

THE MAIN STREET APPROACH TO RECOVERY

As downtowns begin to reopen to the public, the Main Street Approach™ can serve as a powerful tool for economic recovery efforts. The Main Street Approach is a time-tested framework for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization that has strengthened downtowns across the country. The strategies that guide this approach are organized around four points: Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization. Organization involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district. Keep reading to learn about Organization-related recovery activities and ideas to help your Main Street navigate the impact of COVID-19.



Recruit a public health official to your Board of Directors.

Offer an ex-officio slot to help guide your recovery efforts.

Be prepared to advocate for your program when state and local stimulus packages are developed:

- Publish your program's annual statistics
- Create a recovery plan with a budget
- Have letters of support ready for your organization
- Reach out to your city to ensure they know your program needs continued or increased funding. Ask your coordinating program for a [letter of support](#) to your local government officials.

Risk assess your budget.

Develop backup plans for revenue reductions and consider other sources of revenue, including:

- Community Foundations
- Local/Regional Corporations for small business programming and operational support
- Permission to recast special event sponsorships for alternative downtown programming and operational support

Develop strategies to raise revenue now.

- Create an email campaign asking your stakeholders for donations to support Main Street. Describe how COVID-19 is impacting your downtown and your organization, share how your program is responding, and explain how you will use their donation.
- Thank everyone who has supported your organization in the past, and show photos of your recent impact, if possible.



- Make targeted asks to successful businesses or local philanthropists to ask for funding for your organization and Main Street businesses.
- Don't assume all businesses can't honor their pledge or membership to your organization. Communicate and check in with them often.

☐ Examine social entrepreneurship opportunities for added revenue.



For example, Downtown Rochester in Rochester, Mich., is selling branded face masks to benefit their Road to Recovery events and promotions.

☐ Check in with your volunteers.

Share your thoughts on your downtown's recovery and let them know they are needed now more than ever.

☐ Evaluate your organization's recovery pathway.

- Human Resources: Do you need to make cuts, furloughs, or change contracts?
- Budgets: Examine revenue sources and create ratings for their potential to decrease or increase. What expenses can be reduced to coincide with revenue projections? Review income and cash flow statements.
- Legal: Consider the status of your contracts and your lease situation.
- Insurance: Evaluate the status of future events and office visitors.

☐ Use social media tools to share news about your organization, its work, and future needs.

☐ Know your state's reopening guidelines.

For those needing guidance, be a connector and convener, but not the authority.

☐ Develop your District Recovery Plan.

See planning graphic below.



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Hold conversations with property owners.

While much of the conversation has been focused on small business owners, and rightly so, an important part of the equation is the status of the properties where business activity occurs.

- Update your building inventory. It is critical to understand the impact of COVID-19 on building tenancy.
- What space is vacant and likely to be vacant?
- Understand the property owner's outlook on recovery
- Evaluate criteria and need for repurposing space.
- Dialogue about rent concessions and hybrid rental lease agreements, like percent of sales lease arrangements or scaled rent arrangements.

Revamp your recruitment strategies with a focus on new consumer habits that may present unique business opportunities for existing small business owners and new entrepreneurs.

- Health and Fitness: Expect shifts from exclusive workouts in gyms and fitness centers, but growth in home tech equipment, biking, and running accessories.
- Small Scale Production: For example, some may need kitchen equipment as a result of restaurant closures. This will also offer opportunities for greater e-commerce sales.
- Gardening and Natural/Organics: Consumers have become hyper-aware of personal health and wellness.
- Restaurants: Consider shifting to prepared foods and/or ingredients for take-home meal kits..

- Home Improvement, Décor, Kitchenware, and Tech: Increased time spent at home time has revealed flaws and greater interest in this sector.

- New Service Offerings: There are opportunities for brand new services, like community-based delivery for independent businesses, which could be a social venture for Main Street programs to offer as a co-op service.

☐ Look ahead and think through how COVID-19 will impact and shift uses in your district.

- Were you heavy in office/ service businesses and employees? How will more permanent work-from-home shifts impact that space?
- Will you likely experience heavy losses in restaurants? How could you pivot those spaces to uses like small-scale food production or prepared foods production?
- Will some retailers shrink inventories? Are in-store pop-ups or shared complementary businesses a possibility?
- How might you leverage permanent shifts of vacation home users to local residents for co-working spaces or new entrepreneurial endeavors?

☐ COVID-19 has accelerated the need for businesses to reevaluate their business models. Assist businesses (directly or through partner technical assistance providers) to review:

- What should your business model be when you come out of this?
- Is your current business model viable? If so, how can you hang on until it's viable again?
- Are there ways you can pivot all of your expertise into a better revenue stream?
- Inventories: What changes are needed? What changes to suppliers/ vendors?
- How can you reach customers? Through e-commerce solutions; delivery; pick-up; or resellers?

☐ Interview your small business owners to better understand their recovery plans and needs.

Account for survey fatigue by engaging in more a dialogue, which will allow you to go deeper and build relationships. We have developed [a set of interview questions](#) to get you started.

☐ Consider expanding your entrepreneurial programming and ecosystem building efforts.

In times of hyper-unemployment we see increases in rates of entrepreneurship. Check out our entrepreneurship ecosystem resources [here](#).

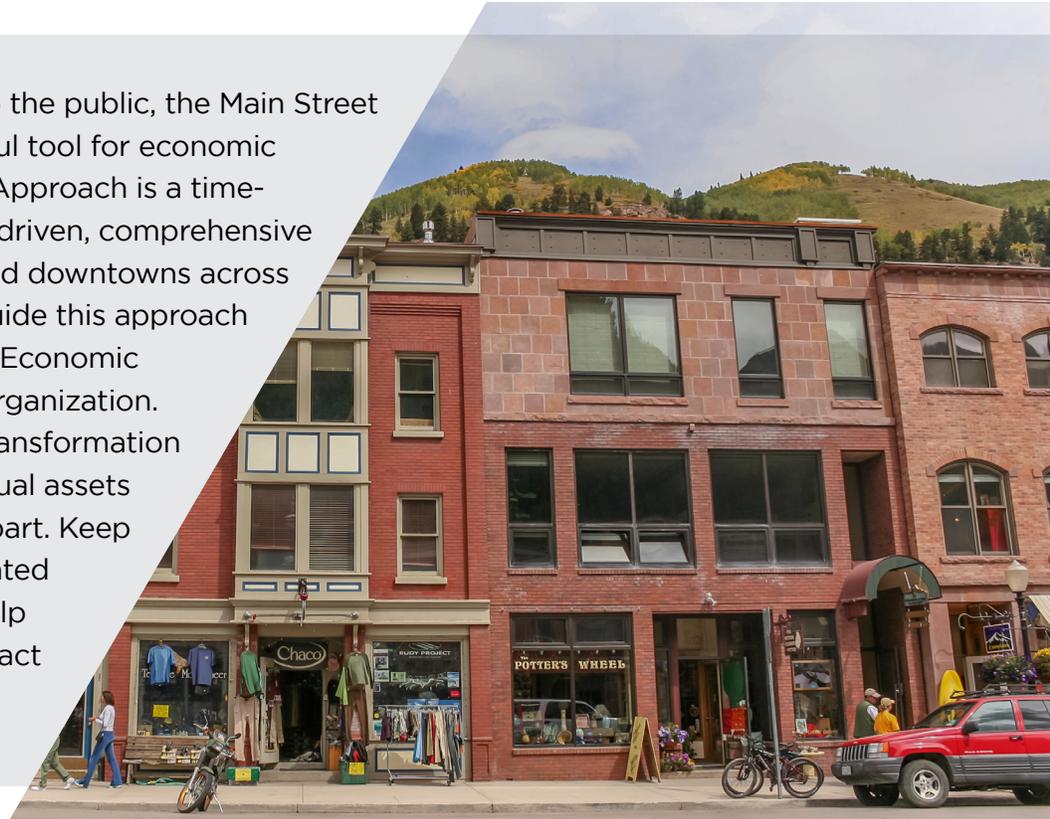
☐ Understand local consumer psyche to gauge issues and attitudes around shopping and events, as well as new habits that may impact shopping and social engagement routines.

- How do they feel about shopping post-reopen?
- What new habits have they developed?
- What safety concerns do they have while shopping?
- Has their economic circumstances changed as a result of job losses?
- We have developed a survey instrument for your use that you can [download here](#). If you use this survey, please let us know how it goes and what you find!



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Evaluate the need for COVID-19-related street infrastructure.

Consider hand washing stations or temporary signage outlining social distancing reminders.

Advocate for people-first streets.

Work with your local Department of Transportation to evaluate potential street closures that could allow for additional space for pedestrians, distanced outdoor seating for restaurants, additional space for sidewalk sales, and multi-modal transportation.

Reopen guidelines will require many business owners to rethink their interior layouts.

Offer technical assistance as part of your design services that focus on store layouts for occupancy limitations, social distancing guidelines, and in-store check-out lines.



□ Work with local transit officials to ensure safe transit practices at local bus stops, transit stations, and ride-sharing operations.

Make sure they're encouraging patrons to observe social distancing through informational signage and that areas are being regularly sanitized.

□ Consider short-term modifications to existing facade and/or sign grants.

