



TRAIL-FRIENDLY BUSINESS

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

Trails have become an essential part of our lifestyle. They provide pathways for recreation, routes for transportation and pathways to health and well-being. But trails also mean business; trail users get hungry and want places to eat or buy a drink. They want to shop for a gift or keepsake, or to replace something they left behind or forgot to pack. Trail users want to explore towns to learn their culture and history, to discover what new and interesting adventures could be around the corner.

The York County Economic Alliance, in collaboration with the York County Parks Department, the York County Rail Trail Authority and Explore York, have created the **York County Trail Towns Program** (yorkcountycloud.com), and created a designation to recognize businesses that focus on providing goods and services for trail users. The initiative, York County Trail-Friendly Business Program, encourages businesses to leverage “trail traffic” through hospitality and service recommendations outlined in this handbook.

Trail users can become a big part of a business’s revenue stream, and YCEA wants to help businesses become destinations that attract trail customers, enticing them to get off the trail and through your doors to become patrons. The result is a collection of “best practices” and guidelines to help businesses understand the trail-user market segment and earn a designation as a Trail-Friendly Business. The objective is to establish a level of customer service along the trail to serve trail users.

YCEA has developed these guidelines to help businesses that want to be designated a Trail-Friendly Business designation, and be recognized as a business that offers superior customer service and goods to those trail customers.

The Trail-Friendly Business Program Guidelines include best practices that can be used for a business to market to and attract trail users, the benefits of being designated a Trail-Friendly Business, eligibility requirements and other criteria for inclusion. Also included is useful information on the trail customer market segment.

The Trail-Friendly Business Program makes it easy for businesses to participate in the Trail Towns Program, benefit from trails in York County and become part of a growing market along the trail.

BENEFITS OF BEING A TRAIL-FRIENDLY BUSINESS



- One-year complimentary York County Economic Alliance membership (\$450 value)
- Trail-Friendly Business window cling for your business
- YorkCountyTrailTowns.com website name placement
- Periodic promotion on Trail Towns communication platforms
- Networking opportunities
- Use of Trail-Friendly Business logo in promotional material
- Trail Towns brochures for distribution
- Notification of training and workshops
- YCEA Trail Towns brand identity tools
- Technical assistance in marketing/promotion/event coordination/working with local governments
- Financing and grant assistance, as appropriate

BUSINESS ELIGIBILITY

The Trail-Friendly Business Program is designed to assist businesses that trail users will frequent, providing goods and services that trail users want and need. Eligibility is not restricted, since all businesses are encouraged to provide trail-friendly services, goods, and superior customer service to trail users. Businesses are encouraged to review the contents of these Guidelines and determine if designation is right for you.

Eligible businesses must be open to the public, during hours that are convenient to the trail user; they must provide products, goods, or services that the trail user may want or need while using the trail. An illustrative list (but not exclusive) of such businesses is below, and additional types of businesses that meet eligibility requirements not listed are also eligible for designation in the program.

Illustrative List of Potential Businesses:

- ✓ Restaurants & restaurant/bars
- ✓ Coffee Shops
- ✓ Microbreweries, wineries
- ✓ Ice cream shops
- ✓ Bike shops
- ✓ Outdoor clothing shops (boots, outer wear, etc)
- ✓ Grocery stores
- ✓ Gas & food marts
- ✓ Medical facilities
- ✓ Specialty stores
- ✓ Antique Shops
- ✓ Art galleries/studios
- ✓ Lodgings - BnB, motels, campgrounds, Air BnB
- ✓ Pharmacy
- ✓ Transit
- ✓ Tourist attractions
- ✓ Hardware stores

GEOGRAPHIC ELIGIBILITY

Businesses must have a physical location in York County to be eligible for Trail-Friendly business designation.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

To be designated a Trail-Friendly Business, a business must meet the **3 Basic Criteria** and **3 of 7 of the Additional Criteria**.

Basic Criteria

Businesses need to meet all 3 criteria listed below.

