

Healthy Maine Streets Brunswick Story: Recruiting Businesses
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As we began recruiting businesses to participate in the Healthy Maine Streets Brunswick initiative in April 2013, I quickly realized that the best approach would be to ask businesses who were already members of the Brunswick Downtown Association (BDA). Since BDA was leading the project in our town, it made sense to ask businesses who were affiliated with them and familiar with the work that a downtown organization does.

Several of the businesses that I approached were eager to learn more and felt that the Healthy Maine Streets project fit in with their work culture and company goals. However, many business owners were reluctant to commit to anything and had a difficult time seeing how this project is part of a broader community effort to improve the health and wellness of downtown Brunswick. When talking with reluctant business owners, the same questions seemed to arise: What is the point of this? What do I have to do? Do I have to make my employees do it? Why should I do this? And of course, what's in it for me? Despite my best efforts to provide good information about the value of participation and the increased benefits to the community of Brunswick, these businesses were not convinced and many of them ultimately did not sign on as a participating partner.

Other businesses showed interest in participating, but felt like they were not a good fit for the needs of the project. These business owners typically had only 1 or 2 employees including themselves, and did not see much value in implementing a worksite wellness program for only one person. Several of these business owners stated that they would be interested in learning more and they are supportive of the project overall, but they did not want to add another task to their to-do list and did not see much benefit for their specific worksite.

As with any community project, there are a broad array of stakeholders and an even wider set of personalities. We learned that some business owners believe that community engagement is good for their business, some business owners likely would have declined regardless of what we were asking them to do, and other business owners feel that they are too small to be included even in "small business" initiatives.

