

A MAIN STREET & LOCAL COMMUNITY GUIDE TO BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION



Prepared for the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center
by Greenberg Development Services



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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

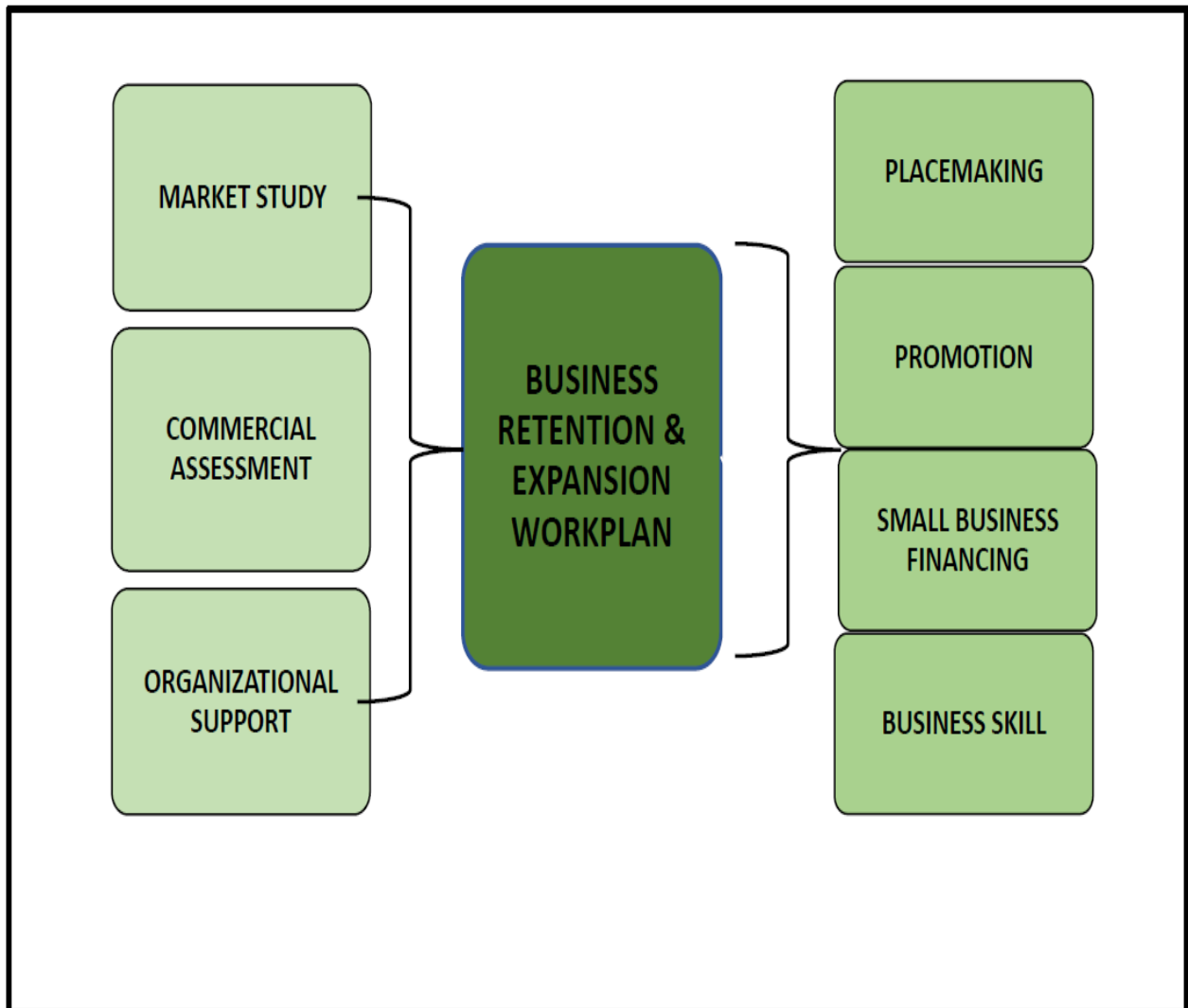
In an effort to build local capacity, the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center (MS&RP) contracted with Greenberg Development Services in 2022 to develop “A Main Street & Local Community Guide to Business Retention & Expansion”. The NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center, part of the Rural Division of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, works in regions, counties, cities, towns, downtown districts and in designated North Carolina Main Street communities, to inspire placemaking through building asset-based economic development strategies that achieve measurable results such as investment, business growth and jobs. This guide is intended to help local governments, economic development professionals and Main Street organizations implement a business retention and expansion program that can will help build healthier business district that generates new jobs and sales tax revenue for the local community. While this guide focuses on strategies to strengthen downtown businesses, these strategies also can be used to strengthen locally-owned businesses outside the downtown area.

