Main Street America is urging Congress to provide funding for a Main Street Community Recovery and Revitalization program to support the critical work of Main Street partners that provide on-the-ground economic assistance to our nation’s downtowns.

Based on well-documented needs*, Main Street America recommends including a $100 million competitive grant through the Economic Development Administration in an upcoming stimulus package to support the vital work of Main Street coordinating programs, local Main Street programs, and small businesses in commercial districts. This program would provide specific funding for Main Street commercial revitalization entities and technical assistance for small businesses struggling to adapt to the public health requirements results from COVID-19.

Main Street America is a national network of community revitalization partners with a proven track record for generating strong economic returns.

In 2019, local Main Street programs leveraged** an average of $30 in public and private investment for every dollar spent on the program. With over 2,000 local community participants and 44 state-, county-, and city-wide coordinating programs, the Main Street network is an efficient, highly-localized delivery system for recovery funding. Because the Main Street program’s approach to revitalization is a longstanding and highly-adaptable model for community growth and prosperity, there are also nascent efforts in the other 11 states, Tribal nations and territories where nationally accredited Main Street programs do not currently exist.

* Source: [https://www.mainstreet.org/howwecanhelp/resourcemanager/mainstreetforward/research](https://www.mainstreet.org/howwecanhelp/resourcemanager/mainstreetforward/research)

** Source: Annual community reporting by the National Main Street Center, 2019.
The COVID-19 pandemic has had an outsized and profound impact on smaller, locally owned businesses that form the backbone of our nation’s downtowns. Congress has taken extraordinary steps to facilitate our nation’s economic recovery, but data shows that Main Street communities and businesses are still struggling.

According to a survey* conducted in early September 2020, 40% of business owners indicate that they will not be able to remain open for more than a half-year. In another survey** conducted by Main Street America, more than 60% of small business owners indicated they planned to leverage regular revenues, e-commerce revenues, and/or promotions with gift certificates and memberships, and did not plan to leverage credit card debt, bank loans, new lines of credit, or government loans. In the same survey, small business respondents indicate that, at present, Main Street programs offer more support than any other nonprofit or government entity, including local chambers of commerce and economic development offices.

COVID relief funding administered through the national Main Street network offers a streamlined solution to support existing community revitalization and infrastructure efforts, including microbusinesses with less than 20 employees.

Main Street coordinating programs are intimately connected to public and private partners and well positioned to link financial resources and expertise to community-level needs. Local Main Street programs work directly with small businesses, offering on-the-ground technical assistance, including essential support in accessing funding, adapting operations, business marketing and promotion, business-to-business collaboration, and community organization and leadership. Therefore, seventy-five (75%) percent of the proposed funding would be used to sustain and expand these essential support networks.

Main Street technical assistance buttresses other economic relief programs by helping small businesses navigate application and eligibility requirements to receive funding and resources.

Whether developing an online presence or implementing socially-distanced outdoor seating, businesses in Main Street districts are facing unplanned needs, such as relying on e-commerce platforms and installing physical dividers to adhere to health regulations. Therefore, twenty-five percent (25%) of the proposed funding would be used to provide technical assistance for these businesses as they attempt to safely reopen, remain open and operate under the auspices of COVID-related restrictions for the foreseeable future.

*Source: Morning Consult on behalf of Verizon Communications Inc. Survey questioned owners and decision makers at 600 small and midsize firms from Aug. 26 - Sept. 4, 2020.
Main Street technical assistance buttresses other economic assistance relief programs by helping small businesses navigate application and eligibility requirements to receive funding and resources.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Main Street programs have played an active role in helping small businesses identify and access relief funds, whether through federal programs such as PPP or local grants and loans. Technical assistance support provided by Main Street programs helps to ensure that funding available to small businesses is utilized to the fullest extent possible and reaches those most in need in a timely manner.

Current federal funding is not reaching Main Street programs and many small businesses.

A variety of federal funding channels have been established to help communities and small businesses, but in many parts of the country, there is an unfortunate lag in distribution and too often funding is failing to reach local organizations and businesses. The Main Street Community Recovery and Revitalization program would ensure direct federal support to Main Street programs in every part of the country that will help support small businesses adapt to public safety requirements associated with COVID-19.

Please visit mainstreet.org to learn more about Main Street America.

For more information or details about this proposal, contact Kelly Humrichouser at khumrichouser@savingplaces.org or call 312-610-5619.