Introduction
This is not an easy time for rural communities and their economies. The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 threatens to totally overwhelm the rural West with a wave of shrinking markets, imploding tourist sectors, surging unemployment and massive debt. The economies in many rural communities and counties in the West have been struggling since the mid 1960’s with decreasing employment opportunities and stagnant wages especially for working class, service and blue-collar jobs. Local and regional problems are compounded with declining employment in agriculture, natural resources and manufacturing, historically the primary employers of rural Americans. Additionally, wildfires, heavy flooding, tornados and even earthquakes have stressed rural economies and given rise to disaster, resiliency and emergency mitigation plans that attempt to buffer the effects of periodic but unpredictable disruption.

But COVID-19 presents problems and issues of a much greater magnitude to rural economies than the disasters of the past. Impacts from COVID-19 distribute across the population, the government, and the economy. There may be no parts of the economy that remain unaffected, as for example in past recessions. What can we do? Where do we start? What ideas and resources are available? How can we access them? Who can help? These are just a few of the questions asked by rural economic development planners, Extension agents, business owners, and rural citizens as they attempt to cope with this cataclysmic event and its consequences.

There are many resources available, perhaps too many to efficiently sort through. Resources from a national, regional, and local perspective can all be helpful and provide useful information to better understand an overwhelming problem viewed from different levels of concern. The most useful resources at whatever level are those that are credible, specific, timely and updated frequently and those that facilitate access and use. Where do I start? And, what do I do to overcome the inevitable obstacles and problems? Listed below is an annotated reference guide from a national, regional, and local perspective for those navigating a pandemic and other economic shocks in rural communities during these turbulent times.

National and General Resources: Selected COVID-19 Information for the General Public
There are many other useful and reliable references for general COVID-19 information, cable news such as NPR (www.npr.sections/health/) and CNN (www.cnn.com/coronavirus-pandemic/) and other online news sources. However, rumors abound online and care should be taken to insure the credibility and reliability of the source.

Centers for Disease Control
https://www.cdc.gov
Timely updates and critical information from the leading public health organization in the United States. Provides authoritative information on coronavirus symptoms, cases, travel guidelines and timing of community mitigation and changes in COVID-19. Useful for general information and for changes and developments in the evolving pattern of the novel coronavirus. Helpful and updated business guidelines...
and resources from CDC can be found at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communuity/general-business-faq.html

American Public Health Association
https://www.apha.org/
Leading public health organization urging the public health community to share science-based information with the public and speaking out for outbreak funding and support. Countering the “infodemic” of misinformation. Tab through Topics and Issues, Communicable Disease, to COVID 19.

United States Federal Emergency Management Agency
https://www.fema.gov/
FEMA along with the Economic Development Administration (www.eda.gov) are primary sources of US federal government information, funding and resources for individual disaster assistance and FEMA disaster declarations. Current FEMA information updates include “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response,” Coronavirus Rumor Control,” and “FEMA COVID-19 Supply Chain Task Force: Supply Chain Stabilization.”

United States Economic Development Administration
https://www.eda.gov/
EDA and FEMA are the primary federal sources of information and assistance for public and private stakeholders to rebuild their local economies. EDA programs that provide assistance and funding for disaster recovery (https://eda.gov/disaster-recovery/) and for local economic development financing such as opportunity zones (https://eda.gov/opportunity-zones/) are especially relevant during the coronavirus pandemic. Restore Your Economy (https://restoryoureconomy.org/index.php) is a one-stop shop of disaster preparedness and post-disaster economic recovery resources, tools, events, and announcements as well as opportunities to connect with peers through social media groups. Also, “Leadership in Times of Crisis: A Toolkit for Economic Recovery and Resilience.”

The US Chamber of Commerce
https://www.uschamber.com/
The US Chamber of Commerce also offers valuable information and resources to businesses. See for example, https://www.uschamber.com/coronavirus-communications-toolkit

State and Regional Resources: Mitigation and Disaster Recovery Information for Business and Economic Development Practitioners and Extension Educators
State Offices of Commerce, Economic Development and Public Health
Every state government in the West (https://coronavirus.utah.gov/, for example) has a public health office dedicated to updates of virus counts, CDC updates and mitigation announcements. Utah’s Governor’s Office of Economic Development also offers a menu of incentive and support programs to rural businesses including a bridge loan to Utah-based small businesses and non-profits impacted by the outbreak (https://business.utah.gov/). At least 25% of the bridge loan fund is earmarked for rural businesses.

