

Application Guide

Introduction

The Main Street Incentive Program is a wonderful resource for improving your community. This guide is meant to aid in planning and executing a successful application so that more projects can take advantage of the funds available.

Program Structure & Roles

While it is the sole responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all required materials are delivered in full and on time, there are a myriad of entities that will be involved in the process. Note the following:

- ▶ The Oklahoma Main Street Center's facilitative and promotional role includes maintaining consultative relationships with local Main Streets throughout the application and participation process.
- ▶ The spending-tracking role is handled by the Research division (or an approved accounting partner). This includes providing the required Excel-based quarterly spending report.
- ▶ The Oklahoma Finance Authority's role in providing bond financing on behalf of the state (without use of state dollars), subject to DFA Board authorization based on the total project amount.
- ▶ The state tax agency's (Oklahoma Tax Commission) role in withholding tax diversion and collection for participating entities.

Other Resources

- ▶ MSIP Timeline Map
- ▶ MSIP Application Example
- ▶ MSIP FAQs



Project

Introduction

The intent of this section of the guide is to assist the director in planning out and executing the project portion of the MSIP application. Each project will have its own set of unique circumstances that will require individual and creative planning. It is encouraged to use this document as a framework for creating that plan, but remember that there is no one size fits all.

Contents

1. Choose the Project(s) / Identify a Need
2. Determine MSIP Eligibility
3. Determine the Resources / Team Needed
4. Determine Feasibility
5. Attend the MSIP Workshop
6. Work Toward the MSIP Deliverables
7. Common Mistakes to Avoid



1. Choose the Project(s) / Identify a Need

- ▶ Define the problems or opportunities in the district.
- ▶ Talk with property owners about their goals and willingness to participate.
- ▶ Collect initial photos and a simple list of desired improvements.
- ▶ Consider how the project aligns with Main Street four points:
 - Design
 - Promotion
 - Economic Vitality
 - Organization

2. Determine MSIP Eligibility

- ▶ Confirm the property is within the Main Street district boundary.
- ▶ Verify the property use meets program requirements and that proposed improvements are eligible.

Note that any expenses related to other Main Street activities or unrelated work do not count toward MSIP spending or compliance. Admin costs do not count.

3. Determine the Resources / Team Needed

Design Resources

- ▶ Does the community have a local designer/architect to help with drawings and facilitating the project?
- ▶ Will the project need a MSIP Design Assistance Request (DAR)?
- ▶ Does the project need architectural drawings, sketches, or color renderings?

Reminder: because the MSIP is open to applicants from communities of every membership level, the **MSIP DAR is also available to any community**. This is different from the DAR's made for private property owners, which are only available to certain membership levels.

Professional Partners

- ▶ Contractors
- ▶ Engineers (Civil, Structural, MEP)
- ▶ Special Consultants
- ▶ Sign Fabricators, Painters, Etc.
- ▶ Other Vendors
- ▶ Architect
- ▶ Project Manager
- ▶ Grant Writer
- ▶ City Liason



3. Determine the Resources / Team Needed (cont.)

Director's Role

- ▶ Attending the MSIP workshop in February
- ▶ Helping coordinate communication
- ▶ Keeping the project on track with documentation
- ▶ Ensuring consistency with MSIP requirements

Community Resources

- ▶ Local incentives or Initiatives
- ▶ Volunteers

4. Determine Feasibility

Scope Clarity

Is the desired work clearly defined enough to estimate costs?

Budget Feasibility

Get rough cost estimates (use contractor input, past similar projects, or design assistance sketches). Make sure to include professional fees in your estimate.

Timeline Feasibility

- ▶ Can the project be fully completed within one calendar year of the award date?
- ▶ Does the project need to be broken up into phases to meet any timeline or funding restrictions?

Historic Feasibility

- ▶ Consider whether the project has historic elements that must be preserved.
- ▶ Determine if the proposed work needs to comply with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.

Risk Check

Are there any red flags or potential issues?

