

Rapid Placemaking to Bring Back Main Street

A Pandemic Recovery Toolkit for Local Communities

MODULE 03:
PROGRAMMING GUIDE



BRING
BACK

MAIN
STREET



Canadian
Urban
Institute Institut
Urbain du
Canada

Happy City

PROGRAMMING GUIDE

The way a space is programmed plays an important role in determining how it will be used, who will participate and how the benefits of placemaking are distributed. When programming is done well, it can support social wellbeing, public health and the economy.

Once you've clarified who is in your community, and which community members your project aims to serve, you'll need to create a process for engaging that key community to ensure you get it right.



Community Chalk Festival

WELLBEING PRINCIPLES



JOY



MEANING



BELONGING



SOCIABILITY

COST

\$\$\$\$\$

LENGTH

Days **Weeks** Months

WINTER FRIENDLY?

It can be. Similar logistics apply to hosting a community snow sculpture event.

MATERIALS

Chalk
Hairspray

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?

Convene a day-long or weekend-long event for artists and the public to create temporary chalk installations on a sidewalk or street. Some pavement spaces can be reserved for local artist installations, while other spaces can be used for games and activities involving chalk, and others can be open for creative expression.

Chalk is a simple tool to creatively transform street space. Hosting a festival is a way to bring people together to have fun, cooperate and create a sense of agency over shared space.



Thank you Ariana Holt for sharing this idea during the BBMS Studio

Community Chalk Festival

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

While artists and kids might be the primary audiences of a chalk festival, everyone can have fun drawing and writing messages in chalk. As long as the event is accessible to individuals with diverse abilities, this event can serve many people.

Will people with diverse abilities be able to participate?

Yes, if you ensure the event takes place in a space that can be physically accessible to those with mobility barriers. Allow chalk art to happen on walls and other vertical surfaces, for those in wheelchairs or who use mobility devices who might not be able to draw on the sidewalk. Many people with diverse cognitive abilities enjoy arts, and chalk art could be appealing.

How can you collaborate with people in your community who are already doing the kind of work you'd like to do?

If you're working with artists, can you select those who reflect the diversity of the community you're aiming to serve?

Are there businesses that might be interested in actively supporting or participating in this program?

Businesses might want to use chalk to increase activity around their shops, and increase awareness about their goods and services.

Are there any COVID-related considerations that need to be accounted for?

Note that in order to keep this event COVID-19 appropriate, you'll need to get lots of chalk so that each visitor can use their own piece, and take it home when they're finished.

How would you measure success?

Number of people who participate, amount of time that people linger, range of community voices elevated, diversity of people who participate, number of posts on social media.

Community Mapping

WELLBEING PRINCIPLES



JOY



MEANING



BELONGING



SOCIABILITY

COST

\$\$\$\$\$

LENGTH

Days **Weeks** Months

WINTER FRIENDLY?

Yes. It could be indoors, or hosted under an awning or tent.

MATERIALS

- Map or other base layer.
- Markers, pins or other art materials.

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?

Community mapping is a way to work with a residents to identify assets in the community, paint a picture of what it's like for residents of diverse experiences to live there, and what opportunities and challenges exist in the neighbourhood. Assets might be strong existing neighbourhood relationships, physical spaces like parks, neighbourhood public art, or social and community services.



Thank you Ajeev Bhatia for sharing this idea during the BBMS Studio

BRING BACK

MAIN STREET

E

Community Mapping

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

Community mapping is a research method that can help you capture information about your community. It will help you make sure your activation is inclusive, context-sensitive, and collaborative. If done right, this activation can also be fun and engaging for participants.

Will people with diverse abilities be able to participate?

If participants will be asked to write or add to a map, ensure it can be reached at different levels. Also, ensure someone is available to write or attach pins to a map for those who might need support.

How can you collaborate with people in your community who are already doing the kind of work you'd like to do?

This activity will help you identify possible collaborators and communities to engage with in the future. Community mapping can take place through an activation in an outdoor space, where residents mark their favourite places and experiences onto a printed map. It can help to highlight community champions and groups whose great work is un-recognized by main street decision-makers.

