



Tennessee Downtowns is an affiliate program of:



The Tennessee Main Street Program

A Coordinating Partner of the National Main Street Center

Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development

312 Rosa L. Parks Avenue, 27th Floor
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

For more information, contact Kim Parks, Tennessee Main Street Director

615.339-1506 or Kim.Parks@tn.gov

The Tennessee Downtowns Program

Think about the heart of your community, the traditional business district where it all got started many years ago. It is easy to recognize that this place is special and unique. The buildings, the stories, the people...all these elements combine to form a unique place rich with character that can be found nowhere else in the world. We often refer to this place as “main street” or “downtown”. It is the representative physical heart of your community.

When the **Tennessee Downtowns** program talks about “main street,” we are referring to Main Street America™, the nationally recognized downtown revitalization movement started several decades ago by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This movement is now led by the **National Main Street Center** and is comprised of over 2,000 communities and neighborhoods across America. Here in Tennessee, 46 communities have earned official designation as a **Tennessee Main Street** community, 14 of those are Tennessee Downtown alumni communities. What that means is they have met the criteria set forth by both the National Main Street Center and the Tennessee Main Street program for managing effective downtown revitalization programs. They are busy all year working to create better downtowns for their communities to enhance quality of life, increase hometown pride, stimulate the local economy, create distinctive experiences, and reconnect with their unique heritage and sense of place.

Tennessee Main Street Designated Communities

Athens * Bolivar * Bristol * Brownsville * Centerville * Cleveland * Clifton Clinton *
Collierville * Columbia * Cookeville * Covington * Dayton * Dyersburg * Elizabethton *
Etowah * Fayetteville * Franklin * Gallatin * Greeneville * Halls * Jackson * Johnson City *
Jonesborough * Kingsport * Lawrenceburg * Lebanon * Lewisburg * Livingston *
Madisonville * Maryville * McKenzie * McMinnville * Morristown * Mount Pleasant *
Murfreesboro * Paris * Pulaski * Ripley * Rogersville * Savannah * Sevierville *
Sweetwater * Tiptonville * Union City * Winchester

Earning designation as a Tennessee Main Street community requires a lot of preparation, hard work, and financial commitment and typically happens after laying extensive groundwork. All great downtown revitalization efforts must start somewhere and that’s where the Tennessee Downtowns program comes in.

Tennessee Downtowns is an affiliate program of Tennessee Main Street and is designed to help communities fully understand what it takes to embark on a comprehensive revitalization effort for their downtown based upon the proven National Main Street Center’s Four-Point Approach™. This 24-month program coaches selected downtowns and their steering committees through the steps of launching a successful and sustainable downtown revitalization effort. *Tennessee Downtowns can be a great path to becoming a designated Tennessee Main Street community, but it is not required after completing the program and participating does not automatically earn Tennessee Main Street designation.*

Eligibility

Space in the Tennessee Downtowns program is limited and highly competitive. To participate in Tennessee Downtowns, communities must have not previously participated in the program and:

- Be a city/town located in a county that is an active participant in the ThreeStar program.
- Designate a program area (revitalization district) focused on a traditional commercial district. The district should feature a pedestrian scale and orientation that is compact in size and has a regular pattern of sidewalks that can be comfortably walked. It should also have a critical mass of buildings, at least 2/3 of which are commercial in nature and fifty-years old, and businesses which form the foundation for revitalization efforts. This is usually the historic downtown core of the town.
- Establish a dedicated five-member volunteer “Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee” of community leaders who will participate for the length of the program. This will involve allocating time for on-site meetings and training sessions.
- Have a designated non-profit or local government organization that will house the steering committee and serve as a conduit for the associated grant. This organization must have the financial resources to spend \$15,000 on a project which will be reimbursed through the Tennessee Downtowns program upon completion.
- Illustrate interest and support from local government, chambers of commerce, merchant organizations, business and property owners within the district, and others who recognize the importance of downtown to their community and are willing to learn along with the steering committee and be involved where needed.
- Adopt a resolution by the city government to participate in the program.
- Clearly demonstrate community need for downtown revitalization assistance.

How to Apply

Eight to ten communities will be selected each round to participate in the 24-month Tennessee Downtowns program. The selection of communities will take place through a competitive application process. The application will be available online.

