



Chamber Task Force Unveils Vision for Reopening Chicagoland's Economy

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Report aims to "accelerate Chicagoland's economic recovery," cites "must haves" for successful reopen

CHICAGO – The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce's COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force laid out a vision and guidelines for reopening Chicago's economy today, outlining policies and conditions necessary for the region's businesses to get back on their feet successfully. The 26-page report examines the logistical and practical challenges of reopening head-on – and includes action items as well as a "Chicago Pledge" for business.

"The Chicagoland Chamber convened this business task force in order to organize the best practices and industry priorities to get people back to work as quickly as possible and accelerate our economic recovery, while simultaneously prioritizing issues of safety, trust, and equity," said Jack Lavin, the President and CEO of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce. "It is our hope that the principles we've established will serve as useful guideposts to deliver on this pledge for our world-class city."

The report also identifies critical steps – "must haves" – that must be taken before Chicagoland's economy can fully revive. They include: Access to and guidance for testing and contact tracing, transportation, schools and childcare, liability protection, talent and workforce development, support for small businesses, regulatory relief, mental health and wellness, and investing in infrastructure.

The Chamber's COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force represents a cross-section of Chicagoland's business community. Its members come from a diversity of views, industries, and business sizes. The group is chaired by Robin L. Brown, VP government affairs and external relations of Ingredion Incorporated; Joe Dominguez, CEO of ComEd; and Bruce Lubin, vice chairman of CIBC US.

"The Coronavirus has completely altered the way we live and work. We hear and talk a lot about 'the new normal,' but no one really knows what that will be. As business leaders, it is our responsibility to define that new normal," said Lubin, who also serves as Chairman of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. "This report establishes the conditions needed to do that."

This Task Force recommended that Chicago's reopening follow five Guiding Principles:

- 1. Rebuilding 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.
- 2. Providing 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.
- 3. Safeguarding public spaces and investing 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.
- 4. Providing 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. Communicating that guidance (which is constantly changing) in a simple and digestible fashion is a crucial step as we seek to safely reopen.
- 5. Supporting 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. 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.

The Task Force also addressed longstanding social and economic disparities experienced by communities of color. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on these communities, and the civil unrest of recent weeks destroyed many small businesses, including on the South and West sides.

"As we work to rebuild our economy, we need to place equity at the heart of our approach. This pandemic has only exacerbated the health and economic disparities within Black and Brown communities, and we can't afford to ignore that," said Brown, who also co-chairs the Chamber's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force, which launched in 2019.

With that in mind, the report's Chicago Pledge hopes to address these challenges and the economic recovery by encouraging all Chicagoland businesses 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 Chicago Pledge is one way that businesses can affirm their commitment to supporting our region's economic recovery. We have to be bold about charting a new path forward—that's why ComEd is proud to take the Chicago Pledge," said ComEd CEO Joe Dominguez.

The full report, and a link where businesses can sign onto the Chicago Pledge, can be found at chicagolandchamber.org.

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About the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce

The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce represents over 1,000 member companies, their 400,000 employees, and over \$24 billion in revenue. We combine the power of our membership with our legacy of leadership and business advocacy to drive a dynamic economy. We focus on delivering value for our members, making Chicagoland a world-class place to live and work. Visit ChicagolandChamber.org.