

Session Topics and Types

Main Street Now 2023 programming is focused around a number of major themes. Check out the conference app to search for sessions by topic!

Community Wealth Building & Shared Prosperity

Main Street programs and other place-based revitalization organizations have a vital role to play in building community wealth and shared prosperity for every resident. This approach to economic development focuses on strategies to enhance local wealth generation and confers direct benefits for residents and local businesses. By harnessing tools like entrepreneurial ecosystems, community land trusts, cultural expression initiatives, and cooperative business models, Main Streets can create inclusive, sustainable, and equitable economic success in their communities and help ensure future prosperity for populations that have been historically marginalized.

Resilient & Future-focused Main Streets

As designers, planners, and local leaders, Main Street professionals are in a unique position to help communities adapt to meet the difficult realities they're facing now and in the years to come. From promoting environmental sustainability and green infrastructure to advancing community health initiatives and cross-sector partnerships, building resiliency goes beyond responding to a crisis — it's about building a strong baseline for resilience that will pay dividends in the years to come. Holistic planning practices and strong community connections help prepare us for change, whether planned or unexpected. Sessions will explore the importance of meeting these challenges head-on and the positive economic and organizational impacts created as a result.

Building Community Connections

The success of Main Streets across the country can often be tied to a common thread: they are driven by people. Thriving communities are built from the power of many, with the strongest among them practicing meaningful collaboration, creating shared goals with stakeholders, and valuing inclusive leadership that provides a seat for everyone at the table. To strengthen the connection to place, Main Streets must embrace the variety of lived experiences of people in their community and empower them to make change. Sessions will highlight the power of coalition building and leveraging your greatest asset: people.



Accreditation The new Main Street America Evaluation Framework outlines what it means to be a high performing Main Street program and sets a path for growth for newer programs. These sessions highlight opportunities to learn more about the new standards and discover how to align with them successfully.

Core Concepts Grounded in the Main Street Approach, these sessions will help your program build a stable base for revitalization through best practices and case studies.

Civic Leader Sessions will give Civic Leaders — whether elected officials or public administrators — tools and insights to support downtown revitalization through a Main Street program.

Climate Resiliency These sessions lay groundwork for Main Street programs to adapt programs and tools to anticipate climate change impacts.

Design for All Learn about design best practices and dialogue about how small design changes can make a big impact in making downtown inviting to all stakeholders.

Digital Promotion Get new ideas on how to utilize digital tools to make economic and social impact downtown.

Equity & Inclusion The unequal impacts of the pandemic — and the continued reckoning with long-standing racial injustices — emphasize the need for commercial districts to prioritize equity in rebuilding local economies. Sessions will help us understand how Main Street programs can center diversity and inclusion.



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Historic Preservation These sessions address strategies and replicable ideas for Main Streets to better address the preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings. Sponsored by:



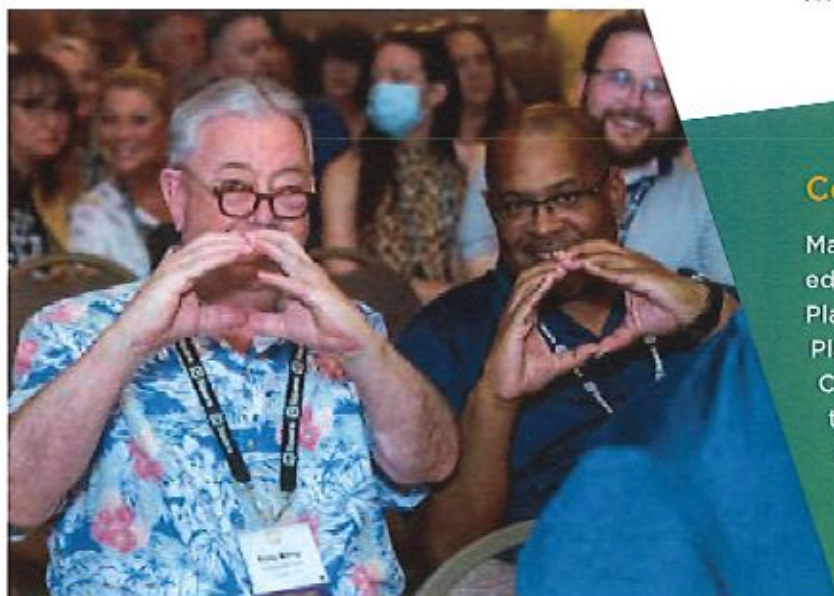
Leadership Through these sessions, get the opportunity to reflect, regroup, and build on our knowledge of how to lead our organizations effectively.

