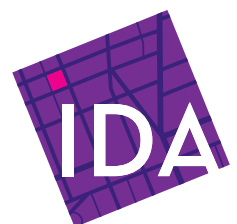




Building on Recovery for Urban Place Management

COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES

A 2021 PUBLICATION CREATED BY
THE INTERNATIONAL DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION



INSPIRED LEADERS
SHAPING CITIES

ABOUT IDA



IDA

The International Downtown Association is the premier association of urban place managers who are shaping and activating dynamic downtown districts. Founded in 1954, IDA represents an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations that employ 100,000 people throughout North America. Through its network of diverse practitioners, its rich body of knowledge, and its unique capacity to nurture community-building partnerships, IDA provides tools, intelligence and strategies for creating healthy and dynamic centers that anchor the well-being of towns, cities and regions of the world. IDA members are downtown champions who bring urban centers to life. For more information on IDA, visit downtown.org.

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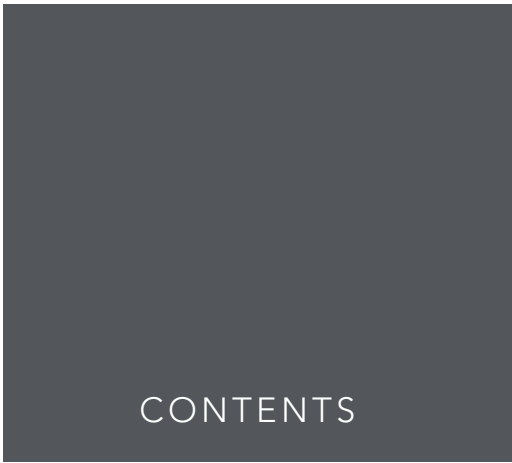
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Introduction

The summer of 2021 brings glimmers of hope to downtown and center city recovery across the U.S. and Canada. As the COVID-19 vaccination rate increases across both nations and case rates and hospitalization decline, we are finally seeing more activity and vibrancy in our urban cores. At the height of the pandemic when cities and states went into lockdown, activity declined precipitously in the span of days. With up to 95% of office workers no longer commuting into the city, foot traffic dropped, and retailers, restaurants, nightlife, and cultural attractions closed their doors to the public. Given the concentration of these businesses in downtowns and city centers, these environments were particularly hard-hit.

Undaunted, downtown communities in cities across the country came together to support their residents, employees, and businesses, displaying urban resilience. Urban place management organizations (UPMOs) became some of the first to provide relief to shuttered small businesses. Quickly, UPMOs organized enhanced cleaning of public areas, communicated timely information, and in some cases, directly provided relief funds to those most affected. Recognizing the importance of small and local businesses to downtown's unique character, downtown communities rallied to help businesses realize income through the purchase of gift cards and takeout or delivered meals from restaurants. These actions were just the beginning of incredible efforts to sustain our urban places, and the work continues now in recovery to help our districts thrive.

Downtowns and center cities are seeing higher numbers of restaurant reservations, increasing pedestrian traffic, and a trickle of workers coming back to the office. These signs of life, while still significantly lower than pre-pandemic, promise a bright future ahead. Recovery is also occurring faster in some districts, particularly those outside the large coastal cities.

Urban places are poised to take advantage of new opportunities with an unprecedented influx of funding from federal recovery plans. In the U.S., the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), signed into law by President Biden on March 11, 2021, allocates \$135.2 billion to cities and counties, based on the community development block grant formula and on each county's population. Half the funding was delivered in May 2021, and the second half is expected in the second half of 2022. Funding must be spent by December 2024. Eligible expenses for this funding are broadly defined. The clause most relevant for downtowns and center cities is on use of funds for "addressing negative economic impacts caused by the public health emergency, including harms to workers, households, small businesses, impacted industries, and the public sector."¹

Urban place management organizations are working closely with city partners to advocate for funding supporting downtown and center city recovery, since these city cores were so uniquely impacted by the pandemic. To date, the City of San Francisco has proposed a \$9.8 million investment in downtown recovery, with the vast majority going toward additional community ambassadors to focus on clean and safe operations downtown. In June, the City of Seattle approved the “[Seattle Rescue Plan](#)”, using the first tranche of Seattle’s ARP funding. Approximately \$49 million will be invested in housing and homelessness citywide, \$9 million in downtown small business recovery, \$2.5 million making “Stay Healthy Streets” permanent, and \$300,000 supporting free outdoor dining and retail permits for another year.

