

How to help Main Street rebound from the pandemic

Main Street is the heart of many small communities. Small businesses have long been the drivers of both local and national economies. The impact small businesses have on their communities may have been lost during the pandemic, when so many establishments were forced to close. The good news is that many small business owners were hopeful that the effects of COVID-19 would soon be a thing of the past. Data from Bank of America, Data for Good and JPMorgan Chase indicates that 59 percent of entrepreneurs expect the impact of COVID-19 to affect their bottom line for two years or less. That's encouraging, but in the meantime community leaders can take various steps to promote everything Main Street has to offer.

• **Create an inviting downtown atmosphere.** Main Street America® is a grassroots network of small towns, mid-sized communities and urban commercial districts that work together to make downtown areas the heart of local communities. Ed McMahon, the chair of the National Main Street Center Board of Directors, notes that a healthy downtown area is vital to having a healthy town. Towns that want to revitalize their downtowns should aspire to create an inviting, inclusive atmosphere that celebrates the character of the town, including its history. Main Street America® notes that people-centered, accessible public spaces can restore and revitalize downtowns, making them places locals and even non-locals want to visit.

• **Make it a partnership.** Business owners in community centers and downtown areas have a vested interest in revitalizing Main Street, but they can't go it alone. Local government

officials, chambers of commerce, private sector businesses, and civic organizations all have roles to play in making Main Street a place where people want to spend their time and money. Local leaders should make a concerted effort to hear every voice as they try to revitalize Main Street.

• **Emphasize safety.** COVID-19 changed how many people shop and dine, and those changes must be considered as Main Street is rebuilt. The Mayo Clinic notes that outdoor fresh air is constantly moving and dispersing the type of respiratory droplets that contain the COVID-19 virus. Because that air is constantly on the move, individuals are much less likely to get COVID-19 when spending time outdoors compared to indoors. Communities may be ready to get back to normal life, but it's important to do so safely. Many small towns closed Main Street and downtown areas to automobiles during peak shopping and dining hours, such as weekend evenings and afternoons, so local businesses could bring their offerings outside. Communities can keep such rules in place after the pandemic, as more outdoor seating at restaurants and less crowded walking areas proved wildly popular among consumers. In addition, communities must make a concerted effort to create and maintain a Main Street where residents and shoppers feel safe at all times of the day and night.

Communities can work together to ensure Main Street thrives as the world slowly emerges from the pandemic.



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