

Executive Leadership

MAIN
STREET
GUIDE



WASHINGTON STATE
MAIN STREET
PROGRAM

Revised 2020

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Executive Leadership Guide

This guide is written for Main Street executive directors and staff. It is also a resource for board members to understand a nonprofit executive director's role and their relationship to boards.

Why It Matters

Ultimately you need to get a lot of work done in a way that is efficient, effective, and true to your mission and values. Good leadership centers on people and how well you engage them meaningfully. To support people, you need good processes and structures in place. You need clear plans and ways to communicate them. This guide focuses on executive leadership and good management practices so that you can lead in efficient and effective ways.

This Guide Focuses On

- Planning
- Human resources
- Volunteers
- Communications

Each section reviews what you need to know, provides tools to help strengthen your practices, and offers additional examples and information.

How to Use This Guide

This guide was designed to be used in three ways:



Answer Questions: There is a lot to know about running an organization, and this guide is a resource to orient you in your leadership position and learn about additional resources.



Learn Together: Running an organization takes an effective team. Executive leadership and the board work side by side to make sure systems support your mission. Use this guide to discuss how you would like to structure management of your Main Street organization.



Get Advice: You are part of a larger network of Main Street organizations supported by Washington Main Street. Experts are ready to train you on what you need to know and connect you with colleagues in other communities. Use this guide as a starting place for further discussion.

Additional Resources



Anytime you see this icon, it means that there are additional resources and information, like sample documents, available through our online resource library. Visit: preservewa.org/main-street-guides

Please note: The documents in our online resource library are *samples for reference only* and does not constitute legal advice. Your organization should consult an attorney or seek necessary counsel before adopting legal documents.



Executive Leadership Checklist

Before we start, take a minute to check in with where your organization is now.

Planning	Yes	No
Does the organization have current mission and vision statements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the organization have a strategic plan that ties directly to the mission and vision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the organization have a work plan that addresses community issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did board members contribute to these plans?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did key community stakeholders contribute to these plans?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a way to regularly assess community needs related to your mission?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you use a dashboard to track key performance indicators?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Resources		
Does the executive director have a current job description?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there an organizational chart that describes the role(s) of staff member(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have staff members received an employee handbook?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a written job description for each staff member?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members attend regularly scheduled meetings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff members receive regular professional development and support?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are staff members evaluated through a goal setting/annual review process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteers		
Do you have a system for recruiting, orienting, and supporting volunteers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do committee members receive a job description outlining expectations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you celebrate volunteers in ways that match how they want to be honored?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication		
Is there a communication plan in place?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a flyer (or simple handout) about what your group does, how, and why?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have an annual report that summarizes the impact and financial situation of your organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your group use social media? If so, do you have board-adopted social media guidelines?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have working relationships with local media outlets?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you regularly communicate with your partners and potential partners in the community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is information gathered through evaluation used in communications with donors and the extended community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Planning

Where will you go as an organization, and what will be accomplished along the way? With your destination—your vision—in mind, you need to plan your steps forward. A thoughtful planning process will create community and board ownership and tell you what skills and experience will be prioritized in recruiting and hiring staff. Having a mission-driven strategic plan is the foundation for all your staffing decisions, activities, communications, fundraising, and evaluation.

Key Questions

- Why does your organization exist? What is its purpose?
- How will your organization achieve your mission?
- How will you engage your community in the work?
- How do you communicate about the work of your organization internally and externally?

What You Need to Know

The Main Street organization works in service to the larger cause of community revitalization. It moves forward its vision and mission through two levels of planning:

Strategic Plan - A strategic plan is a document that describes how your organization will move forward in the next three to five years. It is developed with significant community input. A good strategic plan captures the future of your community.

Work plan - Your work plan comes out of your strategic plan and addresses the specifics of how you will implement the work. Your work plan is the guiding document for your committees.

Evaluation is important to successful planning efforts because it gives you data to know if your organization is achieving its mission.



Cornerstones of Success

- ✓ Clear mission and vision statements
- ✓ A work plan for your committees
- ✓ Evaluation metrics



Key Tools

- ❑ Strategic plan
- ❑ Work plan template
- ❑ An evaluation dashboard

Planning for your community's future shouldn't happen in a vacuum. Your Main Street organization is one of several partners that, when aligned and actively working together, can bring about meaningful change. Are all of these groups talking to each other and collaborating? If not, consider your role in bringing them all to the table.



Mission and Vision Statements

A **mission statement** is a clear and simple description of your organization's purpose. It states who you are, what you do, where you do it, and what distinguishes your organization from others in the community. 

Examples:

“The purpose of the Greenville Downtown Development Association is to develop and promote a healthy and prosperous downtown within the context of cultural and historic preservation.”

“Our mission is to create a unique, historic Main Street experience in a friendly, safe, and collaborative environment.”

“The mission of the Dalles Downtown Association is to encourage and inspire the arts, restoration, economic vitality, and community spirit in the historic downtown district.”

