

Event Driven Capital Absorption

Every few years, cities are handed a version of the same opportunity: a sudden influx of attention, visitors, and capital through a major sporting event, a federal investment, or a large private development.

The promise of economic growth and small business expansion is familiar, but these moments often fail to translate into lasting gains for local businesses or for residents.

In others, they accelerate displacement or concentrate benefits among a narrow set of actors.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup offers a timely example of this broader challenge. It will bring billions of dollars in spending across multiple U.S. cities within a compressed timeframe. But the variation in how cities are preparing suggests that outcomes will differ because of underlying system design.

At Living Cities, we view this through the lens of capital absorption: the set of conditions that determine whether capital translates into durable economic opportunity. This brief examines how different approaches to coordination, business readiness, and capital deployment shape who ultimately benefits—not just during the event, but after it ends.



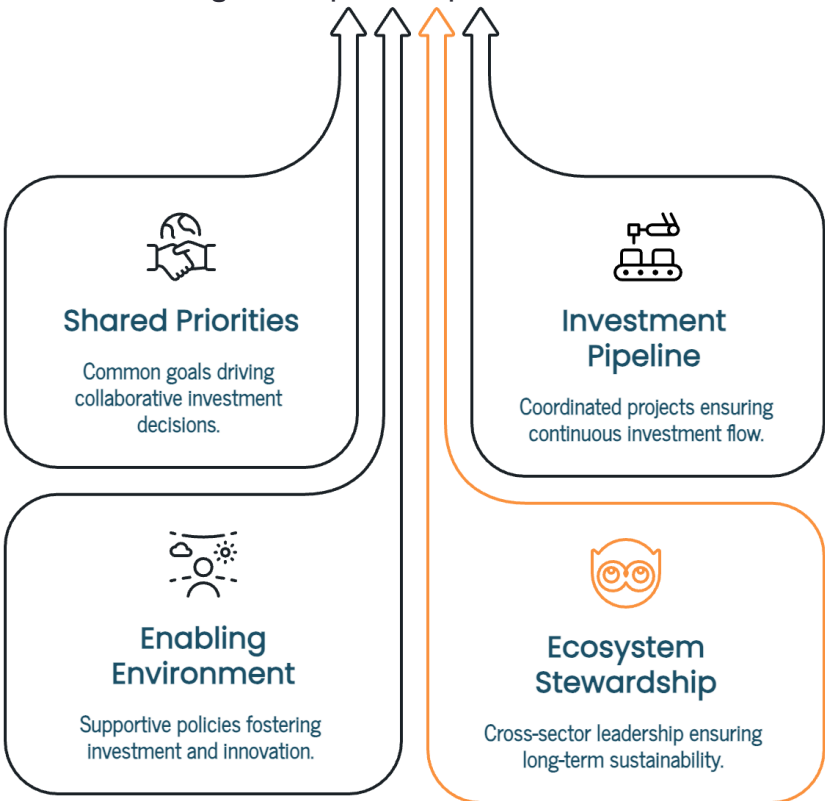
How can cities design systems to convert a surge of attention into sustained, locally rooted small business growth?

Key Question

2026 World Cup Host Cities

- ☐ [Atlanta](#)
- ☐ [Boston](#)
- ☐ [Dallas](#)
- ☐ [Houston](#)
- ☐ [Kansas City](#)
- ☐ [Los Angeles](#)
- ☐ [New York](#)
- ☐ [Philadelphia](#)
- ☐ [San Francisco](#)
- ☐ [Seattle](#)

Living Cities Capital Absorption Framework



Implications for City and Ecosystem Leaders



Shift from programs to system design – Which systems constraints may prevent capital from flowing to all segments of your small business ecosystem.



Fund transaction capacity – Prioritize working capital, inventory financing, and operational readiness



Design for flow, not just participation – Map where demand will concentrate and how people will move.