On July 1, the House of Representatives passed the INVEST in America Act, funding transportation and infrastructure and marking the return of member-designated projects, or earmarks. While this Act is not yet law, several earmarks are dedicated to improvements in downtown areas, such as Downtown Phoenix Electric Vehicle Charging stations, and the Greater Downtown Dallas Master Plan. The reinstatement of earmarks presents future opportunities for UPMOs to engage federal delegations on necessary funding.

In Canada, the 2021 Federal Budget dedicated \$500 million over the next two years to a Community Revitalization Fund supporting non-profit and municipality projects that will “build new community infrastructure and revitalize existing assets, bring people back to public spaces safely, and create jobs and stimulate local economies.”² The top priority of this competitive grant program is to revitalize downtown cores and main streets, followed by reinventing outdoor spaces.

In light of the various recovery efforts, the International Downtown Association (IDA) and Stantec’s Urban Places partnered to produce this COVID Recovery Playbook to present UPMOs and other urban district entities with a framework of actions for navigating recovery from the effects of the pandemic. This framework was developed from a series of focus group sessions conducted in April 2021 with 55 CEOs representing UPMOs from across the U.S. and Canada. While these discussions named potential long-term strategies for COVID recovery, the focus was on short-term, tactical steps to bring people and money back into our downtowns.

IDA members identified several actions that UPMOs and their municipal partners can take to get their districts back on track. This report summarizes the top strategies. Additional examples under each action described in this report are updated on [IDA’s COVID Recovery Resources](#) webpage.

Lead Downtown/District Messaging and Serve As a Trusted Source

The outset of the pandemic was dominated by a flurry of information surrounding changes in government regulations, business closings and government aid. UPMOs across the country emerged as trusted resources filtering through the noise, for not just their members but all downtown users. Through this newfound responsibility to keep downtown stakeholders apprised of local-specific COVID news, UPMOs grew their communications audiences and saw a boost in engagement with outreach demonstrated by higher email and newsletter click rates. Now, as we move into recovery, communication remains as important as ever.

Disseminate key data points about district recovery

Data collection and dissemination are essential tools for UPMOs in being able to track and communicate district recovery. UPMOs are often the sole source of data specific to their district (rather than city- or county-level data). This level of specificity garners increased press coverage and increases credibility among multiple stakeholder groups. Data collection can include tracking real estate data, pedestrian counters or other footfall data as well as survey data (e.g. employer or resident sentiment data).

