



# Local Coordinating Program Handbook

## Montana Main Street

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## Welcome to Main Street

Congratulations on your new position, and welcome to the Montana Main Street network.

You are now part of a group of dedicated Main Street executive directors and leaders who are committed to helping sustain and enhance the character and economic health of historic downtowns and traditional commercial neighborhoods in Montana and across the country.

Montana Main Street is a resource for training and technical services to communities who want to strengthen, preserve and revitalize their historic downtown commercial districts. The MMS Program enables local communities to follow the proven Main Street Approach, which is a practical and comprehensive model capitalizing on downtown's unique assets. The goal is to build high quality, livable and sustainable communities that will grow Montana's economy while maintaining a sense of place.

A Main Street executive director's job is both rewarding and challenging. This resource guide offers an introduction to your new responsibilities as both a downtown development professional and a steward of your community. Montana Main Street is dedicated to helping you grow as an executive director to help your local coordinating program work toward the continued enhancement of your downtown. We encourage you to take this opportunity to learn as much as you can about your downtown and the Main Street Approach.

Looking back at my seven years as a Main Street executive director, both in rural and urban communities, I think networking, getting to know my board members and businesses and participating in new training opportunities were some of the best things I did to help me grow both personally and professionally.



I wish you the best of luck in your new position, and please know that our staff is always here to assist you with the revitalization of your downtown.

Sincerely,

Micky Zurcher, state coordinator

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## National Main Street Program

Established in 1980 as a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Main Street Center works with a nationwide network of state coordinating programs and local communities to encourage preservation-based community revitalization. During its 45-year history, the program has equipped more than 2,000 historic commercial districts with the skills and organizing framework they need for renewal.

An exciting new chapter for the organization began in 2013 when the NMSC launched as an independent subsidiary of the NTHP. This transition enabled the NMSC to build on its record of success with new leadership and new resources that helped communities respond to evolving needs and opportunities in local district revitalization. In 2015, the center launched a new brand for the national network of Main Street communities — Main Street America — to reinvigorate their collective look, feel and strategy and to position them as leaders locally, regionally and nationally.

As a nonprofit organization, MSA provides information, offers technical assistance, holds conferences and workshops and conducts research and advocacy on critical revitalization issues. The proven Main Street Four-Point Approach provides a framework for communities to organize themselves for success, improve the design of their neighborhoods, promote their districts and enhance their economic bases.

Since 1980, the Main Street movement has resulted in \$107.62 billion reinvested, a net gain of 175,323 businesses and 782,059 jobs, 335,675 buildings rehabilitated and 35.3 million volunteer hours contributed locally. In 2023, every dollar a community used to support its local Main Street organization leveraged an average of \$18 in new investment, making Main Street one of the most successful economic development strategies in America.

The Main Street Approach offers a revitalization framework appropriate for communities of all types — including commercial districts in urban neighborhoods, rural towns and smaller and mid-sized cities. Local Main Street organizations can be established either as freestanding organizations or as part of an existing entity, such as a local government or other organization.

The NMSC is based in Chicago, with an office in Washington, D.C., and field staff located throughout the country. For more information, visit [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org).

The Montana Main Street Program is housed in the Montana Department of Commerce and is part of the Community MT Division. This program is managed by the Community Economic Vitality team. This team also oversees the Montana Historic Preservation Grant Program and the Community Development Block Grant Economic Development Grant Program.

Working in conjunction with the MMS Program, local Main Street organizations plan and implement projects that create more vibrant and healthy commercial districts. This handbook is intended to provide general guidance, targeted primarily towards local coordinating organizations that are nonprofits and employ executive directors, e.g., business improvement districts, downtown associations, etc. However, the resources can be adapted to fit your community's needs and organizational framework.

## The Main Street Approach

The Main Street Approach is a commonsense, strategy-driven framework that guides community-based revitalization efforts. Building on four decades of success, this model harnesses the social, economic, physical and cultural assets that set a place apart. The goal is to realize tangible outcomes, such as job creation, small business development, private/public investment and building rehabilitations, which benefit the entire community.



Main Street [transformation](#) is a combination of art and science: Communities first need to learn about the local economy, its primary drivers and its regional context (the science), but they also need to convey that special sense of place through storytelling, preserving the older and historic structures that set it apart, broad and inclusive civic engagement and marketing (the art). To support this powerful network, MSA has a revitalization framework — the Main Street Approach — that helps communities leverage both the art and science of downtown revitalization to create a better quality of life for all.



The Main Street Approach is most effective in communities where residents have a strong emotional, social and civic connection and are motivated to get involved and make a difference. This approach works where existing assets, such as older and historic buildings and local independent businesses, can be leveraged. It encourages communities to take steps to enact long-term changes, while also implementing short-term, inexpensive and place-based activities that attract people to the commercial core and create a sense of enthusiasm and momentum about their community.

The results of these community-driven efforts are places with increased social cohesion and economic opportunity; they are places that support and sustain innovation and opportunity, places where people of diverse perspectives and backgrounds come together to shape the future.

It's helpful to think of the Main Street Approach as three tightly integrated components: community visioning and market understanding (the inputs); transformation strategies which are implemented using the four-points structure; and measurement of quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

### **Identify the Community Vision for Success**

A community can begin to implement the Main Street Approach through identifying and creating a community vision for success in its Main Street district. The vision should be informed by a broad community engagement process that brings diverse stakeholders together as participants in the revitalization process. An understanding of the market realities of the district should also be incorporated into the vision for the district. The vision provides a foundation for outlining the community's identity, expectations and ideals for future development while being grounded in an understanding of what is feasible.

## **Create Community Transformation Strategies**

Once a vision for the Main Street district has been created, communities must identify key transformation strategies that will provide a clear sense of priorities and direction for the revitalization efforts. These strategies will focus on and identify long-term and short-term actions that once achieved will help move a community closer to implementing its vision. Work on these strategies should align with the Main Street Approach's four points of organization, promotion, design and economic vitality.

## **Impact and Measurement**

The Main Street organization must show visible results that can only come from implementing action items and completing projects in the short-term and long-term. Coupled with implementation, Main Street must also focus on measuring progress and results to justify and demonstrate the wise use of scarce resources. The changes occurring in Main Street districts can be quantified by new jobs added, new businesses opened, buildings redeveloped and other metrics of success.

## **The Four-Point Approach**

### **Economic Vitality**

Revitalizing a downtown or neighborhood commercial district requires focusing on the underlying economic vitality of the district. This work is rooted in a commitment to making the most of a community's unique sense of place and existing historic assets, harnessing local economic opportunity and creating a supportive business environment for small business owners and the growing scores of entrepreneurs, innovators and locals alike. With nationwide growing interest in living downtown, supporting downtown housing is also a key element of building economic vitality.

## Quality Design

A focus on design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical elements of downtown while capitalizing on the unique assets that set the commercial district apart. Main Streets enhance their appeal to residents and visitors alike with attention to public space through the creation of pedestrian-friendly streets, inclusion of public art in unexpected areas, visual merchandising, adaptive reuse of older and historic buildings, more efficiently designed buildings, transit-oriented development and much more.

## Effective Promotion

Promoting Main Street takes many forms, but the goal is to position the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and the hub of economic activity while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics. This can be done through highlighting cultural traditions, celebrating and preserving important architecture and history, encouraging local businesses to market cooperatively, offering coordinated specials and sales and hosting special events aimed at changing perceptions of the district and communicating to residents, investors, businesses and property owners that this place is special.

## Sustainable Organization

A strong organizational foundation is key for a sustainable Main Street revitalization effort. This can take many forms, from a standalone nonprofit organization to a special assessment district, to a program housed in a municipality or existing community development entity. Regardless of the organizational type, the focus is on ensuring that all organizational resources like partners, funding, volunteers, etc. are mobilized to effectively implement the community transformative strategies.

## Montana Main Street

Established by the 59th legislature in 2005, Montana Main Street serves as the statewide coordinating program with the authority to designate communities and use the trademarked Main Street methodology through a licensing agreement with Main Street America. MMS serves up to 40 communities. As of 2025, two MMS communities, Great Falls and Butte, also perform at the highest standards set forth by MSA and are recognized as either an affiliate or accredited community with MSA.

