



MAIN STREET AMERICA®

Main Street Approach Toolkit

Get Started

The Main Street Approach is a time-tested framework for transforming local economies, celebrating community character, and enhancing quality of life. The Main Street Approach offers community-based revitalization initiatives with a practical, adaptable roadmap for downtown transformation that is easily tailored to local conditions.

This toolkit is your one-stop shop for the basics you need to know to get started implementing the Main Street Approach, or to take your revitalization efforts to the next level. Explore below, and if you have suggestions for resources to add, [let us know](#).

Publications



THE MAIN STREET APPROACH: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Community Transformation

Learn how your Main Street program can better align your work around district-specific strategies.

[READ HERE](#)



THE MAIN STREET REFRESH: LESSONS LEARNED

Main Street Refresh

Learn about the process, key takeaways and vital updates to the Main Street Approach.

[READ HERE](#)



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR MAIN STREET TRANSFORMATION

Community Engagement

A practical framework for strengthening your community engagement efforts.

[READ HERE](#)

Articles

- **Equipping Main Streets for the New Economy** by Matt Wagner and Hannah White, *State of Main*, 2016
- **Main Street America Refresh**, *State of Main*, 2018
- **Michigan Main Street Refresh Implementation: Our Process and Lessons Learned So Far** by Michigan Main Street, *Main Street Blog*, April 2017
- **Michigan Main Street Refresh Implementation: The Refresh from Our Communities' Perspective** by Michigan Main Street, *Main Street Blog*, July 2017
- **Strategic Planning Through Transformation Strategies** by NMSC, *Main Street Blog*, August 2016
- **Revisit Your Community's Unique Assets: Connecting Asset-Based Economic Development to Community Transformation Strategies** - by NMSC, *Main Street Blog*, June 24, 2016
- **Revitalization and Main Street Transformation** by Patrice Frey, *Public Management*, August 2015

Video

Main Street America The Appr...



Also, listen to **Refreshing Main Street with Patrice Frey**, a podcast with Lucas Sustainable

Sample Documents

- **Catalyst Strategies** – A list of “ready-to-use” Transformation Strategies, known as Catalyst Strategies. These fall into two broad categories, those that are focused on a specific customer segment and those that are focused on an industry, product, or service segment.

HAVE A RESOURCE YOU WOULD
LIKE TO SHARE OR DISCUSS?
VISIT THE POINT >



Deep Dive

Take a deeper dive into the framework and application of the Main Street Approach by exploring sessions and course offerings from the Main Street Now Conference and Main Street America Institute or contacting our technical services team for customized training opportunities.

Main Street Now Conference

The Main Street Now Conference is a one-of-a-kind event where you will find solutions and techniques to help position your Main Street program and community to thrive.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Main Street America Institute

The Main Street America Institute is our targeted professional development training program aimed to equip downtown and commercial district leaders with the tools you need.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Technical Services

With decades of combined experience in the field of commercial district revitalization, our technical services team offers unparalleled support to local, city, and state-wide partners.

[LEARN MORE](#)

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About Us

Main Street America has been helping revitalize older and historic commercial districts for more than 40 years. Today it is a network of more than 1,200 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, who share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. Main Street America is a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, Inc., a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

MAIN STREET AMERICA OUR WORK

The Movement
The Approach
The Programs
Success Stories
Main Street Awards
Main Street Impact

Meet the Team
Project Spotlight
Partners & Supporters

HOW WE CAN HELP

New! Main Street Online Tool
New! Supporting Entrepreneurs
Inclusive Backing
T-Mobile Hometown Grants
Main Street Blog
Main Street Now Conference
Main Street America Institute
Resource Center
Field Services
UrbanMain
Main Street Insurance
Allied Services Directory
Members Area

GET INVOLVED

Become a Member
Career Center
Advocacy Toolkit
We Are Main Street
Subscribe

THE POINT COVID-19 RESOURCES



CATALYST STRATEGIES “CHEAT SHEET”

Catalyst Strategies are off-the-shelf Transformation Strategies that can be adapted to a wide variety of places. Many can exist at any price point (e.g., Apparel or Home Furnishings); a few are organized around an existing institution (e.g., College Town or Military Installation). All can be further customized to local needs.

