

Cheap ideas

Placemaking is a buzzword these days. I like to think placemaking is the introduction to better economic development ideas. And good ideas help make your town a better community.

Today we will talk about The Idea Friendly Method, Getting People Downtown, Adding Some Color, everyone can help, and small ideas that create small businesses.



Iowa and Sioux

I'm Deb Brown and I am from the lands of the loway. The loway people are of Sioux stock and closely related to the Otoe and Missouri tribes. This land is now the state of Iowa.

I currently live on the lands of the Pascagoula, in Gulfport, Mississippi.

Listen

I'll share many inexpensive and practical ideas for doing economic development on a shoestring budget and shaping a better future for your town. Don't try to make notes of all of them!

Listen for the idea that gets you excited, one that matches up with your big idea for your community. That's the one to write down!

There are four rounds to this presentation and they are all related to placemaking, economic development and affordable ways to help your community.

Idea Friendly

First we're going to add some structure, so you can make the most of these ideas or any ideas that you come up with from any source.



We always use our Idea Friendly Method. You gather your crowd around a big idea, and you begin building connections to turn the crowd into a powerful network that can take small steps to get it done.

With the Idea Friendly Method you can take any idea and make it happen while building strength and resilience in your community.

Let's walk through some examples for each part of the method.

Gather Your Crowd

Here's an example of how to Gather Your Crowd.

Pullman, Washington, had a dirty sidewalk problem. Every time it rains, dirt and leaves and stuff wash out of the streets and onto the sidewalks. Pretty messy. At a meeting they talked about doing another cleanup day, but no one was very excited about it.

Then Willow, a business owner, put up her hand and said, "I'll clean up my sidewalk." And she did. But how do you get from one person cleaning their own sidewalk to a crowd of people cleaning up downtown on an ongoing basis?



You can take pictures when you clean your own sidewalk. Put it on social media. Hashtag it #CleanYourOwnSidewalkDay and ask everyone to join in. Every time you clean your sidewalk, keep posting it and tagging it. Make a big deal out of how everyone can do their own sidewalk, too. Soon enough, someone will join you; maybe a lot of someone's.

It worked. Other merchants followed her lead. They all started sweeping their sidewalks on Wednesdays. Then the city joined in: now they send the street sweeper around Thursday in the early morning hours.

That's how you Gather Your Crowd: be conspicuous doing your thing, and invite others to join in. And make it easy to join in!

Build

The next part of the Idea Friendly Method is to Build Connections. Let's say our big idea is to create more public art in town. We're going to need materials. The way we get materials is to Build Connections and network!

In Webster City, Iowa, the mayor held a town clean up weekend. It was a bit different, people actually brought their old things, garbage and no longer wanted items to a central location for recycling or



proper disposal. Volunteers helped unload cars and trucks.

The mayor watched for any paint that was turned in that looked like it was still good, and he set that aside. That paint was later used in the Paint the Street Project. For one week the street was closed, and each business that wanted to would pay \$50 to paint any design they wanted in one section. The funds raised went to support another arts event. Each year they paint over the designs with white paint and start again. And the mayor was able to kick this off by building connections to get that usable paint at no cost.

Small Steps

The third part of the Idea Friendly Method is to Take Small Steps:

What are some cheap ideas to help you get going right away and learn from tiny mistakes?

Let's use the big idea of more public art downtown again. Maybe we can't afford a big-name mural artist but we can take small steps.

Let's make some murals with chalk. Start on the blank side of a building. Or fill in the space where you used to have a mural but it flaked away. Or turn a blank retaining wall into a colorful spot. Any



blank surface is fair game.

Divide up the downtown, let lots of people create chalk murals in all the blank spaces. After a couple of rains it just washes away! But before it does, it's going to generate a lot of interest and conversation around creating more art.

Round One

Your downtown is the area of your community that everyone claims as their own. It's where you gather for events, eat with friends and everyone wants to visit when they come back home. It is the heart of our towns. Many of our independent businesses are there and

they support your community projects, school sports, and keep more of the profits in town.

It makes sense to bring people downtown – both visitors and locals. Let's look at some affordable ways to do that.