1. **Provide a trail-friendly atmosphere** - Trail users need to be provided a welcoming atmosphere in your business, that might include signage or just a greeting from staff.
2. **Provide trail user amenities** - These amenities may include bathrooms, maps of the trail, water, free Wi-Fi, etc.
3. **Agree to complete Trail Towns annual survey** - YCEA will provide a short survey on an annual basis for Trail-Friendly Businesses. This survey will provide YCEA feedback about the amount of business that Trail-Friendly Businesses are seeing from trail users.

Additional Criteria

Businesses need to meet 3 of the 7 criteria listed below.

1. **Front-line staff trained** - Front-line staff are usually the first people that trail users encounter when they leave the trail. They are an essential part of a positive experience for the trail users by providing information on local shops, local attractions, trail information or general information on the area. Having front-line staff trained provides value to customers.
2. **Support the trail community** - Business can support the trail and trail users in several ways. Consider supporting the trail community by joining a larger trail advocacy or friends group for volunteer projects. Other options are to join a local Trail Towns Action Team or collaborate with an established group to provide the starting location for regular walks or bike rides.
3. **Membership in YCEA** - Membership in YCEA is not required, however as the key economic development agency and business supporter in York County, it provides a multitude of resources and benefits. Find more information at yceapa.org
4. **Provide trail equipment storage** - Trail users might have a bicycle or other equipment that requires storage or parking while using your business or exploring town. Having bike racks or bike parking, or long-term parking for overnight trail users are all ways that a business can provide needed storage. If your business provides lodging for trail users, covered and secure overnight storage is a requirement.
5. **Provide Trail Gear Tools** - While many trail users carry common tools for use along the trail, some may not or left them at home. By providing common tools like Allen wrenches or tire levers, a bike pump or other general tools are another way that businesses can assist the trail user and provide value to the trail user.
6. **Trail Event Support** - Sponsoring or hosting a public trail event - such as a clean-up day, bike ride, a hike or a bird walk - encourages more trail use. To qualify under this criterion, your business needs to host or sponsor at least one public trail event per year. Collaboration with existing events or local Action Team for ideas is encouraged
7. **Trail Promotions** - Recognizing the trail user, through targeted promotions or sales events, will further the relationship between the trail user and your business This might include discounts to trail users, special sale days or co-promotion with other trail businesses.

DESIGNATION PROCESS

Businesses that meet the eligibility and criteria can fill out the Application form at yorkcountrytrailtowns.com.

YCEA staff will review the application, perform a site visit, and provide an opportunity for the business and YCEA staff meet each other. YCEA will respond to the business within 30 days of the application with approval, denial, or questions.

A Trail-Friendly Business Designation is valid for three (3) years, starting January 1 of the next year.



BEST PRACTICES FOR A TRAIL-FRIENDLY BUSINESS

Successful Trail-Friendly Businesses share certain characteristics of best practices. Their operations reflect the importance of trail users; signage and window displays welcome trail users, they market and promote to trail users and they collaborate with various other entities. In short, successful trail-friendly business make a good thing...*better*.

Below is a collection of best practices that have developed over multiple years in Trail Town programs across the country. The practices are broken down into 5 categories:

Operations • Food & Drink • Signage/Window Displays • Marketing/Promotion • Collaboration