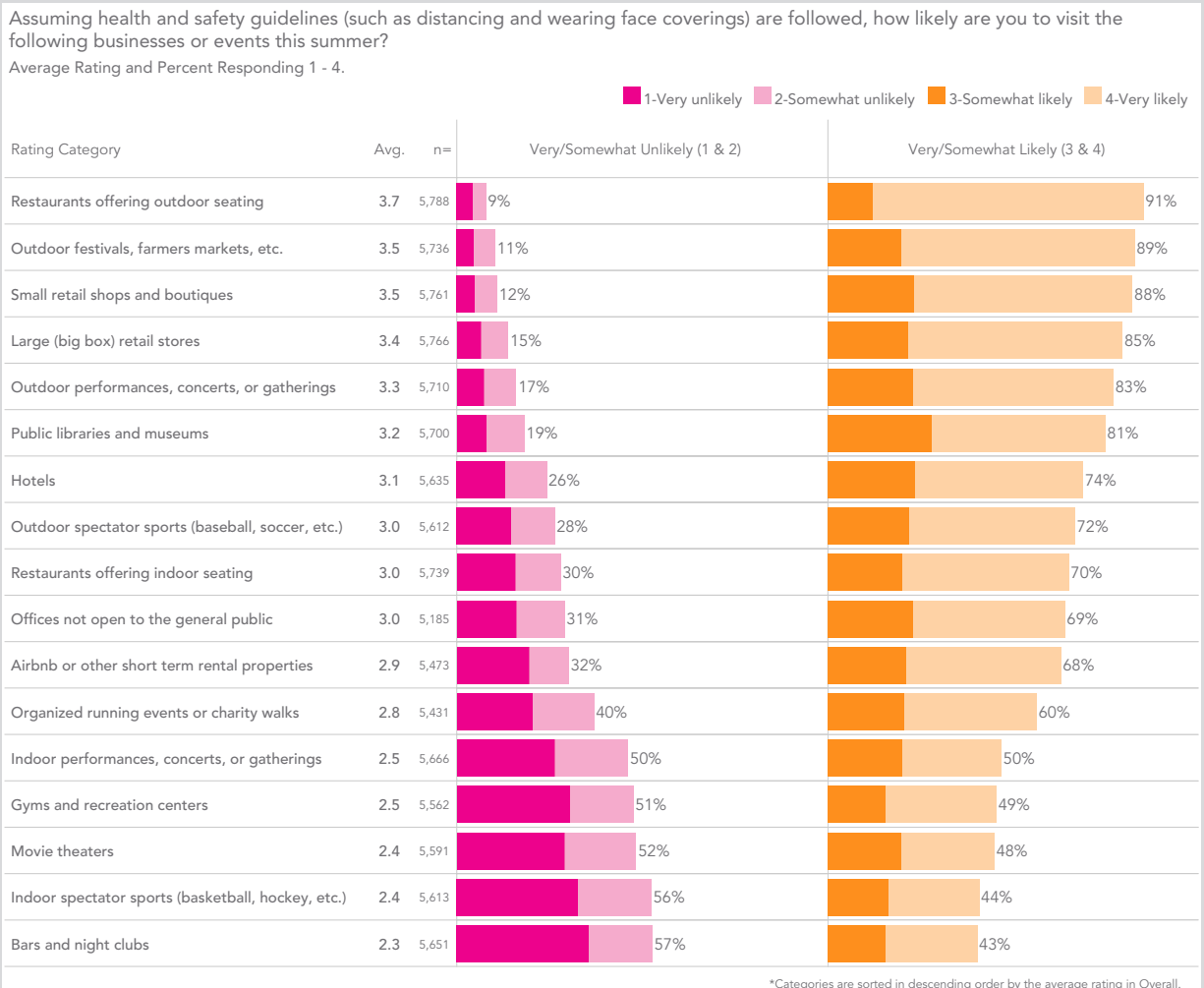
The [Chicago Loop Alliance](#) has published monthly survey data since July 2020, including pedestrian activity, actual office occupancy, parking, hotel occupancy, transit ridership and employer survey data. Across all of these indicators, downtown is showing signs of a comeback. This extensive research allowed the Alliance to foster new partnerships with the media, both in confirming grave news early in the pandemic, and in sharing good news as the recovery takes hold.

[Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership](#) publishes a dashboard, updated monthly, with extensive metrics on office building occupancy, pedestrian visits, parking, transit data and bike share comparing data year-over-year.



Surveying Resident Feedback and Perceptions

IDA partnered with RRC Associates to regularly survey residents and employees in districts across the US about actions and perceptions through the pandemic. The most recent wave, concluding in May 2021, found that respondents were planning to engage in public activities, but still nervous about indoor activities.



Regularize engagement and outreach to small businesses in your district

UPMOs should work to build out their communication infrastructure that made them such invaluable resources during the worst of the pandemic. One prong is through continuing enhanced communication with storefront retailers and restaurants, from the simple question of keeping up-to-date contact information, to engaging business owners about their safety, security, and reopening concerns. With the impacts of the pandemic, downtowns and center cities will likely continue to experience turnover in retail spaces, and UPMOs should be prepared to onboard new businesses that move into the district. UPMOs are a key liaison between the on-the-ground realities of being a small business owner and interfacing with the city, whether challenges are due to language barriers or other obstacles.

