



RELAUNCHING NORTH CAROLINA

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NC  **Chamber**



It's Time to Relaunch North Carolina

If there is one encouraging aspect to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the lessons we can learn from it to establish a sound recovery strategy and ensure North Carolina is better prepared to proactively respond to future crises. To make sure the voice of our statewide business community is heard in this important undertaking, the NC Chamber is providing a blueprint for aligning the efforts of public and private leaders.

We must respond now – time is of the essence if we hope to act on these lessons and relaunch North Carolina at the same pace as competing states. This document outlines a path forward in two areas. The first section, *The Way Forward: Distinguishing North Carolina*, covers the principles the business community believes should guide North Carolina leaders in finding an initial path to statewide recovery. The second section, *Business Continuity: 2020 and Beyond*, takes a longer view, outlining the steps needed to take to create a more resilient disaster preparedness and recovery strategy for future crises.

Together, these bodies of work inform a broader effort – an effort we are calling *Relaunching North Carolina*. We hope you'll [join us](#).



The Way Forward:

DISTINGUISHING NORTH CAROLINA

How to Move Forward

North Carolinians are facing a daunting COVID-19 challenge, one that is testing our lives and livelihood. Yet we've always met and overcome challenges in this state. As we have always done, we will adapt to a less-than-perfect situation and manage risk more granularly. In this battle with an invisible coronavirus, accommodations must also be made to protect those most vulnerable and ensure that our hospitals and medical providers have both the capacity and resources needed to care for all patients, including those with COVID-19.

The time to act is now. The curve on coronavirus is flattened. According to a [Main Street America poll](#) conducted in March, 80% of small businesses reported closing, at least temporarily. Moreover, 30% anticipate closing permanently if the shutdown persists more than two months. More than 1 million North Carolinians, more than 20% of our workforce, have recently filed for unemployment relief. And each week, states which have not confronted COVID-19 as effectively as ours are reopening their economies with more expedient phasing and greater regional flexibility than North Carolina.

North Carolinians deserve clear, cogent, and objective communications and data to better understand when and how they can more normally function. Businesses deserve meaningful metrics and guidelines to know when and how they can reasonably operate. Equally important, employees deserve to be able to provide for themselves and their families, as well as contribute more fully to society.

Our Guiding Principles and Needs

To move forward wisely and effectively, the business community is committed to focusing on the following principles and needs:

- Establish a formalized process for business leaders to collaborate, at least weekly, with public sector representatives, including the Governor and the Secretary of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Secretary of Commerce, respectively.
- Manage risk effectively and adapt to an environment with a virus that currently has no known cure or vaccine.
- Attain increasing degrees of business certainty through responsible and measurable metrics that are both impactful and reasonably achievable. The immediate primary measures are:
 1. Hospital system capacity; and
 2. Consistent leveling of the number of COVID-19 cases.
- Rely on public health to identify, isolate, and respond to potential hotspots – either geographically or otherwise.
- Prioritize clear government policies supporting and enabling both employees and businesses, including:
 1. Reasonable, responsible and pragmatic liability protections;
 2. Department of Labor (OSHA) and CDC-based guidance on employer responsibilities;
 3. Sector-based approach for business to meet recommendations instead of a one-size-fits-all mandate; and
 4. Real-time data transparency regarding cases, hospital capacity, and related demographics.
- Establishing guidelines as recommended best practices that are neither codified into law, rule, regulation or statute, nor incorporated into future Executive Orders.



How it Works:

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Protect People

People are the top priority. The health and safety of people, employees, customers, vendors, communities, and broader stakeholders remains a lodestar for North Carolina employers. Public health efforts are vital. Everyone must have access to timely, transparent, accurate, and relevant information in order to best plan their activities, operations, and lives. History, data, and [current efforts](#) inform us that business will then do their part to keep themselves, their employees, customers, and other stakeholders safe.

Public Sector Responsibilities

- The state must be capable of testing those exhibiting symptoms and providing rapid and accurate results. Public-private partnerships for accelerated testing/kits may offer near-, medium-, or long-term solutions.
- The state must identify "hotspots" in a timely fashion and isolate growing infection outbreaks with thoughtful agility.
- "Testing, Tracking, and Tracing" across North Carolina is a critical governmental responsibility requiring sufficient supplies and capacity.

