

AMERICAN EXPRESS BLOG POST: April 21, 2021

Announcing the Winners of the American Express Shop Small *Order In, Help Out* Innovation Challenge

Since the beginning of the pandemic, downtowns across the country have encouraged their communities to support local restaurants in creative and engaging ways. We're thrilled to celebrate the ingenuity of these Main Street programs by announcing the winners of the American Express Shop Small *Order In, Help Out* Innovation Challenge. From promoting curbside pickup hours through a music video to launching a downtown burger tour, the winners of the *Order In, Help Out* Innovation Challenge rallied their communities to support restaurants when they needed it most.

The American Express [Order In, Help Out](#) campaign encouraged consumers to support local restaurants by ordering takeout and delivery. Applicants of the *Order In, Help Out* Innovation Challenge were invited to submit a local marketing campaign they launched to bring the *Order In, Help Out* campaign to life in their community or share a successful effort they recently ran that supports local restaurants.

Entries were judged on: strategy; innovation and engagement; feasibility; need/response to COVID-19; and results and impact. The first-place winner received \$5,000; the second-place winner received \$2,500; and five third-place winners received \$1,000 each in recognition of their efforts. Learn more about the winners below.

First Place: Downtown Rochester in Rochester, MI

Through their Foodie February campaign in February 2021, Downtown Rochester in Oakland County, Michigan, encouraged their community to order from any downtown restaurant by offering a grand prize drawing and weekly "Foodie Friday" drawing for restaurant gift cards. To promote Foodie February, Downtown Rochester held photo shoots at the restaurants to create social media graphics, placed articles in local newspapers, and hosted live cooking demonstrations on local TV channels. During the month of February, these efforts had a total impact of \$41,880 for local restaurants.

Downtown Rochester also created the [Downtown Dining Dash](#), an online platform that offered customers a "one-stop shop" to purchase gift certificates from downtown restaurants. Downtown Rochester handled all transactions and fulfillment, and 100% of the sales went back to the restaurants. The program is still in place, and Rochester has sold over 250 downtown restaurant gift certificates for an impact of \$6,250.

Second Place: Charles Town Now, Charles Town, WV

Charles Town Now launched a curbside initiative in March 2020, providing curbside spaces to Main Street restaurants, posting daily updates on social media, and going live to promote a gift card giveaway program to local businesses. They even developed a special video, "[Rocking that Curbside](#)," to promote the campaign. In March 2021, Charles Town held a "Curb Your Appetite" campaign to acknowledge the one-year anniversary of consumers in the community ordering curbside. Charles Town Now is currently working on a plan for more curbside videos and restaurant swag. Due to the success of the curbside

program, Charles Town City Council is working towards an ordinance change to allow permanent curbside spaces in downtown Charles Town.

Third Place: Allen Park Downtown Development Authority (Allen Park, MI)

The Allen Park Downtown Development Authority (DDA) launched a “Takeout to Win Contest” in March 2020 through which they awarded a \$25 downtown dining gift certificate every day of the campaign. The DDA posted daily Facebook graphics and videos for the contest, with creative themes like “Whatca Eating Wednesday,” “Thirsty Thursday,” and “TGITO” (Thank God It’s Take-out Friday) to encourage residents to participate. The Take-Out to Win Contest coordinated well with the DDA’s “Comfort Food for Uncomfortable Times” campaign, an online downtown dining directory. The program injected \$1,875 in DDA-funded downtown dining gift certificates into cash-strapped restaurants at the beginning of the pandemic.

Third Place: Georgetown Main Street: Washington, DC

Georgetown Main Street’s [Take Out Tuesday](#) (#GeorgetownToT) campaign was introduced by the local neighborhood association, who wanted to use peer-to-peer marketing to help neighbors encourage each other to support local eateries. Each week, Georgetown Main Street and community leaders selected two restaurants to feature on their channels. A significant feature of the seven-week campaign was an interview with the owners to share more about the people behind the food. Restaurants featured generous specials for Take Out Tuesday. To encourage weekly participation, Georgetown Main Street worked with sponsors to host a weekly giveaway to further encourage neighbors to participate. Featured restaurants on average received 50-70% more orders compared to a typical Tuesday night.

Third Place: Greater Easton Development Partnership: Easton, PA

Easton Main Street ran an impressive four campaigns over the past year designed to build community pride, showcase the delicious and diverse cuisines found in their city, and most importantly, encourage customers to support local restaurants. Their #SupportEaston campaign featured videos on social from restaurant owners asking people to Shop Small. Through their #TheNewWeekend campaign, Easton encouraged customers to order takeout on weekdays. The #CurbsideFirst campaign featured videos of restaurant owners explaining why customers should order pick up or delivery directly through restaurants. Finally, through [#FeastinEaston](#), they also help giveaways for Downtown Easton gift cards.

Third Place: Ocala Main Street: Ocala, FL

Ocala Main Street encouraged their community to dine local by creating a Downtown Burger Tour. The tour not only highlighted the restaurants in their district that offered burgers, but it also included a video series with a chef interview and a written review of each burger experience. The tour was incredibly successful, with restaurants selling out of burgers. This spring and summer, Ocala will run a Tapas & Cocktail Tour, highlighting ten Happy Hour experiences downtown. Each of the restaurants will offer curbside food and drink specials, offering a unique "Happy Hour in Your Happy Place" experience.

Third Place: REV Birmingham: Birmingham, AL

Through the Great Receipt Race, REV Birmingham encouraged residents to shop and dine at local stores and restaurants with weekly prize drawings. During the first round of the Great Receipt Race from August 1 – September 7, 2020, REV asked local businesses to donate gift cards and/or merchandise to contribute to weekly prizes. For the Great Receipt Race during the holiday season, REV asked sponsors to fund gift cards to a local business of the winner’s choice. In 2020, the Great Receipt Race drove more than \$42,000 in revenue to local Birmingham businesses, including numerous restaurants throughout the city.