OVERVIEW

A healthy downtown is a benefit to everyone in the community. Not only does a healthy business district provide important tax revenue that can lessen the burden on local citizens, but it also is an important tool for attracting new employers to the area. Many of today’s increasingly mobile workforce prefer to live in close proximity to vibrant, walkable downtown districts that have a variety of specialty retailers, restaurants and personal service uses. A local government or downtown organization can build a more vibrant business district through a comprehensive Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E) workplan that focuses on the following areas of focus:

- ✚ **Placemaking** activities that strengthen the connection between downtown businesses and the community by improving downtown property, infrastructure and public spaces and through small beautification or vibrancy projects that improve downtown’s curb appeal. Placemaking activities also include image events or marketing activities that focus on changing public perception about the downtown.
- ✚ **Promotion** activities that increase foot traffic and generate sales for local businesses. Downtown promotions typically include district-wide events that promote all businesses and targeted promotions that promote specific business clusters or focus on key demographic or lifestyle segments.

- ✚ **Small Business Financing** activities that connect businesses to available loan or grant programs including programs that target businesses unable to secure traditional financing and renovation loans that can improve rental space.
- ✚ **Business Skill** activities that help to strengthen businesses by providing workshops and training programs that will sharpen businesses' competitive edge.



GETTING STARTED

Before preparing a BR&E workplan, it is important to first conduct a market study and a commercial assessment to better understand market trends and opportunities and downtown's ability to support new business activity. It also is important to clarify stakeholder roles and responsibilities to ensure that workplan activities can be implemented in a timely fashion. (See **Appendix** for information on how to conduct a market study or commercial assessment).

MARKET STUDY

A downtown market study can help clarify or validate assumptions about a community as well as identify new business or expansion opportunities. In addition to summarizing market trends, a market study also can help businesses identify new customer segments or opportunities to expand inventory lines. A typical market study includes the following elements:

- ✚ **Trade Area Map** that identifies where existing or potential customers live in relationship to downtown. Trade area boundaries are typically expressed in terms of residents' distance from downtown either by miles or travel time.
- ✚ **Market Profile** that summarizes demographic, socio-economic and lifestyle characteristics within the defined trade area that can be used to improve promotions or marketing efforts.
- ✚ **Retail Sales Analysis** that clarifies trends and opportunities for new businesses.

COMMERCIAL ASSESSMENT

A local government or downtown organization can evaluate downtown's ability to support business activity through a commercial assessment. In addition to information regarding downtown's strengths or weaknesses, a commercial assessment also can help identify workplan activities. A typical commercial assessment includes the following elements:

- ✚ **Physical Assessment** that evaluates downtown's infrastructure, public spaces, environmental, social and regulatory conditions.
- ✚ **Real Estate Assessment** that evaluates downtown's real estate in terms of ownership, rent, location and general condition.
- ✚ **Business Mix Assessment** that evaluates downtown's businesses in terms of use, function, location and overall viability or competitiveness.

Downtown Kinston Needs Assessment

List the needs you feel are important for the success of your business, ranked in order of importance:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Please return to: Pride of Kinston, 327 North Queen Street, Kinston, North Carolina 28501
This assessment form is available on Pride's website: www.downtownkinston.com
(If you need additional space, please feel free to add additional sheets to this paper.)

OPTIONAL:
(name of individual completing survey) (business name & address) (phone & email address)

For your information, a number of North Carolina Main Street programs have recently surveyed their business communities, and listed below is a sample of issues and ideas which were articulated by some of your colleagues around the State. Some were business specific. Others were community suggestions.