- ▶ Structural Concerns
- ▶ Code/Zoning Issues
- ▶ Scope Creep
- ▶ Timeline Uncertainty
- ▶ Community Pushback



5. Attend the MSIP Workshop

The point of the workshop is to give confidence and direction to the director at the beginning of the application process. To get the most out of the workshop, prepare by doing the following.

- ▶ Familiarize yourself with this document and the other MSIP resources.
- ▶ Complete sections 1 and 2 in the project section.
- ▶ Begin thinking through sections 3 and 4 in the project section.
- ▶ Begin building the plan for your project.

6. Work Toward the MSIP Deliverables

Project Description

- ▶ A clear, plain-language explanation of the proposed work
- ▶ Explanation of goals and expected impact
- ▶ Any unique historic or economic importance

Existing Conditions Documentation

- ▶ Current photos
- ▶ All Elevations
- ▶ Key Details
- ▶ Interior (if applicable)
- ▶ Notes on the condition of materials, structural issues, or code concerns

Proposed Improvements

- ▶ List of all specific improvements
- ▶ Drawings/renderings/annotated photos
- ▶ Color/material selections
- ▶ How the work meets Main Street and program goals

Cost Estimate

- ▶ Itemized contractor estimate or estimate based on quotes
- ▶ Explanation of how the estimate was generated
- ▶ Note any items excluded or uncertain

Directors who do not have in-house design capacity are encouraged to request MSIP Design Assistance to help prepare the required visuals.



6. Work Toward the MSIP Deliverables (cont.)

Project Timeline

Expected start/end dates

Key milestones (design, permits, contractor scheduling, completion)

Demonstration of Eligibility & Standards

- ▶ Confirmation that improvements are eligible under MSIP rules
- ▶ If historic: how work aligns with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards
- ▶ Explain how the project enhances the district's economic or visual vitality

7. Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ▶ Project(s) on private property. MSIP funds must be used on publicly owned property, even if private buildings benefit.
- ▶ Scope too vague or too broad
- ▶ Missing or unclear photos
- ▶ Cost estimate not tied to specific work items
- ▶ Proposed work conflicting with preservation guidelines



Employer Payroll Tax

Introduction

The intent of this section of the guide is to assist the director in planning out and executing the employer payroll tax portion of the MSIP application. Based on the experiences of past MSIP applicants, there has been some difficulty in understanding and explaining this content. It is very important that the director is comfortable talking to business owners about the employer payroll tax to be able to successfully complete the MSIP application. This guide will answer common questions and provide some tools for directors.

Contents

1. What is Employer Payroll Tax?
2. How Does Payroll Tax Apply to the MSIP?
3. How Does This Apply to Business Owners (And How to Talk to Them About It)
4. Handout for Business Owners



1. What is Employer Payroll Tax?

Definition

Employer payroll tax refers to the taxes a business pays on wages it provides to its employees.

Key Concept for the MSIP

Payroll tax is tied directly to actual employees on payroll, not contractors or 1099 workers.

Why it Matters

Payroll tax is used by the state as a measurable indicator of employment activity, business stability, and economic impact.

2. How Does Payroll Tax Apply to the MSIP?

Funding Source

The State of Oklahoma allocates a portion of collected employer payroll tax to fund the Main Street Incentive Program.

This can be phrased simply: "MSIP is funded fully through employer payroll taxes at the state level."

The program is what's called a "pooled funds" program, which is an economic development program that is well established and is used for special projects.

Purpose within MSIP

Payroll tax data is used to validate the business is active and employing people.

What Directors Need to Know

- ▶ MSIP requires participating business owners to report existing annual employer payroll tax totals that they already submit to the state.
- ▶ This information helps confirm eligibility and ensure the incentive funds are connected to businesses contributing to the local economy.
- ▶ The application does not collect sensitive employee information, just the totals the business already reports to the state government.



3. How Does This Apply to Business Owners (And How to Talk to Them About It)

What Business Owners Need to Provide

Their Most Recent Annual Totals For:

- ▶ Employer Payroll Tax Contributions
- ▶ Number of Full-Time and Part-Time Employees
- ▶ Basic Contact and EIN Information
- ▶ A Signed Statement Verifying the Accuracy of the Information

How Directors Can Explain It Simply

Use Language Like:

- ▶ "The state funds MSIP through employer payroll taxes that are already being paid to the state."
- ▶ "We don't need individual employee info, just the same totals you already file for taxes."
- ▶ "This allows MSIP funds to support projects/improvements that contribute to our community."
- ▶ There are three million dollars set aside for this program.

