

Fundraising Planning for Main Street Organizations

Developing a comprehensive fundraising strategy should be led by the Board of Directors and include—board members, committee volunteers, project task force members, and staff—each person sharing in the implementation of the plan. It is not just the job of the board to fundraising and it is not just the job of the executive director/staff to fundraise. Everyone must play an active role in fundraising. Here are some examples of income generators for Main Street organizations and planning recommendations.

Municipal Contributions

1. What is the timetable needed for securing continued funding from the city/town? Has Main Street made regular appearances at Council meetings – not just to ask for money?
2. Review materials that need to be presented. Has the Main Street program been in good communication with municipal officials throughout the year? Do they understand that Main Street is providing support as an economic development organization, not a charitable organization?
3. What is the “Value” you bring to the City? Strengthen your pitch. Share the “Benefits of Main Street” list so the municipality understands that the city/town is the greatest benefactor of a successful downtown.
4. If the city/town has remained at the same funding level for more than 3-years, consider asking for an increase. Municipalities should not be weaned from investing in downtown or the Main Street program.
5. Should the community develop a Business Improvement District (BID)? Understand that this mechanism should not replace city funding, since it comes from the property owners.

6. Track the in-kind support from the City and acknowledge their financial investment made in downtown.
7. Plan recognition of the municipal contribution (especially volunteers from the City and in-kind support).
8. Share other city contributions for other Main Street programs, in state.
9. Consider developing an MOU with the city as to the use of their funding so Main Street can track and provide R.O.I (outcome of projects, leveraging of volunteer time with their hours, etc.) specifically to their investment in Main Street.

Annual Pledge or Investment Drive

The types of investors you might approach to invest in your organization include:

- **Downtown Businesses** (*retail, service, and professional businesses*)
- **Businesses Outside of the Downtown but in the city** (*industrial, retail, service, professional*)
- **Residents/Friends of Main Street** (*giving levels and local philanthropists*)
- **Civic Organizations**
- **Business located outside of downtown or the city, but that make money from downtown businesses** (*trash haulers, restaurant wholesalers, uniform and carpet runner cleaners, beverage suppliers, landscapers, contractors, office supply providers, etc.*)

1. Be sure 100% of the Board has contributed/invested in Main Street. Set the goal for the total annual pledge drive (renewals and new). With renewals, after three years, ask for an increase to help cover cost

increases. What percentage of your budget will come from the annual pledge drive?

2. Develop target list of new contributors/investors. Brainstorm those businesses not in Downtown, but making money in Downtown (trash haulers, food suppliers, food wholesalers). Make peer-to-peer contacts. Ask for multi-year pledges. Stand out on “Main Street” and make a list of commercial vehicles making deliveries in downtown or ask businesses who their suppliers are.
3. Select a desired contribution for each new contributor. Provide average investments from similar businesses.
4. Review all solicitation materials. Personalize them.
5. Plan for person-to-person follow-ups with business contacts.
6. With residential solicitations, “Friends of Downtown”, make it worth Main Street’s effort and have a minimum contribution at \$25 or \$35 per year. Offer an incentive like, pledge \$20 more this year and get a Main Street coffee mug.
7. What is the timetable for this drive to occur? Make sure it fits within the other funding efforts of the organization and does not conflict with other drives in the community.
8. Plan recognition of every contribution.
9. Be sure to bill annually and on time.
10. Consider the option of allowing quarterly payments for larger pledges.
Consider asking “Friends of Downtown” to give more than once a year. At Valentine’s Day for example, send a note that says if you love downtown, consider an additional gift. At Thanksgiving, send a note that says if you are

thankful for all that has improved in downtown, consider making another small donation/investment.

Grants

2. Main Street programs have been successful getting grants from some sources, such as the state economic development agency, charitable foundations, state arts councils, state tourism, etc. Grants are more often project related and don't often support administrative operations.
3. Federal funds may be available from D.O.T. Transportation Enhancement Funds, Rural Development (USDA), EDA, AARP, corporate grant programs, etc. Most of these funds are also project related but sometimes allow for a portion of the funding to be used for admin expenses.
4. Develop an annual timeline for grant application deadlines. Fit in work plan.
5. Find someone skilled in writing grant applications.
6. Follow Main Street America on social media to stay informed about grants like American Express grants or Partners in Preservation, Grills Grants, HartBeat grants, etc.

