



March 19, 2025

Indiana Main Street Forward // 2030

A strategic approach to
strengthening Indiana's Main
Streets and neighborhood
commercial districts.





Addendum to the Indiana Main Street Strategic Plan

The Indiana Main Street Forward strategic plan was created ahead of 2025 with the help of Main Street America. Since the strategic plan was created, Indiana Main Street, overseen by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, has undergone a transitional period.

To account for these programmatic updates and changes to the plan, the following four addendum pages were added in 2026. All other pages in the strategic plan remain unchanged from when they were originally created in 2025. Please reference the addendum pages for the most up to date information on the strategic plan.



Addendum to the Indiana Main Street Strategic Plan

In early 2025, Indiana Main Street, operating within the Office of Community and Rural Affairs, entered a period of transition that affected the timing and advancement of the Indiana Main Street Strategic Plan. These changes required the program to pause the plan's anticipated approval process and re-engage with local programs to ensure that priorities remained aligned with current needs.

To support this recalibration, OCRA and Main Street America facilitated a strategic input session at the 2025 Preserving Historic Places Conference in Fort Wayne. Participants revisited the goals developed during the original planning process and offered updated perspectives based on emerging conditions across the state.

Attendees were asked to identify:

- Urgent needs requiring immediate attention
- Aspirational goals for future implementation
- Items suitable for later consideration

They also provided feedback on how responsibilities could be balanced among coordinating programs, local programs and shared roles.

With the subsequent 2026 sunset of the Indiana Main Street Council, this collective input became even more important in guiding future direction.

Refinement of Goals Based on 2025 Stakeholder Feedback

While the core goals of the Indiana Main Street Strategic Plan remain consistent with the original framework, stakeholder input gathered in 2025 highlighted the need to adjust and refine the strategies used to achieve those goals. The following updates reflect how partners across the Indiana Main Street network prioritized, reinterpreted and strengthened each goal in response to emerging needs and current conditions.

Addendum to the Indiana Main Street Strategic Plan

1. Position OCRA and Indiana Main Street as a responsive state agency and program.

- Ongoing evaluation and outreach through adapting continuously to community needs.
- Efficient and effective structure through meeting the Indiana Main Street Networks needs within the state government.
- Internal training and best practices through building staff knowledge and main street expertise.
- Core competencies and communication through expanding joint efforts with current and future partners.
- Partnership and collaborations through expanding joint efforts with current and future partners.
- Diversified funding through finding new ways to leverage public and private investment.
- Sustainable commitment through ensuring capacity to meet long-term expectations.

2. Position Indiana Main Street as a conduit of statewide economic and social impact.

- Housing through expanded housing development in downtowns and historical districts.
- Rural underserved communities by championing inclusion of rural and urban underserved communities.

3. Promote main streets as Indiana's go-to economic and community development model.

- Awareness at all levels by building recognition of Indiana Main Street statewide while celebrating local identities.
- Create long term trust by strengthening consistency and reliability of support for local programs.

4. Cultivate an active and engaged program network.

- Regular gatherings to create meaningful opportunities for local leaders to connect and share knowledge.
- Annual conferences and celebrations to ensure the Preserving Historic Places Conference meets Main Street programs and celebrates program accomplishments.
- Technology solutions such as finding and using tools that simplify collaboration and engagement across the network.

5. Support local capacity by building at all levels of the Indiana Main Street Network.

- Accessible funding by standardizing and simplifying funding opportunities while balancing accessibility and impact.
- Responsive training by tailored services to meet program specific needs while benefiting the broader network.

Addendum to the Indiana Main Street Strategic Plan

Outline of Goals and Strategies

2026- 2027

Phase 1: Refinement

- Clarify eligibility of non-rural neighborhoods to participate in the network
- Expand in-person training and awards for new or advancing programs
- Explore external partnerships
- Explore program expansion opportunities at the Preserving Historic Places Conference
- Identify grantmaking priorities aligned with this plan
- Identify potential partners and funders for grant programs outside OCRA's internal capacity
- Identify program refinements needed to strengthen existing services

2028-2029

Phase 2: Implementation

- Evaluate opportunities to expand the network if capacity allows
- Strengthen celebrations, conferences and in-person training efforts
- Update the Indiana Main Street website
- Review possibilities for grantmaking priorities and implement feasible options
- Develop an approach for expanded services
- Realign staff and budget resources as needed to support program refinements

2030

Phase 3: Expanded Priorities

- Develop a refined ODAN level as a capacity building phase
- Celebrate expanded services, including tracking and demonstrating program impact
- Offer expanded or new grant programs as funding becomes available
- Engage additional staffing or service providers as needed to implement expanded programs

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

In 2025, OCRA celebrated the 40th anniversary of our Indiana Main Street program. Communities from across the state made their way to the statehouse to celebrate this historic achievement. Main Street organizations and advocates were highlighted and awarded based on accomplishments in several different categories. Awards were presented for Main Street Innovator, Main Street Champion, Main Street Luminary and Main Street Mentor. We are proud of each of our Main Street communities, and we look forward to partnering with them for further growth opportunities going forward.

Over the coming years, we will look to not only add more Main Street communities but also to help our current organizations move up in our level system. We have seen positive results from the Indiana Main Street program and its partner programs in communities like Delphi, Wabash, Huntingburg and Madison. Our aim is to bring these results to rural communities across the state. Programs like Stellar Pathways and PreservINg Main Street bring transformational outcomes in our communities and can put them on a whole new path forward.

We have a network of over 100 Main Street communities across the state. These programs have garnered millions in local and state investment, led to countless new small businesses opening in our downtown corridors, and given their communities the tools necessary to shape their own futures.

Our agency is here to serve you, your local volunteers, elected officials and small businesses. Together, we will honor and celebrate our local Main Street's accomplishments, while working to deliver an even brighter future for our Indiana Main Street communities from 2026 and beyond.

Fred Glynn

Executive Director
Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs

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Executive Summary

Indiana Main Street Forward // 2030 sets a vision for the future of historic district revitalization across Indiana. Rooted in the Main Street Approach™, the plan outlines strategic goals, priorities, and initiatives to enhance economic vitality, preserve historic districts, and foster vibrant communities. The plan builds on a 40-year legacy while adapting to emerging needs and opportunities.

Strategic Goals & Priorities

Our goals and priorities summarized below are outlined on page 18.

1. A responsive state agency and program. Focusing on:

- Ongoing evaluation and outreach.
- An efficient and effective operational structure.
- Investing in internal training and best practices.
- Clearly articulating and strengthening our core competencies.
- Deepening partnerships and collaborations.
- Diversifying funding.
- A sustainable commitment to the network.

2. Broad economic and social impact. Focusing on:

- Entrepreneurship.
- Housing.
- Population attraction and place attachment.
- Championing both rural and underserved communities.

3. Main Street as Indiana's go-to economic and community development model. Focusing on:

- Awareness of Indiana Main Street at all levels.
- Cultivation of the approach as a driver of entrepreneurship.
- Fostering local buy-in.
- Long-term trust.

4. Active and engaged program network. Focusing on:

- Regular gatherings.
- Annual conference and celebration.
- Finding communication solutions that simplify collaboration.

5. Local capacity building. Focusing on:

- Pathways to state-level or national accreditation.
- Building local program competency.
- Consistent, streamlined, and accessible funding programs.
- Responsive training.

Implementation Strategy

The plan will be executed in three phases:

1. **Program Refinement & Development (Year 1)** - Assess and refine IMS initiatives, clarify program criteria, and align staffing and budget priorities.
2. **Implementation & Fundraising (Years 2-3)** - Execute refined programs and expand financial capacity through targeted fundraising.
3. **Expanded Council Priorities (Year 4+)** - Scale program impact with additional grant programs, technical assistance, and expanded partnerships.

Conclusion

By 2030, through strategic investments, strong partnerships, and a commitment to innovation, Indiana Main Street will continue to empower communities across the state, fostering economic resilience and cultural preservation for future generations.



Participants in the Wabash Workshop

Acknowledgments

Indiana Main Street, Office of Community and Rural Affairs, and Main Street America would like to thank the following individuals.

Indiana Council Members

Andrew Carty, VP of Small Business, Indiana Economic Development Corporation
Marsh Davis, President of Indiana Landmarks
J. P. Hall III, Associate Professor, Ball State University
Meagan Heber, Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority
Eva North, President, Main Street Corydon
Brian Sheehan, Business Development Manager, HWC Engineering
Dean Vonderheide, Mayor, City of Jasper
Amy Haacker, VP of Community Foundation Programs, IPA
Tenille Zartman, President & CEO, Grow Wabash County

Strategic Plan Steering Committee Members

Andrea Kern, Director of Strategic Initiatives, OCRA
Duke Bennett, former Executive Director*, OCRA
Megan Zarazee, COO, OCRA
Amy Haacker, Indiana Main Street Council Member
*until 1/10/2025

Indiana Main Street & OCRA Staff

Fred Glynn – Executive Director
Megan Zarazee – Chief Operating Officer
Lydia Kirschner - Communications Director
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Teresa Ayers - East Central Community Liaison
Gerry White - Northwest Senior Community Liaison
Sarah Froderman - West Central Community Liaison
Johnny Kincaid - Southwest Community Liaison
Taten Arnold – Southeast Community Liaison
Lindsey Hammond - Northeast Community Liaison
Andrea Kern - Director of Strategic Initiatives
Abigail Huff - Senior Program Manager (Indiana Main Street)
Shelby Farthing - Program Manager (Community & Economic Development)
Steven St. John - Community Development Block Grant Director
Pamela Guerrero - Senior CDBG Program and Policy Analyst
Armica Bash Gaspar - CDBG Program Manager
Tanaha Simon - CDBG Program Manager

Main Street America

Jonathan Stone – Program Officer of Revitalization Services, *Strategic Plan Author, Interviewer, Workshop Facilitator*
Norma Ramirez de Miess – former Vice President of Field Services – Downtowns, *Strategic Plan Interviewer*
Kathy La Plante – Vice President of Coordinating Programs, *Strategic Plan Advisor*
Jackie Swihart – Director of Network Capacity Building, Strengthen, *Strategic Plan Advisor*

Interviewees

Abby Chapman, OCRA
Abby Huff, OCRA
Alex Downard, Wabash ImageOne85
Andrew Carty, IEDC
Bill Taft, LISC Indianapolis
Brandi Coomes, Shelbyville Main Street
Brian Sheehan, HWC Engineering
Chris Theisen, Noblesville Main Street
Christmas Hudgens, OCRA
Corey Kutz, Lebanon Main Street
Danny Causey, Franklin Main Street
Dean Vonderheide, Jasper
Eva North, Main Street Corydon
George Hanlin, Indiana Humanities
J.P. Hall, Ball State University
Jake Sipe, IHEDA
Jay Ellis, Jeffersonville Main Street
Jim Rawlinson, IEDC
Josh Alsip, Brazil
Karen Momper, Visit Indiana
Kate Baker, Noblesville Main Street
Kate Schwenk, Jasper Main Street
Kati Roberts, Peru Main Street
Kelly Humrichouser, Main Street America
Kristen Johnson, Kendallville Main Street
Lora Arneberg, New Harmony
Mark Dollase, Indiana Landmarks
Meagan Heber, IHEDA
Miah Michaelsen, Indiana Arts Commission
Mike Littlejohn
Missy Krulik, Lebanon Main Street
Morgan Allen, ISBDC
Neil Elkins, Huntingburg
Nicole Vasconi, IU Center for Rural Engagement
Pamela Guerrero, OCRA
Pete Fritz, IN Dept of Health
Russell Harvey, Greencastle Main Street
Ryan Goode, Greendale
Samantha Spergel, IHEDA
Susan Alexander, Kokomo
Suzanne Rollins Stanis, Indiana Landmarks
Tenille Zartman, Grow Wabash County
Valecia Crisafulli, Madison Main Street

The interview process and key insights are summarized on page 24.

