



Main Street Hiring Assistance

The following materials were gathered from a variety of sources to provide assistance to Michigan Main Street communities as they embark on hiring a new, or replacing an existing, Executive Director. For additional assistance, please contact Michigan Main Street staff at MichiganMainStreet@Michigan.org

Executive Director Hiring Assistance

The Michigan Main Street program offers executive director selection assistance to Select and Master Main Street communities. The assistance can be scaled based on the local community's preference. The local hiring committee should provide a hiring timeline that includes activities listed below and which activities the community would like MMS to participate in. At that time, a MMS staff person will be assigned.

- **Advertise Main Street Position** – Michigan Main Street will utilize all channels available to it to reach the highest number of qualified candidates for the position.
- **First Round Resume Review** – Once resumes are collected, MMS staff can review the resumes received and score them based on evaluation criteria provided by the local community.
- **First Round Interview** – MMS staff can participate as a hiring committee and sit in on all first round interviews. While staff will refrain from providing direct recommendations, they will assist by asking questions of the candidate and the hiring committee.
- **Second Round Interview** – MMS staff can participate as a hiring committee member and sit on all second round interviews. While staff will refrain from providing direct recommendations, they will assist by asking questions of the candidate and the hiring committee.

Hiring a Main Street Executive Director

The Main Street Executive Director is the central coordinator of the Main Street program's activities. He or she oversees daily operations, providing the hands-on involvement critical to a successful revitalization program. The director also provides a communication link between committees, ensuring that activities in all four areas of the Four Point Approach are synchronized. Like a shopping center manager, the Main Street executive director coordinates a wide range of projects, from providing support for promotional activities, to assembling marketing information. Most important, is the Main Street Executive Director's role as a full-time advocate for the commercial district and as an authority on information, resources, and programs related to the revitalization effort.

The Main Street Director and Volunteers

Full time executive director is essential to a successful commercial district revitalization program. Keep in mind, however, that the Main Street Executive Director must not take the place of volunteers in the organization. Main Street programs rely on the mobilization of a large number of volunteers throughout the community. In this way, the Main Street Executive Director's job is to expand and develop volunteer capacity and ensure that committee activity is moving smoothly. The manager should serve as a facilitator, coordinating people and resources, to help volunteers work efficiently and productively.

The Main Street Executive Director's Skills

The Main Street Executive Director must be creative, entrepreneurial and flexible - able to wear a variety of hats based on the program's most pressing needs, from blowing up balloons in the morning to discussing financial packaging for a key real estate development project with bankers in the afternoon. The director must be well organized and, above all, able to communicate easily with many different types of people, motivate volunteers, and help resolve interpersonal conflicts.

An effective Main Street Executive Director should have the following characteristics:

- Strong advocate for the commercial district, supporting the goals of the revitalization program.
- Self-starter, capable of working in independent situations.
- Able to work well with the volunteer board to which he or she reports.
- Diplomatic - able to work well with a wide variety of people.
- Skilled one-on-one communicator.
- Have a good sense of design and an awareness of historic preservation.
- Very adaptable
- Capable of fitting into the community, while also bringing new ideas and a fresh approach to the revitalization process.

Main Street Executive Directors come from a broad range of academic and professional backgrounds - finance, real estate development, urban planning, public administration, history, journalism, marketing, and many others. It is obviously important that the director have experience or training in one or more areas of benefit to the revitalization process. It is even more important that he or she have the person skills needed to work well with volunteers, to keep track of scores of details, to communicate effectively, and to inspire people in the community to support the revitalization program.

The Main Street program will probably have greater needs in some areas than in others. Consequently, the director's skills should reflect the strengths appropriate for the community. For instance, if the community has a planning or economic

development office that already offers financial packaging for developers interested in development projects within the commercial district, the Main Street Executive Director may not need skills in real estate development. Instead, a director with marketing, organization or design expertise may be more appropriate.

Local Versus Out-of-Town Applicants

Both local and out of town candidates have pros and cons as potential Main Street Executive Directors. A local candidate may bring extensive knowledge of the commercial district, its economy, and its past revitalization efforts – but may also bring ‘baggage’, which might compromise his or her ability to work effectively with some program volunteers. An out-of-town candidate may bring a fresh vantage point – but may not be accepted as a partner by local participants. Much of the decision about whether to choose a local or out of town director will depend on the community’s personality, the culture of the commercial district, and interpersonal politics. Most importantly is the committee make every effort to find the best person for the position, whether local or out of town.