For the last 20 years, MMS communities have:

- Generated more than \$4.5 million in public and private reinvestment
- Produced more than 3,150 net new jobs for Montana's economy
- Leveraged more than 660,000 volunteer hours
- Assisted in the development of more than 1,070 net small businesses

MMS communities are locally driven programs that focus on implementing the nationally recognized Main Street Approach in their commercial historic districts. The communities within the MMS network are committed to addressing the community-based approach of sustainable revitalization. Each community is responsible for developing their own local framework, which may include:

- A board of directors
- Full-time and/or part-time staff that will execute the revitalization efforts
- Partnerships to secure the long-term viability of the coordinating organization

MMS member communities represent some of the strongest historic business districts in the state. While the program has various reporting and training requirements, the benefits of the delivery from MMS Program staff make this a great resource in your

place-based economic development toolkit. Here's a quick snapshot of what our communities can expect:

**Free Membership:** We value the local commitment to undertaking a Main Street effort, so cost should not be a barrier. Any city or organization wishing to participate in the MMS Program is welcome to apply. Application guidelines can be found at [commerce.mt.gov](https://commerce.mt.gov). If interested, contact the Main Street coordinator to start the process. If accepted, communities must maintain their membership status through an annual signed letter of agreement.

**Training Opportunities:** Training is essential. Communities that are on the forefront of downtown development participate in ongoing training opportunities provided by Commerce and by partners throughout the state. MMS offers monthly training, 60 Minutes with Main Street, specialized onsite training and webinars for participating communities. As the local coordinator, you or someone from your community is required to attend a minimum of three training courses annually.

### Options to Meet Your Training Requirement

- **Main Street executive director meetings:** This is a mandatory meeting held at the Downtown and Main Street Conference annually. If/when that option is unavailable, the statewide coordinator will facilitate a virtual meeting. This meeting is to connect you with your peers across the state to share ideas, discuss issues facing your communities, suggest additional training, etc.
- **Montana Main Street and Downtown Conference:** This is a popular annual conference featuring lectures, workshops, breakout sessions, discussion groups, walking tours and panel presentations. The conference rotates through the state. Any community who wishes to host the conference can contact the state

coordinating program for further information. Scholarships are often awarded pending funding availability.

- **60 Minutes with Main Street:** This networking call takes place monthly on the second Tuesday of the month from 11 a.m.-noon. The typical agenda:
  - Welcome: 11-11:05 a.m.
  - Learn in 30 or spotlight community: 11:05-11:35 a.m.
  - Network sharing: 11:35-11:55 a.m.
  - Commerce update: 11:55-noon
- **Additional webinars or training courses as needed**
- **Main Street Now Conference:** This is another popular annual conference hosted by a state/community that is part of MSA. This is typically a three-day conference. Attendance scholarships are available pending funding.

**Technical assistance:** Establishing a focus for the Main Street effort is critical to leverage local people and financial resources. MMS staff are available to facilitate board retreats, strategic planning, work plan assistance, etc.

**Access to the MMS Planning and/or Implementation Grants:** Only MMS communities are eligible to apply for MMS grant funds. These grants are for projects that support economic development. Funds are made available on an annual basis pending legislative funding. The grant cycle opens at the end of summer/fall, and applications are due around mid-November. Communities interested in applying are encouraged to reach out to the statewide coordinator to discuss their project idea and be sure the community meets eligibility requirements.

**Track your community's success through our quarterly updates:** All MMS communities provide quarterly economic activity updates to the Montana Main Street coordinator at Commerce. A summary is then provided to each community through our MMS annual report. This document is a great resource for both managers and board

members to help communicate the successes of local and statewide Main Street efforts in Montana.

**A network of peers and professionals:** Enjoy the benefit of being connected to a program that has been established in Montana for over 20 years and having access to the expansive network of downtown development professionals. Rarely are there issues that you will face downtown that others have not already tackled. From monthly 60 Minutes with Main Street calls and emails to a private MMS listserv, the extensive network and reach of MMS can help provide your organization with best practices and national trends around downtown development.

**National designation:** Only organizations that meet rigorous performance standards and achieve meaningful revitalization in their downtowns or commercial districts are eligible to receive MSA Accredited designation. Organizations that achieve Accredited Main Street status are required to maintain their MSA community-level membership with the NMSC. This membership offers national recognition, tools for commercial district revitalization and special opportunities. If your community is interested in national designation, contact the state coordinating program for more information.

**Digital resources:** The MMS website is a great resource for downtown development professionals and community revitalization organizations across the state. The website is [commerce.mt.gov/infrastructure-planning/programs-and-services/montana-main-street-program](https://commerce.mt.gov/infrastructure-planning/programs-and-services/montana-main-street-program), or you can click this [link](#).

**Community visits:** The MMS Program conducts community visits bi-annually. Staff will visit your community to:

- Recognize program accomplishments
- Address and discuss additional downtown revitalization issues
- Meet with local leaders and provide presentations as desired

The community visit is meant to examine the effectiveness of the local Main Street Program within its own context and outlines a level of activity the organization and community are prepared to undertake.

During the visit, program staff will conduct onsite interviews with volunteers, board members, businesses, nonprofits, etc. Progress visits are important to the state, as they are opportunities for us to see the great work and hear the story of your community through all the qualitative and quantitative impacts.

This is an opportunity to celebrate you!

**Organizational structure:** The structure for each of our local MMS organizations is uniquely adapted to fit each community's needs. Each community determines where to house their local Main Street coordinating program. For some member communities, this may be a committee under the local government or an arm of an existing nonprofit organization. While each of these frameworks has its benefits, we recommend that you consider the needs and capacities of your local program before deciding to adopt or alter any existing organizational structures.

**Organizational budget:** Main Street revitalization is the shared responsibility of both public and private sectors. Neither sector can — or should — support the revitalization initiative singlehandedly. Any organization, agency or individual who might benefit from the district's revitalization should consider investing in your program.

It is important to keep in mind that organization funding is different than project funding. The organization itself needs ongoing, annual funding to cover the costs for everything from postage to utilities. The organization will undertake many projects over the years — everything from festivals to business assistance workshops. Funding for operations is most likely to come from government sources, corporations and foundations, while



funding for projects and programs will most likely come from pledges, memberships, special assessments, grants and earned income.

Keep in mind that MMS recommends all local organizations have an assorted and diversified funding stream. This ensures the financial stability of your organization. Safeguarding against changes in funding from a primary source will help minimize negative impacts that might affect the progress of your organization's efforts in the community. However, not all Montana local programs have a dedicated budget.

# Main Street Executive Director's Responsibilities

## A Quick Reference

One of the challenges you will have as a new Main Street executive director/leader is understanding the day-to-day responsibilities of your position. With so many things to tackle, it is tough to know where to start. Here at MMS, our goal is to support your efforts at the local level. To help, we have created a checklist you can use to ensure that you and your program remain on track as the year progresses. The tasks identified here are suggestions and will look different in each local community. However, we feel these practices are beneficial to any organization wishing to embrace a positive preservation ethic.

## Your First Three to Six Months

Your first several months as a new manager are all about understanding your program's foundation. Your job is to inform, educate and inspire your community, board members, elected officials and business leaders of the Main Street Approach, highlighting best practices and identifying opportunities that ensure quality community development in your local district. You should:

- Learn the organizational structure of your board and your position within your organization.
  - Learn the chain of command.
  - Update organizational charts.
  - Review your program's bylaws.
- Gather concise budget information so that you understand all income and revenue streams available to you for new and existing projects and programs. Not all MMS Programs will have a dedicated budget.

- Plan a time to sit down individually with each board member and get to know them, their roles on the board and their histories with and interest in downtown revitalization, as well as their priorities.
- Set yourself up for success. Soon you will have emails, documents, contact info and all other sorts of information coming through the Main Street office. If you organize early, you'll be more effective.
- Tour downtown and properties. Even if you are a local walking into the director's position, a tour of the downtown and surrounding community is always helpful.