Workshop Attendees, Wabash

Cindy Keever, Sheridan Main Street Inc
Paul David Bravard, Historic Marion
Carey W Craig, Main Street Pendleton
Sharon Brimberry, Sheridan Main Street Inc
Kristen Johnson, Historic Downtown Kendallville
Heidi Kienholz, Sheridan Main Street Inc.
Ann Finchum, Auburn Main Street
Kati Roberts, ReDiscover Downtown Peru
Terry Smith, Rediscover Downtown Peru
Becky Souder, Historic Warren Main Street
LeAnn Buzzard, Historic Warren Main Street
Marilyn Bradford, Historic Warren Main Street
Kristen Petruniw, Downtown Wabash, Inc.
Tenille Zartman, Downtown Wabash, Inc & Manchester Alive
Chance Morpew, Alexandria Main Street, INC
Tammy Taylor, Historic Broadway - New Haven
Carrie Barrett, New Castle Main Street
Duke Hamm, New Castle Main Street
Niki Keister, Columbia City Connect
Cassidy Throm, City of New Haven
Samantha Oyler, City of New Haven
Mindy Myers, Main Street Centerville
Emily Hurst, New Castle Main Street, Inc.
Andrew Heald, Main Street Fairmount
Jenny Draper, Roann's Community Heritage
Khelley Adams, Angola Main Street
Eric McCoy, Downtown Peru

Workshop Attendees, Bedford

Kim Burgess, Bedford Revitalization, Inc
Sadie Miskuf, Magnificent Monon South
Chelsey Thomas, Possibilities in Paoli
Beth Hurm Lauer, Association for a better Rockport
Susan Gales, Bedford Revitalization Inc
Marcy Marksberry, Cloverdale Main street
Kathy Morgan, Cloverdale Main Street
Eva North, Main Street Corydon
Autumn Moore, North Vernon Main Street
Christine Craig, Main Street Brookville
Suzanne McMillin-Biehl, Main Street Brookville
Pam Steele, Cloverdale main street
Brian Noah, Main Street Brookville

The workshop process and key insights are summarized on page 26.

Survey Respondents

113 stakeholders responded to a comprehensive survey. Survey responses are summarized beginning on page 33.

About Indiana Main Street

Our Mission

Indiana Main Street empowers communities across the state to revitalize their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts through preservation-based economic development. By providing resources, fostering partnerships, and promoting the Main Street Approach, we help build vibrant, sustainable places that celebrate Indiana's unique heritage, support local businesses, and enhance quality of life for all Hoosiers.

Our Vision

Indiana Main Street envisions a future where every Hoosier community thrives with vibrant, resilient downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. Through strong local leadership, strategic investment, and a commitment to historic preservation, we aim to foster economic vitality, cultivate community pride, and create dynamic places where people want to live, work, and gather for generations to come.

Our Values

Community-Driven Leadership

We believe in the power of local people to shape their own communities. Through collaboration, volunteerism, and grassroots leadership, we empower Main Street programs to drive meaningful change.

Shared Investment

We believe that thriving Main Streets require a collective commitment from local communities, the state, and private partners. By leveraging public and private resources, fostering cross-sector collaborations, and aligning investments with community-driven priorities, we ensure that Indiana's Main Streets have the support they need to grow, innovate, and sustain long-term success.

Preservation with Purpose

We honor Indiana's rich history by preserving and revitalizing our downtowns and historic commercial districts. By reinvesting in our past, we build a stronger foundation for the future.

Economic Resilience

We champion small businesses, local entrepreneurs, and sustainable development strategies that create jobs, attract investment, and ensure long-term economic vitality in our communities.

History of Indiana Main Street

Indiana's Main Street program was launched in 1985 amid a nationwide push to revive declining downtowns. That year, the Indiana General Assembly officially established Indiana Main Street (IMS) as the state's coordinating arm of the National Main Street initiative. Preservation advocates – including leaders from Indiana Landmarks – were instrumental in its creation, ensuring that historic preservation became a cornerstone of the revitalization strategy. Notably, Indiana was an early leader in the Main Street movement; Madison, Indiana had served as one of the country's first pilot Main Street communities in the late 1970s, demonstrating the model's potential and helping inspire the statewide program. From the outset, IMS emphasized a comprehensive, "Main Street Approach" to downtown development, focusing on organization, design, promotion, and economic vitality in local commercial districts.

Over the ensuing decades, the Indiana Main Street program evolved and expanded dramatically. By 2018, it encompassed 132 participating communities across 81 of Indiana's 92 counties – more local Main Street programs than any other state at that time. To bolster its impact, the program was bolstered by state government support and reorganization. In 2005, IMS was placed under the newly formed Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) – part of the Lt. Governor's portfolio – which gave the program a dedicated home within Indiana's community development apparatus. Through OCRA, Indiana Main Street has provided robust training, technical assistance, and funding to local programs, empowering grassroots organizations to drive downtown revitalization from the ground up. State initiatives like regular workshops, grant opportunities, and Main Street community exchanges have helped local leaders share best practices and sustain momentum in their downtown transformations. This strong state-local framework enabled Indiana Main Street to become one of the nation's most extensive and successful Main Street networks.

Over nearly four decades, Indiana Main Street has amassed an impressive record of achievements. Since 1985, designated Main Street communities in Indiana have generated over 6,100 new or expanded businesses and more than 37,000 new jobs. These revitalization efforts have been accompanied by over \$6.5 billion in combined private and public investment in Indiana downtowns, along with thousands of rehabilitated buildings and public improvement projects. Indiana's Main Street communities and leaders have also earned national acclaim – for example, Madison Main Street was honored with the Great American Main Street Award in 2024, Main Street America's top award, highlighting the program's excellence in historic preservation and community collaboration. Throughout its evolution, strategic partnerships have amplified IMS's impact. As Indiana's official Main Street America coordinating program, IMS works closely with Main Street America to uphold rigorous accreditation standards and share resources. It has also fostered innovative collaborations at the state level – such as the recent PreservINg Main Street initiative launched with Indiana Landmarks and Indiana Humanities – to provide grants for preserving historic downtown buildings in Main Street communities. These milestones in legislation, partnerships, and performance have cemented Indiana Main Street's role as a catalyst for vibrant, economically thriving downtowns across the state.

About Indiana Main Street

Indiana's Main Street America Coordinating Program

Indiana Main Street maintains a licensing agreement with Main Street America. Main Street America leads a movement committed to strengthening communities through preservation-based economic development in older and historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts. For more than 40 years, Main Street America has provided a practical, adaptable, and impactful framework for community-driven, comprehensive revitalization through the Main Street Approach™. MSA's network of more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development.

Role of a Coordinating Program

Coordinating Programs play a critical role in the national Main Street movement, inspiring best practices and investment in the geographies that they serve. In 2024, Main Street America partnered with 46 entities as Coordinating Programs representing states, counties, and cities. Most coordinating programs are state agencies. Coordinating programs are expected to provide technical assistance and training, funding and grant support, oversee Main Street America accreditation, connect local programs with each other and state and national resources, advocate for downtown revitalization and historic preservation, and help brand and promote local Main Street districts.

Established by State Legislature

In 1985, the Indiana legislature voted to create the Indiana Main Street program. By law, its initiatives must:

1. Encourage the economic development, redevelopment, and improvement of downtown areas in Indiana cities and towns in all geographic regions of the state.
2. Sponsor demonstration efforts in Indiana cities and towns in all geographic regions of the state.
3. Provide technical assistance and sponsor seminars and other educational programs on downtown area revitalization, development, and redevelopment.

The law also establishes the Indiana Main Street Council to develop and direct policy, coordinate administrative "techniques," and provide assistance to carry out the purposes of the Indiana Main Street program.

A Program of the Office of Rural and Community Affairs (OCRA)

IMS is a program of Indiana's Office of Rural and Community Affairs. Main Street is integral to fulfilling OCRA's vision and guiding principles by leveraging Main Street's proven economic and community development framework and establishing a network of communities, organizations, and professionals dedicated to the shared advancement of Indiana.

OCRA's Vision

OCRA works with communities to build relevant and economically thriving places where people want to live, work and grow.

OCRA's Mission

The Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs works with local, state and national partners to provide resources and technical assistance to aid communities in shaping and achieving their vision for community and economic development.

OCRA's Guiding Principles

- Retain, attract and develop talent in Indiana rural communities.
- Incite and encourage regional collaboration and holistic rural planning processes.
- Facilitate transformative investment in rural commercial corridors and support healthy, economically resilient communities working to address inequity.

The Main Street Four-Point Approach™

The Main Street Approach is a comprehensive framework for downtown and commercial district revitalization developed by Main Street America. It provides a structured yet flexible strategy that communities can use to restore economic vitality, enhance historic character, and foster local pride.

At the core of the strategy are four interconnected points:

Economic Vitality

- Focuses on strengthening and diversifying the local economy.
- Supports small businesses, encourages adaptive reuse of historic buildings, and promotes entrepreneurship.
- Helps attract investment and fill vacancies with sustainable businesses.

Design

- Enhances the physical appearance and functionality of the district.
- Encourages historic preservation, good urban design, and improvements to public spaces.
- Promotes accessibility, streetscape improvements, and building rehabilitations.

Promotion

- Markets the downtown district as a destination for shopping, dining, and events.
- Develops branding campaigns, festivals, and community events to attract residents and visitors.
- Engages in digital marketing, social media, and storytelling to highlight local businesses and heritage.

Organization

- Builds partnerships among stakeholders, including businesses, government agencies, and volunteers.
- Ensures sustainable funding, leadership, and community engagement.
- Establishes a strong organizational foundation with a clear mission and structure.

National Impact of Main Streets

Since 1980, Main Street America has helped to generate over \$107.62 billion in local reinvestment, rehab 335,675 buildings, create 782,059 new jobs, and start 175,323 new businesses in over 2,000 communities.

125 communities

More than 20% of Indiana's 569 cities, towns, and municipalities.

49 accredited | 16 nationally

75 of Indiana's 92 counties

Core Initiatives

This plan guides the following core initiatives.

Indiana Main Street Council

Appointed by the Lieutenant Governor for 3-year terms, the Indiana Main Street Council is the stakeholder-stewards of the Indiana Main Street program. It provides guidance and leadership to support OCRA and IMS priorities.

Community Network

The IMS network is an application-based family of downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts committed to the Main Street approach and the revitalization and vibrancy of their communities. Communities begin as Downtown Affiliates (ODAN) with the opportunity to apply for state-level or Main Street America accreditation. Main Street America accredited communities exemplify best practices of community-driven revitalization with a historic preservation ethic.

IMS's network services include site and program evaluation, annual application and accreditation processes, collection of impact statistics, communication and coordination with local program leaders, and maintenance of platforms such as Maestro Community Manager and the IMS Facebook Group. Main Street Ready is a technical assistance program that seeks to assist communities to set strategic priorities for downtown revitalization based on the community's vision for downtown. It is a capacity building tool for affiliate communities looking to work towards state accreditation.

