



Montana Main Street Program Guidelines

Montana Main Street Program

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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 MMS 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 MMS 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 MMS Program is dedicated to bettering the economic, historic and cultural vitality of Montana's downtowns through community development, revitalization and historic preservation. MMS fosters grassroots efforts through coordination and technical assistance. The Program focuses on a comprehensive approach to revitalizing downtowns and preserving the historic structures that contribute to Montana's unique sense of place.

Vision

Adopting the Main Street Approach to revitalization, MMS facilitates efforts to improve downtown economies and historic districts. MMS aims to encourage and promote local efforts through a statewide network focused on educational outreach, collaboration and organizational coordination.

Goals

- Preserve and promote statewide historic and cultural resources.
- Promote long-term planning for revitalization efforts.

- Coordinate conversations among and within Montana communities.
- Support economic and community development.
- Cultivate a sense of place.
- Enable the success of local businesses by supporting vibrant downtown districts.

MMS communities are locally driven programs that implement the nationally recognized [Main Street Approach](#). Each member community is responsible for developing a local framework focused on planning and downtown revitalization. MMS communities are limited in number to 40 and receive technical and financial assistance from Commerce, as funded by the accommodations tax.

Main Street America

Main Street America has revitalized older and historic commercial districts for over 45 years. Today, it is a network of more than 1,200 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, who share both commitments to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. Main Street America is a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Main Street America is a mark of distinction. It is a seal recognizing that participating programs, organizations and communities are part of a national movement with a proven track record for celebrating community character, preserving local history and generating impressive economic returns. Since 1980, over 2,000 communities have been part of Main Street America, bringing renewed energy and activity to America's downtowns and commercial districts.

Main Street America communities are encouraged to make use of the time-tested Main Street Approach. The Main Street Approach is rooted in a commitment to broad-based community engagement, a holistic understanding of the factors that impact the quality of

life in a community and strategic emphasis on the core principles of downtown and neighborhood revitalization: economic vitality, design, promotion and organization.

Four-Point Approach

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.

Becoming a Montana Main Street Member Community

Communities interested in the MMS Program should reference the readiness checklist in Table A below. A community must be actively pursuing downtown revitalization, working with partner organizations and outlining a commitment to long- and short-term planning. Applying to the MMS Program means a community inherits this collective movement among local partners and grassroots leaders. A community will share in the prosperity of resilient economies, which in turn improves quality of life through place-based economic development and community preservation in your downtown.

Table A: Community Readiness Checklist

Task	Response
The applicant has been in touch with Commerce MMS Program staff and discussed the community’s vision and goals if accepted as a member community.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
The applicant has identified and convened with a core group of local stakeholders, community leaders, city representatives and development groups that are engaged in downtown revitalization in the community and have gained consensus on participating in the network.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
The applicant has discussed the MMS Program and opportunities with downtown businesses and downtown property owners.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
The applicant follows the Main Street America Four-Point Approach and has created sub-committees focusing on these four points.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<p>The applicant has visited MMS communities to explore other downtown districts and talk to local leaders about the MMS experience.</p> <p>If yes, which communities did the applicant observe?</p> <p>If no, please inquire with the State Program to help your community get connected with similar programs.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
The applicant has invited MMS to their community for a Main Street 101 presentation and to discuss Program requirements and other downtown revitalization strategies.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

The applicant has established a volunteer base.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
The applicant can demonstrate how they will meet the requirement of submitting an annual report. This is often accomplished by first developing an annual strategic plan or detailed work plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
The applicant has a budget for downtown revitalization work.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
The applicant has completed the training on organization, design, promotion and economic vitality.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Membership Requirements

Once a community has been accepted into the MMS Program, it is required to submit documentation annually and sign an annual member and participation agreement.

Montana Main Street Organizations are required to:

*Items marked with an asterisk (2, 3 and 8) must be attached to this agreement.

1. Develop a comprehensive downtown improvement strategy that follows the Main Street Four-Point Approach, which includes a balance of activities in the areas of organization, promotion, design and economic vitality. The comprehensive downtown improvement strategy includes creating a vision statement, mission statement, goals, objectives and a written annual work plan that details implementation of a comprehensive scope of work.
2. *Submit an annual work plan to the MMS Program.

