

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



**MONTANA**  
MAIN STREET

# **MONTANA MAIN STREET PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

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## **I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

The Montana Main Street Program, established in 2005, is administered by the Community MT Division within the Montana Department of Commerce. As a state coordinating program within the Main Street America network, the Montana Main Street Program awards competitive grant funding to communities focusing on planning and/or implementation projects directly related to downtown revitalization, development, and historic preservation. Using the Main Street Approach to downtown revitalization the Montana main Street Program also offers technical assistance to communities striving for economic vitality while maintaining local historic integrity, quality of life, and a sense of place. Such goals are best met by uniting larger community ideas and efforts with program organization, coordination, and resources.

### **Mission**

The Montana Main Street (MMS) program is dedicated to bettering the economic, historic, and cultural vitality of Montana downtowns through community development, revitalization, and historic preservation. MMS fosters grassroots efforts through coordination and technical assistance, focused on a comprehensive approach to restoring healthy community commercial districts and preserving the historic structures that contribute to Montana's unique sense of place.

### **Vision**

Adopting the Main Street Approach™ to revitalization, Montana Main Street envisions a broader community and state effort dedicated to improving our downtown economies and historic districts. MMS aims to encourage and promote local efforts through a statewide network of educational outreach, coordination, and organization, to effectively lead Main Street communities throughout Montana toward fulfilling our mission as well as their own.

### **Goals**

- Preserve and promote Montana historic and cultural resources.
- Promote long-term planning for revitalization success.
- Organize efforts and coordinate conversations between and within Montana communities.
- Support economic, community, and tourism development to facilitate a comprehensive sense of place.
- Enable small business owners to succeed by creating vibrant and healthy downtown districts.

### **The Main Street Approach**

Since its beginnings in the 1980s, Main Street America has emphasized the Four Point Approach™ as the preservation-based economic development tool that provides a foundational method for local efforts to revitalize downtown historic and commercial districts. As an essential component of the

Main Street Approach, Montana communities utilize their local assets, historic architecture, cultural and natural resources, heritage, local enterprise, and community pride. The four points of the Main Street approach allow Montana communities to harness local ideas and goals in a unified and organized community revitalization effort.

### **What Are the Four Points?**

**Economic Vitality** focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.

**Design** supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.

**Promotion** positions the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.

**Organization** involves creating a strong foundation for sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

## **II. JOINING THE MONTANA MAIN STREET PROGRAM**

### **Becoming a Member Community**


The Montana Main Street program encourages member communities to engage in long-range planning and downtown revitalization. Once accepted into the Montana Main Street Program, communities are considered a member community and part of MMS. Additionally, an MMS community may seek national recognition within Main Street America. Communities interested in this option are encouraged to contact us at the state coordinating level for more information.

For a community to be considered for membership in the statewide program, Montana Main Street staff will need to be invited by local leaders to provide a program overview presentation. Local interest should aim to include a wide range of participants with a vested interest in the downtown core and community. Before pursuing membership, a community should solidify its' local partnerships.

Applications are reviewed annually in the spring. Submitted applications and supporting materials will be evaluated by a review committee. Acceptance into the Montana Main Street Program is competitive and based on community preparedness as well as resource availability at the state level; not every community that applies will be invited to join at the time of application. On average, only 1 to 2 communities are accepted into the program annually. MMS staff are available to assist interested communities throughout the application process and can provide guidance to those communities not accepted into the program.

*Membership Requirements*

1. An established commitment to planning, through the adoption of — or commitment to adopt within first year--an appropriate long-range planning document in support of the community’s vision and overarching goals (growth policy, downtown master plan, etc.);
2. Completed community visit by Main Street Staff for local program overview and assessment;
3. A unified and collaborative local effort to include the city, key organizations, and stakeholders, accompanied by secured letters of support;
4. Demonstrated organizational capacity and local contact designated to gather, record, and submit quarterly reporting;
5. Established work plan setting goals and implementation strategies;
6. Demonstrated understanding of the Main Street Approach™ ;
7. Demonstrated success in identifying and obtaining funding resources for further community and downtown projects.

