

Adaptation Guide

Lessons from a pandemic

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Resiliency Office

Department of Local Affairs



Introduction

Over the past months, the Colorado Resiliency Office has been working with communities to share adaptations and capture lessons learned during COVID-19. Communities have been impressive in their efforts to be nimble and responsive to continuous change. These lessons have the potential to transcend the pandemic and fortify communities to future disruptions.



Startup Mindset: Trials and creativity

When charting unknown landscapes, quick trials and creativity became critical tools. Not wanting to invest too much in any one solution, businesses, public health agencies, and state and local government have proven their ability to rapidly test ideas and pivot in response to COVID-19. Developing solutions to the unknown and ever changing landscape of COVID-19 also requires great creativity. Communities willing to think beyond their traditional approaches, retool assets, and rethink space quickly pioneered ideas.

Spotlight: Basalt, Colorado

The Town of Basalt worked in conjunction with the Basalt Chamber of Commerce to find quick solutions that would address the different public health restrictions, including reduced occupancy in restaurants and limited gatherings. In order to expand outdoor seating, the town worked to section off parking spots on its commercial districts, using concrete “pigs” as blockades. To address potential parking issues in downtown, the town collaborated with the elementary school and middle school to leverage the unused parking lots. The path between main street (Midland Ave) and the school parking lots was then further enhanced with path improvements including the addition of solar lighting and new gravel. Two area non-profits assisted with the improvements. Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers, an organization typically focused on popular far off hiking and MTB trails, leveraged its volunteers to work on the “urban” trail. Aspen Community Foundation leveraged funds from area philanthropic efforts to help fund some of the improvements. The Basalt Chamber assisted with communications to educate both business owners and their employees, as well as tourists visiting the area, about the parking alternative. Lastly, the town’s public art commission repurposed existing funds that were then directed to local visual artists, a group that had been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These artists worked with the area restaurants to create public art on the different concrete pigs, each with its own theme and style, adding to the vibrancy. Some of these improvements took a matter of days, not months, to go from idea to execution. Through public-private collaborations, the town was quickly able to adapt to the new environment, providing much needed vitality and a boost to the local economy.



Value of Relationships: Partner well and partner often

Relationships have been identified as one of the most important foundations to navigating the pandemic. These relationships take many forms. From local governments, business, and public agencies working in lock step to offer guidance and adapt to regulations to entrepreneurs stepping in to fill PPE gaps. The importance of these relationships existing prior to a disruption has become evident. Strong networks, build strong communities. It also became clear that shifting public private paradigms, which empowered local businesses and entrepreneurs to take a lead in response helped foster positivity and creativity. To quote Charles L. Marohn JR, "Where local governments focus on the residents of the community, it is most often in the context of considering them customers whose needs and expectations are to be satisfied in a cheerful manner, instead of collaborators in a joint project known as the city."

Spotlight: Montrose, Colorado

When the Governor's orders required the closing or dramatic reduction in service for nearly every business in Montrose, the City of Montrose knew it had to act quickly. Not knowing what the city's future held financially, they decided to offer an interest free, 12-month-no-repayment loan product rather than a grant to help businesses stay in place during the pandemic. Because they had previously formed a relationship with the small business lender at Region 10, they were able to get Region 10's immediate agreement to review the loans and provide the lending paperwork. Additionally, because of their strong relationships with business owners in the community, they were able to form a loan committee including a business owner who helped advocate on behalf of the businesses throughout the process as well as advocate for the program itself. The business owners also trusted the city to review their finances. Finally, they had built trust with City Council so their approval was easy to gain in fairly and successfully administering the loan program. The city lent out about \$100k to small businesses in Montrose.



Find a Way to Yes:

Reimagine space, policy, and historic approaches

Remember all those years of community conversations about parking strategies on main streets and appropriate use of community spaces? COVID-19 in many cases has laid those debates to rest and allowed communities to reimagine community spaces, remove regulations, and innovate. Historic precedent which may dictate use of our community space can often be outdated. COVID-19 created the opportunity to reconsider space in a way that was quickly responsive to community needs and priorities. This nimbleness and finding a way to yes should be an ongoing attitude in addressing challenges.

Spotlight: Durango, Colorado

The City of Durango's Community Development Department has worked quickly and effectively in response to the pandemic. While there had been much discussion about how to restructure the Department's application submittal and review process in recent years, the pandemic forced the Department to make rapid changes to these procedures. Staff met early in the pandemic response and reviewed existing procedures. Based on this analysis, several adjustments were identified that would make the submittal process smoother and safer for applicants. Digital submittals were allowed and simple guidelines were created to guide applicants in assembling their submittal. Internal communication protocols were established on how to route submittals and move them through the appropriate process. The Department's website was updated to communicate all these adjustments to the public. This is an example of how the pandemic forced a shift in mindset to reimagine historic approaches and find a better way of operating that will most likely remain after the pandemic.



Focus on Your Own:

Double down on community assets

Doubling down on existing businesses and community assets has helped communities thrive during the pandemic. This plays to the notion that sometimes focusing on retention over attraction and maintenance over growth creates strong foundations during disruptions. Turning resources inward during the time of the pandemic helps nurture surviving businesses. As a future looking strategy, focusing on community development as a foundation of economic development can pay dividends. This can include focusing on place and community assets, growing our own, developing leadership, and workforce development.

Spotlight: San Luis Valley

The San Luis Valley Development Resource Group leveraged its community connections and the diversity of the organization to be efficient in fostering a more coordinated “survive to recovery” pandemic strategy. On the “survival side”, their most immediate action was to reach out to their loan portfolio to offer a three to six month payment deferment. This was followed up by a survey to get a better handle on most immediate business need. In that survey, they discovered that utility payments was a common concern and found a small amount of money to award for businesses needing utility assistance. In preparation for recovery, they will deploy an additional \$880,000 in loan funds that will be targeted for participation with local lenders at a zero percent interest rate, hire a recovery coordinator, expand their Small Business Development Center service to four additional spaces, and contract a SBDC consultant who can assist with business valuations in anticipation of transition planning or employee ownership discussions.



Rapid Assessment:

Staying on course

Community resilience depends on rapid assessment of course. That has become particularly true during COVID-19. We need to keep community goals at the forefront but be willing to chart multiple pathways to get there should conditions change around us.

Two important considerations for rapid assessment during this time: 1) What wasn't working before in reaching community goals; 2) What is working well now that the community should maintain? The point being we shouldn't return to processes and approaches that weren't working before and we should maintain adaptations that better serve the community in the long run.



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