CATALYST STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	CUSTOMERS	SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS	BENEFITS, TRADE-OFFS	EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY	Products and services that serve agricultural communities, OR support small-scale agriculture and local food production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Live nearby ▸ Agricultural families ▸ Agricultural workers (incl. seasonal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Appropriate for rural, agricultural communities ▸ Also appropriate for urban districts interested in sustainability and urban agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Serves locals' needs ▸ Serves local economic drivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Install an orchard in a vacant downtown lot ▸ Organize a farmers' market ▸ Launch a community-owned variety store
APPAREL	Apparel cluster, typically differentiated and independent, so as not to compete with malls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Everyone... but, primarily women ▸ Preferably a target niche (e.g., vintage, work clothes, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Street visibility ▸ Competitive industry (malls, online) ▸ Online sales possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Often highly desired retail mix, but highly competitive ▸ Can position district as regional destination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Visual merchandising assistance to apparel biz. ▸ Lunchtime fashion shows
ARTS	“Arts” involves all creative industries, incl. film, music, dance, fine art, theatre, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Demographically diverse; may be shaped by ethnicity, income, etc. ▸ Some sales business to business (rather than consumer) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Different from “Entertainment districts”, though some overlap. ▸ Creative industry workers often keep odd hours, enlivening the district. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Arts industries can make use of hard-to-use spaces ▸ Arts often serve as a draw for other types of businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Create a public arts strategy ▸ Pair artists with retailers for window displays ▸ Launch an “open studios” day ▸ Develop live/work space

COLLEGE TOWN	Makes connections between business district and anchor educational institution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Students, faculty, staff at college/university ▸ Returning alumni, visiting parents ▸ Tourists/visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Residential institutions differ from commuter schools ▸ Strategy may work better where institution already a center of community life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Builds on existing economic anchor ▸ No new parking demand (in many cases) ▸ But: Can be associated with nuisance issues (e.g., noise, drinking) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Install college flags, pennants downtown ▸ Establish direct liaisons to university admin and student body ▸ Set up loyalty card
CONVENIENCE GOODS + SERVICES	Pursues a cluster of retail and retail-service businesses that fulfill day-to-day needs of nearby shoppers. E.g., groceries, dry cleaning, drug store, flowers, hardware, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ People who live nearby ▸ People who work nearby ▸ People passing through (e.g., commuting) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Highly desired by many communities, but... ▸ Competitive ▸ Not differentiated ▸ Functions as an “amenity” to residential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ A “full-service” district ▸ But: Convenience businesses can be generic in nature and they don’t draw customers from elsewhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Improve short-term parking options ▸ Install bike racks ▸ Set out water bowls so residents walk dogs downtown ▸ Shop-local campaign
CATALYST STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	CUSTOMERS	SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS	BENEFITS, TRADE-OFFS	EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES
DINING + ENTERTAINMENT	Focuses on things people do for fun, usually in the evenings. Often serves as a regional destination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Younger (though not always) ▸ Singles and couples (not kids, typically) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Can be complementary to a daytime strategy ▸ Can be associated with nuisance issues (e.g., noise, drinking) ▸ Complements Arts strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Extends business days into evenings ▸ Parking demand complementary to daytime demand ▸ Works well with historic buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Improve lighting to increase safety at night ▸ Engage business owners in “responsible hospitality” program ▸ Organize a “night market”
DISTRICT WORKERS + RESIDENTS	A convenience-oriented strategy (e.g., take-out meals, greeting cards, hair, daycare)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Nearby, but demographically diverse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Captive market ▸ Workers can only shop before or after work, or at lunch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ A “full-service” district ▸ Price competitive and chain-dominated segment ▸ May generate new housing demand (people want to live near work) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Create lunchtime gathering places ▸ Schedule promo activities at lunchtime ▸ Offer delivery service ▸ Develop upper-story apartments