1. Availability of capital	7. Staff training
2. Entrepreneurship training	8. Exterior improvements
3. Store/business marketing/advertising	9. Customers
4. Joint/business marketing and advertising	10. Business plan
5. Website development	11. Loan pool
6. Retail diversity	12. Better parking

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

In addition to conducting a market study and commercial assessment, a local government or downtown organization should clarify roles and responsibilities for implementing Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) workplan activities. While many North Carolina communities have established non-profit organizations to oversee their downtown revitalization programs, few organizations have the funding or volunteer support to coordinate a comprehensive BR&E program on their own. While organizational capacity and stakeholder support varies among communities, implementing a successful BR&E workplan typically requires the active involvement and support from the following stakeholder groups:

- ✦ **Downtown Organization** responsible for overseeing the commercial revitalization process. (See the **Appendix** for additional information on establishing a downtown revitalization program).
 - Communities without a downtown organization could implement a BR&E program through their Chamber of Commerce or through an advisory group appointed by the local government.
- ✦ **Economic Vitality (EV) Committee** responsible for implementing a BR&E workplan as part of its overall responsibilities to spur economic activity in the downtown.
 - See MS&RC's [EV Committee Roles and Responsibilities](#) for additional information.
 - The EV Committee may want to establish a subcommittee or taskforce to focus on BRE workplan activities.
- ✦ **Other Committees or Stakeholders** that could be help to implement a BRE workplan include the downtown organization's Promotion or Design Committee and local and regional small business support organizations.
 - See MS&RC's [Promotion Committee Roles and Responsibilities](#) for additional information.
 - See MS&RC's [Design Committee's Role and Responsibilities](#) for information.
 - Regional or state partners could include NC Dept. of Commerce, NC Council of Governments or the Small Business Development Center. (See the **Appendix** for a list of state and federal resources).

WORKPLAN ACTIVITIES

While rural communities have long understood the importance of having strong, locally-owned businesses, such businesses often struggle to keep up with changes in technology, financing or changing shopping preferences and behavior. While specific activities may vary depending upon a downtown's market and business mix, a typical BR&E workplan includes placemaking, promotion, small business financing and business skill activities that together will create an environment that supports small business activity.

PLACEMAKING ACTIVITIES

While most traditional BR&E programs focus on promotional, financial or technical assistance, a new approach that recognizes the role that quality of place has in influencing entrepreneurs'

location decisions is gaining greater recognition within the economic development community. While demonstrated market demand, site visibility, foot traffic and occupancy costs remain important considerations, businesses also want to locate in areas that are attractive, walkable and have a strong positive image within the region. Several [recent surveys](#) conducted by [Main Street America](#) found that quality of place was an important consideration for both entrepreneurs looking for brick-and-mortar locations and customers looking to spend time in attractive, walkable areas. Placemaking activities that can help strengthen downtown businesses include:

- + **Building Improvements** that increase sales productivity by improving site visibility or curb appeal or by improvements to storefront interiors that can increase sales productivity.
- + **Public Improvements** that strengthen business activity by enhancing downtown’s functionality through public infrastructure or streetscape improvements.
- + **Image Improvements** that improve downtown’s investment climate by creating greater civic pride in the downtown.

Building Improvements

Selecting a site location is often the most important decision a business will make, and it can have a significant impact on profitability and long-term success. While rent is an important consideration, other factors that can impact a business’s bottom line include the curb appeal and building conditions. While site criteria will vary depending on the type of business, the EV Committee can strengthen a downtown business by encouraging the property owner to make building improvements that will enhance curb appeal or increase sales productivity.

- + **Façade Improvements** can increase sales by creating a stronger first impression.
 - o Studies from the [National Federation of Independent Businesses](#) and [Main Street America](#) have found that over 50% of all shoppers based their first impression and decision to stop on the store’s exterior appearance.
 - o According to Main Street America, a facade improvement project can increase a retail store’s gross sales by between 10-15%.



- + **Interior Improvements** can increase sales productivity by creating a more inviting sales space that will improve the customer’s experience.
 - o Common upfit improvements include improvements to flooring, lighting, windows, display fixtures or point of purchase displays.
 - o Other interior improvements that can generate new sales include the establishment of a “power wall” that is used to showcase key merchandise and a “decompression area” that can help customers transition to a stronger shopping mindset.