Wifi

Encourage people to linger downtown by sharing your wifi. Just post a sign with the guest password. Ask other downtown businesses to share their wifi with customers and visitors, too. You



can all use the same password!

And it doesn't cost you a thing.

Empty spaces

This used to be a sad space. They added seating at the end, painted rocks and used the greenery well. All low-cost additions.

This is in Lockhart TX

Shovel

In the winter, you can shovel snow downtown, any place that gets missed by the city or the businesses. This is critical to help

everyone, regardless of their mobility, continue to shop and get services in your local businesses.

Do it like Willow does with sweeping sidewalks in Pullman, Washington. Become a movement that people can get behind and inspire other businesspeople to shovel their own sidewalks and improve access for everyone.

Pinterest

Remind people there's *lots to do* with a Pinterest Board like this one



from the Stone's Throw Café, in Alberta: "What to do in CrowsnestPass"

Make it a group board and gather your crowd through group pinning.

It doesn't cost you any money to promote what you already have.

Fix something

Fix something broken on an empty building, like a loose board or dangling wire. You can even wash the windows. This particular building was such an eyesore that at least 3 people mentioned it to Becky before she even arrived in town. After she suggested they do a little ninja cleanup, one city council member actually adopted

these sad flower boxes with new happy looking plants, and she carried water to the plants all summer long. She told Becky that action led to some great conversations with people right there on the sidewalk.

String lights

Hang string lights or put out solar lights. There's not a space in the world that can't be made better with some string lights. Put them in pocket parks, on trees, on fences, and over outdoor patios.



This is in Iowa City. Lights outside at night also help to make a space safer.

Rock Hunt

Bolivar, Missouri started a rock hunt a few years ago. You've probably heard of other towns that do these. People paint rocks with cute or inspirational images and sayings. Then they hide them around town. If you find one, you post a picture of it on Facebook, then you can decide to hide it again in a new place or keep it and hide a new rock that you painted for someone else to find.

Kids and parents, families, people of all ages were out walking around the park and downtown, spending hours together.

People from different groups, from all across the community helped by painting rocks. Nursing home residents painted rocks. City officials painted rocks. Everyone was painting rocks.

Susan Sparks the organizer said, “It’s an art movement,” We were just looking to spread a little joy and we did.” It united the town. That’s a positive kind of community experience.



Permission

Now, before someone asks you, let’s talk about permission. When do you need it, and when should you ask for forgiveness instead?

Public Safety

When public safety is involved, always get permission. That includes ideas like painting your fire hydrants, crosswalks, bollards like you see here, utility poles and utility boxes.

Temporary

When it’s temporary, just do it. Chalk is so easy to wash off, go ahead.

You are the public

If it's a public common, presume you are part of the public. What we've seen is that we tend to over-assume we need permission, when really, it's a small town and most people will appreciate you doing a good thing. So go ahead and plant native wildflowers in that bare dirt.

In Clark, South Dakota, an older man would just throw seeds over empty lots all around town and everyone was thrilled to see the



flowers grow.

Round 2

People want to live in a place that is beautiful and happy. So next, I'm sharing ideas for making your community more accessible, beautiful, involving, and pleasant for all the local people. Long term, it's attractive to visitors and outsiders, too.

Columbiana

At least make it look better. This boarded up window was an eyesore and folks couldn't understand why the owner didn't do something about it. I went and visited with him and found out he was waiting for a buyer and they he would build out the to the specs of the new business.

Local artist

The city administrator hired a local artist to paint this scene and he worked on this painting during an outdoor festival downtown. Lots of people got to see him work, talk with him a bit and got to tour the building.

Fences

Lots of towns have chain link fence either downtown or along the major traffic routes. It's a natural place to hang some art. Indianola,



Iowa, was renovating their courthouse square and there was a big hole in the middle of town.

The county made the best of a messy situation by decorating the construction fencing with colorful banners that promote their County. They opened it up to the community for people to submit or sponsor their own banners. Since it was a multi-year project, they continued to add more banners over time. They called it "Warren County Strong" to reflect the strength that their communities were showing during this tough time!

And it's much more attractive than blank chain link and a busy construction site.

Vines

Another way to deal with a fence is to grow flowers or vines that crawl up the fence! Actually, this can work on any fence. This is in Savanna Illinois, just across from Sabula, Iowa.