	<p><b>Membership Requirements</b></p>
A Vision and Direction for Downtown Revitalization	1
Community visit by Main Street Staff	2
Established Support and Participation of Local Government	3
A Volunteer Base	3
Submit Quarterly Statistics	4
Detailed Work Plans	5
Utilize Main Street Approach	6
Budget	7

### *Quarterly Reporting Requirements*

All communities are required to report on a quarterly basis on local downtown public/private investment and community engagement. These statistics are used to illustrate the impact of the efforts of each Main Street community, to help improve our state coordinating program, and are reported to the National Main Street Center. Tracking categories include building rehabilitations, public improvements, new construction, new businesses, new jobs, promotions, and volunteer hours. In addition, MMS requires reporting updates on the status of community planning documents including, but not limited to, growth policies, revitalization plans, and heritage tourism/historic preservation plans. Reports are due quarterly based on the calendar year:

1st Quarter: January/February/March - data due **April 30th**

2nd Quarter: April/May/June - data due **July 31st**

3rd Quarter: July/August/September - data due **October 31st**

4th Quarter: October/November/December - data due **January 31<sup>st</sup>**


### *Telling Your Community Story*

All communities are encouraged to send annual reports or a summarized narrative of their communities' yearly successes/achievements. Commerce will also highlight successes by reporting back to our communities through an annual report.

### *Program Services*

1. Main Street Program member communities receive continuous technical assistance from program staff to assist them in achieving programmatic goals.
2. Main Street communities are encouraged to attend the annual Montana Downtown Conference and/or the National Main Street Now conference. Depending on available funding, MMS can provide scholarship opportunities to help defray registration and travel costs;
3. Montana Main Street staff works with communities on issues of planning and organizational needs assessments;
4. Main Street 101 training is provided at the request of communities. Possible topics include quarterly reporting, the Four-Point Approach, and guidance on how to become a nationally Accredited community with Main Street America;
5. Annually grant opportunities at a 1:5 match, dependent on funding. Applicants are eligible for grants if they are up to date on quarterly reporting and currently do not have an active grant;
6. Access to essential books, articles, and digital resources as well as an opportunity to join the monthly downtown collaborating networking virtual call;

7. Use of the Montana Main Street logo for branding, social media, reporting, etc..


	<p><b>Program Services</b></p>
Project Assistance (phone, email, TEAMS, Zoom)	1
Workshop/Conference Discounts	2
Organizational Assistance	3
Main Street 101 Training	4
Competitive Grant Funding (1:5 Match Requirement)	5
Community Resource Library/Networking	6
Use Montana Main Street Logo	7

**III. MAIN STREET AMERICA ADVANCEMENT**

Montana Main Street communities interested in advancing to the national level are encouraged to visit with Main Street staff. Accreditation standards to reach this national recognition are set forth by Main Street America. Montana Main Street staff can help guide communities through the process and steps needed to become nationally recognized.

Table A. below highlights the additional services and program requirements for achieving Main Street America Accredited Community.

**Table A. – Evaluation Framework**

	<b>National Main Street America Accredited Community</b>	<b>Montana Main Street Member Community</b>
<b>Program Requirements</b>		
A Vision and Direction for Downtown Revitalization	X	X
Established Support and Participation of Local Government	X	X
A Volunteer Base	X	X
Submit Quarterly Statistics	X	X
Utilize Main Street Approach	X	X
At least one FTE paid local Main Street staff	X	
Member of National Main Street Center	X	
Annual Accreditation Review	X	
Board of Directors	X	
Identified Transformation Strategy	X	
Detailed Work Plans	X	X
Budget	X	X
<b>Program Services</b>		
Annual Accreditation Review	X	
Accreditation Guidance	X	X
Project Assistance (phone, email, TEAMS, Zoom)	X	X
Workshop/Conference Discounts	X	X
Organizational Assistance	X	X
Main Street 101 Foundational Training/Refresher	X	X
Competitive Grant Funding (1:5 Match Requirement)	X	X
Community Resource Library	X	X
Use National Main Street Trademark	X	
Use Montana Main Street Logo	X	X
Ability to apply as a GAMSAs Community with NMSC	X	

#### **IV. GRANTS**

The Montana Main Street Program awards grant funding on a competitive basis. Grants are to be used for bettering the economic, historic, and cultural vitality of local downtowns through community development, revitalization, and/or historic preservation. Communities may not apply for funding while maintaining an active Montana Main Street grant-funded project unless the active grant is in the close out process. Applications must be submitted by the local Main Street partner organization established in the community and must be certified by the Chief Executive, Mayor, or City Manager of the applicant community. Priority will be given to projects that demonstrate the implementation of larger



community vision and goals or as they relate to previous or concurrent larger planning efforts (such as a downtown revitalization plan, growth policy, historic preservation plan, etc.). Communities must be up to date on quarterly reporting to be awarded grant funds. The Montana Main Street Program Coordinator is available to help throughout the application process and can provide professional insight and guidance on community projects.