This can allow for more broadly defined design needs for small business owners trying to adhere to COVID-19 guidelines.

□ Leverage the growth in trail and park use.

More and more people have embraced their local outdoor spaces and developed new recreation habits during stay-at-home orders. As part of downtown design activities, leverage this growth to push for more trails and park connectivity, Sunday street closures for safe bike and walking districts, as well as district park enhancements.

□ Greater design focus is needed on technology infrastructure as part of district public improvements.

COVID-19 has resulted in likely long-term shifts to remote workforce and e-commerce sales that necessitate cell 5G and high speed fiber networks. An especially important opportunity for rural communities, this infrastructure can help small businesses access online retailing, attract remote workers to communities, and allow an existing workforce to remain competitive.

□ Retail, restaurant, and office spaces will need to be reimagined.

As vacancies in these spaces occur due to remote work or business closures, think creatively about how to re-use these spaces. Converting an upper-floor office space to housing, a vacant retail space to a pop-up store, or a vacant restaurant to a new small-scale food producer will require a renewed look at space and how we maintain our historic preservation and sustainability ethos in these conversions.



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Marketing and Image Building

Welcome the public back to downtown

- Provide weekly updates on new segments of the economy opening downtown via local media and social media
- Keep social media channels active with updates that engage the public. Ask followers what they love most about downtown, or what they are most looking forward to seeing on Main Street.
- Promote merchandise that supports downtown and its businesses.

Promote downtown (and its businesses) as a safe place to visit

- Showcase how businesses are taking precautions to keep customers and employees safe. For example, highlight hand sanitizing stations, masks worn by staff (and recommended for customers), plexi-glass barriers, curbside pickup, and caps on the number of customers allowed in each business at one time.
- Partner with your Visitor's Bureau, Chamber, or City to target in-state residents to day-trip, or vacation at home this year. Consider partnering with

nearby Main Street communities to create a package trip.

- Update your branding to reflect this focus on safety. For example, Main Street Steamboat Springs put a facemask on their downtown logo.



Retail and Business Promotions

Promote Supporting Local Businesses Safely

- Highlight the benefits of supporting locally-owned businesses. Use #SupportLocalSafely on social media.
- If businesses aren't open yet, encourage curbside pickup or online purchases
- Promote downtown gift cards, especially to help businesses that don't have their own gift cards. The public may feel more comfortable buying one from the Main Street program rather than individual businesses.

- Use funding to increase the value of gift cards purchased. In Orlando's Milk District, they offered "Milk Money." Consumers were sold \$10 gift cards for just \$7.50.

Help businesses launch or improve their social media and/or web presence.

- Host Facebook live (or similar) product demonstrations or fashion shows
- For business still closed or doing curbside pick up, encourage them to offer appointments by video.
- Help businesses develop online tools for selling their products.

Engage with customers in new ways.

- Encourage businesses to start a customer database to reach customers directly.
- Develop loyalty programs for shoppers.
- Host a first responders "Thank You Day" or week.
- Host scavenger hunts promoting fitness as people look for clues in storefront windows. Or host a virtual scavenger hunt. Both can be done without requiring people to go into businesses.
- Advertise "Take Out Tuesdays" or a "Take Out to Win" promotions for restaurants. Post photos of people safely carrying out food, with a chance to win prizes or a free lunch.

Special Events and Festivals

Review your promotional calendar through the end of the year.

- Your Board should review all events to determine if they should be postponed or canceled. Postpone events based on local and state guidelines for large public gatherings.
- Consider dropping any events that do not show an economic benefit for downtown businesses. Make sure any events held support your downtown's economic goals/ transformation strategies.
- For any events that are held, establish safety guidelines for attendees, such as requiring

facemasks, marking social distancing requirements, and having sanitation stations.

- Check with your insurance company on holding events, in case they exceed local guidelines.

Contact sponsors of postponed or canceled events and ask if they will commit their sponsorship dollars to other small-scale events and downtown marketing efforts.

Provide online payments for registrations or booth rental fees to cut down on person-to-person contact.

Shift your downtown events to accommodate safety guidelines.

- Provide or create public spaces for community art, dance, and music classes, as well as space for artists to create and display work outside. Promote to community groups that may not have facilities that allow for social distancing.
- Instead of holding large concerts, host bands or buskers in locations throughout the district, inviting people to stroll around downtown.
- Host smaller events, including Ladies Night Out, Wine Walks, Art Walks, etc. They can be ticketed fundraising events, which can limit crowds to 100-300 people.

Develop new guidelines for your Farmers Market.

Increase the footprint of the market, implement one-way directional signage, require facemasks, etc. Check out [these guidelines](#) from the Farmer's Market Coalition for more ideas.

