

101 WAYS TO START MORE TINY BUSINESSES IN YOUR TOWN



Becky McCray

SAVEYOUR
.town

Who can encourage more tiny businesses? Anyone in town! It's not just officials or leaders or people with important titles. Anyone can read through these ideas, find one that excites them, and take action right away.

1. Declare an empty lot open for business and let anyone set up on it (seen in the cover photo)
2. Ask the person who sells storage sheds to let businesses locate inside them temporarily during a festival or special event ([Miller, South Dakota](#))
3. Turn the temporary storage shed businesses into an on-going thing on the sales lot
4. Turn an empty lot into a seasonal or year-round storage shed business market village ([Tionesta, Pennsylvania](#))
5. Put storage shed businesses all around town
6. Try upscale artist shanties ([Hyannis, Massachussets](#))
7. Walk into an existing retail business and ask if they'll dedicate one square foot of counter or floor space to a new tiny business
8. Walk into existing businesses looking for unused facilities, like the retail store I found had an unused beauty salon booth in the back
9. Walk into existing non-retail businesses looking for space to add tiny retail in front
10. Walk into existing non-retail businesses looking for unused offices and rooms that could be tiny work spaces ([Chicago](#))
11. Turn an empty display window into a smoffice ([Durham, North Carolina](#))
12. Walk into museums and historical sites and look for space for businesses to locate or sell products inside them (Sulphur, Oklahoma)
13. Find out what kids make in school that they could sell and find them a place to put it on sale
14. Talk to ag instructors about potential products kids could sell like raising seedling plants, baby chicks, or welded items
15. Talk to garden clubs and see if they have plants to sell that could be a pop-up business
16. Ask other local organizations what they make and sell that could become a tiny business



17. Ask businesspeople if they have a family member who would like to try a pop up business
18. Take over an empty sidewalk for temporary pop-ups
19. Close the streets for a day so you can open them for temporary pop-ups ([Waynoka, Oklahoma](#))
20. Take over an empty building for temporary pop-up businesses
21. Convert an empty building into on-going pop-ups
22. Convert an empty building into artists workspaces
23. Build tiny stores inside an empty building ([Washington, Iowa](#))
24. Find a food business that is closed one or more days a week and ask them to allow a different eatery to open in their location just on the days they are closed
25. Convert a closed restaurant into a short-term food pop-up
26. Convert a closed restaurant into on-going food pop-ups, rentable by the day or week
27. Convert a closed restaurant into a rentable kitchen for mobile food businesses
28. Divide an empty restaurant into four separate spaces and run four restaurants, cafes or eateries at the same time
29. Let two different restaurants split the day in the same building, one for breakfast, one for supper
30. Convert an out-of-the-way building for “ghost” restaurants, with no dine in, delivery only
31. Use a closed restaurant to host community dinners to drum up interest in other food pop-up ideas
32. Use a closed restaurant, former school or church with a commercial kitchen as a kitchen incubator for food-based businesses ([Clinton, Minnesota](#))
33. Make space for business booths at every special event
34. Create special events that only consist of booths and pop-ups ([Webster City, Iowa](#))
35. Hold a holiday market, European style ([Steubenville, Ohio](#))
36. Publicize your library's workspaces as a place to work on a business
37. Hold co-working events like Jelly ([Round Rock, Texas](#))
38. Hold co-crafting events like crafternoons, hacker or maker days



Closing the street for pop-ups, Waynoka, Okla

39. Hold co-working events outside in public spaces so people see how many tiny laptop-based businesses are in town
40. Set up a co-working space ([Pella, Iowa](#))
41. Set up a co-crafting space
42. Create a tool library ([Central Ohio](#))
43. Hold classes in how to use tools to make things
44. Set up a maker space with low-tech tools and materials
45. Set up a maker space with desktop size manufacturing equipment ([example equipment](#))
46. Set up a maker space with high-tech tools and materials ([Sonora, California](#))
47. Create rent-able garages and workshops (Pullman, Washington)
48. Connect people with online platforms for making their own custom goods, like custom printed fabrics, custom promotional items ([Spoonflower custom fabric printing](#))
49. Hold a summer entrepreneurship project for youth like [Lemonade Day](#)
50. Hold a summer entrepreneurship project for adults
51. Set up a video studio anyone can use or rent, to make instructional videos or hold video conferences ([Sonora, California](#))
52. Set up an audio studio anyone can use or rent, to record or edit their music or voice
53. Open public performance spaces or tiny outdoor stages to anyone who gives lessons and wants to let students perform
54. Set up an indoor gym studio where anyone can teach fitness classes, rentable by the day or hour
55. Set up an outdoor gym studio where anyone can teach fitness classes, rentable by the day or hour
56. Hold tasting events for local foods
57. Hang local art on the walls of local businesses ([Goffstown, New Hampshire](#))
58. Hold networking events with existing business owners and want-to-be business dreamers
59. Hold an author fair or literary festival ([Croydon, UK](#))
60. Hold a writing event ([Alva, Oklahoma](#))
61. Hold business fairs for home-based and direct selling businesses ([business fairs](#))



