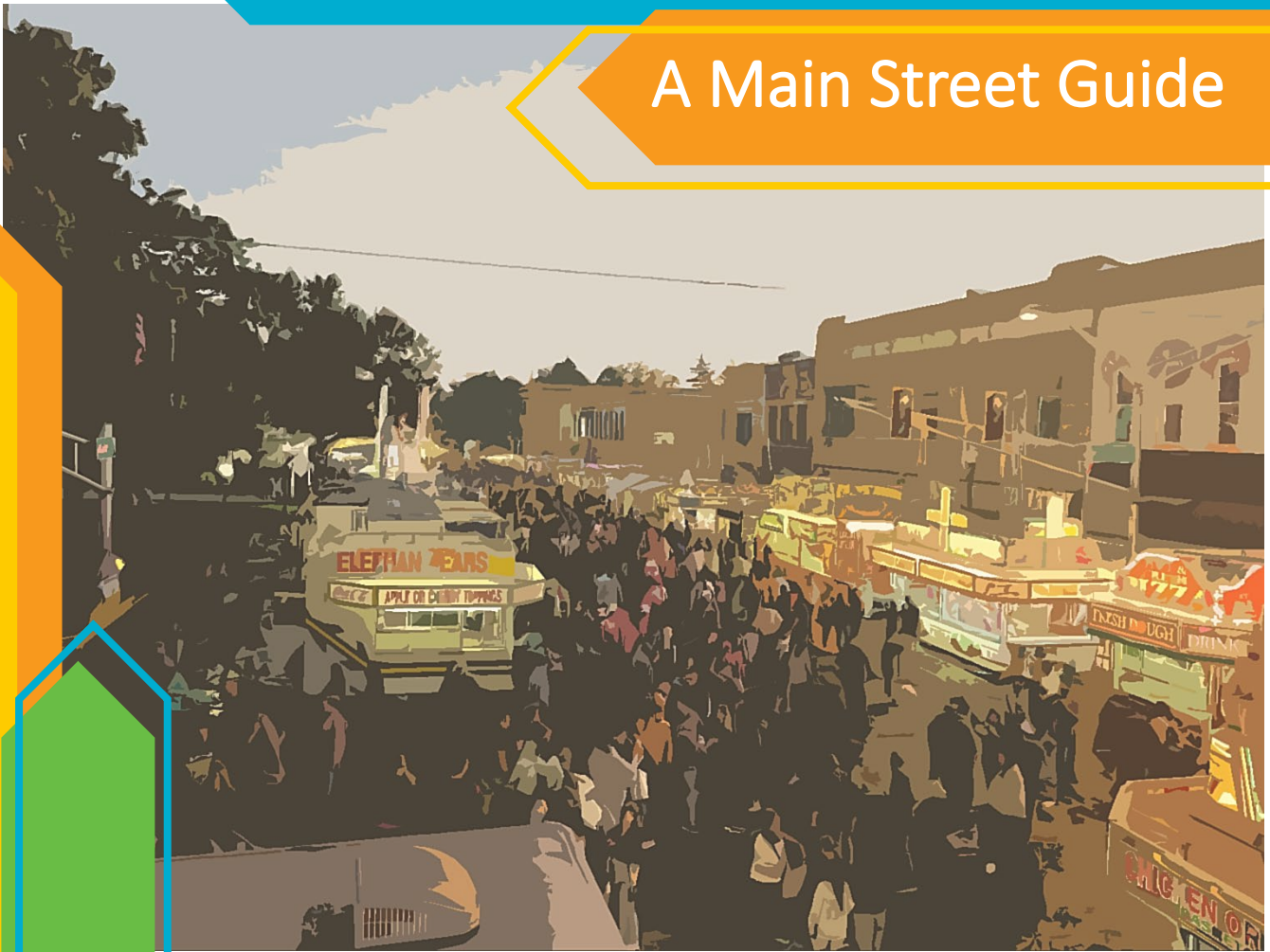


Bringing Everyone to the Table

A Main Street Guide



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What is Indiana Main Street?



Since 1985, the **Indiana Main Street (IMS)** program has been helping communities revitalize the economy, appearance, and image of their downtown commercial districts. Managed by the **Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA)**, IMS provides access to information, help getting focused, and community support and guidance to individuals and organizations interested in downtown revitalization. The Indiana Main Street program has reached and been transforming 118 communities: bringing more jobs, volunteers, investment dollars, businesses, and projects all around the state.

Main Street-style transformation is a combination of both **art** and **science**. Combining the science behind what goes into building a successful and thriving community with the artistry of creating a community that is no longer just a place to live, but a place to experience and flourish in. This framework, that was made to help communities leverage both the art and science of downtown revitalization to create a better quality of life for all, is called the **Main Street Approach**.

For more information on the Indiana Main Street program, visit our website [here](#). Follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook for more!



Overview: Bringing Everyone to the Table

The relationships that are formed and partnerships that are created is what makes Main Street communities distinctive from all others. Being a part of *Main Street America™* means being a part of a much larger community that consists of more than 1,600 rural and urban neighborhoods across the country. The strongest and most important driving factor of any Main Street community are the members of the community themselves.

A community is commonly defined as a group of people with similarities such as values or identity. They are formed by the strength of connections among the people and the attributes they share, but a neglected community lacks financial, physical, or social capital altogether. Relationships are the foundation of a community and communities are the source of human value. Relationships between community members, that facilitate human value in a community, help make downtown revitalization come to life.

Community engagement is one of the most important contributing factors to the downtown revitalization process. It increases the visibility and understanding of issues within the community and empowers people to speak up and contribute to decisions that affect their lives.

Community engagement is commonly defined as *the process of working collaboratively with members of a community to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is important for bringing about changes, both environmental and social, that will improve the health of the community and its members.* *

This toolkit primarily serves as a guide on how Indiana Main Street communities can encourage members of their community to get involved with the organization and encourage them to be a part of the downtown revitalization process. Although this guide is intended for Indiana Main Street communities, it is applicable for all Main Street America® coordinating programs and their communities and can be easily adapted to fit the needs of other individuals and organizations.