3. *Submit the boundary map identifying the downtown revitalization area to MMS for approval. The area must be definable, of a manageable size, compact and pedestrian-oriented. Expanding or changing boundaries from the approved boundary map without prior authorization may affect the community's status as a Main Street organization.
4. Maintain a brick-and-mortar office for the local Main Street organization. Neither the office nor the local organization needs to be exclusively dedicated to the Main Street organization. Local organizations do not need to have full-time or part-time staff as part of the MMS Program participation. The local Main Street organization may operate using local resources, including local government, nonprofit organizations and volunteer groups.
5. Develop a Main Street budget with adequate funding for daily office operations and travel commitments to attend training, workshops, meetings and conferences as required by this agreement.
6. Develop broad-based community support for the local program by the public and private sectors through financial contributions and in-kind or volunteer support.
7. Notify MMS of any changes to the local coordinating organization or contact person by the next quarterly report following the change.
8. *Send a board member or staff member to a minimum of three MMS network meetings, conferences and/or trainings annually.
9. Provide information for monitoring the progress of the local program and submit quarterly updates and all other information requested by MMS on or before the identified deadlines. Quarterly updates shall be submitted by the last day of the month following the end of each quarter.
10. Promote and encourage a historic preservation ethic for the local Program, including advocacy for good design, encouragement of building rehabilitation and adaptive reuse, promotion of financial incentives and advancement of planning policies appropriate for preservation.

Benefits for Montana Main Street Communities

MMS communities benefit from the following:

Partnership

- Communities selected to participate in the MMS network become partners with MMS in a long-term, asset-based economic development effort proven to have a positive impact on investment and job creation.
- Main Street communities are limited in number to 40 and receive focused assistance to develop the local Main Street organizational structure.
- MMS invests in onsite visits, training and technical assistance. After the initial startup phase, the State invests in Main Street communities in the form of ongoing technical assistance and training for directors and volunteers.

Training

- Main Street communities are eligible for program-specific training such as board and committee training, regional workshops and topical workshops.
- Representatives from MMS communities are encouraged to attend the annual MMS/Downtown and national Main Street Now conferences. When funding is available, Commerce offers scholarships for attendees.

Technical Assistance

MMS staff at Commerce:

- Guide MMS communities through goal setting processes to direct MMS efforts.
- Provide action planning sessions.
- Conduct community assessment onsite visits in each community every two years.
- Offer virtual check-ins with local Main Street organizations.
- Deliver virtual training for boards and committees.

- Give guidance and support to communities regarding how to identify and develop financial resources.
- Provide telephone consultations to local Main Street organizations.

Network

- MMS communities may take advantage of and participate in a special network of participating Main Street communities statewide and nationally. This allows for collaboration on best practices, techniques and strategies for downtown development.
- MMS communities benefit from connections to a Program that has been established in Montana for over 20 years and access to the expansive network of downtown development professionals. From emails to “60 Minutes with Main Street” calls, the extensive network and reach of MMS can provide local organizations with information and resources related to the best practices and national trends in downtown development.
- MMS communities are permitted to use the Main Street trademarks on materials designed to promote the efforts of the local organization in collaboration with the State of Montana.
- MMS communities shall identify themselves by posting the Commerce logo, accompanied by the following: “In collaboration with the Montana Department of Commerce, we are a Montana Main Street Community.”

Funding:

- Occasionally, the MMS Program will make funds available to members of local Main Street organizations for conference travel scholarships or other special opportunities. To be eligible to receive these funds, local Main Street organizations must, at a minimum, comply with the terms of this agreement.

- Main Street communities are eligible to apply for MMS Impact and/or Planning grants.
- MMS distributes information on funding opportunities from federal, state, corporate and foundation sources for funding downtown projects.

Resources:

- MMS maintains a library of document samples of projects and activities undertaken by other communities in the Program.
- MMS develops publications and recorded webinars to assist local Main Street organizations in strengthening their operations and improving their downtown improvement efforts.

Economic Impact

Since its inception, the MMS Program has overseen:

- Community volunteer hours exceeding 745,000
- Four million dollars in grant funding
 - Supported over 100 Main Street Planning and Implementation projects
- Twenty-eight million dollars in private and public investments
 - Supported over 2,150 building improvement projects
- Creation of 1,395 downtown businesses
- Creation of 4,445 full- and part-time jobs

Marketing and Recognition

- Main Street organizations are eligible to apply for the prestigious [Excellence on Main Street Awards](#).
- MMS communities receive marketing and recognition through [Commerce's website](#), [press releases](#), local annual reports, MMS presentations, social media sites and onsite visits.

- MMS will help your community become a Main Street America designated community, if desired.