Making the Case Sessions focus on communicating the value of your Main Street program with data, research, and tools to help illustrate the need for and impact of commercial district revitalization.

Rural Focus These sessions will shed light on case studies and practices employed by place management organizations in rural communities.

Supporting Entrepreneurs Main Street research demonstrates that 70% of Main Street businesses grow from within the community. Learn how to create an environment that fosters entrepreneurship.

Big City Focus Sessions will address specific challenges in neighborhood commercial corridors in larger cities employing the Main Street Approach, including bureaucracy, infrastructure, and long-term disinvestment.



Continuing Education Credits

Main Street Now is pleased to offer continuing education units (CEUs) to members of the American Planning Association's American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). To find educational sessions offering CEUs, look for sessions with notations for AICP throughout the program, or you can utilize the mobile app to search the schedule by the CEU track.

Conference Themes & Session Tracks

In addition to perennial Main Street Approach content, Main Street Now 2024 programming is focused around a number of major themes. Check the conference app for session details.

Welcoming & Belonging

Welcoming and belonging strategies help build bridges between new and existing residents, business owners, visitors, and other stakeholders to create stronger bonds within communities. Successful Main Streets foster a sense of community ownership for each resident by ensuring equal access to, and a role in, downtown for people from all backgrounds, including incomes, ages, races, and abilities. Whether it's welcoming new neighbors, championing strategies to prevent gentrification or displacement, adopting immigrant-friendly policies, or creating space for group expression, Main Street organizations are well-positioned to advance these principles and strengthen their districts' social, civic, and economic fabric.

Connectivity Through Civic Infrastructure

Civic infrastructure—parks, trails, town squares, play spaces, libraries, and other public places—boosts local economies, increases resiliency and trust, supports health and well-being, creates a more equitable society, increases civic engagement, and strengthens democracy for all. Underlying a community's civic infrastructure is a system of interconnected policies, programs, and people that work in tandem to build and foster a sense of place. Main Streets share in the community-wide need to dedicate time and resources towards expanding access and use of civic infrastructure to enhance quality of life and create more sustainable communities with vibrant social capital.

Reimagining Local Spaces & Economies

Major economic transformations over the past decade—from real estate market conditions and pandemic disruptions to macro-economic shifts and local entrepreneurship trends—have presented local communities with myriad challenges. In response, Main Streets have adopted future-focused solutions to leverage their place-based assets, remain competitive, and reorient their economic bases for local prosperity. To adapt in an ever-changing landscape, Main Streets can support local investment and ownership in their districts, activate underutilized spaces through creative reuse, champion people-centered infrastructure, and bolster grassroots economic vitality strategies.



BIG CITY FOCUS Neighborhood commercial corridors in larger cities employing the Main Street Approach face specific challenges related to bureaucracy, infrastructure, and long-term disinvestment. Big City Focus sessions bring specific insights to practitioners in these corridors and opportunities to connect with peers.

CIVIC LEADER Civic support for Main Street is essential to creating a thriving district. Sessions in this track will give Civic Leaders—whether elected officials or public administrators—tools and insights on the why and how of supporting downtown revitalization through a Main Street program.

CLIMATE RESILIENCY Environmental changes create ongoing challenges for Main Street programs to adapt infrastructure and plans to be resilient in the face of change. These select sessions contain guidance and ideas to lay groundwork for more adaptation of programs, and tools to be aware of in anticipation of climate change impacts.

CORE CONCEPTS The foundations of the Main Street Approach remain essential to building a strong revitalization effort. Core Concepts sessions will help your program build a stable base for revitalization through best practices and case study examples.

DESIGN FOR ALL The power of design in a revitalization effort is the ability to transform spaces—through preservation, zoning, placemaking, and place-branding—to be inviting and useful to all district stakeholders. Join these sessions for best practices and dialogue about small changes with a big impact on a district's physical environment.

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DIGITAL PROMOTION Utilizing digital tools has become one of the most impactful ways for Main Street programs to promote local. The ability to leverage technology translates into economic and social impact. These sessions help guide Main Streets to new ideas to put into action to bring digital downtown.

