The Situation
In 2007, a statewide economic development conference in Boise included a session on the National Historic Trust’s Main Street Program™ and its role in economic development. The Main Street Program offers an ongoing and comprehensive downtown revitalization strategy that combines historic preservation with economic development. This approach has been widely successful in rural and urban communities nationwide.

While several towns and cities in Idaho are already implementing the Main Street approach, economic and community development professionals from around the state overwhelmingly expressed support for further involvement in the program. University of Idaho Extension was recognized as a resource and potential partner in designing and establishing the program statewide.

Our Response
The Beautiful Downtown Lewiston Association, a non-profit organization, is leading the task of revitalizing Lewiston’s downtown district with the four-point approach—organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring—of the Main Street Program. Extension worked with the Economic Restructuring committee to determine the downtown’s economic condition and market growth opportunities.

Gathering public input on where local people shop and what they would like to see in their downtown is vital. This was accomplished by conducting consumer surveys in December 2009 inside a local downtown business and in July 2010 during an outdoor downtown community event. Quantitative data was collected using Dot Survey, in which a limited number of questions are posted on easels and consumers indicate their responses using colorful small round stickers or “dots.” The Dot Survey was used to learn how often consumers shop and how much they typically spend, what types of businesses they currently use and what types they would like to see developed, and where they live and how they usually get downtown. Participants were also asked to agree or disagree with statements concerning the safety, cleanliness, parking, and image of Lewiston’s downtown. Qualitative data was collected with open-ended questions that allowed consumers to share impressions of their entire shopping trip.

Program Outcomes
Responses from 109 surveys show combined estimated total sales of $4,735 from consumers’ typical shopping trip. More than half of respondents indicate they shop in Downtown Lewiston monthly or every three months with 77% reporting they usually spend between $15 and $30. A majority of respondents indicated they would like to see water-front based businesses downtown and businesses that attract youth. Other possibilities favored include public restrooms and public art. Survey results show restaurants as the downtown business utilized most often by consumers and driving personal vehicles as the preferred method of transportation to get downtown. Issues of concern for respondents are availability of parking and the downtown’s overall image. More than a third of respondents are 41-60 years old. As the wave of Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) begin their retirement years, it may be worthwhile to assess whether downtown businesses and events are “elder-friendly.”

Collecting specific consumer information from downtown shoppers while the experience is fresh in their minds helps community development practitioners...
gain a better understanding of the types of goods and services in demand and gives area residents influence in shaping the future of their downtown area. Survey results can be used by decision-makers in regard to strengthening the downtown economy and advocating for desirable improvements to the downtown business district.

References


FOR MORE INFORMATION

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