Economic Development Collaborative
https://edcollaborative.com/covid19/
The Economic Development Collaborative (EDC) is a key player in delivering business, consulting, funding and strategic initiatives that support the regional economy in Central California. Their COVID-19 Business Resources section provides valuable and timely tools and information including:

- Weekly webinars
- Immediate recommended actions
- Business and personal financing
- SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL)
- Paycheck Protection Programs (PPP)
- EDC Disaster Loan Fund
- Women's Economic Venture Quick Response Loan Fund (WEV)
- Disaster Preparedness and Resiliency Toolkit and consulting services to jumpstart access to programs and funding.
State Land Grant Universities and Extension Services

Every state in the West has a land-grant university with Extension offices serving counties throughout their state. Many of these universities and extension networks have responded with science-based information and assistance during the COVID-19 crisis. The University of Nevada Reno Extension (https://extension.unr.edu/program.aspx?ID=181) has developed a timely and valuable COVID-19 Resources package distributed through webinars and classroom presentations. Webinars include:

- Small Business Owners Guide to the CARES Act
- Small Business Owners Government Programs
- USDA Rural Development COVID-19 Resources
- US Chamber of Commerce Coronavirus Emergency Loans
- Nevada Health and GOED Response to COVID-19
- Nevada Rural COVID-19 Resources

Michigan State University Extension Tourism Team https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/

See their current Issues Impacting Tourism Series:

- COVID-19 Impacts on Tourism and Strategies for Small Town Tourism
- What Tourism Might Look Like After COVID-19
- Food Systems, Agri-tourism and Sustainability

The University of California’s Cooperative Extension and the Western Rural Development Center have reproduced with permission the “Practical Guide to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES)” to inform national and regional extension stakeholders and communities of the resources and funding made available during the pandemic crisis. Contact your state land-grant institution and extension service for assistance and materials provided for businesses, entrepreneurs, and citizens for more information.

America’s Small Business Development Centers https://americassbdc.org/protect-your-business/

ASBDC has a network of offices and resources in each state that provides small business counseling and services including coronavirus impact assistance provided through federal SBA and EDA disaster funding. COVID-19 resources available include SBDC materials and webinars for small businesses: SBA Coronavirus Pandemic Loans Comparison Guide; Small Business Help with the COVID-19 Pandemic; Small Business Resiliency Webinar and materials, “Keeping the Lights On.” Contact your local state SBDC office for more information.

Headwaters Economics https://headwaterseconomics.org/


Regional Economic Analysis Project https://www.reaproject.org/

Regional Economic Analysis Project (REAP) is an organization of regional websites designed to foster and further sound regional economic research, analysis, education, outreach, and decision-making. REAP focuses on bringing regional economic analysis awareness, techniques, and methodologies to local and regional communities across the United States. Using data compiled by the US Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), websites provide data tables and detailed analysis of the trends and composition of the major economic indicators available for counties, states, and regions across the nation. REAP also exclusively produces and packages data and analysis for additional regional configurations not available directly from BEA. PNREAP is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation organized explicitly to foster and further sound regional economic research, analysis, education, outreach, and decision-making.
County and Local Resources: Mitigation and Recovery Information for Business Owners, Entrepreneurs and Economic Development Practitioners

Counties and communities perform critical functions for businesses and impacted individuals. They help with access, application, and other hands-on requirements for funding resources. This is truly where the rubber hits the road. County Economic Development Offices and local SBDC offices are usually the local go-to agencies. Counties, councils and associations of governments may have additional regional resources such as a revolving loan fund and access to state and federal incentive programs that assist local businesses mitigate disaster during shocks and disruptions.

San Juan County (Utah)
https://www.facebook.com/SanJuanEDVS/

San Juan County Economic Development and Visitor Service is an excellent source of local economic development information for county and region business owners and entrepreneurs. And an excellent template for local governments to pattern their website and Facebook communications. The site is constantly updated showing not only state and federal impact programs, but funds dispersed and funding still available. Their COVID-19 Business Funding and Resources Guide includes weekly updates of federal SBA and FEMA programs such as PPP and disaster relief, and to state and local sources of bridge funding and other alternate sources of funding impacted businesses and non-profits. Webinars and recordings are also featured and highlighted. One of the best one-stop sites for pandemic and disaster information and resources.

Local or Regional Small Business Development Center Offices

America’s SBDC (https://americassbdc.org/) provides the basic pandemic information impacting small businesses including:

- webinars
- recordings
- legislation
- funding opportunities

The local county or regional SBDC office in your region provides hands-on, boots-on-the-ground assistance in helping businesses and entrepreneurs connect funding opportunities with lenders. Also, training and consulting for businesses unsure of their next steps during an overwhelming economic crisis. Individual state SBDC websites such as Utah’s SBDC (https://utahsbdc.org/) will direct inquiries to local or regional SBDC offices where hands-on assistance and consultation is available.