



# COVID-19 REPORT

JUNE 2021





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# A Letter from Stan Harris, LRA President & CEO

Dear Members,

More than a year has passed since March 16, 2020, that fateful day when Louisiana restaurants, hotels and bars had to shut down for indoor dining in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's been an excruciating and challenging 15 months, and, even now, as we approach summer 2021, we are just beginning to walk the path of fully reopening. Through it all, my staff and I have been exceedingly proud to represent this resilient community.



Your commitment to this industry, your employees, and your guests has never wavered, not for one moment during this long pandemic. Instead, you have pivoted and persevered, striving every day to provide the unique dining experiences that help define Louisiana and make it a place we all love to call home.

Everyone at the Louisiana Restaurant Association is committed to fighting alongside you to keep this industry whole and ensure its success long after this crisis. We know it will require time and significant assistance to recover from such damage.

The pandemic caused the LRA to pivot as well, focusing on three crucial endeavors: industry advocacy at all levels of government; timely communication to Louisiana restaurants about COVID-19 developments that impact how you do business; member and support services, including educational programming meant to help you navigate operations during a pandemic.

Thank you for all of your efforts and for raising your voice with us during this trying time. We have accomplished so much together, and we're going to continue to fight on your behalf. We created this updated report to provide insight into all of those accomplishments, our recent activities, and to show you just how far we've come together. Most importantly, we wanted to share our plans as we move toward a post-pandemic future.

Our sole purpose is to support you and your business. If there is ever anything we can do to make your restaurants, hotels and bars run more smoothly, during this crisis and beyond, please let us know by reaching out to [communications@lra.org](mailto:communications@lra.org). We believe that we are witnessing the dawn of a renaissance in the industry – a time when restaurants, hotels and bars will begin to recover as they continue to inspire, nourish, and bolster Louisiana's communities. Thank you for all of your hard work toward that end – and for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stan Harris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stan Harris



The NRA, through collective efforts with ServSafe professionals, quickly established a working group of experts to produce its Reopening Guidelines. These guidelines were used to inform our state level Resilient Louisiana Commission – Restaurant and Entertainment Task Force, which LRA President and CEO co-chaired along with Commander’s Palace co-proprietor Ti Martin and Dooky Chase Restaurant’s Edgar Chase IV. From task force level discussions, Harris conferred with the Governor’s team and the State Fire Marshall to set the requirements and recommendations for the [OpenSafely.la.gov](https://www.opensafely.la.gov) online safety protocols. The LRA was actively engaged throughout the public health emergency and at every level to ensure that members were notified timely as compliance and employee and customer safety was paramount to operating during the pandemic.

The LRA has worked nonstop to offset the uncertainty that came along with the pandemic, shifting staff positions to ensure we were able to respond quickly to anxious operators in need of answers and empathy. We’ve tackled ever-evolving compliance issues through the web, our emails, and webinars, and opened up our trove of resources – which has expanded in the time of COVID-19 – to the entire industry.

As COVID-19 shifted the regulatory environment for doing business, the LRA stepped in to help restaurants, hotels and bars navigate their new responsibilities and requirements in several ways.

- Up-to-the-minute compliance changes: The LRA actively monitored federal, state, and local orders; local parish variances; and shifting guidelines to keep our members armed with up-to-the-minute knowledge of what was required of them in daily operations.
- Compliance help, industry-wide: The LRA immediately opened up all lines of communication to restaurant owners across the state. Restaurateurs were encouraged to email questions to [communications@lra.org](mailto:communications@lra.org), and our staff was there, ready to answer emails and phone calls to quickly direct people to the help they needed.
- Compliance webinars: The LRA hosted webinars with state and local government officials, industry stakeholders, and outside experts to help restaurants navigate the new rules governing the early shutdowns, paid sick leave, federal legislation, re-opening, unemployment fraud, navigating the RRF process, and more.
- Compliance resources: The LRA created resource hubs on our website so operators had easy access to all relevant information, including a COVID-19 Resources page and a Restaurant Reopening Resources page, which we continue to update with compliance information and webinar recordings.



## COVID-19 **REOPENING GUIDANCE**

The LRA's Advocacy Team advocates on the industry's behalf at all levels of government. They work tirelessly to keep our elected officials focused on the facts. COVID-19 remains a crisis for our industry and the road to recovery requires continued support.

In addition to supporting the advocacy efforts of the National Restaurant Association (NRA), the LRA works directly with both of Louisiana's U.S. Senators and Representatives on federal legislation, with the goal of securing meaningful financial relief for restaurants, hotels and bars impacted by the pandemic.