A **vision statement** communicates the organization's long-term hopes and intentions for the commercial district and should be developed with broad participation by the board, committees, program volunteers, and community input. The vision statement is a glimpse into the future, say 30 years from now, to see how the Main Street program helped transform the district. 

Examples:

Lakeview Community Partnership

Welcome to downtown Lakeview where you can experience our authentic rural heritage reflected in our beautifully restored and maintained historic buildings, housing vibrant boutique businesses and trendy eateries. Our walkable and inviting downtown serves as a gateway to our area's bountiful outdoor recreational opportunities. We host events throughout the year where you can immerse yourself in our history and culture. We take pride in being a friendly and inclusive community that values working together.

Beaverton Downtown Association

Known for its hometown feel, Old Town Beaverton is a vibrant destination full of fun local shops and multiple dining experiences while still meeting a variety of service needs. Old Town's historic character is enhanced by an inviting pedestrian environment, informal gathering areas, seasonal activities, and an active public art program. The BDA, led by a passionate and committed board, provides an opportunity for people who care about Old Town to be involved, creating a stronger sense of community and helping to achieve our vision. Old Town is the place to be in Beaverton!

A number of Main Street programs have formally submitted their vision statements to their municipalities for review and endorsement as an official statement for the downtown or the neighborhood business district. Often, they are approved at a public ceremony and incorporated into an existing commercial district master plan if it exists.

Mission Statement

Who are you and what do you do?

- ▶ Concise & easily understood
- ▶ Distinct from other organizations
- ▶ What you do on a daily/monthly basis
- ▶ Concrete language, rather than conceptual

Vision Statement

Where are you going?

- ▶ Preferred future of the district
- ▶ Specific, sensory, inspiring language!
- ▶ Consensus, developed by a broad cross-section of the community
- ▶ Comprehensive (i.e., addressing each of the Four Points)

Strategic and Work Plans

A **strategic plan** is your organization's road map. It provides an opportunity to reflect, identifies key messages to communicate with stakeholders, gives direction and focus to leaders making difficult decisions about finite resources, and typically helps you raise money. The board and the executive staff are partners in developing a strategic plan, but not without listening to additional voices that have a stake in downtown.

A **work plan** connects your organization's goals—expressed in its strategic plan—with specific objectives, actions, partners, and resources. It is a living document that guides your board, staff, and committees forward. The general process is like running tea through a sieve. You pour your identified issues through a strategy filter that captures the highest priority challenges or opportunities. You assign those to a committee, and that committee sets objectives and conducts activities to address the issue.



Visit the online resource library to find information, resources, and sample documents to assist in the development of your strategic plan and work plan: preservewa.org/main-street-guides



Evaluation

Data collection is an important part of being a Main Street organization. You will receive guidance from Washington Main Street on what data you collect and how to do that. This section focuses on the data to collect about your organization and how to engage your board and staff around it. Feedback is important to shaping effective programs and making good decisions.

There are two big ideas to consider when it comes to evaluation.

Kinds of Data: There are many kinds of data. There is essential, interesting, and trivial data in terms of its importance in decision-making. There is formative data that tells you how something is going, and summative data that tells you how something went. There is “right size data” where you scale the data you track to your ability to gather and process it. Indeed, data is important if it is helpful. We encourage you to include conversations about data in your staff and board meetings. Think about what your culture is around data and how to shape a data culture that serves your organization.

Dashboard: Let’s spend more time on essential data that drives decision-making. One way to focus staff and board on what really matters is to create an organizational dashboard. You decide in advance what matters and then track those data points over a period of time. You can use a color-coded “traffic light” scheme to denote how you are doing against your goal.

Indicator	Target	This month	3 months ago	6 months ago
Days of cash on hand	60 days	55 days	48 days	25 days
Number of volunteers	50	55	47	25
Percentage of shopkeepers in downtown core who registered an increase in sales in the last quarter	80%	70%	65%	60%



Visit the online resource library to find a guide to quarterly reports to get an idea of what data all Washington Main Street Communities collect: preservewa.org/main-street-guides



For discussion:

- Are your mission and vision statements useful and relevant?
- What is your current planning process? Is it time to create a new strategic plan?
- What data do you collect now? How do you use it make decisions?

Human Resources (HR)

Your biggest asset is your people. The executive director provides the executive leadership for your organization, working with the board to implement the vision and mission. You may also have staff supporting the executive director. It is important that your Main Street has a “people strategy” that makes your organization a great place to work and that keeps you compliant with the law.

Key Questions

- What steps have you taken to ensure a positive and healthy work culture?
- What documented policies and procedures do you have for staff and/or volunteers?
- How do you recruit, hire, supervise, and support for success?

What You Need to Know

There are three main chapters to human resources in nonprofits:

Your Organization: Your HR practice starts with your mission and vision and how you implement it within your community. Your culture is the air that your staff breathes, and it is worth the time to make sure it is a healthy and nurturing culture. Many organizations are intentional about how they create a culture of belonging. 