Strengthen partnerships with the public sector and ensure your UPMO has a seat at the table

The urgency of the pandemic forced municipalities and states to take swift action on many processes that were previously challenging to implement. UPMOs built stronger relationships with their city partners as a result. In many cities, downtowns and other districts in the urban core were disproportionately affected by COVID – bearing the brunt of the economic impact from the loss of office workers, the closure of cultural venues, of nightlife, and of restaurants. As municipalities strategize for recovery, it is critical that UPMOs have a seat at the table to ensure that recovery includes the priorities of their districts, or districts citywide. For example, the CEOs of Downtown Baltimore Partnership, Downtown San Diego Partnership, and the Downtown Seattle Alliance co-chair their respective city's COVID Recovery Taskforce.

Specific actions for increasing advocacy include making permanent changes to outdoor dining permits, streamlined permitting for new businesses, dedicated curbside functions for restaurant take-out, targeting aid to particularly hard-hit sectors such as performance venue and cultural sites, hotels, and nightlife. In addition, UPMOs can play a key role in mapping out the use of funds from federal programs to support the long-term economic and social growth not only within any individual district, but in support of the city as a whole.

Make Public Space Adaptations Permanent

Creative uses of outdoor spaces flourished during the pandemic and built a sense of vibrancy even when gatherings were heavily restricted. Restaurants depended on outdoor seating to help their businesses survive, and sidewalk space and parking lots and spaces were reclaimed for people instead of cars. These programs proved extremely popular in most cities worldwide and thrived year-round. Allocating streets for people and increasing outdoor dining has not disrupted traffic and has been shown to increase business for many retailers and restaurants. UPMOs are well-positioned to work with their city counterparts to make these programs safe and permanent.

Permanently Implement Open Streets Programs

The Open Streets Project defines open streets as “programs that temporarily open streets to people by closing them to cars.”³ Prior to the pandemic, these programs typically happened in cities on an annual basis along one or two select routes. Now, the popularity of open streets programs has expanded widely, and includes expanded access for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as new seating spaces and support for retailers and restaurants who can use the expanded space for their businesses. UPMOs should work with city partners (building upon now-strengthened relationships) to make these programs permanent.

To evaluate success, UPMOs can employ an assessment matrix that incorporates the following elements in the table below. It is also important to consider who these conversions serve, with an eye toward equity. Parklets and open streets programs did not thrive in some lower-income areas with lower usage of these programs, and a more community-driven approach may be necessary.

Pop-Up to Permanent Decision-Making Framework – Public Space

Categories	Metrics
Usage	Open street - number of people staying/moving, groups/individuals, week days/weekends, time of day
	Shared street - volumes at peak/off-peak (ped, cyclists, vehicles) and vehicular speed
	Placemaking and programming events/number of attendees
Safety	Reported/observed conflicts between modes
Accessibility & Equity	ADA compliance (yes/no/partially) and implication on visually impaired
	Diversity of users (who's using the space?) - age, race, repeated crowd or first time visitors
Mobility Network	Impacts on traffic
	Transit operations
	Parking
	Commercial loading
Maintenance & Operations	Durability of materials and amenities
	Staff resources

Source: Sam Schwartz Engineering

Cities are making moves to keep these programs in place. In May 2021, Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York signed legislation to make Open Streets permanent. In 2020, the city had 83 miles of Open Streets across all five boroughs. A New York City business improvement district is the lead partner on 63 of the 266 Open Streets as of June 2021. The Shared Spaces Program in San Francisco also introduced new legislation making the program permanent. In other cities, extensions of the outdoor dining program have been extended, such as the Temporary Outdoor Expansion Program in Denver, until October 2022.

Create Permanent Programs and Support For Outdoor Dining, Streeteries and Parklets

Even without closing down an entire street to cars, the creation of new options for outdoor dining, streeteries, and parklets flourished during 2020. According to the IDA Urban District Consumer Survey, 84% of respondents would like to keep the expanded outdoor restaurant seating in sidewalks, parking spaces, streets at least some of the time, and 57% want to make these changes permanent.