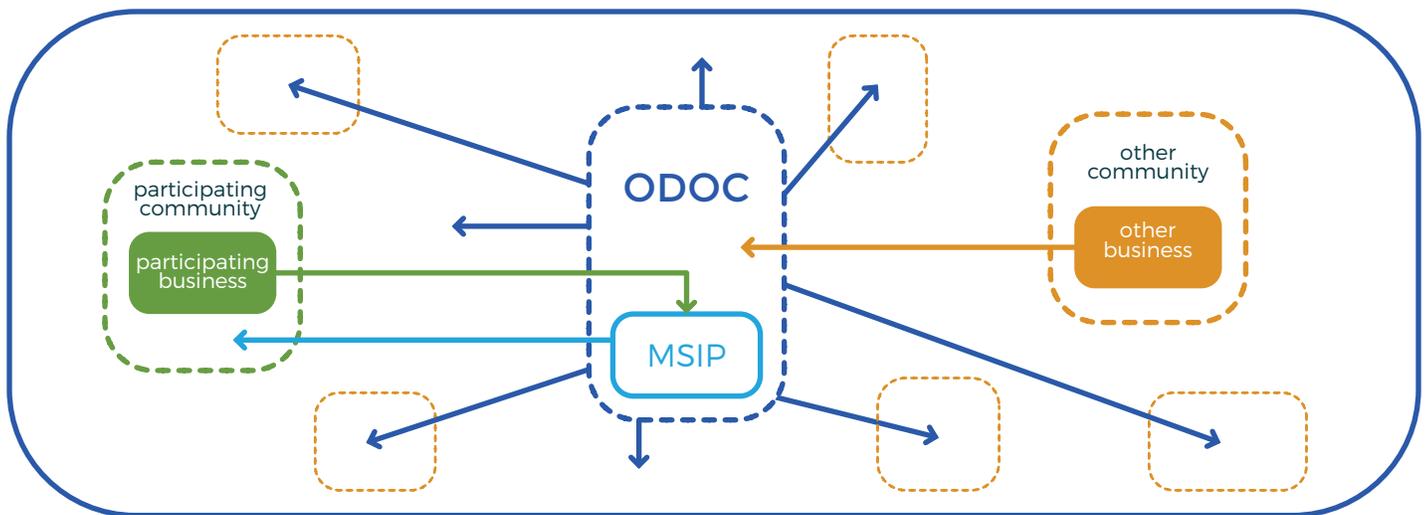
Director Tips

- ▶ Encourage owners to ask their accountant or payroll provider if they're unsure.
- ▶ Remind owners that this is a standard part of the application and uses data they already produce regularly.
- ▶ Keep the conversation positive: payroll tax reporting is a way to show the strength and vitality of the business.
- ▶ Bring visuals of the proposed project so that business owners can see what the funds will be used for.
- ▶ Consider approaching businesses with more employees instead of numerous smaller employers.



What is MSIP?

The Main Street Incentive Program (MSIP) is a State of Oklahoma program that funds community improvements in certified Main Street districts. The goal of this program is to improve downtown districts, increase visitation, and strengthen local businesses.



Why are you being asked to participate?

MSIP is funded through employer state payroll taxes that are already being paid to the state of Oklahoma. The program allows participating businesses to redirect a portion of their existing state payroll tax contribution to support a local Main Street improvement project. You are simply allowing a portion of taxes you already pay to be used locally.

You are NOT:

- ▶ being asked to donate money
- ▶ paying a new tax
- ▶ increasing your tax burden

What you need to provide:

No individual employee information is requested. Only totals that are already filed with the state are required.

- ▶ your most recent annual employer payroll tax total
- ▶ number of full-time and part-time employees
- ▶ federal employer identification number (EIN)
- ▶ a signed statement verifying the information



Matching Funds

Introduction

The intent of this section of the guide is to assist the director in understanding and attaining the required matching funds for the Incentive Program application. It's important that the director is comfortable identifying qualifying funding and pursuing it. The nature of each community will change the funding circumstances, but this guide will provide general frameworks to use for success.