Outreach & Celebration of Impact

Indiana's investment in the IMS program inspires and leverages local investment across the state. IMS celebrates the collective impact of the network through the collection and sharing of local program statistics, events, promotions, and quarterly and annual newsletters and publications.

Grants & Investment

A centerpiece of Indiana Main Street are grant programs dedicated for network communities and other grants offered through OCRA's Community Development Block Grant programs. IMS regularly offers pilot grant programs responsive to the needs of the network and Indiana's policy priorities.

In FY24, grant programs included Main Street Revitalization Program, PreservINg Main Street (\$2m per participating community pilot for preservation projects and administration), Downtown Revitalization Planning Grants (infrastructure planning), and Historic Renovation Grant Program.

Education & Technical Assistance

IMS maintains a year-round calendar of education and technical assistance opportunities for its network. In FY24, specific activities included maintenance and development of toolkits, collaboration on the statewide "Preserving Historic Places" conference, lunch and learns, webinars, executive director training, local program strategic planning (Transformation Strategies), and other technical assistance visits. Indiana Main Street Community Exchanges are peer-learning opportunities designed to connect local Main Street program leaders, volunteers, and stakeholders across the state. These exchanges provide a platform for communities to share best practices, discuss common challenges, and learn from one another's successes. Typically hosted in different Main Street communities, these events include site visits, panel discussions, and hands-on workshops that highlight successful projects, economic development strategies, and innovative approaches to preservation and placemaking. By fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing, Community Exchanges strengthen the Indiana Main Street network and empower local programs to drive impactful, community-led change.

IMS offers scholarships for local program leaders to attend Main Street America's annual Main Street Now conference.

Pictured: Grow Your Own Storytellers Workshop by Storyville on February 21, 2025 in Jasper.

Advancing a Legacy of Impact

Celebrating 40 years in 2025, Indiana Main Street Forward // 2030 aims to build on a legacy of impact.

Program Strengths

Valued Program and Partner

Indiana Main Street is highly valued amongst local program leaders and its state-level partners. Most local program leaders, especially board members, agree that IMS excels at supporting the network in several key dimensions including events and promotions, placemaking, historic preservation, and celebrating the network's successes. Partner agencies expressed in interviews the importance of Indiana Main Street and a statewide approach to revitalizing historic downtowns and the important role that they have and can play in population retention and economic growth.

Key Collaborations

Indiana Main Street is a willing collaborator with numerous successful ongoing and past collaborations.

Current or recent collaborations:

- [Ball State University](#). Pilot design technical assistance program selects two communities annually.
- Governor's Council for People with Disabilities. Pilot internship in 2024 for accessibility technical assistance in 2025.
- [Indiana Arts Commission](#). Previously supported accreditation process and other collaborative programming. Strongly aligned stakeholders.
- [Indiana Department of Health](#). Co-agency on Stellar Pathways program.
- Indiana Division of Historic Preservation & Archaeology. Department of Natural Resources provides LOI for historic grant applications.
- [Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority \(IHCDA\)](#). Co-agency on Stellar Pathways program. Prohousing Grant HUD co-application.
- [Indiana Humanities](#). Preserving Main Street and other grant opportunities for local programs.
- [Indiana Landmarks](#). Preserving Main Street and statewide preservation conference.
- [Indiana Small Business Development Center](#). Occasional technical assistance for statewide trainings. Local programs regularly work with regional offices.
- [Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement](#). Placemaking initiatives in southern Indiana with local Main Street programs. Also collaborates with OCRA on other initiatives.
- [Main Street America](#). Provides thought leadership, field services, education, and training to local programs.
- [Visit Indiana](#). Collaborator in former Stellar Communities grant program. Promotes Shop Small. Collaborates with OCRA on other programs.

Throughout our outreach process, current and potential partners expressed a willingness to deepen their relationship with Indiana Main Street.

Geographically Diverse Network

125 programs are spread geographically throughout 75 of Indiana's 92 counties.

Grantmaking Resources

Since 2014, nearly \$99 million have been invested in Indiana Main Street communities. 513 unique grants have been issued. Grants were frequently mentioned in interviews, stakeholder survey, and workshops.

Skilled Program Staff and Leadership

Indiana Main Street is supported by a dedicated team of professionals committed to empowering communities and ensuring the success of local Main Street programs. With expertise in historic preservation, economic development, placemaking, and community engagement, the IMS team serves as a vital resource.

Training and Networking Opportunities

In addition to grant opportunities, local programs most appreciate available training and resources, especially opportunities for one-on-one coaching, in-person visits, and opportunities to learn alongside peers.

Opportunities for Future Impact

Building on Indiana Main Street's strengths, stakeholder input highlighted the following key opportunities to continue to grow program impact as well as to adapt to changing needs.

- Consistent, streamlined, and accessible funding programs. Ensuring predictable and easily navigable funding programs will allow communities to plan long-term revitalization efforts with greater confidence.
- Refined and expanded technical assistance and training. Enhancing technical assistance will equip local leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to drive impactful economic and community development initiatives.
- Champion of rural and small communities. IMS must continue to advocate for the unique needs of rural and small-town communities, ensuring they have access to state and federal resources.
- Enhanced IMS brand awareness and advocacy. Raising awareness of IMS's role and impact will help attract greater investment and support from policymakers, businesses, and community leaders.
- Fosters local economic development. By supporting small businesses, property owners, and local entrepreneurs, IMS contributes to sustainable economic growth in communities across the state.
- Stable IMS program / long-term trust. A consistent and well-supported IMS program is essential to maintaining trust with local communities and partners.
- Staff roles, responsibilities, and training need to be evaluated to support strategic plan goals. A thorough assessment of IMS staff responsibilities will help align internal capacity with the organization's strategic priorities.
- Emerging community needs relative to housing, adaptive reuse, and entrepreneurship support. As housing affordability and adaptive reuse of historic structures become increasingly important, IMS must integrate these priorities into its programming. Expanding support for entrepreneurs promotes sustainable local growth.
- Peer coordinating programs offer design services and entry-level tracks. Many state-level Main Street programs provide direct design assistance and structured entry-level participation for new communities. IMS can explore similar initiatives to enhance accessibility and impact.

Other Key Stakeholder Input

The following additional input was received during the workshops, interviews, and survey.

- In-person engagement is highly valued. This needs to be balanced with serviced efficiency.
- Stakeholders prefer to receive communications in different ways. Next generation learning and digital resource tools can modernize IMS's communications and content libraries.
- Developing capacity of volunteers is critical.
- Growing diversity in Indiana's communities requires inclusive engagement strategies.
- Population decline and migration away from small towns affects tax bases and community stability.
- Challenges with local program director turnover need to be understood and mitigated.





Our Plan

What must be accomplished over the planning horizon?

Our priorities are designed to evolve over time as goals and objectives are met. We intend to make meaningful progress on each priority over the planning period. Each year, we will evaluate our progress. By 2030, IMS will call upon the community to help us reaffirm or set new priorities.

Goals & Priorities

1. A responsive state agency and program.

For the past forty years, Indiana Main Street has stewarded the implementation of the Main Street Approach across the state. Created by the legislature, there is long-term commitment to our work. We must continue to adapt to changing needs, systemic and localized, across our network. We must explore ways to magnify our impact with limited State resources.

For this plan we are focusing on:

- **Ongoing evaluation and outreach.** What are the needs we must continuously adapt to?
- **An efficient and effective operational structure.** How do we ensure the needs of the Main Street network are met within an agency that serves stakeholders outside of the Main Street program?
- **Investing in internal training and best practices.** Most staff within OCRA support the Indiana Main Street program. How do we ensure that all that support IMS have the highest and most appropriate possible level of training relative to the Main Street Approach and the unique needs of our network?
- **Clearly articulating and strengthening our core competencies.** Much like our local programs, we are often called to be a “Swiss Army Knife.” How can we be adaptive while also being able to articulate when partnerships and collaborations are in the best interest of the network?
- **Deepening partnerships and collaborations.** We are skilled collaborators with many entities involved in our work throughout our history. Based on our outreach, we know that current, former, and potential partners are interested in deepening their support of our network.
- **Diversifying funding** by identifying innovative ways to leverage local and private investment.
- **A sustainable commitment to the network.** To remain responsive, we need to further articulate the level of service expected per community and educate the legislature and other funding partners about the capacity necessary to maintain that commitment.

Our work is even more important in times of economic uncertainty. Focusing on the priorities above will ensure our network is best supported and that greater Indiana benefits from the resiliency of our network.

2. Broad economic and social impact.

The network is responsible for impressive investment throughout Indiana. At its core, Main Street is community-led change. Main Street is uniquely qualified to continue to be a conduit of both statewide economic and social impact. Through this planning process, some local stakeholders expressed that OCRA and IMS programs benefit population centers disproportionately. We must articulate our intended impact, especially for the most economically disadvantaged communities in our network.

For this plan, we are focusing on:

- **Entrepreneurship.** New businesses account for “virtually all job growth” nationally. In small cities, downtowns regularly account for 10-30% of employment. Small businesses have a higher job multiplier effect than large employers. And, of course, businesses born on Main Street can become Indiana’s next big employer and national brand. IMS is uniquely positioned to leverage its partnerships to invest in entrepreneurial ecosystems.
- **Housing.** Throughout the planning process, housing was identified as both an important economic need for the state but also an important opportunity and catalyst for downtowns and historic business districts across the state. Peer agencies acknowledge that resources are limited for small scale housing development. Upper story development is critical for wholistic reinvestment in historic downtown buildings. IMS offers housing related technical assistance most often through its planning grant programs. How can housing development be more broadly supported if not through planning grants?
- **Population attraction and place attachment.** Population attraction as well as retention of higher education students, post-graduation, are goals of multiple state agencies. The Main Street model is unparalleled in fostering a sense of place, local ownership, community, and vitality.
- **Championing both rural and urban underserved communities.** Currently, most Indiana local programs are outside of urban areas. The Main Street Approach is adaptable to communities of all sizes and types. How can we inspire participation by urban neighborhood commercial districts?

To broaden our impact, the capacity of the Indiana Main Street program will need to be increased.

3. Main Street is Indiana's go-to economic and community development model.

Indiana Main Street is a founder and leader of the Main Street Approach nationally. More than 20% of Indiana's 569 cities, towns, and municipalities have adopted the Main Street Approach. Visibility of Main Street as a flagship economic development approach signifies that Indiana is invested in entrepreneurship, local wealth creation, and self-determination.

For this plan, we are focusing on:

- **Awareness of Indiana Main Street at all levels.** How can we further foster a brand for Indiana Main Street while celebrating local programs' efforts to cultivate unique identifies?
- **Cultivation of the approach as a hotbed of entrepreneurship.** Main Street is about small scale property ownership and micro and small business development.
- **Fostering local buy-in.** How do we ensure that Main Street is on the tip of the tongue of all Indiana local officials?
- **Long-term trust.** Feedback suggests that some local programs are apprehensive about Indiana Main Street. Most apprehension is because of inconsistent capacity and programming. Establishing long-term trust is critical to expand Main Street as a go-to economic and community development model.

4. Active and engaged program network.

The Indiana Main Street network represents a broad cross-section of volunteers, professional staff, and local elected officials. Feedback suggests that local programs prefer in-person training and engagement when possible. Planning workshops also suggest that technology can be used to further support an active network.