Guidelines for Employers and Individuals

- Businesses should provide access to and follow guidelines for infection prevention as recommended by [OSHA](#) and [CDC](#), as well as the soon-to-be released DHHS guidelines for social distancing, screening, and hygiene.
- Businesses in higher exposure risk categories should employ recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) and other more rigorous controls, such as temperature checks and others.
- Businesses, depending on their relative size, should consider appointing a response team (and associated leader) to champion and monitor newly implemented safety protocols.
- Individuals should remain vigilant and adhere to CDC-recommended hygiene guidelines.

Planning for a Potential Rise in COVID-19 Cases

An increase in COVID-19 cases is likely as restrictions are relaxed and testing increases. The number of cases leading to hospitalization, rather than increased cases, is a key metric in both determining impact on hospital capacity as well as detecting potential geographic hotspots. The NC Chamber and the North Carolina Healthcare Association (NCHA) will partner together to publish weekly updates, at least initially, on hospital capacity and COVID-19 admissions so that appropriate measures can be taken to understand and responsibly address specific situations or areas.



How it Works:

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Provide Opportunity

Employers and business owners are willing and equipped to provide the safe opportunity for people to meet the needs of their families and communities. North Carolina businesses can and must be trusted to immediately and meaningfully begin re-engaging with their customers and broader stakeholders. A phased reopening, as recommended by the White House [guidelines](#), allows for ongoing capacity assessment of the health care system to ensure their sufficient and sustainable operation consistent with our Guiding Principles.

PHASE 1

Except where otherwise noted, all employers and businesses should follow OSHA and CDC recommended guidelines for sanitization, social distancing, and PPE, including times between customer engagement. Employers can and must develop safe workplace guidelines based on recommended best practices.

- Employers create plans for employees to return to work in stages and allow for teleworking where possible.
- Employers provide reasonable accommodations for vulnerable populations.
- Medical practices reopen and hospitals perform elective procedures.
- Places of worship may reopen with social distancing protocols in place.
- Grocery stores and pharmacies operate with safe guidelines.
- Retail stores and other places of business operate with safe workplace guidelines.
- Restaurants reopen following social distancing guidelines, employing face coverings and other PPE where appropriate. Bars remain closed.
- Personal care businesses, such as hair salons, barbershops, spas, nail salons, and pet groomers reopen for appointments with safe workplace guidelines.
- State parks and outdoor recreation reopen.

PHASE 2

- Employers continue to allow for accommodations for vulnerable populations.
- Common areas are regularly sanitized and social distancing protocols remain.
- Bars may reopen with 50% capacity and social distancing protocols in place.
- Restrictions and special emphasis and support for long-term care facilities, jails, and prisons are maintained.

PHASE 3

- Employers may resume more routine operations with sanitization protocols still in place.
- Employers are encouraged to continue accommodating employees in vulnerable populations.
- Consider adjustments to restrictions on long-term care facilities, jails, and prisons.



How it Works:

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Promise for the Future

As North Carolina begins the road forward, policy changes must be continually reviewed and made to bolster our economy and provide reasonable certainty to business and, in turn, to the lives of North Carolinians. The most urgent include, but are not limited to:

- Liability Protections providing businesses with reasonable assurances that their safe reopening and Good Samaritan efforts will not be unduly penalized. The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) recommends [Pandemic Liability Protection Policies](#), which offers an excellent overview of businesses' relevant needs.
- Protection from over-reaching and speculative workers' compensation claims due to coronavirus. The Workers' Compensation Act currently provides a fair opportunity for an employee diagnosed with COVID-19 to make a claim and an employer to either pay or defend the claim.

All North Carolinians have a role to play to help keep one another safe. We are all ready and willing to reopen our economy responsibly and safely. This unprecedented situation calls for both science-based and commonsense measures, flexibility and a willingness to adapt – all areas in which North Carolina has shown a propensity to excel.

We can both protect the health of our fellow citizens while ensuring that people have the opportunity to care for themselves and others. Together, North Carolina will re-emerge as a stronger and more resilient people and economy.



Business Continuity:

2020 AND BEYOND

Establishing Long-Term Plans for Success

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided the opportunity for valuable learnings. In the midst of this challenge, the business community has implemented policies and best practices that will be instrumental in preparing for and recovering from our state's next unexpected natural, public health, or security crisis. It is imperative that we use the insights from this crisis to determine how we, as a business community, can help our state build resiliency beyond 2020.

