



Main Street FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions about the Main Street Approach

How does the Main Street Program work locally?

Main Street programs are locally driven, funded, organized, and run. They are independent nonprofits or city agencies located in the community and affiliated with the statewide coordinating Main Street organization and a network of other Main Street organizations within the state. The statewide coordinating Main Street organization generally has an application process through which a community can be designated as a Main Street program. The coordinating organizations provide direct technical services, networking, and training opportunities to their affiliated programs. Connecticut Main Street Center is the coordinating program for Connecticut.

How Do I Start a Main Street Program in My Community?

Typically, interest in developing a local Main Street program comes from business or property owners, city government, bankers, civic clubs, the chamber of commerce, historic preservationists, or other civic-minded groups. They contact the statewide coordinating Main Street organization to find out about the application process, discuss goals, establish an organization (Main Street programs are often independent, nonprofit organizations), raise money to hire a full-time Main Street director, and create volunteer committees and a board of directors to carry out the work. Once the program has been established, its participants examine the commercial district's needs and opportunities and develop a long-term, incremental strategy based on the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ to strengthen the district's commercial activity and improve its buildings. Connecticut Main Street Center provides consulting services, support, training, materials, and information to assist a revitalization organization throughout its growth.

Who should be involved in the local Main Street program?

Everyone with a stake in the commercial district and its future should be involved. Merchants, property owners, the chamber of commerce, industries, local government, and private citizens all benefit from a healthy local economy and from a historic core that reflects the community's heritage and personality. A sound partnership is crucial to the Main Street program's success. In fact, a 1988 study of successful downtown revitalization programs in America, conducted by the National Trust Main Street Center and the Urban Land Institute, found that programs funded primarily by local sources were much more likely to succeed than those that relied heavily on state or federal funds. It is also important for both the public and private sectors to support the program financially, thereby demonstrating their commitment to its goals.



Am I the right person to start this program? How can I get others interested?

Your Main Street's revitalization starts with you! Main Street programs around the nation are started by ordinary, concerned citizens who work with others in the community to reach a common goal. To get started, gather as much information as possible and spark interest among community groups that have a stake in the future of your commercial corridor: local government, chamber of commerce, historic preservation groups, etc. Put together a task force to plan the next steps. Contact Connecticut Main Street Center to learn the process for applying in your state. If there are other local Main Street organizations nearby, talk to them about their successes and challenges. If there is an active downtown organization in your community, join it and present your ideas on preservation-based revitalization.

Who pays for the Main Street program? Is it a grant?

No. Financial support for the program comes from the local entities that have a stake in the downtown: city government, merchants, businesses, and the public. The success of the Main Street program over the years lies in the fact that it is a local initiative, both organizationally and financially. When there is local buy-in, people care more about the success of the program and become more involved.

How long does a local Main Street program last?

Commercial revitalization is an ongoing process. Just as shopping centers and malls have full-time staff that work constantly to ensure proper leasing, management, and marketing, downtown and neighborhood commercial districts need ongoing attention, too. To ensure continuing economic success, Main Street programs are ongoing.

What assistance is available to establish and manage a local Main Street program?

Assistance is available in the forms of technical services, networking, training, and information. Connecticut Main Street Center can provide direct fee-for-service technical assistance to cities and towns that are members of the CT Main Street Network.



Is joining the CT Main Street Network Membership Program the same as becoming a Designated Main Street organization?

No. Although the terminology is similar, they are two different processes. CT Main Street Center offers its Network Membership as a service in order to provide information and benefits to any individual, agency, or organization interested in preservation-based commercial district revitalization. For an annual fee (sliding scale, depending upon annual budget or population, if you are a municipality) members receive discounts on training programs, access to member's only information, and other benefits. Being designated as a Main Street program by CT Main Street Center is a completely different process, which requires an application. In order to call yourself a Main Street organization in most states, you must be designated by the statewide program.

We are not ready to apply to CT Main Street Center for designation. Is there anything else we can do?

Yes. You can encourage local leaders, planning agencies, economic development agencies, city government, businesses, and individuals to apply the Main Street Approach to what they are doing now. Persuade them to view traditional commercial buildings as an asset to your community and to see the downtown or neighborhood commercial district as an area full of opportunity to renew your community's sense of identity, history, and place. You can also view case studies in our resources section and bring them to the attention of community leaders. See How To Get Started (below).



How to Get Started Using the Main Street Approach

If your community plans to start a Main Street program to revive your commercial district or reinvigorate a struggling or previously failed revitalization attempt, look over the first steps listed below. These recommendations will help you generate the local support necessary to establish a Main Street revitalization initiative. **Begin by Building Support:**

1. Form a working group: Ask colleagues in your community about starting a revitalization initiative. Canvass all 'stakeholders' who have an interest in the future of your downtown or commercial district, including merchants, business owners, property owners, and residents. Contact the mayor and other local government officials, the municipal planning department and economic development officials, and other organizations, such as the chamber of commerce or merchants association. Form a working group or task force of interested individuals and community leaders to explore launching an initiative. The wider the group of people you gather, the easier it is to build support and spread the word. All of these entities will benefit from a revitalized district and should support your effort, both programmatically and financially, so you need to bring them to the table now.
2. Take a good look at your district: Look at your downtown or commercial district as if you are a first-time visitor. What are its strengths? What needs improvement? Take photos and make notes.
3. Generate broad-based local interest and support: Hold a community meeting to discuss the idea. Call CT Main Street Center for advice and possible attendance at the meeting. Show the Main Street Approach PowerPoint presentation (available from CT Main Street Center). Also use photographs to illustrate what needs to be done. Ask for feedback from participants and invite them to join the effort. Take their contact information and follow up later.
4. Join CT Main Street Center: Contact CT Main Street Center to find out about joining as a Member Community.
5. Network with successful programs: Invite an executive director or board president from another Main Street community to talk with your working group or community about their accomplishments and answer questions about how the program works. Their enthusiasm, stories, and pictures will make a strong argument for a preservation-based revitalization program. Facilitate discussions among your stakeholders and those already involved with other Main Street programs. This type of dialog is invaluable, especially for members of the working group. Get mayors, business owners, and economic development staff talking.
6. Spread the word: Ask the local newspaper(s) to run a story about the commercial district revitalization initiative. Position a member of the working group as a guest on the local radio station to explain how the community can start a program.