Public Improvements

Not only does downtown’s physical appearance affect how people perceive a business and influence whether they decide to shop or invest, but on-going improvements in public infrastructure can help build a more attractive environment for entrepreneurs. While public improvements are typically the responsibility of local government, a downtown organization can provide important input about desired elements and build public support for projects. In addition to infrastructure improvements, downtown’s physical appearance can be enhanced through small

beautification projects that create greater vibrancy or social interaction and through revisions to government regulations that can strengthen property maintenance. A downtown public improvement plan typically includes the following elements:

✚ **Streetscape Plan** that provides a roadmap for improving downtown’s functionality through physical improvements to downtown streets, sidewalks, and utilities as well as changes to current regulations or codes that would strengthen building conditions. Typical elements included in a streetscape plan include:

- Transportation improvements including circulation, walkability, parking inventory and management and ADA compliance-related improvements.
- Utility improvements including stronger cellular coverage and Wi-Fi or broadband service as well as improvements to water, sewer and electrical infrastructure that today’s businesses need to have to compete.
- Landscaping improvements including new wayfinding signage, benches, banners, trash receptacles, lights, outdoor seating, restrooms, street trees and landscaping as well as opportunities to improve visitor amenities and gathering places.



✚ **Vibrancy Projects** are small-scale, inexpensive improvements that improve downtown’s curb appeal or help to increase social interaction.

- Examples of vibrancy projects that improve curb appeal include parklets, public art installations, flower baskets, customized bicycle racks or benches and street murals.
- Examples of vibrancy projects that increase social interaction include outdoor dining areas, live music, Instagram photo spots, food trucks, lawn games, etc.



✚ **Local Ordinances** can strengthen business activity requiring property owners to make on-going building improvements.

Image Campaigns

While building and streetscape improvements can strengthen downtown businesses, the downtown organization also can change public perception about the downtown through an image campaign that includes community events and marketing activities that build civic pride in the downtown. An image campaign is typically coordinated by a downtown organization’s Promotion Committee or a Chamber of Commerce and should be authentic and align with the community’s vision for downtown.

✚ **Community Events** are an easy way to strengthen downtown’s reputation within the region. Image events differ from retail promotions in that their focus is on changing perceptions rather than increasing sales during the event. Image events can include:

- Holiday-centric events that can attract both local and out-of-town visitors.
- Heritage events that highlight the community’s industry, agriculture, history or architecture.
- Tourism events that are often done in partnership with other organizations and focus on increasing hotel occupancy.
- Themed events that promote a fun, quirky side of the community.

✚ **Marketing Campaigns** can strengthen downtown’s image through media stories that highlight downtown businesses or recent projects and through products that visually communicate downtown’s story.

- The advertising campaign should include downtown’s logo and tagline
- The campaign can include a variety of products or mediums including social media, flyers, signage, banners, t-shirts, coffee mugs and Christmas ornaments.



Recommendations

✚ **Building Improvements**

- Façade or interior upfit programs should be reviewed annually to improve effectiveness.
- Building improvements can be made by property owners as part of their rental agreement or through improvement programs administered by a local government or downtown organization.

✚ **Public Improvements**

- A vacant storefront program can help improve downtown’s curb appeal by screening vacancies from the public eye.
- Funding for small beautification or vibrancy projects can come from a variety of sources including community foundations, local arts councils, garden clubs or civic organizations as well as from residents through crowdfunding campaigns.
- Before adopting new regulations, it is important to review existing codes and regulations to be sure they are being enforced.

✚ **Image Campaigns**

- Downtown image events should be reviewed annually to be sure that they are helping to change misperceptions about downtown or helping to build a more positive image.
- A graphic designer can help develop a downtown logo that better aligns with the organization’s vision.
- It is important that holiday events be inclusive in terms of religion, ethnicity and racial composition.



PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

Unlike image campaigns that are used to change public perception, downtown promotions are used to generate additional revenue for businesses by increasing foot traffic and in-store sales. While

businesses are responsible for in-store promotions, district-wide or group promotions are usually coordinated by a downtown Promotion Committee, a Chamber of Commerce or a merchant association. While promotions may vary depending on downtown’s business mix and volunteer capacity, activities should support identified economic development goals and objectives and reinforce downtown’s positive image campaign. A downtown promotion workplan should include:

- ✦ **District Promotions** that promote all downtown businesses.
- ✦ **Group Promotions** that promote specific business sectors or target a specific demographic or lifestyle segments.