Establishing a Framework for the Future

Achieve Consensus and Transparency in Data

The business community has a history of using generally agreed upon "market indicators" as benchmarks for decision making. Reviewing certain markers and continually measuring our trajectory to determine where we need to go is standard operating procedure. Similar practices must apply to any future recovery process. There must be transparency and consensus regarding the correct data, datasets, and inputs needed to guide our state's response to a crisis; determining what data to track should be a collaborative process. Any predictive modeling should be vetted and found to rest on a sound conceptual framework.

In the case of a future crisis, there must be broad agreement – among leaders in both the public and private sectors – on what the right data points are. Any changes on those points should be paired with clear communication and input on why the measurement has shifted. Businesses and other entities share a common focus on the quality, quantity, reliability, and consistency of data being used to guide decisions in a crisis; therefore, the goal posts set with regards to data must remain consistent.

Secure Statewide Uniformity

A lack of uniformity leads to an inconsistent statewide response, creating an environment of uncertainty for all – including businesses, local governments and private citizens. The Governor's authority over counties and municipalities should be clear in a crisis, and the power to preempt the patchwork of local orders should be equally established.

Guiding Principles

In determining best practices when preparing for and recovering from an unexpected natural, public health or security crisis in the future, the business community is focused on the following guiding principles:

- Collaboration between the public and private sector. North Carolina is made stronger by cooperation and shared power, to develop agreement on direction, and to take action based on risks.
- Participation in the process so that any plan implemented includes business review, input, and acceptance, maximizing its effectiveness.
- Legal research to provide better clarity on the scope of authority and the distinctions between legal mandates and guidance.



Going forward, the business community will work to bring proactive clarity to this process through research and recommendations, as well as bolstered relationships and coordination with the N.C. Association of County Commissioners and the N.C. League of Municipalities.

The business community will also urge state government to establish a government-maintained “one stop shop” for citizens and businesses to view all orders in effect across North Carolina. This missing capability has helped create an atmosphere of uncertainty around enforcement of directives.

Elevate the Role of the Business Community

Whether our state is faced with a natural, public health, or security crisis, the strength of North Carolina’s economy is an essential piece of its recovery. There must be a formal process for the business community to offer input that is taken seriously.

This process should allow for review of the designation of businesses as “essential” vs. “non-essential.” Currently, there is broad consensus among the business community that such a divisive practice is unnecessary, given the symbiotic nature of our economy.

As North Carolina businesses prepare to reengage the economy, this improved process would allow the business community to ask for clarification on guidance from the government as needed.

Sharpen a Coordinated Communications Strategy

The business community must be more purposeful and nimble in coordinating and communicating its key messages. Though our response as a business community has steadily improved throughout the COVID-19 crisis, at the outset, there was not a coordinated public-facing communications strategy to show solidarity. The vacuum did not instill confidence that business had the proper plans in place to protect the health and safety of both employees and customers, which was simply not the case.

Following a crisis, consumers will lack confidence, even when government provides the “all clear.” The business community must work

collaboratively with the public sector to return some of that confidence.

Businesses also play an important role in providing a balanced measure of accountability of our elected officials in times of crisis. As employers, we have a pulse on what is happening in local communities and can better advocate for a more urgent path forward.

Address Challenges in the Supply Chain

Testing must remain a priority, and North Carolina must build its testing capability for future crises. Our supply chains for testing and treatment inputs, including PPE and other medical supplies, need to be reformulated so that North Carolinians are not beholden to international supply lines over which they have little control.

While pandemic planning has been undertaken by public health officials for years, the COVID-19 response has been “just-in-time,” rather than being able to rely on planning exercises to guide the deployment of public and private resources. It will be important to establish clear processes for a more collaborative, proactive response in the future.

A key component of planning should include assessment of funding allocation to ensure equity across the research/medical community.

Improve the Introduction of Assistance Programs

There has been tremendous confusion surrounding small businesses’ efforts to access federal and state assistance. Business owners may not have fully understood the “loan” nature of some federal assistance. The collaboration across industry sectors to provide more detailed guidance and expertise is certainly a best practice for future crises.

Continuing the Dialogue

Business Continuity: 2020 and Beyond is not a focus that ends with this document. The NC Chamber, on behalf of the statewide business community, will continue to engage and advocate for policies and best practices that will be instrumental in preparing for and recovering from our state’s next unexpected natural, public health, or security crisis. We must work together as a state to build resiliency beyond 2020.





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