The toolkit will cover topics like:

Preparation
<i>A guide on how to get to know your community better and who to bring to the table to help your Main Street organization.</i>
Engagement
<i>A guide on how to create a vision and plan to engage the community in your downtown revitalization process.</i>

Celebration
<i>A guide on the importance of highlighting your community accomplishments and giving back to those who contributed.</i>
Evaluation and Continuation
<i>A guide on how to use community feedback and engagement evaluation to improve your downtown revitalization process.</i>

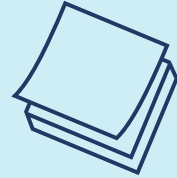
*Source: Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education

Bringing Everyone to the Table

Action Plan

STEP 1: Preparation

- Get to know your community
 - Community Network Analysis (CNA)
 - Demographic analysis
 - Identifying networks
 - Talk to city leaders
 - Engage with the community
- Identify stakeholders
- Building trust in the community
- Managing controversial issues



STEP 2: Engagement

- Connect with stakeholders
- Share information
 - A Main Street vision
 - Downtown Revitalization Importance
- Community involvement
 - Generating ideas
 - Inspired Community Meetings
 - Community engagement opportunities



STEP 3: Celebration

- Highlighting accomplishments
- Giving back to the community



STEP 4: Evaluation and Continuation

- Community feedback
- Evaluating engagement



PREPARATION

Get to Know Your Community

Knowing who is in your community is essential for creating an environment that embraces spirit, character and pride. It is crucial to create a community that holds both personal and collective identities and helps create a sense of trust and belonging. It is important to understand who is in your community and what their wants and needs are for their community and downtown area.

Here are some tips and tools for you to use to get to know your own community a little better:

Develop a [Community Network Analysis \(CNA\)](#) to better understand who lives and works in your community using demographic data and learn about what matters most among residents.

Resource: [Community Network Analysis Tool](#)

STEP 1: Know your demographic.

Use demographic data to create a community profile of who lives and works in your community. Identify groups and individuals who will affect or be affected by the work and projects of your organization.

- *Who might be affected by the outcomes of the project?*
- *Who can offer new insights and perspectives?*
- *Who might oppose or stand in the way of the project?*
- *What groups exist in the community that we don't hear from?*
- *Are there priority stakeholders we need to engage and why?*

STEP 2: Identify community networks.

Identify formal and informal groups and where in the community those groups regularly gather.

- *What formal organizations represent your demographics?*
- *What informal ways are people organized, and where do they regularly get together?*
- *Who on your Main Street team has connections with these formal and informal networks?*

STEP 3: Find network connectors.

List key individuals seen as trusted members of different networks in your community.

- *Who do others routinely go to for advice?*
- *Who are seen as trusted opinion holders or as leaders in the networks?*
- *Who regularly spreads the word about community happenings or comes into regular contact with many people?*

- **3a: Assess network resources** – identify skills and capacity that different networks can bring to your effort.
 - *Do any networks offer assets (like meeting space or equipment) that we could use?*
 - *Do any networks offer specific skills or expertise that would be valuable?*
 - *Might they consider funding or sponsoring certain events?*
- **3b: Understand network interest in the project** – estimate the level of interest/skepticism different groups will have in your project, nurture relationships with all groups.
- **3c: Recognize network connections** – map out links between different community networks and identify partnerships.

Example brainstorm on local resources:

Community Networks	Resource
Chamber of Commerce	Marketing expertise, event sponsorship
Local Churches	Meeting spaces
Schools	Meeting spaces
Teen Center	Social media expertise
Service Organizations	Newsletters to missing voices
Network Connectors	Assets/Skills
Astrid Ortega	Web development expertise
Monica Lewis	Fluent in 3 local languages
Rick Boswell	Spreadsheet expert
Sam Rasmussen	Videographer
Starr Milano	Social media expertise

STEP 4: Identify communication opportunities

Learn where and through which channels your networks share and receive information.

- *What are the gathering places where your community's different networks hang out: coffee shops, hair salons, bars?*
- *What activities do your networks regularly attend: group meetings, sports events, community dinners, community celebrations?*
- *Where do your different networks get their news: local newspaper, local radio or television, bulletin boards, websites, coffee shops?*
- *What community events offer the chance to mingle with multiple networks (county fairs, town wide festivals, church suppers)?*
- *Which local media channels hit multiple networks?*

STEP 5: Identify engagement opportunities

Consider demographics and networks when developing engagement approaches.

Demographic Analysis

Demographic data is crucial for getting to know your community better. This is done by collecting data like age trends, household size, socio-economic information and ethnic makeup. An analysis of your community's demographics provides a basis for understanding on where the community is now, where they have been, and where they are headed.

Data Includes:

- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Marital status
- Income
- Education
- Employment
- Location of residence
- Language
- Religion
- Family and dependents
- Political preferences

Why is this important? – Once you understand the characteristics of your community, you can begin “speaking their language,” meaning you can engage your community in a way that addresses or takes into consideration their concerns, feelings and ideas. Getting to know your community better generates community involvement when their interests and likings are catered to. After completing a demographic analysis, you’ll have a better understanding of the people who make up your community.

How to Get Demographic Information

Data Sources for Demographic Research –

- [U.S. Census Bureau](#) (Free)
The U.S. Census Bureau offers a wide range of community information through data profiles using a variety of tables, maps, pages and microdata, for over 100,000 different geographies covering topics like education, employment, health and housing.
 - [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#)
 - [Current Population Survey \(CPS\)](#)
 - [Survey of Income and Program Participation \(SIPP\)](#)
- [Economic Profile System](#) (Free)
The Economic Profile System, by Headwaters Economics, is a report system that allows users to customize and download 17 different socioeconomic reports for U.S. communities, counties and states.
- [Esri](#) (\$65.00 +)
Esri is a geographic information system (GIS) software that uses ArcGIS technology to provide tools and information to manage, analyze and share geographic data. It includes access to thousands of curated datasets and maps that can be explored and leveraged for analysis and insight.

