

United States Travel and Tourism Advisory Board

November 5, 2021

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo,

During the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board's (TTAB) September 15, 2021 meeting, you tasked TTAB's membership with building proposals to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing the country. TTAB divided into four subcommittees to focus on each of the issues at hand. The Vaccination Subcommittee was charged with developing recommendations to increase U.S. COVID-19 vaccination rates through private sector and government partnerships in order to bring the pandemic under control.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the U.S. economy. This pandemic ended over 100 straight months of U.S. job growth, with 20.5 million jobs lost by April 2020¹. The U.S. travel, tourism, hospitality, and entertainment sectors have been hit especially hard. The U.S. Travel Association has asserted that COVID-19 caused greater decline in travel spending than the 9/11 attacks and drove up industry unemployment higher than in the worst year of the Great Depression². The travel and tourism industry is not expected to fully recover from the COVID-19 pandemic until at least 2024³.

December 2020 marked a pivotal turning point in the battle against COVID-19. The rollout of the first COVID-19 vaccines finally offered a path back to normalcy. The vaccines deployed in the U.S. have been proven to be both safe and effective and have demonstrated that they're essential for protecting the vulnerable and safely reopening the ailing economy.

The Administration has shown true leadership on the U.S. vaccination campaign. From working to ensure an adequate vaccine supply to sharing science-based information about the vaccines with the public, the Administration's support of U.S. vaccination efforts has been critical to their success. The business community recognizes that the Administration's recent large employer vaccine requirement will be a driver of vaccination uptake which will complement many of the pro-vaccination efforts already underway at numerous U.S. companies.

The private sector has a leading role to play in promoting vaccinations which are critical tools in safely reopening and growing the economy and are foundational to the sustained recovery of the travel industry. While over 78% of people age 12 and older in the U.S. have received at least one shot against COVID-19, there's still more work to be done to increase vaccination levels to get the pandemic under control⁴. The following recommendations highlight key initiatives where the public and private sectors can partner to increase U.S. vaccination rates and move the country to a brighter post-pandemic future:

¹ Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/ten-facts-about-covid-19-and-the-u-s-economy/>

² U.S. Travel Association, https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/media_root/document/TravelDepression_FactSheet.pdf

³ U.S. Travel Association, <https://www.ustravel.org/press/new-forecast-signals-long-road-recovery-business-travel>

⁴ CDC, https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations_vacc-total-admin-rate-total

Recommendation #1: Leverage existing public service ad campaigns and messaging to target vaccine-hesitant-but-convincible adults and parents of unvaccinated children, particularly as vaccination eligibility expands to age groups under 12

When the U.S. began giving the first COVID-19 vaccinations at the end of 2020, around half of U.S. adults were either uncertain or skeptical about getting vaccinated⁵. To support the rollout, the Ad Council – in partnership with numerous companies, non-profit organizations, community groups and faith leaders – launched a massive public service campaign called the COVID-19 Vaccine Education Initiative⁶. The campaign focused on encouraging vaccinations by sharing quality, accurate health information via trusted sources through a variety of communications platforms. This effort played a key role in encouraging and inspiring around three-quarters of U.S. adults to get vaccinated in less than a year. By October 2021, the segment of U.S. adults who were either uncertain or skeptical about getting vaccinated, or who were intending to get vaccinated but had yet to do so, had shrunk to around 8 percent⁷.

Young adults between 18 and 29 make up a significant portion of this segment of the unvaccinated adult population, with around 13 percent of young adults remaining undecided about whether to get vaccinated against COVID-19⁸. Within that young adult population, pregnant women are a particularly under-vaccinated demographic, with only 31 percent of pregnant women in the U.S. vaccinated as of September 2021⁹.

Beyond vaccine-eligible adults, there remain millions of children in the U.S. who either have long been eligible but remain unvaccinated, are just now becoming eligible for COVID-19 vaccination, or are currently ineligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Children 12 and up have been eligible for vaccination since May 2021. However, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, only 49 percent of children 12 to 17 are fully vaccinated, well below the national vaccination rate for adults¹⁰. For parents of younger children 5 to 11 who are just now becoming eligible for vaccination, nearly two-thirds previously indicated that they either are unsure about whether to vaccinate their child or that they do not plan to vaccinate their child¹¹.

The Department of Commerce should work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Ad Council, the private sector and community leaders to use existing COVID-19 public service content, messaging and infrastructure to deploy a targeted campaign focused on the parents of unvaccinated children and the remaining vaccine-hesitant-but-convincible adults. The campaign should leverage celebrities and athletes who are most popular with key demographics and pair them with trusted medical professionals from targeted communities. While the entirety of the campaign could be national in scope, when practical, messaging should be tailored regionally or locally to more effectively influence audiences from specific communities. This content should be pushed on platforms most used by the target audiences, including Twitter and TikTok to better reach young adults. These more focused messages should provide clear, science-based information on the benefits of vaccination, particularly for pregnant women and children. Additionally, campaign partners should lay the groundwork on messaging to reach the parents of currently vaccine-ineligible children so a

⁵ Ad Council, IPSOS survey conducted December 11-21, 2020

⁶ Ad Council, <https://www.adcouncil.org/covid-vaccine>

⁷ CDC, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccine-confidence>

⁸ CDC, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccine-confidence>

⁹ CDC, <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2021/han00453.asp>

¹⁰ American Academy of Pediatrics, <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/children-and-covid-19-vaccination-trends/>

¹¹ CBS News, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/children-covid-19-vaccination-opinion-poll/>

new set of ads and educational resources will be ready for release when public health officials approve COVID-19 vaccines for children under 5.