Familiarize yourself with the downtown area and its relation to the following:

- Schools
- Industrial parks
- Recreational parks
- Lakes or rivers
- Highways
- Commercial corridors
- Malls
- Box stores
- Other traditional downtowns
- Airport or modes of transportation

You'll also want to walk your district to assess the buildings and public infrastructure. This should give you a better sense of the resources you have in your district and the opportunities for improvement. While walking around the district, bring a pad of paper or camera to document your findings.

If you do not have an active list of properties, this is something to consider implementing. In 2024, MSA implemented the [BOOMS Tracker](#). This is a tool that can be utilized to get your downtown buildings list created.

The MMS website has a community profile page to help identify buildings downtown and can be adapted to fit your needs.

- Meet all business and property owners. Business and property owners are your main constituent group. Begin to develop Those relationships with one-on-one visits. The conversation should not be focused on Main Street but on them as business and property owners.
  - What are their struggles?
  - Successes?
  - Past experiences?
  - Future priorities?

After several visits, you'll begin to develop relationships with stakeholders and become the go-to person for their downtown needs. If there is not already a list of your businesses and property owners, you should consider creating a listserv and contact list that could coincide with the bullet above as you tour downtown and properties.

- Have one-on-one meetings with all major funding partners, board members and councilpersons. As the local coordinating program leader, you act as the face of downtown. Many people's relationships with the program are directly related to their relationships with you. It is important in the early weeks of your employment with the local program that you begin to build those necessary relationships to show consistency and stability in the program and the future of downtown. Below is a list of people and organizations that we consider high priority. However, each community has unique needs and stakeholders, so be sure to take that into consideration when scheduling these introductory meetings.

#### Municipality

- Mayor

- Council or commission
- Planning board/commission president
- Economic development corporation director
- City manager
- Parks and recreation director
- Code enforcement officer
- Assessor's office
- Police/fire chief
- Department of public works director

### Partner Organizations

- Chamber president/executive director
- Regional economic development organization executive director
- Convention and visitors bureau staff
- Library director
- Historic and service organizations
- School superintendent
- Entities hosting major downtown events
- Foundations and other nonprofit organizations
- Local media outlets and key contacts

### Funders

- Major sponsors
- Member businesses/organizations
- All donors

- Additionally, you should attend the city council meeting(s) and county commission meeting(s). City council meetings are a great opportunity to gain visibility for yourself and the organization. Regular communication with leadership ensures that they know the successes the organization is bringing to the community. Many local programs are operated by a separate coordinating program; the municipality will be the fiscal agent for any funding a local program receives. We recommend you have a standing meeting spot on the council agenda quarterly, at a minimum, to give an update on all that is happening in your local program and district.
- Join local civic groups. This is a wonderful opportunity for the local Main Street Program to demonstrate its partnership with these organizations and provides an outlet for giving updates and access to volunteers. Many directors find themselves wearing multiple hats. It is important to choose how you volunteer wisely. As the face of the program, giving your time to other organizations by fundraising or soliciting goods and services can often confuse donors and wear out your welcome for future Main Street-related requests.
- Consider joining MSA. Unlike MMS, MSA requires a membership fee. If you choose to join MSA, that relationship is between your community and MSA. The only time MMS needs to be involved with your membership at MSA is if/when your community wants to receive accredited or affiliate status.
- Join applicable social media pages.

### Quarterly Updates

- Quarterly updates are due at the end of the following month for each quarter. Q1 (January, February, March) is due April 30. Commerce must capture specific data in a timely manner for communities to gauge their economic impact. We strongly recommend you share this data with your Main Street board and city council as well.

## Acronyms

Acronyms make up the jargon of state and local government programs. This list of acronyms and their meanings is offered to ensure that you, as a manager, won't get lost in the acronyms at your next meeting.

### A

ADA            Americans with Disabilities Act

### B

BID            Business improvement district

### C

CDBG          Community Development Block Grant

CEcD          Certified economic developer

CLG           Certified local government

CVB           Convention and visitors bureau

### D

DDA           Downtown development authority/association

### E

EPA           U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

### F

FTE           Full-time equivalent

### H

HPC           Historic preservation commission

HUD           U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

### I

IDA            International Downtown Association

**L**

League	Montana League of Cities and Towns
LMI	Low to moderate income
LOA	Letter of agreement
LOS	Letter of support

**M**

MACo	Montana Association of Counties
MDT	Montana Department of Transportation
MMS	Montana Main Street
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
MSA	Main Street America

**N**

NMSC	National Main Street Center
NMTC	New Market Tax Credit
NPS	National Park Service
NR	National Register of Historic Places
NTHP	National Trust for Historic Preservation

**O**

OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Administration
OZ	Opportunity zone

**P**

PR	Public relation
PSA	Public service announcement

**R**

RFP	Request for proposal
RLF	Revolving loan fund
ROI	Return on investment



**S**

SBA	U.S. Small Business Administration
SBDC	Small Business Development Center
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SOI	Secretary of Interior

**T**

TIF	Tax increment financing
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**U**

URA	Urban redevelopment agency
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

**Keeping It All Together**

In the early weeks of your position, you will have a mountain of materials to sift through. Organize yourself early so you have a strategy for managing information as projects and people draw your attention.

- Set priorities. There never seems to be a shortage of empty buildings, litter or people vying for your time. Setting specific priorities at the beginning of the year will give you something to measure activities against. With each phone call, request or unplanned project that pops up, you can ask yourself:
  - Does this get the program closer to its goal?
  - Does this align with the priorities the president and I have set for me?

This can be especially helpful on those extra hectic days in the office where time is scarce.

- Manage your time. After you've prioritized, you can begin accomplishing tasks in a way that allows you to create work-life balance. Directors have come up with a variety of tricks to manage their time. Some have a two- or three-evening



maximum each week they'll allow for meetings. Others find small breaks throughout the day offer the most respite and allow themselves a walk, a cup of coffee outside or a casual chat with stakeholders or staff when they've accomplished their three to five highest priority items for the day. Do whatever it takes to keep you driven and refreshed for another day and another challenge.

- Separate active and non-active files. Your Main Street office will quickly become a clearinghouse for paperwork of all kinds: documents and contracts from old projects, current projects and potential future projects. Divide active and non-active files between two filing cabinets. As a project comes to an end and the final review is done by both the committee and the board, the file can be archived. These historical documents can be very helpful in updating a walking tour or resurrecting an old event but do not need to clutter up your immediate workspace until then. Consider digitizing all your files and keeping them in corresponding folders.
- Only touch a document once. Once a filing system has been put in place, it is important to use it, because piles of disorganized papers can cause a director to do the same task several times. If you become too busy with meetings to be a good steward of your documents, try assigning a task every Friday to file and organize. That way you only have to file once a week, and you're prepared for an organized start to the following week.
- Get a good calendar and an eraser. You'll be managing a variety of committees, subcommittees and ad hoc committees. Though you won't be producing the projects, you will have an intimate knowledge of these groups' activities and a very full calendar. It is important to find a system for keeping it all straight.
- Consider your office, insurance and equipment. You'll be spending a lot of time in the Main Street office. Make it a place where you feel comfortable. Desks, storage and other equipment should be set up to enable you to be successful, not as impediments. Though they may be larger investments, they will have long-term return. You'll also want to ensure that your organization is carrying the

appropriate insurance coverage. There are a variety of providers that can assist, and it is always good practice to check with local providers first.

## **Committee Management**

Each committee has a variety of responsibilities and projects that can become overwhelming for any director. Without having the committee projects well organized, the director can become a bottleneck for a committee's progress. A few easy organizational tips and tools can keep that from becoming the case.

