

VIRGINIA  
**MAIN**  
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT  
OF HOUSING AND  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
*Street*

*2025*  
**PROGRAM  
GUIDELINES**



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## Introduction

Main Street is a national model created by the National Main Street Center (NMSC), a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, to bring jobs, dollars, and people to small towns and commercial districts. It is a powerful, grassroots network consisting of over 45 Coordinating Programs and more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities across the country committed to creating high-quality places and building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. Main Street programs leverage private and public investment and capitalize on the unique appeal of historic downtowns and communities. The result is one of the most successful economic revitalization strategies in the country.



As a Main Street America™ Coordinating Program, the Virginia Main Street (VMS) program, housed in the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), nurtures successful, local revitalization programs across the state based on the Main Street Approach™.<sup>1</sup> From 1985 to 2023, the VMS program has supported the opening or expansion of more than 8,200 businesses; created more than 27,000 jobs; and generated more than \$2.3 billion in public and private investment in Virginia.<sup>2</sup>



## Three Tiers of Participation

The VMS program provides technical assistance, consulting services, training, and grant funding to communities of all sizes with different levels of experience in, and commitment to, commercial district revitalization. There are three levels of participation in the VMS program:

1

Exploring  
Main Street

2

Mobilizing  
Main Street

3

Advancing  
Virginia Main Street

VMS works with all three tiers—utilizing local and regional assets, community vision, and market understanding to create qualitative and quantitative outcomes through targeted design, economic, organization, and promotional strategies and activities. Layering grant opportunities and technical assistance with economic development, entrepreneurship, urban design, and fundraising, VMS strives to provide each community with individualized support.

Communities in all three tiers are encouraged to leverage VMS training, information, and consulting services, along with other DHCD programs and funding such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG),

<sup>1</sup> National Main Street Center; Main Street America; Main Street; Main Street Four Points; and Main Street Approach are registered trademarks of the National Main Street Center.

<sup>2</sup> Adjusted to 2023 dollars using the Consumer Price Index.

Community Business Launch (CBL), and the Industrial Revitalization Fund (IRF)—just to name a few.

**Tier One: Exploring Main Street**

The Exploring Main Street (EMS) tier is open to all communities, including incorporated and unincorporated municipalities and urban neighborhood commercial districts, who are exploring the Main Street Approach for downtown commercial or neighborhood revitalization. EMS communities have access to organizational development services and grant opportunities through VMS.

**Eligibility:** EMS communities are pedestrian-oriented commercial areas that are interested in community and historic revitalization practices that spur local economic activity. At the heart of every EMS community are local stakeholders that are working to adopt the Main Street Approach as the foundation of their long-term sustainable revitalization efforts.

**Application Process:** Communities complete a non-competitive application. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and must include an adopted resolution from the local government noting their support and authorization. Visit [dhcd.virginia.gov/vms](http://dhcd.virginia.gov/vms) to download a PDF version of the application. To learn more, contact VMS at [mainstreet@dhcd.virginia.gov](mailto:mainstreet@dhcd.virginia.gov).

**Requirements:** EMS communities must keep their community contact information updated with VMS and are expected to attend VMS trainings or request VMS technical assistance at least once a year, as well as give an annual update each January of the program's progress. Participants are also encouraged to join Main Street America (MSA) as a Community Member at the Affiliate level. To join, visit [mainstreet.org](http://mainstreet.org).

**Grants:** EMS communities are eligible to apply for VMS grants such as Community Vitality Grants (CVG) and Financial Feasibility Grants (FFG), which can provide additional funding for projects such as: organizational development consulting services, entrepreneur support programs, place-making projects, façade programs, and environmental design consulting services. Please consult the VMS Grant Manual for additional information.

**Services:** VMS provides EMS communities with technical assistance as resources permit. VMS can assist with organizational issues including roles and responsibilities of staff and Board/Committee and work plan development (either on-site or virtual).

Exploring Main Street	
Follow the Main Street Approach	The Main Street Approach is the foundation of long-term, sustainable revitalization.
Active Participation	Each year, EMS staff or volunteers must attend a minimum of one VMS-sponsored training from the calendar at <a href="http://virginiamainstreet.com">virginiamainstreet.com</a> or reach out to their VMS program administrator at least once per year.
Progress Reporting	EMS communities must maintain updated contact information with VMS and must give an annual report of their program's progress each January.
Main Street America Membership at Affiliate level	EMS communities are encouraged to join MSA as a Community Member at the Affiliate level. This membership provides access to additional resources, contacts, and examples.
Work in a pedestrian-oriented commercial district	EMS programs should generally have a pedestrian-oriented commercial area with a focus on economic development through locally owned businesses and fostering entrepreneurship.