### KEY FEDERAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Paycheck Protection Program (PPP):** The LRA partnered with the NRA in the early days of the pandemic to advocate for industry relief on a federal level. Once the PPP was rolled out, the LRA pushed for an extension of the program timeline and a shift in the eligible forgivable expenditures, allowing restaurants to use their loans to cover more overhead costs. We partnered with the NRA once again to secure a second round of loans, and advocated to include non-profit organizations in the funding (including the LRA).
- **Employee Retention Tax Credit (ERTC) Expansion:** We expanded eligibility for this important tax credit so PPP recipients could also benefit, and we fought to increase the ERTC amount to \$19,000 per employee.
- **Restaurant Revitalization Fund (RRF):** After a year of working closely with the NRA and other industry partners, we helped secure this significant, industry-specific source of grant funding.



### KEY STATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During the pandemic the LRA Advocacy Team worked successfully through a Legislative Session that was irregular in every way imaginable. There were also two special sessions in 2020, which were in large part guided by the work of the Louisiana Legislative Task Force, of which LRA CEO Shan Harris was a member. In preparation of the two special sessions, one in which the Main Street Grant Program to support Louisiana's small businesses was born, the LRA worked with its members to testify before the Task Force on how the legislative process could better support the industry.

**Senate Bill 508**, by Senator Patrick McMath and Representative Rick Edmonds, was signed into law as Act 305. This law provides a restaurant owner or operator protection from a guest alleging they contracted COVID-19 by using this business. It does not contain any protection for an employer from an employee claim that may be subject to workers' comp. Its term aligns with the first through any further executive orders specific to COVID-19.

**House Bill 826**, by Representative Thomas Pressly, was signed into law as Act 336. This provides additional liability protection and additionally indemnifies businesses, government agencies, trade show organizers and event planners for civil damages for injuries or death from COVID-19 unless they can prove the high legal standard of "gross negligence or willful misconduct." The state has indicated that adhering to OpenSafely-la.gov guidelines complies.

#### Kitchen Cabinet New Orleans

The LRA has supported the Restaurant Advocacy Fund (RAF) for many years, recognizing it as the main source of funding to promote and defend our industry at the state and local levels. Throughout the pandemic, advocacy at the local level, particularly in the New Orleans (a major tourism hub), resulted in the LRA being awarded an RAF grant allowing us to expand upon our reach and messaging. With COVID-19 still top of mind for the city's leadership, this funding will aid in our efforts to address the myriad of issues that continue to emerge as the city looks toward recovery.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the LRA launched a robust communication program to provide straightforward, real-time updates to the entire industry and the media. Since those first critical weeks of the crisis, we have become the central hub of information for the state's restaurants, hotels and bars industry.



### Website

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the LRA converted its website into the COVID-19 Resource Center—making the information accessible at no charge to the industry. This included state and local public health emergency orders; signage, recommendations, and up-to-the-minute news impacting restaurants. More recently, COVID-19 has moved to its own section within the website; however, the LRA continues to promote vaccinations, RRF application FAQs and any timely news on its home page regardless of its connection to COVID-19.



### Email

Historically, Snapshot is a weekly e-newsletter highlighting industry and public policy news impacting restaurant and foodservice operations. During the course of the pandemic, our messaging to membership increased to twice, if not more, per week, and the newsletter became the go-to resource for members for all things COVID-19. This twice weekly correspondence provided guidance on navigating the various government declarations, funding assistance, vaccination information, employee guidance, health and sanitation protocols, etc. We continue to send news, timely resources, compliance information and other pertinent developments, but our frequency has scaled back to coincide with the transition back pre-pandemic norms.



### Podcast

In light of the unprecedented times, the LRA released a special edition podcast series called **“Conversations in the COVID Crisis.”** In the interviews, we spoke with LRA members, restaurant professionals, suppliers and everything in between on how to learn to make the implications of the pandemic our “new normal.” We examined the highs and lows, the unintended consequences, and just how lucky Louisiana is to be home to countless distilleries. The podcast was available on the LRA website and popular streaming platforms including iTunes, Spotify, Android and Apple podcasts.

### Social Media

We continue to share pertinent updates via Facebook and Twitter, and have used the @larestassoc Instagram account to showcase dining across the state, reinforcing the message that supporting local restaurants and hospitality workers is safe, fun and important for the future of our communities.