Are there businesses that might be interested in actively supporting or participating in this program?

This activity will also help you identify possible businesses to engage with in the future.

Are there any COVID-related considerations that need to be accounted for?

If you will be asking people to stand or sit in close proximity to a map, ensure you designate socially-distant gathering spaces and spaces for participants to line up while waiting. If possible, use materials that will not be reused. If you do need to share materials, like pens, sanitize them in between each use.

How would you measure success?

Quality of relationships established, number of people who participate, number of people and organizations identified.

Case Study: Vancouver

Vancouver Mural Festival partnered with Indigenous groups to support artistic capacity among youth and increase the presence of indigenous art in the city.



Vancouver Mural Festival partnered with a number of Indigenous-led groups to lead [Kulus \(Young Thunderbird\) workshops](#) for and by Indigenous youth. Working with [Lu'ma Native Youth Mentorship Program](#), [Collingwood C.R.E.W.](#), [Raycam Community Centre](#) and [UNYA's OCM Program](#), the goal of the program is to help add capacity to ongoing community work, and to support wellbeing and cultural connections for Indigenous youth. One recent Kulus initiative, called the "Hides Painting" program, supported youth to choose their own designs, transpose them onto "hides" and display them across Vancouver at summer festivals.

Thank you Sierra Tasi Baker for highlighting this idea during the BBMS workshop

Image: Paul Windsor Art, Vancouver Mural Fest photo

Community Hub (indoor/outdoor)

WELLBEING PRINCIPLES



JOY



MEANING



BELONGING



SOCIABILITY



RESILIENCE

COST

\$\$\$\$\$

LENGTH

Weeks Months Years

WINTER FRIENDLY?

Yes. An indoor community hub can run year round.

MATERIALS

- Removable seating
- Tents or umbrellas
- Signage
- A community hub could also be indoors, occupying a vacant storefront

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?

A community hub is a public space where multiple organizations and groups can co-locate. We often envision community hubs to exist inside under the same roof, but hubs could also spring up on the sidewalk or in the park.

Community hubs can support people to access essential goods and services, while also gathering socially. For example, an outdoor community hub might host a reading space facilitated by the public library and a seed or plant sharing stand. They are often perceived as more approachable than large institutions that offer similar services.



Thank you Cheryll Case, Ajeev Bhatia and Rob Leblanc for advancing this idea during the BBMS Studio

Community Hub (indoor/outdoor)

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

Community hubs can be designed to support any kind of group, program, or initiative. The hubs can support the same groups semi-permanently or provide space for a rotation of groups.

Will people with diverse abilities be able to participate?

Make sure the hub is located in a space that is physically accessible. Further, make sure services and groups that co-locate in the hub serve equity-seeking residents with diverse abilities.

How can you collaborate with people in your community who are already doing the kind of work you'd like to do?

The community hub is a great way to provide space for local community initiatives. It can be staffed by people who live in the neighborhood.

Are there businesses that might be interested in actively supporting or participating in this program?

The community hub is focused on grassroots and not-for-profit groups that serve the public.

Are there any COVID-related considerations that need to be accounted for?

Make sure each group that co-locates in the hub agrees to the same physical distancing terms. Ensure visitors wear masks and follow physical distancing protocols. You may need signage to make the protocols clear.

How would you measure success?

Range of services fulfilled, feedback from community, range of people who participate, number of people served, number of repeat patrons.

Live Music

WELLBEING PRINCIPLES



COST

\$\$\$\$\$

WINTER FRIENDLY?

Yes. By adding (physically distanced) heaters and wind shelters, as well as by hosting short music sets, this can be made winter friendly.

LENGTH

Weeks Months Years

MATERIALS

Musicians aren't materials, but they - and their instruments - are vital. Beyond that, materials can increase in line with the ambitions for the performance. A space to mark out physical distancing, speakers, a power source, a stage, lighting and more can be progressively added as desired.

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?

Live Music. Music brings main street to life. It sparks joy and enables connections. It can expose people to new ideas and cultures. A variety of local musicians can be hired with the aim of appealing to an array of audiences.



