

LEADING MAIN STREET

By Norma Ramirez de Miess

We all know strong leadership when we see it, but how do we define it? While there may not be a one-size-fits-all Main Street leader, there are common characteristics among programs and communities leading successful revitalization efforts.

Norma Ramirez de Miess, Senior Program Manager and Director of Leadership Development, highlights five of these key attributes, and shares insights and examples from Main Street leaders across the nation on what it takes to lead effectively.



We are always impressed at the sheer number of unique initiatives and innovative projects that communities are in the Main Street America Network are implementing across the country to revitalize their historic downtowns and commercial districts. These efforts are not only leading to more vibrant and sustainable economies, but stronger, more resilient communities. What is common thread among these successful revitalization efforts? Effective leadership.

In fact, we believe that the future of Main Street depends on cultivating active, focused, effective leadership. To help Main Streeters in their work, we have spent the past few years strengthening the Main Street Approach™ with a stronger focus on strategy-driven revitalization, based on community vision and engagement, increased market understanding, and defined measurable outcomes. These integrated components, centered around the proven Four-Point framework, are intended to provide leaders with a roadmap for successful downtown revitalization.

Although there is no one-size-fits-all Main Street leader, there are many common attributes that influence the success of their programs and communities. Let's walk through five of these key characteristics, and see some insights and perspectives from a few of your Main Street peers. This list is by no means comprehensive, but intended to highlight specific areas that are essential for impactful leadership.

EFFECTIVE LEADERS:

- VALUE PEOPLE**
- BUILD CAPACITY**
- LEAD THROUGH STRATEGY**
- STAND ON SOLID GROUND**
- NEVER STOP LEARNING**

As Senior Program Officer and Director of Leadership Development at the National Main Street Center, **Norma Ramirez de Miess** helps communities across the nation assess organizational and programming needs, build consensus, and define and implement strategies to help build successful revitalization programs. With over 20 years of leadership experience, Norma is also focused on supporting the crucial role of revitalization professionals and local leaders. She regularly conducts professional development and volunteer leadership trainings across the country, including at the Main Street Now Conference and the Main Street America Institute.

EFFECTIVE LEADERS VALUE PEOPLE

Our work offers ample opportunities to talk with local stakeholders about how and why they are involved with their community's revitalization program. Time and again, they attribute their participation, support, and investment in Main Street to leaders who impressed them through their genuine care and interest. These are leaders that are authentic in their connection and are focused on building real relationships with everyone — be it a district business or property owner, resident, or elected official. They are optimists, who celebrate the positives and commit to finding solutions to challenges. They motivate and inspire people.

Organizations often invest a great amount of time and funds in initiatives to raise money, but unfortunately don't always give enough attention, time, and effort to cultivating their staff and volunteers. We encourage Main Street leaders to place people at the heart of their organizational culture and programming efforts, and to expand their reach to connect and engage with more district and community stakeholders.

Effective leaders recognize people as the greatest asset for success and strive to leverage their support as a talent source, not simply as a labor force. Valuing people is essential for building trust, confidence, and ultimately, positive and active engagement in revitalization efforts.

An important element in any expression of appreciation and value is the sincerity with which it is delivered. Although it may have a dated ring to it, for me there is nothing more meaningful than a hand-written note that conveys in concrete terms the impact the recipient had on the project. [...] I also believe in the power of the small gesture: the gift certificate for lunch at a local establishment, a small but fragrant flower arrangement made in a wine glass or small vase, a newspaper clipping in which the receiver is featured (with a note of congratulations), a jar of local honey, etc. Nancy Hoffman, Downtown Estacada Commission

Guidance, group input, and collaboration are key ingredients when working with people who are your volunteers, partners, and staff. Expressing appreciation with small tokens or a quick text or email to let them know their work is valued is a great way to continue to show how important they are to your organization. Valued people work harder and create a better environment for everyone. Carolyn Honeycutt, Ellensburg Downtown Association