What to Expect if Selected

Communities selected to participate in Tennessee Downtowns will be involved in a 24-month process of learning about downtown revitalization based upon the National Main Street Center's Four Point Approach™, a successful strategy proven to work in communities of varying sizes and with different levels of resources. You can learn more about the Main Street Approach™ by visiting www.mainstreet.org

The **first 12 months** of the Tennessee Downtowns program will focus on education, building resources, and organization. The **second 12 months** will focus on a community project that will be funded by a \$15,000 reimbursable grant from TNECD. The following activities and resources are part of the program.



Getting Started Site Visit	Each community will receive an on-site half-day visit by Tennessee Main Street staff. They will meet with the steering committee and tour the downtown. The steering committee will receive a written Preliminary Assessment following the visit.
Four Points™ Workshop	All steering committees will assemble for a full-day workshop presented by National Main Street Center staff. This workshop will serve as an introduction to the Four Point Approach™. This approach focuses on four key aspects of successful revitalization programs: Design, Economic Restructuring, Organization, and Promotion. One day of travel will be required.
Webinars	At least four webinars will be provided for the steering committees during the first 12 months. These webinars will include more in-depth information on the Four Points™.
SWOT Analysis	Each community will receive an on-site half-day visit Tennessee Main Street staff to conduct a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). The "Top Five" priorities for downtown will be determined. A written SWOT Analysis Report will be provided.
Work Plan Development	Each community will receive a half-day on-site visit to conduct Work Plan development. Work Plans are based on the Four Points™ and this process will generate objectives and activities the community will begin implementing during the program. It will also assist with grant planning.
Innovation Grant	Each community will receive a \$15,000 reimbursable grant to use for a project that incorporates the Four Point Approach™.
Materials & Signage	Steering committees will receive digital copies of the following materials: the <i>Revitalizing Main Street</i> book from the National Main Street Center, the <i>Main Street Board Members Handbook</i> , four committee handbooks (design, economic restructuring, organization, and promotion), PowerPoint summaries from sessions and webinars, and a Tennessee Downtowns metal community sign.
Moving Forward Report	Upon "graduating", each community will receive a "Moving Forward" report provided by Tennessee Main Street staff. The report will provide written recommendations for carrying the downtown revitalization initiative forward.

APPENDIX

- **Tennessee Downtowns Q & A**
- **Sample Letter of Intent to Apply**
- **Sample Resolution for a City Council (not required for application—some cities need this to process grant funds).**
- **Sample Letter of Support**
- **National Main Street Center's Four Point Approach & Eight Guiding Principles**

TENNESSEE DOWNTOWNS Q & A

1. How will communities be selected to participate in the Tennessee Downtowns program?

A team of professionals will review each application based on the information provided by that community. The team will be composed of individuals with a professional background in neighborhood revitalization, economic and community development, planning, historic preservation, tourism and/or other applicable professions.

2. Who should complete the application?

It is always best to have the Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee work together as a team to complete the application. A strong application will address all the questions with clear and concise answers.

3. What if our downtown is not historic?

This program follows the National Main Street Center's Four-Point Approach™ for downtown revitalization which was originally designed to work best in a traditional commercial district setting featuring commercial buildings at least 50 years old. It is the "walkable" nature of such a district, its opportunity to incorporate a variety of uses, and its "anchor position" in the hearts and minds of citizens that make it important to the community. Downtown does not have to be officially designated a local historic district to participate in Tennessee Downtowns.

4. Can our community apply even if we have already started a downtown revitalization effort?

Yes! An established effort focusing on downtown is an important first step. If your community has started a downtown revitalization effort and is in the early stages of implementation, this program will be an excellent opportunity to learn more. However, if you have had a substantial downtown revitalization effort in place for some time, the information provided by Tennessee Downtowns may be too basic. In that case, consideration should be given to pursuing Tennessee Main Street designation. Past participants in Tennessee Downtowns and designated Tennessee Main Street communities are not eligible to apply to participate in this Tennessee Downtowns program.