Operations

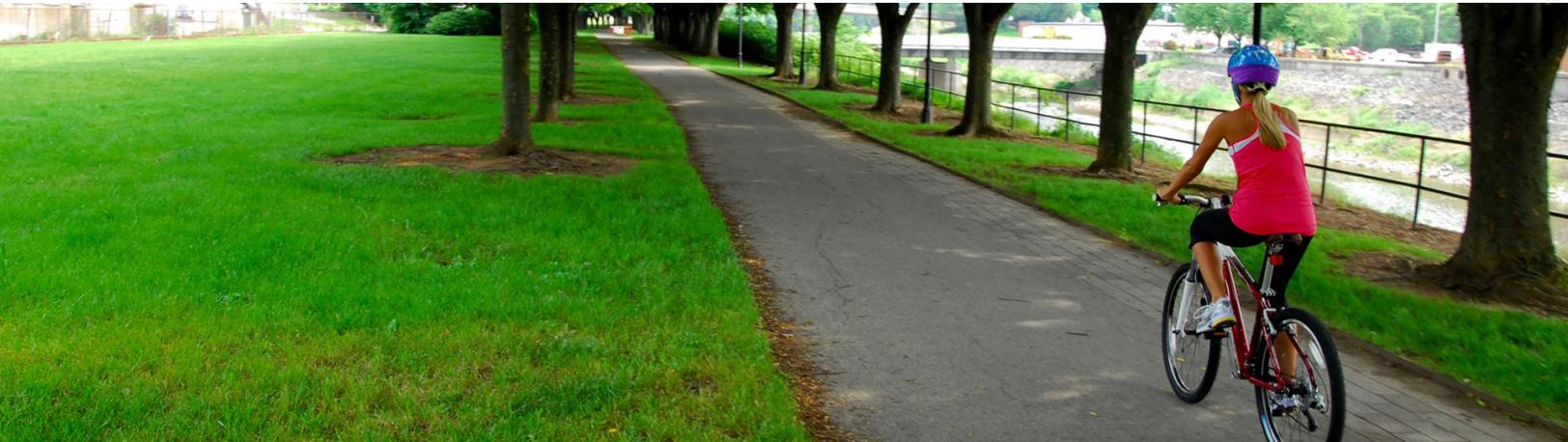
Front line training – Front line staff, those employees who greet a customer and often serve them, are the first impression that trail users may have of a shop or restaurant. Front line staff are essential in establishing that welcoming atmosphere for trail users. They are already trained in providing good customer service, but a trail friendly business front line staff should also be able to speak knowledgeably about the local trail and be prepared to explain how to get to the nearest trailhead, ATM or

hospital. They should also be knowledgeable about other visitor attractions in the area.

Know your customer - Trails are used for assorted activities - cycling, running, and walking (which include individuals, families and groups). The most recent data shows that the largest type of user on the Heritage Rail Trail is the cyclist, with over 43% of trail users being cyclists. The next largest group was walkers/hikers at nearly 28% of all users, and then runners at about 11% of all users.

Runners - Typically, runners will not stop during their run. However, running clubs do enjoy having a place to stop and get a bite or a beer after their group run. Restaurants or bars might consider hosting a running club event or marketing their business specifically to a club as a post-run destination.

Walkers - This trail user group includes individuals, families and groups. All may take a break during their walk or after to get a bite or a beverage. Families with young children may have strollers, so providing enough space for strollers to be parked is a plus.



Cyclists - There are several types of cyclists that may patronize a business and recognizing the differ-

ences among them can attract more cycling customers of all types.

a) Recreational Rider: These are probably the most common cyclists that use a multi-use trail. The recreational rider may ride a road bike, a mountain bike, a hybrid or a single or multi-speed “comfort bike”. They are looking for an experience of a leisurely morning or afternoon ride (versus distance or speed), and will likely ride between 5 - 15 miles per trip; these riders could include families with children. This customer will spend more time eating or drinking and are candidates for ice cream shops!

b) Day Road Rider: This is the “spandex” crowd, sporting special clothes and cycling shoes; these riders are out for longer and faster rides in a single day, perhaps up to 50-75 miles weather permitting. Road riders make significant investments into their bikes, ranging from \$5,000- \$10,000 apiece. Understandably, security for these bikes is important as is a restroom, fast service, and a menu of higher proteins and carbohydrates. This same crowd will be in search of a beer to quaff after a long ride.

c) Independent Touring Rider - The touring rider is a different breed altogether! This category of riders is riding a multi-day trip and are self-supported - i.e., they carry their own gear in bike panniers (but may stay in a hotel or b and b) and will stop for meals or to restock supplies. These riders are on an adventure; they are interested in local culture, history, and attractions. In addition to needing Wi-Fi, they typically will shop for groceries and are likely to shop in local stores. Their purchase could range from a key-chain to furniture and will want the option to have

items shipped home. Laundromats are also essential for those out for more than 2-3 days.

Hours - Trail users will use trails pre- and post-typical retail hours often dictated by hours of daylight. Consequently, trail-friendly businesses should consider extended hours to accommodate trail users opening early (before 9:00 AM) or staying open (after 5:00 PM) especially on weekends.