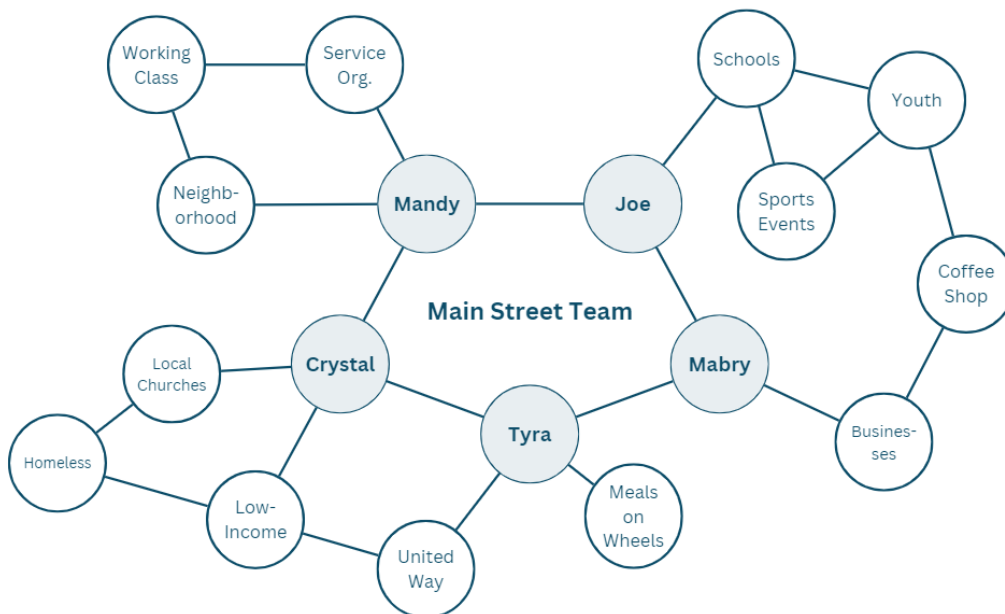
Creating Your Own Survey:

- SurveyMonkey
- Qualtrics
- Google Forms
- Microsoft Forms
- Typeform
- Alchemer
- SurveyPlanet
- Zoho Survey
- Crowdsignal

Identifying Networks

When identifying **community networks**, it is important to look at both formal and informal networks. Formal networks, such as people belonging to a particular organization, and informal networks, groups of people who have similar interests or hobbies, can both be found all throughout your community. It tends to be easier to identify formal networks than it is informal, so when finding informal networks in your community you must think creatively about people's everyday lives and how they connect with one another.

Example community network map:



When finding **network connections**, it is important that you are looking for people who are trusted by others in the community to provide them with sound advice, useful information and good networking opportunities. It is especially important to find people who have connections with hard-to-reach demographics in the community or with those who are frequently overlooked.

Example list of demographics, networks and network connectors

<i>Local Demographics</i>	<i>Community Networks</i>	<i>Network Connectors</i>
Homeless	Faith based groups	Richard (Priest of church with soup kitchen)
Poverty/Low-income	Service organizations	Ashton (Health dept. w/ school supplies program)
Military residents/families	Military service organizations	Celeste (Wounded warrior program)
School-aged youth	Elementary, junior high/middle school, high school Parents PTOs	Principal, counselor, teachers, student council
Youth/young adults (18-25 yrs.)	Coffee shops, pubs, laundromat, food delivery places	Social media
Long-time residents and newcomers	Farmers	Frank and Rosanne (Generational Farm Family)

Talk to City Leaders

City leaders play an important role in downtown revitalization. They are the connection between partnerships, collaborations and decisions that puts everything into action and facilitate the revitalization of downtown. City leaders rely on a network of public, private and nonprofit entities to meet basic needs and unique challenges of their residents.

City leaders are . . .

- Mayors
- Fire chiefs
- School superintendents
- Religious leaders
- Business leaders
- Other well-known community figure

Why are city leaders important to downtown revitalization?

- △ **Networking** City leaders have many connections and relationships/partnerships with an abundance of people and organizations. They can network, seek resources, spot talent and engage with local employers that could be a benefit to downtown revitalization.
- △ **Government Decisions** City leaders that work for the government handle issues that affect our day-to-day life. They can influence decisions that could positively impact downtown revitalization.
- △ **Funding** City leaders tend to have access to larger amounts of funds that could be beneficial towards downtown revitalization.

Engage with the Community

Connecting with people in the community is a great way to get a sense of how people feel about their community and about downtown revitalization.

How can YOU engage with the community?

- △ **Message Centers** Places that are frequently visited in your community should have message boards set up for easy and mass communication.
 - These can be utilized for **informing** people about downtown revitalization in your community.
 - They can also be used for posting links to **surveys** to get to know the community better.
- △ **Local Events** Hosting local events allows for the community to come together and engage with one another and city leaders.
 - This is a great opportunity to **present downtown revitalization** to the community and **receive input** from members of the community on their thoughts and feelings.
 - **Local events can be** *charity events, concerts or movie nights, a community garden, festival, or farmer's markets.*
- △ **Ask for Feedback** Asking community members directly about feedback on their thoughts and feelings towards downtown revitalization is a great way to get to know how your community is feeling and what they potentially want out of your organization.
 - Anonymously through polls
 - In-person meetings
 - Emails and phone calls
 - Quick surveys
- △ **Connect with Schools** Teachers, principals and district administrators have the best understanding of the needs and opportunities within the community.
 - The school board represents the community's voice in public education, providing citizen governance and knowledge of the community's resources and needs and board members are the policymakers closest to the student.

Levels of Engagement:



Inform

Provide balanced and objective information on Main Street projects.



