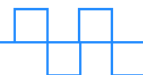


DOWNTOWN TEAM SERIES #3

Putting it All Together: Downtown Team Scenarios



In previous publications in this series we explored the composition of downtown teams, member roles and the specific interests underpinning each member's involvement in their local downtown revitalization efforts. We will dive a bit deeper in this publication to explore specific scenarios facing downtowns and connect these scenarios to specific team members.

Relationships are one of the most important elements in successful downtown revitalization efforts. It is essential that all members know who the other team members are and how they can work together to accomplish shared goals. Building a team is an excellent place to start once you have identified the issue you want to address. It is important to remember team members impact the project's viability and they should have an interest in the issue along with an ability to commit supportive resources to it. Keep in mind that members with strong voices or those in charge will be ready to engage, but it is also critical not to overlook engagement with vulnerable populations or those directly impacted by the project idea.

Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.

– Henry Ford

Guidelines for Scenario Planning Exercise

The following scenarios are adapted from real world examples and draw from situations where team members amplified the outcomes of projects or programs. Specific details may have been altered to help illustrate specific points. Each scenario represents a theme commonly associated with downtown revitalization – vacant buildings, community festivals, and parking.

Read the scenario. Brainstorm to create an inventory of existing team members. Simply start a list. Some partners are easy to identify while others may be more difficult but continue thinking creatively. Be inclusive. Don't worry about too many; instead, prioritize not leaving people out. Here are the questions to consider:

- Who will be negatively affected by project?
 - What perspectives have we not yet heard from? (vulnerable/invisible/voiceless populations)
 - Who can we include to gain that perspective?
 - Who will benefit from the project?
 - Who is already working on something related?
 - Whose influence is helpful to the success of the project?
 - Who supports or opposes the changes the project may bring?
 - Who might have resources to contribute?
- Considering the team members you identified – what interests may attract them to this effort and what roles may they play? [Reference publication #2 Downtown Team Member Roles and Interests]
 - Draft a strategy to address the scenario, utilizing the existing team members and their roles and interests to accomplish their stated goal. Summarize the strategy in one paragraph and note the roles of each member.
 - What pieces are missing? Are there any additional members this team could seek out? If so, what role can they play, or what interests may attract them to join?

This document is part of a larger series on Downtown Teams in the Kentucky Promise Zone. The other resources in the series support this document by providing a brief case study and information about the specific roles and interests of team members. While this series is focused on downtown revitalization it can be adapted to address a number of challenges that require strategic team building.

Scenario 1. Vacant buildings downtown

Background: The community was hustling and bustling two generations ago when every building downtown was occupied with a variety of retail, personal, and professional services and overnight accommodations. As time passed, the economy declined with outmigration further compounding the situation. While many buildings are still actively occupied nonetheless some have fallen in to disrepair as their vacancy constantly reminds passersby of a forgone and more prosperous time. These vacant buildings tend to attract nefarious activities and broadly contribute to negative perceptions. Other building owners are now inclined to follow this precedent as they start to forgo routine maintenance. Now however there are concerned parties interested in revitalizing the remaining building stock and changing the public perception around building vacancy.

Downtown Team: Currently, the team is led by an established coalition. The effort is coordinated by staff of the regional economic development authority who are well versed in data collection, evaluation, grant writing, and is a primary liaison with the county and city government. Also heavily involved is the local tourist and convention commission, who have a keen interest in the visitor experience of downtown and provide expertise in promotion and event coordination. Additionally, the Chamber of Commerce and non-chamber businesses are able to provide insights on rent stability, retail trends, and leverage broad community support for efforts aimed at improving local business development. Lastly, a local college with an extensive repository of historic photos and oral histories is interested in showcasing the historic narrative of existing buildings.

Goals: Each team member comes to this project with slightly different goals, but each are connected by the physical buildings, their stories, their impact on adjacent buildings, and the business opportunities they represent. The goal of the effort is to ultimately occupy the buildings with active uses.

