

Story #1 – The Process of Starting a Wellness Committee

Bath is a vibrant community, with an active downtown full of businesses and nonprofits eager to create a place for residents and visitors to play, shop, and stay. When we heard about the Healthy Maine Streets program, we knew it would be a perfect fit for Bath. The City currently has a large handful of health and fitness businesses, along with a vibrant farmers' market, so we knew the city business owners would be interested in a new wellness initiative. Gathering our 10 businesses was no problem – we actually started with almost 15! The first few meetings, which happen on the last Tuesday of every month, have been energetic and inspiring, with everyone excited to start implementing our worksite wellness plans.

There have been a few bumps along the way that could be avoided in future programs like this. Our biggest hang up right now is the website for completing the Worksite & Employee Surveys. We had the training very early on, with 100% attendance from our businesses, and from there we were going to get working on the surveys. This was the first bump in the road. The system was down nationwide and our businesses had to jump through some hoops to get signed up. That was taken care of, and our businesses started working on the surveys. This is where the second bump in the road came in. Our survey closed for an unknown reason, and had to be re-opened after several businesses complained. Main Street Bath, and a few other businesses, had no problem entering their data in, and moving pretty quickly through the inventory and surveys. However, this was not the case for many of our other businesses. One of our larger businesses successfully got her employees to take the survey, but they noticed there was already data in the survey online when they went to fill it out. This was our third bump in the road. Apparently data from another person filling out the online survey was still in the fields when people were going online to fill their surveys out. This led some of the employees to be concerned that the data was not saving, and that there was a breach in security.

We are still pushing forward with filling out the surveys and getting the businesses all up to speed, but these bumps in the road have been jarring. I think that when the online site is not working, continuously, it weakens the trust within the program, from the point of view of the businesses and employees. It also makes this process difficult, and much more of a hurdle than was expected. There is obviously the understanding that problems will arise in any situation like this, but I believe there are some ways around this, that other communities might find helpful. The biggest thing I think to make this process smoother, is to print off the employee surveys, have the business owners hand them out to their employees, and then have the Main Street staff enter them into the HMS website. This would eliminate the issues with having to get employees on the computer if they are not tech savvy, and keeps the Main Street Staff as the sole business handling the technical problems that may arise. This takes some weight off the businesses shoulders, which will keep them interested in the program. When it becomes burdensome it's difficult to keep the committee members' energy levels high, and their energy and enthusiasm is what we have found is keeping the program moving forward in our community.