

BUILDING A CONSISTENTLY VIBRANT DOWNTOWN

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Most downtown areas in the northern California study area are active only during events and/or daytime hours. There is limited or no activity after 6-8 pm, Sundays or Mondays. There are few restaurants that open late, no or few central gathering places, and a lack of reasons to linger or return downtown when programs are not running.

Why it matters

This matters because a downtown area that goes dormant between activities and weekends will struggle to function as a vibrant economic center, causing residents and visitors to leave in search of opportunities outside of their community.

Step by Step Actions

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Strategy 1: Form a Downtown Activation Team

A Downtown Activation Team brings together key stakeholders to create a shared vision, coordinate resources, and drive initiatives that make downtown a vibrant destination for residents and visitors. By fostering collaboration among businesses, community organizations, property owners, local leaders, and regional development organizations, the team can implement targeted events, marketing efforts, and placemaking projects that increase foot traffic, support economic growth, and enhance the overall downtown experience.

- 1. Recruit Key Stakeholders** - Identify and invite representatives from: city government, Chamber of Commerce, downtown businesses, arts and culture organizations, community groups and volunteers, tourism agencies, and property owners.
- 2. Establish a Team Structure** - Assign leadership roles and responsibilities. Here are a few examples:
 - i. Chair/Coordinator: Oversees implementation
 - ii. Events Lead: Organizes programming and activities
 - iii. Business Outreach Lead: Engages merchants and recruits participation
 - iv. Marketing Lead: Promotes events and downtown activities
 - v. Design & Beautification Lead: Focuses on signage, public spaces, and placemaking
- 3. Develop a Shared Vision and Set 90-Day Goals** - Define what success looks like, Desired downtown atmosphere, Target audiences (residents, visitors, families, young professionals). Examples: Recruit 15 businesses for extended hours, launch one

recurring event, increase downtown foot traffic by 10%, or create a downtown social media campaign.

4. **Meet Regularly** - Hold monthly activation meetings. Review attendance, sales data, and feedback. Adjust strategies based on results.



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Strategy 2: Secure commitments from businesses

Securing commitments from downtown businesses is essential to creating a consistent and engaging visitor experience that encourages people to stay longer, shop more, and return frequently. By building a network of participating businesses, coordinating extended hours and promotions, and demonstrating measurable results, the community can generate increased foot traffic, strengthen local commerce, and establish downtown as a vibrant destination.

1. **Create a Business Participation Program** - Develop a simple commitment package:
 - Stay open until 7-9 p.m. one designated day each week
 - Participate in downtown promotions
 - Display event signage
2. **Conduct Personal Business Visits:** Activation team members should:
 - Visit each downtown business
 - Explain benefits of increased foot traffic
 - Address concerns about staffing and costs
 - Gather ideas from business owners
3. **Start with Early Adopters:** Recruit a core group of enthusiastic businesses first:
 - Aim for 10-15 participating businesses
 - Publicize their commitment to encourage others
4. **Establish a Consistent Weekly Event** - Examples: Thursday Night Downtown, Friday Night on Main Street, Saturday on the Square:
5. **Promote Participating Businesses** - Create:
 - Maps listing participating businesses
 - Social media spotlights
 - Window decals identifying "Downtown After Hours" partners
6. **Track Results** - Collect customer counts, sales data (if businesses are willing), visitor feedback, event attendance figures and use positive results to recruit additional businesses.

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Strategy 3: Business Integration

Business integration helps ensure that downtown events directly benefit existing businesses by intentionally connecting vendors, activities, and visitors to local storefronts. By creating partnerships, encouraging in-store experiences, and incentivizing exploration throughout downtown, this strategy increases customer engagement, boosts sales opportunities, and strengthens the overall economic impact of community events.

- 1. Redesign Event Vendor Rules** - Require that vendors partner with a downtown business, set up in front of an assigned storefront, and drive visitors toward permanent businesses.
- 2. Assign Vendors Strategically:** Match vendors with businesses that complement their products. Examples:
 - Food vendor near specialty retail
 - Artisan vendor near gift shop
 - Music performance near a restaurant patio
- 3. Create In-Store Experiences:** Encourage businesses to offer: Product demonstrations, tastings, pop-up exhibits, live art or music, make-and-take activities.
- 4. Develop Event Passports** - Create a visitor challenge:
 - Visit five participating businesses
 - Collect stamps
 - Enter a prize drawing.
- 5. Incentivize Purchases** - Examples could include event-night discounts, downtown gift card giveaways, spend-and-win promotions, and business-to-business coupons.
- 6. Measure Participation:** Track number of businesses participating, vendor-business partnerships, passport completions, sales increases, and repeat attendance.

Who to involve

Identify and invite representatives from: city government, Chamber of Commerce, downtown businesses, arts and culture organizations, community groups and volunteers, tourism agencies, and property owners.



Potential Timeline

Phase 1: Organize and Build Support – Form a Downtown Activation Team, meet with downtown businesses and discuss goals, recruit businesses to stay open one evening per week, select a recurring event night.

Phase 2: Launch and Activate – Launch marketing campaign, require vendors to partner with downtown businesses, organize in-store activities, hold first downtown after-hours event

Phase 3: Sustain and Expand – Continue monthly events and promotions, evaluate results and expand participation



Success Measures

- 10-15 businesses participating
- One recurring downtown event each month
- More businesses open after 6 p.m.
- Increased foot traffic and sales
- More residents and visitors spending time downtown after events

Costs

This strategy includes costs associated with marketing and branding efforts, business outreach and recruitment, signage and promotional materials, including banners and window decals, as well as entertainment and cultural activities designed to support project objectives.

Possible Funding Sources

Anchor Sponsorship: The presenting sponsor, providing core financial support to produce the event series.

Organizational Support: An entity that contributes funding, staffing, and coordination as part of its downtown revitalization mission.

Local Business Participation: Vendor fees and booth participation, extended hours and promotions that reinforce the event's success.

Public Sector Support (Indirect Funding): A city supports such events by managing street closures and infrastructure and providing public safety & event coordination.

Case Study: Fridays After Five – Paducah, KY

Fridays After Five is a free, recurring summer concert series and street activation program in downtown Paducah, Kentucky. They held weekly along Broadway Street and the riverfront, which transformed downtown into a family-friendly block party featuring live music, vendors, and community activities.

This program is focused on weekly live music performances (multiple stages and bands), temporary street closures to prioritize pedestrians, food vendors, markets, and local business participation, and family-friendly programming, including a kids' zone and activities.

Project Partners

- Paducah Main Street: Lead organizer and program manager
- First National Bank (FNB): Presenting sponsor and primary financial supporter
- City of Paducah: Provides logistical support (street closures, public safety, permitting)
- Local businesses, restaurants, and vendors: Extend hours, set up booths, and benefit from increased traffic
- Performers and community organizations: Provide entertainment and programming.