#### *Funding Information & Required Match*

Communities are required to commit matching funds at a ratio of \$1 for every \$5 requested of the Montana Main Street Program. Grants or cash contributions from other local, state, or federal agencies and programs or private organizations are also acceptable forms of match for Montana Main Street grant awards. However, preference may be given to projects with committed and firm cash funds. Reasonable in-kind services, in-kind labor, and/or volunteer hours can count to 20% of applicant match yet the remaining 80% of applicant match must be committed cash. Staff reserves the right to request justification for in-kind service valuation. Funds must be firmly committed at the time the grant is awarded. Communities awarded grant funds will receive an award letter following the decision, and the applicable local government will contract with the Montana Department of Commerce for the administration of the grant award. MMS staff will assist communities throughout the grant administration process; however, communities awarded grant funding will be responsible for the administration of grant funds received. While grant funds must be awarded to the applicable local government, grant administration (i.e. reimbursement requests, progress reports, invoice payment, etc.) may be handled by the Main Street partner organization.

The Montana Main Street Program is a state action subject to the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Most Main Street projects will be exempt or excluded from MEPA review under ARM 8.2.328(2) and ARM 8.2.304(5). As authorized by ARM 8.2.304(5)(a), Main Street grant projects which are: (1) located within or adjacent to the boundaries of a historic commercial district, (2) involve minimal site disturbance for activities such as landscaping, pedestrian walkways, non-permanent improvements, and small-scale construction within the bounds of a formerly developed property, and are (3) situated on property that is not located within mapped wetlands, 1% annual chance flood boundaries, or other environmentally sensitive area may be considered categorically excluded from MEPA unless the circumstance falls within the thresholds described in ARMS 8.2.328(3). For detailed information on MEPA, see A Guide to the Montana Environmental Policy Act, or A Citizen's Guide to Public Participation in Environmental Decision Making at: <https://leg.mt.gov/committees/interim/past-interim-committees/2017-2018/eqc/montana-environmental-policy-act/>.

#### *Eligible Activities*

MMS staff will review projects submitted for consideration and determine specific project eligibility and the amount of funding to be allocated. Applicants are encouraged to contact MMS staff for eligibility and project ideas.

The following types of projects are eligible for Main Street Grants. This list is intended to provide insight as to the type and scope of projects that can be funded, but is by no means exhaustive:

- Long range planning: growth policy development/update; downtown master plans; capital improvements planning, strategic/organizational planning; board development training; TIF District creation;
- Assessments/Studies: preliminary architectural reports; architectural renderings; tourism assessment; business recruitment/retention plans; business plan development; historic preservation assessment/inventory; market research; feasibility studies;
- Infrastructure/Brick and mortar: streetscape/public improvements; lighting; building façade improvement; parklets, pedlets, pocket parks/pedestrian gathering spaces and other installations to activate spaces;
- Promotion: branding plans wayfinding studies & plans; public signage and Kiosks.

As funding allows, additional themed grants may be made available. Specific guidelines outlining eligible applicants and activities, funding requirements, award criteria, and ineligible costs will be developed and published with the application form.

#### *Ineligible Expenses<sup>1</sup>*

- Advertising and marketing ;
- Entertainment/events;
- Travel, lodging, food, and drink;
- Salaries or administrative costs excluding postage, copy and printing costs associated with the administration of eligible grant activities;
- Any otherwise eligible project costs incurred prior to the date of announcement of grant award by the Department of Commerce.

#### *Administrative Procedures and Requirements*

Commerce will notify successful applicants of a Main Street Grant award by sending a formal award letter. The completed application, including any written modifications resulting from the review of the application by MMS staff, will be incorporated into the grant contract between Commerce and the successful applicant(s). The grant contract must be executed by an authorized agent of the local government in addition to an established Main Street partner organization (when applicable) and must include a detailed scope of work and project implementation schedule. Grant recipients must execute a contract with MDOC before any grant funds can be reimbursed.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: list of ineligible activities is not all inclusive; please contact Montana Main Street staff if you have questions about whether a proposed project or activity is eligible under these guidelines.

The provisions below describe some of the more significant administrative procedures and requirements successful MMS Grant applicants must comply with. All procedures and requirements that the award recipient must comply with will be set forth in the grantee's contract with Commerce.