District Promotions

Rather than focusing on specific businesses, district promotions promote all businesses through a variety of mediums. Common downtown district promotions include:

- ✦ **Shop Local** promotions that promote the benefits of supporting local businesses through educational flyers and special events.
 - Shop Local campaigns can be year-long efforts or one day events such as the *Small Business Saturday* event held in November.
- ✦ **A Business Directory** is an inexpensive way to promote downtown’s goods and services.
 - The directory can be posted on a local government or downtown organization’s website.
- ✦ **Gift Cards or Dollar Programs** can promote businesses and encourage repeat customers.
 - Gift cards or dollars are typically purchased through the downtown organization and redeemed at participating businesses.
 - Major employers often purchase and distribute cards to their employees during the holiday season.



Group Promotions

Group promotions can generate sales for downtown businesses by targeting key demographic or lifestyle segments or by promoting business niches.

- ✦ **Market Niche Promotions** target specific customer segments through customized events or promotions.
 - “Early bird special” or senior discounts can be used to increase sales to retirees.
 - Family-friendly events or discounts can be used to increase sales to families.
 - Employee discounts or appreciation events could be used to increase sales to schoolteachers, government employees or military personnel.



✚ **Business Niche Promotions** promote specific business clusters through specialized events or promotions.

- A furniture/home accessory cluster could be promoted through design workshops or by sending coupons from home improvement businesses to new residents.
- A dining and beverages cluster could be promoted through a “Taste of Downtown” event or pub crawl.
- A personal care cluster could be promoted through a “Health and Wellness” workshop or a Mother’s Day “Pamper Yourself” event.
- An automotive-related cluster could be promoted through a classic or new car show held downtown.



Recommendations

✚ **District Promotions**

- Promotions should be reviewed annually to be sure that they meet economic development objectives and increase foot traffic or sales for participating businesses.
- Businesses should be encouraged to tie into group promotions through in-store activities or sales.
- The downtown organization can purchase a downtown mobile app to send visitors information about downtown businesses by category.



✚ **Targeted Promotions**

- A market study can help to identify demographic or lifestyle segments that can be targeted through focused promotions.
- Businesses selling similar or complementary products should be encouraged to work together to promote their business cluster.

SMALL BUSINESS FINANCING ACTIVITIES

While small businesses often use credit cards or self-funding from savings or equity lines of credit to start or expand their businesses, they can have troubles qualifying for conventional loans due to issues with credit or work history. A local government or downtown organization can encourage business expansion by providing businesses with information about available financing programs, encouraging property owners to make building improvements and by developing new tools to encourage new businesses to locate downtown. (See MS&RC [Funding Resource Guide](#) for funding resources). While financial assistance programs can vary depending on businesses’ financing needs, downtown small business financing programs typical provide assistance in the following areas:

✚ **Financing Data Base** that can help connect downtown businesses with available loan programs.

- ✦ **Renovation Tools** that can encourage property owners to make building improvements that will improve rental space.
- ✦ **New Business Incentives** that can support entrepreneurs that want to open their businesses in the downtown.

Financing Data Base

The EV Committee should work with local government and small business resource organizations to identify small business financing options including programs that provide assistance to small businesses that do not qualify for conventional business loans. This information should be uploaded to a local government or downtown organization's website and distributed to downtown businesses. (Please see the Appendix for list of sample financial resources). While financing programs are constantly changing, information about the following programs should be included in downtown's data base:

- ✦ **US Small Business Administration (SBA)** has several loan programs that can make it easier for a small business to secure financing by reducing lender risk. Several SBA loan programs focus on providing financing for minorities, women or veterans that often have greater difficulty securing conventional financing due to work history, credit or cashflow issues.
 - The **SBA 7(a)** program provides funding for inventory or equipment and is SBA's most popular program.
 - The **SBA 504** program can be used to purchase real estate with loan amounts tied to job creation.
 - The **SBA Microloan** program is specifically targeted to small, start-up businesses with priority given to minority, women and veteran owned businesses.
- ✦ **US Department of Agriculture (USDA)** has several loan programs that serve small businesses located in rural communities.
 - **USDA- Rural Business Development** program provides technical assistance and training for small rural businesses.
 - **USDA-Rural Development Energy** Program provides assistance to agricultural producers and rural small businesses for renewable energy systems and energy efficiency improvements.
- ✦ **Non-Profit Organizations** that provide small business counseling or financial support include:
 - **Community Development Corporations (CDC)** can provide loans or grants to small businesses that are located in economically distressed areas.
 - **NC Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)** can provide loan guarantees to businesses that do not meet traditional lending criteria.
 - **The NC Rural Center** has a variety of loan and grant programs for small businesses.