- **Project management software:** Some programs and budgets have chosen to organize projects, tasks and volunteers through project management software. Examples include Maestro, Basecamp or Teamwork.com. These programs can easily adapt your work plans to their programs and will allow you to automate reminders, task assignments to volunteers, tracking hours and more. For communities with a more tech savvy volunteer base and strong work plans, these programs can make a big difference.
- **Parking lot binders or boards:** Community members, volunteers and the director will come up with ideas for programming that they think may be a fit for the community. Every committee meeting can't be a brainstorming session, so to limit the interruptions, use parking lot binders or boards. These are folders of ideas for each committee. The director contributes to the idea folders by printing materials from the listserv or conferences. When it is time for planning and brainstorming, the director pulls out the binders to jumpstart conversations.
- **A binder for each committee of open projects:** Each committee will have a variety of open projects at any given time, and managing all the paperwork as the project inches towards completion can be overwhelming. Manage the clutter by creating a binder for each committee, clearly labeled and with tabbed dividers for each of the open projects. As drafts are created or documents are circulated, they can be easily stored in the binder. Keeping the binder in a public space allows committee members to access the information, further empowering them



to take leadership roles within their projects. When meetings move to locations outside your office, the binders keep all the relevant documents at your fingertips.

- A buddy system for new volunteers: Onboarding for new volunteers can include a variety of tools, but don't underestimate the power of a peer showing a new volunteer the ropes. This exercise will take the task off your plate and help build the confidence of a potential leader volunteer by being a mentor.
- Email groups: Don't search for the right email when you need to get information out fast. When gathering email addresses from volunteers, committee members, business owners, property owners, etc., instead of just adding them to your contacts, add them to specific groups within your contacts. Segmenting your contacts list can make quick communication easier. Some contact lists to keep ready include one for each committee, business owners, retailers, volunteers and board members.

## Business Management

Successful downtown businesses are a prime indicator of a Main Street Program's success. Being able to manage the businesses and the people behind them becomes very important.

- Scheduling face time can be difficult. You get the most work done when you are in your office uninterrupted, but face time is critical to maintaining visibility for the program and the positive perception of your impact and value in downtown. Depending on the size of your downtown, meeting with every business every month can become burdensome. Pencil this in just like any other task.
- Never mail something that could be hand delivered. To maintain visibility, look for opportunities to take yourself outside of your office. Whether it is delivering mail or taking meetings to downtown businesses or restaurants, the quick trip will help check off a few business visits from your to-do list and will be a nice break in the day.



- Keep notes of conversations in your contacts. With all these visits, there will be questions, comments and bits of information that will quickly get lost between the business and your office. To keep it all together, take notes as you visit each business. This will help you track the items you said you'd follow up on and notes on the business' performance that may be helpful for future support. This information can be stored in each contact's "Notes" section for future retrieval.
- Keep a business intake binder. As the program establishes itself as a resource for existing and potential businesses, you'll likely have walk-ins looking for information on how and where to start a business. Before this information ends up on sticky notes scattered all over your office, organize it in a business intake binder. This is a binder of blank worksheets of typical questions you'd like to ask walk-ins. The worksheets can ensure you don't miss gathering important information and help guide you on the best next steps for a potential business. Once complete, the sheets become a handy tool for follow-up on a regular basis.

### Other Tips

The following tips range from suggestions to strong recommendations. It is important to understand your role and the expectations set forth by your board. Each local program should clearly define the role of the executive director and Main Street manager.

1. It is not the executive director's program.
  - a. Main Street is successful because it is all-inclusive and teaches local empowerment. The director has been hired to orchestrate the efforts of the local Main Street Program, not to single-handedly implement the activities of the program for the district. The director is the coordinator, facilitator, instigator and communicator.
2. Main Street is a volunteer-driven program.

- a. It is staff-managed, not staff-driven. Main Street directors are professionals hired to:
  - i. Coordinate all activities of committees/volunteers
  - ii. Facilitate work plan development
  - iii. Coordinate communication among committees
  - iv. Support and uphold board decisions
  - v. Handle public awareness and public relations for the program
  - vi. Work closely with building owners and business owners
  - vii. Handle administrative details: records, reporting, files, etc.
  - viii. Become the local district technical assistance provider who either has the answer or knows where to find someone who has the answer
  - ix. Establish strong relationships with the city, chamber, county, etc.
  - x. Educate the district on Main Street, economic development and historic preservation
  - xi. Become a leader in the district, especially in smaller towns
  - xii. Motivate volunteers to do the work of the program
  - xiii. Report to and work for the pleasure of the board of directors
  - xiv. Be accountable and report directly to the board president
  - xv. Attend all board and committee meetings
  - xvi. Teach self-help, thereby empowering volunteers to turn district dreams into realities
  - xvii. Give credit for the program's success to the volunteers and leaders
- 3. The executive director is a professional hired to coordinate the efforts of the district's program. The director does not:
  - a. Become the fundraiser for Main Street  
Nothing diminishes your credibility faster than trying to raise your own salary.
  - b. Take the minutes at board meetings  
This is the secretary's responsibility.

- c. Chair, lead or preside over meetings of the board of directors or committees
  - d. Write the entire newsletter for the program
  - e. Take an official position on behalf of the organization, unless that position is determined and agreed upon by the board
  - f. Do the books for the organization  
This is the treasurer's responsibility.
  - g. Sign his or her own paychecks
  - h. Implement the activities of the program  
He or she must empower volunteers to take responsibility.
4. Executive directors will come and go, but the program must continue. When a program becomes staff-driven and that staff member leaves, the program goes with the director, and the organization/district is left hanging.
5. Gain the trust of those who hired you for the position. Use them to propose your ideas, then support them during discussions. Make your ideas their own.
6. Go to lunch weekly with a different board member, stakeholder or city official, and listen! It's amazing what you will learn.
7. Always work through the board president. It is very difficult to answer to 9-13 bosses.
8. Use work plans as your guided task list. Be able to say, "We are not working on that particular project at this time," or "Our board-approved work plans are filled with activities that support our mission. To add this item to our approved work plan, you will need to present the idea to the board of directors."
9. Find someone not involved with the program or related to you to become your confidante, such as an executive director from another Main Street district.

10. Remember that respect is earned, not expected. Dressing as a clown for an event in the morning does not mean that the bank president will not respect your opinion or suggestions at an important meeting in the afternoon.

## **Defusing a Difficult Situation: 10 Guiding Principles**

1. Identify the problem. Look at the situation. Often the problem that appears on the surface is not the actual problem.
2. Verify a trend. Make sure the problem is ongoing in nature and not simply a one-time aberration.
3. Take it to the source. Nothing gets solved when most of the discussion is going on behind the backs of the people or entities involved. Have the courage to confront situations directly, and make sure that all involved parties are part of the solution.
4. Brainstorm alternative solutions. There is hardly ever one right answer to the problem. The obvious solution often addresses only the surface problem.
5. Be patient. Every organization experiences problems and difficulties, some of which take a long time to resolve.
6. Put it into perspective. May organizational problems do not deserve the time or energy devoted to them, particularly when those human resources can be put to more productive use.
7. Make it a family affair. Take time to discuss issues, and make sure no one talks about the problem externally.



8. Agree to disagree. Not everyone is going to agree all the time. Develop the habit of agreeing to disagree when it is obvious that the solution is not going to please everyone.
9. Strive for win-win solutions. Long-term relationships are best maintained with when both parties feel they have gained something with the outcome.
10. Commit to the good of the order. Nothing is worth the total derailment of the organization. Be willing to move past a problem, even if it never gets completely solved, to work together for the common goals of the organization.

## **Sample Agenda for Board of Directors Meeting**

Meeting Date

Meeting Time

Meeting Location

1. Call meeting to order
2. Recognition of guests
3. Minutes – (insert name of secretary)
4. Treasurer’s report – (insert name of treasurer)
5. Program manager’s report – (insert name of PM)
6. Old business (particular items/issues may be listed)
7. New business (particular items/issues listed)
8. Committee reports:
  - a. Promotion – (insert name of chair)
  - b. Design – (insert name of chair)
  - c. Economic vitality – (insert name of chair)
  - d. Outreach or organization – (insert name of chair)
9. Public comments
10. Review of tasks, e.g., agree on three things that Main Street is doing for district, which all board members can share between today and the next meeting
11. Motion for adjournment

Note: It is recommended that a regular date and time be set for board meetings. If your organization does not have a regular scheduled meeting date, set the next meeting’s date and time before adjournment.

## **Main Street Committee and Task Forces**

Main Street Programs are grassroots initiatives that recognize the need to elicit support from the entire community to be agents of change. This support typically comes in the form of volunteers serving on committees or task forces to help plan and execute projects or goals of the Main Street organization's annual work plan. While some Main Street organizations still embrace the traditional four-point committee structure, we encourage you as the new executive director to find a balance that works best for you, your board of directors and your downtown.