Alleys

The next step is to encourage businesses to make their alley entries more useful and attractive.



Hutchinson Minnesota had their main street completely redone. The Chamber worked with their stores to brighten up the back entrances, make them safer so customers could use parking behind the stores.

Webster City Iowa has big parking lots behind the stores and the retailers have been sprucing up their entrances and making the sidewalks behind the stores safer. It also frees up the parking in front of the stores.

Flowers

Great use of flowers in a parking garage! This is in Huntington, West Virginia. What other unique areas could you put flowers in?

Adopt

Almost every town has some flowerpots or planters downtown. Usually there are several planters that don't have anything growing in them!

Let people and groups and businesses take over maintaining one pot. Then encourage them to plant lots of colorful plants.

Jenny Amy told us: "We have Stealth Gardeners in Southampton, Ontario, who come out and water potted plants that are sad and



pull-out weeds, and even sometimes spread mulch." They work in the early morning or late evenings, so few people ever see them. So they really are Stealth Gardeners!

Those planters don't have to be limited to just flowers. What about some tomato plants or berries for picking? Or other garden items?

The Town of Lumby, B.C., plants herbs in pots on the utility poles downtown. Everyone is welcome to take some!

PLANT the town RED

Another highly visible community pride project comes from Lincoln, Illinois. They created a "**Plant the Town Red**" project. They encouraged everyone to plant red tulips in front yards and in public

spaces. Together, they've put over 40,000 red tulips in the ground in Lincoln. To make it even more visible, they lined a lot of the public thoroughfares.

And since you can dig and divide tulip bulbs, this is one project that can keep growing and growing.

Webelos Cub Scout Pack 101 in Lincoln took part in the city-wide program, Plant the Town Red. The troop members planted tulip bulbs at the Lincoln Fire Station as well as the Veterans Memorial



Park on Union Street.

Selfie

Paint or set up something people will want to take their picture with. You can paint or chalk on blank walls.

For something more durable than chalk but less permanent than paint on walls, you can paint selfie backdrops on fabric, cardboard, wood, or anything you can find. Then bring them out for special occasions.

This is in Van Buren County Iowa and they set them up for their twice a year event across the entire county.

Hashtags

Want people to use your hashtags? Post them! You'll be getting more people to help promote your community.

When I visited Paulding, Ohio, there was a big sign painted on the wall of an empty building. It was advertising a business that was no longer there. The building's owner lived in China and had no plans to return. Before I left, we covered the old sign by painting their favorite hashtag promoting the town. And no, we did not ask for



permission! Lots of people honked and cheered when they drove by, including the county sheriff. This was a good way to make more locals aware of the My Paulding hashtag.

More

Dublin, Texas, posts their most popular hashtags with little signs like this one at the municipal airport. They have a lot of visitors, and this is a great way to remind them to share photos and use your hashtags.

Construction

At some point there will be construction going on. Create some great looking boards in front of it! Use quotes from your local people. Let the students be involved in the work. Make it fun! By

using quotes from residents, you're involving more people in your community!

Paint by Numbers

Painting murals using the paint by numbers method is a great way to bring more people into the process. In Webster City, Iowa four groups, government, business, education, and a nonprofit, developed a creative placemaking art project that everyone could be involved in.



They picked a building with some boarded up windows on the second floor that they could use as a canvas for some art. The building was owned by a Latino, and many of the businesses on the ground floor serve the Hispanic people and young people in the community.

An artist drew a simple paint by numbers design of colorful geometric shapes and colors from the town's history. They took all the panels to the fairgrounds and laid them out.

Then they invited everyone in town to come paint, even a tiny bit. Anyone could go for even a few minutes and be part of painting the designs. The local newspaper took pictures. You could see the camaraderie created when people come together to make art.

Now that the panels are installed over the boarded-up windows, that building is now a place the locals love to look at and share with their friends.

Murals

This mural is in Minnesota. The artist drew the image and added paint in a few places and the community painted the rest! Everyone was invited to also add their logos or names in a tiny way.

Roles



Everyone has gifts to share and ways they can play a role in your community. Not everyone can participate in the same way. We have to make the size of what we ask them to do match what they are capable of and motivated to do. These next ideas are about breaking down the size of what you ask people to do.