Contents

1. What Qualifies as Matching Funds?
2. Who Commonly Contributes Matching Funds?
3. Tips for Talking to Potential Funders or Sponsors



1. What Qualifies as Matching Funds?

Definition of Match

- ▶ Matching funds are the fundraised dollar amount that equals (or exceeds) the MSIP award.
- ▶ Match must be committed and verifiable at the time of application.

Eligible Types of Matching Funds

- ▶ Capital from a partner organization (local nonprofit, economic development group, foundation)
- ▶ Private donations or sponsorships
- ▶ Bank loans or lines of credit dedicated to the project
- ▶ Municipal or county funds
- ▶ Other grants that allow co-funding

What Does Not Qualify

- ▶ Future fundraising that hasn't been secured
- ▶ Verbal commitments without documentation
- ▶ Volunteer labor
- ▶ Discounts from contractors
- ▶ In-kind contributions

2. Who Commonly Contributes?

Typical Sources

- ▶ Local Economic Development Organizations (EDOs)
- ▶ City Governments (facade grants, TIF programs, beautification funds)
- ▶ Chambers of Commerce
- ▶ Local Preservation Nonprofits
- ▶ Downtown/Merchant Associations
- ▶ Community Foundations
- ▶ Banks or Financial Institutions (community reinvestment initiatives)
- ▶ Civic Groups (Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, Junior Service League)
- ▶ Tribal Nations (funding or community development support)



2. Who Commonly Contributes Matching Funds? (cont.)

When MSIP Joins an Existing Project

Sometimes a project is already funded and MSIP is used to expand or enhance the scope. Examples include:

- ▶ Streetscaping
- ▶ Improved Lighting
- ▶ Better Materials
- ▶ Landscaping

3. Tips for Talking to Potential Partners

When to Start the Conversation

Early in the project identification stage, not at the last minute in August/September. Earlier conversations help partners budget and commit funds before application season. Once the project has:

- ▶ A Clear Scope
- ▶ Basic Visuals or Photos
- ▶ A Rough Cost Estimate

How to Frame the Opportunity

- ▶ Emphasize visible impact: "Your contribution will directly transform our downtown."
- ▶ Connect to economic outcomes (foot traffic, job creation, increased vitality).
- ▶ Highlight leverage: "Your dollars help unlock additional state investment."
- ▶ Mention the Main Street mission alignment.

Practical Tips for Directors

- ▶ Bring visuals (concept sketches from DARs work great).
- ▶ Start with organizations that have historically funded district initiatives.
- ▶ Offer tiered levels of involvement (lead sponsor vs. supporting match partner).
- ▶ Keep discussion simple: "We need \$X in secured match to unlock \$X in MSIP funding."
- ▶ Document commitments in writing (letters, emails, sponsorship forms).



3. Tips for Talking to Potential Partners (cont.)

Common Questions Funders Might Ask

- ▶ "Is my contribution tax-deductible?"

It depends on the structure. Directors should not promise anything and should encourage sponsors to consult their accountant or attorney.

- ▶ "Will our organization be recognized publicly?"

Yes. Directors can plan for signage, press releases, ribbon cuttings, etc.

- ▶ "Who oversees the project?"

Typically, the Main Street director will be coordinating and assisting the project team. Sponsors are not responsible for managing any part of the project.



Case Studies

Introduction

The intent of this section of the guide is to assist the director in planning out and executing the project portion of the MSIP application. Each project will have its own set of unique circumstances that will require individual and creative planning. It is encouraged to use this document as a framework for creating that plan, but remember that there is no one size fits all.

Contents



Perry, 2025



Kendall Whittier, 2025



Muskogee, 2025



Ponca City, 2025



Perry

MS Level: Fully Designated

Director: Laura Vollmer

Budget: \$49,315 Total

(\$24,657 MSIP Match)

Project Description

District Speaker System



Project

How did the project come about?