For this plan, we are focusing on:

- **Regular gatherings.** Local leaders celebrate the opportunity to gather and share knowledge. IMS provides opportunities for local programs to gather more than 20x per year. We will continue to focus on ensuring gatherings are relevant and meaningful.
- **Annual conference and celebration.** IMS partners with Indiana Landmarks for its annual conference. Indiana Landmarks ensures a focus on historic preservation. Expanding on this partnership, IMS needs to ensure that local programs have educational goals met at the conference. Additionally, the annual conference is an excellent opportunity to celebrate accomplishments of local programs.
- **Finding technology solutions that simplify collaboration** and engagement.

5. Local capacity building.

Local capacity building, especially fundraising, communicating impact, and nurturing people were identified by local programs as opportunities for improvement in the stakeholder survey. Stakeholder workshops identified several organizational development themes. Most programs in the IMS network are at the Downtown Affiliate level, which means they have not pursued or have not yet met accreditation standards. Accreditation standards are considered best practices including diversified funding, leadership development, volunteer engagement, and employment of professional staff.

For this plan, we are focusing on:

- **Pathways to state-level or national accreditation.** How do we further define the Downtown Affiliate level as a capacity building phase with supportive curriculum?
- **Building local program competency** in ongoing and emerging skills. Housing and property owner support (including design services), entrepreneurship, and organizational development are priorities.
- **Consistent, streamlined, and accessible funding programs.** IMS/OCRA regularly offers pilot or one-time funding programs. How can funding opportunities be standardized based on what we've learned through our temporary opportunities? How can we balance accessibility with impact given that most of our funding opportunities are currently offered from CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) and other funding sources that have complicated reporting and eligibility requirements?
- **Responsive training.** For accredited programs, how can individualized services further meet their specific needs while also benefiting others?

A Phased Approach

This Strategic Plan is aspirational by design. It stretches beyond the current capacity of state government. The following phases articulate steps Indiana Main Street can take based upon the Goals and Priorities stated above. The length of each phase may be shorter or longer than initially intended depending on our progress.

1. Program Refinement and Development

During this phase, expected to last up to one year, we will methodically evaluate each of our initiatives and identify how they can be adapted to align with our goals and priorities. Some of those adaptations will be able to be implemented in phase two. Others may need to be identified for phase three. During this phase, we will identify the best approach to fundraising, whether that is done internally or in collaboration with a nonprofit partner and we will identify the best approach for expanded programming, whether that is cultivated in-house, through partnership, or with an external provider.

2. Implementation and Fundraising

During this phase, which is expected to last 2-3 years, we will methodically and sequentially begin to implement program refinements that do not require extra capacity. And we will identify and focus on fundraising priorities. Fundraising will require dedicated effort. Ensuring the capacity to fundraise is maintained will inform the pace of implementation of refinements.

3. Expanded Council Priorities

Expanded priorities, principally new specialized technical assistance such as design services, will come in phase three or as fundraising allows. We want at least a year delivering expanded services before revisiting our strategic plan.

Leveraging Private Investment

During its December 2024 meeting, the Indiana Main Street Council expressed support that Indiana Main Street should leverage state resources to attract private investment. The work plans that will be developed because of this strategic plan will identify the scale of potential new investment. While this plan has private investment in mind, its catalytic goals can be more quickly realized with increased state-level support.



Alignment of Core Initiatives

Shown below are key steps to implementing this plan. It does not address items that are generally ongoing.

Phase 1 - Refinement

Indiana Main Street Council

- Provide feedback on how goals and priorities can shape core initiatives.
- Identify key metrics and provide feedback on tracking.
- Review key program design, changes, and implementation approach.
- Identify fundraising framework.

Community Network

- Develop refined ODAN level as a capacity building phase.
- Clarify eligibility of non-rural neighborhoods to be a part of the network.
- Determine sustainable community to service ratio.

Outreach & Celebration of Impact

- Identify timeline to introduce community awards and celebration.
- Explore external partnerships.

Grants & Investment

- Identify grantmaking priorities aligned with this plan. Determine when and how grantmaking focus can be adjusted within current grantmaking capacity.

Education & Technical Assistance

- Develop ODAN curriculum framework.
- Identify program refinements.
- Develop approach for expanded services.

Phase 2 - Implementation

- Provide feedback on implementation schedule.
- Review program implementation.
- Assist with external relationships for partnerships and fundraising.

- Implement ODAN tier updates.

- Community awards and celebration and other communications and outreach priorities.
- IMS brand refresh. New website.

- Implement updated or new grant programs.
- Identify potential partners and funders for grant programs that are not within OCRA's capacity.

- Implement ODAN curriculum.
- Implement program refinements incrementally.

Phase 3 - Expanded Priorities

- Provide feedback on implementation schedule.
- Review program implementation.
- Assist with external relationships.
- Identify timeline and process for strategic plan update.

- Opportunity to expand network if core service capacity is increased based on community to service ratio.

- Celebrate expanded services. Track and demonstrate impact of expanded services.

- Offer expanded/new grant programs as funding allows.

- Implement expanded programs or new services as funding allows.

Staffing & Budget Alignment

Phase 1 - Refinement

- This phase assumes FY25 budget and staffing levels.
- Review staffing roles and responsibilities for plan goals.
- Identify fundraising priorities.
- Develop OCRA staff training plan.

Phase 2 - Implementation

- Realignment of staff and budget resources as needed to support program refinements.
- Prioritize fundraising.
- Implement staff training plan.

Phase 3 - Expanded Priorities

- Additional staffing or service providers as needed to implement expanded programs.



Madison, Indiana Farmers Market
(Source: Main Street America)



Appendix

Plan Objective & Planning Horizon

- Further define and position Indiana Main Street within the portfolio of programs offered by OCRA.
- Identify best practices and respond to stakeholder needs.
- Establish goals and intended impact.
- Anticipate necessary resources and expertise for identified initiatives.
- Planning horizon = through 2030.

Project Timeline

- Project Needs Assessment - Spring 2024
- Over 40 Partner Interviews - March to October 2024
- In-Person Local Program Workshops - August 15 & 16 2024
- Formation of Steering Committee - September 2024
- Stakeholder Survey - Oct. 12 to Nov. 5 2024
- IMS Council Meeting - December 12, 2024
- Draft Report Development - January 2024
- IMS Council Report Written Feedback - February 2024
- Final Report Presentation to IMS Council - April 24, 2024

Stakeholder Feedback

Interviews

43 interviews were conducted starting in March 2024 with a range of stakeholder types. A list of interview participants is under acknowledgments on page 7.

Key Insights

The following key insights were shared through the interviews.

Common Feedback

Across all interviews, the following feedback was commonly shared.

- In-person is valued.
 - In-person visits to communities are valued, allowing for real-time and tailored feedback.
 - Some felt that in-person trainings are more beneficial than webinars.
- Need for better communication.
 - Opportunities for better consistency and clarity.
 - Particularly regarding application processes and status updates.
 - *Some interviewees expressed frustration with spending time on unnecessary application materials.*
 - Adopt relationship management tools.
 - Some expressed that misplaced documents lead to possibility of losing Main Street status.
 - *Evaluate channels that work for a broader set of stakeholders.*
 - Balance frequency of communication.
 - *Some felt overwhelmed by the volume of communication.*
- Desire for more and accessible training and resources.
 - Particularly about volunteer capacity building
 - Scheduled webinars should be recorded
 - Repository accessible to staff, volunteer, and board members
 - On-demand/flexible training
 - More targeted such as incremental housing development
- Difficulty with tracking and metrics.
 - Difficulty measuring volunteer hours, event success, and other key metrics
- Local leader development.
 - Desire for training for new local leaders and elected officials
- Strengthen the Indiana Main Street brand.
 - More visibility could attract resources and recognition. The network could serve as advocates for policy at all levels. Preservation-focused grants and tax credits were specifically mentioned.

Indiana Main Street Strengths

Through the course of the interviews, the following was identified as strengths of Indiana Main Street.

- Respected and valued staff.
- Support for local programs. Including assistance with volunteer development, program guidance, and training.
- Valuable resources and tools. Maestro CRM and Booms Tracker were specifically cited.
- Grant programs. Programs supporting historic preservation, placemaking, and community engagement were specifically cited.
- Connection to resources. Such as with other state agencies.

Common Trends

Interviewees were asked to identify trends that impact Main Street work.

- There is a greater emphasis on placemaking and quality of life with funders and in other state agencies.
- Indiana's communities are becoming more diverse. Regardless of background, community members need to feel included and engaged.
- Large projects are becoming more common creating tension between investment and jobs and housing and amenities.
- Need for support for small businesses.
 - Small business needs to be recognized more in broader economic development efforts.
 - Directors and local leaders are advocating for more resources and attention of small business as part of community development strategies.
- Population decline and migration. Impacts tax base and capacity of local communities to proactively reverse the trend.
- Vacant upper-story housing. Many local property owners lack resources or expertise.
- Historic church and fraternal lodge vacancies.
- Uneven retail recovery. Smaller towns facing more challenges than larger cities.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Interviewees shared ideas for potential collaborations.

- Incremental/small-scale housing development. IHCD is open to exploring what small scale housing could look like.
- Design services used to be provided in-house by OCRA. Potential to expand relationship with Ball State University if pilot was to be formalized and funded.
- Placemaking. Interagency collaboration and coordination on placemaking initiatives. There are several related and potentially overlapping programs.
- Culture/arts. Main Streets are de facto arts agencies in some communities. Tourism and arts agencies are both interested in expanding cultural experiences in small towns.
- Regional network integration. Some agencies do not have a regional presence. Others have regional footprints with differing boundaries.
- Technical assistance. Some partners have technical assistance programs that could be expanded to benefit Main Street organizations.

Other Feedback

- Need to increase funding for historic preservation grants and affordable housing in downtown areas.
- Opportunity to improve partnerships and break down silos especially amongst state agencies. Annual coordination event suggested. Previous community development working group could be revived.



Stakeholder Feedback (continued)

Local Program Leadership Workshops

Two workshops, one in Wabash and another in Bedford were held on August 15, 2024 and August 16, 2024 respectively. Local program leaders, board, volunteers, and staff were invited to attend. Each session was unique based on the differing experiences of the attendees. Wabash had a higher proportion of tenured program representation. Bedford had more representatives from newer programs.

Workshop Agenda:

- Individual Exercise: SWOT of local programs
- Group Exercise: SWOT of Indiana Main Street
- "In 10 Years" vision exercise
- Brainstorm Questions

Local Program SWOT Analysis

Attendees were asked to reflect on their own local programs. Programs have differing strengths and needs. The following summarizes key themes from those conversations.