EQUITY & INCLUSION The unequal impacts of the pandemic—and the continued reckoning with longstanding racial injustices—emphasize the need for Main Street districts to prioritize equity and inclusion as a key tool to rebuilding local economies. Sessions in this track will help us understand the ways that Main Street programs can break down barriers and center diversity.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION The preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings and spaces in Main Street districts requires specific tools and resources. These sessions address strategies and replicable ideas for Main Street and commercial district programs to better address the physical maintenance of historic built environment assets.

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LEADERSHIP Every Main Street leader is called upon to respond to the needs and concerns of our communities. Through these sessions, we look to opportunities to reflect, to regroup, and to build on our knowledge of how to lead our organizations effectively.

MAKING THE CASE Measuring and communicating the value of Main Street is essential to advocating for resources for recovery. This series of sessions is focused on developing the message of your Main Street program with data, research, and tools to help illustrate the need for and impact of commercial district revitalization.

RURAL FOCUS In the smallest of communities, Main Street programs play an outsized role in transformational change to develop local economic power. These sessions will shed light on case studies and practices employed by place management organizations in rural communities.

SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURS Main Street research demonstrates that 70% of Main Street businesses are grown from within the community. In these sessions, gain skills and knowledge about the ways that Main Street programs can focus on creating an environment that fosters entrepreneurship.

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Conference Themes & Tracks

In addition to perennial Main Street Approach content, Main Street Now 2025 programming highlights one core theme and three related sub-themes. Check the conference mobile app for session details.

A HEALTHY MAIN STREET MOVEMENT Main Streets are the hearts of our communities. They are hubs of innovation and creativity, where the dreams of entrepreneurs become local institutions serving vital community needs. They are gathering places, bringing together people from across the street and across town. They are places of shared memory and cultural expression that carry the stories of generations through permanent public art installations and temporal events. In these ways, and so many more, Main Streets both reflect and shape individual and community health. And just like people, Main Streets require care, nurturing, and attention to reach their full potential. To foster healthy Main Streets, we must bring people together to encourage deeper connection, drive future-focused solutions by exploring innovative approaches, and create a sustainable Movement where everyone can fully participate and thrive.

CONNECT Connection is a powerful tool that can help us name and achieve shared goals for our Main Streets. Philadelphia's focus on active transportation and unparalleled public art program provides a rich backdrop for exploring the importance of designing people-centered districts. Accessible infrastructure, welcoming public spaces, and arts programming are examples of proven ways to help create vibrant, inclusive communities. Cultivating these ways to connect not only nurtures social bonds, but also promotes healthy, cohesive Main Streets where everyone feels supported, represented, and valued.

INNOVATE We need fresh, creative ideas to meet the new and long-standing challenges impacting our communities. Innovation can take many forms, from using new technologies to thinking outside of the box. Whether creating accessible spaces and getting people involved or supporting grow-from-within economies and building resilient communities, innovation champions healthier Main Streets—ensuring that our communities thrive physically, socially, and economically for generations to come.

SUSTAIN Sustainability weaves together many threads of Main Street work. It means taking care of our local leaders by providing them with the support, resources, and work/life balance they need to be happy and successful. It means protecting our environmental health by investing in green technology and preparing for the impacts of climate change. It means supporting entrepreneurs and small business leaders to promote resiliency, equitable growth, and strong local economies. From our people to the planet, a holistic approach to sustainability secures a healthy present and future for our Main Streets.

Our tracks are tailored learning paths designed to help you dive deep into sessions most relevant to your role within your organization and the Main Street Movement. Check the mobile app for a full list of sessions in each track and plan your personalized conference experience.

EXPERIENCED DIRECTOR

Find sessions focused on advanced strategies, leadership insights, and innovative approaches to take your Main Street program to the next level.

NEW DIRECTOR Designed for early-career professionals, this track offers foundational knowledge, practical tools, and key resources to confidently begin your Main Street leadership journey.

BOARD MEMBER Learn how to maximize your impact as a board member with sessions dedicated to governance, strategic planning, and collaboration with program staff.

CIVIC LEADER This track empowers civic leaders to champion Main Street initiatives in their communities through sessions on partnerships, advocacy, and local policy alignment.

COORDINATING PROGRAM

Explore strategies for managing statewide or regional Main Street programs, fostering collaboration among your local communities, and scaling the impact of the Main Street Approach.