

Main Street: Investing in Washington's Communities

Main Street is a robust economic development tool that capitalizes on our unique assets and provides a framework for communities to build local resiliency.

In Washington State, the Main Street movement is fueled by the Washington State Main Street Program (WSMSP), a statewide program of the Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation (DAHP). This program provides capacity building services and technical assistance to 72 towns across the state — ranging from Vancouver to Colville, Dayton to Renton. These local Main Street organizations work tirelessly to support small businesses, create resources and partnerships, and build community.

A Smart Investment

The power of Main Street in Washington State is irrefutable. Not only is Main Street **the most effective economic recovery tool our communities have**, but it also has a **proven positive return on investment**. A recent Impact Study demonstrates that for every \$1 the state has invested in the program, a return of \$1.58 is generated in state revenues and showcasing how Main Street makes economic, fiscal, and social sense as a powerful tool and investment strategy.

Meeting Demands

The WSMSP already supports a network of **over 70 communities** across the state in implementing a comprehensive economic development strategy built around a community's unique assets and sense of place. With growing interest in Main Street across the state, **WSMSP has experienced consistently increasing demand for services**. Our communities need continual care and access to resources and support to withstand and even thrive within uncertainty.

Sustained Funding for Main Street

In the 2021-23 budget, the Legislature provided DAHP a budget proviso of \$700,000 in additional Main Street program funding to increase program staff and enhance the services each of the participating communities receives.

The WSMSP was able to double its community services and outreach, thanks to this increase. There are currently four full-time staff dedicated to a very large network, with Washington still falling behind Main Street America's national standard of one state staff to every ten local communities (standard is 1:10; WSMSP is at 1:18).

To sustain continued recovery and resiliency on Main Street and support the increasing number of communities and small businesses served, **the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation strongly supports Governor Inslee's budget which includes continuing present funding levels for the Washington State Main Street Program for the 2023-25 biennium through an increase in \$700,000 over current maintenance level funding to maintain**

"What we've... received from WSMSP has been consistently positive and encouraging. Not once have we ever heard from staff that we are too small or too far gone or too rural. Having them rally and cheer us on has been invaluable!" — LaCrosse Community Pride

The Resiliency of Main Street Businesses

Study released in 2022 with data collected from 36 designated Washington Main Street Communities between 2020-2021



This study confirms that the type of economic development that Main Street organizations practice every day – a trust-based, nimble, and responsive approach – is critical to our communities in good times and in bad.

Resiliency isn't just about the response in the wake of a crisis, but about the strong baseline of community connections that Main Street works to build every day. Investing in WSMSP is a key strategy for ensuring resiliency in communities across the state.

- Main Street businesses rebounded from the pandemic at a faster rate than business in other areas without Main Street organizations.
- By fall 2021, consumer spending in Main Street districts surged significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. This long-range resiliency outpaces similar districts without a Main Street organization.
- By October 2021, spending at restaurants exceeded pre-pandemic levels by 19% in Main Street districts, which is 7% better than in similar districts without Main Street organizations. Meanwhile, the statewide restaurant spending remained 2% below pre-pandemic levels.
- The share of local customer spending nearly doubled in May 2020 compared to before the pandemic. And that high level of local spending did not trickle off after the initial emergency of 2020. The community loyalty and pride that Main Streets have nurtured over the years has helped keep their businesses' doors open.
- Main Street organizations provided critical direct technical assistance to over 1,000 businesses, direct financial resources to over 700, and touched over 3,500 small businesses through education and information sharing. They also activated over 340,000 square feet of public space to benefit small businesses.