### Data

In partnership with the National Restaurant Association, the LRA issued seven industry-focused surveys throughout the pandemic to solicit regular feedback on the state of the industry, to support our advocacy effort, and to better inform the public and the media of the realities the industry is facing. These surveys have been critical to our success. Responding to these surveys is one of the most important things you can do to influence policy in this era.

### Media

We had a near-daily presence in the media at the beginning of the pandemic and continue to be a regular source for all major press outlets in the state. We field an increasing number of requests for comments from restaurants, connecting reporters with members to share their stories and increase public awareness.

#### Key themes

- Capacity and distancing requirements
- Impact survey results
- Industry recovery
- Hiring challenges



### LRA Live! A Recovery Marketing Virtual Event

In a time when restaurateurs were seeking solutions to challenges never before imagined, the LRA was constantly striving to provide solutions and information to improve processes, professionalism and profitability within the our industry. With that as our motivation, LRA Live! was born – a 2-day recovery marketing event of live, virtual sessions designed to reach restaurateurs, operators, managers and decision makers at a time when it was needed most.

LRA Live! included 12 educational sessions, recorded and then made available on-demand on our YouTube channel for members who could not attend live.

Sessions included:

- Creating Your Restaurant Comeback Strategy with Anne Gannon, Principal CPA, The Largo Group
- Engaging Today's Workforce with Cultural Intelligence with Gerry Fernandez, Founder & President of Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance
- How to Build an A-Team in 90 Days with Donald Burns, The Restaurant Coach
- How to Read Your Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Statements with Patrick Gros, Principal, Patrick Gros, Public Account Firm
- The Art of Being Indispensable at Work with Bruce Tulgan, Author/Founder & CEO RainmakerThinking, Inc.
- Leave me Alone, Addressing Workplace Absences with Michelle Anderson, Partner, Fisher Phillips
- What the Election Outcome Means for Restaurants with Sean Kennedy, Executive Vice President, Public Affairs National Restaurant Association



### Outreach

Lamar Outdoor generously offered to help the LRA promote the restaurant industry at no cost statewide during the pandemic. LRA Communications provided the creative for two separate outdoor advertising campaigns as messaging changed with corresponding restrictions branded “Keep Calm & Carry Out” and “Keep Calm & Dine Out”.

Two things in Louisiana that make our state unique is our bountiful seafood industry and our beloved restaurants. The LRA partnered with Louisiana Seafood and Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser’s office for a two-month **statewide multi-media campaign**, encouraging Louisianans to enjoy local seafood while eating in their favorite restaurants.

The LRA presented **Restaurant Week New Orleans** in October 2020 as its first promotional program since the onset of the pandemic. Favorable positive case data in Orleans and Jefferson parishes paved the way for this popular event’s return. Many establishments fully embraced the takeout trend and offered a to-go option as part of the 2020 promotion. With restrictions lifted and pent up demand at an all-time high, we have high hopes for Restaurant Week 2021 turnout, scheduled for June 21 – 27.

We are all too aware of the staffing challenges that exist for restaurants, hotels and bars right now, so the LRA relaunched its job board in early May of 2020. **LouisianaHospitalityJobs.com** allows members to post their vacant positions free of charge. Lamar Outdoor again offered its services gratis to promote the job board statewide via outdoor billboards.





**COVID-19 UPDATE**  
**The Restaurant Industry IMPACT SURVEY**  
Published April 20, 2020

To assess the economic impact of the coronavirus to date, the National Restaurant Association conducted a survey of more than 6,500 restaurant operators nationwide, April 10-16.

The restaurant industry, **MORE THAN ANY OTHER INDUSTRY** in the nation, has suffered the **MOST SIGNIFICANT SALES & JOB LOSSES** since the COVID-19 outbreak began.

**8+ MILLION RESTAURANT EMPLOYEES**

have already been **LAI D OFF OR FURLOUGHED**

since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak

**2 OUT OF 3** restaurant employees have **LOST THEIR JOBS**

This survey measured **only the impact to restaurants** and their employees. The data **does not include other foodservice outlets** such as hotels, ballparks, and other venues.



The industry will sustain **\$240 BILLION IN LOSSES** BY THE END OF 2020

The restaurant & foodservice industry will **LOSE \$80+ BILLION IN SALES** by the end of April

This includes **\$30+ BILLION** lost in March and **\$50+ BILLION** in April

**61%** of operators say **Existing Federal Relief WON'T PREVENT MORE RESTAURANT LAYOFFS**

**4 IN 10** restaurants are **CLOSED**

For more information & resources, visit [restaurant.org/covid19](https://restaurant.org/covid19)