

# Fostering Connection on Main Street

*Ideas Shared During the Main Street America + U.S. Chamber of Connection Webinar on March 3, 2026*

During the webinar Fostering Connection on Main Street, participants from across the Main Street network shared dozens of practical ideas in the chat about how they cultivate connection in their communities. The ideas below capture many of those suggestions so others can explore and adapt them in their own districts.

Community leaders emphasized that connection often grows from simple, consistent opportunities for people to gather, collaborate, and participate in shared experiences.

## Community Connection Ideas

- Monthly networking meetups for merchants or downtown stakeholders
- Business happy hours or informal merchant gatherings
- One-on-one check-ins with local business owners
- “Mornings with Main Street” open office hours at local businesses
- Quarterly coffee gatherings for downtown stakeholders
- Walk-and-talk meetings or informal walking conversations
- Social fairs that introduce local clubs, organizations, and volunteer opportunities
- Programs that connect newcomers with community members
- Buddy systems for people attending events alone
- Welcome programs for new homeowners, renters, or business owners
- Community newsletters or local contact lists
- Social media groups that function as community message boards
- Partnerships with chambers, libraries, or small business development centers to connect entrepreneurs

## Events and Activities That Bring People Together

- Farmers markets
- Street dances or community dances
- Outdoor concert series such as Music in the Park
- Block parties and neighborhood gatherings
- Dog-centered community events
- Chalk art festivals and public art events
- Sip, Shop, and Stroll retail events
- Open mic nights and live music jams
- Holiday markets and seasonal celebrations
- Game nights hosted at coffee shops or community spaces
- Community craft classes or maker events
- Retail promotions that encourage friends to attend together
- Cultural festivals that celebrate the diversity of the community

### **Third Places That Encourage Social Interaction**

- Coffee shops and cafés
- Public libraries
- Breweries and restaurants
- Community centers
- Pocket parks and plazas
- Farmers markets
- Historic theaters
- Bookstores and arts venues
- Community gardens
- Makerspaces and art studios
- Public gathering areas such as downtown plazas or parks

### **Volunteerism and Community Stewardship**

- Community clean-up days
- Adopt-an-alley programs
- Tree stewardship and planting initiatives
- Flower bed or streetscape maintenance groups
- Native plant restoration or environmental projects
- Community murals and public art installations
- Garden volunteer programs
- Spring and fall planting days
- Volunteer teams supporting downtown events
- Civic partnerships with groups such as Rotary, Lions Club, or Kiwanis

### **Welcoming and Connecting Newcomers**

- Hosting newcomer nights downtown
- Creating “first 60 days in our town” checklists or welcome guides
- Partnering with local realtors to share information with new residents
- Connecting newcomers to volunteer opportunities and local clubs
- Creating welcome committees or welcome events
- Providing spaces where people can easily meet others before attending events

### **Helpful Resources Shared During the Webinar**

- Main Street America Annual Report – <https://mainstreet.org/about/2025-annual-report>
- Belonging Barometer Report – <https://preservewa.org/programs/mainstreet/belonging-barometer-report>
- Percent for Place resources – <https://percentforplace.org/resources>
- U.S. Chamber of Connection – <http://chamberofconnection.org>
- Six Points of Connection report – <https://www.chamberofconnection.org/the-six-points-of-connection-2026>

- Welcoming Newcomers Playbook – <https://www.chamberofconnection.org/welcomingnewcomers>
- The Spirit Level research on inequality and connection – <https://equalitytrust.org.uk/evidence-base/the-spirit-level-at-15>
- Social Connection Collective (LinkedIn group) – <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/14936039>
- Main Street America Knowledge Hub – <https://mainstreet.org/resources/knowledge-hub>

### **Closing Thought**

The ideas shared during the webinar demonstrate that connection on Main Street rarely comes from a single program or event. Instead, it grows through many small, consistent opportunities for people to gather, collaborate, volunteer, and build relationships in the places where they live and work.

Communities across the network are experimenting with creative ways to bring people together. By sharing these approaches, Main Street leaders can learn from one another and continue strengthening the social fabric of their districts.