The Perry MS had a list of projects on the back-burner that they wanted to do, but hadn't had the resources to get started. One project was replacing the non-functioning speaker system on their courthouse and expanding the system throughout their downtown. They spoke with their city manager about their intent and got a quote from an A/V installer to put a number on the project.

Were there any early challenges or red flags?

A big challenge was the placement of the speakers. They're technically over public property (which is what qualifies it for the MSIP) but the speakers had to be attached to the faces of private buildings and required the use of private wifi connections. There was a lot of coordination that needed to happen with all of the building owners and agreements had to be drawn up establishing installation and ongoing maintenance .

Why was this project a good fit for the MSIP?

It heavily impacts not only the day to day experience in Perry's downtown, but also the ability to host community-wide events on special occasions.



Employer Payroll Tax

How did you explain payroll tax to business owners?

This was a struggle to communicate through on this project. Even working with larger financial institutions, it seemed like no one knew what it was or how it worked. Sharing the form and clarifying that the businesses were not being asked to contribute any funds outside of what they already pay to the state seemed to help some, but it was a murky process.

What kind of concerns came up? Did the business owner need any extra assistance?

One of the business owners involved their HR team. This was not because the form was too confusing or lengthy, rather that they did not have a confident understanding of how the employee payroll tax works or how it might affect their business.

How long did it take to identify your businesses and gather the commitments?

In total, it took around three weeks to get both of the employer payroll tax commitments secured because of the one business needing to coordinate with their HR team.

Matching Funds

What did your team of partners look like?

This project had one sponsor: a local family foundation. They are already involved in investing in the community so they were a natural fit for a project like this.

Did you run into any challenges with documentation?

No problems came up with documentation. Something that helped was getting the quote from the A/V installer at the beginning of the project so they had their goal numbers in hand the whole time.



Kendall Whittier

MS Level: Fully Designated

Director: Evon Markum

Budget: \$260,000 Total

(\$130,000 MSIP Match)

Project Description

Placemaking elements such as neon striping, Route 66 shield, historical clock repairs, wayfinding signage, banners, equipment box wraps, etc.



Project

How did the project come about?

Some projects had already been identified by the Kendall Whittier MS design committee by walking the neighborhood and putting out surveys to the community, but the resources to complete them hadn't been identified. The MSIP became available and that allowed for the projects to become more realistic.

Were there any early challenges or red flags?

An early challenge was defining and paring down the scope of work to fit the MSIP framework. There were a lot of different improvements that involved different areas of the district. It was difficult to decide on a starting point and to plan out phasing the improvements over the course of potentially multiple MSIP cycles.

Why was this project a good fit for the MSIP?

It is in alignment with the city of Tulsa's goals for improvement and the momentum happening across the community at large. The project heavily impacts community pride and placemaking, helping to redefine not only the opinions of the district members, but also the larger audience of the city it sits within.



Employer Payroll Tax

How did you explain payroll tax to business owners?

VERY simply. The business pays their payroll tax to the state. The state has designated that a portion of that tax money could be used for the incentive program if individual business owners specifically commit their taxes to being used that way. The state then allots that money to be used for local improvements via the MSIP.

What kind of concerns came up? Did the business owner need any extra assistance?

People were skeptical because their first reaction was that they were being asked for money. Once everything was explained in simple terms and it was made clear that no additional funding was being petitioned for, there were no issues. None of the business owners needed help filling out the form.

How long did it take to identify your businesses and gather the commitments?

There was some struggle in finding the right businesses to approach, but once that happened it was a very quick process. In total, it took about two weeks.

Matching Funds

What did your team of partners look like?

Some money was dedicated by a city councilor as part of a district-wide improvement initiative. The larger portion of the matching funds came from a family foundation that has a vested interest in improving Kendall Whittier and already had a representative on the KWMS design committee.

Did you run into any challenges with documentation?

There were no issues providing the documentation required for the MSIP. The project did run into a challenge with the required documentation by the city of Tulsa (more permits were required than anticipated) but the issues were resolved by working closely with a liaison to the city and hiring a project manager.