The role of the executive director is to ensure the committees run smoothly and inspire maximum volunteer dedication, achievement, responsibility, impact and satisfaction. In a successful volunteer organization, everyone works smarter, not harder.

We recommend committees establish a regular meeting schedule. However, with the advancement of technology, volunteers and committee members have alternative ways to communicate and share ideas with each other between meetings. Facebook groups can be a great way to interact and facilitate discussion with volunteers who are working together on a specific project. Google Docs or Dropbox can be a great way to share relevant files and documents among group members.

It is important to keep in mind that a volunteer's time is valuable. As a manager, you should help connect people with the right volunteer commitment by identifying volunteers who are willing to serve on a committee for an indeterminate length of time, versus those who prefer to work on task forces that are created to address short-term goals and objectives. Allowing volunteers the flexibility to roll on and off committees and short-term task forces as desired can help prevent volunteer burnout and encourage new participation from untapped resources in the community.

General responsibilities of the standing committees of local Main Street Programs — typically, the promotion, design, economic vitality and organization or outreach committees — include the following:

## The Promotion Committee

The promotion committee's primary responsibility is to market a unified, quality image of the business district as the center of activities, goods and services to retailers, residents, shoppers, investors and tourists. The responsibilities of this committee are broad and typically include coordinating advertising, reversing negative images of the district, implementing special events and establishing and maintaining good media relations.

The first job of the promotion committee should be to conduct a thorough inventory of all current district and district promotional activities by checking with the Chamber of Commerce, local art groups, the merchants' association and all service clubs. After this, the committee and the board should make some basic organizational decisions about the role and activities of the promotion committee. Most local Main Street Programs have found that a combination of assisting existing programs and developing a limited number of new promotional activities is the best way to implement a comprehensive, balanced promotion calendar.

Members of the promotion committee might include representatives of the district merchants' association, Chamber of Commerce, local art association, school Board, library, civic associations, special interest clubs, YMCA/YWCA, an ad agency or even a bank or hospital marketing department. Beware of the conflict-of-interest local radio stations, TV stations and newspapers may experience by having advertising sales representatives participate in the promotion committee.

## Potential Functions of the Promotion Committee

- Directs retail promotional, traffic-building and image improvement activity for the business district or establishes liaisons and develops joint promotional strategies with existing organizations active in one or more of these areas
- Assumes primary responsibility for defining the marketable image of the district and ensuring continuity of that marketable image in all promotional programs
- Monitors district and consumer perceptions of the district and seeks to reverse negative attitudes and build on positive ones
- Allocates funds for promotional activities in accordance with the Main Street Program's overall annual work plan and budget
- Works toward building new sources of promotional funding for a portion of the program's total annual promotional budget
- Builds a strong network of volunteers to participate in implementation of promotional programs and establish good working relationships with district organizations, charities, school clubs and other groups who might participate in promotional programs
- Works with the economic vitality committee to monitor changes in the district's market and adjusts the promotional plan, building on local assets to increase the district's market share
- Works with the design committee to ensure a consistent, high-quality graphic image in signs, advertisements and other graphic material associated with the Main Street Program
- Establishes a sound working relationship with local and regional media
- Monitors the effectiveness of promotional programs on an ongoing basis

## Promotion Checklists

1. Steps to define the market image

- a. Identify the tangible and intangible assets of the district.
  - i. Architecture
  - ii. Sense of the district
  - iii. Convenience
- b. Compile market information and identify market users.
  - i. Market area served
  - ii. Goods and services available
  - iii. Current consumers groups
  - iv. Market not being served
- c. Review market studies.
- d. Gauge how different market groups react to the district's assets.
  - i. Seniors
  - ii. Youth
  - iii. Families
  - iv. Newcomers
- e. Develop or review a position statement identifying the district's market and consumers' attitudes.

## 2. Promotion strategy

- a. Determine how to reach consumer groups.
- b. Evaluate the current promotional program.
  - i. Number of retail events, special events and image activities
  - ii. Who is responsible for the event
  - iii. Informal evaluation of each event
  - iv. What additional events are needed, if any
- c. Create a comprehensive annual calendar of promotions.
- d. Develop work plans with budgets for each activity.

## 3. Image development: creating positive impressions of the district



- a. Slogans, graphics and jingles
  - b. Street banners (See design committee activities.)
  - c. Buttons, balloons, hats and T-shirts
  - d. Brochures with calendar of events, business directories and specialty directories
  - e. Series of ads reflecting quality and characteristics of the district
4. Special events: reinforcing the district's image and generating pedestrian traffic
- a. Festivals
  - b. Holiday celebrations
  - c. Farmer's market and other agriculture themes
  - d. Cultural displays and demonstrations such as art, music, dance and drama
  - e. Social and athletic themes
5. Retail events: increasing sales
- a. Discount
    - i. Seasonal clearance sales
    - ii. Crazy Days/Maxwell Street Days
  - b. Non-discount
    - i. Brands promotion
    - ii. Owner is home
  - c. Cooperative promotions, such as stores offering like or complementary merchandise cooperating on a promotion
  - d. Gallery night
  - e. Cross-retailing, or grouping businesses in an event
  - f. Bridal show
  - g. Garden show
6. Niche promotion: focusing on a consumer group

- a. Senior citizen day
- b. Good student discount
- c. Welcome back teachers

#### 7. Tourism

- a. District walking tours
- b. Motor coach tours and day trips
- c. Festivals and events
- d. County fair tie-ins

#### 8. Evaluation of promotion

- a. Percentage of sales increases
- b. Vehicular and pedestrian traffic counts
- c. Rooftop pictures
- d. Ticket sales and drawings
- e. Concessions and giveaways
- f. Business evaluations

### The Design Committee

The design committee's purpose is to create an attractive, coordinated and quality image of the district by capitalizing on its unique assets. Its responsibilities do not lie solely with the improvement of traditional commercial buildings. It should be involved in all aspects of design that have an impact on the overall image of the district, including analyzing parking, developing a logo, coordinating window displays and acting as a design resource for property owners. If the local Main Street organization is planning to develop a local low-interest loan pool or other financial incentives to stimulate interest in design projects, this committee will play a critical role in setting up and administering a design review and approval process.



Many design committees make the mistake of jumping immediately into establishing design ordinances. However, an ordinance is only one of a variety of measures that the committee should consider for the protection of the business district's visual quality.

The committee's members should include people who are qualified — either by profession or volunteer interest and experience — to supervise its projects, such as architects, landscapers, interior designers, graphic artists, sign painters, contractors, historic commission representatives, artists and citizens interested in good design. It might also include a district property owner and the city's building inspector.

### **Potential Functions of the Design Committee**

- Directs design improvement activity regarding building maintenance and rehabilitation, historic preservation, new construction, public and private signs, graphic material, public improvements, visual merchandising, traffic and parking
- Works with the promotion committee to ensure a consistent, high-quality graphic image in signs, advertisements and other graphic material associated with the Main Street organization
- Establishes a sound relationship with local design and construction professionals, sharing technical information on historic preservation, rehabilitation and maintenance of traditional commercial buildings
- Promotes awareness of local design and historic preservation issues throughout the district
- Monitors design changes throughout the district
- Works with the economic vitality committee to plan, implement and administer appropriate incentives to encourage design improvement and property development activity
- Allocates funds for design improvement activities in accordance with the Main Street Program's overall annual work plan and budget

- Monitors local ordinances and other applicable regulations affecting district design issues and works toward developing a supportive regulatory environment for district revitalization activity
- Establishes a sound working relationship with the State Historic Preservation Office and other state and regional agencies that provide assistance in areas related to district design improvement through historic preservation
- Conducts and maintains a thorough inventory of district properties

## **Design Checklists**

### **1. Photo inventories**

- a. Current digital images and prints
  - i. Exteriors
  - ii. Interiors, first and upper floor (especially vacant buildings)
  - iii. Before, after and in-progress
- b. Historic photo collection