5. Do we need to have paid staff for participation in Tennessee Downtowns?

No. This program is designed to work with a dedicated five-member volunteer steering committee that should comprise a broad mix of individuals from the community. Tennessee Downtowns will focus on local organizational development strategies that may eventually include board of directors, standing committees, volunteers and staff. It is not a requirement or recommended that paid staff be on board to participate in Tennessee Downtowns.

6. How much does it cost to participate in Tennessee Downtowns?

If selected to participate in Tennessee Downtowns, each community will receive a reimbursable grant of \$15,000 to complete a downtown project. The cost of the project will be reimbursed as invoices are paid. The Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee members will be required to participate in meetings, workshops, and webinars during the 24-month program. This may involve some travel expenses to and from the one day workshop near Nashville, Tennessee.

7. What is the difference between the Tennessee Main Street program and the Tennessee Downtowns program?

The Tennessee Main Street program designates communities that meet or exceed the National Main Street Center's standards of performance for recognition on an annual basis. This includes having an organization in place that is dedicated to the revitalization and management of downtown with a board of directors and managing staff, an annual work plan focused on implementing the Four Point Approach™, and collecting statistics on downtown progress (such as new jobs and public/private investment). Tennessee Downtowns is a learning program for communities that are just getting started with a revitalization effort. It requires a five-member steering committee to lead the effort over a 24-month period.

8. Will we automatically be designated a Tennessee Main Street community after completing the Tennessee Downtowns program?

No. Communities that participate in the Tennessee Downtowns program may wish to continue a self-initiated downtown revitalization effort at the end of the program or apply for designation as a Tennessee Main Street community through a separate application process. Communities will not automatically be accepted into the Main Street Program and it is not required to pursue that designation. Tennessee Downtowns alumni communities in good standing may be eligible for additional grants from the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development to continue their revitalization efforts.

SAMPLE LETTER OF INTENT TO APPLY

Tennessee Downtowns Program

The city/town of _____ intends to complete and submit an application to participate in the Tennessee Downtowns program. We understand the eligibility requirements and are prepared to meet all financial and time expectations if selected to participate in this program.

Our downtown is in need of a revitalization strategy and we look forward to the learning opportunity Tennessee Downtowns can provide through resources from the Tennessee Main Street Program and National Main Street Center.

Signature of Mayor

Date

Signature of Steering Committee Chair

Date

SAMPLE RESOLUTION

(For a City Council)

A resolution authorizing_____to submit an application to participate in the Tennessee Downtowns program, a downtown revitalization education and grant program offered by the Tennessee Main Street Program and the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development.

Whereas the Tennessee Downtowns program has been created to help communities fully understand what it takes to embark on a comprehensive revitalization effort for downtown through a 24-month education and grant process; and

Whereas the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development will be selecting Tennessee cities to participate in the Tennessee Downtowns program based on a competitive application process;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF _____, that the city:

Endorses the submission of this application and agrees to participate in the Tennessee Downtowns program if selected; and

Endorses the goal of economic revitalization of the downtown within the context of the preservation and rehabilitation of its historic buildings; and

Endorses the Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee members participation in all required meetings/training sessions for the Tennessee Downtowns program; and

Endorses (if applicable) _____ as the non-profit organization to house the Downtown Revitalization Steering Committee and serve as the financial conduit for associated grants.

[add additional provisions here]

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED THIS _____ day of _____, _____.

MAYOR

CITY CLERK

SAMPLE PARTNER LETTER

[“Partner” letterhead with address and contact information]

Date

Tennessee Downtowns Program
312 Rosa L. Parks Avenue, 27th Floor
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

RE: Application to the Tennessee Downtowns Program

On behalf of [*the “partner”*], it is my pleasure to write a letter supporting a local application to participate in the Tennessee Downtowns program.

I/We understand the value of downtown in our local economic and community development strategies. Downtown is a key asset for encouraging tourism, recruiting and retaining businesses, preserving local heritage and bringing the community together through festivals and events. Tennessee Downtowns will provide the expertise needed to embark on a comprehensive downtown revitalization effort and our community will benefit from resources, training, and technical assistance provided by the Tennessee Main Street Program and National Main Street Center.

A healthy and vibrant downtown [name of city] is important to our local economy and the quality of life of our citizens. [The “supporter”] intends to support this mission by [please explain how the support will be manifested {financial, in-kind, partnership, etc.}].