Policies and Procedures: It’s important to identify in writing how work is supposed to happen. This is typically contained within an employee handbook. Laws change, so make sure your handbook is current.

HR Life Cycle: Employment is an ongoing cycle: recruiting, hiring, supervising, and supporting. There are important actions along the way, such as developing clear job descriptions, providing a supportive staff review process, and integrating regular feedback into discussions with the executive director.



Cornerstones of Success

- ✓ A shared understanding of the executive director’s role
- ✓ Written policies
- ✓ A healthy work culture
- ✓ Feedback



Key Tools

- ☐ Executive director job description 
- ☐ Employee handbook 

Executive Director's Role

The executive director is responsible for the overall strategy and operations of your organization. This one person connects the mission to the community, including the board, funders, and everyone on the outside of the organization. This person also runs the organization day-to-day, overseeing the office, finances, staff (if there are staff members), etc. Many say that the job is far more than any one person can do. Thus, it takes an active and engaged board to ensure that the executive director is successful over time. Clearly defining roles and expectations is a cornerstone for a collaborative and efficient dynamic. Success depends on a few tools:

- ❑ Updated executive director job description 
- ❑ Updated board commitment forms
- ❑ Updated committee descriptions

Engagement is key to a Main Street organization. One phrase you may choose to adopt is “with, not for”: Main Street organizations work with business owners, the city, and residents (not for them) to bring about change that benefits the entire community.

Executive directors can choose to coordinate projects or people. Those who choose to coordinate projects may become burnt out and resentful of an ineffective volunteer base. Those who choose to coordinate people enjoy a support system of volunteers willing to do impactful work.

The executive director's role has three main parts:

▶ Leadership

The executive director leads the movement and manages office systems.

- ◇ In partnership with the board and community stakeholders, establishes a vision for downtown
- ◇ Develops, with the board, appropriate downtown revitalization strategies
- ◇ Builds productive relationships with public and private entities, and encourages a cooperative climate with all partners
- ◇ Develops and conducts ongoing public awareness programs, raises the organization's profile, and serves as the chief representative to the public
- ◇ Serves as an advocate for the downtown district at local and state level.

▶ Management

The executive director ensures that the organization's resources - both in terms of finances and people - and structures are being maximized to accomplish its goals.

- ◇ Expands revenue-generating activities in partnership with the board to support operations
- ◇ Manages administrative aspects of the program
- ◇ Coordinates committees and volunteers, and ensures that volunteer leadership is woven into the organization's processes
- ◇ Track progress by collecting data on projects, volunteer time, district and business changes, etc.

▶ Execution

The executive director rolls up their sleeves to work alongside volunteers to get things done.

- ◇ Utilizes work plans and the Main Street Approach™ structure to make progress toward vision and goals
- ◇ Serves as a resource to downtown business and property owners.

Employee Handbook Checklist

The employee handbook is the user's manual for your nonprofit's staff. It lays out the rules and procedures that you follow. Having these in writing and mutually agreed upon allows your organization to work efficiently, effectively, and legally.

While the exact contents of employment handbooks vary—and should be reviewed by an employment professional or attorney—typical topics include:

General employment practices

- At-will employment
- Equal employment opportunity
- Background check
- Records of hours worked, payroll, and overtime
- Performance evaluation
- Personnel data changes
- Problem-solving procedure
- Inclement weather
- Expense reimbursement

Employee acknowledgement

- It is a best practice for the employee to sign a document that states that they have received the employee handbook, and that it has been reviewed with them.

Time away from work

- Holidays
- Paid time off
- Maternity leave
- Bereavement leave
- Jury duty leave
- Domestic violence leave

Workplace guidelines

- Confidential and proprietary information
- Harassment and discrimination prevention
- Social media policy
- Intellectual property
- Health and safety
- Emergency preparedness

The [Board Leadership](#) guide includes a list of legal and financial policies that you can familiarize yourself with or refer to when questions arise.



Executive Director/Staff Performance Review Plan

Nonprofit executive directors and staff work hard. It is important to build in time for regular feedback and staff development goals. Reviews create the space for conversations that may otherwise be missed in the day-to-day.

Review conversations often come up once a year, usually around the end of the budget cycle. However, it is more effective to have regular performance and staff development conversations. Include discussion about job descriptions, goals, and what support is needed on a monthly or quarterly basis. This conversation typically takes place between the executive director and board president.

There are three main ideas in executive director or staff performance reviews:

▶ Job Description

Performance discussions should center on the job description. If a job description is accurate, it outlines the major tasks that the individual is expected to perform. It can be a simple process to turn the job description into a review form by pulling key responsibilities out as goals. Give the form to the person being reviewed so they can comment on their own performance.

▶ Performance Support

People do not work in vacuums; their productivity often depends on someone else's performance. In the case of the executive director, their success is closely linked to the performance of the board. Use the opportunity of quarterly staff development meetings or annual reviews to have a two-way conversation. Simple questions to ask are:

- What would you like to see MORE of from [the board or the supervisor]?
- What would you like to see LESS of?