Organizational Visit	VMS assists with organizational issues including roles and responsibilities of staff and Board/Committee. Work planning assistance is also provided (on-site or virtual).
Grants	EMS communities are eligible for VMS grants such as CVG and FFG, which can provide funding for projects such as: organizational development consulting services, entrepreneur support programs, place-making projects, façade programs, and environmental design consulting services.

## Tier Two: Mobilizing Main Street

Mobilizing Main Street (MMS) is a two-year program that provides targeted organizational development support to build a community’s revitalization program using the Main Street Approach. Through grassroots leadership and a commitment to holistic preservation-based economic development, downtown champions can create lasting impact for the local economy and community as a whole.

Alongside fellow MMS cohort members, participants work to better position their community for economic opportunity. The program’s curriculum focuses on building the capacity of the local Main Street initiative to further their local mission. VMS works closely with MMS communities to build a solid organizational foundation and enhance their implementation of the Main Street Approach, which will ultimately prepare participants for the responsibilities of Advancing Virginia Main Street (AVMS) designation and Main Street America Community Accreditation.

At the end of the MMS two-year program, communities are eligible to apply for AVMS designation. Completion of the MMS curriculum is a requirement for communities that intend to pursue application for AVMS designation.

**Eligibility:** Active EMS communities that are looking to further their Main Street work and aspiring to pursue AVMS designation should consider MMS. Eligible communities should:

- Meet the description of a Main Street District;
- Have an existing 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission for commercial district revitalization OR an existing Main Street steering committee consisting of a chairman and minimum of five (5) stakeholder members, and;
- Have local government support and commitment to Main Street as an economic development strategy, which could be a recent EMS or MMS resolution, financial contribution to Main Street program operations, and/or municipal letter of support.

Interested communities are strongly encouraged to contact VMS staff to discuss their goals, level of need, potential for investment, and available resources to determine whether MMS is the right fit.

**Application Process:** Communities complete a competitive application. The application includes a letter of intent and an adopted resolution from the local government noting their support. Applications are available on a biannual basis and new communities will be accepted into this tier as resources allow. Visit [dhcd.virginia.gov/vms](https://dhcd.virginia.gov/vms) to download a PDF version of the application.

**Requirements:** MMS communities will be required to sign a letter of intent outlining the participation requirements and expectations of the MMS program. These include, but are not limited to the:

- Establishment of a dedicated committee that will participate in the MMS program;
- Achieving incorporation and 501(c)(3) non-profit status, if not currently;
- Regular attendance and participation in MMS webinars, huddles and Rev Ups (both in-person and virtual), along with the completion of any/all session work is required for the duration of

- the two-year program;
- Representation at all other VMS trainings;
- Apply for and maintain [MSA community membership](#) at the Affiliate level, and;
- Document their program’s progress each year by submitting monthly economic development data reports to VMS and an annual self-assessment to MSA.

**Grants:** MMS communities are eligible for Community Vitality Grants (CVG) and Financial Feasibility Grants (FFG) through VMS. For more information, please refer to the VMS Grant Manual. They are also encouraged to apply for other DHCD grants to leverage additional resources in the community. VMS staff can assist with more information on these opportunities.

**Services:** VMS provides MMS communities with ample technical assistance and resources throughout the two-year MMS program. VMS will assist with organizational development issues such as staff and Board roles and responsibilities, annual work plan development, fund development, volunteer engagement and management plans, non-profit organizational management, and/or urban planning to direct the design work of the organization.

**Grace Period:** The goal of the Mobilizing curriculum is to get communities ready for AVMS designation. If a community applies for and does not receive AVMS designation at the immediate end of its Mobilizing curriculum year, it will have an additional two years to re-apply without re-enrolling in the Mobilizing program. During this grace period, the local Main Street organization will 1) be designated as a Mobilizing Main Street Community, 2) be able to attend Mobilizing trainings as needed and 3) receive targeted technical assistance from VMS staff as the organization continues to progress. Targeted technical assistance will be identified and provided as part of an annual service plan during this time, as resources allow.