This is not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. Research shows that placing people first positively impacts the bottom line. On Main Street, we are all familiar with the saying "retention is our best recruitment tool." This doesn't only apply when we are talking about business development. It also rings true for Main Street America organizations, and the people — both staff and volunteers — that make it all possible. The reality is that in today's environment, no one person "has to" work or volunteer for our organizations. People have more options than ever before with where to work or volunteer, and are more selective in choosing the communities where they want to live and the organizations they wish to join and support. It's up to strong leaders to show them why Main Street is where they want to be.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

We asked you: How do you show your staff, volunteers, partners, etc. that you value them?

One way we show our promotional volunteers their value is by including them in media interviews. **We invite volunteers to be interviewed alongside staff when reporters attend our events.** We often hear “My kids were so excited to see me on channel 15,” or “My friends said they heard me on the radio when they were driving their kids to school!” Ensuring volunteers receive public recognition “in the moment” shows them we have trust in them and keeps them engaged in the events that they have worked so hard to plan and execute.
Carol Lilly, Community Main Street

Each year we hold a volunteer recognition party in February that the volunteers can bring their spouses/ others to just enjoy each other’s company with refreshments. We recognize one volunteer from each of our 5 committees and then announce our Leadership Award winner for the year who is recognized in April at the state level. **We continue to have new volunteers join us and I think it is because they can have fun, feel successful and the time commitment is manageable.** **Peg Raney, Jefferson Matters: Main Street**

I have a rule that I drop everything when a volunteer, partner, or business approaches me with a question or idea. Yes, this means other projects pile up but I consider this position a vocation and not a job. [...] I think it is imperative for this job to live and work in the District—meetings and big ideas happen at all times of the day and all over the community.
Joe Jennison, Mount Vernon-Lisbon Community Development Group

We have found that the secret to success, in many areas of our program, is personal communication. Our meetings and presentations involve a personal invitation. Our donors receive hand-written thank you notes at the time their checks are deposited! Our donors, volunteers and partners are invited to an annual appreciation event where we have the opportunity to say thank you, in person, and send them home with a token gift showing our appreciation. [...] It’s truly the every-day “thank you for your help, couldn’t do it without you,” message that we try hard to mention, often! **Kelly Haverkate, Dayton Community Development Association**

I believe that our time is the one unrenowable asset we have to give. When people volunteer and invest their asset of time, it needs to mean something to them. Make it fun and thank them and they will continue to invest. **People are our very best ambassadors.** **Linda Haglund, Wenatchee Downtown Association**

Business in all forms is about relationships. It is essential to consider the entire relationship you are building; not just addressing the needs of your organization, but their needs as well. What would enhance their experience or meet their needs? What is of interest to them both inside and outside their participation on your board, event, or committee? **By being present, asking good questions, and contributing your own time, talent, and treasure to things that are meaningful, you show that what they value is also important to you.** **Diana Schwartz, River District Association**

EFFECTIVE LEADERS BUILD CAPACITY

Over the past four decades, Main Street has provided a solid foundation for building strong community leadership where property and business owners, residents, and neighbors, can come together and take ownership of their district’s revitalization alongside public partners. This diverse base of leadership is one of the key factors that sets Main Street apart from other economic development approaches.

Yet, a strong base of community leadership doesn’t just happen. Main Street leaders must go beyond simply inviting people to be part of their boards or committees. Effective leaders make a conscious effort to define and confirm specific roles and responsibilities for different aspects of the revitalization effort. Every board member should hold an active responsibility in leading key aspects of the organization and every committee or team should make it a priority to have a leader for every project. Distribution of roles provides a clearer understanding of the gaps in leadership and avoids the threat of burn out.