Live Music

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

People of many ages and backgrounds benefit. Local musicians benefit. Businesses who strengthen their offerings through experience benefit. An array of communities can be represented through live music. When equity and inclusion are considered goals, Live Music can serve a very broad range of people, from parents and caretakers with kids, to youth, to adults and seniors, of all backgrounds. Neighbours living on main street may not appreciate noise later at night. People with hearing impairments may struggle to hear acquaintances speak. However, the music experience can be made more inclusive in locations where music is regularly performed by integrating [hearing loops](#) into the space. Consider how locations impact people who live on the street.

Will people with diverse abilities be able to participate?

Yes, but it is important to locate musicians in spaces where they, and anyone who gathers to watch, don't impede movement for people. People with diverse abilities people who enjoy music may like to attend, and calm nearby space could make this more appealing.

Are there any COVID-related considerations that need to be accounted for?

Ensure that a space is marked out to ensure physical distancing between performers and the audience. Consider ground markings or a street mural that makes it easy for people to measure 2 metres of physical distancing from others.

Are there businesses that might be interested in actively supporting or participating in this program?

Restaurants, cafes and bars, and others whose customer experiences are enhanced through music.

How can you collaborate with people in your community who are already doing the kind of work you'd like to do?

By involving local musicians from an array of cultures that are present on your main street. By highlighting diverse performers with an array of identities. By considering how music can benefit children and seniors, as well as the opportunities it presents to connect people across cultures. By harnessing music's potential to foster inclusion. Coordinate programming with local businesses and community groups.

How would you measure success?

Feedback on the events, number of people who view them, length of time people linger, number musicians hired, range of cultures celebrated, number of posts on social media

Distanced Fitness Class

WELLBEING PRINCIPLES



HEALTH



JOY



SOCIABILITY



BELONGING

COST

\$\$\$\$\$

LENGTH

Weeks Months Years

WINTER FRIENDLY?

Unlikely. Could be conducted with heaters, but may not attract many people.

MATERIALS

- Instructors
- Speakers
- Signage
- Promotional material

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?

Outdoor, distanced movement classes led by local instructors. Opportunities for safe, distanced physical activity allows community members to keep moving and stay healthy. Group fitness classes also provide an additional wellbeing benefit by allowing participants to learn new skills, engage with different cultures, interact socially and connect over shared experiences, which can contribute to building a sense of community.



Distanced Fitness Class

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

Classes can be tailored to be accessible to a variety of community groups, including different ages and abilities. For example, a seniors-focused yoga class or kids dance class can be programmed specifically for these demographics. Also, classes can include specialized forms of dance or physical activity that represent the different cultural groups in the community, like Tai Chi or Bhangra. Importantly, if these programs are free or low-cost, they can further benefit those who would otherwise not have access to programmed physical activity.

Are there businesses that might be interested in actively supporting or participating in this program?

Local gyms, fitness centres or yoga and dance studios. Any physical activity-focused business who is facing challenges due to limitations on class sizes and physical distancing requirements.

Will people with diverse abilities be able to participate?

It is possible to program specific fitness classes designed for people in wheelchairs or other mobility devices. This would require a trainer with specific training and specialization in this field.

Are there any COVID-related considerations that need to be accounted for?

Class participants must stand 2 metres apart from each other at all times during the session. This will require markings on the ground (or use of existing ground murals) that demarcate where each participant must stand. High-intensity or more vigorous classes may also require increased spacing between participants.

How can you collaborate with people in your community who are already doing the kind of work you'd like to do?

Hire local fitness instructors, dancers or other physical artists who can share their knowledge with the community. Find local fitness hubs that may have closed their doors or may be struggling with decreased class sizes and invite them to bring their programming outdoors. Consider how classes can be programmed to benefit an array of physical abilities and skill sets.

How would you measure success?

Number of classes, number of participants in total, number of different classes offered, age range of people who participate, cultural approaches highlighted

Market Day

WELLBEING PRINCIPLES



RESILIENCE



SOCIABILITY



EASE

COST

\$\$\$\$\$

LENGTH

Weeks Months Years

WINTER FRIENDLY?