Amenities - Trail users gravitate to places they feel welcomed, and their needs are met. As mentioned above, understanding the trail user customer will help you succeed. Word of mouth (mostly via social media) can make or break your image as being trail friendly so be generous about letting people use your restroom and Wi-Fi; offer to fill water bottles and provide trash and recycle receptacles. Don't forget the 4-legged users; a dog water bowl and treats will go a long way in winning hearts!

Support Infrastructure - Trail users, particularly cyclists, need places to store their bikes while eating or shopping. Bike racks or secure bike parking are essential to be a trail-friendly businesses or community. Consider providing complimentary bike locks to secure bikes and try to install bike racks that are visible to riders when they are in your establishment. Lodgings should have secure overnight parking if storage in a visitor's room is not possible. Other amenities to consider are a bike pump and common bike tools that are free to use; if your town has multiple trail-friendly businesses, consider collaborating with them and the borough to purchase a bike fix-it station that can be centrally located for everyone's benefit.

Product & Merchandising - Trail users, like any visitor, like to pick up a keepsake or locally made products to remember their trip. Retailers that carry large or fragile items like artwork, glass or antiques should provide shipping services. Runners and cyclist will search out energy bars and drinks, and easy to carry and consume meals. Stocking bicycle tubes (of varying sizes) is also encouraged.

Trail Information - Businesses should provide information about the trail ranging from trail maps they can take with them or display of an enlarged map mounted in a prominent place. Lodging establishments of all kinds should also make this information available to guests. Reach out to your local parks department and visitors bureau to see what is available.

Host a "service trail day" - A business might host a service trail day in which volunteers give local service workers a tour of the local trail so they can better describe and recommend it to tourists.

Keep a guestbook - This is a best practice for almost any type of retail store. Capturing emails helps in future promotion and reinforces the wide-spread attraction of a trail and nearby town. Another popular option is to display a map of the USA and provide pins for customers to use to "pin" their hometowns.

Feedback - A customer experience doesn't end when they leave your business so it's a good idea to track your customers comments online. Tracking feedback and online comments require prompt and immediate respond in positive ways especially if they have less-than-positive comments. Visitors often rely on on-line sites such as Facebook, Yelp or TripAdvisor in making decision on where to shop or eat. While customers are in your shop or restaurant, encourage them to "follow & like" your business

Food & Drink

and ask them to post reviews on-line.

Every trail user needs to eat and drink! Your restaurant, ice cream shop or bar and grill could be the first or last stop of a trail user's adventure or somewhere in the middle. They may be dirty, sweaty and tired, however they arrive, they need to feel welcomed. This is an opportunity to introduce trail-related specials or a special menu item with a trail theme like a "Rail Trail soup of the day" or a signature sandwich! This type of creativity reinforces the image of a trail-friendly business and promotes the nearby trail as well!

Outdoor dining – Providing outdoor space for customers is another popular best practice. Trail users by nature gravitate to the outdoors; dining and drinking are no exceptions. Outdoor dining will also allow cyclists to remain in view of their bicycles during their visit.

Delivery and take out – restaurants should provide take-out if located near a park or community picnic tables. Offering delivery to nearby campsite or lodgings is also a great way to expand your



Signage/Window Displays

business

The exterior of a business communicates a lot about your business to a potential customer. Signage and window displays are great ways to invite trail users into your business and establish expectations. Below are inspired best practices developed by the North Country Trail Alliance that can be replicated for success.

Signage – Business signs have a key role in a downtown. They should be well-designed, properly scaled for the building and street, and while they need to support some design continuity, individuality also needs to be encouraged. Best practices include:

- Signs should be limited to 1 square foot of signage for each linear foot of storefront
- Lettering should be no more than 10 inches high
- Internally illuminated signs should be discouraged

- Design materials should reflect the physical character of the building

Windows - Windows and doors also play key roles in a downtown. They help advertise goods, they reinforce the building form, add interest for the passer-by, draw people into the store and provide a sense of safety. Best practices include:

- At least 60% of the ground floor facing the primary sidewalk should be transparent glass
- Displays should be kept simple and not overcrowd the window
- The back of the display window should be open to allow the store's interior to be visible.
- Primary doors should face the sidewalk



Marketing/Promotion

- Door facing the street should be recessed whenever possible

While every business engages in marketing and promoting its services or products, being a trail-friendly business means casting a wider net to reach trail users. Working with other trail-friendly businesses and local events can result in more business for everyone.