Consult

Obtain feedback from community on issues raised and alternative solutions.



Involve

Ensure community concerns and opinions are reflected and provide feedback.



Collaborate

Collaborate with community in decision making and identifying solutions.



Empower

Final decision making is delegated to the community stakeholders.

Identifying Stakeholders

Stakeholders are a critical aspect of community engagement and downtown revitalization. They are identified as individuals or groups that: **a)** Can influence the outcome of a project, program or initiative, and **b)** who will be affected by the project, program or initiative.

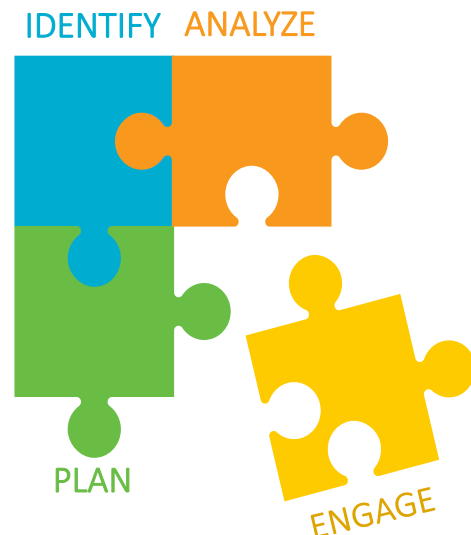
Possible Stakeholders in Your Community:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property owners | <div style="background-color: #00AEEF; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Step 1</div> Stakeholders that can affect the outcome |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail and service sector business owners | <div style="background-color: #FF9933; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Step 2</div> Stakeholders that can be affected by the outcome |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City and county government | <div style="background-color: #76D7C4; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Step 3</div> Matching stakeholders to engagement goals |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers | <div style="background-color: #FFD966; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Step 4</div> Communicating with stakeholders |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber of commerce | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic clubs | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic preservation organizations and historical sites | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faith-based organizations • Hospitals • Recreational groups • Arts councils • Tourism board • Local manufacturers • Municipal staff |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional planning and economic development organizations | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial institutions | |

When identifying stakeholders in your community it is important to take note of those who can affect the outcome and ones that will be affected by the outcome. It's best to find individuals from all different demographics, including those who are typically underrepresented voices in community decision, when choosing which stakeholders would be best for your Main Street organization.

What should you think about when looking for stakeholders?

- △ Who will be impacted positively or negatively?
- △ Who NEEDS to know about this?
- △ Who can or will contribute to this conversation?
- △ Who could stop this project?
- △ Who might be hard to reach?
- △ Don't forget internal stakeholders!



Building Trust Within Your Community

Building community trust in your organization is key to a successful relationship and partnership with the people it serves. Community organizations should prioritize creating trustworthy bonds with their community members to create an authentic and transparent process and produce new opportunities.

Trust Building Tips:

- Effective communication
- Respect
- Transparency of processes
- Share information widely
- Engage stakeholders in meaningful ways
- Be prepared with accurate information
- Update information often
- Be honest
- Empathize with feelings and fears
- Admit any complications, risks or uncertainties
- Acknowledge the inconveniences placed on the public
- Hold yourself accountable
- Act when you can
- Don't "stack the deck" – give people all options and a chance for them to form their own opinions



Tip:

Trust is earned... highlight accomplishments and show your community that your organization and their participation is making a difference.

Can your organization offer a genuine and concise answer to the following questions?

What is the goal of this project?

Who is it aimed at?

How will input be used?

Which selection criteria will be used?

How will the ideas be implemented?



CHARACTER



CARING



COMPETENCE



CREDIBILITY



CONSISTENCY



COMMUNICATION

Managing Difficult Situations

Community engagement brings a lot of positive influence to a community, but with that also comes conflicts and difficulties. Not everyone is going to be on the same page and share the same opinions, so learning how to understand and manage conflict within a community can help prevent issues before they become serious problems. The best time to address challenges are in the early stages when it may be possible to establish some common ground in either understanding of the issue or each other's perspectives.

Why do difficult issues arise?

Faulty or Inconsistent Communications

between leaders and citizens, as well as within communities themselves.

Value Clashes

community members view issues through the lens of their own experiences and values, which can affect their perceptions of the problem and any potential solutions.

Poorly Defined Responsibilities + Authority

there is a lack of understanding or agreement on roles and responsibilities.

Need for Recognition

all community members appreciate being recognized as valuable and legitimate contributors (this is often overlooked in community engagement).

Competition

real or perceived (e.g., fear that one group's gain means another's loss).

Acceptance of Change

everyone 'comes to the table' with variable levels of comfort with change, regardless of the merits or circumstances of the situation.

Power or Status Differences

this can frequently be the source of conflict and may or may not be immediately obvious.

Unresolved Prior Conflict or Lack of Trust

legacy issues/conflicts that you may have to consider.

Other reasons issues can arise:

- Feeling of having little to no control over a situation
- Fear of consequences/result
- Feeling that their best interest is not in mind
- Feeling left out of the process
- Lack of understanding of a situation
- Facing the unknown
- Fear of change or disruption to the norm

Questions to Ask to Understand the Situation

- △ What is the level of interest or concern?
- △ Who, and how many, may be affected by the outcomes of this process?
- △ Who are the relevant authorities and decision-makers?
- △ Are the relevant authorities committed to good-faith implementation of the outcomes?

△ Do you have all the relevant information you need?



ENGAGEMENT

Connect with Stakeholders

When finding community members to be a part of your organization, it is important to look for people who will find the project interesting and impactful. Stakeholders can be anyone that would be impacted by your organization. While it is important for the entire public to be consistently informed and included in the revitalization process, stakeholder groups are a specific list of people, neighborhoods, businesses and organizations that are affected by Main Street and should specifically be engaged.

Steps to an Effective Stakeholder Relationship



Identify Stakeholders

(Refer to pg. 12)

- What role does each stakeholder play?
- Who has an impact on project outcomes?
- Who needs to stay in the loop?