UPMOs should work with their cities on making these programs permanent through physical improvements as well as regulatory improvements. Physical improvements include ensuring mobility access for all, better separation for dining from vehicles, and longer-term, encouraging greater use of public transportation given reduced on-street parking. On the regulatory side, it became much easier to apply for permits to use sidewalk or parking spaces when a UPMO had a good working relationship with their respective city partners, and this expediency should be retained. Many states and cities also lifted alcohol restrictions, allowing for cocktails-to-go or for drinking in public spaces. As of May 2021, 11 states have passed permanent legislation for selling mixed drinks to-go, and more are currently considering permanent legislation.⁴

Depending on the community or district, converting parking spaces to curbside pick-up or 15-minute meter spaces has been more successful for its businesses, and making these conversions permanent also allows more people to access the district.

River City Company in Chattanooga worked with the Chattanooga Department of Transportation to develop the SPROUTS Grant Program, giving up to \$6,000 to businesses for the purchase and installation of furniture, fixtures and equipment related to expanding outdoor capacity. The SPROUTS playbook describes the city regulations and sample parklets to inspire local businesses.



Grow Consumer Confidence and Attract Activity To Urban Cores

After more than a year of public health restrictions, people are eager to get out and explore their neighborhoods and experience vibrant streets. Public health concerns are beginning to recede, in spite of recent flare ups of COVID variants and changing CDC guidance. However, many may still remain hesitant to visit the urban core, particularly as they continue to have concerns about public transportation and recall images of unrest from the summer of 2020. Public safety concerns, particularly for downtown areas, continue to present challenges in perception for many. The IDA Urban District Consumer Survey found slightly more than half of all residents feel “less safe” downtown than before COVID-19, with 16% of respondents feeling “much less safe” downtown today than before the pandemic. One of the strengths that UPMOs can execute is in marketing and positive messaging, and it is more important than ever to heavily promote the ways people can safely access activities, opportunities, and vibrancy in each district.

UPMOs need to recognize that coming downtown or visiting urban commercial districts, more than ever before, will be a choice. While the long-term effect of remote work remains to be seen, it seems clear that only some fraction of office workers will be mandated to come to the office on a regular basis. Surveys show, however, that one of the primary reasons that workers enjoy coming to the office is for the amenities nearby, and UPMOs should strive to give

workers and visitors strong reasons to travel downtown. Getting “back to normal” will require a multi-pronged effort across all sectors.

Advocate and Facilitate the Return to the Office

The biggest question facing downtowns and dense urban cores is how many office workers will be coming back. Despite increased mixed-use buildings and the growth of a residential population, the sheer number of office workers downtown, or the daytime population, is typically several times more than residents. The presence of this daytime population has an enormous impact on the viability not only of their own businesses and office real estate, but also on the ecosystem of support staff in office buildings and small businesses like restaurants, cafes, bars, and retailers that create vibrancy downtown.

As of July 26, 2021, the average actual office occupancy across 10 large metros in the US is 34.8%.⁵ Metros in Texas such as Austin, Dallas, and Houston all have occupancy above 50%, while New York, San Francisco, and San Jose only have occupancy hovering just above 20%. Richard Florida cites work by economist Nick Bloom that estimates that ultimately, remote work will account for one-fifth of all workdays, compared with just 5% pre-pandemic.⁶



Downtown organizations can prepare for this shift by working closely with businesses to understand how needs are changing and provide information on the return to the office. Employers value information on best practices for reopening offices, for both physical layouts as well as easing employee anxiety on the return to the office. This could take the form of webinars ([Golden Triangle BID](#) in Washington D.C.) or even curating “Welcome Back to Work Kits” that welcome back employees and promote downtown businesses ([Downtown Indy](#)).

[The Denver’s Ready](#) campaign, a coalition led by the Downtown Denver Partnership, City & County of Denver, COVIDCheck Colorado, Gary Community Investments and RTD, is actively calling for companies to pledge to responsibly return to the office. Resources provided as a part of this campaign include employee communication tips, new protocols for the office, and a CEO toolkit.

The Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal launched a multi-pronged [“I love working downtown”](#) campaign, with C\$8.5 million (\$7 million USD) in funding from the Quebec government. This campaign is focused on the return of workers downtown, developing a strategy to support innovative solutions for hybrid and physically distanced workspaces, deploying creative projects to attract workers and visitors, and strengthening the business sector downtown, including support for retail and restaurants.