Yes

MATERIALS

- Signage / tents
- Tables / chairs
- Power sources
- Queue management system
- Human resources

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?

A day (or series of days) when streets are closed to vehicle traffic and local businesses expand their stores onto the streets and sidewalks, creating a pedestrian mall along one or several blocks of a main street. This allows businesses to reach more customers, by increasing the number of visitors that can access their goods or services at one time. Market days can also encourage residents to walk or take active mobility options to reach the main street. Market streets bring an energetic, social energy to the area.



Thank you Will Dunn for highlighting this idea during the BBMS Studio

BRING BACK

MAIN STREET

N

Market Day

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

Market days benefit local shops and businesses by increasing access to more clientele. They also benefit all members of the community by providing more space for shopping and interacting with each other at a safe distance. Car-free streets can, however, provide accessibility challenges for those who require vehicles for transportation, or who are unable to walk with ease.

Are there businesses that might be interested in actively supporting or participating in this program?

Yes - this programming initiative specifically engages local businesses.

Will people with diverse abilities be able to participate?

Yes, open, car-free streets will be accessible to people with mobility barriers if locations with accessibility features are selected. To compensate for inaccessible existing infrastructure, ramps can be added. Some people with brain-based differences may be hesitant to visit if the market is busy, or require a nearby space to relax.

Are there any COVID-related considerations that need to be accounted for?

Market streets may require specific entry and exit points to manage traffic and control the number of people using the space at once.

How can you collaborate with people in your community who are already doing the kind of work you'd like to do?

By engaging businesses and gauging interest for this type of programming. By providing materials necessary to reduce barriers to participation. By engaging and inviting a broader range of local businesses to participate, even if they don't have main street retail space. By inviting small businesses that don't have brick and mortar locations to establish a physical presence in the community. By connecting with local farmer's markets and engaging existing local vendor networks.

How would you measure success?

Number of businesses who participate, number of people who visit, total revenue generated, number of early-stage entrepreneurs who participate

Main Street Scavenger Hunt

WELLBEING PRINCIPLES



HEALTH



JOY



SOCIABILITY



MEANING

COST

\$\$\$\$\$

LENGTH

Weeks Months Years

WINTER FRIENDLY?

Yes

MATERIALS

Items to be found through the scavenger hunt. They can take many forms.

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?

Main Street Scavenger Hunt. It encourages people to get to know their main streets. It offers light physical activity, aligns with physical distancing requirements, can include educational components and can involve community groups and businesses. There are many ways to approach this activity, including family-oriented hunts, photo scavenger hunts, or local business passport stamping.



Main Street Scavenger Hunt

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

Parents and children are likely groups to benefit from this, as well as summer camps and organizers of activities for kids. Teenagers and adults may be less interested in this activity. Black, Indigenous, and people of colour looking in hard-to-reach places risk being perceived as causing mischief or worse. Ensure the activity is well-publicized and that law enforcement are aware of it.

Will people with diverse abilities be able to participate?

If this is organized without considering accessibility, people using wheelchairs or other mobility devices may be excluded. Planned with an eye on inclusion, this activity can be enjoyed by people with an array of abilities.

How can you collaborate with people in your community who are already doing the kind of work you'd like to do?

Community groups can use this activity to engage others in their areas of interest, while businesses could participate, and draw in potential customers. Artists or craftspeople could be hired to make the items that people search for.

Are there businesses that might be interested in actively supporting or participating in this program?

Businesses whose customers include parents and children may be interested, as could arts supply stores.

Are there any COVID-related considerations that need to be accounted for?

Observe public health directives and physical distancing.

How would you measure success?

Number of people who participate, feedback from participants and businesses, number of posts on social media

Main Street in a Box

WELLBEING PRINCIPLES



HEALTH



MEANING



BELONGING



RESILIENCE



SOCIABILITY



JOY

COST

\$\$\$\$\$

LENGTH

Weeks Months Years

WINTER FRIENDLY?

Yes

MATERIALS

A shipping container to store everything, whatever items you'd like to include, from arts supplies to sports equipment, children's toys to street furniture



Thank you TJ Maguire for sharing this idea during the BBMS Studio

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?