Mobilizing Main Street	
Requirements	MMS communities must have a dedicated committee to attend monthly meetings and sessions as a part of the MMS curriculum. Regular attendance, participation, and completion of the session work is required. MMS community staff and/or volunteers are expected to attend all VMS sponsored trainings (listed on <a href="http://virginiamainstreet.com">virginiamainstreet.com</a> ).
Progress Reporting	MMS programs must complete monthly homework assignments and economic development data reports.
Main Street America Membership at Affiliate level	MMS programs must join MSA at the Affiliate level. This membership provides access to additional resources and examples of how to implement the Main Street Approach.
Work in a pedestrian-oriented commercial district	MMS communities should have pedestrian-oriented commercial areas with a focus on locally owned businesses and fostering entrepreneurship, unless otherwise approved by VMS.
Services and Grants	MMS communities are eligible for all the services and grants of EMS communities.
Reconnaissance Visit	VMS and/or outside specialists perform a preliminary needs assessment of the physical and economic environment of the community and downtown (on-site or virtual).
Organizational Services	VMS and/or MSA staff assists with organizational issues including roles and responsibilities of staff and Board. Assistance includes annual work plan development, fund development, volunteer management plans, and non-profit organizational management. Additional topics such as urban planning and design may be available.



### Tier Three: Advancing Virginia Main Street

Advancing Virginia Main Street (AVMS) is the top tier of VMS participation. AVMS communities have established volunteer organizations that are committed to long-term implementation of the Main Street Approach. These organizations are found in cities, towns and neighborhoods across the Commonwealth that have a strong local will to create positive change in their community. They are supported by their local municipality and other local community and economic development organizations, along with VMS and MSA.

**Eligibility:** Towns, cities, or neighborhoods must meet the following requirements to be eligible to apply for AVMS designation:

1. Maintain [MSA community membership](#) at the Accredited level;
2. Be an established 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with an independent Board of Directors and a paid, professional executive director dedicated to managing the work of an all-volunteer organization.
  - a) For communities with 5,000 or more in population, the executive director must be full-time.
  - b) If the community is less than 5,000 in population, the executive director can be part-time, working at least 20 hours per week;
3. Demonstrate active partnership with at least one (1) local government partner;
4. Demonstrate organizational sustainability that includes broad community support, and;
5. As of 2023, communities must complete the two-year MMS program to be eligible to apply for AVMS designation.

Additional information can be found in the “AVMS Eligibility Criteria Expanded” section below.

**Application Process:** AVMS designations are available through a competitive application process offered every few years, as resources permit. Competitive applicants are community driven and have strong organizational capacity to implement downtown revitalization based on the Main Street Approach.

**Requirements:** In addition to the accreditation requirements set by MSA, VMS expects AVMS programs will also meet the following criteria and continue to meet them to maintain their designation and receive VMS services:

- Focusing their work in their Main Street district
- Utilizing the Main Street Approach
- Public/Private Letter of Agreement; VMS Biennial Agreement
- Submit timely reporting information to VMS

Additional information can be found in the “AVMS Requirements for Designation Expanded” section below.

**Grants:** AVMS communities are eligible for Downtown Investment Grants (DIG) and Financial Feasibility Grants (FFG) through VMS. For more information, please refer to the VMS Grant Manual. Communities are also encouraged to apply for other DHCD grants to leverage additional resources in the community. VMS staff can assist with more information on these opportunities.

**Services:** In addition to on-going technical assistance provided by VMS staff, AVMS communities are also eligible for various consultant services including architectural design, organizational assessments, and downtown development planning. To see a complete list, please refer to the “Resources for AVMS Communities” section below.

### **AVMS Eligibility Criteria Expanded**

The requirements for AVMS eligibility are outlined above and more detailed information is provided below regarding each of the individual requirements.