ELDER-FRIENDLY + AGING-IN-PLACE	Recognizes that people have different needs as they advance in age and life stage. An Elder-Friendly strategy helps people continue living independently for as long as possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Elders... but, ▸ More active than previous generations of retirees ▸ Greater proportion of single-person and multi-generation households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ More than other strategies, must be particularly attentive to the physical environment – e.g., traffic safety, seating, amenities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Seniors spend more money on experiences (less on things) ▸ Empty-nesters and down-sizers ▸ Buy stuff for grandchildren 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Improve sidewalk lighting ▸ Grants to make stores accessible ▸ Set up walking/exercise groups in district ▸ Offer home delivery
ETHNIC SPECIALTIES	Pursues a cluster of retail and retail-service, entertainment, industrial, and wholesaling businesses that primarily serve the needs of a particular ethnic or cultural group, but may be patronized by any shopper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Members of a specific ethnic or cultural community ▸ Others seeking out authentic cultural foods, products, or experiences ▸ More than other strategies, the customer defines the district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Ethnic economies can be fairly self-contained and even insular ▸ Business mix can be very wide-ranging – manufacturing to galleries to restaurants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Creates a regional destination ▸ Highly differentiated (does not typically compete with malls, chains) ▸ But: May not be embraced by whole community, if diverse ethnicities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Install bilingual signs ▸ Partner with local social service agencies ▸ Organize a “Street Fare” of local, ethnic foods ▸ Establish a commercial kitchen to grow culinary businesses
FAMILY-FRIENDLY, FAMILY-SERVING	Focuses on local families; characterized by family-friendly events and businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Families, particularly with babies and young children at home ▸ Grandparents ▸ Teens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ A daytime strategy ▸ Most active on weekends ▸ Appropriate for communities with young demographic, growing families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Offers products and entertainment locally ▸ Helps engender positive downtown experiences for young people ▸ But: Not compatible with strategies dependent on bars and nightlife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Add kid-scale street furniture in public spaces ▸ Offer internships to high school students ▸ Show family films outdoors on weekends ▸ Expand business mix with gifts and toys
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FOOD	Establishes the commercial district as a food hub, including farmers’ markets, food production, catering, restaurants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ People who live or work in the district ▸ People looking for a social experience ▸ Business to business sales of food production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Works well with historic, interesting spaces ▸ Can complement arts or entertainment businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ District becomes a food destination ▸ Presence of restaurants often attracts new office-based businesses ▸ But: High startup costs for food businesses; high failure rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Develop a public orchard in a pocket park ▸ Partner with closest culinary school ▸ Establish a deferred repayment loan program for restaurants

GREEN PRODUCTS + SERVICES	Pursues environmentally-friendly economy for the commercial district; supports businesses concerned with recycling and upcycling, and service businesses that use sustainable practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Tend to be younger, highly educated, values-driven ▸ Young families ▸ Idealistic and aging “Boomers” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Green practices become part of district’s identity ▸ Renewable energy, zero-waste practices, public transit, historic preservation, local sourcing all play a role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ A forward-looking strategy that leverages the benefits of traditional business districts ▸ But: Typically associated with higher price points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Install bike lanes ▸ Install rain gardens ▸ Hold zero-waste special events ▸ Help businesses to purchase energy from renewable sources
HEALTH + WELLNESS	Pulls together retail, recreational, educational, and professional businesses (including social service orgs) and organizes them around improving people's wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Families to seniors ▸ Tend to be more highly educated ▸ Tend to be more affluent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Can work equally in a spa/vacation community or convenience-based district ▸ Often relies on marketing to make the strategy visible to public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Many businesses can participate (even those not explicitly health-related) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Mark walking and running trails in district ▸ Identify healthy options on restaurant menus ▸ Work with local gym or trainer to offer outdoor “boot camps” downtown
HOME FURNISHINGS	Clusters retail, service, and professional businesses related to the home and home life, including, furniture and housewares, floors and finishes, garden and outdoors, design and construction services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Younger (people still at a stage when acquiring the things they need) ▸ Homeowners (esp. for appliances, renovations, etc.) ▸ Renters (smaller furniture, furnishings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Strategy can exist at any price point, from used to vintage to new, designer ▸ A regional destination strategy: district is known as home furnishings source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Works well in historic setting, buildings ▸ Works well for larger spaces ▸ Still a bricks-and-mortar retail purchase ▸ But: Not a daily consumer need for locals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Paint some old wooden chairs and place them around district ▸ Stage living window displays ▸ Turn a café into a furniture store (or vice versa)
KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY	Primarily focuses on software and technology, but also includes workers in creative professions and the traditional professions (e.g., lawyers, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Typically younger ▸ Highly educated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Requires excellent broadband service ▸ Workers keep long/odd hours, making the district more vibrant at night 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Attracts young, creative entrepreneurs ▸ Can be a way for rural communities to grow jobs and population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Establish a co-working space ▸ Make wifi available in all businesses