Beyond defining roles, empowerment is crucial for building a strong leadership base. Main Street directors in particular serve an important role in cultivating, inspiring, and empowering people within their organization and extended volunteer base to see long-lasting results. This requires the ability to build trust, delegate, and provide guidance, coaching, and support. Empowering volunteers and staff also frees up time for organizational leaders to go beyond project management and spend more time managing key foundational, programmatic, and strategic areas of work. Effective leaders avoid the trap of being positioned, or positioning themselves, as merely project or task managers, rather than program directors.

The role of a Main Street director is often compared to that of a choir director or conductor. Their talents are best utilized as leaders of the entire group. They are responsible for bringing diverse talent together, empowering individuals to find their perfect fit and flourish, forming teams that have common ground, and then leading the entire group to produce the desired outcomes. Just as a conductor is not expected to fill in for the violinist, it is not recommended that Main Street directors take on specific tasks, manage individual projects, or lead committees that others within the organization are able to handle. The director's crucial responsibility is to lead the entire program and empower his or her base through participatory leadership.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

We asked you: What has been your biggest barrier to building capacity and how did you overcome it?

The biggest barrier is that we have more ideas that need financing than we have budgeted income. Grant opportunities of all sizes have helped us reach our goals. We leverage funds to raise even more. [...] Being aware of possible resources and bringing the right people together has helped us overcome barriers. **Peg Raney, Jefferson Matters: Main Street**

Perception has been the biggest barrier to building capacity. Perception that we were a government agency, perception that the City covered all of our expenses, or perception that we were/were not responsible for certain activities in our community. In an effort to change perceptions, four years ago we led an aggressive communication effort that used multiple outlets to start telling our story. We needed to build understanding and change the negative perceptions. It took baby steps, celebrating the small successes, and continually telling others about ourselves and the positive impact that Main Street has on the community not only each year, but over the long-run. **Cathleen Edgerly, Howell Main Street Inc.**

The biggest barrier to building capacity is defining the need. **A lot of people see an organization trying to raise money as a negative thing, even if they rely on that entity to a large degree for information, expertise, etc. that they might need.** One lesson learned is that it is important to have simple and precise information about what that capacity could do for the organization and the community. Simple and concise facts and figures do a lot to build capacity. Another lesson learned is to make sure that the board and volunteers are on board to help build the capacity. A lot of people fear fundraising the way they do public speaking, so finding ways to make it easier for them to be part of the process and solutions also help increase capacity and their own development as leaders in the organization and the community. **Derek Lumsden, Osceola Chamber Main Street**

*I was at a national conference a couple years ago and the keynote speaker gave a quote that changed my thinking and removed a big barrier: “**The lack of resources is no longer an excuse NOT to act.**” I stopped using resources as excuse and started thinking outside the box. **Linda Haglund, Wenatchee Downtown Association***

With regard to volunteers, our biggest barrier to building capacity continues to be clear cut “jobs” to offer those who want to help.** We are now working on building clear cut work plans for sustainable projects so that we can offer volunteers a job that fulfills them and gives them more of a sense of purpose. Each year we are better at building a board that we trust to send out to spread our message in a way that is true to our mission and values. With more board members able to help in this way, it relieves the staff from being the only “recruiters” of volunteers and funding. **Kelly Haverkate, Dayton Community Development Association

*There is a quote by Michael Strahan, “**We are our own worst enemy. You doubt yourself more than anyone else ever will. If you can get past that, you can be successful.**” I sometimes observe that pattern of thinking—in myself, my board, and even my community at times—and I think that is a big but important barrier to chip at constantly. [...] For example, a board member recently remarked to me that our sponsorship package for a new event was too high, that it would work in neighboring communities or perhaps even another organization, but not ours. I asked if it was because he felt we aren’t worth as much as they are? He told me he had never thought about why he believed that, and would examine his feelings about that question. **We have to challenge the reasoning behind why we hold the beliefs that we do, not only as individuals, but as a community as well.** **Diana Schwartz, River District Association***

EFFECTIVE LEADERS LEAD THROUGH STRATEGY

The work of Main Street revitalization is two-fold — there are programming activities that help achieve the transformation of the commercial district, and there is the organizational structure that includes assembling the human and financial resources to make it all happen. Effective leaders understand that both need defined vision and direction.