Steps in Hiring a Main Street Director

- Development of selection committee
- Identify desired skills of candidate and draft position description
- Development of position description
- Advertise a position
- Development of evaluation criteria and interview questions
- Collection of resumes
- Invitation to interview
- Conduct interviews
- Committee discussion of candidates
- Committee decision on top 2-3 candidates
- Invitation to second interview
- Conduct second interview
- Committee discussion of candidates
- Board decides on a candidate (backup candidate if desired)
- Board approval of job offer
- Extension of job offer
- Negotiation of terms of employment
- Final agreement of terms of employment
- Notification to other candidates
- Announcement of staff selection
- Begin director onboarding process

The Process of Hiring a Main Street Executive Director

Development of Selection Committee

The task of hiring the Main Street Executive Director is usually delegated to a small task force or committee charged specifically with this assignment. The task force should include representatives from several of the key groups, organizations, and agencies involved in the Main Street program. If the community has already established a board of directors or steering committee for the Main Street program, a task force of this group may be appropriate. Politically, it's important to get representatives from key groups involved in the process. If they help select the director, they will be more apt to work closely with the executive director rather than be antagonistic towards him or her. Limit the selection committee to a manageable number – ideally an odd number, no more than five or six. Be sure the task force includes at least one person with experience in hiring and personnel.

With input from others, the committee should decide:

- If the executive director should be hired locally, or if a broader search be conducted?
- What particular strengths and skills should the executive director possess?
- What compensation will we offer?
- If the executive director will be a salaried employee of the local Main Street program or a consultant working under contract with the program?

The task force's job is to screen the applicants down to the top three potential candidates so the board can take over. The entire board and city manager or administrator should conduct the second interviews and select the top candidate.

Outline a Hiring Timeline

The task force should develop a timeline for hiring the Main Street Executive Director. Typically, the Main Street director search shouldn't take more than three months. Per your community's contract with MMS, the organization cannot go more than six months without an Executive Director. A sample timeline is below. As you can see, finding a competent manager won't happen overnight. Be patient!

March 1-15	Draft position description
March 15-31	Post position in all appropriate outlets
April 10	Applications due
April 13-14	Screen applications
April 18	Call 5 to 7 applicants for interviews
April 19 & 20	Interviews
April 21	Check references on those that make the cut
April 23-30	Call three applicants for second interview
May 1	Second interviews
May 2	make final selection
May 3	Call successful candidate, then others

Identify Desired Skills of Candidate and Draft Position Description

The committee should develop a set of skills that the candidate should possess and build that into the job description for the Main Street Executive Director, then a notice for the available

position that can be used to advertise the position. This sort of activity begins with thinking about the goals and opportunities the Main Street program has and what skills are necessary to meet them. Fundamentally, skills should include communication, volunteer management, or fundraising. Or all three.

These skills can then be compiled into a position description that captures the objective of the job, the expected qualification, any special demands, and of course the job duties. Tasks should be listed in the order of the time consumed or level of importance. Focus on what must be accomplished instead of how each item should be accomplished. Each candidate is going to bring skills and abilities to tackle the outcomes differently. See the sample Main Street Executive Director job description in the back of this document.

Advertise a Position

A position available notice can be used to advertise the position's availability. The task force should use the job description to draft a position notice. Often, this is a brief notification that the organization is hiring, where to find more information, and when resumes are due. The task force should place advertisements in local and statewide newspapers, state planning and preservation newsletters, and in the career planning and placement offices of colleges with graduate programs in planning, administration, marketing, preservation, or business. A sample position description and advertisement is below. Also consider reaching out to Michigan Main Street and National Main Street as they often can circulate the opportunity within their circles as well.

