

By Bill Brunelle, Independent We Stand

Building a Better Future

5 Reasons to Join a Main Street Organization in Your Community



Just like any good foundation, the community is strongest when all its pieces work together. Around town, small businesses often come together in Main Street organizations, such as small business associations, downtown improvement districts and shop-local programs. These groups dedicate themselves to supporting small businesses as a way to further the community.

Consider how the following ways of working with a local small business organization can help you build a better future for your business and your community.

1. Your reach gets bigger.

Main Street organizations connect you with other small businesses in the community. Through those connections, you can brainstorm new ideas, cover more ground with outreach campaigns and get more people talking about your business. By participating in community events and establishing new local traditions, your Main Street organization can introduce you to new customers, new partners and new supporters. Whether you want to solve a problem within your store or introduce a new initiative to the entire community, your Main Street organization can help you build a path forward with other like-minded small businesses.

2. Your brand becomes more recognizable.

In addition to building your network, your Main Street organization can help you build your brand. Retail success today requires an omnichannel marketing approach. Small businesses sometimes struggle with implementing and maintaining these strategies. However, your local Main Street

organization can make it as simple as sharing a buy-local Facebook post or downloading a press release template. Main Street groups also typically offer members valuable promotional opportunities, such as a free listing in a small business directory, social media graphics, customizable point-of-sale materials and group discounts on local media advertising. By leveraging these resources, your small business can spread awareness of your company and tap into the Main Street organization's buy-local brand.

3. Your voice is more powerful.

More than a foundation, your local Main Street organization is also a platform. Is there an issue in your community that matters to you, such as a new development that could threaten your business or a new tax incentive that would help your bottom line? By joining your local Main Street organization, you can find opportunities to make your voice heard. That's because Main Street organizations don't only provide services to members; they also advocate on behalf of the entire small business community.

Take the Austin Independent Business Alliance (AIBA) in Texas, for example. In 2017, AIBA successfully advocated for \$500,000 in public funding for local business marketing and programming. AIBA members worked with other local organizations to support the initiative and then spoke directly to the Austin City Council ahead of its vote on the funding. Ultimately, the Austin City Council voted unanimously to fund the local business marketing and programming with an existing hotel occupancy tax.

4. Your efforts will boost the local economy.

According to the National Main Street Center (NMSC), a program operated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Main Street programs have driven more than \$74 billion in reinvestment, created more than 614,000 jobs and launched nearly 140,000 businesses since 1980. NMSC estimates that \$26.43 of investment occurred for every dollar that a community spent on a Main Street program in 2017.

The Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), a research organization focused on promoting local development, found that Main Street organizations correspond with higher revenue growth, increased local media coverage, greater support from local officials and more customer loyalty. In 2016, ILSR reported data showing independent businesses in communities with active Main Street organizations measured average revenue growth of 7.4 percent, compared to 4.2 percent for independent businesses elsewhere.

5. Your investment will instill local pride.

Main Street organizations drum up enthusiasm for small businesses and local traditions. They keep people in the community and draw in visitors, which means more customers for your business and more regional prosperity.

Independent We Stand recognizes one Main Street organization each year for its commitment to the community in the annual America's Main Street Contest. Last year, the public chose Bridge Street Ashtabula in northeast Ohio as the winner. This year's contest is now open. Nominate your local Main Street organization through April 21 at mainstreetcontest.com. ➔



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Independent We Stand (IWS) educates communities about the benefits of supporting locally owned businesses. IWS inspires small business owners to celebrate their locally owned status and helps consumers understand their value. IWS is sponsored by STIHL, Do it Best Corp. and PPG Paints.

Show Your Local Support

To find a Main Street organization in your community, consult your local chamber of commerce or search the American Independent Business Alliance (amiba.net), the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (bealocalist.org) or the National Main Street Center (mainstreet.org) for a local chapter near you. You can also access promotional materials and small business tips with an Independent We Stand membership.

Learn how you can support your small business community at independentwestand.org.

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