Recommendation #2: Foster public-private partnerships to host targeted vaccine drives aimed at boosting vaccination rates among communities of color, rural populations, under-resourced urban areas, young adults and children

The targeted vaccination public service announcement campaigns mentioned in the first recommendation aim to better tailor science-based vaccination messages for the parents of unvaccinated children and adults in the 8 percent of the unvaccinated-but-potentially-willing population. Another portion of this 8 percent are adults who intend to get vaccinated but haven't done so yet¹². These adults may face a variety of barriers to vaccination; they may not be able to take time off work, they may live in a rural area or an under-resourced urban area, or they may have childcare challenges¹³. According to the CDC, the share of black and Hispanic populations in the U.S. reporting a desire to get vaccinated but not having done so yet are larger than the comparable portion of the white population¹⁴. The same is true for the share of younger populations still wanting to get vaccinated compared to older populations¹⁵.

In order to get vaccinations in the arms of the willing who face barriers, the Department of Commerce should work with local governments, the CDC, HHS and the Department of Labor to foster public-private partnerships specifically designed to make vaccinations more convenient for communities of color, rural populations, under-resourced urban areas, young adults and children. These partnerships should look at specific local community barriers and aim to address them by offering free or low-cost childcare for vaccination appointments, on-site workplace vaccination activations, mobile vaccination units to reach spread-out populations and vaccination events for children and families at public schools. These efforts should be tailored to individual communities, taking into account local culture and preferences for more private or discrete vaccination sites and opportunities versus public settings.

Additionally, the Department of Commerce needs to encourage and share best practices with the private sector on ways employers can support their employees and their families to get vaccinated. A key private sector practice that has been held up as a critical way to remove barriers to employee COVID-19 vaccination is an employer-hosted on-site workplace vaccination drive. These have been successful in making COVID-19 vaccination convenient for employees, and many of these workplace events have welcomed employees' families and local community members to come in for vaccination as well. Beyond offering vaccines conveniently in the workplace, employers should also consider offering schedule flexibility for employees and their dependents to get vaccinated and recover from any vaccine side effects. To this end, the Department of Commerce should leverage the work already underway, including the development of free COVID-19 business resources and tools created by Business Roundtable, the Health Action Alliance and other similar organizations¹⁶. Access to vaccination best practices is especially important as businesses work to comply with the Administration's new employer vaccine requirement for companies with 100 or more employees. Of particular focus should be getting those tools in the hands of small and mid-size businesses in collaboration with the Small Business Administration.

¹² CDC, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccine-confidence>

¹³ CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/downloads/covid19-vax-field-guide-12-strategies.pdf>

¹⁴ CDC, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccine-confidence>

¹⁵ CDC, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccine-confidence>

¹⁶ Business Roundtable,

<https://www.businessroundtable.org/movetheneedle#:~:text=%E2%80%9CMove%20the%20Needle%E2%80%9D%20is%20a%20campaign%20to%20support,other%20precautions%20as%20the%20vaccination%20effort%20is%20underway>

Recommendation #3: Launch an outreach campaign directed at states to encourage repurposing unused federal COVID-19 relief funding for COVID-19 vaccination efforts and incentives

The COVID-19 pandemic upended the U.S. economy, putting businesses and individuals in sudden dire financial situations through no fault of their own. Many state governments initially braced for the budgetary impacts of COVID-19, tightening the belt on spending in anticipation of steep decreases in tax revenue. Federal government assistance to companies and states, including from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act, provided critical support during the most difficult days of the pandemic and along the long road to recovery.

For many state governments, increased tax collections after the initial COVID-19 pandemic shock was overcome, paired with federal recovery funds, have resulted in state budget surpluses¹⁷. In July 2021, the Department of the Treasury issued a press release to clarify that American Rescue Plan assistance to states could be used for COVID-19 vaccination programs, including lottery or direct incentive payments for individuals who get vaccinated¹⁸. While this information has been posted online, it doesn't seem to be widely publicized information.

We recommend the Department of Commerce lead an information outreach campaign, in partnership with the Department of the Treasury, to amplify this message to encourage states to use surplus COVID-19 federal aid for targeted vaccination efforts focused on specific populations highlighted previously in this letter. States are well-positioned to know local concerns and challenges related to COVID-19 and can deploy funding accordingly for targeted vaccine drives, information campaigns and incentives for vaccination that are tailored to unique local culture and opportunities. Previous incentive campaigns, including those in West Virginia and Hawaii, have been effective in motivating residents to get vaccinated.

Thank you for your continued leadership and support during this challenging time. We appreciate your review of these recommendations and stand ready to assist you in implementing these initiatives.

Respectfully submitted,



Brad Dean
Vice Chair

¹⁷ Pew, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/07/26/awash-in-cash-state-lawmakers-ask-how-long-the-boom-will-last>

¹⁸ U.S. Department of the Treasury, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0297>