Provide Options to Resolve Issues

- What solutions are possible for the issue?
- What can be done to compromise?



Set Desired Outcomes

- What are the needs of all parties?
- What must be accomplished to meet these needs?



Don't Avoid Problems

- How can you work with stakeholders who are resistant to change?
- What issues are major and should be addressed?



Be Open with Stakeholders

- What makes for effective stakeholder communication?
- What will everyone need to know?



Keep Your Promises

- Are your promises realistic?
- How will you ensure that you deliver on your promises?



Listen

- How can you productively respond to feedback?
- How can you make everyone feel heard?

A Main Street Vision

Providing Background Information

Providing background information to the community on who you are and why you are doing what you're doing will help inspire community engagement. A lack of proper background information and understanding of your Main Street organization's purpose, can result in a lack of public engagement. It is important to make sure that your organization's information is accessible and readily available to anyone who wants to see it.

Information Delivery Methods:

- Documents
- Memos
- Videos/photos (Storytelling)
- Council meetings
- Maps
- Links to organization's web pages with information
- Historical data/information

Background information that should be shared with the community from the start are things like:

- △ Who is your Main Street organization and what do you do? What is your vision?
- △ Why is there a Main Street organization in their community? What was the need for one?
- △ How will a Main Street organization benefit your community and each individual?
- △ How have Main Street organizations impacted other communities?



Figure 1: The Main Street Approach: A Guide to Comprehensive Commercial District Transformation, **National Main Street Center**

Creating a Vision Statement

A vision statement is a glimpse into the future to see how the revitalization effort paid off, what the Main Street district is like, and how the Main Street program helped transform the district. The vision, while inspirational, needs to be based on the market reality and potentiality of your district. It should provide a foundation for outlining the community's own identity, expectations and ideals. A successful vision statement is one that inspires every individual to show up for their community and get involved in its revitalization process.

Having a distinctive vision for your community will help sell your dream to the community's business owners, volunteers, members and others. Your statement will help turn your revitalization dream into reality by gearing the work going on behind the scenes towards achieving that vision. Your Main Street organization's statement will not only motivate staff and volunteers but help compare the progress of your annual projects and initiatives to where you want to be.



Tips on Vision Statements:

- Concise
- Easily understood
- Distinct from other organizations
- Longer than mission statement (but still brief)
- Preferred future of the district
- Specific, sensory language – inspiring!
- Consensus (developed by a broad cross-section of the community)
- Comprehensive (*i.e.*, addressing each of the four points)

Organizations should create a vision for success on Main Street, that is rooted in a solid understanding of the market realities of the district and is informed by broad community engagement. A vision statement provides a foundation for outlining the community's own identity, expectations and ideals. A successful statement is one that inspires every individual to show up for their community and get involved in its revitalization process.

What are the benefits of being an Indiana Main Street community?

- △ Training events
- △ Networking opportunities
- △ Resource toolbox
- △ Grant opportunities
- △ Monthly newsletter
- △ Technical assistance

Downtown Revitalization Importance

Downtown revitalization can benefit everyone in the community. Revitalizing downtown does not bring benefits to just one person, but to everyone in the community. It is critical for everyone involved in downtown and commercial corridor revitalization to understand the value of a thriving downtown.

Resource: [Indiana Main Street Program Guide & Handbook](#)

Here are some good reasons why:

- The downtown area can be a **prominent employment center**. Even in the smallest communities, downtown is often the center for most employers.
- It may represent the largest concentration of businesses in your community – it also serves as an **incubator for new businesses** which are the success of tomorrow.
- Most businesses in the downtown district are **independently owned**, who support local families and in turn support local schools, etc. Independent businesses are a great way to keep profits in town.
- The **downtown area reflects** how your community sees itself – a critical factor in business retention and recruitment efforts.
- Downtown represents a significant portion of the **community's tax base**. If this district declines, property will decrease in value and subsequently increase the tax burden on other parts of your community.
- The business district is an indispensable **shopping and service center**.
- The downtown area is the **historic core** of your community. Many of the buildings are historically significant and help highlight your community's history and development.
- Downtown represents a vast amount of **public and private investment**. If a downtown were to be neglected, it would be a waste of past dollars spent.
- Downtown is the **heart of the community** and place for government, arts, churches and financial institutions.
- The downtown area is an important space for the community to **meet equally** for parades, speeches and other community events.
- Downtown helps **reduce sprawl** by concentrating activity in on area.
- Downtown is where **arts and culture thrive**.



Know how to cater to everyone's liking and get them excited about what downtown revitalization can do for them individually.

Potential Stakeholders Property Owners:

- Increased occupancy rates
- Rent stability
- Increased property values
- Increased stability
- Reduced vandalism/crime deterrent
- Better image
- Assistance with tax credits, grants, loan programs, design and co-cop maintenance
- Communication medium with other property owners
- New uses, especially on upper floors

Service Business Owners:

- Image building/improvement
- Pride
- New/renewed/repeated exposure
- Increased variety of services
- Healthier economy generates new/more business
- Tapping leakage
- Increased competition means no more aggressive business styles
- Increased population – new customers
- Improved image – creates new market

Retail Business Owners:

- Increased sales
- Improved image
- Increased value of business
- Coordinated efforts between local businesses and franchises
- Quality of business life
- Increased traffic
- Education opportunities (seminars and workshops)
- District marketing strategies (promotion and advertising)
- Better business mix
- New market groups downtown

Residents/Consumers:

- Community pride
- Have needs/issues addressed
- Enhanced marketplace (better shopping and benefits of shopping locally)
- Sense of pride in downtown
- Social/cultural activities
- Opportunities to keep kids in town
- Sense of hometown community
- Preservation of architecture and heritage
- Opportunity to participate/volunteer
- Better communication (newsletter)
- Political advocate
- Home values increase

City Government:

- Increased tax base
- More tourism
- Increased property values
- Increased number of jobs
- Better goals and vision
- Healthy economy
- Better services available
- Positive perception of downtown and community
- Industrial recruitment
- Better relationships between city hall and private sector
- Increased volunteer base for city
- Takes political heat, develops consensus for political requests
- Impetus for public improvements
- Education resources for city leaders (officials) on planning and economic development

Preservationists:

- Main Street Approach® reinforces common goal of preservation
- Increased opportunities for education and advocacy
- Improved public image
- Increased awareness and builds credibility
- Improved economic feasibility of preservation

County Government:

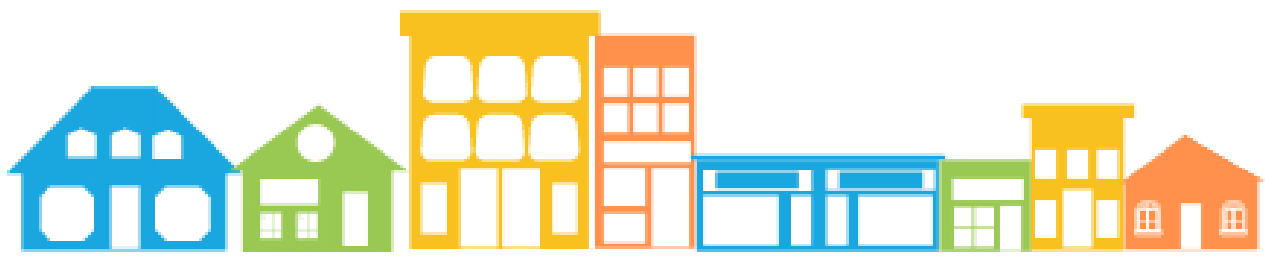
- Increased public relations for county
- Viable downtown increases tax base
- Rippling effect
- Viable downtown is a draw for industry and countywide area businesses
- Common partnership with city hall
- County/community pride
- Heritage preservation
- Alternative to a redevelopment district
- Quality of life issues, especially for employees
- Help with parking issues

Financial Institutions:

- Community Reinvestment Act (federal government requirement)
- Potential for loans, deposits and other services (bank cards, financial services)
- Improved image and goodwill
- Survival of community critical to bank success and economic stability
- Central location more cost effective

Utility Companies:

- Additional business
- Longer business hours
- More employees
- Healthy businesses feel freer to increase utility usage
- Proof of new products
- Healthy economy causes community to grow
- Overcome bad guy image
- Quality in downtown public improvements



Community Involvement

Community engagement is an important part of creating [social capital](#); the networks of relationships among people in a community that enables them to function effectively. When community members and city leaders seek out each others aspirations, concerns, and values, it creates a greater sense of community ownership and improves the outcomes of the community.

A community's well-being involves the amount of engagement happening within. A person's well-being involves the amount of meaningful participation in all aspects of one's life and being empowered to do so, especially by others in the community. The two go hand in hand, without community well-being there is no personal well-being and vice versa.

Why is community engagement important?

- Builds and sustains close-knit communities.
- Leads to improved community outcomes.
- Ensures access and community empowerment.
- Helps local governments to promote decision-making.
- Influences stakeholders with government, political or funding power to implement public projects and policies that primarily benefit individual communities and drive social change.
- Drives social change and transformation.
- Critical to deepening democracies.
- Increases the likelihood that projects will be supported.
- Creates more effective solutions by drawing on the knowledge of community members.
- Improve community members' knowledge and skills.
- Empowers people from different backgrounds to get involved in their community.
- Creates a local network.
- Creates an opportunity for addressing and discussing concerns.
- Increases trust in community organizations and governance.



How to get the community involved

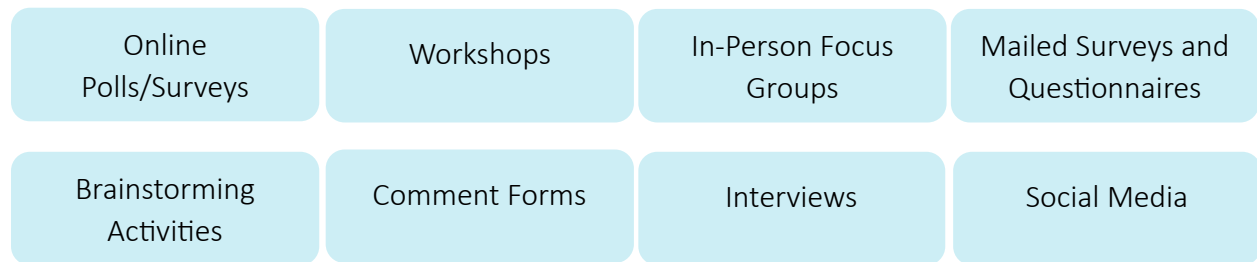
Generating Ideas and Input

Educating your community on the importance of downtown revitalization and the benefits of being a Main Street community is the first step to involving the community in your organization. Not only is providing education to the community important, but so is allowing the community to educate you. It is valuable to listen to community thoughts and feelings and to come together to generate ideas. Take into consideration the community's perspective on issues and ongoings and address their concerns. The best way to get people involved is to align your vision with their values:







- Provide opportunities for members of your community to provide feedback and input for your Main Street organization.
- Educating the community provides insight on what downtown revitalization will look like and bring to every individual.

Tip: Remember when talking to community members about downtown revitalization, speak to their interests and their experiences.

Places to Receive Feedback from Community Members:



Techniques to Share Information (Community Engagement Plan City Toolbox)

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Utility bill inserts |  Press releases and press packets |
|  Briefings |  Printed public information materials |
|  Centralized contracts |  Videos |
|  Hot lines |  Information kiosks |
|  Electronic forums, social media, groups and email |  Websites |

Resource: [Community Engagement for Main Street Transformation](#)

Idea/Input Generation Spotlight:

- ◇ **Community Graffiti Wall.** Post your question(s) on giant chalkboard surfaces and leave space for people to record their answers. Be sure to record these permanently before they disappear!