1. Be an Accredited Member of Main Street America (MSA).
2. Demonstrate local program support through a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to downtown revitalization and a paid, professional executive director dedicated to managing the work of an all-volunteer organization. Revitalization organizations must be incorporated with the Commonwealth of Virginia, hold or have applied for 501(c)(3) non-profit status with the Internal Revenue Service, and maintain an independent Board of Directors with independent decision making, fund development, and fiscal management. With written approval by VMS, local programs may be housed within or partnered with another local organization, but must maintain organizational self-government.
  - a. *Why is an independent organization important?* Experience shows that an AVMS organization functions most successfully as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Working in partnership with local government, as well as Chambers of Commerce and other community organizations, successful AVMS programs focus on creating an inviting downtown business environment, rather than the larger geographical area addressed by other community partners. If your community is interested in AVMS designation, your organization will need to apply with the Internal Revenue Service for 501(c)(3) status.
3. Demonstrate active partnership with at least one local government partner. The municipality within which a local program operates benefits the most from the revitalization organization’s efforts. Increased entrepreneurship, private investment, and social activity restore economic vitality to the heart of the community. Fiscal and in-kind support from local government is critical to, but not the sole support of, the local program. Communities are required to provide a written commitment of the support, including financial support, provided by their local governments as a component of eligibility, as well as ongoing support.
  - a. *Why is financial commitment from the local municipality important?* Financial support, stability, and diversity is key to an AVMS program’s success. A comprehensive fund development program should include pledged support from local government(s), corporations, independent businesses, and individuals, as well as anticipated revenue from fee-based programs and services, registrations from events, attractions, and organizational/event sponsorships. Commitments for funding support for your AVMS



program’s first three years of operation must be in place and documented in the designation application.

4. Demonstrate organizational sustainability. Local revitalization efforts are often in the hands of a dedicated group of property owners, business owners, and community volunteers. However, the demands of work, family, and other community activities can become too demanding for that core volunteer group to maintain their initial level of activity. Many Boards of Directors serve no more than two successive terms with one-third of the Board rotating from service on an annual basis. Former Board members can make valuable committee members and are encouraged to serve in alternate capacities for at least one three-year term before being invited to return to Board service.
  - a. *What is “community-driven” and why is it important?* Main Street promotes a community-driven process that brings diverse stakeholders from all sectors together, inviting them to be proactive participants in the revitalization process. This essential step provides a foundation for outlining the community’s own identity, expectations, and ideals while confirming real and perceived perceptions, needs and opportunities. It also ensures that the vision is a true reflection of the diversity of the community.
5. Completion of the two-year MMS program. The MMS curriculum helps communities establish a solid foundation for their local Main Street initiative and prepares them for AVMS designation. For more information, please see the “Tier Two: Mobilizing Main Street” section above.

### AVMS Requirements for Designation Expanded

AVMS designated communities must meet the MSA annual accreditation requirements noted in the “Main Street America Community Evaluation Standards” section. In addition, VMS expects the program will also meet the following criteria and continue to meet them to maintain their designation and receive VMS services.

Advancing Virginia Main Street Requirements (in addition to Main Street America Standards)	
Work in a Main Street district	Main Street districts must be a physical setting conducive to applying the Main Street Approach, including a pedestrian scale and orientation; critical mass of buildings and businesses; and critical mass of structures that would be eligible for frequently used rehabilitation incentives.
Use the Main Street Approach	Main Street provides the only proven, comprehensive approach specifically designed to address the issues and opportunities of traditional downtown commercial districts. Following the approach is a requirement of initial and on-going designation. Downtown revitalization in the context of historic preservation is central to the approach. Whether your program is project- or committee-driven, the strategic inclusion of the components of Design, Organization, Economic Vitality, and Promotion are vital to its success.
Public/Private Letter of Agreement; VMS Biennial Agreement	Local commitment and support are critical to Main Street success. In designated communities, the downtown organization signs a letter of agreement with the local government as well as an organization contract with VMS that clearly specifies the responsibilities of each entity. AVMS communities are required to renew their contract with VMS bi-annually.