When strategy is not in place to guide the direction of our programming efforts, ideas brought to the table can quickly become projects that take the organization in several directions, or none at all. Organizations can end up with a long list of to-dos that do not always leverage broader market opportunities or address the community’s vision to produce comprehensive change. Lack of strategy also often puts a higher burden on the organizational aspects of our work, especially regarding engagement with volunteers and fundraising.

Although strategy has always been an essential component of the planning and implementation process of the Main Street Approach, too many revitalization programs have become more project- and process-driven than strategy-driven. Starting in 2014, we at the National Main Street Center undertook an effort to strengthen the overall framework of the Main Street Approach by bringing strategy back to the forefront. This “refreshed” Main Street Approach provides Main Street directors, and volunteer leaders and partners, with a defined path for revitalization through Transformation Strategies. And, we have found that selecting Transformation Strategies helps leaders learn how to define and maintain focus, and even say “no” to those appealing ideas that inevitably pop-up, but do not directly advance organizational goals. These strategies guide the planning and implementation of the work of an organization, ensuring that all projects and activities align.

Main Street leaders, especially Main Street directors and boards of directors, play an essential role in directing the process of defining appropriate Transformation Strategies through meaningful community engagement and analysis of the district's market position. Through this process, Main Street Directors can elevate their role by establishing themselves as strategic leaders, and help their boards focus beyond the routine of everyday tasks and projects. We also believe that the strengthened Main Street Approach enables more effective leadership and alignment across teams and committees needed to carry out successful revitalization efforts.

*When presented with opportunities, stay true to your mission. **As intriguing as a partnership or project may be, if it doesn't fit within your organization's mission and strategic plan, you need recognize it and move onto a project that is a better fit.** Our downtown is experiencing a period of growth, which includes a plaza area that will be privately owned, but under management by a soon-to-be established non-profit entity. As important as we think the plaza will be to our downtown, when asked to include it in our streetscape fundraising campaign, we were unable to do so since our plan calls for us to focus on specific streetscape features.*
Carol Lilly, Community Main Street

*Stop assuming and leaning on "well we have ALWAYS done it this way". **I believe that organizations...especially nonprofits get stuck in the way it has been so it is the way it should be.** I, with intent, target organizations and businesses NOT typically connected to our organizations. Most simply do not understand what we do and why we do it. Given the opportunity, I have found that they will engage and that has increased partnerships and revenue. Mostly it has increased awareness for Main Street and the key role we play in the community.* **Linda Haglund, Wenatchee Downtown Association**

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

We asked you: What are your best words of advice for defining strategic direction, staying focused, and not taking on projects that do not serve the community's vision for your district?

*Our Mission is very clear, if an appealing opportunity is not within our mission I would encourage the volunteer in question to consider finding another organization to pursue said opportunity. If this opportunity is indeed in our mission, then I would ask the volunteer to agree to be chair. No chair, no project. **The greatest idea is worthless without a volunteer to manage it.***
Joe Jennison, Mount Vernon-Lisbon Community Development Group

*Colorado Main Street created an opportunity for our board to participate in strategic planning and revisiting our Transformation Strategies. Our prior strategies were overly detailed, committing us to very specific projects. We got too overloaded, forcing us to postpone or eliminate projects and the board was disappointed if we weren't able to accomplish all of our tasks. **Strategic planning taught us to take a broader approach to our Transformation Strategies so that we can tackle projects efficiently and add opportunities that arise throughout the year that follows our mission as a Main Street community.***
Angie Cue, Lamar Partnership Inc.