Example Executive Director Posting

Main Street Executive Director. [Name of community or organization] is accepting applications for the position of Main Street Executive Director. The executive director will be responsible for coordinating commercial revitalization activities through the Main Street program. Applicants should have education and/or professional experience in one or more of the following areas: historic preservation, planning, economic development, retailing, marketing, design, volunteer management, nonprofit management, and small business development. The executive director must be entrepreneurial, energetic, imaginative, well organized, and capable of functioning effectively in an independent environment. Excellent verbal and written communication skills are essential. The salary range is [specify range], depending on experience. Submit resume, letter of interest, and three references to [name and address of selection committee contact person]. Preference will be given to resumes received before [date].

A complete list of posting locations is below;

- Main Street America website - The Pointe (use local log-in information)
- Michigan Downtown Association website: www.michigandowntowns.com (If your community is a member)
- Michigan Planning Association website: www.planningmi.org - www.planningmi.org/jobs - \$\$
- Michigan Municipal League website: www.mml.org/classifieds/ - \$\$
- Michigan Nonprofit Association: www.mnaonline.org/nonprofitjobinternshipcenter - \$\$
- Local Main Street social media channels (Facebook & LinkedIn)

Development of Evaluation Criteria and Interview Questions

It can be easy, particularly in rural communities, to use personal experiences with individuals to guide resume review. Before you look at the first resume, the task force should come up with a set of skills or qualities in an ideal candidate. This information can be captured in a simple grid that can be used by each task force member to evaluate resumes and interviewees. An example can be found in the back of this document. After identifying these skills, interview questions can be developed that help the candidate demonstrate their command of these skills and abilities. Example questions have been included below.

Typically, introductory questions about the candidate, their experience, and their understanding of downtown development are reserved for the first interview. Problem solving and situational questions are best reserved for the second interview.

A set of standard questions (same for every applicant) should be prepared ahead of time for each interview and allocated to the various team members. These questions should not however, dissuade follow up questions from anyone during the process.

Interview questions might include:

- Why do you want to be a Main Street Executive Director? What special qualities do you feel you would bring to the position?
- Have you had any special work experiences, either professional or voluntary, that relate to the position?
- How would you go about organizing or strengthening a downtown development organization?
- What is the most innovative project you have been involved in?
- How would you convince skeptical merchants, property owners, or city officials to participate in the Main Street program?
- Before hearing about this position, were you aware of the National Main Street Center and the Main Street approach to downtown revitalization? Are you familiar with historic preservation issues?
- The executive director must deal with a large number of people, from government officials, to media representatives, to merchants. Can you give examples from your experiences that demonstrate your ability to work productively with others?
- The success of a local Main Street program depends largely on diligent efforts made over a number of years. Do you feel you can commit several years to this position?
- This position will require occasional travel to other communities and other states, in addition to evening and weekend work. Do you have problems with these demands?
- Can you tell us what you think a comprehensive downtown program entails?
- Do you work best independently or in a group situation?
- How do you prioritize projects for yourself? How many projects do you feel comfortable working with at any given time?
- Of the four point approach; Design, Organization, Promotion, and Economic Vitality (business recruitment and retention), which do you feel most and least comfortable and competent?
- If you were setting up a promotional event at the last minute and all of your volunteers dropped the ball, what would you do?

- What are two of your best characteristics and two characteristics that you'd like to improve about yourself?
- What would you expect from your board in the way of supervision or support?
- Give an example of a project you have created and completed on your own.
- If selected, how soon could you begin work?
- How would you build collaborative working relationships between the organization, agencies, and constituencies involved in the revitalization process? What do you think the most important elements are of such collaborative working partnerships?
- What is the most innovative project you have been involved in?
- How would you convince skeptical merchants, property owners, city officials, or others to participate in the Main Street program?
- What is the first thing (or first things) you would do as a Main Street Executive Director?
- Do you feel comfortable and competent speaking publicly and working in a position with high community visibility? How would you describe your public speaking style?
- Before hearing about this position, were you aware of the National Main Street Center and the Main Street 4 Point Approach®? Are you familiar with historic preservation issues?
- Why do you think America's historic and traditional commercial districts need revitalizing? What happened to make them deteriorate economically?

A job description, and information about your community and organization (perhaps even a copy of a recent MMS report or plan) are all worth providing prior to the second interview. Follow-up questions might reference these materials to see how much the candidate picked up about your community, the job, and the revitalization approach being taken.