Wabash workshop local program SWOT, summarized and edited for clarity:

Strengths:

- Strong partnerships with government, businesses, and community groups
- Dedicated volunteers and engaged board members
- Access to state and national incentives for revitalization
- Well-preserved historic downtowns and public gathering spaces
- Supportive local businesses and community-driven initiatives
- Active events and programs that foster engagement and growth
- Social media and marketing efforts that enhance visibility
- Strong sense of community identity and collaboration

Opportunities:

- Increased collaboration and networking opportunities
- Public education on revitalization and historic preservation
- Access to grants for placemaking, preservation, and business growth
- Expanding small business sector and local investment potential
- University connections and available real estate for development
- Growing population; improving quality of life
- Downtown revitalization initiatives and increased community engagement
- Potential for increased volunteer involvement and partnerships
- Enhanced outreach through social media and marketing efforts

Weaknesses:

- Limited volunteer capacity and leadership engagement
- Difficulty securing diverse and sustainable funding sources
- Vacant and underutilized downtown storefronts
- Resistance or lack of support from property and business owners
- Communication gaps and disengagement from some local government entities
- Volunteer fatigue and challenges in recruiting new members
- Limited staffing and organizational resources
- Lack of historic preservation ordinances and business incentives

Threats:

- Volunteer burnout and declining participation rates
- Economic instability, funding shortages, and political challenges
- Decreasing population and reduced foot traffic for businesses
- Lack of strategic planning and unified vision for development
- High rents and property control by a small number of owners
- Business closures and resistance to change within some communities
- Negative community perceptions and lack of public engagement

Bedford workshop local program SWOT, summarized and edited for clarity:

Strengths:

- A historic and beautiful downtown with revitalization potential
- Ownership of property
- Strong grant-writing capabilities
- A committed core group of leaders, including young and engaged individuals
- Strong community partnerships and collaboration among multiple organizations
- Good relationships with elected officials and town leadership
- Community pride, motivation, and successful event programming
- Recent progress in revitalization, positioning the organization for further success

Opportunities:

- Potential for building expansion and revitalization efforts
- Many empty storefronts available for redevelopment
- Growth in downtown and new business openings
- Grant opportunities and small revolving loan funds
- Establishing a consistent annual fundraising campaign
- Developing diversified funding sources and new fundraising initiatives

Weaknesses:

- Need for more volunteers and administrative staff
- Challenges in maintaining board engagement and implementing ideas
- Sense of competition with other communities
- Lack of buy-in from town government
- Lack of a central gathering space or downtown anchor
- Parking limitations and need for economic vitality programming

Threats:

- Volunteer burnout and staff turnover
- Dependence on inconsistent or insufficient funding
- Limited financial support from the town government
- Challenges posed by the downtown's location near a major highway
- Resistance to change and lingering mindset of "we've tried this before"

Stakeholder Feedback (continued)

Local Program Leadership Workshops (continued)

Indiana Main Street SWOT Analysis

Attendees were asked to reflect on Indiana Main Street. The following summarizes key themes from those conversations.

Wabash workshop IMS SWOT, summarized and edited for clarity:

Strengths:

- Provides structure, accreditation, and a clear framework for communities to follow
- Strong staff support, training opportunities, and access to national resources
- Encourages networking and collaboration among Main Street communities
- Offers research, funding connections, and advocacy at state and federal levels
- Regular communication through newsletters, webinars, and social media groups
- Provides recognition and credibility for participating communities
- Strong partnerships with OCRA, National Main Street, and other key organizations
- Helps communities with strategic planning, status accountability, and technical assistance
- Facilitates inspiration and knowledge-sharing through success stories and best practices

Opportunities:

- Expand funding resources and improve access to grant opportunities
- Strengthen connections between new and established Main Street programs
- Increase in-person events, hands-on training, and networking opportunities
- Develop a centralized database for funding and grant writing education
- Advocate for communities of all sizes at the state and national levels
- Support economic development through tourism, housing initiatives, and business growth
- Enhance strategic planning efforts to help communities thrive long-term
- Build greater partnerships with state and national organizations to increase impact

Weaknesses:

- Limited technical assistance and staffing constraints
- Need for more in-person visits and tailored support for all program levels
- Inconsistent skill, dedication, and longevity of Community Liaisons (CLs)
- Lack of clarity in disseminating digital resources and centralizing information
- Insufficient advocacy at the county level and limited state funding
- Reporting requirements can be labor-intensive and burdensome
- Website functionality and access to template policies need improvement
- Limited support for historic preservation initiatives
- High turnover within IMS staff and inconsistent funding for local programs
- State conference could have a stronger focus on Main Street topics

Threats:

- Political dependence, particularly tied to the Lieutenant Governor's office
- Regionalization of state funding, making access more challenging for small towns
- Staff burnout and turnover, leading to instability for communities relying on IMS
- State elections and changes in leadership could impact funding and priorities
- Limited awareness and understanding of IMS among elected officials
- Economic downturns and funding fluctuations pose risks to sustainability
- Challenges in meeting program requirements, particularly for those not yet accepted into IMS

Bedford workshop IMS SWOT, summarized and edited for clarity:

Strengths:

- Renewed interest and engagement in Main Street participation
- Credibility and established reputation of the IMS program
- Strong communication channels, including weekly emails and resource toolkits
- Community Exchange Program fostering collaboration and shared learning
- Quick and responsive support from IMS staff, including face-to-face visits
- Networking opportunities through events and exchanges

Weaknesses:

- Need for better training on Maestro Community Manager for volunteers
- Need more structured education on diversity, inclusion, and grant opportunities
- Support for volunteer recruitment and engagement strategies
- Clearer points of contact, including stronger liaison relationships
- Greater influence on elected officials to advocate for Main Street initiatives
- More tailored grant-writing support and guidance from liaisons
- Standardized best practice sharing between communities
- Expanded training for Main Street directors, including a structured handbook and monthly learning opportunities

Opportunities:

- Increased access to grants and funding opportunities
- Enhanced networking and collaboration among organizations and communities
- Support for businesses in financial structuring and resource access
- Indiana to host national Main Street Now conference
- More structured pathways for communities to advance within IMS levels
- Diversity and inclusion
- Education for affiliate communities
- Greater collaboration between IMS, local programs, and state agencies
- Sharing success stories with actionable insights and connections
- Expanded platforms for idea-sharing and peer networking
- Hosting more collaborative roundtable discussions

Threats:

- Sustainability concerns for locally owned and financed businesses
- Limited funding availability and competition for revitalization funds
- Economic factors such as rising interest rates impacting business growth
- Low brand awareness and lack of engagement from some communities
- Political changes and elections affecting program priorities
- Inconsistent advocacy from IMS to local government officials
- Burdensome reporting requirements for participating communities

Stakeholder Feedback (continued)

Local Program Leadership Workshops (continued)

In 10 Years, Vision Exercise

Write a headline. What do you want to read in the newspaper about Indiana Main Street in 10 years?

Wabash workshop:

- Lilly's collaboration with Main Street creates amazing economic growth in downtowns
- Rural Indiana Main Streets Thriving
- Due to IMS, Small communities are thriving and have improved quality of life
- Indiana Main Street Creates "X" millions of dollars with local impact (via volunteer time, grants, promotions, etc.)
- Monumental Main Street milestones: reflecting on the programs successes
- The Indiana Main Street program has been credited for being the most impactful driver in rural communities
- Indiana Main Street was a catalyst of unprecedented quality of place investments across the state.
- IMS recognized for its network of 92 regional offices
- Indiana Main Street a national model for best practices to thriving communities
- Indiana Main Street well endowed
- Indiana Main Street continues to help grow our communities by supporting Main Streets
- An article explaining the impact of Main Street organizations for all communities and all members (people) in that community.
- Indiana Main Street continues to empower small, rural communities.
- Indiana Main Street districts combine as the top contributor to the state GDP
- Indiana Main Street Program projects monumental growth
- Indiana Main Street exceeds expectations in the revitalization of Main Streets

Bedford Workshop:

- IMS successfully underwrites MS organizations in all 92 counties!
- IMS hosts national convention generating \$3 million toward state economy
- IMS recognized nationally for overall beautification of the state
- IMS receives \$10m grant from Eli Lilly
- IMS celebrates being able to provide all accredited Indiana Main Streets with \$25,000 over two years to assist with revitalization and growth
- IMS celebrates 5 years as largest economic development organization in the state
- IMS: Revitalization team/crew in place to restore historic Indiana
- IMS: In the past 10 years, IMS was instrumental in the growth of small Main Street communities
- IMS celebrates 10 years of economic growth and local business empowerment

Key Themes from Vision Exercises:

- Economic Growth & Investment – IMS driving major economic impact, increasing GDP contributions, and securing substantial funding for revitalization.
- Thriving Rural Communities – Small towns benefiting from IMS initiatives, improving quality of life and fostering sustainable development.
- National Recognition & Leadership – IMS becoming a model for best practices, earning national acclaim, and hosting major events.
- Expanded Reach & Resources – IMS supporting all 92 counties, growing its network, and

providing direct funding to Main Street programs.

- Historic Preservation & Beautification – Strengthening restoration efforts, enhancing downtown aesthetics, and preserving Indiana's heritage.
- Collaboration & Partnerships – Stronger alliances with organizations like Eli Lilly and increased investment from corporate and philanthropic sources.
- Empowered Local Communities – Increased support for small businesses, stronger volunteer networks, and greater community engagement in revitalization efforts.

“Propelling” Question Brainstorm

In 15-20-minute small group discussions, the following questions were considered. The questions were based on themes that emerged previously from interviews as well as that were discussed in earlier sections of each workshop.

What would make data collection as currently designed more valuable to your local program or the network as a whole?

Wabash workshop:

- Being able to pull real estate data to identify and be an advocate for funding
- Being able to pull vacancy data
- ROI data should be spot on
- Being able to use data for tourism draw
- Data will impact us financially

Bedford Workshop:

- Pre-made surveys that can be customized
- Process on how to collect data from building owners --> how to stress that we need to know
- How it can be less time sensitive
- Can it be once a month and then quarterly updates, or are there known ways to track?
- Maestro training as it is relevant to us
- Best practices of tracking collaborative discussion
- Reporting is daunting, do other Main Streets feel this way?
- Knowing the point of the data being tracked, what is the end result or goal of the data being collected?

If in-person visits were more frequent to your community, how would you imagine getting the most value out of those visits?

Wabash workshop:

- Having staff familiar with your community
- Share success and communicate needs (more data for IMS)
- More frequent strategizing, pivoting when necessary
- More frequent visits communicate/foster professionalism to the board/local government
- Strengthen the voice of the individual community at the state level
- More opportunity for open dialogue, not rushed
- Systematic education, rather than sporadic
- Accelerated initiative completion

Bedford Workshop:

- City/town council to discuss Main Streets role for funding
- 1-on-1 with director for new communities
- Board training
- Don't require 70% board attendance during the work day or allow committee members to fill the spots

If you were starting from scratch, how would you design IMS's communication and resource sharing efforts?

Wabash workshop:

- Easy way (forward facing) method of tracking volunteer goals
- User friendly mobile app (push notifications, volunteer tracking, event calendar, easy communication access, volunteer opportunities)
- Quarterly check-ins (on progress)
- Grant database
- Access to representative for government affairs
- Utilize AI: Assistance with property form completion, property history

Bedford Workshop:

- Not discussed in Bedford workshop.

Stakeholder Feedback (continued)

How do we leverage the knowledge and expertise of local programs to benefit others?

Wabash workshop:

- Knowledge Hub
- Personal Community Exchanges w/ key leaders
- Convos while travel = gold
- tell the story / narrative authorship
- Justify Existence / ROI
- Clarify and communicate purpose
- Questions/Queries/FAQ's
- Resource Sharing / Living List

Bedford Workshop:

- Business incubator, meeting with people interested in starting business, have local business speakers
- Social media or group for all Main Streets, share/connect/communicate
- Collaborative calendars
- Main Street Newsletter

What could be a transformative partnership opportunity for IMS?

