



# ENHANCING VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND DESTINATION AWARENESS

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Across multiple towns, visitors are already coming for events, recreation, sports, and tourism, but they do not always know where to go or what's offered in the downtown, cannot find local businesses' websites easily online, and/or arrive when downtown businesses are closed. Visitors come to the community, but many are not being converted into downtown customers because they cannot easily find information about businesses, attractions, events, or business operating hours. Recreation users may not enter downtown before or after their recreational activities. Highway traffic may not be converted to downtown stops. And event attendees may not spend money in downtown stores. Gaps include poor wayfinding, limited online presence, no central "what's open now" information, and weak storytelling around downtown identity and assets.

While downtown has many valuable assets, they are not connected through a compelling and consistent story, limiting its ability to differentiate itself, build a stronger sense of place, and attract investment and engagement.

As a result, communities are missing opportunities to capture visitor spending and encourage repeat visits.

## Why it Matters

Visitors are already coming to the community, but without clear information, wayfinding, and promotion, many do not visit downtown businesses, resulting in lost revenue, fewer repeat visits, and missed opportunities to showcase the community's unique assets and identity.

## Step by Step Actions

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### Strategy 1: Make downtown more accessible

Making downtown more accessible helps remove barriers that prevent residents and visitors from fully exploring and enjoying the community. By improving signage, parking visibility, wayfinding, maps, and online information, communities can create a more welcoming and user-friendly experience that increases visitation, supports local businesses, and encourages people to spend more time downtown.

- 1. Evaluate Visitor Experience** - Walk through downtown as a first-time visitor and identify areas where people may have difficulty finding parking, businesses, attractions, restrooms, or event locations. Inventory downtown businesses, hours of operation, website presence, etc.

**2. Identify Key Destinations** - Create a list of destinations that should be highlighted, such as:

- Downtown businesses
- Restaurants and cafés
- Public parking lots
- Parks and trails
- Event venues
- Public restrooms
- Historic and cultural attractions

**3. Develop a Wayfinding Plan** - Determine where visitors need directional guidance and map out locations for:

- Gateway signs
- Directional signs
- Parking signs
- Information kiosks
- Walking route markers



**4. Install Gateway Signage** - Place welcoming signs at major entrances to downtown to clearly indicate arrival and establish a strong community identity.

**5. Add Directional Signs** - Install clear, easy-to-read signs directing visitors to downtown businesses, parking areas, attractions, parks and trails, and public facilities.

**6. Improve Parking Visibility** - Clearly mark public parking areas and provide signs directing visitors from parking lots to downtown destinations.

**7. Visitor Maps** - Develop printable downtown maps, digital maps on the community website, mobile-friendly versions, and maps showing businesses, attractions, parking, and walking routes.

**8. Install "You Are Here" Kiosks** - Place information boards with downtown maps in high-traffic locations such as downtown squares, trailheads, parks, event venues, and visitor centers.

**9. Create Walking Connections** - Use sidewalk markings, banners, decals, or pedestrian signs to guide visitors between attractions, parking areas, and downtown businesses.

**10. Improve Online Mapping and Presence** - Work with businesses to:

- Verify Google Maps listings
- Verify Apple Maps listings
- Update hours of operation
- Add photos and website links

- Correct business addresses and contact information
- Update business websites.

**11. Promote Downtown Navigation Tools** - Share maps and visitor information through community websites, tourism websites, social media, event promotions, and QR codes placed throughout downtown.

**12. Monitor and Update** - Review signage, maps, and online listings regularly to ensure they remain accurate and useful.

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## Strategy 2: Create a strong downtown identity

Creating a strong downtown identity helps distinguish the community from competing destinations and gives residents and visitors a clear sense of what makes the area unique and memorable. By developing a cohesive brand, incorporating local arts and culture, and consistently showcasing community assets, downtown can build greater community pride, attract visitors, support local businesses, and create a recognizable sense of place that drives long-term economic vitality.