Officials

In any organization you are part of, give smaller grant amounts. Give ten \$100 grants for every 1-thousand-dollar grant. Your budget is extra tight anyway, so this is the perfect time to support promising tiny ideas. And if you can't grant money, print certificates, and give public recognition.

This is the young entrepreneur of the year, Norfolk County Ontario.

Donate

We know you are resourceful people who take action because you're here. But you'll talk to some people who say they just don't have time for all this! Great, they can donate money!

Dickinson, North Dakota, has a group of 300 people who donate \$100 a quarter to be used to better the community. Then the majority in attendance decide who to donate to.



Spearfish, South Dakota, have 100 women who donate \$100 for similar crowdfunding projects.

Luling, Texas, Chamber of Commerce invited people to bring just \$20, then they all shopped together at a local business. That's called a cash mob, and it's a great way to support a local business.

Katy Kassian told us she has a group of friends in rural North Dakota who each give \$5 then they use the group money to support local businesses. They helped a craft shop purchase an initial round of yarns and helped Stag Valley Homestead purchase some greenhouse items.

Stuff

Some folks can't donate money. Great, they can donate stuff!

Encourage people to donate an extra tool they no longer need, as long as it's still usable. You can add it to the tool library.

Ask them to check their shed and garage for paint, lumber, and other materials that could be used in projects around town.

Tell them to look around the garden. Any plants you could dig and



divide for flower baskets downtown?

Time

If people can't donate stuff or money, maybe you can help them can donate just a little time. You'll find people **don't** have time to serve on a multi-year committee, but they do have a couple of hours to help on a project for one day. So make sure you ask people for time spent doing, not meeting.

Toni Henry from Pennsylvania told us:

“Our East Brady Beautification Group was having trouble getting people to meetings. I always said they came to eat cake and refreshments, but when asked if they could show up on another day

to weed the park they were busy. I assumed they used up their only available hour meeting and eating cake!! So...I suggested that instead we meet at the park with tools and while we are weeding we could "meet". After weeding we could all stop in at the Old Bank Deli for ice cream (supporting a local small business). That seemed to work!!”

(East Brady is fewer than 1,000 people)

Living room



This last idea is all about building community and creating better connections and understanding. You can create a listening post in an empty lot - two chairs and a sign encouraging people to just talk and listen to each other. Community happens when people talk to each other.

This was an art project in Lyons NE

Livability

A lot of these ideas are about livability. If you don't have excitement, beauty, and a joyful atmosphere any work you do to create economic development will be fruitless and wasted time. Start small, get people excited and involved and make your town the place people talk about.

The strength of interested people talking to each other becomes even more powerful when people do projects together. They take ownership of the project and look forward to doing more. Community is being created. No matter how small of a step you take, you feel ownership for the project you work on.

The Idea Friendly way makes room for everyone to participate by taking small steps. Trying and testing ideas, enjoying the



participation and ownership of many people, and creating your community is economic development.

Round 4

Let's look at some ways to start tiny businesses that don't require huge investments. These ideas really do involve placemaking and using what you have. You can lower the barrier to entry for entrepreneurs, let them test their ideas out and see if they work and create more excitement around new businesses. You want more new tiny business ideas to get tried, so you can find the most promising ones to grow.

Zuni

Our first few ideas are about expanding the places where your tiniest business startups can make sales and grow.

The Pueblo of Zuni, New Mexico, had lots of local people making traditional crafts and arts, but very few usable commercial buildings. To support their artists in growing their businesses, they created an outdoor market area in an empty lot and started a series of arts and crafts market events. The artists reached more



customers together at these temporary events than they would have each on their own.

This is easy to start in any town: Take an empty lot. Pick a weekend and have your local crafters, artists and entrepreneurs sell from pop-up booths.

Tionesta

Tionesta, Pennsylvania (pop. 483), lost an entire block of downtown buildings to a fire. The lot sat empty for 10 years. No one business was coming to save their town. Then the industrial development board decided to try something different – lots of tiny businesses.