Muskogee

MS Level: Fully Designated

Director: Courtney Graham

Budget: \$150,000 Total

(\$75,000 MSIP Match)

Project Description

Broadway Green and Alley Projects:
Greenspaces, infrastructure
enhancements, streetlighting,
landscaping, and sidewalks



Project

How did the project come about?

The Muskogee MS attained funding for the development of a master plan for the downtown district. They partnered with the city (who organized the design team) and together were able to study the district's needs and establish a list of goals. All of the scope of work was planned to happen through a series of phases that will take place over several years. This case study project is one of the phases, but their intent is to reapply for the MSIP each cycle to assist the other planned improvement projects.

Were there any early challenges or red flags?

The biggest challenge was breaking up the huge scope of work from the master plan into smaller chunks that align with not only the MSIP's criteria (construction timing and funds available), but also all of the other funders and entities involved in the improvement of the district.

Why was this project a good fit for the MSIP?

This project heavily aligns with Main Street's goals for community development. It focuses on bringing pride, usability, and vitality to downtown Muskogee through a many-pronged approach. This first streetscaping phase will lay the groundwork for many improvements to come.



Employer Payroll Tax

How did you explain payroll tax to business owners?

The first resource that was used to explain payroll tax (the official documents produced by the department of commerce) was entirely too complicated and didn't use language that was easy for anyone to understand. It was only after simplifying it to a more basic description that the concept was communicated properly.

What kind of concerns came up? Did the business owner need any extra assistance?

After it was explained in simpler terms by the director, the business owner was comfortable filling out the required form. They did not need any accountant assistance or any help procuring the required information.

How long did it take to identify your businesses and gather the commitments?

Working with one large business which they had a good connection with made this process really quick.

Matching Funds

What did your team of partners look like?

Since this project is in partnership with the city of Muskogee, the funds were set up with the City of Muskogee Foundation which designates specific resources towards community betterment. No private partners were needed to meet their funding goals.

Did you run into any challenges with documentation?

With the large scope of work, it was somewhat complicated getting the specific estimates on each phase/project. But having the design team established before the application helped because they had people who could pull those numbers for them.



Ponca City

MS Level: Fully Designated

Director: Maci Graves

Budget: \$1,302,956 Total

(\$150,000 MSIP Match)

Project Description

Grand Avenue streetscape improvements, including corner safety nodes, planter irrigation system, ADA accessibility, Edison-type lighting attached to streetlights



Project

How did the project come about?

When the MSIP became available, the Ponca City MS went through an effort to identify projects that might be eligible. They found that the city already had a streetscaping project in progress and that the MSIP could add to the pool of resources going towards improving the district.

Were there any early challenges or red flags?

There is invalidation of the Ponca City MS happening by some in the community and some within the city government (a problem that many Main Streets encounter). It did not stop the ability to contribute to this project, but it has affected the momentum of other potential MSIP projects.

Why was this project a good fit for the MSIP?

While this project is not the invention of the PCMS, it is highly aligned with the purpose of the MSIP: community betterment. It will make a noted impact on the usability and character of the district as well as contribute to a general energy of improvement that others can join in on.



Employer Payroll Tax

How did you explain payroll tax to business owners?

They explained that instead of the employee payroll taxes being thrown into a general pool at the state level, that this is a bag of potential tax redirection that gets allocated at a local level. In other words, a business can commit their taxes to specifically being spent in their community instead of being spent wherever the state sends the money.

What kind of concerns came up? Did the business owner need any extra assistance?

Something that caused some confusion was about businesses that have several locations, and that their main location might not be the one in your community. This caused particular messiness with a financial institution and they ended up needing to involve their HR team.

How long did it take to identify your businesses and gather the commitments?

Even with the financial institution needing to do some internal investigation, this entire process took about a week. Having good prior relationships with the businesses helped a lot.

Matching Funds

What did your team of partners look like?

The matching funds were already in place through the Ponca City Development Authority. Since this project was already organized and funded prior to MS involvement, no additional partners were needed.

Did you run into any challenges with documentation?

There was no issue gathering the necessary documentation. Having entities on the project (the Ponca City Development Authority's design team) who were dedicated to running it made it very easy to get what they needed for the application.

