducing community transmission at the workplace. We are also pursuing new training opportunities to prepare people for entry into critical health care programs.

Moreover, we applaud the city of Chicago for launching a \$56 million grant for community-based organizations to implement a "Contact Tracing Corps," which will provide funding to hire and train 600 individuals to conduct case investigation of community-based COVID transmission. This type of activity will help prevent the spread of contagious disease and has been widely used in other public health emergencies.

### ACTION ITEMS

- Refocus the Chamber's existing job training programs to provide employers with new, in-depth training on new safety policies and protocols.
- Support city- and state-led workforce development efforts to increase our contact tracing capacity.



***Our regional economic recovery will largely depend on our ability to quickly respond to the changing needs of employers through workforce training.***

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

### SMALL BUSINESSES:

#### Supporting the Backbone of Our Economy

The pandemic's disproportionate health and economic impacts on communities of color have been widely reported in the media, but what has received significantly less airtime is the impact on minority business owners. There have also been economic effects from the recent social unrest across the city. We cannot talk about economic recovery without discussing the unique challenges facing minority business owners, whether it's access to capital, exposure to other networks/entrepreneurs, or marketing support.

Every day, the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the Chicagoland Chamber receives a huge volume of calls, emails, and requests for assistance from distressed small business owners and entrepreneurs. Many of these businesses are concentrated on the city's South and West sides. Even prior to the pandemic, cash flow was a major area of concern for these small businesses. According to our 2020 Small Business Outlook Survey, 75% of small business respondents expressed a lack of confidence in managing their cash flow. Additionally, 63% of respondents cited access to capital as a major concern, which was up 2% from the previous year. The pandemic and recent social unrest have only exacerbated these concerns.

For our part, the Chicagoland Chamber has hosted dozens of webinars with our lending partners and representatives from the U.S. Small Business Administration, DCEO, the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development, and the Chicago Department of Business Affairs & Consumer Protection (BACP). The goal of these meetings is to inform thousands of small business owners and entrepreneurs about the resources available to them. Furthermore, the Chicagoland Chamber's Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Task Force has been working to increase business and contracting opportunities for certified businesses across the region, including M/W/DBEs. Our members have made it clear that business and supplier diversity is essential to propping up our supply chain, which has undergone unprecedented disruption as a result of the pandemic and social tumult.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, small businesses also need clearer guidance about what to do when an employee tests positive. This is essential to their ability to rebound. This work cannot slow down. The health and durability of these businesses is directly tied to our overall economic prospects in the months and years ahead.

### ACTION ITEMS

- ▶ Launch new small business support programs to increase SBDC advising, training, professional business coaching, and education with a specific emphasis on minority, women, veteran, and disability-owned businesses (among other certified business types).

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

### REGULATORY RELIEF:

If there was ever a time to reduce the regulatory burden on the business community, that time is now. In recent years, businesses big and small have had to bear an increasing share of the tax burden, locally and at the state level. Before levying new taxes, we should first ensure that we are getting the most out of the revenue streams that already exist by providing businesses with greater flexibility to operate, especially in the restaurant and hospitality industry, which have been especially hard-hit from the pandemic. Furthermore, we are constantly advocating to mitigate overly burdensome regulations and unfunded mandates. These anti-regulation efforts are needed more than ever to ensure that our businesses have the runway to recover. As a result, we will continue to push for commonsense policies and legislation to create a more business-friendly environment.

### ACTION ITEMS

- Push back against costly mandates like universal testing.
- Advocate for fair property tax reform.
- Advocate for balanced regulatory relief regarding the timing and implementation of Fair Workweek rules and new minimum wage requirements.

### MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS PROGRAMS:

The impact of COVID-19 on the workforce extends beyond economic indicators like high unemployment and shuttered businesses. Employee mental health and well-being are also at risk, as many employees face the prospect of: extended remote work; isolation from co-workers, friends, and family; as well as the threat of job loss and stable income. According to the CDC, nearly one in five U.S. adults aged 18 or older (18.3% or 44.7 million people) reported mental illness in 2016, while at least one symptom of stress was reported by 71% of adults. Employees have also delayed other wellness issues that will impact their health in the long run.

As employees manage the effect that COVID-19 is having on their personal lives, they are more likely to experience stress, anxiety, and depression. These ailments, as well as other underlying mental health concerns, may directly impact employee job performance, engagement, and communication. Employers can take steps to mitigate these impacts by promoting the importance of mental well-being and wellness programs to employees.

As we move into the next phase of reopening our economy, it is critical that we acknowledge the toll that COVID-19 has had on our employees and their families. By offering resources and support, employers can play a key role in positively impacting mental health by ensuring that their employees receive the care and guidance they need to make mental well-being a priority. A list of mental health resources is available at the end of this report.

### ACTION ITEMS

- Promote wellness and mental health programs to our members and the business community.
- Disseminate free resources to employers about mental health and stress management.

# THE MUST HAVES:

## Enablers for Reviving Our Economy

### INVESTING IN OUR INFRASTRUCTURE:

As we work to meet the challenges of reopening the economy, we must prioritize the long-term infrastructure investments that will supercharge our recovery while capitalizing on our region's competitive advantages. Continued investments in the O'Hare Modernization Program and the untangling of our freight and distribution channels will allow us to maintain and enhance our world-renowned transportation assets.

Additionally, several major developments in the region were already underway prior to the pandemic. Given the massive job losses nationally and globally, it might be tempting to de-prioritize these types of projects. That, however, would be a huge misstep. Major projects like the Obama Presidential Center, Lincoln Yards, the 78, ONE Central, and the Michael Reese Hospital site development will create desperately needed construction jobs in the short term, while providing the infrastructure needed to attract companies in the future when our economy rebounds. We must not lose sight of the long-term economic needs of our region, which suggest that people want to live in dynamic urban environments near where they work.