Garden sheds

They put garden sheds on that empty block and added facades to match the downtown buildings. This block became the Tionesta Market Village and is a tiny business incubator. Each shed is home to a business that rents the space for about \$50 a month. There is a bakery that expanded from another town and a winery's 2nd location. You'll find a woman who makes doll clothes, a man who sells hand-tied flies for the people who fish. There's a barbeque place, an artist's retail space and a candle shop. This market gives



local entrepreneurs the chance to try out their business ideas and test the market.

They've also incubated new local businesses, like a pair of local pottery makers who were one of the first to rent a shed and have since outgrown it and moved into a larger garage in town.

Art on walls

Our next idea is business inside a business. This is simple to start. Walk into an existing retail business and ask if they'll dedicate one wall for another local business to decorate with something for sale. This coffee shop in Watertown, Minnesota asked a local photographer who worked from their home to display their work on

an empty wall. In Goffstown, New Hampshire, local artists have joined together to put art on the walls inside existing businesses, and they pop up a temporary gallery inside of empty buildings.

Retail Floor space

Look inside your service businesses, nonprofits, museums, government buildings and any other places that are open to the public. If there's room for a shelf, you can turn that into another business. This shelf of locally produced foods is inside the



Chickasaw Nation's Cultural Center in Sulphur, Oklahoma.

Showcase

This next idea brings your hidden businesses out with new opportunities to sell and network. Michele Robles from Ohio, helped put together a business showcase specifically for home based and rural businesses that were unknown to most people. They held it in an empty building downtown.

Michele told us, "The seed of the concept was a local business owner who needed a custom hose for a piece of equipment. He had to drive 17 miles to the closest city for them until he found out that a small business in the rural area just 2 miles away could make them cheaper. He had no idea they were there!"

Here's the unexpected bonus: showcasing those hidden businesses resulted in the creation of at least two new businesses in town.

Networking

These next few ideas are about getting your potential businesses the resources they need to start or grow.

Norfolk County, Ontario, added a formal **networking exercise** at their Economic Development and Tourism meeting. Attendees were



able to book a one-on-one meeting with anyone else who would be there. Interestingly, people asked for meetings even with people they already knew. They weren't looking for an introduction.

They were looking for a time to make a pitch or open a conversation about a future project. Even people who run into each other around town may not get a chance to start a deeper conversation. You know, the post office often isn't the right place to ask about earning someone's business. Organizer Clark Hoskin told us that people found new jobs during that exercise and one person made a connection that led to a new business.

Entrebash

Several counties in Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa decided they wanted more entrepreneurs, so they held an informal gathering called Entrebash. Round tables were set up so you could visit with the experts personally. The young Hispanic couple you see in the photo met with the Small Business Development Center and have since started their own greenhouse business.

Garages



These next ideas are more about your makers and crafters, your tiny manufacturers.

How many of your potential entrepreneurs have a garage-sized business idea, don't have a usable garage of their own? or they don't own a house, or they can't afford to buy a house just to get a garage to get started?

Twisp, Washington (pop 1,500) converted a former forest ranger station into spaces for local businesses. This is the old equipment shed. They are slowly converting it into small shop spaces by adding the fronts. These are rented to local craft entrepreneurs, including a blacksmith and a conservation birdhouse maker.

Tool Library

Another idea to get more people making things and support an entrepreneurial mindset is a tool library. People can check out tools for woodworking, metal work, sewing machines, even culinary tools, and kitchen equipment. Why not 3D printers, desktop laser etching, or even compact machine tools? Any kind of tool you can think of, this is a good way to get it into the hands of more creative people in your community.



Located on Factory Street in North Carlisle, PA the Carlisle Tool Library makes “tools, shop space, and expertise available to everyone,” according to their website, carlisletoollibrary.org. Nate Smith, co-founded the space with Jeff Adams in October of 2017. Nate had been renovating his house nearby and was able to borrow a lot of what he needed from Jeff. The idea of a tool lending library was soon hatched, and in April 2018, they officially opened their doors. Nate explained some of the nuts and bolts.

“The Carlisle Tool Library at its most basic gives the community access to tools which they may not be able to get otherwise,” “We have over 800 tools, many of which are expensive or tools that one might only use one time in their life. We also offer classes to teach

skills that are often hard to come by in a society that decreasingly values building and repairing,” he said.