Wabash workshop:

- A strategic partnership with Lilly
- Consistent funding
- Private entity
- Large scale initiatives (matching \$ for MS organizations, endowment opportunities)
- Like-minded missions (Hoosiers, historic, community)

Bedford Workshop:

- IMS a line item on state budget, local municipalities contribute from their budget
- Collaborative partnership with Lilly at IMS level

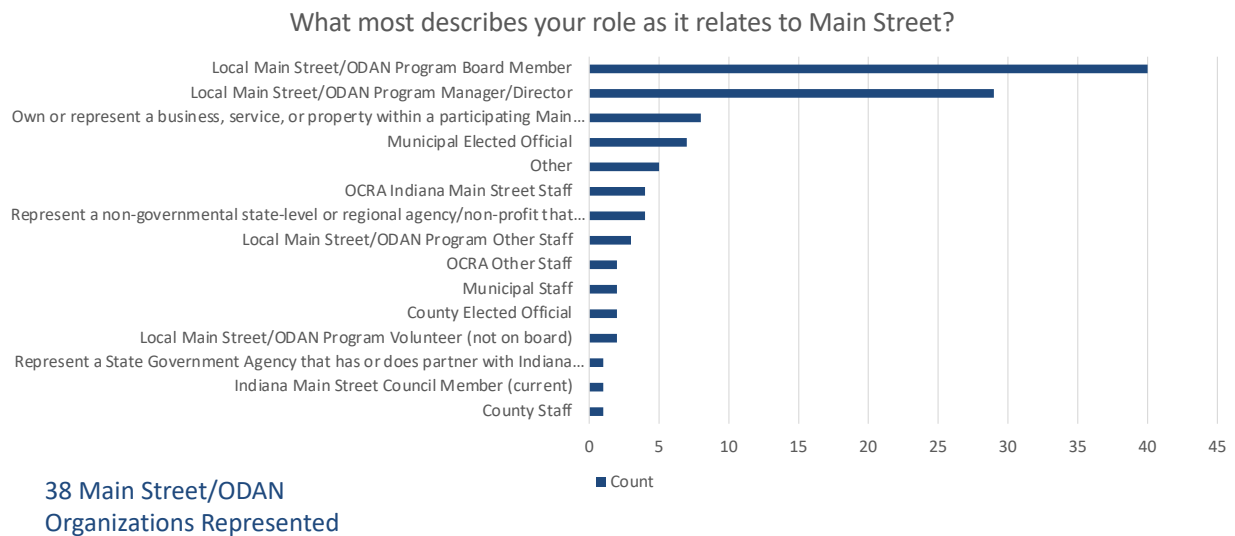


Survey Responses

113 responses were received for a survey was distributed on October 4, 2024, to IMS’s Community Network including staff, board, and local officials and partners. State-level stakeholders were also encouraged to participate.

What most describes your role as it relates to Main Street?

SURVEY RESULTS – RESPONDENT TYPES



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Do you have a participating Main Street/ODAN organization in your city/county?

This question was shown to county and municipal staff and elected officials.

- 8 Yes
- 2 No

What is the name of your agency/organization/local government that you represent? If you don't know, just list the City where it is located.

This question was shown municipal, county, and state government respondents as well as state-level or regional agency respondents.

- City of Delphi
- City of Marion
- City of Terre Haute
- Spencer County
- Streets of Monticello
- Jasper County Economic Development
- City of Columbia City
- City of Huntingburg
- City of Angola
- City of Tipton
- City of Kendallville
- Community Foundation
- Jones Petrie Rafinski

Stakeholder Feedback (continued)

Survey Responses (continued)

What is the name of your local Main Street/ODAN organization?

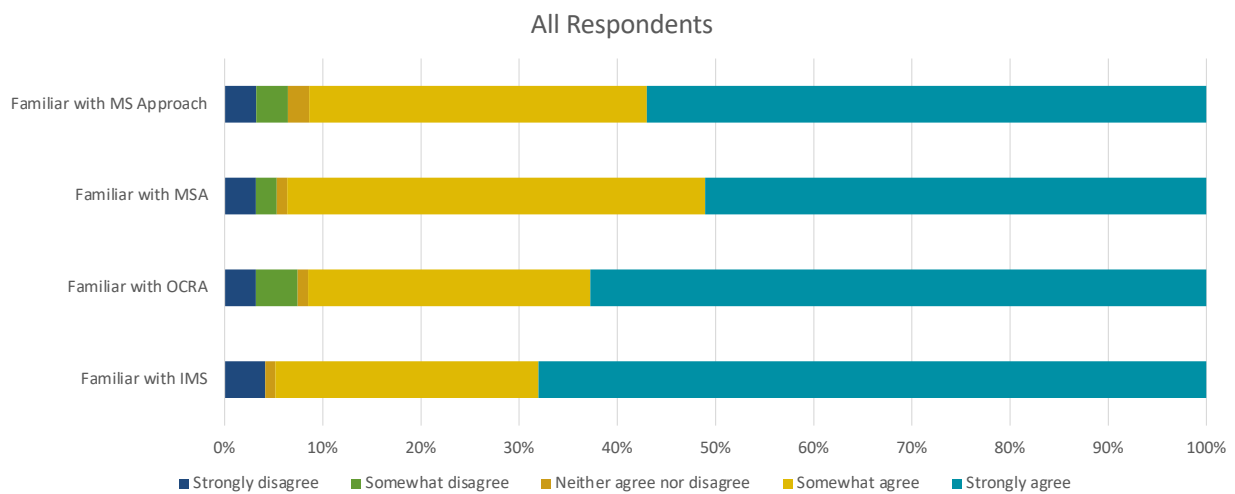
The following organizations were mentioned. Responses are standardized. Some organizations have multiple associated responses.

- Auburn Main Street
- Albion STAR Team
- Angola Main Street
- Association for a Better Rockport
- Columbia City Connect
- Community Action Leading Loogootee
- Crawfordsville Main Street
- Decatur Main Street
- Delphi Main Street
- Destination Huntingburg
- Discover Connersville
- Discover Downtown Washington
- Discover Oxford Indiana
- Downtown Wabash
- Greendale Main Street
- Greenfield Main Street
- GROW Jasonville
- Heart of Jasper
- Historic Broadway (New Haven)
- Historic Downtown Kendallville
- Historic Marion
- Historic Newburgh
- Irvington Development Organization
- Knightstown Main Street
- Logan's Landing
- Main Street Corydon
- Main Street Greencastle
- Main Street Greensburg
- Main Street Shelbyville
- Main Street Warsaw
- Mass Ave Cultural Arts District
- New Albany Main Street
- New Castle Main Street
- Noblesville Main Street
- Renew Cannelton
- The Heart of Lebanon
- The Heart of Rushville
- Tipton Main Street Association
- Winchester Main Street

Two responses that are not downtown organizations are not shown.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

SURVEY RESULTS - FAMILIARITY



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- Indiana Main Street program has the strongest familiarity across respondents.
- Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) has the least familiarity with 7 disagreeing that they are familiar.

How likely are you to recommend the Main Street model of downtown revitalization (e.g. community-driven, four-point approach, preservation-based) to a peer community, state, or region? Leave blank if you do not know.

This question was shown to all local program staff, board members, and volunteers as well as municipal or county staff or elected officials that have a participating Main Street/ODAN organization in their city/county.

- Detractor: 6 responses
- Passive: 24 responses
- Promoter: 58 responses
- Cumulative Net Promoter Score: 63

Net Promoter Score is positive for all respondent groups. It is highest for managers and board members (no detractors) and lowest for other government (non-local) respondents.

How likely are you to recommend Indiana Main Street (state agency/program) to a peer? Leave blank if you do not know.

This question was shown to all local program staff, board members, and volunteers as well as municipal or county staff or elected officials that have a participating Main Street/ODAN organization in their city/county.

- Detractor: 4 responses
- Passive: 25 responses
- Promoter: 45 responses
- Cumulative Net Promoter Score: 55

Net Promoter Score is positive for all respondent groups. It is highest for local program board members with (no detractors). It was lowest for those that do not represent local programs as board members or managers or non-local government.

How long have you worked for, volunteered for, or served on the board of your Main Street program (in years)?

This question was shown to local program staff, board members, and volunteers.

- Lowest: 0.5 years
- Highest: 18 years
- Mean: 4.7 years
- Median: 3 years
- Mode: 2 years

What about your background/interests most prepared you for your role with Main Street? Or, what excites you most about Main Street?

This question was shown to local program staff, board members, and volunteers. 60 responses are summarized below.

The survey responses highlight diverse backgrounds and motivations for involvement with Indiana Main Street. Many participants have experience as small business owners, real estate professionals, marketers, economic development specialists, or community planners. Others bring expertise in event planning, nonprofit leadership, grant programs, or financial management.

Common themes include a deep passion for community development, historic preservation, and revitalization efforts. Many are lifelong residents committed to improving their downtown areas, while some are transplants eager to contribute fresh perspectives. Excitement about fostering a strong sense of community, supporting local businesses, and driving positive change is a recurring sentiment. Volunteers and board members appreciate the opportunity to make a tangible impact, collaborate with stakeholders, and enhance quality of life in their towns.

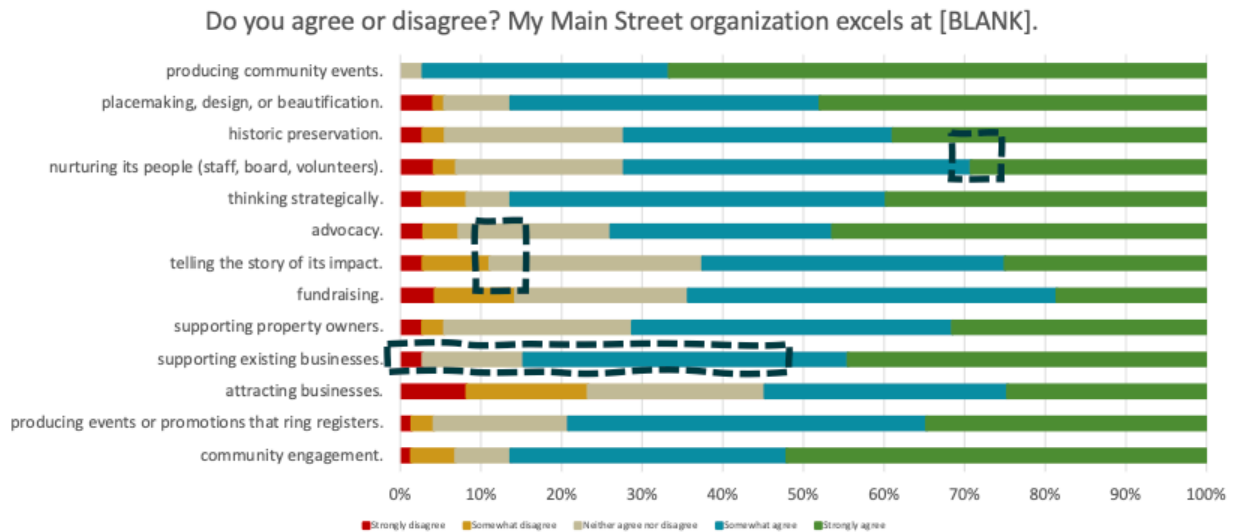
Stakeholder Feedback (continued)

Survey Responses (continued)

Do you agree or disagree? My Main Street organization excels at [BLANK].

This question was shown to all local program staff, board members, and volunteers as well as municipal or county staff or elected officials that have a participating Main Street/ODAN organization in their city/county.

SURVEY RESULTS - MY MAIN STREET EXCELS AT



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Local programs feel that they are weakest at nurturing people, advocacy, telling the story of their impact, fundraising, and attracting businesses. They feel they are strongest at producing events, placemaking, supporting existing businesses, and community engagement.

Is there anything you would like to add about your local program to help Indiana Main Street evaluate its programs and services?

This question was shown to all local program staff, board members, and volunteers as well as municipal or county staff or elected officials that have a participating Main Street/ODAN organization in their city/county. 36 responses are summarized below.