Submit timely information to VMS	All designated AVMS communities must submit the following each year: 1) twelve economic development data reports (submitted monthly); 2) salary survey; 3) program revenue report; 4) an annual report that includes: a) a vision and mission statement, b) key accomplishments and achievements, and c) local economic impact data; 5) the actual budget, including revenues and expenses, 6) a list of the board of directors, committee members and staff, including dates and topics of training for board, committee members and staff; 7) the current Comprehensive Main Street work plan; 8) policies and procedures; 9) contract with local government, if applicable; 10) bylaws, if updated in reporting year; and 11) fund development plan for reporting year and assessment of report year fund development
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### Reporting Information Required for AVMS Communities

Main Street program performance information must be submitted to VMS each year. This serves the dual purpose of determining eligibility for recognition as an Accredited Main Street America™ Community and providing an opportunity for targeted assistance from VMS as needed. Communities must submit:

- Monthly economic development data reports;
- An annual report that includes:
  - Vision and mission statement
  - Key accomplishments and achievements
  - Local Economic Impact Data
- The actual budget (including revenues, expenses and adoption date);
- List of board of directors, committee members and staff (including dates and topics of training for board, committee members and staff);
- Policies and procedures;
- Current Comprehensive Main Street work plan (including adoption date);
- Salary and benefits survey;
- Program revenue report;
- Contract with local government (if applicable);
- Bylaws (only if updated in reporting year)
- Fund development plan for reporting year and assessment of report year fund development
- MSA Community Self-Assessment

If these items are not submitted, or indicate that the organization may not be meeting accreditation requirements, VMS will immediately begin working with the community on a plan to maintain designation.

### Resources for AVMS Communities

Restored facades, lower vacancy rates, and new streetscapes are not signs that revitalization is finished. It means that AVMS programs are entering the management phase and must continue to meet all designation requirements. VMS provides ongoing services to assist current communities in maintaining long-term effectiveness and progress. Using a performance-based approach, VMS will provide the services listed below, as resources allow and as determined between the community and VMS to set appropriate strategic outcomes.

Resources for Advancing Virginia Main Street Communities	
Specialist Services and Technical Assistance	
Design Assistance	Comprehensive assistance from an architect experienced with older historic commercial architecture, including façade designs, consultations, and training.

Specialist On-site Visits	VMS staff available on request.
Remote Consultation	VMS and MSA staff members available by phone, video meetings, and e-mail.
Organizational Visit (On-site or virtual)	VMS and/or MSA staff assists with organizational issues including roles and responsibilities of staff and Board. Assistance includes annual work plan development, fund development, volunteer management plans, and non-profit organizational management. Additional topics available.
Annual Assessment	An annual assessment is conducted to determine MSA Accreditation according to six Community Evaluation Standards that outline what it means to be a highly successful Main Street program.
Research	VMS research assistance on topics of interest using state and national contacts.
<b>Program Support and Professional Development</b>	
Program Director Training	Regular training by state and national experts is provided. Local program directors must attend.
Board Training	State or National Main Street training is available to board members on a regular basis and tailored training is available as resources allow.
Virginia Main Street Trainings and Webinars	A variety of training for local program professionals, public and private partners, and local officials. Provided by VMS and outside specialists to include virtual, classroom and field session training, as well as presentations on downtown revitalization topics.
Main Street Now Conference	Scholarships to the MSA annual conference are provided as resources allow.
Resource & Information Sharing	Frequent electronic communications from the MSA and VMS assist local programs with accessing programs, services, and information around the Main Street global network. On-site state and regional meetings provide networking and resourcing opportunities among local programs.
<b>Marketing</b>	
Public Relations	Regular press coverage and exposure provided through media releases and marketing materials, and other promotional opportunities.
Use of Main Street Logo	The Main Street America logo is available for use only by nationally Accredited and Affiliate communities.
Use of VMS Logo	The Virginia Main Street logo is available for use only by designated AVMS communities.

### **Main Street America Community Evaluation Standards**

MSA has six (6) [Community Evaluation Standards](#) that a community program must meet to be considered an Accredited Main Street America Community. Receiving Accredited status is a prestigious designation. While every AVMS program can work toward accreditation, not every program receives it every year. VMS evaluates AVMS programs every year using the MSA Community Self-Assessment tool. Performance to MSA accreditation standards is required of all AVMS communities. Failure to achieve accreditation for two consecutive years will result in a program losing AVMS designation. If an AVMS program is unable to meet the accreditation standards, the organization, VMS, and the local government will agree upon a remedial action plan.

### **Non-Compliance and Remediation**

Occasionally, a community with an interest in maintaining AVMS designation encounters difficulty meeting the requirements in one or more areas. The organization is strongly recommended to contact

VMS as soon as possible to discuss the situation, arrange assistance, and develop a schedule to address the issues in a timely manner.