Collection of Resumes

First, the hiring committee, or identified individual on your hiring committee, eliminates unqualified resumes – applicants who do not fit criteria for education or experience. Using the scoring criteria developed in earlier steps, evaluate resumes, and collaborate with other hiring committee members to identify top scorers.

Invitation to Interview & Conduct Interviews

When you have narrowed down the list to about eight to ten candidates, conduct interviews. The committee should develop a list of 4-6 questions, which each committee member will use to conduct the interviews.

Committee Discussion of Candidates & Selection of Top Candidates

After the first interviews are completed, the selection committee should be able to identify three to five candidates for face-to-face interviews with the entire board of directors. Rely on the scoring sheet to help guide discussion, ensuring that the candidates are being evaluated on the skills the group is seeking. Also, allow time for each committee member to draw their own conclusions about each candidate before opening up discussion to the group. This allows each individual's opinions to be formed before group discussion begins to sway their views.

Following the interview, team members need to rate or make notes about the candidate, and perhaps discuss the interview. Make sure that your comments get to the issues (Did I like this person? Will our town like him/her? What characteristics did I perceive?) Get past the skills and experiences.

Discussion Points for Committee Members

- Did the applicant listen and respond well to the questions asked?
- Did the applicant make direct eye contact?
- Did the applicant ask clarifying questions when appropriate?
- Did the applicant convey a sense of pride and accomplishment when speaking of past jobs and experiences?
- Has the applicant prepared for the interview by doing research on the Main Street program and on the community?
- Did the applicant appear to be outgoing, pleasant, and easy to speak with?
- Did the applicant display a good understanding of the ideas and issues involved in the economic revitalization of historic commercial districts?
- Did the applicant appear to be open to learning new approaches and ideas?
- Do you think you can work well with this individual?
- Do you think this individual will be accepted easily by your community?

Invitation to Second Interview

It is usually best to schedule all the interviews to take place on one or two days so that differences between candidates will be clearer with the entire board of directors participating in the interviews. Allow at least one hour for each interview, with a space of at least one half hour between them, for the committee to discuss the candidate's strengths and weaknesses. Call the candidates and schedule the interviews. The committee should decide in advance if it will reimburse out of town candidates for travel expenses.

Ask applicants to bring several writing samples. The Main Street Executive Director will need to write everything from press releases to annual reports, so be sure to hire someone who can communicate well both verbally and in writing. Also, if you have not yet asked the candidate to provide the names and telephone number of several professional references, do so now.

Conduct Second Interview

Designate a spokesperson to begin each interview by briefly describing the program and the job. Remember, though, that the applicant should do more talking than the committee. Each committee member should ask questions of the candidate. Be sure to ask several similar questions of each candidate in order to make evaluation easier. Finally, be sure to tell each candidate by what date a decision will be made.

Remember the applicant's spit and polish always takes center stage during the first interview. By the second, the candidate is considerably more confident and comfortable. An effective way to get past the polish is to ask each of the semi-finalists to respond to 2 or 3 essay questions prior to their interview. Questions should be phrased to encourage specific examples of how the applicant has dealt with a situation or organized an activity (i.e., doesn't engender, just a statement of personal philosophy).

Questions might include:

- Give some reasons why a business/property owner should fix up (make an investment in) his/her building.
- How would you approach recruiting a new business? What would you anticipate to be the major factors?
- Why should we bother with downtown? What makes it worth the time and money we're about to spend?

Check References

Call at least three of the references each candidate provides to you. Briefly describe the Main Street program and the requirements of the position for which the candidate is being considered, then engage each person in a discussion of the candidate's potential strengths and weaknesses for the position. Example questions are included in the back of this document.

Sample Reference Check Questions

- How long have you known the candidate and how has your association with him or her enabled you to evaluate his/her skills and abilities?
- Has the candidate had a good working relationship with coworkers and supervisors?
- Can you give examples of how the candidate has used innovative approaches to resolve problems?
- Does the candidate prioritize problems well?
- Is the candidate a good communicator? Does he or she develop a good working relationship with others?
- What are the candidate's greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- This position will require someone who can work independently - but who can also work effectively with a board and committees. Can this person do this well?
- This position is not a 9 to 5 job; it's a demanding position that frequently involves overtime and requires a strong commitment to the program's mission. Is this candidate capable of this kind of commitment?