Geezers

If you take the garage sized spaces, and outfit them with a tool library of donated equipment people can share, you get a low-budget makerspace.

One maker space like this is in Akron, Iowa, and it got started thanks to a group of retired fellows who drink coffee together each



morning. The men had woodworking tools cluttering up their garages. They got together and moved their tools into an unused workspace in an empty building. They call their workspace the Old Geezers Club.

They work with the local shop teacher and help students learn the craft of wood working. It's a great place for potential makers to try out the equipment without investing a ton of money into their project.

Crafters

You can boost creativity while building community with co-crafting events like crafternoons, hacker or maker days.

From tech enthusiasts to crafters, scientists to garage tinkerers, at these kinds of events, novices and experts of all ages come together to show what they've made and share what they're learning.

Once you start looking around, you'll see a lot of crafting and making events. Like the North American Indigenous and New Canadian artists who teach their skills in Crafternoon events put on by Mentoring Artists for Women's Art in Winnipeg.



Shared Art spaces

Much like the shared woodworking space, all kinds of artists and makers can benefit from shared spaces and shared equipment.

The ARTesian Gallery, in Sulphur, Oklahoma, is a project of the Chickasaw Nation. They took an empty building and divided it up into individual studios for artists to work in, gallery space for exhibits, classroom space for training, an art supply shop and shared equipment like a pottery kiln that all the artists can use. Mark Mulligan with the Chickasaw Nation said his vision for the Gallery is a collaborative co-working space for artists or an arts incubator with artists meeting each other, trying new things, and sharing ideas.

Local artists

An example of one kind of local artist you could be growing through your crafternoons and shared workspaces is Rose Williamson of the Crow Reservation in Montana. She started her beaded jewelry business from her home. She expanded into making clothing too, like you see here. That's Rose in the middle. She sells her jewelry, clothing, and beadwork at popups, at events around the state, and online. Because Rose is fairly well known, she gets a lot of event invitations, and she reaches out to other, less well-known artists to



come with her and exhibit their art.

When you're looking for who would fill a shared art space, or attend crafternoons, or use your maker space, start by looking at who already sells in booths at events and online. Those are your seed businesses to not only fill the space but also to support and inspire people who could make their art or hobby into a tiny business.

Cord

In Webster City, Iowa the nonprofit organization Legacy Learning Boone River Valley brought an Iowa artist, Cord McMann to be the artist in residence. An empty building owner let him use the front part of a building for his gallery and workshop for 6 months. He

lived with family nearby. He hosted gallery showings. Held a summer program for young people. Brought in locals and their dogs and offered drawings for sale of their pets. Cord also learned how to hold open hours and balance a business. He learned more about marketing his business. And he made some money too!

SSUP

Another way to fill your shared spaces and support more startups is to start with your student entrepreneurs.



One terrific youth entrepreneurship program happens in Norfolk County, Ontario. They have a summer project for kids in grades 6 through 12, called the Student Start Up project, or SSUP.

Kids can apply for real money to start a real business. They submit a very simple explanation of what business they want to start, following an elementary level “business plan” template. Over the years Norfolk County has offered anywhere from \$50 to \$200 in start-up grants to the kids, depending on how much funding is available.

Then kids run their businesses all summer. And during the summer, Norfolk County holds a special marketplace event, where the young

entrepreneurs can feature their businesses in booths and displays. I'm sure people in the county look forward to this every year.

At the end of the summer, kids can earn a small cash bonus by turning in a final report that looks a lot like a simple profit and loss statement.

Newcomers

In Bennettsville SC they have a newcomer gathering every quarter



or so. Realtors personally invited the people they sold houses to the newcomer event – at this event they fed them, had a county person, city person and me available to answer questions. It was very informal. Yet two people started new business because they heard about the empty buildings. This could be a great time to introduce your newcomers to your retailers – either personally or with a handout of the businesses.

Sign up

This mural was created by a student in Jackson County, KY. The local tourism people and local artists created a contest to have kids design murals for around the county. Most of the physical products were donated by businesses, and there was a small grant as well.

It's important that you involve your kids in your community. They are creative, happy, smart and our future leaders!

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