Title of the Story: Town of Breckenridge COVID-19 Rapid Response

Destination Name: (include any state, province or region)
Breckenridge
Country: USA

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Position: Sustainability Coordinator

Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

☐ Culture & Communities
☐ Environment & Climate
☐ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Islands & Seaside
☒ Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID-19
☐ Post COVID-19 recovery
☐ One of the 17 SDGs* (if yes, which one) Click or tap to choose

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopmentgoals.html

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: http://tourism4sdgs.org/

Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices here
DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced
The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus has impacted all communities differently. Being a service and tourist focused destination with a heavy reliance on sales tax, Breckenridge was severely impacted. Without ski resorts, lodging, and restaurants for visitors to come and enjoy, the destination became quiet very quickly and businesses, especially visitor focused ones, were immediately threatened. The Breckenridge Town Council knew it had to act quickly to offer relief to business owners and community members to sustain them through the uncertainty. Not only was the physical and financial health of residents an imperative priority in Town relief efforts, additional resources to support community mental health were also a key focus. What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice? Click to add your text

Methods, steps and tools applied
In a March 24 meeting, Town Council approved $1.5 million for COVID-19 relief for the Breckenridge community. Half a million dollars was given to a local non-profit, Family & Intercultural Resource Center (FIRC), for an individual rent relief program and $1 million was allocated for the Small Business Relief Program to assist businesses with rent payments during closures. An application process was quickly developed for both programs to disperse relief funds as quickly as possible, and the program began taking applications six days later on March 30th.

To support these relief efforts, two new committees were formed- the Recovery and Reopening Committees.
• Recovery Committee: Works on strategies to re-open safely, in support of businesses and the safety of the public. The Town Mayor sits on the advisory council for the committee.
• Breckenridge Reopening Committee: Lead by the Breckenridge Tourism Office (BTO) and TOB staff, this diverse group of residents is developing a plan to reopen Breckenridge. The team conducts extensive scenario, feasibility, and solution planning for the reopening of businesses, facilities, and events.

In early May, Council adopted an emergency ordinance requiring face masks to be worn when entering businesses or when outside in public places and not able to maintain 6’ of distance to other individuals. To promote social distancing as businesses reopen, the Town approved Main Street as a pedestrian mall beginning June 12. The goal is to also allow businesses to expand service on to sidewalks and the street to accommodate for social distancing and restrictions on decreased seating capacity inside businesses. A Task Force has been formed to address the design concept of the pedestrian area and outdoor business model.

Recognizing that the community was under immense stress, the Town encouraged residents to take
advantage of mental health resources available from a local non-profit, Building Hope. TOB fully recognizes those in our community living with mental illness and substance use disorders and pledges to support those individuals and their families; reaffirming TOB’s commitment to ensuring people living with mental health conditions know they are not alone. A proclamation was adopted by Council to support mental Health Awareness Month this May. How was the good practice implemented? Click to add your text

Key success factors
In the first two weeks of the rent relief application process over 100 grants were awarded. The average grant was approximately $2,800. Following the first round of grants, the Town had left over relief funds and expanded eligibility for the Small Business Rent Relief Program on April. Funds were still available in early May, and the Council approved an additional 50% of what businesses had already been awarded from their initial application. As of May 5th 2020, the Small Business Rent Relief Program has awarded $630,000 for 209 small businesses.

Also in early May, the FIRC nearly exhausted the funds available for employee assistance rent support. To support employees and ensure a stable workforce, Council added $100,000 into the FIRC’s fund for rental assistance and asked businesses if they were willing to donate their rent award for employees. Two-thirds of the workforce were financially impacted when the tourism and restaurant industries came to a halt on March 13. In addition to the FIRC rental assistance program, food assistance is also offered. FIRC has provided approximately 100,000 pounds of food to the community through the food pantry since March 16th, supporting 6,519 community members (528 of which were from Breckenridge). The FIRC processed 402 rental assistance applications, hiring seven additional staff to support the increased demand. FIRC has served 14,000 people since March 13, while they normally serve 4,000 people a year. What helped you tackle the issues? Click to add your text

Lessons learned
The virus has brought to light the extreme need for additional mental health resources in the destination. A proclamation was adopted by Council to support mental Health Awareness Month this May. The destination acknowledges that when compared to other Colorado communities, the incidence of substance abuse and mental health indicators is elevated in Summit County and, as a result, the Town is concerned about the impacts of mental illness on the quality of life for our residents. These programs must continue to be invested in and a plan to expand access and reduce the stigma of needing support must be lessened to ensure a safe and well community.

In addition to mental health, the virus has brought to light the extreme need for community level resilience planning. Given that the Town is largely funded by sales tax, a great financial burden was experienced when retail, restaurants, lodging and transportation sectors were closed by the Public Health Order. As reported by the TOB Finance Director, 62% of Town revenue is gained from sales tax and another 17% comes from accommodations taxes (see Staff Report page 110). The Town predicts a 45% decrease in revenue from the virus (see Staff Report page 12). Even after $13 million worth of budget cuts in capital improvement projects, land acquisitions, hiring freezes, etc., the Town is still negative $300K in net fund balances from the decrease in revenue from sales taxes. With such a large portion of revenue coming from sales tax, the Town must consider a business approach when
developing disaster preparedness planning. The virus has proved that the Town must invest in resiliency planning to ensure it is prepared to sustain our community in the face of future disasters. While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome? Click to add your text

Results, achievements and recognitions

We have not received any awards or recognitions for this effort. For results, see “key success factors” above.

Additional references

* This section did not allow me to enter hyperlinks to the various resources.

In the Town of Breckenridge, the safety, health, and well-being of our community is a top priority. To share the intricacies of the dynamic pandemic with our residents, the Town actively shares updates in one streamline location. This knowledgebase shares Town, County, State, and Federal resources to ensure our community members have access to all the tools needed to protect themselves. Additional resources include:

• Daily video updates from the Town Mayor
• Social media moratorium to post COVID related content only
• Examples of public safety announcements are shared in section 5
• Town Council meetings have been made available virtually to keep the community informed and allow for community input
• BTO and TOB newsletters share best practices, public health order updates, and additional resources for businesses and residents
• BTO COVID-19 Toolbox includes assistance and guidance on how employees and employers can best plan and respond during the pandemic
• TOB COVID-19 knowledge base offers updates to keep the community informed and safe
• Connect with Breck Newsletter, COVID-19 Edition: announced the rent relief program and instructions to apply as well as other resources to keep the community safe
• Conservation during COVID-19 infographic to share sustainability best practices amid the pandemic
• SustainableBreck blogs and weekly newsletters share COVID and conservation tactics to rebuild sustainably
• Mask ordinance public announcement
• Safer at Home outreach materials
• Recreation while social distancing best practices PSA

Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from Youtube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL.