

Dr. Downtown World Café – Small Business & Entrepreneurial Support

Small Business Support Questions:

1. What small business/entrepreneur support challenge, if resolved, could make the greatest difference to the future of your Main Street program? (Diana, Maggie, Meredith, Charlotte, Greg, Ann, Jennifer)
 - How to identify Entrepreneurs – where are they and what phase are they in? (i.e. homebased as an example – could be a good target for main street when ready)
 - How do we reach into minority community?
 - **There is a disconnect between expecting the Main Street organization to produce foot traffic vs. having a business model that turns that into sales. Many businesses don't understand their customer base well enough.**
 - Managing expectations of Main Street businesses in reference to the MS Director.
 - Building a better relationship with business owners
 - Example: (Greg from Staunton) Thumbs up award – award for above and beyond main street promotional support
 - **Encouraging mutual support and working together among merchants**
 - Developing a visual to show connections between businesses
 - Challenge to get business owners to think outside the box to draw people in.
 - **Theme – educating existing businesses on PR and Public Relations**
 - Ann – Fredericksburg examples – group for existing retailers – gave them money as an incentive to work together – used outside facilitators.

2. What is the next level of thinking that we need to address? (Rebecca, Jenny, Shirley, Charity, Todd, Zach, Kathy)
 - Customer service mindset – need to be a welcoming community
 - **Need to address territorial issues**
 - Face to Face understanding
 - **Develop a Fam Tour (familiarization) to help merchants understand each other's business.**
 - Newer businesses tend to work better together (wine and popcorn pairing example)
 - One on one conversations with business owners to get to know them and their specific issues.
 - Merchant meetings at different businesses
 - **Communication is the next level of thinking**
 - How to control the “bitch” sessions? 😊
 - Personal communication works – and new businesses do tend to support each other moreso than established ones.
 - Pop ups and programming to support them.

3. If our success was completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose? How can we support each other in taking the next steps? (Kirsten, Dan, Debbie, Alex, Maggie, Jessica, Alex)
 - Incubator spaces for crafters
 - Maker spaces
 - Co-working spaces

- (Cautionary conversation about strategic use of space – don't assume combination of maker space and co-working is complementary or wise)
- Need to figure out how to list needed resources for entrepreneurs in one place.
- Education + Food – working with local organizations to plan events.
- Personal connections are important
- Downtown coffee connection at different businesses – include pertinent news and then conversation
- Peer to Peer mentorship – Pilot program
- Saturday Works program
- Altavista's feasibility study (IALR, Altavista, STEM partnership in co-working plus children's makerspace) – to support young family demographics
- Bricks and Clicks – Jon Schallert – came about from a wine gathering of merchants (Andrea Dono)
- Followup and support each other. Honor vulnerability.