VMS will review the reporting information that programs submit (see “Reporting Information Required for AVMS Communities” section above) and will work with localities, as needed, to strengthen areas that may impact the program’s effectiveness and its ability to meet designation requirements. In such cases, VMS will offer targeted assistance to the program, including assisting with the development of a detailed work plan to address areas of concern in a timely fashion.

AVMS communities that are unable to meet accreditation requirements for two consecutive years will be offered the choice to: 1) commit to a remediation plan designed by VMS to address the organizational issues preventing the community from achieving full accreditation or 2) be placed in the EMS program. At VMS’ sole discretion, and based on extenuating circumstances, VMS may allow additional options for participation.

Communities choosing option one (1) above that successfully complete their remediation plan will have their AVMS designation reinstated administratively. If the community is not able to successfully complete the remediation plan, they will relinquish their AVMS designation. Any former AVMS community may re-apply for designation through the competitive application process during a regular VMS designation round.

Dedicated and well-planned efforts by a local program to meet designation requirements are vital to continued economic health in downtown and a strong partnership with VMS and DHCD. Additional special services may be provided at VMS’s discretion to help the community with designation requirements and strengthening their organization. Other staff and consultant services may be provided to assist with this organizational growth, as well as to identify areas of improvement.

*VMS will always work to assist communities in maintaining their designation.*



### **Training and Continuing Education**

VMS offers a variety of learning experiences designed to convene commercial district revitalization leaders from across the commonwealth, including local program professionals, public and private partners, and local officials, to learn about the innovative methods and practices that fuel the Main Street Approach™ and catalyze results. Offerings include:

- Webinars for convenient on-line learning and content delivery
- Facilitated virtual meetings for regular peer support and solution-based discussions
- In-community workshops for real-time interactions and skill development
- National conference scholarships for three days of educational sessions, special events, and mobile workshops to explore the host city

**Regional Rev Ups:** An in-person, half-day workshop designed for networking, learning, and seeing the possible through peer communities. Offered to all VMS communities biannually in three, rotating locations across the state.

**Main Street Now Conference:** A national event, hosted by the National Main Street Center and a state-coordinating program, providing attendees with an opportunity to convene and learn about the innovative methods and practices that make the Main Street Approach™. This conference brings together commercial district revitalization leaders from across the country for three days of education sessions, special events, mobile workshops, and opportunities to explore the host city. The conference offers solutions to common problems and new techniques to help communities thrive.

**Exploring Main Street Community Interchanges:** This triannual, virtual gathering, facilitated by VMS staff for EMS communities, focuses on strengthening the program's network of leaders and boosting Main Street efficacy in communities.

**Mobilizing Main Street Huddles:** This monthly, virtual gathering, for MMS communities, is dedicated to regular connection, peer support, and solution-based discussions focused on targeted organizational development and effective revitalization programs.

**Directors Retreat:** This annual, in-person learning experience for local AVMS program directors inspires skill development for economic development and community advocacy professionals.

**AVMS Director Huddles:** A virtual gathering facilitated by VMS staff for AVMS program directors that facilitates ongoing connection, peer support and solution-based discussions. AVMS directors who have been in their positions for less than two years are invited to network together monthly.

**AVMS Board Forums:** This triannual, virtual gathering, facilitated by VMS staff for local AVMS board members, is focused on unifying the network of nonprofit leaders and boosting Main Street efficacy in communities.

## Consulting Services

The VMS program provides consultant services that are connected to the ongoing work and plans of AVMS, MMS and EMS communities as resources and eligibility allow. Steady progress in meeting fundamental activities must occur during the first three to five years of the organization's AVMS designation in order for specialist services to continue. Progress on fundamental activities will be assessed during end-of-year evaluations.

## Architectural Services

Architectural services are available, as program resources allow, for a variety of services. Those services, based on the scope of work identified by VMS and the architectural design service consultant each program year, may include the following services.

**Site visits:** Site visits can include meetings with property owners and studying individual buildings to find feasible design solutions for historically sensitive restoration and maintenance. Design consultations will range from providing assistance with compatible signage design to storefront design and rehabilitation recommendations. The consultant shall also provide general technical assistance on proper building rehabilitation techniques consistent with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, as well as look at non-building improvements such as streetscape or parking lot layouts.

**Long Distance Façade Renderings:** Long distance façade improvement renderings and recommendations that property owners can use to complete their projects in a historically sensitive manner.

