



2026-2027 INDIANA MAIN STREET ASPIRING IAMS CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

Applicant Process

INDIANA MAIN STREET OVERVIEW

Since 1985, the Indiana Main Street Program (IMS) has supported communities in revitalizing the economic vitality, appearance, and overall image of their downtown commercial districts through the National Main Street Center's proven Main Street Approach. This comprehensive and incremental approach to revitalization is grounded in each community's unique heritage and assets. By leveraging local resources and leadership, the state program assists communities in developing and implementing strategies that promote long-term economic growth and strengthen pride in their downtown or commercial core.

In 2005, the IMS Program transitioned to the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA), where it continues to be administered. IMS provides valuable access to information, guidance, and community support for individuals and organizations committed to downtown revitalization. It also serves as a central resource for the latest tools and best practices in downtown development, offering general program information, project development assistance, and other helpful materials. While the state program is an important partner, lasting revitalization ultimately depends on strong local commitment, initiative, and follow-through.

In 2019, OCRA partnered with National Main Street and the Indiana Main Street Council to conduct a program evaluation in alignment with Main Street America accreditation standards. In November 2020, OCRA announced a series of updates designed to enhance the program and provide additional value to both new and existing Main Street organizations. A key outcome of this improvement process was the creation and implementation of the new Levels System, which supports communities at varying stages of development and capacity.

The addition of the Aspiring-IAMS level provides communities with a clear pathway for growth, enabling them to progress from the foundational ODAN designation—where only two of the Four Point Approach elements are required—to full implementation of all four points. This level also guides communities in meeting [the baseline requirements and standards](#) established by Main Street America. Completion and acceptance of this application are not the final steps. Upon entering the program, the community commits to attending required annual trainings, participating in yearly evaluations, and ensuring that the board actively works to implement proven revitalization strategies. The goal of this structured progression is for the community to achieve Indiana Accredited Main Street status within three years of beginning the process.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applicants interested in participating in the Aspiring IAMS Capacity Building Program are those who currently have, or are actively developing, the capacity to implement the Main Street Four Point Approach and meet the Baseline Requirements of the Indiana Accredited Main Street Standards. Communities seeking to apply should follow the steps outlined below.

Step One: Maintain ODAN Status for at Least One Year

Communities must have maintained ODAN designation for a minimum of one full year at the time of application in good standing with IMS. The Community Liaison (CL) will verify this status with Indiana Main Street (IMS) Staff.

Step Two: Contact Your Community Liaison

All interested communities should contact their Community Liaison to express interest in the Aspiring IAMS Capacity Building Program and to discuss readiness and next steps.

Step Three: Review the IAMS Baseline Requirements and Accreditation Standards

Communities should thoroughly review the [Baseline Requirements and Accreditation Standards](#) to ensure that all baseline criteria can be met within one year, and that progress toward full standards can be developed incrementally.

- Indiana Accredited Main Streets are exempt from employing staff and from identifying and using Transformation Strategies. These elements are baseline requirements for Nationally Accredited Main Streets but are not required at the Indiana Accredited or Aspiring level.

Step Four: Complete the Self-Assessment Benchmark Report

This tool is available to help communities identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement prior to submitting the application. The completed Self-Assessment will be included as part of the formal application process.

Step Five: Submit the Application

Applicants must complete and submit the Aspiring IAMS application through the designated state link available on the OCRA website, along with the required and supporting documents.

Deadline: December 31, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. ET.

Step Six: Review and Determination

Indiana Main Street program staff will review all submitted applications and will notify communities of their acceptance or non-selection in the spring. Communities that are accepted will be invited to participate in a certificate ceremony and attend their first training session. If a community is not selected, IMS will provide constructive feedback to help guide future efforts.

Step Seven: The Work Begins

Once accepted into the Aspiring IAMS Capacity Program, communities begin the active phase of implementing the Main Street Four Point Approach. This includes carrying out planned revitalization activities, participating in required trainings, engaging stakeholders, and building the organizational capacity needed to achieve Indiana Accredited Main Street status. Throughout the year, communities will collaborate with their Community Liaison and IMS staff to track progress, refine strategies, and ensure steady advancement toward program goals.