62. Start a fix-it shop where people can repair neighbors' things, like clothes and electronics ([Willimantic, Connecticut](#))
63. Create a recreation equipment library to promote more recreation-based businesses ([fishing tackle](#))
64. Create a public garden space
65. Teach gardening classes
66. Open a special space at the farmer's market for people with just a few items
67. Help people find, collect and sell unharvested fruit from trees in town ([Fallenfruit](#))
68. Create small mobile slaughterhouses for local livestock businesses ([niche meat processing](#))
69. Hold a real-world in person event for sellers in your local Facebook and online swap/buy/sell groups
70. Provide more public wifi in more places available 24/7 ([here's why](#))
71. Make space for truck and trailer-based businesses
72. Ask businesses that are based in rural areas (outside of town) if they would like to start a tiny business outpost in your town
73. Publicize waste products that local businesses pay to dispose of
74. Publicize raw materials that local businesses need to buy
75. Publicize products and services that local businesses need to buy
76. Publicize waste products that local governments, nonprofits and agencies pay to dispose of ([Iowa](#))
77. Publicize raw materials that local governments, nonprofits and agencies need to buy
78. Publicize products and services that local governments, nonprofits and agencies need to buy
79. Stand at the city limits and look out. What do you create or produce that you could sell to other areas?
80. Find out what manufacturing or industrial equipment sits idle part of the day, over weekends or part of the year that could be rented out
81. Pay local artists, musicians and other creatives to be part of local events, even if they're just starting out
82. Host a paid artist in residence, poet in residence, or maker in residence
83. Shop local and spend your money with tiny businesses



Local musicians, Hutchinson, Kansas

84. Talk to every tiny business owner about what they need to learn to step up to a larger business
85. Talk to every tiny business owner about what physical resources they need to step up
86. Find and publicize every service provider or nonprofit that provides any kind of business training
87. Find and publicize every for-profit business that provides any kind of business support
88. Find every class, course and training that happens in your area and connect the graduating students to tiny business opportunities
89. Find and publicize every financial literacy program and class offered locally
90. Find out and publicize what online training and information databases your library offers access to
91. Make it possible to check out a wireless hotspot from the library ([Oklahoma](#))
92. Write profiles and shoot video stories of people who do tiny businesses, and publish them in your newspaper, social media and your blog
93. Give awards to people who try tiny businesses
94. Tell people who try tiny businesses that you appreciate them because they matter to the community
95. Start a Pinterest board of tiny local businesses and make it a group board
96. Start a Pinterest board of tiny business spaces available in town
97. Hold a Tour of Empty Buildings to clean up and show off available spaces in your town ([Webster City, IA](#))
98. Release economic development data to the public and hold sessions to show them what opportunities the data shows ([Alva, OK](#))
99. Create bike lanes that help people without cars get around town and so they can potentially do business
100. Create tiny local investment funds and micro loan funds ([local investing](#))
101. Test these ideas in your town before you worry about whether they fit into the rules
102. If it is against local rules, regulations or code, pay the fine and do it anyway
103. If it is against local rules, regulations or code, declare a bureaucracy-free zone temporarily to see how many tiny businesses you can create
104. If it is against local rules, regulations or code, work to change the rules
105. Eliminate or relax licensing rules on all kinds of businesses (licenses hold people back)



WHY YOU WANT MORE TINY BUSINESSES TO START

More opportunity for all

Rural and small town businesses aren't limited to the downtown mom-and-pop stores or the manufacturing businesses recruited into the industrial park any more. In fact, rural businesses today don't really have to look like any of the traditional business models for small towns.