Conduct a board self-assessment at the same time as an executive director performance review to round out the conversation. (See the [Board Leadership](#) guide for a board self-assessment.)

▶ Goal Setting

Most people are motivated intrinsically. They have goals that they are trying to achieve for themselves, their organizations, or their communities. Review conversations are a great time to invite executive directors, with the board, to reflect on and articulate their goals in a more formal way. Discussion about goals creates the space to ask: How can I/we help you to achieve these goals?



Find executive director job description and performance support samples online in the online resource library: preservewa.org/main-street-guides



For discussion:

- Where are you spending most of your time: Leading, Managing, or Executing?
- Do all key leaders (staff and volunteers) have clear expectations about their—and each others'—roles?
- How do you budget (time and money) for support to help people achieve their goals?

Volunteers

People give of their time and expertise for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. Because volunteers are the backbone of any Main Street organization, careful planning and good volunteer management can mean the difference between failure and success for your organization.

Key Questions

- Why would someone choose to volunteer with your organization?
- How can you support your volunteers and optimize their opportunities for satisfaction and success in their work on behalf of your organization?
- How can you recognize your volunteers and celebrate their accomplishments?

What You Need to Know

Volunteers are a critical part of your Main Street program. The steps to finding volunteers and having them do good work on behalf of your organization can be understood as a volunteer cycle with five main parts: recruitment, orientation, engagement, feedback, and gratitude.

The Main Street Approach was built around volunteer and leadership. The Four Points typically operate each as a distinct, but interconnected, committee. This structure can be leveraged for recruiting and engaging community members in your Main Street organization's work. By helping your volunteers understand the role each of the Four Points plays in the overall vision for the district, you can ensure that they have a better sense of their own role within the organization.



Cornerstones of Success

- ✓ Understanding the volunteer engagement cycle
- ✓ Using Main Street committees to achieve your mission



Key Tools

- Volunteer application form
- Volunteer job description
- Volunteer evaluation



Visit the online resource library to find volunteer management tools and additional information:
preservewa.org/main-street-guides

The Volunteer Cycle

People volunteer for a variety of reasons, and the work of your organization has many parts. Having insight into what motivates someone to volunteer and matching that motivation to the work that needs done can result in a high level of satisfaction and engagement for the volunteer and great results for your organization. The structure of the volunteer cycle can be a helpful way to achieve this.

Recruitment

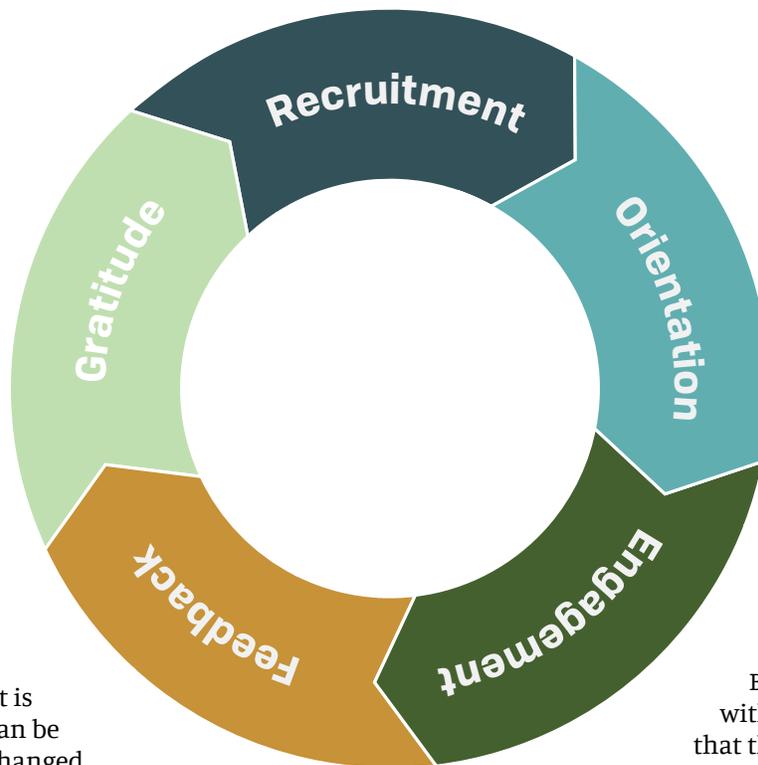
Find the volunteers and interest them in participating in the work of your organization.

Orientation

Familiarize your volunteers with everything they need to know to be successful in their work on behalf of the organization.

Engagement

Build an ongoing relationship with your volunteers and ensure that they have a positive volunteer experience.



Gratitude

Thank volunteers how they most want to be thanked (this may be publicly or privately). Acknowledge their contribution to your mission.

Feedback

Gain insight into what is working and what can be improved or changed.



