

100 GREAT IDEAS



FOR YOUR MAIN STREET PROGRAM

1. Form a board and committees to implement your organization's plan of action.
2. Talk about what's good in your historic commercial district.
3. Think of ways to thank volunteers over and over again!
4. Hire a manager to help coordinate the activities of your Main Street organization.
5. Establish an office in a downtown/district location (don't forget signage!).
6. Review copies of the National Trust Main Street Center's publications.
7. Beat the streets...meet your neighbors! Know your constituents, and keep them informed! Find out the needs of your district businesses by communicating with them on a regular basis. React with appropriate projects.
8. Publish a newsletter (print or electronic version) to keep everyone in the community informed about your progress.
9. Recognize a volunteer of the month in your newsletter or the local newspaper.
10. Develop a work plan for the upcoming year that clearly defines your organization's mission, goals, projects, and specific tasks. Develop a timeline and budget for each task, and delegate the projects to specific individuals. Develop a budget for your organization based on the plan.
11. Hold a town meeting. Identify downtown/district priorities by consensus. Write down your ideas...and share them. Encourage others to do the same.
12. Join the National Main Street network.
13. Train your volunteers. Develop volunteer job descriptions, and create a "volunteer manual". Conduct a short training session, and provide information about the organization, appropriate news articles, your work plan, etc.
14. Establish a close working relationship with the Chamber of Commerce, regional planning commission, the Small Business Development Center, utility companies and others. Coordinate a monthly lunch meeting for the executive directors of all of these organizations to touch base and stay informed about each others activities.
15. Work with your local financial institutions. Ask them to make a commitment to downtown/district revitalization.
16. Hold a fund raiser for a specific project.
17. Educate various stakeholder and community groups about the importance of the district.
18. Throw a party to bring people together. Tell them about your organization. Show the PowerPoint presentations provided by Main Street Iowa.
19. Create a brochure to explain your revitalization organization. Emphasize the importance of volunteers to the effort.
20. Build a website for your Main Street program and the district.
21. Explore using social media to engage volunteers and spread the word about your local businesses and vibrant commercial district. Set up a MySpace page. Start a blog. Take digital photos & place them on sites like Flickr. Establish a Facebook group. Develop an e-newsgroup where you can keep in touch with your neighbors.
22. Add "youth" to your board of directors, or organize a youth advisory group to tap into students' viewpoints about the district, increase your volunteer pool, and provide an educational opportunity for teens.
23. Work with the schools to display student's artwork or awards inside downtown businesses. Today's children are tomorrow's customers.
24. Sponsor monthly "coffee breaks" for merchants to talk about district revitalization activities and issues that affect them. Rotate the location among businesses.
25. Take a field trip to other Main Street Iowa communities that have implemented successful commercial district revitalization programs or projects.
26. Create a Power Point highlighting your organization's accomplishments. Take it to civic clubs, schools, the chamber of commerce, and the city council.
27. Determine your district's brand identity. Develop a slogan and encourage all businesses in your district to use it. Create an instantly recognizable logo for your organization that symbolizes your district. Make sure the logo is easy to use and will be able to meet various graphic needs. Use it on stationery, newspaper ads, posters, flyers, etc.
28. Rehearse an "elevator speech" to share about your revitalization program.
29. Build a strong relationship with the area news media. Compile a list with contact information, preferred press release formats and deadlines. Make it easy for them to cover your stories.
30. Install "welcome" signs at the entrances to your central commercial district.
31. Hold a cleanup day with the assistance of volunteers and community groups. Make it fun! Make it an annual event.
32. Develop an ongoing downtown/district maintenance program. Keep sidewalks and alleys free of litter. Put receptacles where trash accumulates, and be sure they are emptied regularly.
33. Spruce up...plant flowers, clean the alleys and sweep the streets, pull the weeds.
34. Work with the city to pass a preservation ordinance for the district. Initiate preservation planning, including application for status as a Certified Local Government (CLG). CLG status can protect your historic district and potentially provide funding for projects. Seek assistance from the State Historic Preservation Office.
35. Inventory your buildings now. Building rehabilitations can best be promoted with before and after photos.
36. Create an "Idea Book" with drawings of buildings provided by Main Street Iowa as a result of your Design Façade Tech Visit, to show building's potential and to encourage renovation.
37. Develop Design Guidelines for appropriate district building renovation projects.
38. Encourage building rehabilitation that respects the heritage of each building and the district.
39. Participate in Historic Preservation Week held every May. Check the National Trust for Historic Preservation website for more information.
40. Provide information on state and federal incentives and loan programs that have been used successfully by many communities for building renovation projects.
41. Create a local incentive program to encourage small physical improvements to downtown/district buildings such as new or repaired signs, paint, or awnings.
42. Pretend you are a visitor. Coordinate a walk-through to really look at your district. What do you see? Identify "problem areas" that need attention. Write them down!
43. Work with property owners to clean and maintain vacant buildings. Nobody will rent a building filled with junk if any other alternatives exist.
44. Encourage business owners to change their window displays frequently, and to light them at night. Sponsor a window display and interior merchandising workshop. Educate business owners on the importance of attractive window displays. Ask a creative person to volunteer to work with merchants.
45. Install attractive displays in vacant windows. Local organizations, school classes, your local historical society, or other businesses may be very willing to help.
46. Create a banner program.

47. Target some realistic facade improvement projects in the early stages of your program.
48. Put together a "sign squad" for your district. Remove signs and the supporting hardware that no longer serve existing businesses.
49. Sponsor a design workshop to educate building owners, contractors, and volunteers on appropriate improvement projects.
50. Assist business owners with appropriate signage and awnings. Include signage and awning sections in your design guidelines.
51. Develop an architectural awareness contest that draws attention to your district's historic assets. Hold a "treasure hunt" of architectural details.
52. Save an endangered building! Look for a building that can be dramatically improved with a relatively small cash outlay. Repair or remove torn awnings, fix broken windows, and repair broken signs.
53. Go Green! Educate property owners about energy efficiency - that which is inherent in historic buildings as well as infill developments that incorporate sustainable design principles.
54. Ask the city how it is working to strengthen the downtown.
55. Complete an inventory of your streetscape amenities, such as trash receptacles, benches, and trees. Is your street lighting adequate? Develop a plan for future improvements.
56. Showcase a recent district facade and interior renovation. Provide a tour of a quality interior remodeling or upper floor residential conversion. Publish a photo of a quality facade renovation in the local newspaper.
57. Create a "people place" — a park or children's play area.
58. Produce a walking tour, brochure and/or school programs to promote the district's history.
59. Assess the district's parking situation. Count your parking spaces. Add signs to your public parking lots. Develop a voluntary contract to get business owners and employees to agree to leave prime parking places for the customers.
60. Take into account handicapped access to your sidewalks, public buildings, and stores.
61. Toot your horn often... promote your success!
62. Coordinate an image development promotion or campaign that promotes your district's strengths and assets.
63. Replace hand-lettered signs with professional graphics.
64. Encourage community groups to schedule their events in the district.
65. Plan a promotion calendar that allows plenty of time to prepare for the activity; and then publish your list of events for the district. Name a separate chairman for each promotion activity.
66. Organize a festival. Include food, music, activities for all ages, something free, and overlapping events.
67. Develop a weekly newspaper column or radio show dedicated to your Main Street program.
68. Invite citizens to teach a craft or hobby in the district.
69. Involve children (tomorrow's customers) in revitalization by providing them with activities that help them understand the district's importance.
70. Have a parade!
71. Hold a street dance!
72. Make sure your events are listed in all local, regional, and statewide listings and tourism publications.
73. Invite merchants to become involved in the revitalization process.
74. Learn what superior customer service means in today's market. Encourage your downtown/district retailers to visit stores in the area and learn from the competition.
75. Work with district merchants to invent a retail promotion that will make those cash registers ring.
76. Coordinate an exciting holiday promotion to bring people to the district!
77. On a designated evening, have merchants serve refreshments in their business.
78. Creatively look at the businesses in your district to see how they complement each other.
79. Count how many people work in the district/downtown. Your historic commercial district is likely one your town's biggest employers.
80. Develop a business directory of the downtown/district to call attention to the wide variety of retail businesses, services, professional and government offices that the downtown/district has to offer. Be sure to include a map and information on where to park. Distribute the directory through the chamber of commerce, the utility companies, and motels.
81. Show movies on the outside of a building in the summertime.
82. Schedule performances by local artists and musicians in the district.
83. Sponsor an advertising and marketing seminar.
84. Conduct "focus groups" to ask community leaders how they feel about your historic commercial district.
85. Conduct a market analysis for your district to better understand your customers and to help identify their needs. Use the ESRI information on your community and trade area provided by Main Street Iowa. Survey the businesses in your district to find out what and to whom they sell. Identify customer needs that aren't being met. These are business opportunities.
86. Meet with area realtors. Let them know what Main Street's goals are, especially in relation to downtown/district properties.
87. Stay informed. Budget for professional development opportunities offered by the Downtown Resource Center/Main Street Iowa as well as other groups.
88. Develop a library with revitalization information that can be used by volunteers, businesses, and the community in general.
89. Learn about your city's zoning regulations.
90. Complete an inventory of buildings and businesses in the district. Include size, ownership, cost to rent, and availability.
91. Calculate financial projections on vacant buildings. Rental costs will determine how much can be spent on building rehabilitation.
92. Encourage businesses to establish uniform hours and extend store hours to make it convenient for your customers to shop on their way home from work.
93. Develop educational programs to address the needs of your downtown/district businesses.
94. Get information out about free or low-cost business assistance that could benefit downtown/district business owners.
95. Stay on top of downtown/district vacancies. Be prepared to share information about them with business prospects. Use your completed market analysis to develop a business retention, expansion, and recruitment strategy.
96. Work with the city to streamline the permitting process to help make your district more attractive to investors.
97. Renovate upper floors of buildings for services, office space, or housing. Upper floor housing increases downtown's customer base.
98. If you have questions - send an "Inquiry" to Main Street Iowa to find out the issue was handled in other cities.
99. Send copies of event posters, brochures, photos, newsletters, etc. to Main Street Iowa. We want to include your revitalization successes with others. And, there are so many opportunities for us to do this — when making slide show presentations, at workshops, when responding to resource library requests, and during telephone consultations.
100. Engage in advocacy efforts that support your local Main Street program, as well as your state, county, and citywide coordinating program.