**1. Identify What Makes Downtown Unique** - Gather input from residents, business owners, community leaders, and visitors to identify the community's distinctive assets and character. Consider features such as:

- Arts and culture
- Historic buildings
- Outdoor recreation
- Waterfront amenities
- Local food and agriculture
- Entertainment and events

**2. Define a Downtown Brand** - Develop a clear and memorable identity that reflects the community's strengths. Examples include but are not limited to: Arts District, Historic Main Street, River Town, Outdoor Adventure Hub, and Cultural Destination.

**3. Develop a Visual Identity and Brand and Promote it Consistently** - Create a consistent look and feel for downtown that includes logo or icon, color palette, fonts and design standards, signage styles, and marketing materials. Use the downtown brand across websites, social media, advertising, tourism materials, event promotions, and signage and maps.

**4. Incorporate Public Art** - Install public art that reflects the community's identity,

such as murals, sculptures, painted utility boxes, artistic benches, and interactive art installations.

- 5. Enhance Signage with Creative Design** - Use artist-designed signs and wayfinding elements that reinforce the brand while helping visitors navigate downtown. Examples include decorative directional signs, artistic street banners, branded gateway signs, and creative district markers.
- 6. Encourage Business Participation** - Work with downtown businesses to align storefronts with the overall brand by improving window displays, adding coordinated signage, enhancing façades, incorporating local themes and artwork, and providing design guidance and small incentives when possible.
- 7. Highlight Local Assets** - Identify and promote assets that support the downtown brand, such as trails and outdoor recreation, historic sites, local restaurants and food experiences, public art, community events, unique shops and attractions. Ensure these assets are featured in marketing materials and visitor information.
- 8. Create Artistic Orientation Features** - Help visitors explore downtown through creative placemaking elements such as art-themed maps, artist-designed kiosks, walking tour markers, public art trails, and storytelling panels that share local history and culture.
- 9. Integrate the Brand into Events** - Incorporate the downtown identity into festivals, markets, concerts, and community events through consistent branding, themed activities, local artists and performers, and storytelling about community assets.
- 10. Engage the Community** - Encourage residents, artists, businesses, and community groups to contribute ideas and participate in projects that reinforce the downtown identity.
- 11. Evaluate and Refine** - Regularly gather feedback from visitors and stakeholders to determine which branding elements are most effective and adjust as needed.

## Who to involve

- City Government
- Chamber of Commerce
- Tourism and Visitors bureau
- Downtown business owners
- Downtown Association
- Parks and Rec
- GIS and Mapping Partners
- Art and cultural organizations



- Historical society and heritage organizations
- Community organizations and volunteers

## Potential Timeline

**Phase 1: Assess and Plan** - Evaluate the visitor experience, inventory key destinations and amenities, define downtown identity, and develop a wayfinding and branding plan.

**Phase 2: Design and Prepare** - Design signage, maps, kiosks, walking routes, branding materials, public art concepts, and storefront enhancement approaches.

**Phase 3: Launch, Promote and Refine** - Install signs, kiosks, maps, walking markers, and public art; launch the branding campaign; promote downtown attractions; gather feedback and update materials as needed.

## Costs

These strategies include costs associated with producing digital maps, parking signs, basic directional signs, and business listing updates, as well as community engagement, marketing materials, and website & social media integration.



## Case Study: Greenville Downtown Redevelopment (Greenville, KY)

Greenville, Kentucky's downtown redevelopment, often described through "façades, festivals, and footpaths," is a comprehensive revitalization effort that transformed a declining Main Street into a vibrant economic and community hub. The initiative combined streetscape improvements, façade restoration, and recurring events to reenergize downtown and attract residents and visitors.

- Façade improvements to restore historic downtown buildings
- Public realm upgrades (sidewalks, lighting, planters, signage)
- Festival and event programming (e.g., concerts, arts festivals)
- Pedestrian and recreation investments, including trails and a nearby nature park

### **Project partners**

- City of Greenville (Mayor & City Administration): Led vision, local coordination, and implementation
- Greenville Tourism Commission: Funded events, façade programs, and downtown activities
- Pennyriple Area Development District (PADD): Provided grant writing, planning, and technical assistance
- City Council: Supported policy and funding decisions
- Local businesses and residents: Participated in façade improvements and community initiatives
- Kentucky League of Cities: Advised on funding mechanisms and local tax strategy

