

Community Action Lab

The most comprehensive
way to mobilize your community
for change.

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About Strong Towns

For 80 years,

North American cities have pursued a pattern of development that is without precedent in human history, a pattern that Strong Towns calls “The Suburban Experiment.” This is now the default approach to growth for communities of all sizes. It has led our towns and cities down the path toward financial insolvency while making them less safe and inviting. Precious resources have been tragically squandered—including not only our tax revenue and land, but also the finite time, energy, political will, and public trust available to make our cities more prosperous and livable.

The Strong Towns movement is challenging the status quo and helping communities change course. In contrast to the Suburban Experiment, the Strong Towns approach leads to financial strength and resilience. It relies on small, incremental investments rather than on large, transformative projects. It prioritizes the resilience of results over the efficiency of execution, adapts to feedback, and conducts as much life as possible at a personal scale.

Strong Towns has grown to be an international leader in making critical connections between fiscal health and development. Our articles, podcasts, and events now reach millions of people annually. Advocates from all walks of life are implementing the Strong Towns approach in hundreds of towns and cities across the United States and Canada. From city halls to the halls of Congress, in communities of all sizes, and in every corner of North America, the Strong Towns movement is seeing rapid, exponential growth.



The Community Action Lab

Strong Towns is working intensively to implement the Community Action Lab in four communities across North America, helping them accelerate community transformation using the Strong Towns approach. **We're looking for more communities who are ready to work with us in 2024.**

The Community Action Lab is the most comprehensive way to mobilize your town or city for change.

The Community Action Lab brings together everything we've learned about building a movement for stronger, more resilient communities. Strong Towns is shifting the vital center of dialogue in each participating community using our broad reach, non-partisan appeal, and accessible messaging. The Community Action Lab:

- Introduces new concepts and insights on building prosperity into the broader community dialogue.
- Provides community leaders with a personalized journey applying Strong Towns principles to local challenges.
- Trains a local Action Team to kickstart implementation.



How It Works

The Community Action Lab accelerates community transformation by building broad demand for more prosperous and resilient community development. Strong Towns acts as a mentor focused on education, capacity building, and skills implementation with each participating community. Through tailored media content and strategic coaching for each community, the Community Action Lab is sparking fresh dialogue and generating new conversations around community growth and investment.

Local leaders across North America find the Strong Towns approach to be a powerful foundation on which to create lasting prosperity in their communities. Our approach focuses on:

- Financial productivity.
- Continuous incremental investment.
- Building resiliency through adaptability.
- Bottom-up engagement.
- Human-scale action.

In pursuit of this approach, the Community Action Lab uses the community development tools Strong Towns has been refining for years, including:

- Community events.
- Customized curriculum.
- Digital marketing.
- Coaching.
- Local Conversations (Strong Towns community groups).
- Public engagement.



Outcomes

Over the span of a two-year engagement with Strong Towns, you will accelerate transformation in your community while reshaping the local conversation around the future of your place.

Your community will create a path toward concrete changes to the built environment and the operating system of your municipality. In the conversations around you, you'll notice a new passion for financial sustainability, prudent land use practices, and an increased appreciation of the need for a public return on investment. Your community will better understand the high return on investment that flows from small, targeted projects like pedestrian connections, start-up retail spaces, street furniture, and more. You will build a team that possesses the insight and decision-making capacity for action.

You will witness your neighbors responding with hope and enthusiasm to the message that your community has everything it needs to address its problems and challenges. You will notice a new interest in the development pattern in your community and a deepening pride in the true assets to be found where you live.

Leaders from our four pilot communities across the U.S. and Canada have reported that they are:

- Facing the facts of their financial challenges head on.
- Addressing the impacts of resource-draining growth.
- Grappling with the causes of pronounced economic disparities.
- Changing their reliance on fragile revenue streams.

We will support you, coach you, and equip you in leading your communities down a path that is full of opportunity and marked by resilience.

Project Phases

The Community Action Lab consists of five phases. The phases, while somewhat sequential in nature, are not entirely isolated from one another and should be thought of as overlapping components of a greater whole.

A: Foundation

Strong Towns will develop preliminary messaging and targeting for launching an online marketing campaign. We will conduct a baseline survey of community members and ask you to connect us with local media contacts with whom we can collaborate. Strong Towns will work with the project sponsor to form an Action Team. The Action Team will engage with us in coaching sessions during the first project year, and in check-in sessions during the second year. Members of the Action Team should be individuals eager to learn Strong Towns concepts and apply them through problem-solving as part of their ongoing public service work. Our team will assist you with scheduling and communication as you plan the logistics of your kickoff event.

B: Introduction of Ideas

Strong Towns will work with you to kick off the Community Action Lab, starting with a large, multi-day event that engages your community. Our team will participate in public lectures, Q&A sessions, and other activities to most effectively introduce Strong Towns principles to your community. We will brief community leadership to increase their participation, outline mutual expectations, and establish communications protocol. Our team will meet with the Action Team to discuss project format, deliverables, and education materials.