Promote Storefront Businesses

“Shop local” campaigns proliferated throughout the pandemic. In the present recovery phase, promoting retailers, especially small businesses, typically falls under “Open for Business” messaging. However, marketing consultants Bright Brothers note in their Summer 2021 Recovery Trends “it can be counter-productive to give visitors the impression that the district ever closed, and it minimizes the work of every stakeholder who worked hard to survive this past year.”⁷ They recommend focusing on fresh, timely content that highlights the best assets of your district.

Promotion of small businesses can take many forms, and the most successful ones build upon the unique assets in downtown. For instance, the Downtown Tempe Association

held [“A Mountain Challenge”](#), encouraging residents to climb A Mountain multiple times, record and share their progress, and win prizes from downtown Tempe businesses.

One of the most popular strategies in the early days of the pandemic was using gift card promotions to support local businesses, where the UPMO would provide a bonus added to local gift card purchases. Others like Downtown Greensboro are promoting a Downtown Summer Passport program where those who show a receipt of a purchase greater than \$25 at any downtown business are entered into a weekly raffle to win \$500. These promotions focus on getting people into the downtown to support local businesses, which is particularly important as resident survey results reveal that about a quarter of respondents are likely to visit downtown less often than usual.

To activate empty storefronts, UPMOs are also pursuing pop-up programs, especially since landlords are willing to offer highly reduced or even free rent in current conditions. UPMOs are also using this opportunity to focus on bringing in more diverse entrepreneurs. These programs are described in further detail in the next theme on “Recover with equity at the forefront.” Other UPMOs are activating vacant storefronts with public art programs. The Montclair Center BID sponsors [Fresh Air Montclair](#), which features local artists who create exhibitions that support positive messages. Starting downtown in the summer of 2020, this program has expanded in 2021 township-wide.



Increase Placemaking to Attract Activity

Downtown organizations have long been charged with building the vibrancy of their district, and this will become even more important as the role of the urban core as an employment hub shifts. If workers are no longer required to come downtown on a five-day-a-week schedule, they may choose to come downtown because of strong amenities, activities, and vibrancy. As a result, Richard Florida hypothesizes that “A day at the office will be spent less in a single building and become more like a localized business trip.”⁸

To appeal to those who have not been to the downtown or district in more than a year, organizations are focused on putting their best foot forward and making a strong impression. Clean and safe operations continue to be a core component of UPMO services. Seeing ambassadors on the street, well-maintained sidewalks, planters, etc. gives visitors and passers-by the impression that despite reduced foot traffic, there are still people on the street.

Organizations should focus on increasing placemaking and activation in new and surprising ways throughout the district. These could include alleyway activations, public art installations, murals, or even outdoor offices. Organizations are looking to federal funding to implement these plans.



The start of summer 2021 has also seen the return of programming such as fitness classes in the park, summer movie nights, and markets and festivals. Events are typically smaller-scale for the moment, allowing for greater flexibility to adapt to changing public health conditions.

The Rosslyn BID's [Rosslyn Refresh](#) campaign in Arlington, VA, brings together a variety of components to get outside safely. Examples include hosting giveaways with the chance to win gift cards to local restaurants, new faux flower installations, farmers markets, and O2: Outdoor Office. The Outdoor Office saw great success in fall/winter 2020, and continues to be in high demand as it responds not only to public health concerns, but also allows people to gather safely and be at work in a different environment than the office or at home.

Creating strong reasons for people to come downtown are extremely important not just for attracting visitors but for giving employees added reasons why they should come into the office in a hybrid environment. Organizations are considering whether to better coordinate events so that they can focus on attracting workers who can choose to work from home on a day-by-day basis, such as hosting farmers markets and other events on the same day.

Focus on Regional Tourism

Domestic tourism is starting to increase, but most people are still most comfortable traveling by personal vehicle. UPMOs are responding with drive-time marketing for regional visitors using radio ads, digital ads, and traditional marketing. Digital assets like a dedicated website ([University City District in Philadelphia](#)) can reconnect local visitors to district offerings. Tourism (along with business travel) is key to bringing the hospitality industry, particularly hotels, back online. Nationally, CBRE forecasts that U.S. hotels won't return to the 2019 average daily rate and revenue per available room until 2024.⁹ Lower-priced hotels will recover faster than luxury hotels, and smaller markets like San Bernardino, Dayton, Oklahoma City, Virginia Beach and Savannah are already close to 2019 revenue per available room levels.