Renovation Tools

In addition to providing information about small business loans, local government or a downtown organization also should work with property owners to make building improvements that will translate into greater sales activity. Renovation tools that can strengthen small businesses include:

- ✦ **Façade Programs** that focus on exterior improvements that increase foot traffic and visibility
 - Façade grant programs typically help fund improvements to exterior windows, signage,

awnings, doors or brickwork.

- Grant programs typically require a 50:50 match.
- ✚ **Interior Improvement Programs** that focus on interior upfits that will increase sales productivity.
 - Grant programs often require a 50:50 match.
 - Grants can be used to defray the cost of improvements to interior lighting, flooring, painting or windows or merchandise displays.
- ✚ **Tax Credit Programs** that can offset the cost of building renovations.
 - Property owners located in a [National Register Historic Districts](#) may be eligible for [state or federal historic tax credits](#) for qualifying building renovations.
 - Businesses or property owners located in a NC [Opportunity Zone](#) may be eligible for capital gains tax deferrals or write offs.

New Business Incentives

A local government or downtown organization could encourage new businesses to locate downtown by adopting incentives that help defray costs or provide other assistance that can help new businesses during the early months of operation. Examples of new business incentives include:

- ✚ **New Business Grant Program** that provides funding to cover rent or other costs associated with opening a new business.
- ✚ **Business Plan Competitions** that provide funding or other in-kind support to a new business.
 - Individuals typically pitch their ideas to a panel of judges with the winner receiving a cash prize, discounted rent or in-kind assistance such as mentoring, publicity or membership to the downtown organization or Chamber of Commerce.
 - Business competitions are often paired with business training programs to improve the quality of applications.
- ✚ **Crowdfunding** can provide local funding for a new business or help an existing business to expand.
 - Participants typically receive discounts or free products in exchange for their contribution.
 - There are a number of crowdfunding platforms with varying fees and criteria that can be used to launch a campaign.
- ✚ **Other Assistance** that be used to encourage new business activity downtown include opportunities for networking, mentoring or publicity.
 - “Grand Openings” can increase publicity about new business.
 - Mentoring programs that pair experienced businesses with new businesses can provide important support that can help businesses during the early years of operation.
 - The EV Committee could prepare a guidebook for opening a downtown business that would include useful information about permits, fees or other requirements



Recommendations

- ✚ **Financing Data Base**
 - The data base should be updated regularly to provide information about new programs or changes to existing programs.

- The downtown organization should work with local government and regional business support agencies to hold small business financing workshops at a downtown location to increase participation.

+ Renovation Tools

- See NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center’s “[A Downtown Director’s Guide to Working with Redevelopment Projects](#)”.

+ New Business Incentives

- New business grant programs should be paired with required educational training programs to improve business skills and success rates.
- Property owners should be encouraged to provide tenant upfit incentives that can be incorporated into the lease agreement.

BUSINESS SKILL ACTIVITIES

Small businesses, particularly businesses just starting out, often need additional support to help them compete in today’s challenging marketplace. In addition to connecting businesses to available financial resources, a local government or downtown organization can strengthen business activity by supplementing available training programs with customized technical assistance that can help to sharpen their competitive edge. Before offering new workshops or training programs, it is important to survey downtown businesses to identify specific issues. This information is typically gathered as part of a Commercial Assessment that identifies business issues relating to location, financing and business skills. (See the Appendix for information regarding how to conduct a Commercial Assessment). While educational workshops or training needs will vary depending on downtown’s business mix, local government or a downtown organization can strengthen business skills by focusing on assistance in the following four areas:

- + Business Planning** assistance including the preparation or updating of business plans.
- + E-Commerce** assistance to help businesses increase sales through a stronger on-line presence.
- + Customer Service** assistance including workshops or training programs to help downtown businesses improve workforce retention, adopt new store hours or add delivery or other customer service options that will help increase customer satisfaction.
- + Entrepreneurial** assistance including mentoring and technical support that can nurture start-up operations.