1. Procurement: All goods and services must be procured in accordance with local government procurement policy and all applicable state statutes. Grantees must provide documentation of the applicable procurement process before reimbursement requests will be processed for project expenses. Grantees should inquire with their city or county attorney regarding the appropriate procurement process if unsure.
2. Payment: Payment for approved expenses under the Main Street grant contract will be on a reimbursement basis only. Commerce will typically disburse 50% of the grant award upon request for payment for planning projects with proper documentation and submittal of 50% or more completed draft plan, although more frequent requests for payment can occur with construction projects, if needed. To request payment from the Department, grantees must submit the following forms and documentation:
  - Request for Funds Form,
  - Project Progress Report,
  - Uniform Invoice Tracking spreadsheet,
  - Invoices detailing the work performed, number of hours worked, amount billed per hour and item, dates work was performed, and total amount billed.

Documentation of insurance is required as a start-up condition and must be maintained throughout the life of the project.

To receive final payment, the grantee must show proof of expenditure of all matching funds (when applicable) and include a copy or documentation of the deliverables contractually agreed upon. Commerce will determine, in its sole discretion, whether supporting documents for a request for payment are sufficient and adequate to approve reimbursement. If the grantee fails to obligate expenses on or before the termination date of the grant contract, Commerce cannot reimburse the grant award funds, unless the grantee can demonstrate, to the satisfaction of Commerce, a reasonable basis for the delay in requesting reimbursement. All documentation and requests for reimbursement must be received by the department within 90 days of termination of the grant contract.

3. Reporting Requirements/Project Monitoring: Grantees will be required to submit progress and expenditure reports in accordance with the requirements of the grant contract. Planning grants must submit a draft at 50% complete, a final draft for comment, and the final adopted copy. Commerce reserves the right to perform site inspection(s) to monitor the Grantee's compliance with the terms of grant contract, including but not limited to verification of services performed and monitoring of MMS grant funds.

4. **Project Amendments:** Modifications to the project budget, implementation schedule, or scope of work may need to be modified at some point during the project. The following procedures should be followed to accomplish those modifications:
  - Budget modifications of less than \$5,000 to any line item of the budget can be submitted as part of the grantee's request for funds, and Commerce approval of the request for funds will constitute approval of the modification. Budget modifications of \$5,000 or more to any line item of the budget must be preceded by a written justification for the necessity of the change. Commerce will review and approve the requested change and provide written approval prior to processing the request for funds.
  - Implementation schedule modifications should be included in the associated progress report as part of the request for funds process and approval of the request for reimbursement will constitute approval of the modification. If the grantee seeks to extend the completion date of the project beyond the termination date identified in the executed contract and implementation schedule, the grantee must contact Commerce as soon as possible to request an extension. Projects that encounter delays or are not completed by the contract termination date may be required to execute an amendment to their contract. A rationale for extending the contract beyond the termination date will be required.
  - Scope of work modifications must be submitted to Commerce in writing with justification that clearly demonstrates the appropriateness and necessity of the modification. Commerce, at its discretion, may grant a modification to the project scope of work that does not materially alter the intent or circumstances under which the project was ranked and approved for funding.
5. **Project Closeout:** Project completion is the process by which Commerce determines that the Main Street project has been completed in accordance with the terms and conditions of the project contract. Within 90 days of project completion (adoption of a plan, certificate of substantial completion, etc.), the grantee must submit a Grant Completion Report and final request for reimbursement. Upon review and approval of the Grant Completion Report, Commerce will issue the Notice of Project Completion. Once the Notice of Project Completion is issued, the Main Street grant project is considered complete, and the file is closed. No more requests for reimbursement will be accepted on the project after the project is closed.
6. **Public's Right to Know:** Applications that are funded are subject to disclosure, in response to requests received under provisions of the Montana Constitution (Art. II, §9). Information that could reasonably be proprietary, privileged, or confidential in nature should be identified as such in the application.

7. **Authority/Approvals:** The signature on the application is the Applicant's (or their authorized agent's) certification that the local government/Main Street organization has approved submittal of the application and has firmly committed the matching funds required.
8. **Compliance with Laws:** The Applicant must certify on the application that the proposed project complies with all state, federal, and local laws, ordinances, and regulations, including any necessary environmental review and procurement requirements.
9. **Return of Funds:** At Commerce's sole discretion, the grantee will be required to and agrees it shall return to Commerce all funds that are determined by Commerce to have been spent in violation of the terms and conditions of the grant contract.
10. **Cost Savings:** In the event that expenses for a Main Street project are less than the projected costs and grant award, Commerce may, in its sole discretion, authorize additional related planning efforts for the same facility to enhance the overall project or reduce the grant award accordingly.