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I have found that a solid, transparent strategic plan based on Transformation Strategy keeps everyone focused and makes it easier to say no, or not right now. If you have a solid plan and can show the ROI, timelines, resource capacity and how it will benefit your merchants, partners, and community, it is easier to stay on-task. The more you involve your constituents in creating the plan, the more likely you are to have buy-in and support when you have to decline opportunities that don't fit into the current plan of work or strategic direction. **Diana Schwartz, River District Association**

We have a tendency to say “no” to things that don't directly or indirectly help multiple member businesses. [...] We once had an artist walk in the spring, but our surveys after the event indicated that consumers were not patronizing storefronts as a result of the event, and artists didn't want to coordinate their activities with storefronts. If our metrics indicate that we aren't tangibly creating benefit, we either retool or eliminate the activity. **Our best advice is to eliminate emotional decision making. Identify a measurable way to define success prior to the execution of an activity, and then record your metric to determine the viability of your initiative.** **Casey Woods, Emporia Main Street**

*I am big on research and branding. When I first joined DOCA, we underwent an extensive community and visitor market research process that established Downtown Oregon City's brand promise as “Portland Metro's Small Town Experience.” **We have since maintained yearly research that helps us track our progress on key metrics while also identifying if our brand is resonating with our target customers.** We began this prior to the Main Street Refresh and have now incorporated that foundational work into what we now know as Transformation Strategies.* **Jonathan Stone, Downtown Oregon City Association**

EFFECTIVE LEADERS STAND ON SOLID GROUND

The strength of the Main Street movement is demonstrated by the passion and commitment of everyone involved. Stakeholders bring a range of interests and diversity in perspectives regarding the needs and ideals for revitalization. Main Street leaders have an important role in helping build an environment that not only welcomes diversity of expression, but offers a path to building consensus and confirming a common vision for the future of the district. This role requires leaders to stand on solid ground as proactive advocates for the district and ambassadors of the vision for its future.

Effective leaders strive to build a strong position for the organization amongst all sectors of the community, while remaining attentive of the diversity in priorities and interests. They work hard at connecting with others and building strong collaborations, yet keep their organizations' mission strong and in the forefront. They understand that there might be conflicting priorities among stakeholders — perhaps internally within the organization or within the district; perhaps externally within the community.

This kind of tension is not necessarily a bad thing — it means that people care about their community. But, a Main Street director must have the skills and foresight to build, maintain, and convey a unified voice for the organization and be clear about what the program should be involved in and how best to advance the strategy for the district. Main Street leaders should keep the Main Street Approach and its principles at the forefront to guide internal and external discussions, and build awareness and increased understanding within the district and among community stakeholders.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

We asked you: What are your best tips for advocating for your district and creating an environment that welcomes diversity of expression? What have you found to be the best means for resolving tension due to conflicting priorities among stakeholders?

We have a large selection of diverse restaurants in our downtown and our University has a large number of international students. **So we have partnered with our University to develop a street festival to highlight the different international student organizations.** We have groups from over 10 different countries with tables set up showing the cultural differences that contribute to not only our downtown but the whole county. Since our fall festival was so well received we're partnering with them for a spring festival to be held at the University and bring in 4th-7th grade students to learn about the different cultures.

Barbara Watkins, Main Street Morgantown

Honest, sincere, and regular communication with our community has allowed us to keep conflicts to a minimum. **We work hard to develop partnerships with our City leaders and Council as well as the district businesses so that we can build channels that allow that two-way conversation.** We invite participation in our events, on our board, and within our volunteer pool, from different ethnicities, different age groups, and genders. **Kelly Haverkate, Dayton Community Development Association**

This one is simple....“Don't Give Up.”