For discussion:

- How does your Outreach Committee currently find volunteers?
- How do you orient them?
- How do you give feedback to volunteers about their work and growth?

Committees

A primary way that people volunteer in the work of Main Street programs is through committees. Committees, typically made up of five to seven people, are organized around the Main Street Approach™. They meet at least once a month to plan and prepare activities that create additional demands for time and volunteers. The committees sometimes form ad hoc groups to involve others in the effort for specific projects and activities.

Committees need a broad range of people to guide their development. Not only will you want people with a variety of technical and professional skills, but you will also want people with different working styles—some who enjoy working independently, some who are good number crunchers, some who are good at working out the details, and some who can see the big picture.

Likely Committee Candidates:

▶ Design	▶ Promotion	▶ Economic Vitality	▶ Outreach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architects • Real estate agents • Contractors • Property owners • City planners • History enthusiasts • Interior designers • Graphic designers • Artists • Architecture students • Historic preservation professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown merchants and employees • Civic groups involved in the arts • School board members • Marketing professionals • Event planners • Graphic designers • Artists • Staff in advertising or tourism offices • People who want to be “part of the action” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merchants • Realtors/mortgage brokers • Property owners • Marketing professionals • Developers • Business students • City’s economic development staff • Small Business Development Center (SBDC) representatives • Economic Development Council (EDC) staff • Bankers • Historic preservation professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merchants • Residents • Media representatives • Volunteer specialists • Property owners • Civic groups volunteers • Accountants • Event planners • Communications professionals • Graphic designers • Librarians • Major employers (like a local hospital’s marketing staff)

One thing to keep in mind is that, while these may be “likely” candidates for each committee, effective volunteer managers get to know volunteers as individuals and help them find the right places for them to plug into the organization’s mission and work. For instance, you may find that a banker wants nothing to do with Economic Vitality and would much rather pursue their personal passion for public art or active transportation through a volunteer position with the Design committee. Get to know your people and work with them to find the best fit.

Learn more about the types of work each committee takes on in the [About Main Street](#) guide.

Committee Roles and Responsibilities

Before you recruit committee members, it is important to have a clear sense of the job. The best committee members will join knowing their role and responsibilities. We provide here an overview of the jobs of the committee members and chair. It is a good idea to have job descriptions for both these positions customized to your organization and discussed as a part of your recruitment and orientation process. As we noted in the performance review section, a great way to check in on how people are doing is to use the job description as a guide.

Committee members have an important role—they represent a unique perspective and set of experiences within a larger team. They also have responsibilities to ensure that the work gets done in a professional manner. An ideal committee member has a passion for the work and the ability to commit to the workload, committee meetings, and the *preparation* for meetings required to make the most of your time together. Specific responsibilities include:

- ◇ At least one year of service of monthly committee meetings and subcommittee meetings if appropriate. Preparation for meetings is required!
- ◇ Work three to five hours per month outside of committee meetings.
- ◇ Attend all orientation and training sessions.
- ◇ Learn about the Main Street Approach™ to downtown revitalization.

Leadership of the committee is important. It keeps the team moving forward in a way that achieve goals and serves the community. An effective committee chair is organized, understands the Main Street Approach™, and has the ability to develop a strong rapport with committee members. The specific responsibilities of a committee chair are to:

- ◇ Recruit committee members.
- ◇ Run meetings, while always working to forge consensus.
- ◇ Organize work plans and keep the committee on track with work plans.
- ◇ Serve as spokesperson on behalf of the committee to the board and vice versa.
- ◇ Work to coordinate projects with staff.
- ◇ Ensure that the paperwork gets done, including meeting minutes, work plans, evaluations, and committee records.

Role of the Executive Director in Committee Activity

The executive director is responsible for ensuring that the committees run smoothly and inspire maximum volunteer dedication, achievement, responsibility, impact, and satisfaction. Frequently, the major role of a volunteer association's staff is to develop the volunteer capacity of the organization.

A staff member's goals and record are often measured by volunteer commitments and results. One way to ensure maximum volunteer participation when developing a committee work plan is to imagine that the organization has no staff and therefore cannot include staff time in the projects. Once the work plan is completed, add staff capacity. This exercise will help the organization draw up a reasonable work plan, one in which staff adds to the capacity of the organization, enabling it to expand and add new projects. In many organizations, volunteers tend to relax after the staff is hired, assuming that the staff will pick up their efforts.

In a successful volunteer organization, everyone works smarter after the staff is hired, due to the greater organizational efficiency that the staff can introduce.

It is the executive director's role to build support for the economic health of the district over the long term by building a broad organization- and district-wide awareness of the issues confronting downtown. One of the most effective ways of achieving this goal is through effective mobilization of committees and task forces.

Communications

What you say about your organization matters. So does how you say it, when you say it, and to whom. Giving thought and consideration to your communications strategy, both internally and externally, is an important part of managing your organization.

Key Questions

- Why is communication important to your organization?
- Who needs to know what and when?
- Who is your designated person for managing communications?