Build coordination infrastructure explicitly – Do not assume alignment; fund convening mechanisms, shared data systems, and joint deployment strategies



Treat the opportunity as a permanent ecosystem investment

Capital Absorption in Practice: Atlanta and Kansas City

Atlanta’s approach to the World Cup is intentional flow design, a strategy rooted in the recognition that demand during mega-events is highly concentrated and must be actively redirected to generate inclusive outcomes. Rather than treating small business support as a standalone intervention, the city is engineering how capital moves through space: targeting investments within a defined radius of the stadium, layering digital visibility through corporate partnerships, and activating underutilized commercial corridors to intercept visitor traffic. This is reinforced by a coordinated capital stack, grants for activation and marketing, low-cost lending for operational readiness, and partnerships with CDFIs and banks to extend financing.



Kelsey Maynor, Invest Atlanta

How do we take 70,000 people who are going here—and get them to go here?

Recent conversations with civic and ecosystem leaders reveal two distinct approaches to this capital absorption challenge.



Nia Webster, KC Neighborhood Services Department

“Our businesses need to be viable ... they need inventory, systems, capacity.”

With a more dispersed urban form, limited transit infrastructure, and a compressed planning timeline, Kansas City’s challenge is less about optimizing flow and more about standing up the minimum viable system for absorption. The city has responded by coordinating over 100 business-serving organizations, and building a pipeline of hundreds of participating businesses through storefront activation programs and open calls for applicants. But the most important design choice is explicit: prioritizing transaction readiness over broad inclusion. This means focusing on businesses that can operate at scale to convert demand into revenue. In doing so, Kansas City is using the World Cup as a forcing function to shift from startup-oriented support to growth-stage economic infrastructure, recognizing that access alone does not translate into outcomes.

Hao Quach, President, National Association of Asian American Professionals - Kansas City

We received a grant through the Open Doors program and rent subsidy. Those two things made a tremendous difference for us. They removed the barriers we had in getting our own space, which has been a dream of ours for a long time. Through this program we were introduced to another local nonprofit organization that is focused on music performance, KC Jazz ALIVE. After meeting, we decided to partner and create a space together called the 515 Music Hub. We probably would not have created such an immediate collaboration without this program, and we will serve the music community in even more incredible ways through this partnership. I can’t wait to see what we create.



Capital Absorption Diagnostic for Event-Driven Growth

While every city’s context is different, five structural conditions consistently shape whether a surge of visitors, spending, and investment translates into lasting economic opportunity. Leaders can use these dimensions to diagnose strengths, identify gaps, and prioritize interventions before, during, and after major events.

Coordination Infrastructure

Do actors act as a system or as competing programs?
To address this concern, Seattle has invested in dedicated support personnel in communities closest to event venues.

Capital Stack Design

Are there layered financial tools aligned to business needs? This includes grants, loans, CDFIs, and deferred repayment. Houston creatively has connected between WC opportunities to accelerate existing environmental sustainability efforts.

Spatial Strategy

Is demand concentrated or intentionally distributed?
For WC 2026, cities adapted their approach to their assets (e.g., Atlanta uses corridor design, KC uses dispersed activation).

Flow Visibility

Businesses need to be seen to benefit from the incoming demand.
Multiple cities have leveraged public and private resources to enhance digital and geographic targeting along with training resources for small business owners.

Transaction Readiness

Businesses must handle volume, payments, inventory, and logistics to maximize the opportunity.
Kansas City’s approach prioritizes businesses with sufficient operational capacity to convert demand into revenue. This lesson was informed in part by the city’s experience hosting the NFL Draft.





Local KC Business Owner

Through the Open Doors! program, NAAAP Kansas City received both grant funding and valuable support resources from the City of Kansas City that helped us expand our vision for how local Asian American entrepreneurs, artists, and small businesses can participate in the momentum surrounding the 2026 World Cup. The support has helped us build visibility, strengthen partnerships, and create space for community-driven cultural and economic opportunities.