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MANUFACTURING	Focuses on small-scale manufacturing compatible with commercial districts, appropriate for upper-floor spaces, warehouses, and other secondary or peripheral spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Sales to other businesses ▸ Direct-to-consumer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Can be associated with a local agricultural product, specialty, or ethnicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Can be a good secondary strategy, especially to make use of difficult spaces ▸ Employees of manufacturing businesses become customers of the district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Activate windows by bringing production to front of stores ▸ Assist manufacturers with distribution and marketing ▸ Establish a “maker space” for entrepreneurs
MILITARY INSTALLATIONS	Appropriate for communities with a military installation nearby; makes better economic and social connections between installation and downtown.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Military personnel ▸ Military spouses and families ▸ Civilian staff ▸ Military contractors, vendors ▸ Military heritage visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ In the new military, which is very career-oriented and family-centered, quality of life and community are important ▸ But: May find strategy competes with on-post restaurants, retail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Provides shopping and social alternatives for military families, whether living on-post and off-post ▸ Fosters stronger links to local economic driver ▸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Install American flags throughout downtown ▸ Create driving tour guid to military historical sites ▸ Establish liaison to post ▸ Host military appreciation event ▸ Promote downtown residential options to military singles, families
MILLENNIALS	Addresses the demographic slice born between the early 1980s and early 2000s. The authenticity and “retro” nature of traditional business districts appeals to this generation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Younger ▸ Educated ▸ Entrepreneurial ▸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Reaching milestones later than previous gen’s (e.g., purchase a car, own a home, marry, have kids) ▸ Interested in experiential retail, authenticity, and local sourcing ▸ Digitally connected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Demographic aligns well with traditional business districts, esp. for entertainment, independent businesses ▸ Trendsetting demographic attracts “piggybackers” to district – older followers ▸ But: Millennials are accustomed to buying many things online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Install native plant landscaping ▸ Encourage Millennial-appropriate design sensibility in signs ▸ Recruit Millennials to Main Street board ▸ Connect businesses through social media ▸ Establish a co-working space
SPORTS + RECREATION	Connects outdoor activities – camping, boating, hiking, climbing, hunting, etc. – with supporting businesses and amenities. This includes outfitters and equipment sales, restaurants and food services, accommodations, and others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Outdoor enthusiasts ▸ Varied spectrum of ages and abilities, and travel lifestyle preferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ While frequently associated with youth, many outdoor enthusiasts are seniors traveling without families or children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Connects the downtown to those who use nearby outdoor or recreational attractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Install wayfinding signs from nearby trails or paths to downtown ▸ Install a climbing wall (or ice-climbing wall) downtown ▸ Work with sporting equipment businesses to offer guided tours

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TOURISTS + TOURISM	Addresses people who visit the district from elsewhere, usually to experience something unique to the place, such as history or architecture, arts and culture, or shopping	Vast and varied customer profiles, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Heritage travelers ▸ Cultural tourists ▸ Weekend/second home-owners ▸ Resort-goers ▸ Conventioneers ▸ Business travelers ▸ Outdoors enthusiasts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Tourism and tourism-related amenities exist at all price points ▸ Needs of regional tourists are different from national or international visitors ▸ Create a place that locals love, and visitors will love it, too 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Brings outside consumer spending; adds to local buying power ▸ But: Locals may not be happy about outsiders making it feel “less local” ▸ Increased tourism can result in higher prices (food, housing) for locals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Install way-finding signs geared toward those unfamiliar with district ▸ Convene regional tourism professionals to share data ▸ Set up large-format maps in stores and have customers mark where they live