Main Street in a Box. Main Street in a Box involves both programming and intervention. It can include all of the things that a community needs to activate a main street. It can be tailored to specific communities in the area. To succeed, it requires a steward who conducts on-site programming.

Main Street in a Box

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

It depends on what is included in the box, but the free use of items will benefit many people with limited incomes. Youth are an obvious group, as are parents with lower incomes, but it can be tailored to meet the needs of many groups. With this in mind, it is important to consider how your selection will invite or exclude people. Careful with the location of the box. A location that is seemingly unused or out of the way could be a street-involved person's sleeping place.

Are there businesses that might be interested in actively supporting or participating in this program?

Businesses could organize programming that corresponds with items included in the box.

Will people with diverse abilities be able to participate?

In principle, yes. But this is an important point to consider when selecting what items will be placed in the box. Some people with brain-based differences will require nearby calm space, if an area becomes busy. An inclusive atmosphere can be supported by ensuring diversity among the people conducting programming.

Are there any COVID-related considerations that need to be accounted for?

Items will need to be sanitized before and after use. Keeping hand sanitizer on site for everyone using items will also be important.

How can you collaborate with people in your community who are already doing the kind of work you'd like to do?

Crowdsource (and then sanitize) items that are included in the box. Ask people what they would like to have on main street. Reach out to people and groups who may typically be excluded from decision-making, including Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) youth and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

How would you measure success?

Community feedback, total participants, diversity of people who participate, number of repeat visitors

Program Name:

CREATE A VISUAL OF YOUR PROGRAM

WELL BEING PRINCIPLES



COST

\$\$\$\$\$

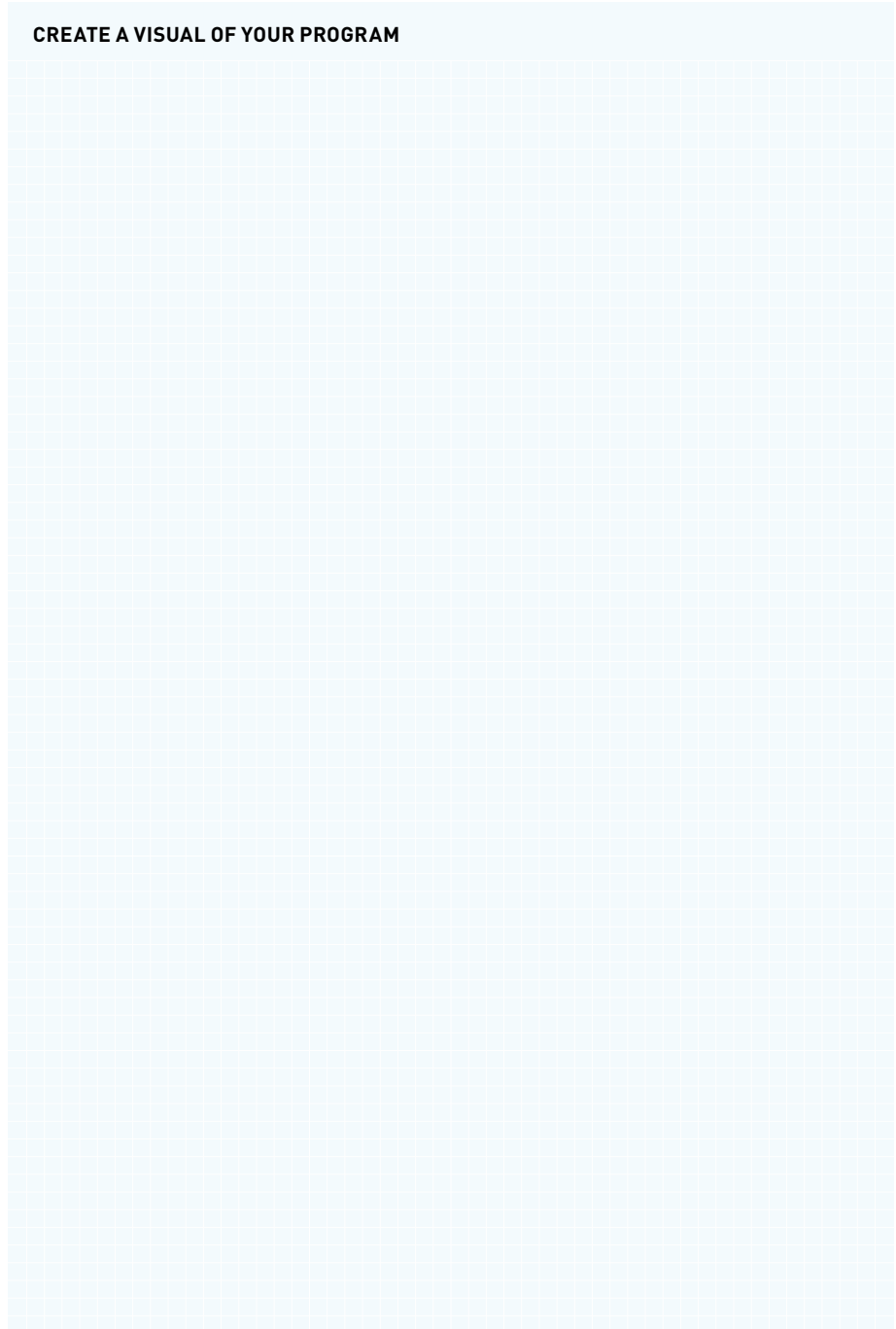
LENGTH

Days Weeks Months Years

WINTER FRIENDLY?

MATERIALS

What is the idea? Why is this a good idea?



Program Name:

Who benefits from these activities? Who doesn't? Does this idea serve a specific age, gender or cultural group?

Could this intervention risk encroaching on existing sidewalks, bike lanes or public spaces?

Could this intervention risk encroaching on existing sidewalks, bike lanes or public spaces?

Could this intervention require input or review by City officials?

Who, in your community, is already doing this kind of work you're hoping to do? Can you hire, get advice or otherwise engage them to bring this intervention to reality?

Could this become a long-term or permanent idea?

What maintenance does this intervention require?

How would you measure success?

About this Toolkit

Rapid Placemaking to Bring Back Main Street is part of the Bring Back Main Street project, a nationally-coordinated research and advocacy campaign committed to finding the best solutions to ensure our main streets recover from COVID-19 and emerge from the crisis more resilient than ever. Bring Back Main Street was developed in the public interest by the [Canadian Urban Institute](#), with the support of BIAs/BIDs, city-makers and researchers from across the country.

This toolkit is intended to support the connection between main street and community by advancing an equitable design process, highlighting programming opportunities and offering design ideas that together bring back main street.

Overview

COVID-19 has radically altered the way humans gather, interact and even walk down the street. Globally, the heightened fear and awareness of this virus – and the vital physical distancing measures that followed – has touched nearly every aspect of people’s lives. In March, main streets across Canada transformed from bustling centres to vacant spaces in mere days.

In recent months, people have found creative ways to use the main streets around them. Canadians are using streets that typically prioritize cars to: access essential jobs and services by foot and bike, to meet friends and neighbours, and share messages of hope and gratitude. And as reopenings occur, businesses and cities are expanding patios and public spaces into main streets across the country. Importantly, people are taking up main street space to grieve and protest the racist treatment of Black and Indigenous peoples within communities and by police.

Reallocating and reprogramming main street space—from parking or traffic to people and local businesses—is an essential part of a holistic pandemic recovery. Research indicates that the risk of COVID-19 transmission is significantly higher in indoor shared spaces than outdoors. This shift in how main streets are used can support the triple bottom line for health, local business and community.

While it may be less obvious, engaging communities in the process of reshaping and reimagining main streets in towns and cities across Canada is also vital to a holistic pandemic recovery. Research indicates that during lockdown, the most resilient Canadian main streets were those with strong community connections. During this same period, societal inequalities were laid bare, as vulnerable and marginalized communities faced the greatest impacts of COVID-19. As such, equitable engagement can support a just recovery, local business and community. Fundamentally, the success of main streets and communities is intertwined.