Recover with Equity At the Forefront

The pandemic and calls for racial justice globally underscored the deep racial inequities that challenge our societies, and challenge the work of place management in particular. We are charged with the work of making thriving and vibrant districts, but sometimes that can exclude certain groups. As we recover from the pandemic, we must also recover with a focused equity lens that empowers all to live, work, and play in our districts.

Develop Programs Supporting Minority Entrepreneurs

During 2020, the number of new business startups in the U.S. grew from 3.5 million in 2019 to 4.4 million, a 24% increase.¹⁰ Furthermore, researchers found that the ZIP codes with the greatest increase in business registrations were in areas where Black residents make up more than half of the population.¹¹ Pre-COVID data showed that there were only three Black-owned businesses per 1,000 Black residents, compared to 20.3 White-owned businesses per 1,000 White residents.¹²

To help address this inequity, build upon the startup momentum, and fill vacant storefronts, UPMOs are developing programs that focus specifically on small business support for Black-owned and other minority businesses. This is a rare opportunity to partner with property owners who are willing to lease at free or low rents to incubate new and diverse businesses. UPMOs are also taking the step to develop minority-owned businesses and encourage property ownership to have a permanent stake in the community.

The Downtown Partnership of Baltimore's BOOST (Black-Owned and Operated Storefront Tenancy) program will support five Black-owned businesses with up to \$50,000 in grants for build-out and operations, affordable lease at a storefront downtown, and additional technical assistance. The program is supported by a wide-ranging partnership, including software company Fearless, Baltimore Gas & Electric, M&T Bank, Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, Baltimore Development Corporation, and downtown property owners. DPOB announced their first cohort of participants in July 2021.

The Golden Triangle BID in Washington D.C. launched their Grow Golden program to connect retail and restaurant entrepreneurs with building owners concerned about filling high-profile ground floor space. The program provides technical assistance with selection based on diversity and equity. The properties offer three months free rent and many include up to nine additional months with percentage rent terms (10% of gross revenue).



Use Strategic Planning to Incorporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Internally and Expand Districtwide Programming to Be More Inclusionary

The pandemic and racial justice concerns have shaken up urban place management organizations, and organizations are using this opportunity to revisit their strategic plans. UPMOs with a diversity of staff better ensures a diversity of programming. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are vital principles that have become more closely scrutinized following 2020. UPMOs have always had to balance being pro-business and organized by property owners with representing the community as a whole and avoiding a public image as an island of privilege. This could mean ensuring your organization has strong relationships with city agencies as well as with community organizations who represent grassroots interests. Some organizations have prioritized different skillsets – for instance, with increased business engagement needed during the pandemic, employees with these specialty are in even higher demand.

The Milwaukee Downtown BID is partnering with the City of Milwaukee to develop its next downtown Master Plan, looking ahead to 2040. In addition to identifying the next set of catalytic projects that will enable Milwaukee to remain a world-class city, there will be a focus on equity and engagement and plans to engage a firm specifically to solicit public input from the neighborhoods around downtown.

Leverage This Crisis For the Next Decade of Transformation

The unprecedented funding from the federal governments in both the U.S. and Canada offers new opportunities to invest in downtowns and urban districts. For organizations that already have a district master plan, this is an opportunity to accelerate the implementation of those shared visions. If there is no district master plan, this is the time to develop one! With the shared realization of how urban districts have been more heavily impacted than other areas, it could be easier to build a shared vision now about what kind of urban district and central city the community wants to see emerge from the pandemic.

Invest in pedestrian, multimodal, and green infrastructure

Investing in long-term infrastructure needs will transform the future of downtowns. The pandemic clearly showed the value of well-connected, walkable urban districts, complemented by green spaces that were critical for recreation as well as for gathering in times of need. As a result, UPMOs are prioritizing pedestrian improvements, multimodal infrastructure, and increased green spaces in communities large and small. While in the U.S., these infrastructure improvements are not eligible for ARPA funding, they may be eligible under the proposed American Jobs Plan that is also being structured with an equity framework. In Canada, these improvements qualified under the Community Revitalization Fund.