Merchandise Sales

2. If the location of the Main Street office provides a storefront display window, selling merchandise sales can be more successful.
3. Identify all items that the program will make money on for the organization. This may include annual holiday ornaments, cookbooks, branded clothing, city Monopoly games, etc. for sale.
4. If expanding into this area for funds, consider the initial investment by the program to acquire the goods. Return on merchandise sales is not immediate.
5. Merchandise for special events – sponsors may be found. Do not solicit sponsors for this during your annual pledge drive, when you may be asking for this business to contribute.

6. Keep in mind there is an investment in buying merchandise and merchandise can also be used as a PR tool.
7. Calendar raffles fall in this category too. (Crestview FL's gun raffle, Dogs of Downtown, etc.)

Special Events or Special Projects Fundraising

1. Coordinate the entire year's calendar for sponsorship. Who will be contacted and what amount will they be asked to pay for sponsorship? Keep in mind that money raised during the annual pledge drive comes from the "charitable" side and money to sponsor events comes from a "marketing" pot of money.
2. Strive to have events break even or make money for the organization. There are many activities that people are willing to pay for and it's not Main Street's job to provide free events to the community – because they are not free to put on.
3. Have each committee, with special projects or special events, note the businesses they would like to solicit as sponsors. Make sure there is a plan so that businesses know what kind of recognition they will receive.
4. Build an administrative fee into all sponsorships. Many businesses have indicated they no longer want to support the administrative operation of Main Street programs but will sponsor projects where their name is included. For example, if a business is asked to sponsor Main Street's newsletter, their fee should not just cover the amount of postage and printing. Add a fee that will include staff time to complete this project. Building in an administrative fee to every project will help close the gap on the administrative budget.
5. Charge admission to events held on the street (public spaces). Set up barricades with volunteers asking if people would like to make a \$2-\$5 donation to support the festival. Provide wristbands to those that do. Partner with a local civic organization to do this and split the proceeds.

6. Review each event or projects as soon as it is complete and access new ways to increase sponsorships and fundraising for the following year.
7. Try to have all special events paid for by sponsors before the event even happens. This assures that money will not be lost if the event is rained out.
8. Offer special perks for sponsors, VIP parking, bathroom facilities, T-shirts for their employees, masters of ceremony or award presentations and photo-ops. To build your volunteer base, ask sponsors to also provide volunteers on the day of the event (this is as valuable as money for the event).
9. Shirt-Stakes – selling festival T-shirts with a raffle ticket attached. Chance to win \$1,000-\$2,000 by buying a T-shirt.
10. If your festivals and events are well-loved, successful events, consider having a "Friends of the Festival" donor category. For example, the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough offers the following Friends of the Festival: Want the VIP experience? Become a Friend of the Festival and receive special benefits that will make your next Festival visit extra enjoyable! Benefits include 2 full-weekend Festival tickets; 2 tickets to the Yarnspinners' Party at the Festival; access to the Partners Retreat with a place to rest, complimentary refreshments and a private restroom; acknowledgement in the Festival's souvenir program. There are multiple levels available.

Fundraising Events

Fundraising Events are not special events that make money. Instead these activities' primary purpose is to raise money for the organization or a special project. When people attend or participate, they know that the money they are spending on tickets, admission, or in buying goods is raising money for revitalization. There are hundreds of fundraising events that have worked in communities. From selling bricks to \$100 per ticket raffles. Fundraising events will only be successful if

adequate time is allowed for the planning and implementation, usually 6-12 months is needed. Setting a goal for the fundraiser will guide the planning. Some fundraising events include:

- Live silent auction/ dinner/wine tasting events (many components for funds) held during a Local Celebrity Roast, Taste of _____ events, Men’s Beauty Pageants
- 50/50 or Heads and Tails raffles
- Farmer’s Dinner or dinner on the street with locally sourced foods and drinks
- Historic Home, Garden and Cemetery Tours
- Sweet Treats on Main Street
- Street Art Auction: cows, pigs, guitars, chair, birdhouses, wolves, etc.
- Game Shows – Trivia “So you think you know _____ (your city), Gong Show, the Not-so-Newlywed Game, etc.
- Dancing with the Stars, Local American Idol competitions
- No Bake, Bake Sale (instead of baking something for a bake sale, just send us the money you would have spend making something and buying something)
- Calendar Raffles
- Rubber Duck, Turtle, Fish, or Pumpkin floats (raffle tickets)
- Pick a Purse (gift certificates inside)
- Wine Walks
- Craft Brew Festivals
- Etc., Etc., Etc.



Credit: Main Street America