Online - Many trail users will use on-line sources for information on where to stop along the trail for food, drink, shops, and other activities to include on their trail adventure. Building a strong on-line presence, and utilizing different social media platforms, is strongly encouraged. Be sure to mention the trail-friendly aspects of your business and as mentioned under Operations, keep track of visitor comments, and respond appropriately. A robust online presence is also an opportunity for monthly drawings, photo contests, and customer surveys.

Word of Mouth (WOM) - Whether in person or via social media, WOM is a critical element of marketing, particularly among regular trail users. Creating a welcoming and friendly environment is a collaborative effort among the business community, residents, and local government so partner with

groups in your community to make this happen.

Reach out - There are great resources at your disposal to become a Trail-Friendly Business. Take time to work with other businesses, York County Economic Alliance, York Historical Society and Explore York (the county tourism bureau), to develop a memorable visitor and trail user experience. Collaboration with accommodations, attractions, outfitters, and performance venues generate opportunities for your business to partner in larger events; it also may provide access to funding through grants to improve your amenities to be a trail-friendly business! Reaching out is an invitation to instill creativity to your venue! Adding an interpretive storytelling hour, music with some front porch picking, artist demonstrations or school or youth performances attract a new audience. Establish your business and town as a destination by using the Asset Inventory created by your Trail Towns Action Team to create unique and authentic opportunities for trail users.

Promotions - Seasonal or special sale promotions backed by cooperative advertising can help drive trail-related revenues to local businesses. As previously mentioned, restaurants or bars should consider creating a trail-themed sandwich or drink special. Consider assembling a working group of store owners and restaurants to plan for, conduct and promote seasonal, themed, or special retail promo-

Collaboration

tions.

Beyond the suggested collaboration practices previously listed, businesses should establish an ongoing dialogue with local Trail Towns Action Teams and town government. The trail town economy grows fastest and strongest when businesses and organizations work together; sharing a cohesive vision evolves a town from a convenient stop along the trail into a destination attracting more visitors, who stay longer and come back again and again.

Collaborate with local Trail Towns Action Team - The local Action Team is comprised of residents, local officials, businesses owners, and individuals who care about making the town into a Trail Town. The Trail Towns Action Team has created an action plan that establishes a framework for change; the team play an important role in making the plan a reality. They meet regularly to identify opportunities, make sure that the action plan is moving forward and that the recommended actions in the plan are worked on or accomplished. Local Action Teams may have a good understanding of trail users and their needs, and businesses will benefit from that knowledge.

Businesses can contact YCEA to learn who is on their town's Action Team, to learn about the Action Plan and understand your role in it, the Action Team can also help businesses work with town government to the benefit of everyone in a Trail Town.

Collaborate with local government - The elected and appointed officials and staff are key partners in a Trail Town's success. Trail Town governments support the Trail Towns program, have been involved in the development of the local Action Plans; they may be overseeing improvements to the town to make it more trail-user friendly like wayfinding signage, installing benches or bike racks. Not only do they oversee many of the regulations that affect a businesses' operations and exterior signage, but they are valued partners as they may have knowledge of funding opportunities and have useful infor-

mation on trail usage.

Businesses will generally have interacted with certain staff when they first open. Having the names and contact information of key staff (such as code enforcement or borough secretary/manager) is useful. Staff is a great starting point and sounding board as a business is considering changes to the exterior or to their property. Staff is a great source of information about issues facing the elected officials, upcoming projects and programs that may support the Trail Towns, and, of course, they are familiar with local codes and policies. Be proactive in reaching out to staff, rather than waiting until a permit is needed. Staff can provide information and guidance about permits and various local government approvals. Attending a council meeting can also be a worthwhile investment of time; agendas are usually posted on a town's website prior to the meetings so businesses can see if there are relevant issues scheduled to be discussed. A businessowner may also want to introduce himself/herself at



YORK COUNTY TRAIL TOWNS



**York County
Economic
Alliance**



Explore
YORK
have it made here