I had an absentee property owner that would never engage, answer any question or even reply to a simple question. Never ever would call me back...for years. I just kept them in the loop and continued to not take it personally. After 6 years, things in their family ownership structure changed and with that change, they saw a need to connect and engage. Progress is happening with their two properties...the first time in years. It also allowed me to connect them to more engaged property owners who connected and formed a bond and relationship. Their words “we love this little town now and we want to invest more in it.” **Linda Haglund, Wenatchee Downtown Association**

It's both a top-down and bottom-up approach here. I'm a huge champion for our program and district and I think that rubs off on others. The volunteers, City council, partners, board members are also big champions so we lift each other up in advocating for our district. We don't have conflicting interests too often but we often allow others to “lead the charge.” **I'm a big fan of sayings things like “that's a great idea, would you like to lead it?” That really allows people to decide if it's important enough that they're willing to put THEIR time, effort, etc into it or is it just something they think OTHERS should do.** I also think conflict lessens when all of the stakeholders understand the direction and are on board.

Chad Banks, Rock Springs Main Street/URA

Any community can plan and find money. Any community can make a “place,” BUT without social capital a downtown/place will not be activated. **Advocating for inclusiveness and the need for collaboration is a necessity for aligning visions and resolving tensions.** Helping people know that they are valued and giving them a sense of collective ownership is key. **Josh Adams, Owosso Main Street/DDA**

It is important to include all voices and views, and to welcome new ideas and concepts. **Try to keep in mind that sometimes it is the ideas or comments that we aren't comfortable with initially that can morph into something that turns into a win for the community if you keep an open mind.** Also remember—sometimes your critics may be right! Remain positive and open to dialogue and know that being respectful doesn't mean you have to agree. Many times it is as much about the attitude you bring to an issue as it is the issue itself. **Diana Schwartz, River District Association**

The most common conflicts we face result from a difference in values. Some people simply don't value community cores, public amenities, entrepreneurship, or quality of life efforts. We have to make sure that we clearly state our values and why we believe our values are important. **Communicating the necessity of equitable reciprocation within partnerships prior to engaging in initiatives can help diffuse some issues.** But, conflict is inevitable whenever you are creating change. Conflict should always be mitigated, but not at the cost of progress. As long as people have a clear understanding of everyone's value system, short term goals, and partnership requirements, common ground can usually be found. **Casey Woods, Emporia Main Street**

EFFECTIVE LEADERS NEVER STOP LEARNING

We often say that there is never a boring moment on Main Street, but there can be plenty of overwhelming ones. It's not uncommon to think of the position of Main Street director as a master of all trades, encompassing wide-ranging areas of expertise normally led by several different individuals within local government or community development organizations. Starting with Organization, a Main Street leader must master volunteer development, finances and fundraising, and overall nonprofit or organizational management. With regards to Promotion, communication and marketing skills are a must, as well as being well-versed in social media tools and event organizing. Design requires knowledge in historic preservation, architecture, and even streetscaping. And Economic Vitality requires expertise in business and real estate, along with experience in managing financial incentives.

The good news is that Main Street leaders don't need to master it all! As a community-driven effort, Main Street draws upon the experience and expertise of everyone involved. The Main Street director takes an active role in connecting, engaging, and leading individuals who have strong interests and experience in each of these areas. To be most effective in this capacity, Main Street directors must bolster their own skills by maintaining a strong commitment to professional development and encouraging the people they serve with to learn alongside them. This ultimately will foster an environment for continued innovation and growth for everyone involved in the revitalization effort.

I get so much out of the National Conference—several great ideas and potential projects and development opportunities for me, the board, and the org come from those meetings and keynotes. I like to take board members along and expose them to these other ideas as well.
Joe Jennison, Mount Vernon-Lisbon Community Development Group

Well, honestly the National Main Street Conference has been a game changer for me. In the first few years in this job, I used the excuse of money. Now when I come back from the conference, my brain is full of ideas and I simply see things differently. So much so that my board automatically includes it in my budget. We need to see things new or we get stale. Get out of your town and visit other Main Street programs at the very least. See what works and what doesn't. **Linda Haglund, Wenatchee Downtown Association**