What You Need to Know

It can be helpful to divide communications into two groups: internal and external.

Internal Communications: It is important to coordinate your work within your organization, from day-to-day communication to the bigger picture of your mission and vision and how you express it to the outside world. A nonprofit develops ways of communicating both in-person and online to ensure that the work gets done.

External Communications: Ensuring stakeholders understand your mission and work and how they can be involved is fundamental to success on Main Street. External communication includes contact with supporters and potential funders, community groups and partners, committee members and potential volunteers, regulatory and government agencies, and the general public. Because you will need to reach these audiences through different messages and mediums, a communication strategy is an important tool to help your organization keep track of messaging, maintain a consistent brand, and prioritize this important work.

It is also important to track with whom you will be communicating.

Key Contacts: Maintaining up-to-date contact lists will make coordinating messages for different audiences and outreach campaigns more successful. Every Main Street program should have contact lists for all downtown businesses (it's great to have both the owner and manager, if different, included), downtown property owners (including real estate agents or building managers, where appropriate), board members, volunteers, and local media. You can also build a contact list of community members who have opted in to receive regular communication (such as a monthly newsletter) from your organization; this list can be generated through sign-ups at events, on social media, and through your website.

Managing Contacts: Depending on your organization's capacity and preferred tools, these contact lists could be simple Excel documents or held in contact management software. Whatever form your contacts database takes, the keys are keeping it up to date and centralized, so that whether you want to send a work schedule to event volunteers or a critical update to your downtown business owners, you can communicate easily and effectively with downtown stakeholders.

Cornerstones of Success

- ✓ Consistent messaging across all mediums
- ✓ Clarity of purpose in every communication
- ✓ Communications are strategically timed

Key Tools

- ☐ List of key contacts
- ☐ Internal and external communications plans
- ☐ Press Release 

Effective Communications

It can be helpful to think about your organization's communication using the traditional journalism structure of who, what, when, where, why, and how.



Visit the online resource library to find a workbook for packaging your organization's value and developing a communication strategy around it: preservewa.org/main-street-guides

Who:

It is strongly recommended that you have one person who is designated to be in charge of managing the communications for the organization. This doesn't mean this person has to do all the communicating but that the communications are coordinated by one person and consistently executed according to an overall purpose and strategy.

Who also means who your organization is communicating with, whether it is, for example, staff, board members, and volunteers, or funders, government agencies, and media outlets. Being mindful of who you are intending to communicate with will play an important role in determining the rest of the Ws and the H in this list.

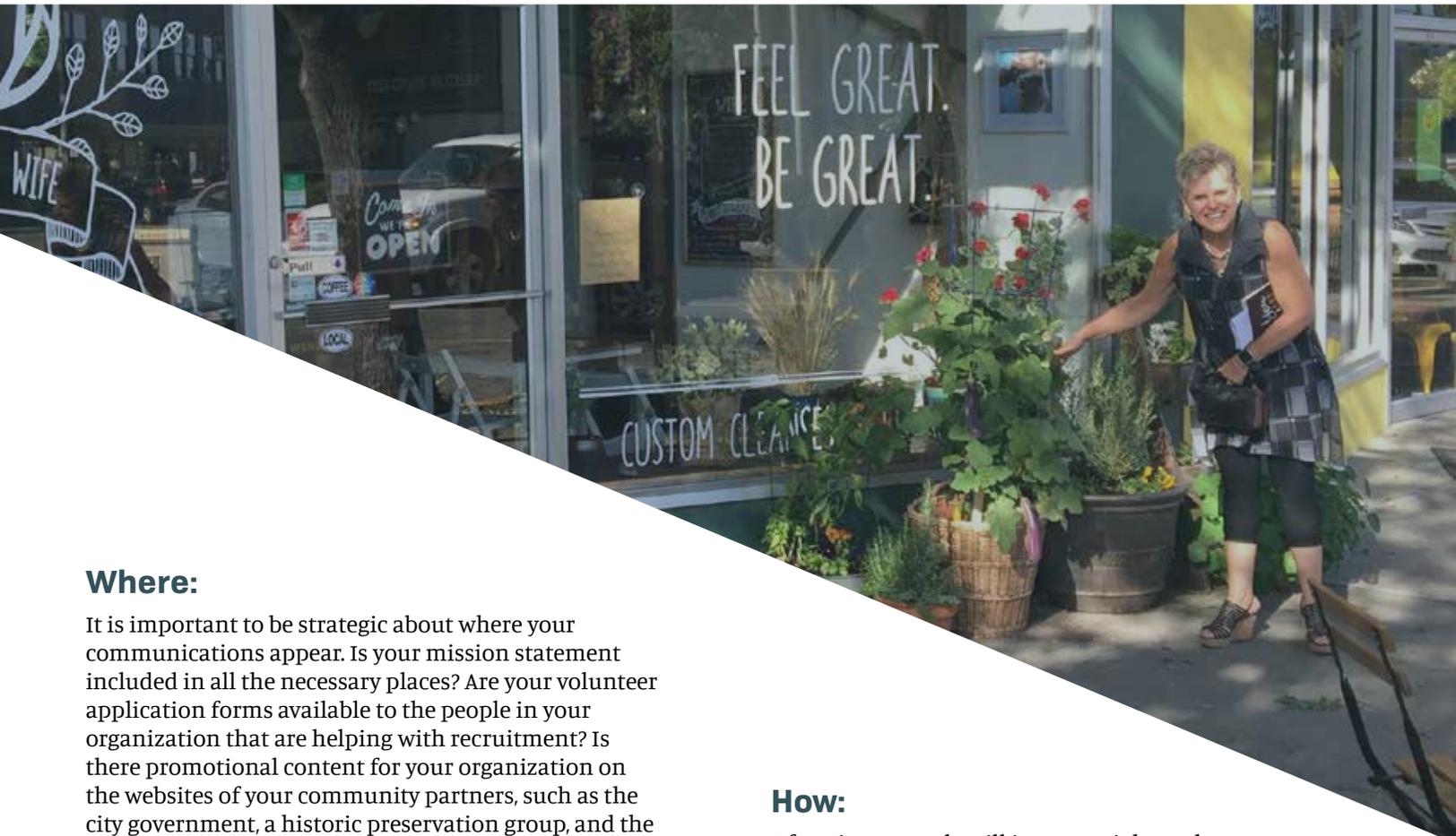
What:

Every communication should have a stated purpose. Identifying, specifically, what you want to communicate allows you to be clear and succinct in your messaging. The world we live in today is flooded with communications. Don't waste time or miss opportunities because of a lack of clarity about what you want to communicate. Get to the point and make an impression.

When:

The timing of your communications should be planned. Whether it is getting your minutes and board meeting agenda out on a regular schedule before the board meeting, submitting your press release to the local newspaper before their deadline, or thanking your donors before you ask them for funding again, timing matters. Knowing when something needs to be communicated also allows you to schedule backwards so that the communication can be produced well and in a timely manner.





Where:

It is important to be strategic about where your communications appear. Is your mission statement included in all the necessary places? Are your volunteer application forms available to the people in your organization that are helping with recruitment? Is there promotional content for your organization on the websites of your community partners, such as the city government, a historic preservation group, and the chamber of commerce? Likewise, when you make changes to your messaging or contact information, do you have a listing of all the places where your content needs to be updated? It can also be useful to ask the question, "Where else can I communicate for the benefit of the organization that I am not already?"

Why:

The "why" of your communication is the "so that ..." of your "what." For example, if the "what" is a donor thank you letter, the "why" is "so that ..." the donor will feel appreciated for the donation, feel connected to the work of the organization, and be more inclined to want to donate again in the future. Defining the "why" of your communication is the final component to determining the "how," listed next.

How:

Oftentimes people will jump straight to the "how" when thinking about communications: we need a website, or we need a press release. Walking first through the five Ws will provide the essential framework for how your message should be crafted and how it should be delivered. For example, if you have a strategic planning session coming up and it is already past the deadline for the local weekly newspaper, then a press release to the newspaper is not helpful. Or let's say you have plenty of time and you do the press release and you decide to also post flyers around town—the content for the press release is going to be presented and worded differently for the press release than for the flyer. And you could send the press release and the flyer to your mailing list, but you will also need to write the information in a more personal and very brief way in case the mailing list recipients don't bother to open the press release and flyer attachments.

The key is to determine your "how" based on the answers to the five Ws. Keep in mind that as you tailor your communications to each delivery method and audience, it is essential to keep your messaging consistent across all channels. What you say in one place shouldn't contradict what you say in another. Your organization should be readily recognized as being the same organization, wherever your communications show up.