Business Planning Assistance

Every business should have a [business plan](#) to guide future growth or evaluate business performance. In addition to clarifying market support, a business plan should delineate an organizational structure and identify benchmarks or metrics that can be used to evaluate financial health. A business plan also should include a strategy for selling or liquidating the business at some future point. The EV Committee can encourage downtown businesses to prepare or update their business plans and partner with regional small business organizations such as NC [Small Business Centers](#) or SBA’s [Small Business Development Centers](#) to provide workshops or training on how to prepare a business plan or start a business. Key business plan elements that the EV Committee should focus on include:

- ✦ **Financial Planning** that can help businesses compare profitability, performance and occupancy costs to industry standards or business plan objectives. (See MS&RP [Retail Self-Assessment Tech Sheet](#) for a review of common financial metrics).
 - Profitability metrics can include return on investment (ROI) and net profit margin can help a business evaluate overall profitability.
 - Productivity metrics can include lead generation or employee productivity can help measure the ratio of work generated to the resources used.
 - Space efficiency metric (total retail sales divided by total square footage) can help a business determine how efficiently they are utilizing available sales space.
 - Occupancy ratios (annual rent divided by annual gross sales) can help a business determine whether the amount of rent they are paying aligns with industry norms. If a business's occupancy ratio is higher than industry norms, the business may need to consider relocating or discuss restructuring options with the landlord.
- ✦ **Succession Planning** that can help businesses determine the best way to transfer ownership in the event of their death, illness or retirement.
 - Before selling a business, a business will need to determine a sales price and develop a plan for marketing the business.
 - In addition to connecting a business with a broker who can assist with the sale, the EV Committee may be able to identify a local resident interested in continuing the business.

E-Commerce Assistance

While E-Commerce activity is increasing, many small businesses need help improving their digital marketing strategy. The EV Committee can help downtown businesses improve their on-line business skills through the following activities:

- ✦ **Omni-marketing** assistance to help downtown businesses develop a multi-channel method for reaching customers that will increase sales and lessen their dependence foot traffic.
 - The EV Committee should work with small business resource organizations to provide information regarding various social media platforms including new platforms such as TikTok and Snapshot Spotlight.
 - The EV Committee should work with small business resource organizations to help interested businesses add E-Commerce platforms to their existing website.
- ✦ **Financial Programs** that could help defray the cost of adding on-line sales capacity.
 - American Express's [Inclusive Backing](#) grant program provides funding for E-commerce improvements.
 - [The Heartbeat of Main Street](#) grant program sponsored by Main Street America in partnership with The Hartford can be used to fund E-Commerce improvements.

Customer Service Assistance

Good customer service can help a small business retain customers and increase word of mouth referrals. Good customer service involves meeting customers' expectations in a pleasant, efficient and timely manner. In addition to providing quality products in an attractive environment, businesses should have convenient hours, knowledgeable staff and provide the type of services that customers have come to expect. The EV Committee can help downtown businesses improve their customer service policies and practices by focusing on the following key areas:

- ✦ **Store Hours** will vary depending on type of business but should align with customer’s preferences as different people shop at different times of the day.
 - Businesses should be encouraged to conduct surveys to analyze their foot traffic in an around their business to determine peak hours.
 - Businesses should be encouraged to conduct sales/hour surveys to identify peak buying times as foot traffic doesn’t always correlate with actual sales.
 - Businesses should determine their operating costs per hour (total expenses/total # hours open) to determine how much it would cost to add additional store hours.

- ✦ **Workforce Retention and Training**

- While small businesses may not be able to match employee benefits provided by larger companies, they should be encouraged to offer other employee benefits that will help them to retain or attract employees including employee discounts, flexible hours and opportunities to advance or acquire ownership interest.
- Small businesses also could work with others to develop shared-employee programs to increase hours and benefits of part-time employees.

- ✦ **New Services**

- Downtown businesses should consider continuing curbside pick-up and delivery options offered during the pandemic.
- Other customer services added during the pandemic that should be reviewed include outdoor dining, contactless payment and valet parking.



