

# Checklist for Preparing to Re-Open Your Business

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Although a re-open date for those South Carolina businesses that were temporarily closed has not yet been confirmed, now is the time to go ahead and start putting together a plan for when your business does re-open. As you begin looking at re-opening, keep two things in mind:

1. **Business will not be back to the way it was before the pandemic right after you re-open and it may take months before you get back to “normal”, if ever.** People will be hesitant to leave their homes, they will be hesitant to interact with other people, and they will most likely keep the contact-less habits they made during the pandemic until they feel safe to do otherwise. With so many lay-offs, those who would go out and shop, may no longer be able to financially do so. Because of this, you should not base your business decisions or financial forecasts on what you were bringing in during the months prior to the pandemic.
2. **The decisions you make for your re-open may have long-term impacts, so these decisions need to be made deliberately and with some thought behind them.** Take the extra down time you have now to go ahead and start putting a plan together using the checklist below. That way, when the re-open is announced, you are ready to go and can make the transition as easy and as seamless as possible.

## FINANCIALS

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- Know your financial situation.** Look at your finances, run cash flow and profit and loss forecasts, consider different “what if” scenarios, talk to your banker, accountant, or financial advisor, get a clear picture of where your finances are right now and what they may look like in the next few months. Knowing what you can and cannot do financially will affect every checklist item below and any other re-open decisions you may need to make. Running these forecasts and working through “what if” scenarios will also put you in a better position to keep your doors open once you are able to re-open.
- Determine how the re-opening will be funded.** Will you use revenue made from online or take-out sales, will you use personal or business savings, were you approved for one of the small business loans, or will you have to look into a different loan or outside funding?
- Make cuts or adjustments if necessary.** If you are not financially able to re-open at the same level you were at before the closure, or are hesitant to do so, look at where adjustments in your business can be made. Maybe you hire employees back in phases as business picks up instead of hiring them back at once. Maybe you use a pared-down menu, limit your hours, or take off a costly service for the time-being.
- Plan the future.** Use this down time while you have it to plan for the future. For example, whatever budget you had before the pandemic probably is not realistic anymore and needs to be re-adjusted. While you make your changes, consider the “what if” statements again. What if the governor issues another temporary closure? What if you aren’t able to re-schedule a big event? What if it takes months for business to pick-up? Thinking ahead and planning for these “what ifs” now can save you time and stress in the next few months or even years.

## EMPLOYEES

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- Get an accurate count of which employees can be re-hired.** Hopefully you have been regularly communicating with your employees and know where they all stand in relation to being re-hired, but if you haven’t, reach out to them now. There is a chance that some have found other employment already or are not interested in being re-hired. You also need to ask each employee if they can potentially wait to be re-hired back or if they will find other employment if they have to wait too long. Those answers will affect the item below and you also don’t want to assume an employee will wait, only to not have them available when you need them.
- Create a re-hiring timeline and re-hiring criteria.** Can you bring everybody back at once, or do you need to re-hire in phases? If you need to re-hire in phases, develop criteria or a ranking system to

determine which employees need to be brought back first and which ones can wait until business picks up more.

- **Review your hiring and training procedures.** If you are going to have to hire new employees, now is a good time to look over how you hire and train new employees and see if there are any improvements that can be made. For example, if you don't have training videos, you can easily use your phone to make some simple training videos to share with new employees (or even current employees as a refresher) before they officially start.

## OPERATIONS

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- **Review your current inventory.** Go through all of your inventory and supplies and make sure you have everything you need to re-open.
- **Check in with all of your suppliers.** With all the recent closures and business disruptions, you may no longer be able to get the products from your suppliers that you will need to re-open or supplies may be in short-supply. Talk to your suppliers and figure out if they can provide what you need not only for the time being, but for the next few months as well.
- **Find alternate supplies if necessary.** If you are not able to get the supplies you need, go ahead and start reaching out to other suppliers. Don't hesitate to think outside the box and approach businesses you would not normally go through as well. Even if you have the supplies you need, it also might be beneficial to talk to other suppliers and have them as a back-up plan just in case.
- **Prepare for any operation changes.** If you had to make cuts or adjustments to your business for financial reasons, don't forget to do the necessary steps to prepare for these changes. For example, if you are only going to serve a limited menu, you may want to print some inexpensive menus for your diners.
- **Do NOT stop offering the other methods you may have started using during the closures.** If you offered delivery, pick-up, virtual shopping, virtual classes, gift card purchases, or any other method because of the pandemic, you need to keep offering those once the closure is lifted. Even when the closures are lifted, there will be many people who are hesitant to return to their pre-COVID-19 habits and will still be wanting to use these contact-less methods. If you reduce these alternate operations or get rid of them entirely, you may lose out on a good source of revenue in a time when any source of revenue needs to be utilized.