Challenges:

- Limited capacity due to volunteer-based boards and lack of staff.
- Difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers.
- Funding constraints, especially for operations and redevelopment projects.
- Need for better ways to measure and communicate Main Street's impact on local businesses.
- Struggles with local government support and property owners resistant to preservation efforts.
- Board engagement and participation in training/resources could improve.

Successes:

- Strong event planning and community engagement.
- Effective promotional efforts that have boosted visibility.
- Programs with strong town council relationships see better results.
- Many groups making steady progress despite challenges.
- Positive feedback on Indiana Main Street's training and resources.

Needs & Suggestions:

- More guidance on attracting new businesses and supporting existing ones beyond social media promotion.
- Increased funding opportunities outside of OCRA.
- More resources for volunteers to assist with staff-level work.
- Assistance in educating local government and businesses on the importance of downtown revitalization.
- Continued support for smaller programs that may feel left out due to their size and lack of a paid director.

Please briefly describe how you have or do partner with Indiana Main Street/OCRA. In what ways could your partnership be or have been more meaningful?

This question was shown to state-level or regional governmental or non-governmental agency respondents. 4 responses are summarized below.

Current Partnerships with Indiana Main Street/OCRA:

- Connecting Main Street businesses to IMS/OCRA resources.
- Collaborating on downtown planning and revitalization projects.
- Utilizing grants and funding opportunities to support Main Street initiatives.
- Engaging in training and learning programs provided by IMS/OCRA.
- Providing design assistance for Main Street revitalization efforts.

Opportunities for a More Meaningful Partnership:

- Stronger collaboration on economic development specifically for Main Street businesses.
- Greater support for businesses to invest in historic spaces instead of relying solely on nonprofits.
- Enhanced focus on aligning community needs with OCRA priorities and grant opportunities.
- More strategic partnerships to drive business growth and downtown sustainability.

In what ways do you imagine your mission and goals intersect with Indiana Main Street? Do you think your agency would be open to exploring collaboration with Indiana Main Street?

This question was shown to representatives of State Government Agencies that do not partner with Indiana Main Street.

No responses to this question.

As a collective movement of more than 100 downtown and neighborhood district organizations, what do you want the Indiana Main Street network of communities to be most known for? Please limit your answer to 1-2 sentences if possible.

Shown to all respondents. Responses summarized below are roughly categorized supporting the identity of the IMS Network and the desired reputation and impact of the network. 75 responses are summarized below.

Core Identity of Indiana Main Street Network:

- Revitalization of downtowns, preservation of historic buildings, and economic development.
- Supporting small businesses, fostering local economies, and attracting new businesses.
- Beautification efforts, placemaking, and enhancing walkability.
- Strengthening community engagement, collaboration, and partnerships.

Desired Reputation and Impact:

- Being a leader in downtown revitalization and sustainability.
- Advocating for historic preservation while embracing future growth.
- Creating vibrant, unique, and thriving communities.
- Providing education, resources, and funding to support local Main Streets.
- Showcasing Indiana's small towns as economic drivers and cultural hubs.

Stakeholder Feedback (continued)

How do you want state government to be known for supporting the collective impact of the network?

Shown to all respondents. 71 responses are summarized in the following 6 categories.

- **Funding & Grants:** Strong demand for financial assistance, including grants for historic preservation, placemaking, façade rehabilitation, downtown improvements, and general operating expenses.
- **Technical Assistance & Education:** Requests for training, resources, and guidance on best practices, business development, and regulatory processes.
- **Reducing Bureaucracy:** Desire for simplified access to funding, fewer barriers to applying for grants, and more streamlined processes.
- **Increased Visibility & Advocacy:** Encouraging the state to actively promote the impact of Indiana Main Street programs and ensure small towns are included in economic development initiatives.
- **Equal & Sustainable Support:** Need for consistent, long-term investment in both urban and rural communities, ensuring small towns are not overlooked.
- **Recognition as a Partner:** Calls for state government to be seen as an engaged leader in Main Street revitalization efforts, offering strategic support beyond funding.

Most commonly, responses to this question focused on funding and grants, and resources, training, and technical assistance.

Most respondents emphasized the need for consistent financial support, including grants for building restoration, placemaking projects, small business development, and operational funding for Main Street organizations. Many wanted baseline funding, less restrictive grant programs, and more equitable distribution of resources to rural and small-town communities.

Many responses highlighted the importance of state support beyond funding, such as offering educational resources, training programs, and clear guidance on the Main Street Approach. They wanted the state to act as a partner and advisor, helping local organizations navigate challenges, streamline processes, and foster growth.

If your Main Street program had \$100,000 additional in guaranteed unrestricted revenue for the next five years, what is one way that you might recommend using it? (2-3 sentences maximum)

This hypothetical question was shown to all local program staff, board members, and volunteers as well as municipal or county staff or elected officials that have a participating Main Street/ODAN organization in their city/county. The purpose of the question was to get respondents to think in tangible terms about sustained increases in capacity, no matter the source. 66 responses are summarized below.

Building & Property Revitalization

- Purchasing and renovating downtown buildings for retail and residential use.
- Providing façade grants and supporting historic preservation efforts.
- Offering grants to downtown businesses for interior and exterior improvements.
- Creating “white box” ready storefronts to attract new businesses.
- Addressing blight and revitalizing underutilized spaces.

Funding Staff & Operations

- Hiring a full-time or part-time director to improve Main Street initiatives.
- Supporting staff development and board training to strengthen the organization.
- Reducing volunteer burnout by ensuring paid personnel oversee projects.

Small Business Support & Economic Development

- Establishing small business grant and loan programs.
- Offering incentives for business recruitment and retention.
- Implementing incubator programs or subsidized lease initiatives for startups.

Placemaking & Beautification

- Investing in landscaping, tree planting, and green spaces.
- Adding murals, statues, lighting, signage, and benches.
- Improving sidewalks, parking, and accessibility, including ADA compliance.
- Constructing town entryway structures to drive traffic to downtown.

Marketing & Promotion

- Expanding branding, marketing, and signage efforts.
- Funding large-scale marketing campaigns, including billboards and geofencing.
- Promoting downtown events and local businesses to boost visibility.

Community Engagement & Events

- Organizing placemaking events to activate downtown spaces.
- Enhancing cultural and artistic programming, including public art initiatives.
- Supporting community outreach and local collaborations.

Sustainable Funding & Long-Term Investments

- Establishing a community revitalization or revolving loan fund.
- Investing in revenue-generating assets like rental properties or event spaces.
- Creating endowments for long-term financial sustainability.

Infrastructure & Public Amenities

- Installing public restrooms, streetlights, and improved accessibility features.
- Enhancing public transportation and parking solutions.

The most common responses focused on building and property revitalization and funding for staff and operations.

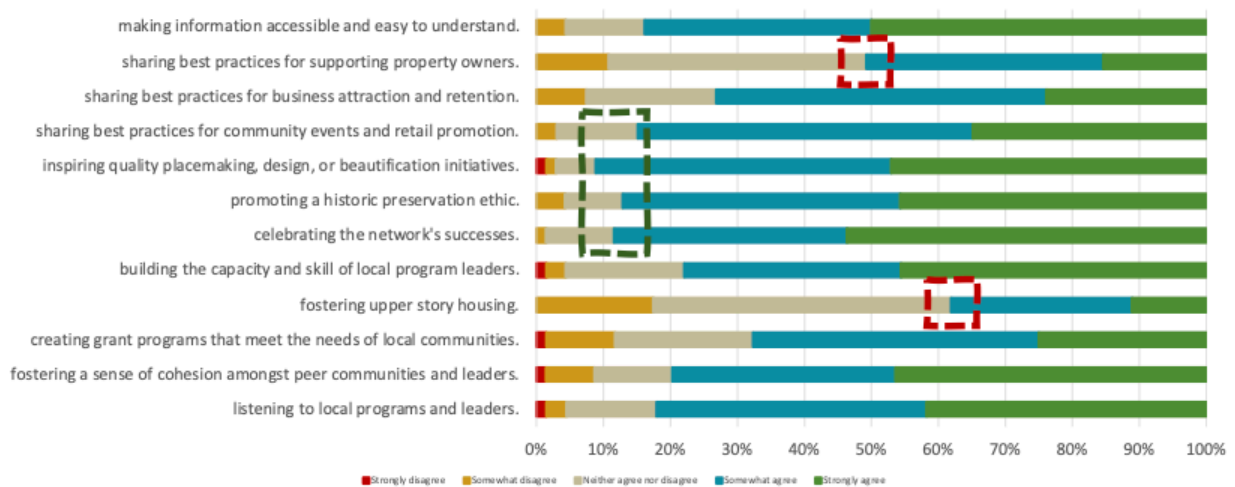
Many respondents emphasized using the funds to purchase, renovate, and improve downtown buildings for retail, residential, and business use. This included façade grants, historic preservation, blight reduction, and making spaces “white box” ready for new tenants.

A significant number of responses focused on hiring a full-time or part-time director to manage Main Street initiatives, reducing reliance on volunteers. Others suggested using the funds for staff development, board training, and ensuring long-term organizational sustainability.

Do you agree or disagree? Indiana Main Street/OCRA excels at [BLANK].

SURVEY RESULTS - IMS EXCELS AT

Do you agree or disagree? Indiana Main Street/OCRA excels at [BLANK].



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According to survey respondents, IMS most excels at support for community events and retail promotion, placemaking, design, or beautification, historic preservation, and celebrating the network’s successes. It least excels at supporting property owners and fostering upper story housing.

Stakeholder Feedback (continued)

Survey Responses (continued)

What do you think is Indiana Main Street's greatest opportunity to strengthen the network over the next five years? Do you want to clarify any answer for the statements above, especially if you stated disagreement or not excelling?

Shown to all respondents. 53 responses are summarized below.

- **Volunteerism & Staff Sustainability** – Many respondents expressed concerns about volunteer shortages and the increasing burden on staff, leading to burnout and turnover. There is a call for rethinking the Main Street model to ensure boards take more ownership rather than placing all responsibilities on directors. Suggestions include improving staff compensation and implementing best practices from staff transition training.
- **Funding & Grants** – A significant number of responses emphasized the need for more accessible and impactful funding opportunities, particularly for large-scale projects like upper-story housing, historic preservation, and placemaking. Respondents also requested unrestricted funds to accommodate diverse community needs and more regional funding models to foster collaboration rather than competition.
- **Resource Sharing & Peer Networking** – Respondents want an online platform where Main Street organizations can share templates, best practices, and grant application tips. Many also called for stronger peer networks to facilitate idea exchange, mentorship, and shared problem-solving, especially for new directors and small rural communities.
- **Community Education & Engagement** – There is a need to educate property owners, businesses, and local leaders on the value of the Main Street program. Respondents suggested more localized training, networking opportunities, and workshops to ensure accessibility for those who cannot travel. Collaboration with universities like Purdue was also mentioned as a way to leverage student-led service-learning projects for downtown revitalization.
- **Small Business & Economic Development** – Strengthening business attraction and retention efforts was another key theme. Suggestions included expanding incentives for small businesses, increasing retail diversity, and promoting micro-retail models. Respondents also want Main Street to be a stronger advocate for rural communities, ensuring funding and attention aren't overly concentrated in urban areas.
- **Strategic Improvements in Funding & Policy** – Some respondents highlighted the need for adjusting grant release timelines to avoid costly construction delays and ensuring state officials actively promote Main Street's impact to government and economic development leaders.
- **Recognition & Capacity Building** – Many want increased recognition opportunities for successful Main Street programs and support for smaller communities that struggle with reporting requirements due to a lack of staff. Some suggested reintroducing major initiatives like the Stellar Program to make a bigger regional impact.