C: Engagement

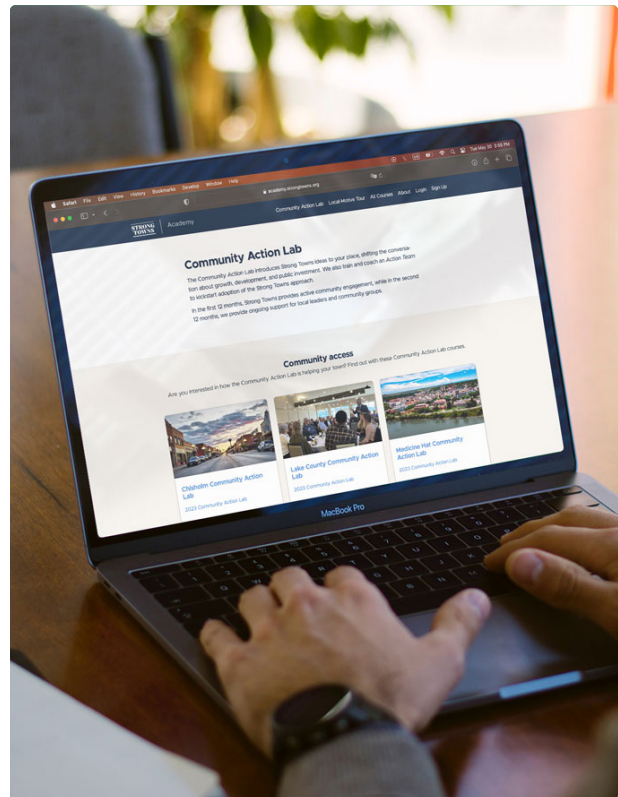
This substantial phase of the project will include coaching sessions with the Action Team every 2–3 weeks, done virtually except during the three on-site events. Coaching sessions will be used to uncover critical topics and issues, exploring local challenges through a Strong Towns lens. Strong Towns will develop a community-specific online curriculum for the Action Team, lessons that will also be available to the public on the Strong Towns Academy. We will implement a full content marketing strategy to increase local engagement with topics of community interest, and monitor engagement across all of our platforms. The engagement phase will be punctuated with a second public event.

D: Implementation

After the second event, we will shift our emphasis from education and discussion to the implementation of the Strong Towns approach. Action Team members will focus on addressing local challenges with solutions grounded in Strong Towns principles. To assist the Action Team with implementation, our staff may invite select outside experts to attend coaching sessions. Content marketing and media outreach will continue as we assist in the planning of your third public event.

E: Strategic Support

After an intense year, we will begin winding down Strong Towns' active engagement in your community. In the second year of the project, the Strong Towns team will support your community with remote briefings and one final in-person speaking engagement. Action Team members will maintain access to all Strong Towns Academy courses, and Strong Towns will continue to engage with activity within the public Strong Towns Academy course designed for your community. Our team will also connect Action Team members and key leadership with similar people from other communities that have gone through the program, so we can continue to learn from and support each other.



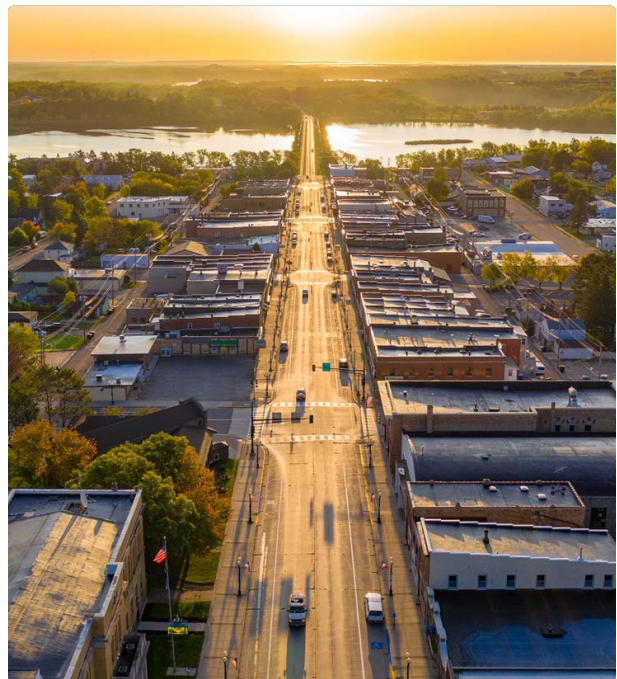
Is the Community Action Lab Right for Your Community?

Eight decades of the Suburban Experiment have left communities financially vulnerable, less safe, and less connected. 2024 could be the year your community changes course, and that change can start with you.

We're looking for communities with:

- Thoughtful, conscientious leadership ready to expand the community's vision.
- Competent, curious staff ready to grow their knowledge and skills.
- A community that is ready to engage and be part of the solution.

The Community Action Lab requires a financial commitment of \$175,000–\$215,000 for a two-year program and a reasonable time commitment from participating leadership and staff. Members of the Action Team should expect to commit 2–3 hours per week to this project, and local leadership must be prepared to take on the primary responsibility for hosting three public events in the first year of the project. This program may be funded by a foundation or donor, but local leadership must engage as the primary participant and be prepared for an intense engagement process.



Get in Touch

Because of how comprehensive this program is, **Strong Towns can only launch the Community Action Lab in five communities for 2024.**

For more information and to see if the Community Action Lab would be a good fit for your community, schedule a call with Strong Towns Development Associate Grace Whatley.

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