I/We will partner in the effort by [explain role here].

Thank you for considering [name of city] for participation in the Tennessee Downtowns program.

Sincerely,

[Writer’s name with signature above]



The Main Street Four-Point Approach

As a unique economic development tool, the **Main Street Four-Point Approach™** is the foundation for local initiatives to revitalize their districts by leveraging local assets—from cultural or architectural heritage to local enterprises and community pride. The four points of the Main Street approach work together to build a sustainable and complete community revitalization effort.

Organization



Organization establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in the commercial district. By getting everyone working toward the same goal, your downtown revitalization program can provide effective, ongoing management and advocacy for your downtown or neighborhood business district. Through volunteer recruitment and collaboration with partners representing a broad cross section of the community, your program can incorporate a wide range of perspectives into its efforts. A governing board of directors and standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of volunteer-driven revitalization programs. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid program director. This structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders.

Promotion



Promotion takes many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that will rekindle community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in your commercial district. Advertising, retail promotions, special events, and marketing campaigns help sell the image and promise of downtown to the community and surrounding region. Promotions communicate your commercial district's unique characteristics, business establishments, and activities to shoppers, investors, potential business and property owners, and visitors.

Design



Design means getting downtown into top physical shape and creating a safe, inviting environment for shoppers, workers, and visitors. It takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in a commercial district by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, parking areas, street furniture, public art, landscaping, merchandising, window displays, and promotional materials. An appealing atmosphere, created through attention to all of these visual elements, conveys a positive message about the commercial district and what it has to offer. Design activities also include instilling good maintenance practices in the commercial district, enhancing the district's physical appearance through the rehabilitation of historic buildings, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, educating business and property owners about design quality, and long-term planning.

Economic Vitality



Economic restructuring strengthens your community's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. This is accomplished by retaining and expanding successful businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of business owners, and attracting new businesses that the market can support. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the district. The goal is to build a commercial district that responds to the needs of today's consumers.

Coincidentally, the four points of the Main Street approach correspond with the four forces of real estate value, which are social, political, physical, and economic.

The Eight Principles

The National Main Street Center's experience in helping communities bring their commercial corridors back to life has shown time and time again that the Main Street Four-Point Approach succeeds. That success is guided by the following eight principles, which set the Main Street methodology apart from other redevelopment strategies. For a downtown program to be successful, it must wholeheartedly embrace the following time-tested Eight Principles.

- **Comprehensive:** No single focus — lavish public improvements, name-brand business recruitment, or endless promotional events — can revitalize downtown. For successful, sustainable, long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach, including activity in each of Main Street's Four Points, is essential.
- **Incremental:** Baby steps come before walking. Successful revitalization programs begin with basic, simple activities that demonstrate that "new things are happening" in the commercial district. As public confidence in the downtown district grows and participants' understanding of the revitalization process becomes more sophisticated, Main Street is able to tackle increasingly complex problems and more ambitious projects. This incremental change leads to much longer-lasting and dramatic positive change in the Main Street area.
- **Self-help:** No one else will save your downtown. Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilize local resources and talent. That means convincing residents and business owners of the rewards they'll reap by investing time and money in Main Street — the heart of their community. Only local leadership can produce long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.
- **Partnerships:** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the district and must work together to achieve common goals of downtown's revitalization. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations in order to forge an effective partnership.
- **Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets:** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.
- **Quality:** Emphasize quality in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies to all elements of the process — from storefront designs to promotional campaigns to educational programs. Shoestring budgets and "cut and paste" efforts reinforce a negative image of the commercial district. Instead, concentrate on quality projects over quantity.
- **Change:** Skeptics turn into believers and attitudes on Main Street will turn around. At first, almost no one believes downtown can really turn around. Changes in attitude and practice are slow but definite — public support for change will build as the revitalization program grows and consistently meets its goals. Change also means engaging in better business practices, altering ways of thinking, and improving the physical appearance of the commercial district. A carefully planned downtown revitalization program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.
- **Implementation:** To succeed, the downtown program must show visible results that can only come from completing projects. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way and succeeding. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger ones as the revitalization effort matures, and that constant revitalization activity creates confidence in the downtown program and ever-greater levels of participation.