- △ **Poll Creatively.** Rather than a standard survey, put simple question drink coasters at local restaurants and bars, with space for people to fill in their answers, or use a QR code for people to scan!
- △ **Poll Colorfully.** Have people of all ages “vote” on options by placing jellybeans in glass jars.
- △ **Throw a Mixer.** Ask attendees to fill out a short survey to get free drinks, food or prizes before they enter a space.

Inspired Community Meetings

Community meetings are a vital part of downtown revitalization, as it is the time and place for your Main Street organization to connect with members of the community and discuss important topics. Sometimes the best way to engage your community is to get everyone into the same room. A lot of community meetings tend to be dreaded, although necessary and function in a very formal setting. Normally, “experts” present on determined options to prevent the bad from happening, rather than options to bring the good, while an audience provides feedback.

In **Inspired Community Meetings**, everyone in the room has the option to use their wisdom and creativity to solve complex challenges in the community. They are structured to encourage passionate participation, prevent hostile takeover and honor disagreement. Inspired Community Meetings are meant to be energizing and build excitement for a collective effort.

Resource: [Community Engagement for Main Street Transformation](#)

Here are the key elements of Inspired Community Meetings:

Eliminate Barriers

- Provide childcare.
- Provide food.
- Have multiple convening at different times of different days of the week.
- Don’t rely solely on digital promotion or sign-up. Not everyone is online!
- Organize ride shares or other forms of transportation. Provide gas or bus vouchers. Locate the meeting somewhere easily accessible by walking, parking and public transportation.
- Provide language interpreters.
- Make your meeting fun. If word of mouth is that your meetings are enjoyable, you’ll get more people the next time.
- Locate the meeting in a place where participants feel welcome and safe, that is neutral in terms of politics and factions, is quiet and is pleasant space to spend a couple hours.

Welcome Setting

- Plenty of light.
- Good acoustics. Make sure people can hear and focus!

- Reflections of your community. Display pictures of your town or art from local school children that relates to the topic at hand.
- Welcoming touches. If there are tables, use tablecloths. Put out flowers. Light candles. Play soft music when people enter.
- Plenty of wall space for working with and displaying flip charts.
- Snacks and beverages.
- Chairs in a row are not conducive to conversation!

Inspiring Activities

The following information was drawn from **Main Street America's Community Engagement for Main Street Transformation**. For more information on the following topics, access the [PDF here](#).

Circle. Set the chairs for the meeting in a circle to put everyone on the same footing in terms of expertise and responsibility.

- Good for reflecting on a question together.
- Helps with practicing deep and active listening.
- Helps to ensure all voices are included and heard.
- Powerful for meeting openings and closings.

World Café. This imitates a café setting due to small groups all conversing together around tables. This cluster can be anywhere from around 10 to 100 people who are in conversation about issues that matter to them or work they are trying to do together.

- Helps find solutions that work for the community as a whole.
- Develops a shared language within the community.
- Surfaces knowledge from the whole room.

Open Space. Here, you call a meeting around a core question and each person who has a topic they'd like to raise under that core question announces it to the room.

- A place to start when you have no idea what the solutions might be, when you're stuck as a group and when there is a diversity of questions in the room.
- Organizes work and gets people to take responsibility for moving it forward.
- Reveals which issues people care about most.

Collective Story Harvest. People who have been directly impacted by the issue being discussed are invited to the meeting to share their experiences.

- Good for learning from what has already happened and for keeping history relevant.
- Brings simplicity to complex issues.
- Gives a human face to the work at hand.
- Although the focus is on one person, it gives everyone important tasks.
- Promotes deep listening.

Community Engagement Opportunities

A helpful and engaging way to increase community involvement with your Main Street organization is through community activities and engagement opportunities. When planning community engagement opportunities, remember to keep things creative and inclusive, catering your activities to all demographics. For any opportunities you plan for your community members, give attendees the option to provide feedback to your organization.

Making sure the community is the focal point of downtown revitalization is an important component of encouraging and influencing community engagement. Focusing on the community increases visibility and understanding of the issues within and empowers communities to have a say over decision-making. A community works better together with supportive relationships and a positive environment.

Small Group Opportunities:

- Charrettes
- Community juries
- Coffee klatches
- Study circles
- Deliberative forums
- Focus groups
- Task forces
- World café
- Ongoing advisory groups

Large Group Opportunities:

- Open houses
- Public meetings
- Workshops

Non-Traditional Opportunities:

- Online platforms
- Fairs and events
- Tours and field trips
- Neighborhood block parties

What are some tips for planning successful community opportunities?

- △ **Plan with a purpose.** Determine why you want to plan an event, the goals of the event and the outcomes you want out of it.
- △ **Come with activities.** Events in the community should have engaging activities. Plan activities that create both enjoyment for your guests and help you meet your goals.
- △ **Advertise.** Get the community excited about your event through fun and engaging advertisements.

Events and fundraisers help bring the community together by forming closer bonds, creating new relationships and developing a better sense of belonging. Providing positive and uplifting experiences to people through events, tends to create positive and uplifting feedback and more engagement in the community. Create interactive and educational experiences to engage the community in the downtown revitalization process and give local businesses and organizations an opportunity to be a part of your event(s).

Planning a Community Event

When creating change, community is key. Community events are what keep members engaged and encourages them to continue to be involved in their community. It's the perfect way for promoting downtown revitalization and the change that is coming to the community.

How to Plan a Community Event:

- △ Start with **basics** – event name, date, time, and objective(s)
- △ Stick to a set **budget** (partnerships can help stretch funds)
- △ Plan an event that **resonates** with your community
- △ Secure an event space/venue that is easily **accessible**
- △ Ensure you have all necessary **permits** and **permissions**
- △ Identify what is **needed** (*e.g.*, catering, seating, performers, volunteers, merchandise, suppliers)
- △ **Advertise** your event (social media, local newspapers, community centers, schools, colleges)
- △ Work with **caterers**, **vendors**, and **suppliers** who understand local community needs
- △ Get as much **help** as possible (volunteers are a lifesaver)
- △ Remember to **thank everyone** for all their hard work!