According to a report the Chamber released last year with AECOM, the region stands to unlock billions in economic activity by making these types of capital investments. That is why our organization led a coalition of business and labor groups to pass landmark state legislation in 2019 that creates tax incentives aimed at bringing data centers to Illinois. As we look ahead, we must continue to support capital infrastructure projects that can help revitalize our economy and position us for future success.

### ACTION ITEMS

- Push for the full \$8.5 billion investment in modernization at O'Hare Airport.
- Encourage the federal government to provide additional CREATE funds to maintain and enhance our place as the nation's premier distribution and logistics hub.
- Push the city of Chicago to accelerate zoning and planning approval for major projects like the 78, the Obama Presidential Center, ONE Central, Lincoln Yards, and the Michael Reese Hospital site development, as well as for companies seeking to build data centers in Chicago.
- Encourage the use of P3 agreements to leverage private capital while reducing risk to the public sector.



# A Chicago ★ Pledge

## Recovery & Equity

**This report is merely a starting point on the long road to recovery. We know that this must be a living document, and we will continue working with our COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force to help businesses respond as conditions on the ground change and infections rates ebb and flow.**

But we cannot, and should not, simply hope for a return to the way things were. This health crisis and the renewed calls for racial equality and reform have exposed deep inequities within our society and our economy that have existed for too long. They are expressed in the pandemic's disproportionate health impact on Black and Brown communities and the especially brutal economic consequences on small business owners in these communities — the very same communities that so many of us call home.

We must commit to change, which is necessary to help us move forward. Chicago has a rich history of reinventing itself for future generations. That is why the Chicagoland Chamber encourages all businesses in the region to take the Chicago Pledge — a renewed commitment to fostering a more diverse and inclusive business community that works for all residents, workers, and entrepreneurs.

It starts by supporting small businesses, the backbone of our economy, and in particular minority- and women-owned businesses, and disadvantaged business enterprises. Ensuring that they have the tools, resources, and business relationships to contribute to our regional supply chain is key. The Chicago Pledge also demands that we buy locally, hire diverse talent from our communities, and continue to invest in those communities. And it means we have to listen, and then act. This is not only the right thing to do, but it is the economically prudent thing to do.

As an organization, we know that we cannot fix every societal ill. But as a united business community, we can reshape our economy for the modern age. In the Chamber's 116-year history, our business community has endured the modern era's greatest challenges, including: the 1918 flu pandemic, global conflicts, economic shocks and recessions, and civil unrest. We can meet and overcome today's challenges as well.

It is time for us to rebuild Chicago for the 21st century. The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce and the business community remain committed to doing our part in the weeks, months, and years ahead.



***As a united business community,  
we can reshape our economy for  
the modern age.***



# RESOURCES

Visit [chicagolandchamber.org](http://chicagolandchamber.org) for the most updated list of business resources.

## Existing Health & Safety & Other Resources for Reopening

As more businesses are permitted to reopen their doors, local, state, and federal authorities have issued various guidance to help businesses prepare. Several national organizations and industry groups have also issued suggested guidance, which you can find at the websites listed below.

### Federal Resources

- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- [Occupational Safety & Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor \(DOL\)](#)
- [U.S. Food & Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#)

### State Resources

- [State of Illinois COVID-19 Response](#)
- [State of Illinois Restore Illinois plan](#)
- [Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity \(DCEO\) Phase 3 \(Recovery Phase\) Guidelines](#)
- [DCEO Phase 3 Business Toolkit](#)
- [DCEO COVID-19 Resources for Businesses](#)
- [DCEO COVID-19 Information for Small Businesses](#)
- [Illinois Department of Public Health \(IDPH\) Coronavirus Business and Organization Guidance](#)

### City of Chicago Resources

- [City of Chicago Coronavirus Response Center](#)
- [City of Chicago Protecting Chicago Framework](#)
- [City of Chicago Phase 3 \(Cautiously Reopen Phase\) Guidelines](#)
- [Be Safe. Chicago: Business Self-Certification](#)
- [City of Chicago PPE Market](#)

### Other Resources

- [World Health Organization](#)
- [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#)

# RESOURCES

Visit [chicagolandchamber.org](http://chicagolandchamber.org) for the most updated list of business resources.

## Workplace Resources

There are now several resources available from local and state governments, as well as best practices from Chicagoland Chamber members, to help guide businesses as they rethink their physical workplaces in the age of COVID-19. *Forbes* recently published a ranking of the nation's top employers' responses to the pandemic, and several chamber members made the list, including Verizon, Target, AT&T, Walmart, T-Mobile, JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Walgreens, Ford Motor Company, and many others. Additional best practices are provided below.

- “Reopening the World’s Workplaces” (CBRE)
- [Clayco’s COVID-19 Resources & Guidelines](#)
- “The Great Return: Making the Workplace Ready” (Colliers)
- “A Matter of Trust” (Siemens)
- “SAFE Retail: Considerations for Retail Operations Post COVID-19” (Target)
- “Back to the Workplace Playbook” (Transwestern)

## Mental Health & Wellness Resources

- One Mind at Work: Workplace Mental Health Assessment — Resources
- American Psychiatric Association: Center for Workplace Mental Health — Employer Resources
- Mental Health America: Mental Health and COVID-19 – Information and Resources
- Mental Health America Toolkit: Tools 2 Thrive Outreach Kit
- CDC: Mental Health in the Workplace
- City of Chicago: Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19
- State of Illinois: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response — Mental Health
- SHRM: Managing Employee Assistance Programs
- Gateway Foundation: Resources

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