



## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Downtowns and urban commercial districts play an important role in their communities and in Wisconsin's overall economy, functioning not only as prominent employment and business centers, but oftentimes standing as the historic foundation of the municipalities they serve. They are the center of local government, providing a meeting place for the community. These places where people congregate to do business, attend events, or simply enjoy contact with their neighbors add vitality to an area that improves the quality of life for residents and visitors.

Successful commercial districts don't just happen. They need to be planned and nurtured. Their prosperity requires interest and action from many stakeholders who share a vision for the community. Where do you start? Who needs to be involved? What resources will be required to succeed?

These questions and more form the basis of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation's (WEDC's) Connect Communities Program.



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# CONNECT COMMUNITIES

RESOURCES FOR YOUR  
DOWNTOWNS AND URBAN  
COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS



# SHARED GOALS

Connect Communities offers technical assistance and networking opportunities to local leaders interested in revitalizing their downtown or urban commercial districts. It also provides access to additional financial and technical assistance programs.

Because no two districts are identical, Connect Communities, like all WEDC programs, is adaptable to downtowns and urban commercial districts of all sizes. Connect Communities complements WEDC's very successful Main Street Program. In fact, successful Connect Communities may choose to apply for Wisconsin Main Street status.

Connect Communities helps local planners leverage the unique assets of their downtowns and urban districts. While the characteristics of each community may differ, Connect Communities participants share an interest in creating economic vibrancy within their districts. The goal is to reduce sprawl while spurring business and residential growth.

## AVAILABLE SERVICES

Communities selected to participate in the Connect Communities Program will have immediate access to resources that will help them get started with a commercial revitalization effort. You will also benefit from interaction with WEDC's experienced staff and the leaders in the Connect Communities network. Connect Communities services include:

- A ListServ/Network Group to get new ideas from staff and other participating Connect Communities
- Participation in one Main Street Executive Director Workshop each year with a focus on a downtown revitalization topic. Past topics have included business recruitment, volunteer development and branding
- An on-site visit from one of WEDC's community development staff to assist in identifying needs and offering assistance
- An on-line open house to get your questions answered by experts
- Training for your downtown director or board president
- Roundtable discussion groups on pertinent topics held once every year
- Possible opportunities to link college/university student projects to your downtown/urban commercial district needs
- Access to WEDC's downtown development library
- Access to resources and training materials that have been developed for Wisconsin Main Street communities
- Invitation to the annual Main Street Awards Program, plus eligibility to nominate a project for a Connect Communities award
- Webinars/Regional Training

## PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- Must have an organization that focuses on downtown/urban commercial district issues
- Signed agreement with WEDC
- Reporting (twice a year)
- Must have access to computer with required software
- Must commit to majority of training opportunities
- Annual fee: \$200

## APPLICATION AND SELECTION

- Up to 20 communities selected each year
- Renewal application every two years
- Scoring based on:
  - Strength of committee/organization
  - Need for assistance
  - Clearly defined downtown/urban commercial district
  - Local resources available
  - Potential

If your community is interested in learning more, please contact us at (608) 210-6840. To apply to be one of our Connect Communities visit [www.inwisconsin.com/connectcommunities](http://www.inwisconsin.com/connectcommunities).