The traditional way to go into business in a small town was to have an idea, develop a business plan, create your legal organization, try to find a usable location or spend a lot to build or rehab a building, then figure out marketing, staffing, financing, and more. You needed a lot of personal assets, great credit, good connections, solid experience, and maybe even insider knowledge. This puts a huge barrier between a regular person with an idea and going into business in the traditional model.

Tiny businesses tear down barriers to entry. More people can participate in the benefits of owning a business with less risk of catastrophic failure. Tiny businesses spread opportunity to many more people. You don't have to have personal wealth to get started. You don't need all the best connections. You don't have to risk everything on a big experiment.

You can start small. You can try it just for a day. If you fail, you can recover quickly. If you do well, you can parlay that into a larger try.



Photo business pop-up, Waynoka, Okla.

More prosperity for the whole community

Here are four reasons why having more local people starting their own business is the best thing you can do to help your small town prosper.

1. When locals start a business, they decide what values to put first.

“One of the best things you can do to drive societal change is start a successful business,” entrepreneur Fred Keller of Grand Rapids, Michigan said.

Keller's business, Cascade Engineering, doesn't just look for a net profit. It looks at the return on people, the planet, and then profit. It's the now-famous triple bottom line. The prosperity of his business lets him share the prosperity with his entire community.

When local people start a business, they get to decide what matters. They don't have to leave those decisions up to corporate headquarters far away. The values of local people are more likely to line up with the things that matter in your place.

2. More small businesses means more jobs.

Edward L. Glaeser and William R. Kerr in the Harvard Business Review said that “more small firms means more jobs.” They found that small, entrepreneurial businesses are highly correlated to regional economic growth and faster employment growth. ([Read a summary of Glaeser and Kerr's HBR article.](#))

People who never start a business will never hire anyone else or create any new jobs. The more of your people who start businesses, the more jobs you'll see. And that's much more likely than succeeding at recruiting some magical employer from far away while competing against every other town in your region.

3. Locally-owned small businesses are the key to local prosperity.

You may be tempted to think that tiny businesses wouldn't be important enough, that only the traditional businesses matter. That's wrong. Each tiny business is one contributor to an overall prosperous town. Let's look at the total return on local small businesses.

Charles Tolbert, Baylor University, did the research and found local small businesses were associated with:

- higher average income
- less income inequality
- lower poverty levels
- lower unemployment levels
- less crime
- better health outcomes
- lower levels of diabetes and obesity
- lower rates of death from chronic illness

Large businesses showed no such association.

When you have lots of tiny small businesses that are moderately prosperous, they make a big difference to your town.

4. Locally-owned small businesses return more of what they earn into the local economy.

Locals who start their own businesses put twice as much of each dollar into your town than what a chain store would. That's because locals buy more of their supplies and services locally, are more likely to stock local products for sale, and give more back to your community. And that's before they turn a profit, because local owners spend more of their profits in town than any chain that ships all the profits off to company headquarters far away. Add all that up, and it's twice as much as what chain-owned businesses keep in town.

So even if your town did recruit some big employer to open a plant or branch in your town, you'd still be better off with a bunch of tiny local businesses that keep more of the prosperity in your town or region.



Photo credits:

- Cover photo: empty lot market, photo by Becky McCray
- Tionesta Market Village, photo courtesy of Forest County IDA/IDC
- Local products in the Chickasaw Cultural Center, photo by Becky McCray
- Closing the street for pop-ups, photo courtesy of Jeanne Cole
- Video studio, photo courtesy of Greg Falken
- Local musicians, photo by Becky McCray
- Crowsnest Pass empty building tour, screenshot courtesy of Stone's Throw Café
- Photo business popup, photo courtesy of Jeanne Cole
- Headbands, photo by Becky McCray
- Author photo by Cody Johnson

A Positive View of Rural



Becky McCray believes small towns have a future. She watches the global trends in the economy, technology and society, then she delivers practical steps rural people can implement right now to shape the future of their town.

Her advice is based on her real-world experience as a retail store owner and cattle rancher. She and her husband Joe make their home in Hopeton, Oklahoma, a place with 30 people. She doesn't just talk about rural issues; she lives them.

Get Becky's *Positive View of Rural* in your inbox every week, plus a bonus ebook with 20 business ideas for small towns:

<http://SaveYour.Town/101ways>