

STRENGTHENING THE MOVEMENT

Main Street America Institute

We were honored to recognize the first graduating cohort of the Main Street America Institute at the Main Street Now Conference in May 2017. Achieving the Main Street America Revitalization Professional credential, currently the highest credential offered through the Main Street America Institute, is a tremendous accomplishment. In just over a year, these nine professionals completed ten online courses, two in-person workshops, and one intensive final exam demonstrating a mastery of subject matter essential to downtown and neighborhood district management. Armed with the knowledge, tools, and ability to lead revitalization efforts, our MSARP recipients each have a unique perspective on the future of the profession. We asked them:

The biggest opportunity is to expand creative partnerships. In an era of scarce funding and changing attitudes towards volunteerism, getting creative to tap partnerships offers a way to expand your reach and welcome new partners to your revitalization efforts. Whether it is collaborating with your local library, school, club, or local interest group, Main Street directors have an incredible opportunity to use new technology and ideas to rethink Main Street creatively.

ALEXANDER BALLOON
*Manager, Tacony Community
Development Corporation*

Embracing the growing diversity of our communities—large and small—is the most exciting opportunity, yet most significant challenge currently facing Main Street directors. “Building a bigger table” will ensure our work is more inclusive and can harness new ideas and creative solutions which spark growth in our programs and districts in ways currently unimagined.

BREANN BYE *Executive Director, 6th Avenue
Corridor*

Downtowns are on the upswing, which is both an exciting opportunity as well as the biggest challenge facing downtown directors. People want to live and socialize in downtowns. This creates opportunity for directors to be a part of positive change. It’s gratifying to see community improvements and to look back with pride and say “Hey, I was part of that.” Helping downtowns reclaim their place as the social and cultural hearts of their communities is a huge challenge with endless possibilities.

AMY HANSEN *Executive Director, Downtown
Fond du Lac Partnership*

I’m starting to see new growth and excitement as more towns are realizing the value and potential a vibrant downtown has on economic development, business recruitment, and job creation for their entire city. Because of this, downtown directors are now being paid for the importance that their role brings to a community. Now, we not only love what we do, but we are beginning to get paid for the passion we bring to our jobs.

PATRICK KAY *Director, Americus Main
Street & Americus Downtown Development Authority*

“What do you see as the most exciting opportunity and/or biggest challenge facing Main Street directors in the next five years?”

As Main Street directors work to do more with less resources, including a work-life balance, more and more communities will see this as an either unnecessary position or entry level position. This puts Main Street directors in a lose-lose situation to implement effective community development through attacks and distractions from other entities. By working to strengthen the position and visibility of directors, we can combat this phenomenon nationally.

DEREK LUMSDEN *Executive Director, Osceola Chamber Main Street*



We were honored to recognize the first graduating cohort of the Main Street America Institute at the Main Street Now Conference. Back Row: Patrick Kay, Alexander Balloon, Martin Smith, Donnie Rodgers, Derek Lumsden Front Row: Breann Bye, Sarah Thompson, Diana Schwartz, Amy Hansen.

What does the future of Main Street hold for you? Develop your skills and create your own path with the Main Street America Institute.

VISIT MAINSTREET.ORG/MSAI FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE MSARP CREDENTIAL AND ALL OUR PROGRAMS.

One of the biggest challenges for directors could be the workload and pay gap. Most directors are very passionate about their work and it is easy for them to get overloaded. The challenge for boards will be to put as much time and energy into finding volunteers and offering the kind of salary and benefits that will retain a passionate director. By becoming certified one has shown that they are passionate about the work.

SARAH THOMPSON *Executive Director, Hamilton Hometowns*

Main Street directors must embrace new and changing technology. Technology has made it possible for us to reach people across the world with the single click of a mouse. There is major potential with technology in helping us tell our story and build local awareness while reaching new markets outside of our community.

DONNIE RODGERS *Executive Director, Downtown Lee's Summit Main Street*

One of the challenges facing many Main Street organizations is sustainability of funding. Not only for our organizations, but for everyone involved in economic vitality in a community. With the inherent volatility in politics, it is imperative to understand additional funding mechanisms such as BID and TIF. Thanks to the certifications and credentials I achieved through MSAI, I feel that I have a much better understanding of how to find additional ways to sustain this growth.

DIANA SCHWARTZ *Executive Director, River District Association*

The biggest challenge facing Main Street directors in the next five years is the same as it has always been—funding. This challenge does, however, also produce our biggest opportunity. By advocating for preserving federal dollars in this administration effectively, you can demonstrate what I always say—investing in Main Street now is investing in a leading local economic engine with both quantifiable and qualitative returns—one that helps make your community somewhere people want to work, live, and, most importantly to decision makers, pay taxes.

MARTIN SMITH *Executive Director, Barracks Row Main Street*