

Statewide and Local Main Street Programs

Powerful Tools to Revitalize Traditional Downtown Districts

What is Main Street®?

Main Street is a common-sense, community driven approach to revitalizing traditional downtowns and neighborhood business districts. Developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the 1970's, the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ provides a flexible framework for local public and private sector participants to breathe new life into their traditional commercial districts. Main Street focuses on comprehensive work in four key areas:

- **Organization** – assembling human and financial resources for a successful, sustainable revitalization program.
- **Promotion** – marketing the commercial district and attracting new customers.
- **Design** – working to improve the downtown's physical appearance; and
- **Economic Restructuring** to improve the downtown economy through business and property development.

The Main Street program has been enormously successful. Since 1980, more than 1,700 communities across the U.S. have established Main Street programs. The commercial districts of these villages, cities, and towns have seen \$18.3 billion reinvested in their Main Street districts, representing a net gain of 60,577 businesses and 244,543 jobs (net). 96,283 building renovations have spruced up America's Main Streets – an average investment of \$10,000,000 per Main Street community.

What Does a Statewide Main Street Coordinating Program Do?

The primary function of state Main Street Coordinating Programs is to provide competitively-selected local Main Street organizations with the expertise and guidance to establish and strengthen downtown revitalization efforts and to address specific downtown issues. Typically housed in a government agency or a nonprofit organization, Main Street Coordinating Programs partner with the National Trust Main Street Center to provide hands-on technical assistance and advice to participating communities. (Few states provide limited project-specific financial assistance.) State Main Street programs also provide advocacy and information resources for downtown revitalization in the state. These activities all help communities develop and sustain successful downtown revitalization and management programs.

How Are Statewide Main Street Programs Structured?

The structure of state Main Street Coordinating Program varies according to the needs and resources of each state. Each state Main Street program has, at minimum, a full-time professional coordinator – usually someone with direct Main Street experience. Most have expanded over time to include additional staff who provide other specialized assistance, such as a full-time architect to provide basic design assistance, or a business consultant. The average state Main Street program budget is \$508,224, with an average of 3.09 full-time and 1.64 part-time staff who serve an average of 30.11 local Main Street programs.

What Assistance Do Statewide Main Street Programs Offer?

Typically, the statewide Main Street Coordinating Program provides local Main Street programs with three to five years of expert training and consultation in the Main Street Approach. After the start-up period, local programs have built sufficient capacity to function more independently, and the state program offers a more limited set of technical assistance. While downtown districts can participate in the Main Street program individually, the challenge can be daunting without the support of a state Main Street program to provide professional advice, networking, advocacy, and encouragement for all the Main Street programs in a state.

Active Statewide Main Street Coordinating Programs

AL	IN	NE	TX
AZ	IA	NH	UT
AR	KS	NJ	VT
CA	KY	NM	VA
CO	LA	NC	WA
CT	ME	OH	WI
DE	MD	OK	WV
FL	MI	PA	WY
GA	MS	SC	
IL	MO	TN	

These 38 active state Main Street programs are housed in:

- economic development departments (16)*
- private non-profit organizations (9)*
- state historic preservation offices (8)*
- housing/community development depts. (3)*
- lieutenant governor's office (1)*
- department of agriculture (1)*

Protecting the Irreplaceable

What Do Local Main Street Programs Do?

Local Main Street organizations implement both small-scale and complex projects that improve their downtown areas. These may include visible projects, like streetscape and building improvements, as well as behind-the-scenes activities, like business development or creation of a marketing strategy for downtown.

Rather than relying on a single issue or a "big fix" development project, local Main Street programs implement smaller, incremental, lasting changes that, over time lead to a revitalized commercial district. Their activities are balanced between short-term, small-scale improvements and longer-term, larger scale activities. Using the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ as a framework, communities are able to address their specific needs and priorities in their downtown districts



How Are Local Main Street Programs Structured?

Local Main Street programs are most often structured in a non-profit organization funded by the community. They are volunteer-driven programs that have support and participation from a variety of stakeholders in the community. Each local Main Street program establishes a broad-based governing board of 9 to 15 various community representatives, typically including business and property owners, residents, city officials, financial institutions, schools, religious institutions, civic groups, preservationists, media, etc. The board guides policy, funding, and planning for Main Street.

Local Main Street programs also establish committees that correspond to the four points of the Main Street Approach — Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring. Committees average five to 10 people who plan and implement activities in each of Main Street's Four Points. Depending on the circumstances of the commercial district, local programs may also create issue-oriented task forces, such as a Parking Task Force.

The local Main Street program hires an executive director to manage the program, coordinate volunteers, assist with project implementation, and act as a primary spokesperson for the organization. Staff reports to and takes direction from the governing board. Depending on local needs and resources, the organization may hire more than one staff member, with the additional staff focusing on a specific aspect of the revitalization effort, such as business development or promotions.

What Do Local Main Street Programs Achieve?

The Main Street Approach to managing traditional commercial districts leads to impressive economic development in downtowns and neighborhood business districts across the nation. Most Main Street programs achieve significant investment in the commercial district over time, including exponential growth in the number of businesses and jobs, as illustrated below. They also revive community spirit and pride, creating exciting and livable downtowns that attract residents and visitors alike.

While every program is different, Main Street organizations bring together a variety of community leaders and organizations to establish a consensus vision for the downtown, then implement projects to bring that vision closer to reality. In addition to its local economic impact, Main Street programs also have the secondary benefit of developing new leaders and, often, building partnerships and new and creative ways of working to improve America's cities and towns.

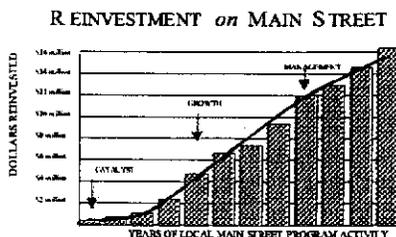


Figure 1. Average reinvestment in the physical environment over time in a local Main Street district

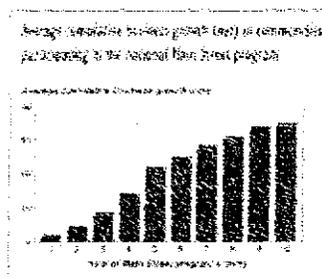


Figure 2. Average net growth in businesses in local Main Street districts over ten years

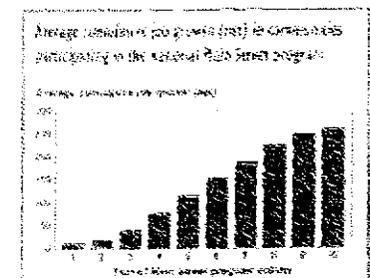


Figure 3. Average net growth in jobs in local Main Street districts over ten years