Committee Discussion & Selection of Candidates

After all the interviews have been conducted, the committee should rank the candidates. Choose a first and second choice, so that the committee will not have to re-interview candidates if the first choice turns down the position. The task force chairperson should call the selected candidates with the job offer. Immediately after a candidate is chosen and accepts the position, send out short letters thanking the other applicants for their interest in the Main Street program.

Final selection should be based on consensus. Depending on the size of the group, not everyone will be happy with the selection. Nonetheless, if the hiring team is not satisfied with their final choices, they need to go back through the resumes and interview further or repost for the position. Do not hire someone you don't feel very good about!

Board Approval, Extension, and Negotiation of the Job Offer

When making an offer to a potential staff person, there will likely be a bit of negotiation. The board should put together a high and low offer and discuss their level of comfort with a variety of different benefits before calling the individual.

Once the board has identified the salary range and benefits they are comfortable with, one person, typically the board president, can call the candidate and extend the offer of employment. This may take some back and forth. Stay firm within your previously agreed upon salary range, and don't be afraid to let the person know that you'll have to get back to them.

Final Agreement of Terms of Employment

Regardless of whether the Main Street Executive Director is a salaried employee of the Main Street program or a consultant working under contract with the Main Street program, the committee should develop a written contract. The contract should state the rate of pay and method of payment, benefits offered, work to be performed, performance review system, and vacation and sick leave policy. The contract might also include stipulations about potential conflicts of interest (for instance, prohibiting the Main Street Executive Director from using 'inside' information to make real estate development investments not available to the general public). It should also specify the officer to whom the executive director is expected to report. Many municipalities have this information spelled out in their human resources policy. If this is the case, the committee and board should familiarize themselves with the policies for sake of consistency.

Notification to Other Candidates

It is polite to let the other candidates know that you have not selected them for the position. Typically, this is done with a phone call or letter thanking them for their participation in the process, but letting them know that they were not selected. The candidates may reach out to you looking for feedback regarding their interview. This sort of feedback is a great learning tool and perfectly acceptable.

Announcement of Staff Selection

Welcome the new manager by introducing them to the community and their future volunteer base. Many communities will do this through a press release to local press or an open house shortly after the person begins. Invite all the necessary stakeholders that the individual will likely be working with in the future. Partner organizations, local municipalities, and community volunteers will be anxious to meet their new downtown development partner. This sort of formal introduction will help when the new executive director begins their work.

Begin Director Onboarding Process

Onboarding of the new executive director is the single biggest indicator in the individual's success and longevity in the program. Michigan Main Street will provide a series of resources to the new individual over the course of several months. However, there is a substantial amount of information specific to your local community that MMS cannot share.

Each board member should review a different aspect of the program. Committee chairs can meet with the executive director to discuss their work plans and committee members. The

treasurer can meet with the new director to review the organization's finances and financial processes. Within each organization: the city manager, planning director, and Chamber of Commerce can provide a piece of the puzzle to the manager.

At a minimum, all existing plans and maps should be shared with the director. Documents such as the City's master plan, downtown development plan, redevelopment plan, or work plans, should all be thoroughly reviewed and updates given for each project. This level of onboarding will ensure that the individual can hit the ground running.

Sample Main Street Executive Director Job Description

Work Objectives

The Main Street Executive Director coordinates activities within a downtown revitalization program that utilizes historic preservation as an integral foundation for downtown economic development. He/she is responsible for the development conduct, execution, and documentation of the Main Street program. The executive director is the principal on-site staff person responsible for coordinating all program activities and volunteers, as well as representing the community regionally and nationally as appropriate. In addition, the program director should help guide the organization as its objectives evolve.