Key Takeaway:

Indiana Main Street's greatest opportunities lie in rethinking volunteer and staff sustainability, improving funding accessibility, enhancing peer networking and resource-sharing, educating communities on Main Street's value, and advocating for rural economic development. Addressing these issues can strengthen the network and ensure long-term success.

Is there anything you would like to share that you didn't share that would be useful for Indiana Main Street's strategic planning process?

Shown to all respondents. 27 responses are summarized below.

- **Data Collection & Impact Metrics:** There is a call for a system to collect and share data on the economic and social impacts of Main Street initiatives. This would help demonstrate success and advocate more effectively for funding and support.
- **Site Visits & Personal Engagement:** Some respondents suggest more site visits by Indiana Main Street staff to observe both the successes and challenges of Main Street organizations firsthand. This could help with more tailored support.
- **Education & Training:** There is an appreciation for continued education and face-to-face time, with a request for further training opportunities. Some respondents noted that evening sessions for rural communities could increase accessibility.
- **Staffing Challenges & Financial Support:** Many pointed out the burden that paid staff requirements for accreditation place on smaller programs, with some unable to afford proper staff. There were suggestions for financial incentives or operational grants to help sustain staff and maintain accreditation.
- **Accreditation Process & Requirements:** Several responses highlighted frustrations with the requirements for accreditation, especially for smaller or volunteer-led organizations. There were requests to reconsider some standards, like the use of Maestro, which many found not user-friendly and time-consuming.
- **Grant Opportunities & Financial Support:** Respondents indicated a need for better grant access, especially for smaller organizations and those located in rural communities. Suggestions included finding ways for OCRA to distribute funds directly to organizations or allowing communities like Tipton to bypass certain eligibility restrictions.
- **Collaborative Advocacy:** There were calls for more collective efforts from local Main Streets to support advocacy at the local level and with state agencies, including local government leaders.
- **Improving Tools and Templates:** Respondents requested better templates and tools for both the Aspiring Main Street application and for data entry. Some felt current tools don't align well with what they were taught or that they are overly complex.
- **Support for Rural Communities:** Many noted the challenges faced by ultra-rural communities with populations under 20,000. These areas often struggle with financial resources and staffing, and there was a desire for more targeted support.
- **Engagement with Local Foundations & Community Partners:** Suggestions were made to encourage local foundations to invest in downtown revitalization, potentially through a development bond model or other creative financial structures. Additionally, some asked for more outreach at statewide conferences to connect with communities.
- **Historic Preservation & Best Practices:** Respondents expressed interest in learning more about best practices for saving historic buildings and enhancing historic preservation as part of the revitalization process.
- **Local Government & Financial Engagement:** There were calls for greater engagement with local elected officials, particularly around funding allocations, to ensure Main Streets are prioritized and adequately supported.

Key Takeaway:

Respondents emphasized the importance of data-driven advocacy, financial support, more flexible accreditation requirements, and better tools for managing Main Street organizations. Rural communities, in particular, need tailored support, and there is a desire for increased collaboration among local leaders to strengthen the network.

Peer Coordinating Program Best Practices

Throughout the process, several peer coordinating program best practices were referenced.

Entry-Level Program Curriculum

A number of coordinating programs offer defined curriculum for programs that are starting out. Currently, IMS does not offer a specified curriculum and a timeline for its ODAN communities.

- Tennessee Downtowns is a 2-year competitive program that includes training, site visits, regional workshops, webinars, technical assistance and an innovation project grant. Communities must complete the program to be eligible for ECD's Façade Improvement Grant program.
- Virginia Mobilizing Main Street program is a competitive 2-year program designed to assist with organizational development issues such as staff and Board roles and responsibilities, annual work plan development, fund development, volunteer engagement and management plans, non-profit organizational management, and/or urban planning to direct the design work of the organization. At the end of two years, these programs are eligible to apply for higher network tiers.

Design Services

Numerous coordinating programs offer design services. Indiana Main Street did so at one time. Kansas Main Street has an in-house architect that also serves as a community liaison. That position is responsible for conceptual design of facades, conceptual design to demonstrate feasibility of new building uses, and support with historic preservation standards. Capital stacking support is also provided. Virginia Main Street offers similar services but through an external consultant.

Responsive Technical Assistance

Washington (State) and Michigan are examples of coordinating programs that map their technical assistance resources to individualized needs of each participating program based on accreditation evaluations or progress visits. Those visits determine a portion of their technical assistance budget for outside consultants as well as when and for what purpose internal technical assistance is provided, virtually or in person. This specialization may be reserved for communities at higher tiers if a separate curriculum is available for entry-level communities.

Main Street Approach Specialization

New Mexico and other coordinating programs employ specialists by subject matter rather than region. Typically, a specialist might be assigned a portfolio of communities as a general liaison while providing more specialized technical support across the network. For some coordinating programs, these specialists are employed on staff. Others, such as New Mexico, fill some or all positions with contractors. On staff, New Mexico has both a promotions and economic development specialist. Through its contractors it is able to provide ongoing services focused on organization & capacity building, promotion & image development, creative economy and cultural planning, business and entrepreneur development, preservation and design, property redevelopment, and more.

Grants

Grant programs vary widely across the network. Typically, coordinating programs that are viewed as strongest have robust grant programs, often seen as an important carrot for participation in the network.

Iowa

- The flagship grant offered by Iowa Main Street is the Community Catalyst Program which offers grants up to \$100,000.
- Downtown Revitalization Program is open to a group of buildings or a single iconic building. Grant maximum of \$650,000.
- Other grant programs are offered in partnership with Iowa Economic Development Authority (loan guarantee program) and the Iowa State Historic Preservation Office.

Kansas

- ROOMS grants up to \$50,000 for each applicant for upper story housing development.
- HEAL (Historic Economic Asset Lifeline) grants up to \$100,000.
- Access to other opportunities such as STAR (tax revenue) bonds.

Oregon

- Revitalization Grants ranging from \$20,000 to \$400,000, backed by Oregon Lottery bonds.

OCRA's Strategic Plan Summary

OCRA's most recent strategic plan had a planning horizon of 2023-2024. The following summarizes how Indiana Main Street's current or recent activities align with goals and objectives outlined in that plan.

Strategy 1: Provide opportunities and programs focused on our people and place-based investments.

- Taking Care of Main Street (TCOMS) Grant offered in 2023.
- Stellar Pathways eligible to Main Street Communities
- OOR offered in 2022. Not directly for Main Street communities.

Strategy 2: Expand OCRA's role as a Center of Excellence.

- Opportunity to further highlight IMS and local programs to meet this goal.
- Community exchange program.
- Expanded relationship with MSA including scholarships and TA.

Strategy 3: Build capacity of rural leadership.

- Maestro used at local level for data aggregation.
- IMS networking and knowledge-sharing. Transformation Strategy implementation.
- (IMS includes some urban programs.)

Strategy 4: Support economic growth and preservation in downtown and commercial districts.

- Evolution of PreservINg Main Street program
- Planning Grants for Main Streets

Strategy 5: Facilitate strategies to address rural infrastructure access.

- No direct IMS tie-in.

IMS Council Meeting Summaries

Meeting 1 Summary

On December 12, 2024, the Indiana Main Street Council met to learn about the strategic planning process, the stakeholder input that had received, and to provide feedback to help prioritize potential new or expanded program areas.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

Synthesized from all stakeholder input. The following was presented to the Council as actionable insights.

Indiana Main Street Program Strengths

- Valued program and partner.
- Key collaborations (e.g. grants, training)
- Geographically diverse network.
- Long history with many high performing local programs.
- Grantmaking resources.
- Skilled program staff and leadership.
- Training and networking opportunities.

Vision for OCRA/IMS' Impact

- Consistent, streamlined, and accessible funding programs.
- Refined and expanded technical assistance and training.
- Champion of rural and small communities.
- Enhanced IMS brand awareness and advocacy.
- Fosters local economic development.
- Stable IMS program / long-term trust.

[Other] High-level actionable insights

- Staff roles, responsibilities, and training need to be evaluated to support strategic plan goals.
- Emerging community needs relative to housing, adaptive reuse, and entrepreneurship support.
- Peer coordinating programs offer design services and entry-level tracks.

Stakeholder Feedback Discussion

- Any shifts in Main Street program nationally? (Disaster prep, Transformation Strategies, and population shifts were discussed.)
- Need to establish a task force to more specifically identify what economic development means.
- Was any feedback received from outside the network. (No)
- IMS/we don't do a good job storytelling. How do we attach people to place?

Evaluating New/Expanded Program Areas Discussion

The council was presented with four potential new or expanded program areas as a way to help establish goals and priorities in the strategic plan. Summary below.

Housing & Property Owner Support

- Housing identified through interviews, surveys, and workshops.
- Property support and fostering upper story housing identified as a weakness in surveys.

Entrepreneurship

- 3rd lowest "strongly agree" in survey to "IMS/OCRA excels at sharing best practices for business attraction and retention."
- Survey calls for sustainable, community-centered growth.

Design Services

- Service provided by numerous peer coordinating programs.
- Cited as a tool to kick-start projects for grant funding or to inspire property owners on possibilities.

Capacity Building & Organizational Development

- Survey states organizations identify fundraising, telling the story of impact, and nurturing people as weaknesses.
- Workshops commonly identified organizational development themes.

What stood out?

- Housing and entrepreneurship.
 - Example of need: Muncie.
 - How many people are needed downtown?
 - Love to see more housing and property owner support and capacity building.
 - We don't have to do it alone. SBDC could help with entrepreneurship.
 - Need to educate the public on why to live downtown.
- Would love to hire an architect. (Ball State only has so much capacity.)
- Need for board training. Consider partnership with Indiana Philanthropy Alliance.

Concerns:

- Capacity building in communities. High turnover. A really good Main Street centers around a good Executive Director. IMS provides this support but to a degree.
- What is the capacity of IMS to take on entrepreneurship and housing? If cities are involved, stronger capacity.
- Uncertainty of change in administration.

What focus areas would be most impactful?

- Discussion focused on housing, design, and capacity building.
- Discussion of how communities have successfully leveraged planning/design work to propel investment and 2nd floor uses. Drawings are very useful.
- Could do workshops centered on design.
- Housing could be supported through grant opportunities and training.
- ED's need capacity building in order to take on housing and entrepreneurship. Need expertise.

Strategies to expand IMS's core competencies:

- State level policies affect housing development.
- Discussion on how IMS can receive external money. Potential nonprofit companion group. Consensus on openness to exploring fundraising to support IMS capacity.
- Discussion on whether staff can be realigned to support priorities.
- Discussion on if services are expanded within existing capacity would the number of communities supported need to decrease.
- Phase 1, develop ODAN curriculum. Consider ODAN as not an indefinite tier.

Key Insights

Main Street America felt that the most actionable insights from the meeting were as follows:

1. Openness to fundraise externally. Potential companion organization.
 - This does not preclude further investment from the state budgeting process.
2. Overall interest in expanding specialty areas such as design and capital stacking within IMS either on staff or through consultants.
3. Consider how all proposed focus areas can be incorporated into strategic plan.

IMS Council Meeting Summaries (continued)

Meeting 2 Summary

The Indiana Main Street Council is scheduled to meet on May 28, 2025 to review this final strategic plan draft. This section will be updated (along with incorporating feedback throughout) after that meeting.



Downtown Angola (Source: Visit Indiana)