

REVITALIZING COMMUNITIES THROUGH STREET TRANSFORMATION

How fusing neighborhood revitalization with economic development inspired Broad Avenue Arts District, Crosstown, the Edge District, and the Pinch District to reimagine urban landscapes.

HOW CAN NEIGHBORHOODS TRANSFORM THEIR STREETS INTO VIBRANT, INVITING COMMUNITY HUBS?



MEMFix, a “Tactical Urbanism” program for economic development in Memphis, started in response to the 2008 recession and declining population, which posed significant challenges for local businesses. Many previously vibrant commercial districts experienced hardships, losing tenants and customers in the process.

MEMFix was adopted from successful “build-a-better-block” events held in other cities, as well as “A New Face for an Old Broad” (NFOB), an event held in Memphis in 2010 and led by Livable Memphis (now BLDG Memphis). NFOB showcased community-driven urban space transformation, enhancing social capital and sparking neighborhood revitalization, resulting in investments, new businesses, property renovations, and increased housing.

Innovate Memphis, formerly the Mayor’s Innovation Delivery Team, launched MEMFix to replicate NFOB’s successful vitality strategy and partner with the City to facilitate economic and community development. MEMFix is not your typical street festival – it’s a low-cost, low-risk trial showcasing a neighborhood’s potential through art installations, local business pop-ups, and activation events that draw residents back to disinvested commercial corridors, reigniting investments in Memphis’ urban core.

CORE OBJECTIVES:

- **Demonstrate what is possible** by showcasing the potential of urban streets, temporarily transforming them into vibrant, people-friendly hubs.
- **Reorient government systems** by engaging City government as an effective partner in neighborhood revitalization.
- **Educate neighborhoods on replication** by equipping them with the tools and knowledge needed to reproduce similar initiatives.



DEVELOPMENT:

MEMFix heavily relies on community engagement, including brainstorming sessions and neighborhood walks that involve property owners, residents, experts, and various local organizations. Together, they define a placemaking vision, emphasizing activating vacant spaces, enhancing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and hosting community events to draw the community together to test the possibilities of what that place could be. The City of Memphis and public agencies provide support for implementation, such as permits, infrastructure improvements, and logistical advice.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Initial MEMFix events featured three activations hosted in Crosstown, the University District, and Soulsville, featuring local pop-up shops, music, food, art, bike lanes, walkways, and storefront restoration. Details on each can be found here:

- **Crosstown** (11/10/2012)
- **University District** (4/13/2013)
- **Soulsville** (10/12/2013)

To ensure the program's sustainability, MEMFix continued through BLDG Memphis, who led the following neighborhood activation events:

- **Edge District** (10/18/2014)
- **The Pinch District** (4/11/2015)
- **Film Row** (9/24/2016)

"SOMETHING BEGAN TO HAPPEN AROUND 2010...THERE'S THIS ABILITY TO AFFECT CHANGE AT A GRASSROOTS LEVEL, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO ALWAYS WAIT FOR THE MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR PROJECT TO AFFECT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD."

— TOMMY PACELLO, MEMPHIS LAWYER AND CITY PLANNER





OUTCOMES:

Following MEMFix and NFOB events, neighborhoods experienced a renewed interest, with substantial new activity and investments:

- **Broad Avenue Arts District:** The \$20,000 NFOB event led to \$20 million in private investments by 2014 and continues to grow today.
- **Crosstown:** A “vertical urban village,” Crosstown Concourse is now a nationally recognized mixed-use location that houses over 50 organizations ranging from retail and restaurant businesses to health care facilities to arts, culture and education institutions.
- **Edge District:** The Memphis Medical District Collaborative (MMDC) launched in 2016 to lead ongoing revitalization efforts in this area. The Edge continues to grow rapidly with new housing and businesses moving in, including the 2022 opening of The Ravine — a community-led greenspace and plaza for events.

It also inspired neighborhoods across the country to seek guidance in planning similar events, showcasing its influence as a replicable model. This success resulted in a comprehensive "How to Manual," facilitating urban revitalization efforts. Additionally, MEMFix led to entrepreneurial initiatives like MEMShop, which supports startups in vacant storefronts, and MEMMobile, a program promoting mobile shop formats.

BLDG Memphis now leads and sustains this effort across Memphis. In April 2023, BLDG Memphis launched a series of new MEMFix events as part of a larger Community Navigator Pilot Program in seven neighborhoods, aiming to revitalize small minority-owned businesses impacted by COVID-19.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT INNOVATE MEMPHIS, VISIT OUR [WEBSITE](#).