Full Range of Duties to be Performed

The executive director should carry out the following tasks:

- Coordinate the activity of the Main street program committees, ensuring that communication among committees is well established; assist committee volunteers with implementation of work plan items.
- Manage all administrative aspects of the Main Street program including purchasing, record keeping, budget development, accounting, preparing all reports required by the state Main Street program and by the National Main Street Center, assisting with preparation of reports to funding agencies, and supervising employees or consultants.
- Develop, in conjunction with the Main Street program's board of directors, downtown economic development strategies that are based on historic preservation and utilize the community's human and economic resources. Become familiar with all persons and groups directly and indirectly involved in the downtown. Mindful of the roles of various downtown interest groups, assist the Main Street programs' board of directors and committees in developing an annual action plan for implementing a downtown revitalization program focused on four areas: design/historic preservation; promotion and marketing; organization/management; and economic restructuring/development.
- Develop and conduct on-going public awareness and education programs designed to enhance appreciation of the downtown's assets and to foster an understanding of the Main Street program's goals and objectives. Use speaking engagements, media interviews, and personal appearances to keep the program in the public eye.
- Assist individual tenants or property owners with physical improvement projects through personal consultation or by obtaining and supervising professional design consultants. Assist in locating appropriate contractors and materials. When possible, participate in construction supervision. Provide advice and guidance on necessary financial mechanisms for physical improvements.

- Assess the management capacity of major downtown organizations and encourage improvements in the downtown community's ability to carry out joint activities such as promotional events, advertising, appropriate store hours, special events, business assistance, business recruitment, parking management, etc. Provide advice and information on successful downtown management. Encourage a cooperative climate among downtown interests and local public officials.
- Advise downtown merchants' organization and/or chamber of commerce retail committees on Main Street program activities and goals. Help coordinate joint promotional events, such as festival or business promotions, to improve the quality and success of events and attract people to downtown. Work closely with local media to ensure maximum coverage of promotional activities. Encourage design excellence in all aspects of promotion in order to advance an image of quality for the downtown.
- Help build strong and productive relationships with appropriate public agencies at the local and state levels.
- Utilizing the Main Street program form, develop and maintain data systems to track the progress of the local Main Street program. These systems should include economic monitoring of individual building files, photographic documentation of physical changes, statistics, on job creation, and business retention.
- Represent the community to important constituencies at the local, state, and national levels. Speak effectively on the program's directions and work, mindful of the need to improve state and national economic development policies as they relate to commercial districts.

Resource Management Responsibilities

The executive director supervises any necessary temporary or permanent employees, as well as professional consultants. He/she participates in personnel and project evaluations. The executive director maintains local Main Street program records and reports, establishes technical resource files and libraries, and prepares regular reports for the state Main Street program and National Main Street Center. The executive director monitors the annual program budget and maintains financial records.

Job Knowledge and Skills Required

The executive director should have education and/or experience in one or more of the following areas: commercial district management, economics, finance, public relations, planning, business administration, public administration, retailing, volunteer or nonprofit administration, architecture, historic preservation, and/or small business development. The program director must be sensitive to design and preservation issues and must understand the issues confronting downtown business people, property owners, public agencies, and community organization. The director must be entrepreneurial, energetic, imaginative, well organized and capable of functioning effectively in an independent environment. Excellent written and verbal communication skills are essential. Supervisory skills are desirable.

Sample Main Street Executive Director Scoring Criteria

From Resume			From Interview	Date:	
Skills, attributes	Possible Score	Awarded	Skills, attributes	Possible Score	Awarded
Demonstrated leadership	15		Demonstrated leadership	15	
Non-profit management			Non-profit management		
- planning	3		- planning	3	
- development	3		- development	3	
- board and volunteer management	3		- board and volunteer management	3	
- public relations	3		- public relations	3	
- office management	3		- office management	3	
Communication Skills			Communication Skills		
- written	5		- written	5	
- oral	5		- oral	5	
- public presentations	5		- public presentations	5	
Creative	10		Creative	10	
Energetic	10		Energetic	10	
Visionary	10		Visionary	10	
4- Points			4- Points		
- design	2		- design	2	
- promotions	2		- promotions	2	
- organization	2		- organization	2	
- economic restructuring	2		- economic restructuring	2	
People-to-people			People-to-people		
- professional service providers	2		- professional service providers	2	
- personal service providers	2		- personal service providers	2	
- retailers	2		- retailers	2	
- customers	2		- customers	2	
Computer Skills	7		Computer Skills	7	
			Appearance		
			Personality		
			Body Language		
			Enthusiasm - Passion for job		
Total Points	15				
Greatest Strength					
Greatest Weakness					
Overall Impression					