

■ What is the Main Street Program?

The Wisconsin Main Street Program is based on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's philosophy, which advocates restoration of the historic character of traditional business districts while pursuing development strategies such as marketing, business recruitment and retention, real estate development, market analysis, and public improvements.

Each year, the Department of Commerce selects communities to join the program. These communities receive technical support and training needed to restore their Main Streets/urban neighborhood districts to centers of community activity and commerce.

The results in Wisconsin have been impressive. Wisconsin Main Street Programs have brought significant numbers of new businesses and jobs to their respective downtowns. Facade improvements and building rehabilitation projects have upgraded the image of Main Street. Promotional activities bring the community together in a positive way.

Wisconsin Main Street Program Investment Statistics and Return on Investment (ROI) Fiscal Years 1988-2003

- 3,115 Building Rehabilitations = \$140,493,296
- 170 New Buildings = \$151,485,751
- 2,403 New Businesses = 11,925 New Jobs
- \$42,325,237 estimated real estate taxes generated by building rehabilitations and new buildings (ROI)
- \$151,200,000 estimated state sales taxes generated by new businesses (ROI)
- \$71,845,020 estimated state income taxes generated by new jobs (ROI)
- \$41.46 return for every state dollar invested through Wisconsin Main Street Program
- \$10.61 return for every local dollar invested through local Main Street organizations
- \$8.45 return for every state and local dollar combined invested through Main Street

■ The Four-Point Approach

There are no quick fixes for declining downtowns/urban neighborhoods. Success is realized through the comprehensive and incremental approach of the Main Street Program.

Four elements combine to create this well balanced program:

Design involves creating an environment where people want to shop and spend time. First impressions can have a lasting influence. Rehabilitated buildings, attractive storefronts, enticing window displays, clean streets and sidewalks, and properly designed signage together present an appealing image to potential customers, tenants and investors.

Organization involves building a Main Street framework that is well represented by civic groups, merchants, bankers, citizens, public officials, and chambers of commerce. Everyone must work together to renew downtown/urban neighborhoods. Fundraising, volunteer development, and public relations are examples of organization activities.

Economic Restructuring involves analyzing current market forces to develop long-term solutions. Sharpening the competitiveness of Main Street's traditional merchants, recruiting new businesses, and creatively converting unused space for new uses are examples of economic restructuring activities.

Promotion creates excitement in the downtown/urban neighborhood district. Street festivals, parades, retail events, and image development campaigns are some of the ways Main Street encourages consumer traffic in the downtown. Promotion involves marketing an enticing image to shoppers, investors, and visitors.

■ Services Available to Communities

Communities selected to participate in the Wisconsin Main Street Program receive five years of free technical assistance including:

1. Onsite volunteer training programs;
2. Manager orientation and training sessions;
3. Advanced training on specific downtown/urban neighborhood issues, such as marketing, business recruitment, volunteer development, and historic preservation;
4. Onsite visits to help each community develop its strengths and plan for success;
5. Onsite design assistance;
6. Onsite consultation to business owners and managers; and
7. Materials such as manuals and slide programs.