### **2. Building information inventory**

- a. Assessor's information (owner, date, value, square footage)
- b. Amenities (heat type, loading dock, elevator)
- c. Use/condition (especially upper floors)

### **3. Public improvements**

- a. Space/amenities inventory (lights, trash containers, drinking fountains, benches/seating, vending machines, pay phones, trees/plantings)
- b. Parking inventory/survey
  - i. Number of stalls and location
  - ii. Percentage of occupancy
  - iii. Turnover

- c. Publics improvements program

- i. Cleanup day
  - ii. Streetscapes

- 4. Design assistance

- a. Follow-up/implementation

- i. Locate proposals
    - ii. Locate contractors
    - iii. Develop cost estimates
    - iv. Assist with labor
    - v. Assist with incentive applications
    - vi. Provide incentives

- b. Design toolkit

- i. Awnings samples
    - ii. Paint samples
    - iii. Drawing supplies (colored pencils, markers, paper, scales, straight edges, light table)

- 5. Technical information: resource library

- a. Preservation briefs
  - b. Preservation technotes
  - c. Historic preservation

- 6. Certified local government/Historic Preservation Commission

- a. Formation
  - b. Development
  - c. Interaction
  - d. Representation

7. Historic research/survey
  - a. Windshield survey
  - b. Sanborn maps
  - c. National register nomination
8. Ordinances/guidelines/plans (with city and/or county)
  - a. Develop/review/revise
9. Incentives: formation and/or marketing
  - a. Local (grants, loans, tax abatement, tax increment financing)
  - b. State (Main Street Planning or Implementation Grant)
  - c. Federal (Community Development Block Grants, National Trust Preservation Services Fund, Federal Tax Credits, National Realtors Association)
10. Design education and awareness
  - a. Workshops/trainings
  - b. Newsletter/news releases
  - c. Awards/recognition
  - d. Workshops/demonstrations
11. Window displays/visual merchandising
  - a. Workshops
  - b. Contests

## The Economic Vitality Committee

The economic vitality committee works to develop a market strategy for the district that will result in an improved retail mix, a stronger tax base, increased investor confidence and a strong, stable role for the district as a major component of the district's economic health.

The economic vitality committee's responsibilities are complex; therefore, getting volunteers for this committee can often be difficult. To overcome this, the board can identify initial tasks that do not require specialized expertise, such as collecting data on district buildings for a retail recruitment program or reviewing and summarizing existing market information.

One of the committee's first tasks might be to identify public and private sector groups in the district already active in economic development, such as local development companies, development authorities and city planning and development agencies. Set up appointments with all these groups to discuss their activities and to explain the goals of the local Main Street organization. Ask for copies of any plans and market studies they have produced or commissioned.

The economic vitality committee could be composed of city council members, officers of financial institutions, realtors and chamber of commerce board members or staff, as well as merchants, property owners, attorneys and business teachers.

### **Potential Functions of the Economic Vitality Committee**

- Works to strengthen existing core area businesses and, eventually, to recruit additional businesses through such programs as the development of business assistance teams; sponsorship of business seminars; identification of market opportunities and dissemination of relevant information to existing and potential businesses; development of promotional literature describing the district business environment; and development of incentive programs to stimulate business growth
- Monitors changes in the local market on an ongoing basis; assesses the local market share within the district and the region; measures the involvement of

various market groups in the commercial district; monitors sales leakage or surplus; and assesses the district's mix of retail, commercial, residential, recreational and civic space

- Directs activity related to core area commercial and real estate development
- Works with the design committee to plan and implement appropriate incentives to encourage design improvement and property development activity
- Works with the promotion committee to monitor and adjust the district promotional plan to increase the local market share
- Establishes a sound working relationship with local and regional financial institutions, business assistance organizations and other businesses and agencies that provide assistance in areas related to core area economic development
- Conducts and maintains a comprehensive inventory of core area businesses
- Allocates funds for core area economic development activity in accordance with the Main Street Program's overall annual budget and work plan
- Becomes familiar with city, county and regional economic development strategies and coordinates projects when possible, utilizing economic development programs already in place and investigating the creation of new programs when appropriate
- Promotes the core area as a good place for commercial and real estate development activities

## **Economic Vitality Checklists**

1. District assessment
  - a. Base data collection
    - i. Past surveys
  - b. Building inventory (consider BOOMS Tracker)
    - i. Partner with design committee



- ii. Assessor's information (owner/date/value/square footage)
  - iii. Photographs (historic/current)
  - iv. Current use and availability
  - v. Local contact (property manager)
- c. Business inventory
  - i. List all businesses
  - ii. Categorize by type
- d. Position statement
  - i. Partner with the promotion committee to develop a statement identifying the district's market, available goods and services and consumers' attitudes.
- e. Conduct market analysis
  - i. Summarization secondary information
  - ii. Determine primary market area
  - iii. Select survey format (mail, phone, intercept)
  - iv. Gather, tabulate and evaluate surveys
  - v. Present findings

## 2. Business retention

- a. Business directory
- b. Block captain program
- c. Educational seminars and workshops
- d. Newsletter articles
- e. Business transition support packets
- f. Enterprise team
- g. Incentives
- h. Business call program

## 3. Business expansion

- a. Focus groups
  - i. Business
  - ii. Customer
  - iii. Market feasibility studies
  - iv. Business plans and projections
- 4. Business recruitment
  - a. Assemble recruitment packet
    - i. Market data
    - ii. Available building information
    - iii. District data
  - b. Create recruitment teams
  - c. Develop incentive package
    - i. Local grants
    - ii. Local governmental incentives
    - iii. Low-interest loans
    - iv. State incentives
- 5. Real estate development
  - a. Clustering strategies
    - i. Determine existing clusters
    - ii. Create list of complementary businesses
  - b. Perform an analysis
  - c. Adaptive reuse studies
  - d. Incentives (see above)

## The Organization or Outreach Committee

The organization or outreach committee is the foundation of your work. Much of the success of the local Main Street Program and the viability of the organization will



depend on its ability to recruit and develop new leadership, stay in close touch with its supporters, meet its supporter's needs and involve and mobilize many volunteers in the program's activities. This is an intense, ongoing effort that requires diligent work year-round by the organization committee, which is established to meet several needs of the organization.

### **Potential Functions of the Organization Committee**

- Plans and conducts annual fundraising activities for the Main Street organization and ensures that adequate funding is always in place
- Organizes and conducts an annual nomination program for board of directors; when applicable, organizes and conducts an annual membership drive
- Helps the design, promotion and economic vitality committees recruit new members
- Promotes the development of a strong volunteer network within the Main Street organization and encourages leadership development within the Main Street organization
- Works with the board of directors to orient new board and committee members to the Main Street organization's goals, activities, policies and procedures
- Recruits new members to the Main Street board and committees
- Recruits new volunteers for the Main Street organization and helps them find assignments they will enjoy
- Raises funds for the ongoing operation of the Main Street organization

### **Organization Checklists**

#### **1. Funding**

- a. Develop budgets and budgetary procedures
- b. Assist board with planning of annual drive

- c. Plan fundraising events to supplement the budget
- d. Create and control inventory for promotional merchandise

## 2. Public relations for the organization

- a. Speaker's bureau
- b. Social media
- c. Newsletter (design, layout, distribution)
- d. Main Street column
- e. Radio show
- f. Program brochure (design, layout, distribution)
- g. Quarterly updates to city and county government
- h. News articles/regular press releases
- i. Compile media list
- j. Promote work plans

## 3. Internal communications

- a. Meeting minutes
- b. Committee reports
- c. Main Street mixers
- d. Annual report or organization
- e. Annual meetings (plan and coordinate)
- f. Compile program work plans

## 4. Volunteer development

- a. Volunteer recruitment
  - i. Ask peer-to-peer
  - ii. Information booth at district events
  - iii. Speaking engagements
  - iv. Call for volunteers in local media (list of jobs, open invitation)

- v. Program brochure
- b. Volunteer orientation
  - i. Discover their interests (interview, development recruitment form)
  - ii. Education on purpose of the program
  - iii. Information on role of committee
  - iv. Use training slides and videos
  - v. Create a volunteer handbook including program overview, job description, committee work plan, etc.
  - vi. Encourage attendance at training locally, regionally and nationally
- c. Volunteer retention
  - i. Give them a job
  - ii. Send thank you notes
  - iii. Write letters of appreciation to employers
  - iv. Recognition in newspaper or newsletter
  - v. Annual birthday party
  - vi. Nominate for volunteer of the month, quarter and year
  - vii. Never waste their time

## **Strategic Planning and Community Vision**

At this point we know that Main Street organizations consist of volunteers, business owners and community stakeholders, all equally invested in seeing the success and revitalization of your community's commercial historic district. Your team's success will be determined by two key components: your leadership abilities and your organization's ability to create and follow a comprehensive strategic plan. A Main Street strategic plan is developed through community visioning, a board planning session and an annual work plan.