**Specialized Design Visits:** A limited number of specialized design visits are offered to AVMS communities. The purpose of the visits may include:

- a. Wayfinding Sign Systems - Wayfinding consultation includes a preliminary inventory of existing signs, interviews with key stakeholders in the community about the need for a system, potential destinations, and current and potential graphics or system. During the visit, a presentation to the community summarizes these findings along with an overview of how wayfinding works, and recommendations for next steps. A follow-up report includes schematic designs for the community including gateway and trailblazer signage, shows examples from other communities, and provides guidance for the community to move forward with designing and implementing a system. This guidance includes cost estimates and examples, but not construction documents.
- b. Adaptive Reuse/Feasibility Study - Feasibility studies show property owners and the community how to proceed with making improvements to “white elephant” buildings or buildings “ready for demolition.” A feasibility study visit includes the evaluation of the building, which can be roughly 30 feet wide by 100 feet deep and two-stories high. The visit also includes a preliminary assessment of the building’s architectural features and historic value, documentation of the building, and an interview with the property owner to learn possible uses. The feasibility report outlines a scope of work to bring the building back into service, a building code analysis, potential uses, plans, historic tax credit potential, and a range of comparable construction cost estimates.
- c. Other Study - In the course of the year, if another type of study related to design or aesthetics is determined necessary by the VMS, a specialized site visit can be customized to that need.

Only AVMS organizations may apply for these services. VMS approves each service in consultation with the consultant (architect).

### Organizational Development Services

Organization visits must involve the local AVMS organization board, committee representation, staff, local government representatives and other local Main Street stakeholders. Organization services are available for a variety of services, as program resources allow. Those services are based on the scope of work identified by VMS and the MSA each program year and may include the services described below.

**Organizational Assessment Visit:** MSA and VMS staff conduct a one or two-day visit to evaluate an AVMS organization’s efforts, recognize the program’s accomplishments and develop strategies for future programming. This includes assessing the AVMS program’s structure, strategic plan, and committee work plans. The consulting team looks at Board health, the effectiveness of each committee to ensure that Design, Promotion, Economic Vitality, and Organization activities are included, and the perception of the AVMS organization by local government leaders and stakeholders. A final report providing recommendations for the AVMS program will be provided shortly after the visit.

**Organization Consulting Visit:** MSA provides, in coordination with VMS, one- to one-and-half day visits for communities needing additional board and committee training, strategic planning assistance, fundraising planning, and/or work plan development. The MSA consultant

customizes each organizational visit.

**Fundraising Plan Development:** MSA provides, in coordination with VMS, one-and-a-half day visits for communities needing additional fundraising development assistance. This service helps the organization plan, implement, and market a comprehensive fundraising campaign tailored to challenges and opportunities in a specific community. AVMS communities are eligible for these organizational services, valued at an estimated \$8,000 each. VMS, at its discretion and as funds are available, may offer any organizational consulting visits and services to MMS communities that are working to pursue AVMS designation.

**Promotional Assessment Visit:** MSA provides, in coordination with VMS, one-and-a-half day visits for communities needing assistance evaluating their promotions events and calendars. This service helps the organization better plan, implement, and market a comprehensive promotional calendar given the distinct challenges and opportunities in a specific community. AVMS communities are eligible for these services, valued at an estimated \$7,500 each.

The **Center for Nonprofit Excellence (CNE)** is a 501(c)(3) that provides consulting, training, information, tools, and resources to nonprofits organizations. AVMS communities may access CNE member services such as:

- Discounted training rates for board, management, and finance,
- Leadership mentoring, coaching, and mastermind groups,
- Best practices information and research, and
- Online job board, event calendar and social media postings.

More information about CNE and their services can be found at their website, [thecne.org](http://thecne.org). If used to its full capacity, this service value is estimated at approximately \$1,000 or more per community, annually.

### **Strategic Economic Development Planning Services**

Strategic Economic Development Planning Services are available, as program resources allow. Those services, based on the scope of work identified by VMS and the MSA each program year, may include the following services.

**Market-Based Transformation Strategy Services:** MSA and VMS staff conduct a two-day visit to assist in creating a downtown development plan, identifying and prioritizing work for the Economic Vitality Committee, and developing a market position strategy. The visit usually includes a two- to three-hour work session and results in a final report providing recommendations for the AVMS organization's economic vitality strategies. The report will be provided shortly after the visit. All visits are customized based on a community's previously completed economic vitality studies and planning.

