

Maine Downtown Center 2026 Maine Downtown Affiliate & Municipal Programs

Program Overview

The Maine Downtown Affiliate (MDA) program was launched in 2009. The program helps communities build an appropriate organizational and funding base for an effective downtown/neighborhood commercial district revitalization effort, and introduces them to the fundamentals of the [Main Street Four-Point Approach](#). MDA members can be a volunteer-led committee of a municipality, a nonprofit organization, or another type of grassroots organization. They learn about best practices in the field, network with peers from around the state, and access training by state and national downtown revitalization experts. MDA is ideal for communities looking to deepen their engagement in historic preservation-based downtown revitalization. Participation in the MDA program is required to become a nationally accredited Main Street community.

Eligibility Criteria

The following are required to become an MDA member community:

1. A **central business district** which serves as a center for community interaction and commerce, characterized by a core of historic and/or older commercial and mixed-use buildings. It must have sufficient density of businesses, buildings, and public space to be accessible by people using diverse transportation methods.
2. An **organized, volunteer-led effort** which reflects the community's make-up and includes a diverse representation of district stakeholders including merchants and service providers, property/building owners, employees, residents, local government, arts and culture organizations, and other community organizations with presence in the downtown.
3. A high-level **multi-year budget** summarizing projected income to cover program costs and achieve specific goals. MDA members must be willing to work toward developing diversified and sustainable program funding including contributions from local government, residents, and local businesses.
4. **Commitment to following the Main Street Four-Point Approach** is a requirement of initial and ongoing participation and is the foundation of all Maine Downtown Center (MDC) assistance. Communities accepted will be asked to sign a Letter of Agreement with the MDC indicating the responsibilities of each party and pay an annual membership fee.

Program Trajectory & Participation Goals

Communities that are interested in becoming Maine Downtown Affiliates should attend the information session offered each year. **Applications are due on October 5**, with a site visit and interview to follow in November/December.

The Main Street Approach is rooted in the belief that small, consistent, incremental steps are the best and most sustainable way to engage in downtown revitalization. Maine Downtown Affiliates are required to demonstrate progress in each of the following five key program goal areas within each three-year work cycle.

Goal 1: Formalize Your Structure

Goal 2: Join peers for MDC workshops and trainings

Goal 3: Gather Your Data

Goal 4: Develop an Active Project Committee

Goal 5: Promote Your Program

After a minimum of two years in the program Affiliates may aspire to “ascend” to Main Street status with additional support from MDC. At that time their workplan will transition to focus on preparing to meet Main Street America’s national accreditation standards. For an Affiliate to qualify to ascend to Main Street status, the following must occur:

1. Full realization of Affiliate program goals 1-5
2. The creation of a 5-person Accreditation Committee
3. Coordination with an MDC Advisory Council coach/mentor
4. Development of a 3-year funding plan to hire 1 FTE Program Director
5. Becoming a [Main Street America Community Member](#)

It is expected that up to 8 hours per committee member per month for 10-12 months will be required to prepare an application for national accreditation.

Program Benefits

MDA members receive the following benefits:

Events & Training

- Discounted or free registration to Maine Downtown Center and Maine Development Foundation (MDF) trainings, events, webinars, and programs (including the [Institute for Civic Leadership](#) and [Leadership Maine](#))
- Annual board and committee trainings
- Scholarships for additional training as needed and available

- MDA members also automatically receive MDF membership. See [MDF's website](#) for full details on what membership includes.

Resource Sharing

- Participation in a peer-to-peer statewide network
- Optional monthly virtual Community Meet-ups
- Option to become a [Main Street America Community Member](#)
- Option to become a nationally designated Main Street America Affiliate Community, which requires annual completion of the MSA Community Self-Assessment (this is encouraged for Affiliates, but not required)

Technical Assistance

- Every three years, MDA undergo goal setting with the assistance of MDC staff or Advisory Council members
- Technical assistance may be ongoing, one-on-one from MDC staff and MDC Advisory Council members up to 10 hours per year

If at any point you find an issue or challenge with a component of the MDA goals/work plan, MDC is available for specialized technical assistance. This rapid response technical assistance may be in response to situations such as a natural disaster, budget/funding issue, or organizational structure challenge. Rapid response includes more involvement by the MDC team and specialized resources and results in a stronger organization, solutions to the specific issue or challenge, and realignment with the MDA workplan. Contact MDC to schedule rapid response technical assistance.

Opportunities for Funding & Support

- MDC writes Letters of Support for community grant applications
- Access to MDC administered/supported initiatives and sub-grant opportunities when available
- 1 bonus point on [State of Maine Community Development Block Grant](#) Downtown Revitalization Fund applications

Participation Requirements

MDA membership is contingent on the on-time completion of the following:

- Returning a signed Letter of Agreement (LOA) annually
- Paying an annual membership fee of \$750 by July 31 each year (increases to \$1000 for “ascending” Affiliates)
- Conducting a goal setting session with MDC every three years
- Completing an annual reporting form

- Participating in the Maine Downtown Center Annual Awards Celebration
- Participating in at least 4 MDC offered or supported trainings or webinars per year
- Sharing information with the MDC network through stories for media, newsletter articles, presentations to peers, etc.

Municipal Members

Maine Downtown Center Municipal Members that do not have a volunteer-led downtown revitalization effort in their community pay an annual fee of \$500 and have access to free and discounted training and up to 5 hours of technical assistance per year, including review of grant applications/provision of LOS. They do not qualify for any other Affiliate member benefits, nor are they subject to goal setting, event attendance, and reporting requirements. MDC staff are available to support Municipal Members that wish to establish a volunteer-led committee and apply for full Affiliate membership.