What are some community event ideas?

Charity

- Community-wide donation drive
- Charity concert
- Trivia night
- Community training events
- Talent shows
- Marathon or walkathon

Social and Cultural

- Arts and crafts festival
- Movie screening
- Heritage celebration
- Cultural food festival
- Tourist events

Promoting Positive Change

- Skill development and community training events
- Community gardening days
- Community cleanup events

Bond-Building and Family

- Farmer's market
- Community field day
- Open mic night
- Host a street party

CELEBRATION

Highlighting Accomplishments and Giving Back to the Community

To continue having a successful relationship with your community members, it is important to recognize those who helped your organization immensely and give back to the community for helping. Doing so, you ensure community satisfaction and increase your chances of keeping community members engaged with your organization. Highlighting accomplishments your organization had helps show community members that their contributions are making a real difference and impact.

Tips for Highlighting Accomplishments and Giving Back:

- Send out a **newsletter** highlighting accomplishments and thanking those who contributed.
- Post accomplishment highlights on **social media**.
- Post accomplishments on your organization's **website**.
- Send **'Thank You' Letters** to those who exceptionally contributed to your organization, highlighting what their contributions did for their community.
- Host an **event** to bring the community together to highlight the community's accomplishments and thank those who exceptionally contributed in-person.
- **Give out merchandise** as a special thank you for contributing to your organization.



EVALUATION & CONTINUATION

Community Feedback and Evaluating Engagement

When working with and for a community, it is important to receive feedback from its members and evaluate the success of your organization so far. Creating an evaluation plan can help guide you through steps of evaluation and find the right information needed for your organization to use. Evaluating the progress of your organization will help improve your engagement practices and downtown revitalization process.

Why use an evaluation plan?

- △ **Gain insight** to assess the needs and wants of stakeholders and participants, reinforce program purposes and goals, and to raise awareness about community or project related issues.
- △ **Improve the way things are done** to refine plans for new practices and projects, improve communication materials and determine where to allocate future resources and funding.
- △ **Determine the effects of the program** on the skill development of participants and changes in community behavior over time.

Primary Types of Evaluation

Formative Evaluation: provides information to guide program improvement *during the implementation phase*, and includes:

- **Process Evaluation** – to determine whether a program was well-designed and implemented.
- **Developmental Evaluation** – to respond to unanticipated events and changes that occur during the program.

Summative Evaluation: provides informational judgments about whether the program worked.

- **Outcome Evaluation** – evaluation of observable conditions of a specific population, organizational attribute or social condition that the program is expected to have changed.
- **Impact Evaluation** – examines the program's long-term goals.

Methods of Evaluation

- Website activity (hits, downloads, comments submitted)
- Emails and phone calls received
- Attendance at public hears, meetings and events
- Timelines of information materials on the Web
- Validity and accuracy of mailing and email lists used
- Tracking tools like Placer.AI and others

- Spreadsheets/Word Docs/other familiar methods to store documentation
 - Think of something to which you can easily add information and then present it to the decision-makers.

Keeping Everyone at the Table

It is just as important to encourage community members to join your organization’s movement, just as it is to keep them involved. Community engagement increases community vitality and empowers members to have a say over decision-making that affects their everyday lives. Finding ways to maintain community engagement will help sustain downtown revitalization.

Community engagement is a lifelong goal. There won’t always be community engagement events and activities, so finding alternative ways to keep people involved with your organization is key.

Here are some tips to help keep people in your community engaged:

Diversify your content

- Mixing up the type of content and events that you provide to community members can increase the appeal and be very beneficial for maintaining community engagement.
- Change what themed events you host, plan different community meeting activities or use different advertisement or polling mediums.

Be active

- Being active and present in the community helps spread our Main Street organization’s name and spreads your reach. Continue **creating opportunities** for the community engage with one another and get involved in downtown revitalization.
- **Social media** is a great way to promote your organization and the work that they are doing. Monitor your posts and continue to drive people to your account.
- Sending **polls** and/or **surveys** out regularly can help your organization get a sense of where your community is at in that moment and serves as a gentle reminder that you are there for your community.
- **Interviewing** community members can help build stronger and more impactful connections. If there isn’t high engagement, it can be useful to ask interview questions around community engagement. Why aren’t people engaging? Do they have access to opportunities? Do they have enough information?

Provide materials and merchandise

- Regularly passing out pamphlets and informational materials around your community is a good way of keeping the public informed on your organization and any activities that are going on.

- A good promotional material for your organization is merchandise. Providing swag items with your Main Street organization's logo is a good promotional tool to get your name out in the community.

Strategic review

- It's easy to get ahead of yourself and caught up in the fast-moving pace of everyday communications. That's why it is important for you and your organization to take a pause and reflect on your organization's performance to see where you've excelled and where you can improve.
- Ask yourself: what engagement tactics are working? What could be improved? What seems surprising?

Prioritize efforts and improve focus

- There will be a lot of things to get done and everyone will have different tactics and opinions on how to tackle your to-do list. A good way to navigate challenges is to prioritize what should be done first to help create a sense of focus and encourage more impactful decisions.

Additional tips for sustaining community engagement:

- Keep doing what's working.
- It's never too late to leverage effective launch tactics.
- Automation doesn't mean that you need to sacrifice personal connections.
- Don't be afraid to try out different things.
- Build and document operational process that your organization can use for years to come.



Resources

The material in this toolkit is drawn from a variety of online resources and tools listed below.

[City of Golden Community Engagement Planning Guide](#)

[Community Engagement for Collective Action](#)

[Community Engagement for Main Street Transformation](#)

[Community Network Analysis Tool](#)

[Indiana Main Street Program Guide & Handbook](#)

[What is Community Engagement?](#)