There may also be opportunity to reimagine the office environment, and better integrate residents into the urban core. Residents were the saving grace in many districts, whom when working from home, continued to patronize their local businesses. While the future of office is being reshaped, it seems clear that the lines between office and home continue to be blurred, but the value of a strong place, that offers opportunities and amenities for residents, workers, and visitors alike will continue to be in high demand.

The National Landing BID in Arlington, VA launched a public awareness campaign for [“People Before Cars”](#) in May 2021. People Before Cars presents a vision for a multi-

modal, pedestrian-friendly Route 1, the primary roadway that currently splits the district. The BID and its partners are advocating for reduced pedestrian wait times and crossing distances, improved sidewalks, narrower lanes to promote slower driving speeds, more bike lanes, all to attract new businesses and create a safer, more walkable downtown. Arlington County and the Virginia Department of Transportation are currently designing plans for this segment of Route 1 following the arrival of Amazon’s HQ2.

Downtown Davenport Partnership (DDP), part of the Quad Cities in Iowa and Illinois, spent 2020 developing its [“Davenport 2030: A Resilient City”](#) master plan. DDP focused on resilience because Davenport was devastated by record flooding in 2019 and downtown business owners were further challenged by the 2020 pandemic and civil unrest. The primary strategies in the master plan are to invest in the public realm, focus on residential, build on Davenport’s strong Arts & Entertainment backbone, and build an entrepreneurial ecosystem to support the growth of small-scale office and retail. The development of this master plan gives downtown Davenport a clear path forward in recovery and the community and stakeholders have already been aligned around a clear vision for the future and importance of downtown.

Chart Downtown/District Recovery Roadmaps

Many cities organized downtown-focused recovery taskforces, and their plans have begun to be released. Having a clear roadmap to organize actions across the public, private, and non-profit sectors that not only considers short-term actions but also long-term plans (and identifies clear pots of funding), sets the table for the long-term success of the city.

The Downtown Austin Alliance's [Roadmap to Recovery and Resilience](#) describes both short-term recovery strategies and long-term goals to enhance downtown's resilience. It includes four priorities for the short-term: address unsheltered homelessness, activate parks and public spaces, support small businesses and live music, and promote downtown Austin. Longer-term, the roadmap focuses on transforming downtown with infrastructure and placemaking through seven major projects downtown that focus on improving connectivity and improving parks and green spaces.

TRANSFORM DOWNTOWN WITH INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLACEMAKING

Champion enhanced infrastructure to improve downtown's appeal, vitality and resilience. Ensure that new public places support increased inclusion and vibrancy.



The [Louisville Downtown Revitalization Team](#), created in January 2021, brought together diverse business owners, industry leaders, residents, and community partners over six months to “envision and create a downtown environment that is even better than it was before,” including diversity, equity and inclusion goals throughout the Action Plan. Its detailed action plan focuses on three different time frames – 30 days, 60 – 90 days, and 120+ days with specific funding within the categories of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Clean, Green & Safe; Commercial Occupiers; Events, Marketing & Communications; Residential Occupiers; Small Business; and Tourism.

The [City of Chicago’s Central City Roadmap](#) highlights four themes for its recovery strategy: Communicate, Activate, Full Return, and Invest. Detailed action items under each theme cross city sectors and some highlight the specific work of UPMOs like the Chicago Loop Alliance and Magnificent Mile Association. This includes the CLA’s Back to Work Toolkit and “Sundays on State,” a placemaking event that closes the historic retail corridor on State Street.

Conclusion

Cities are resilient and have always adapted to new innovations or challenges. Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen people gravitate towards the amenities and experiences that previously drew them to urban cores. UPMOs continue to be vital organizations uniquely placed at the intersection of the public and private spheres, offering on-the-ground knowledge of local conditions and supporting district stakeholders. More than ever, now is the time for UPMOs to take the lead in ushering in the recovery and advocating at all levels for more vibrant, human-centric, and equitable urban places for all.

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Photo Credits

Special Thanks



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Lancaster City Alliance
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