Good work plan development is one of the most important building blocks of your organization's foundation. Your local Main Street organization's success can be unnecessarily compromised if your foundation is not well developed and stable. Building a solid foundation in the early years of your program will not only help you, as a manager, reach your full potential but will also result in a better downtown.

The challenge that most new managers face is not having enough patience to see this process through in a comprehensive and strategic way. By taking the time to develop a clear and detail-oriented work plan for your Main Street district, you will set yourself up to accomplish substantial revitalization initiatives in a measured and meaningful way. Once created, this document will help guide you, the board and your volunteers through a series of projects and tasks that will ultimately lead to the success and revitalization of your historic district.

A community visioning session provides the local Main Street organization with an opportunity to invite diverse and varied representatives of the public to participate and contribute ideas and recommendations to help craft the work plan. While the size and scope of the community visioning session will vary from town to town, the purpose it plays in work plan development remains the same. The ideas expressed here will serve as a framework for you, your board of directors and your downtown area for years to come.

One of the most important things to keep in mind when planning a community visioning session is that these meetings should be used to gather feedback and information, while serving solely as a listening session. It can at times be both exciting and frustrating for you, as the Main Street executive director, and the board, to hear the good, the bad and the ugly truth about the local perceptions of Main Street. It is important, though, to consider that different people bring different perspectives, and all opinions are valuable. Keep in mind that not everyone who wants to participate in your

community visioning session is able to do so. With that in mind, it can be helpful to provide additional avenues for public input and feedback, such as an online or printed survey.

## **Board Planning Session**

Now that you have gathered community input, it is time to sit down as a board member to discuss the feedback received. This is best done through a board retreat or planning session. During the board retreat, the Main Street executive director and fellow board members will have the opportunity to discuss and plan the direction of the Main Street Program. In preparation for this retreat, the Main Street executive director should pull together historical documents including master plans, community surveys, historic resource studies and even prior work plans so that patterns, trends or gaps in services can be identified and addressed.

We recommend that you either invite MMS staff to facilitate the planning session or consider bringing in a professional meeting facilitator to help enable dialogue and discussions during your board retreat. Meeting facilitators can often say things that need to be said and ask questions that can lead to deeper probing and reflection. In certain situations, managers may feel uncomfortable voicing their opinions for fear of possible retaliation or hurt feelings; a meeting facilitator can help alleviate these concerns.

During the board planning session, the board and executive director should identify areas of focus for the next one to two years. When working to develop an annual plan of work, approach downtown development and revitalization with a wide-angle lens. Earlier in this handbook, you learned about the Main Street Approach and the role that the four points can have in creating a balanced and harmonious downtown. Now we want to make sure that we are thinking about the big picture by asking the following questions.

Will what we are doing or proposing:

- Be good for the downtown?
- Be good for the businesses?
- Complement our program's vision and mission?
- Positively impact the community?
- Be fair to all concerned?

If you can answer yes to the above, then what you are proposing is most likely on the right track. Keep in mind that Main Street cannot be everything to everyone. While it is important to make sure that you are serving the greater good, it's just as relevant to ensure that you remain effective and focused on your efforts.

## **Annual Work Plan**

The program's annual work plan should reflect the organization's major priorities and goals for the next one to two years. It should serve as a framework for the goals, projects, programs and tasks that need to be undertaken to accomplish the overarching strategies identified during the board retreat. A well-developed work plan will include measurable goals with necessary objectives identified to accomplish each goal. Each individual task should have ownership either by an individual, a board member or a committee and should lay out the desired timeframe for accomplishing each objective.

Understanding how many steps it will take to complete a project can help you as a manager identify the resources needed and potential partners necessary to execute your plan. Good work plans have benefits beyond organizing work. They are a useful public relations tool and should be posted on your website and shared with the public to help educate the community regarding your organization's purpose.

The Main Street executive director should ensure that the organization does not take on activities that do not serve the purpose of supporting the program's overall mission and work plan. With limited time and resources available to complete the program's outlined

goals, the work plan must remain focused and timeline-oriented. It is easy to get sidetracked by great ideas and opportunities. As the Main Street executive director, make sure that your organization remains open to new ideas while remaining optimistically cautious in evaluating the time, money and resources that may be diverted away from the existing work plan.

### **The Development of the Work Serves Four Purposes**

- To manage the wide range of activities that must take place for the revitalization effort to succeed
- To develop a timetable and budget for activities
- To explain the organization's purpose and its activities to the public
- To help measure, in quantifiable terms, the district revitalization program's success

### **Elements of the Work Plan**

Vision and mission statements reflect the consensus of the district regarding the future condition and character of the district business district.

Involving the district with the development of the vision statement and yearly work plan generates support and awareness for the Main Street Program. The mission statement should clearly and simply describe the organization's purpose. The statement should be flexible so it will remain relevant as the organization evolves. It should be used to explain the district revitalization program in press releases, publications, media interviews and at meetings.

### **A Narrative Summary or Listing of Items Within the Organization's Program of Work**

In some districts this is optional, but it is useful when orienting new volunteers to committees, when used as a separate public relations piece to promote the

organization's activities and when used as fundraising collateral to explain the program to potential donors and contributors.

### **A Goal or Goals for Each of the Organization's Committees**

The board of directors should generally be responsible for establishing the goal statement for each of the Main Street committees. This task should not be delegated to a committee or task force since it is the board that is responsible for the Main Street Program's direction and is held accountable for its activities.

### **Specific Objectives That Provide Direction Enabling Each Committee To Reach Its Goal**

The objectives/strategies for reaching each committee's goal should be developed by the respective committee's chairs and volunteers. Objectives are specific statements outlining how each goal will be reached and identifying the major areas of responsibilities for each committee. Objectives should also relate closely to the issues and priorities that have been established during the visioning or brainstorming session.

### **Projects or Activities Appropriate to Each Objective**

Activities are specific projects that have an identified timeframe and desired result. Activities should be developed by the committee that will implement them to foster a strong sense of empowerment, involvement and commitment.

### **A List of Tasks To Be Performed To Complete Each Project or Activity**

Tasks are specific steps required to complete an activity or project. Assigning specific tasks to each volunteer is the responsibility of the committee or subcommittee chair.

### **A List of Person(s) Responsible for Completing Each Task**

Each task should have a person assigned to complete it. This person is not the program manager.



### A Timetable for Completing Each Task

Each project should have a realistic timeframe which shows when the project will be started and when it will be completed.

### A Cost Estimate or Budget Line for Each Task

Each project should have a budget reflecting realistic costs.

### A Method for Quantifying Progress, Returns or Results

Activities must be measurable if a Main Street Program is to gauge its progress, to set standards for future activities and to demonstrate its overall success.

## Funding Opportunities for Main Street Programs

The way a Main Street organization makes itself financially sustainable can vary from community to community. While there are many different avenues to achieve financial independence, we typically see the items listed here used most frequently in local organizations across the state.

**City government** can be a partner in funding basic operating expenses and often also contributes dollars to specific downtown projects. Basically, there are two funding pots from which you can solicit money from the city government: the general fund, and special dedicated funds. Within these funds, the city government has a certain amount of money that must be allocated for projects. For instance, one special dedicated fund is made up of money from gas taxes. This money must be allocated to street projects. General fund dollars can be applied to downtown management, public improvements, public facilities, technical assistance and possibly promotions.