Lessons Learned From Other Executive Directors

- **The organization is NOT the executive director's program!** Main Street is successful because it is all-inclusive and teaches local empowerment. The executive director has been hired to orchestrate the efforts of the local Main Street program, not to singlehandedly implement the activities of the program for the district!
- **Main Street is a volunteer-driven organization!** It is not staff-driven but rather staff-managed. Main Street executive directors are professionals hired to:
 - ◇ Facilitate work plan development.
 - ◇ Coordinate communication among committees.
 - ◇ Support and uphold board decisions.
 - ◇ Handle public awareness and public relations for the program.
 - ◇ Work closely with building owners and business owners.
 - ◇ Handle administrative details: records, reporting, files, etc.
 - ◇ Establish strong relationships with the city, chamber, county, etc.
 - ◇ Educate the district on Main Street, economic development, and historic preservation.
 - ◇ Motivate and celebrate volunteers and district leaders.
 - ◇ Be accountable to and report directly to the board president.
 - ◇ Attend all board and committee meetings.
 - ◇ Empower volunteers to turn district dreams into realities.
- **Executive directors will come and go, but the Main Street organization must continue!** When a program becomes staff-driven and that staff member leaves, the program goes with the executive director and the organization/district is left hanging.
- **Gain the trust of those who hired you for the position.** Use them to propose your ideas, then support them during discussions.
- **The executive director is a professional hired to coordinate the efforts of the district's revitalization!** The executive director does NOT:
 - ◇ Become the fundraiser for Main Street. Nothing diminishes your credibility faster than hitting the streets trying to raise your own salary.
 - ◇ Take the minutes at board meetings. This is the secretary's responsibility.
 - ◇ Chair meetings of the board of directors or committees.
 - ◇ Write the entire newsletter.
 - ◇ Voice their own opinion publicly unless it is consistent with the opinion of the board.
 - ◇ Do the books for the organization. This is the treasurer's responsibility.
 - ◇ Sign their own paychecks.
 - ◇ Become the sole person implementing the activities of the program. They must empower volunteers to take responsibility.
- **Go to lunch weekly with a different board member, stakeholder, or city official . . . and then LISTEN!** It's amazing what you will learn.
- **Always work through the board president.** It is very difficult to answer to seven to 11 bosses.
- **Use work plans as your Rock of Gibraltar.** "We are not working on that particular project at this time." "Our board-approved work plans are filled with activities that support our mission. To add this item to our approved work plan, you will need to present the idea to the board of directors."
- **Find someone not involved with the program or related to you to become your confidante.** This is the person you may vent to. An executive director from another Main Street district works well in this role.
- **Remember that respect is earned.** Dressing as a clown for an event in the morning does not mean that the bank president will not respect your opinion or suggestions at an important meeting in the afternoon.



Discussion Guide

Executive leaders and staff spend so much time in the work that it is hard to find time to step back and think about the big picture. These discussion questions give you some prompts to consider.

1. Main Street programs are complex systems of board, staff, committees, volunteers, and community, all working in alignment to achieve something important. Think about this work from a systems approach.

- Where are some places where the system is really working?
- Why is it working? What can you learn from this success?
- Now . . . where are some stall points or traffic jams?
- What do you think the challenge is?
- How could you address it?

2. Culture is so important within an organization. It sets the tone for how people show up, engage with one another, and stay motivated in the work.

- What words would you use to describe your culture?
- What words do you want to be able to use to describe your culture?
- Discuss how you could work to bridge where you are now with where you want to be.

3. Nonprofits exist in life cycles, just like any living thing. They start, they experience growth, they mature, and they (sometimes) decline.

- Where are you in your organizational life cycle? Different parts of your organization can be at different stages.
- Consider board leadership, executive leadership, administrative systems, and community support (funding and partnerships). At what life stage are you for each of these? Why do you think that?

4. Strategic planning has a bad reputation. We think about plans sitting on the shelf, getting dusty because they aren't helpful.

- What is your experience with strategic planning?
- How could you make the process more engaging or the product more dynamic?
- Why is strategic planning important for your Main Street organization?

5. Feedback is a theme in this guide. We discuss it in performance review, evaluation, strategic planning, and volunteer management. Getting good at giving and receiving feedback is an important executive leadership skill.

- How does feedback happen within your organization?
- Is it a constructive part of your culture or something that you try to avoid (or something in between)?

Companion Guides

This **Executive Leadership** guide is written for Main Street executive leaders and staff. It is also a resource for board members to understand a nonprofit executive director's role and their relationship to boards. It is one of four guides provided by the Washington State Main Street Program, your State Coordinating Program, to provide a common reference handbook and set of resources to start-up, emerging, and established Main Street organizations statewide. A brief description of the other three guides follows.



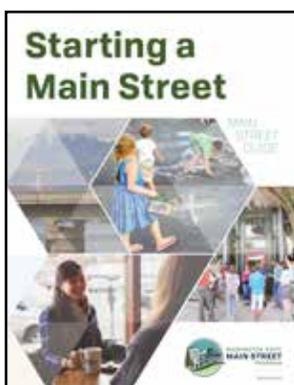
About Main Street

This guide is written for anyone wanting to know more about the Main Street Approach™ and how Main Street organizations serve their communities. It explores why downtown matters, what a Main Street organization is, who benefits from it, and how to be a successful Main Street organization.



Board Leadership

This guide is written for Main Street organization board members and the staff with whom they work. It explores the basics of board governance, financial management, and nonprofit law, and each section reviews what board members need to know as well as tools to help strengthen board leadership.



Starting a Main Street

This guide is written for people new to Main Street and considering starting a Main Street organization in their own community. It explores why your community might use the Main Street Approach™ and how to tap into state and national resources, start a Main Street organization, and become a nonprofit.



Find all guides at: preservewa.org/main-street-guides



WASHINGTON STATE MAIN STREET PROGRAM

The Washington State Main Street Program helps communities revitalize the economy, appearance, and image of their downtown districts using the successful Main Street Approach™, a comprehensive revitalization strategy built around a community's unique heritage and attributes. Reach out to your State Coordinating Program:

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