Understanding the crucial role of Main Street leaders at all levels, the National Main Street Center provides a solid base of training and educational opportunities to support the continued development and strength of our leadership network. Our annual Main Street Now Conference provides an opportunity for everyone in the Main Street movement to come together to hear best practices and great examples of revitalization across the country. The National Main Street Center's recently launched Main Street America Institute (MSAI), is a year-round professional development program especially designed to enhance the knowledge base and leadership skills of commercial district revitalization professionals. Through online and onsite coursework, our leadership network now has easy access to best practices about the Main Street Approach and other essential topics. Committed to strengthening the powerful base of Main Street leaders, MSAI also offers advanced leadership development online courses and an onsite workshop with content specifically focused on elevating the role of strategic leaders and enhancing individuals' ability to lead people effectively.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

We asked you: How do you prioritize and address your individual professional development and that of your leadership base to continue to enhance and innovate your revitalization and community's efforts?

I try to schedule one workshop a quarter to attend from these or similar organizations in areas where I have less expertise or simply wish to refresh myself. It is amazing how many ideas and initiatives that we have pursued in Bandon have germinated from this personal development. And realizing that, you understand that you must let that culture build throughout the organization. **I believe that leadership is an action we all can take. You must create the space for leadership to emerge.** You actively support and mentor your staff and volunteers' professional development. When that development leads to their departure to another place inside or outside the community, you have another party to network with outside of the organization and another opportunity opening within the organization for someone else to develop professionally. **Harv Schubothe, Greater Bandon Association**

This year I partnered with the Jackson County Visitor Center and attended some continuing education opportunities with their director. **I think that it is important to think outside the box and think not only about our district but how the entire county can be affected by the events, and design elements we implement in our district.** It helped us to collaborate on projects and get ideas and put our resources together to do great things. I also attended several continuing education opportunities that our Chamber of Commerce offered. These included topics like fundraising, event planning, and board development. All of the topics were applicable to our projects here at Main Street and I was able to pass along the information and graphics to our board of directors and our committees. **Becky Schepman, Seymour Main Street**

Read! Connect! Talk! Debate! One of the biggest benefits of being part of Main Street America is the vast amount of knowledge and resources that lie within the people involved in the movement. All experiences, good and bad, offer the opportunity to learn, and I truly believe that the people within MSA are one of the best learning tools available. [...] That said, **I would highly recommend Main Street America Institute. The Accreditation I earned from MSAI has opened the door to opportunities I may not have otherwise had access to.** The knowledge I gained from the classes I took have been an integral part in the confidence I have to tackle hard questions in community development. Whether you can only take one class, earn one certificate, or successfully earn your accreditation, it is time and money well spent. **Diana Schwartz, River District Association**

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

We asked you: How do you prioritize and address your individual professional development and that of your leadership base to continue to enhance and innovate your revitalization and community's efforts?

When we find educational opportunities that have a track record of generating assets or catalyst activities, our community is generally pretty supportive in making sure leadership attends. If development activities devolve into a round table discussion of oversimplified generalizations (leadership is good, youth are our future, change is happening, where do you want to be in 20 years, etc.) the meeting is occurring simply to "network." If, however, access to new assets is provided (along with the appropriate conduits), we want to participate in those types of development activities. **Casey Woods, Emporia Main Street**

THE FUTURE OF MAIN STREET DEPENDS ON EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

The Main Street movement will continue to thrive with leaders that value people and bring them together through a strong sense of ownership in revitalization. Leaders that expand their roles to go beyond project-driven routine and establish a solid focus on strategy-driven programming to produce measurable transformation. Effective leaders stand as strong advocates for their districts and organizations and are attentive to continued growth and innovation. And while there is no one-size-fits-all Main Street leader, there are several qualities that we see as pivotal in driving revitalization efforts forward. On behalf of Main Street America, we celebrate the dedication and strength of our Network and recognize all Main Street leaders for their contributions to the success of this movement.