**Fees paid for membership** to an organization can be a source of funding for most aspects of downtown revitalization. A well-thought-out strategy and campaign must be administered for membership dues to be a strong source of funding for a program. This

form of fundraising is ongoing and can only succeed with a good chair to spur the board on. Follow-through is essential to a good membership campaign.

**Corporate donations** may be distinguished from membership dues primarily by the size of contributions. Many corporations have actively supported commercial revitalization efforts through donations of money, services and equipment. Most look upon donations to social and economic development causes as investments in the community. Their willingness to give will be directly proportional to their existing or future corporate presence in the community. A corporation will typically evaluate a donation in terms of return on investment, usually in terms of dollars, publicity, human betterment or economic growth.

An **improvement district** is a local self-help funding mechanism authorized by Montana state statute which allows municipalities to levy special assessments on businesses and property owners within a defined district. Funds collected can be used to provide management, landscaping, improvements, maintenance, promotion, business recruitment and parking within the district.

**Fundraising events** are a good source of revenue for downtown management, promotions, public improvements and public facilities. They differ from special events in that they occur regularly, they are conceived and run like a business and they are regarded as a business venture by the sponsoring organization. The whole purpose of putting on a fundraiser is to make money; therefore, it is critical that goals, plans and budget are thoroughly worked out, or the fundraiser may end up being much less than profitable.

A budget can be subsidized by **selling products** related to the organization, community or promotion. Some examples of these are T-shirts and sweatshirts, posters, specialized game boards and bricks for streetscape projects. Product variety is only as limited as

the imagination. Before going into special product sales, there must be a well-thought-out plan in place for selling the items. Don't depend on product sales to make ends meet.

**Sponsorship** is a good source of funding for special events and promotions. Suppliers of many of the products used in special events, as well as the media, are willing to donate a portion of their products to be listed as a sponsor of the event. Like corporate donations, potential sponsors evaluate such contributions in terms of return on investment. Businesses seldom sponsor anything from a totally philanthropic viewpoint.

**Foundation** donations are grants given by foundations to aid social, educational, charitable, religious and other activities which serve the common welfare. Foundations are non-governmental, nonprofit organizations which, primarily through investment of their assets, have produced income that is awarded as grants. Foundations generally have restrictions concerning what they will and will not support. You must be a tax-exempt organization recognized by the IRS to qualify for a foundation grant. Foundation grants can be used to fund public improvements, public facilities, technical assistance, promotions and downtown management depending on the purpose, activities and area of interest of the foundation.

**Volunteers** are often an overlooked means of funding many commercial revitalization projects. Volunteers can provide many services that might otherwise require cash resources well beyond the means of the organization. Volunteers might sell spots in a coordinated advertising campaign; they might provide part-time office help or clerical support; volunteers might help solicit donations and memberships; they might help paint a building or sweep a sidewalk, prepare a financial statement or submit a tax return, design a logo or print the newsletter. Given correct motivation and correct management, volunteers can do almost anything.

**Service fees** are a common source of funds for many nonprofit organizations but are not often used in the commercial revitalization field. Service fees might be generated for professional services such as commercial building design assistance, parking management or enforcement, property management, real estate negotiation or packaging, retail promotion packaging, advertising or business recruitment. Service fees are a dependable and self-perpetuating source of income but can be deceptive. Many nonprofit organizations have started profit-producing services to subsidize their basic mission driven projects, only to learn that the services were not actually producing income but sapping the resources of the organization.

## Resources

Though not an inclusive list, these are some of the publications maintained in hardcopy at Commerce. You can find some of them on MSA's website, [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org).

### Publications

- National Main Street Center publication
- The Main Street Board Members Handbook
- Main Street America committee handbooks
- Navigating Main Streets as Places: A People-First Transportation Toolkit from Main Street America
- “Strong Towns” by Charles L. Marohn, Jr.
- “Revitalizing Main Street: A Practitioner’s Guide to Comprehensive Commercial District Revitalization Paperback” by National Trust Main Street Center
- “The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader’s Guide” by Donovan D. Rypkema
- “What’s Your Signage (How On-Premise Signs Help Small Businesses Tap Into a Hidden Profit Center)” by Darrin Conroy, published by the New York State Small Business Development Center
- “Building Small: A Toolkit for Real Estate Entrepreneurs, Civic Leaders, and Great Communities” by Jim Hied of the Urban Land Institute
- “Main Street’s Comeback: And How It Can Come Back Again” by Mary Means and Randall Mason

### Websites

- [Board Source](#)
- [Census](#)
- [International Downtown Association](#)

- International Economic Development Council
- Montana Community Foundation
- Montana Department of Commerce
- Montana Economic Developers Association
- Montana Historical Society
- Montana League of Cities and Towns
- Montana Main Street
- Montana Nonprofit Association
- Montana Small Business Development Center
- [Montana.edu/extension](https://montana.edu/extension) and Local Government Center
- National Main Street Center
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- [Saveyour.town](https://saveyour.town)
- Secretary of Interior Standards
- [Strongtowns.org](https://strongtowns.org)

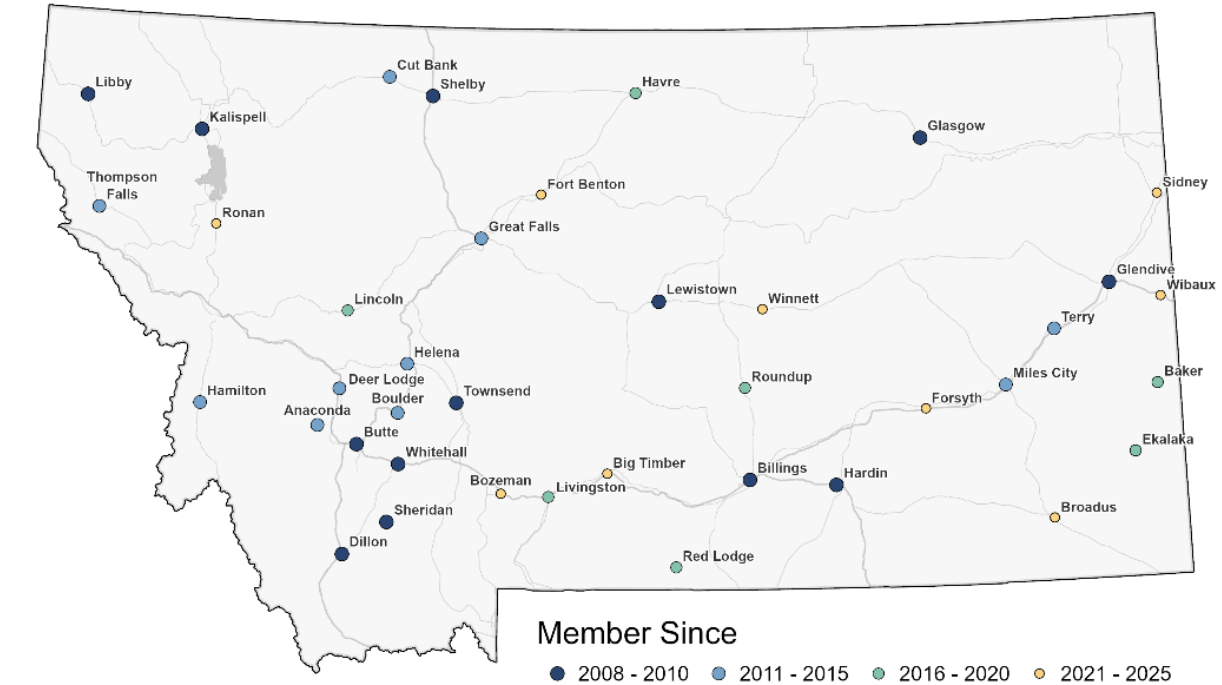
## Suggested Newsletters

- Most communities have a weekly or monthly newsletter. Reach out to the network and get signed up so you can emulate what others are doing.
- Sign up [here](#) for Commerce’s “Weekly Roundup” email.
- Sign up [here](#) for the municipal bulletin from the Montana League of Cities and Towns.

## Current Montana Main Street Communities

A full list of the network can be found at [commerce.mt.gov](https://commerce.mt.gov).

### Montana Main Street Members



Map Source: Commerce.