Entrepreneurial Assistance

Many communities are encouraging new business growth through a stronger support system that encourages and supports new businesses. Sometimes referred to as “entrepreneurial ecosystems,” these strategies attempt to build business activity from within by building an environment that supports entrepreneurs. The EV Committee can help to foster entrepreneurial activity downtown through the following activities:

- ✦ **Business Competitions** to encourage entrepreneurs to open businesses in the downtown. The business with the most promising business plan typically receives grant funding and technical
 - In-kind assistance can include mentoring assistance, website development, advertising or publicity.
 - Business competitions are often paired with business training programs to strengthen participants’ business plans.
- ✦ **Networking and Mentoring** activities that support new businesses during their early years.
 - The EV Committee should coordinate networking events for new downtown businesses.
 - The EV Committee also could establish a mentoring program that pairs experienced businesses with new businesses.
- ✦ **Incubator Program** that provides inexpensive space for start-up businesses to test ideas or collaborate.
 - Traditional incubator programs are done in partnership with local government, higher education or regional economic development organizations. (see [NC Small Business Incubator Guide](#) for more information about downtown incubator programs.

- Examples of non-traditional incubator programs include local farmers' markets, pop-up stores or co-share office buildings that provide small, flexible space for vendors or small businesses looking to test the market before leasing a permanent location.

Recommendations

+ Business Planning Assistance

- Businesses should be encouraged to update their plans to reflect “lessons learned” from the pandemic.
- Businesses with above average occupancy ratios may need to consider relocating to a smaller space or finding a co-tenant to share costs.

+ Customer Service Assistance

- The EV Committee should conduct a peak hour's survey to help businesses understand foot traffic trends.
- The EV Committee should work with businesses to incorporate beacon technology or QR codes in their window displays to capture sales when they are not open for business.

+ Entrepreneurial Support Assistance

- The EV Committee should interview downtown entrepreneurs to better understand the technical assistance needs.
- In addition to providing on-going workshops or support, the EV Committee can promote entrepreneurial activity through annual awards and monthly recognition programs.



APPENDIX

RESOURCES

1. BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION PREREQUISITES

A. Market study resources

- [ESRI Business Analyst Online](#)
- [Claritas Online Reports](#)
- [Placer.AI](#)
- [U.S. Census Reports](#)
- [BLS Consumer Expenditure Survey](#)
- [North Carolina Demographic Reports](#)
- [NC Dept. of Revenue Retail Sales Reports](#)
- MS&RP [Market Data Basics Handout](#)
- MS&RC [How to Conduct a Retail Market Analysis Handout](#)
- Main Street America [Market Analysis for Community Transformation](#)
- UofWI-Madison [Downtown Market Analysis Website](#)

B. Commercial Assessment

- [Downtown Diva Property Data Base](#)
- [Maestro Community Manager Property Data Base](#)
- [SCORE](#)
- [NAICS Business Classification System](#)
- [U.S. Census Business Builder Business Reports](#)
- MS&RP [Downtown Property Inventory](#)
- UWI-Madison [Business Survey Sample](#)

C. Organization

- MS&RP [Economic Vitality Roles and Responsibilities Handout](#)
- MS&RP [Organization handouts](#)
- WA Main Street [Downtown Revitalization Handbook](#)

2. BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION WORKPLAN ACTIVITIES

A. Placemaking

- NEA- [How to do Creative Placemaking](#)
- MSA [Design Handbook](#)
- [Creative Placemaking Resource Guide](#)
- [Build a Better Block](#)
- [Project for Public Spaces](#)
- MS&RP [Design Resources](#)

B. Promotions

- MS&RP [Promotion Resources](#)

C. Financing Programs

- [Small Business Administration Loan Programs](#)
- [SBA Lender Match Tool](#)
- [US Dept. of Agriculture Loan Programs](#)
- [US Economic Development Administration](#)
- [NC Department of Commerce](#)
- [NC Small Business and Technology Development Center](#)
- [Appalachian Regional Commission](#)
- [NC Community Development Financial Institutions \(CDFIs\)](#)
- [The NC Rural Center](#)
- [Golden Leaf Foundation](#)
- [Establishing a CDC handout](#)
- [Carolina Small Business Development Fund](#)
- MS&RP [Funding Resource Guide](#)
- MS&RP [A Downtown Directors Guide to Working with Development Projects](#)

D. Business Skills

- SBA [Small Business Resources](#)
- SBA [Succession Plan guidebook](#)
- MSA [Entrepreneurial Ecosystems](#)
- MSA [Entrepreneurial Audit](#)
- MS&RP [Economic Vitality resources](#)
- MS&RP [Small Business Resources](#)
- MS&RP [Retail Self-Assessment Handout](#)