This service is only effective with the full involvement of the Board of Directors, Economic Vitality Committee, staff, local downtown development experts, and local stakeholders.

Only current AVMS and MMS communities in good standing with both VMS and MSA are eligible for this service, which is valued at approximately \$10,000.



### Technical Assistance

Each AVMS and MMS community has an assigned VMS team member on call to help troubleshoot and spot emerging issues as they arise.

### Grant Opportunities

Each year, DHCD and VMS offer a number of grant opportunities to further the revitalization and preservation of Virginia's historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts with a goal of creating vibrant and thriving local economies. Grant opportunities made exclusively for VMS communities include Downtown Investment Grants, Community Vitality Grants, and Financial Feasibility Grants. For information regarding available VMS grants, please confer the [VMS Grant Manual](#).

### Knowledge Sharing

VMS disseminates information and expertise about historic commercial district development and management through a variety of platforms, including but not limited to:

- In-person and/or virtual conversations and presentations;
- Blog posts that highlight stories from communities and other how-to information;
- Online newsletter and e-blasts that spotlight the latest community revitalization-based news and happenings;
- Podcasts that feature the voices of leaders and change makers from across Virginia;
- Tech sheets designed to help localities develop upper-story housing downtown, wayfinding sign systems, and more; and
- Evergreen webinars that cover best practices, strategies and other information every Main Street leaders needs to know.

Through the continuous exchange of information, insights and expertise, VMS seeks to foster learning, innovation and collaboration among people. By enabling individuals, teams or organizations to experience personal growth, organizational success and Main Street advancement, we can push the boundaries of what we can achieve, together.

### Fine Print

Until a community achieves Accredited or Affiliate status, they may not use the Main Street America™ logo. A community may not use the VMS logo unless it achieves AVMS designation. Former AVMS communities, who are no longer designated, may not continue using the logo until they have been re-designated as an AVMS community.

MAIN STREET AMERICA™ word and logo marks: The Licensee's right to use, and to delegate use of the MAIN STREET AMERICA™ word mark and the following MAIN STREET AMERICA™ logos are limited to use made to



identify the Licensee as a member in good standing as a Coordinating Partner Member in the MAIN STREET AMERICA™ program, and to identify Local Programs, that are members in good standing of the MAIN STREET AMERICA™ program at the Affiliated and Accredited membership levels.

### Main Street® Districts

VMS is a preservation-based economic and community development program that follows the Main Street Approach™ created by MSA. The program was designed to address the need for revitalization and on-going management of smaller to mid-sized downtowns and communities and uses the traditional assets of downtowns as a catalyst for revitalization. Nationwide and in Virginia, successful Main Street districts share certain common characteristics. In order to assure a setting conducive to success in utilizing the Main Street Approach™, communities must have evidence of the following:

- A pedestrian-oriented commercial district;
- A concentration of buildings and businesses which form the foundation for revitalization efforts;
- A critical mass of structures that would be eligible for frequently used rehabilitation incentives (for example, state and federal tax credits and local tax abatement).
- A committed group of individuals that are ready to work and steer the community to create a better version of itself.
- A working relationship with local municipalities (be it town, city, or county, as well as local planning commissions and other partners that can directly impact your work).

Communities interested in joining the MMS tier level program or applying for AVMS designation may request that VMS review a potential district for its appropriateness. AVMS programs seeking to enlarge the boundaries of their current districts must also meet these guidelines for the expanded district. EMS communities are not required to have a traditional district but should have a pedestrian-oriented commercial district and submit the appropriate maps along with their application. For EMS and MMS communities that plan to pursue AVMS designation, it is suggested that the traditional district criteria be used in order to prevent the need for a change to the boundaries when application for designation is made.

The community must propose specific boundaries for the commercial district revitalization effort and provide evidence that the district meets these criteria. VMS can provide assistance with methods for compiling this information including building and business inventories, as well as guidance on how to measure setbacks.

VMS will review the district criteria and make an on-site visual assessment of the commercial district at the request of the community to determine the appropriateness of the proposed new or expanded district. A written summary of the assessment can also be provided.



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