

**Main Street Challenge**  
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**Step-by-Step**

1. Groundwork
  - a. Ideally, establish a vision for the downtown in concert with a broad range of stakeholders. Find out if there is community interest in bringing new business to the downtown, and find out what kinds of businesses people want to see. Use this feedback in your selection criteria (e.g., contestants could receive points for being a retail business, or a business that will enhance walking traffic, or a business that enhances the creative community, etc...)
  - b. Meet with City officials, codes office, local banks and local property owners to ensure buy-in and get any feedback.
  - c. Review procedures that any new business encounters when coming to town. Is yours an entrepreneur-friendly process? How can you help encourage a one-stop-shop experience for new business owners?
  - d. Look at the overall development plan for your downtown. Are there programs in place (as well as a sufficient number of potential customers) that would make it likely for new businesses to succeed?
  - e. Meet with small business owners in the downtown to explain the goals of a Main Street Challenge. Assure them you will not recruit direct competition to their business (if that is the case).
  
2. Create a process and timeline.
  - a. Consider using a college student majoring in business or communications to help with create the process.
  - b. Feel free to use Heart of Biddeford's process as a template. Please credit the Heart of Biddeford where appropriate in your materials and press.  
<http://www.heartofbiddeford.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/03/MainStreetChallengeApplicationandDetails-2.pdf>
  
3. Gather the incentive package.
  - a. Ask existing small business owners what would motivate them to have a business there.
  - b. Contact your city manager or economic development director or a regional economic development organization. Explain your goals, ask if they will serve on your selection committee, and ask what sources of funds would be available for an incentive grant (or forgivable loan). If there is a TIF or economic development loan fund, they may be willing to devote funds to a grant or forgivable loan.
  - c. Contact property owners to find out if they are willing to offer a reduction in rent for winners (e.g., 6-months of free rent). Determine if they will "hold" the space until winners are announced, or if they will

keep it on the market. Find out everything you can about the space (rent, typical utility costs for past two years, whether it is already fitted for any particular business type, square footage, parking availability, what is on the upper floors, whether it has any zoning restrictions.

- d. Contact local businesses that would like to be associated with positive economic development and that would be helpful to new businesses to see if they will offer free incentives to the winners. (e.g., Chamber of Commerce, graphic designer, architect, lawyer, sign maker, website host, etc...). See a list of what we offered on the Heart of Biddeford site.
4. Gather a selection committee of respected community members that includes people experienced in economic development, small business start-up, small business financing, legal issues, and downtown development. Come to consensus on selection criteria and selection process.
  5. Market your project through press releases, websites, Facebook, and paid ads in communities where you'd like to attract contestants.
  6. Refer to Heart of Biddeford's process for our timeline and selection process. We found the following phases to work well. Our process went from March-November (program announcement to doors-open). This was a high-speed process, which helped keep excitement. However, it may have deterred some potential business owners who would not have been able to do it that quickly.
    - a. Phase 1: short written pitch (invite ~10 to write full business plan. Offer business plan writing assistance from local SCORE or SBDC).
    - b. Phase 2: full business plan (select 5 or 6 who will be interviewed)
    - c. Phase 3: semi-finalist interviews
    - d. Selection of *up to* three winners.
  7. Support the new businesses through every stage of opening, helping to remove barriers to their path. If these businesses don't succeed, it will take a lot of effort to avoid negative effects.
  8. Hold Grand Openings and promote the results everywhere you can. Use the press to also promote the existing businesses you have. For example, in a press release you can say, "We are hopeful that as people come downtown to visit New Business X they will get a chance to visit the donut shop that's been there for 100 years or the jewelry store."