Context and Challenge: In some cases, buildings are currently not up to code and face substantial renovations to be functional again. It is commonly understood that the vacant or abandoned buildings are owned by absentee landowners who live out of town and may not care about the impact their properties are creating. We aren't entirely sure how many buildings are actually vacant or abandoned or who owns them. There hasn't historically been a political appetite to condemn, demolish buildings or enforce codes with fines or liens.



Scenario 2. Establish a new festival or community celebration

Summary: In the heart of downtown once stood a remarkable historic building that defined downtown's landscape for generations but time was not kind to this building. Over time, it fell into disrepair and was eventually demolished to prevent harm to the public. A vacant lot remained in the heart of downtown. Eventually the lot was sown with grass and came to represent an informal park of sorts where dogs were walked yet there were no features signifying this lot as a public greenspace. Finally a group of concerned citizens have coalesced around the idea of promoting community assets and have started to consider establishing a new use for the park unlike anything currently offered by the community's established festivals and celebrations.

Downtown Team: The effort was organized by a group of concerned citizens who want to promote their community in new positive ways. This group represents both young and older residents, business owners and neighbors and has been successful utilizing social media to bring attention to their community's assets. They have created so much attention that the local elected officials are starting to take notice and have offered to assist if needed and have identified a proxy to attend meetings. A local university also has an interest in this part of town as it intersects with planned investments to create more downtown housing options for the students, faculty and staff. A local arts program is interested in supporting programs that emphasize arts engagement and promoting community creativity.

Goal: The ultimate goal of the group is to create a long lasting community festival that activates the informal greenspace bringing attention to potential future uses for and users of the space. Given the location of the greenspace it is seen as a potential gateway to the community providing the perfect location and backdrop for place based branding. Additionally the group wants to promote local arts, music and food while discovering what park amenities are most demanded by potential future users.

Context and Challenge: This is a very new group, simply an aggregate of concerned citizens, who don't have a system for processing donations or administering the funds with oversight. This is a very new idea and would be the first year of the festival. Ownership of the greenspace is often misunderstood by the community and there are other organizations that organize events who may be critical of the effort. Some existing organizations choose to ignore the efforts.



Scenario 3. Parking!

Summary: Over time the community has addressed parking in a number of ways, yet parking is often brought up as a downtown challenge by business owners. In an effort to address this, the community removes parking meters to provide free parking downtown, but this does not change opinions. Downtown is becoming more attractive to businesses because of an innovative incentive program being offered to those willing to make substantial investments. Downtown building occupancy is nearly 100%. As downtown becomes more active, parking continues to be expressed as a challenge so much so that the local government is considering using a vacant lot to create new parking spots downtown. The downtown manager starts to see this as an opportunity to learn more about the reality of parking, and bring attention to community health by promoting alternative transportation (walking and biking). A recent parking study concluded that there were enough parking spots within a short distance that on most reasonable days parking needs are accommodated with available on-street parking.

Downtown Team: The effort is coordinated by the downtown manager who is a paid staff member of the city government. The downtown manager is also responsible for implementing the new business incentive package. Their duties include frequent contact with downtown businesses, who often share concerns or opportunities. The mayor is very supportive of the downtown manager's efforts and provides a significant amount of leeway on developing projects. Local Extension programs are offered that promote healthy lifestyles and active living.

Goal: The goal of the downtown manager is to utilize the recent parking study to highlight available parking in the downtown area. Coupled with this data would be a pedestrian centric wayfinding program to help promote walking. An outreach campaign focused on promoting walking and parking information would ultimately shift perceptions about walking and parking.

Context and Challenge: Business owners often park in front of their enterprise, occupying the closest spots. The automobile dominates the landscape of the community. The community often scores low on community health indexes. Parking is rarely expressed as an impediment to shopping at the nearest big box store. The community is quite small geographically and easily traversed on foot in less than 30 minutes. Downtown hosts regular events including high school football games, festivals, and live music throughout the year.