This toolkit was produced by Happy City (Mitchell Reardon, Emmay Clayton Jones, Harry Olson, Cheri Hessami, and Charles Montgomery) with input from many city-builders from across Canada. For more information, please contact Happy City at info@thehappycity.com.



An evolving response to COVID-19

The content for this toolkit is based on public health direction, research, stakeholder input, expert insight and emerging best practices in June and July 2020. We remain in the midst of a global pandemic. Accordingly, main street pandemic responses remain fluid.

The ideas presented in this toolkit have been developed with a focus on [the broad array of main streets](#) that are found across Canada. Recognizing that ongoing effects of COVID-19 can vary by region, local application of these ideas should be tailored to the direction of relevant public health authorities.

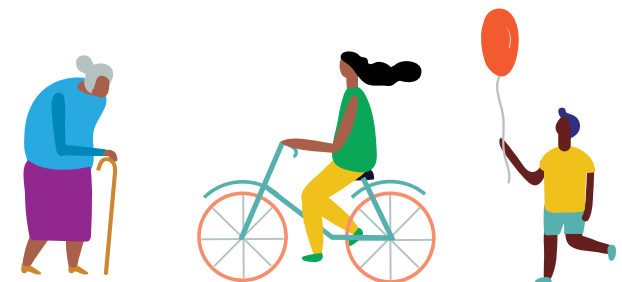
Who should use this toolkit?

Anyone who wants to see their main streets thrive in the short and long term as safe and inclusive places to connect, access services, shop and live.

The Bring Back Main Street Rapid Placemaking Toolkit is intended for Business Improvement Areas/Districts and City staff tasked with retail and public realm recovery work, as well as interested community groups and residents.

How should it be used?

Whether you're working on main street in a major city centre, a suburban plaza or small town, the activities and ideas here can support your local businesses and community. A just recovery is fundamental to creating a better normal. That's why activities, tips and questions to help you establish an inclusive process are spread throughout this toolkit. You know your main street best. With this in mind, the toolkit includes an array of programming ideas and design interventions for you to pick and choose what's right for you. As you scroll through, you'll all see space for you to write out your process and test your ideas. Feel free to download and markup the PDF, or print it out and write on it, in real life. There are more ideas to bring back main street than pages in this toolkit. We invite you to send in your ideas, and any enhancements you've made to ours.



THANK YOU

Thank you to CUI for the opportunity to work on the Bring Back Main Street project, and our Bring Back Main Street Partners. Thank you to all of the BIAs, BIDs and other organizations whose generous support made this project possible.

Thank you to the BIA and BID representatives from Halifax, Moncton, Ottawa, Regina and Surrey who participated in our focus group. Your insight helped establish the direction for this toolkit. See their contributions in the appendix.

Thank you to the array of thinkers and doers whose reflections, practices and advice have contributed to the development and evolution of the wellbeing framework used in this toolkit. For this iteration of guiding principles, this notably includes Ali Grant, Dr. John Helliwell, Dr. Eva Kail, Robin Mazumder, Guillermo Penalosa, Jay Pitter, Gord Tulloch, Dasho Karma Ura, Hannah Wright, and Bring Back Main Street Studio Participants.

We are especially grateful for our Bring Back Main Street Studio participants: Ajeev Bhatia, Ariana Holt, Cheryll Case, Elora Wilkinson, Harry Olson, Houssam Elokda, Karin Pasqua, Lior Steinberg, Paty Ríos, Renée Miles Rooijmans, Rob Leblanc, Sierra Tasi-Baker, TJ Maguire and Will Dunn. This session, full of thoughtful discussion, creative ideas and critical thinking guided our approach and generated excellent process, programming and design ideas. Learn more about these young and rising urban thinkers and doers, and check out their contributions, in their bios on pages 69 and 70.

TOOLKIT CREATED BY:



Mitchell Reardon, Emma Clayton Jones, Harry Olson, Cheri Hessami, Madeleine Hebert and Charles Montgomery

GRAPHIC DESIGN BY:



Harry Olson





bringbackmainstreet.ca