## SAFETY

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- **Give your space a good cleaning before you re-open.** If your business has been closed, you definitely want to get in there and get out all the dust and stale air before you re-open. Even if the business hasn't been closed or has been regularly cleaned, it is still a good idea to sanitize everything that might come in contact with a person before you re-open. As you are doing this sanitization, take pictures and post them on your social media. It will make your customers feel better about coming in if they have seen proof of the business being sanitized for their safety.
- **Implement CDC-recommended safety measures.** We don't know yet what the status of the virus will be when businesses are able to re-open, but be prepared to alter your business practices to follow whatever safety guidelines the CDC recommends. These could include limiting the number of customers allowed to come in to business at once, maintaining six-feet of social distance, sanitizing stations, and other precautions. Below are some suggestions of safety measures you can start preparing for that the CDC might recommend or that you can go ahead and use to make your customers and employees feel safe.
  - If your business has seating, take out or block off every other seat or table. This will force people to social distance without you having to monitor or enforce it.
  - Use tape or stickers to indicate how customers and employees should space themselves from each other. This can be especially useful for areas where people tend to line up like the register.

- For further protection at a counter or register, you can also install a clear barrier on the counter to separate the customer and employee, but still allow communication.
- Set up hand sanitizer at points of contact like doors, bathrooms, registers, etc.
- **Ensure that all employees have the necessary PPE.** If your employees are going to come into close contact with customers, it is very important that you provide any and all personal protective equipment. At the minimum, if an employee is handing or receiving something from a customer (like food, deliveries, a credit card), they should be wearing gloves. Depending on the level of contact and the status of the virus, you may also need to provide masks for all employees. You should also ensure that all of your employees are using their PPE correctly for every single customer.
- **Create and follow a continual sanitizing schedule.** Similar to the PPE, you need to have a sanitizing schedule that is completed on a regular basis that every employee follows. This could be wiping down the screen or credit card pad after each transaction, cleaning door handles every hour, or spraying down the waiting room.
- **Prominently share and post all safety measures.** Compile all the safety measures you will be following and put it on your website, your social media, your front door, at your register, and anywhere else you think it needs to be. If there are certain rules customers need to follow, like limiting how many people can come into the store at once, you need to make those rules easy for them to find. Sharing your safety measures can also benefit your business because you may have customers that choose to come to your place simply because they know that their health will be protected.

## COMMUNICATIONS

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- **Share your re-opening date everywhere you can.** One of the biggest mistakes you can make when you re-open is not telling people that you have re-opened. Post it on your website, make signs for your storefront, send it out to your email list, share it on your socials, and maybe even make an event for it on Facebook. Not everyone uses the same communication methods, so if you want to reach a wider audience, you need to utilize as many of the methods as possible. You also need to share about your re-opening more than once. Once the closure is lifted, many other businesses will also be sharing their re-opening date and just your one post could easily get lost. Social media is a great tool to use for posting multiple times or even starting a daily countdown.
- **Continue to promote even after the re-opening date.** Not only will you have to tell people you are going to re-open, you also have to keep reminding them that you are open. Beyond just posting that you are open, you can also post about your safety measures, any changes to your operations, promotions, and anything else that will help raise awareness about your business with customers and potential customers.
- **Consider a promotion to get people in the doors.** If you are worried about getting people back into your business, you can always offer a temporary promotion like a certain percentage off or a free add-on to help encourage people to come in. A promotion might also appeal to customers who are being more wary of their spending.
- **Communicate with other businesses.** Don't be afraid to reach out to each other for support and advice. Businesses in your same industry may be able to help with financial predictions, suppliers, employee referrals or what strategies they are using. Businesses outside your industry, especially any neighboring businesses, may be willing to help cross-promote by displaying your promotional materials in their store and encouraging their customers to check out your business if you do the same.

For more COVID-19 resources for businesses, check out the Florence Downtown page [here](#) and the Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce page [here](#).