Grants

The MMS 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 MMS Grant-funded project unless the active grant is in the closeout 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 updates to be awarded grant funds. The MMS Program coordinator is available to help throughout the application process and can provide professional insight and guidance on community projects. Grant applications are reviewed within 30-45 days after the deadline.

The MMS Program has two types of grants: Planning and Implementation.

- **Planning Grants** are intended to support MMS communities' needs for studies and plans.
- **Implementation Grants** are intended to support MMS communities' need for implementation dollars for projects to activate spaces for downtown revitalization.

Emphasis will be placed on large and impactful projects, but funding may be awarded to a wide variety of community-prioritized projects. Preference will be given to projects linked to overall community revitalization efforts through planning or revitalization goals.

Applicants should focus on projects involving real and immediate benefits and demonstrate a need for assistance.

Screening Checklist

- Applicants must be an MMS community member and must have received their annual recertification letter.
- Applicants must not have a current grant.
- If the applicant is not the local coordinating program, the applicant must have a letter of support from the local coordinating program in addition to having the application certified by the applicable local government, chief executive, mayor or city manager.
- Applicant must have inquired with the MMS Program coordinator.

For additional information, refer to commerce.mt.gov for the [grant application](#).

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 applicants. 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 Commerce before any grant funds can be reimbursed. The provisions below describe some of the more significant administrative procedures and requirements with which successful MMS Grant applicants must comply. All procedures and requirements will be set forth in the grantee's contract with Commerce.

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.

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 a 50% or more completed draft plan, although more frequent requests for payment can occur with construction projects, if needed. To request payment from Commerce, grantees must submit the following forms and documentation:

- Request for Funds Form
- Project Progress Report or Project Completion Report
- Uniform Invoice Tracking Spreadsheet
- Applicable invoices

Lump-sum contracts typically do not provide sufficient documentation for reimbursement of project expenses; they are generally not allowed for design and construction engineering services. Cost-plus contracts are not allowed.

Invoices need to be itemized with the following information:

- Work performed by the consultant/contractor
- Hourly rate and number of hours by the consultant/contractor
- Dates of work performed
- Invoice number

- Description of eligible expenses
- Total amount being invoiced

Documentation of insurance is required as a startup 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, at its sole discretion, whether supporting documents for a request for payment are sufficient 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 Commerce within 90 days of termination of the grant contract.

Reporting Requirements/Project Monitoring

Grantees will be required to submit progress and expenditure reports in accordance with the requirements of the grant contract. Planning grant recipients must submit a draft at 50% complete, a final draft for comment and the final adopted copy. Commerce reserves the right to perform site inspections 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.

Project Amendments

Modifications to the project budget, implementation schedule or scope of work may be required during the project. The following procedures should be followed to accomplish such 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's 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 require the grantee 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.

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.

Public's right to know: Applications that are funded are subject to disclosure, in response to requests received under provisions of [Article II, Section 9 of the Montana Constitution](#). Information that could reasonably be considered proprietary, privileged or confidential should be identified as such in the application.

Authority and approvals: The signature on the application is the applicant's, or their authorized agent's, certification that the local government and Main Street organization have approved submittal of the application and have firmly committed the matching funds required.

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.

Compliance with contract conditions: Commerce may require grantees to adhere to technical guidance documents and templates based on the scope of the project, as applicable.

Return of funds: At Commerce's sole discretion, the grantee will be required to and agrees it shall return to Commerce all funds determined by Commerce to have been spent in violation of the terms and conditions of the grant contract.

Cost savings: If expenses for a Main Street project are less than the projected costs and grant award, Commerce may, at its sole discretion, authorize additional related planning

efforts for the same facility to enhance the overall project or reduce the grant award accordingly.

Main Street America Advancement

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

Table B, “Evaluation Framework” highlights the additional services and Program requirements for becoming a Main Street America Accredited Community.

Table B: Evaluation Framework

	National Main Street America Accredited Community	MMS Member Community
Program requirements		
Vision and direction for downtown revitalization	X	X
Established support and participation of local government	X	X
Volunteer base	X	X
Submission of quarterly statistics	X	X
Utilization of Main Street Approach	X	X
At least one paid FTE local Main Street staff	X	
National Main Street Center member	X	
Annual accreditation review	X	
Board of directors	X	
Identified transformation strategy	X	


COMMERCE

Detailed work plans	X	X
Budget	X	X
Program services		
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/refreshers	X	X
Competitive grant funding (1-to-5 match requirement)	X	X
Community resource library	X	X
Use of national Main Street trademark	X	
Use of MMS logo	X	X
Ability to apply as a Great American Main Street Award Community with NMSC	X	