Step Eight: Assessment

The community will complete an annual self-assessment, followed by an on-site assessment conducted by IMS staff and the Community Liaison. During this visit, IMS will interview and engage in discussion with board members (with at least 75 percent participation required), staff (if applicable), and community stakeholders. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the community's progress toward meeting the baseline requirements and standards.

Following the assessment, the Main Street organization will receive a Benchmark Report outlining strengths, opportunities for improvement, and recommendations. Based on this evaluation, the community will be advised on whether it will continue in the Aspiring IAMS level (up to a maximum of three years) or advance to Indiana Accredited Main Street status.

APPLICATION CRITERIA

General Information

- **Main Street Legal Name**
- **Municipality**
- **Main Street County**
- **Resolution of Commitment to Becoming an Aspiring-IAMS Community**
 - This resolution should be formally adopted by the Main Street board and must demonstrate that all board members have voted in favor of, or signed in agreement with, pursuing the Aspiring-IAMS application.
 - The resolution must also reflect the board's full understanding of the program requirements and its commitment to fulfilling all responsibilities associated with becoming an Aspiring-IAMS community.

Media

- **Organization's Website Address**
 - It is recommended to begin developing an independent website that can be linked to the municipality's website.
- **Organization's Facebook Page Link**
 - Efforts should be made to promote the organization, share its mission, vision, and goals, and support advocacy and small businesses within the district.
- **Other Social Media Platform Links**

Individual Submitting the Form

- **Name of Individual Submitting the Report**
- **Submitting Individual's Email Address**
- **Submitting Individual's Phone Number**

Mission/Vision Statement

- **Organization Mission Statement**
 - *Your mission statement should:*
 - Define the organization's purpose
 - Explain how you support downtown revitalization
 - Identify the community you serve
 - Highlight your core objectives
- **Mission Statement Adoption Date**
 - Mission statements should be reviewed, updated as needed, and formally adopted annually.
- **Organization Vision Statement**
 - *Your vision statement should:*
 - Be simple, inspiring, and community-focused

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- Describe the future your Main Street program aims to create
 - Emphasize long-term community impact
 - Paint a picture of the ideal downtown
 - Inspire partners, residents, and businesses to unite around a shared future
- **Vision Statement Adoption Date**
 - Vision statements should be reviewed, updated as needed, and adopted annually.
- **How does the organization communicate its mission, vision, and goals to the community?**
 - Provide examples demonstrating how your organization shares its mission, vision, and goals, such as:
 - Social media posts from the past year
 - Placement on your organization's website
 - Inclusion in marketing or promotional materials
- **Main Street By-Laws**
 - Review the Indiana Main Street Handbook for guidance.
- **By-Laws Adoption Date**
 - By-laws should be reviewed, updated as needed, and formally adopted annually.
- **Main Street Policies and Procedures**
 - Review the Indiana Main Street Handbook for guidance.
- **Main Street Policies and Procedures Adoption Date**
 - Policies and Procedures should be reviewed, updated as needed, and formally adopted annually.

Board of Directors & Committees Rosters

- **Organization's President's Name**
- **Organization's President's Email**
- **Board of Directors Roster**
 - It is recommended to use the template provided by Indiana Main Street (IMS), as all required information must be included.
 - Required details typically include:
 - Name
 - Contact Information
 - Affiliation to the Community
 - Term Limits
 - Committee Chair Roles
 - Committee Assignments
 - A Board Matrix is recommended to ensure diverse community representation.
 - Note any board members who serve as ex officio (non-voting) members or who are appointed positions.
- **Board Meeting Minutes**
 - Provide board meeting minutes from January through the date of submission.
 - All board meeting minutes should follow Robert's Rule of Order
 - All board meeting minutes should show demonstration of the following
 - Attendance, location, date and time
 - Call to order
 - Secretary minutes read, motion, and approval
 - Treasurer's report read, motion and approval
 - Executive Directors report (if applicable)
 - OCRA updates
 - Old Business
 - Committee Summaries

- New Business
- Meeting adjourn with announcement of when and where next meeting
- **Committees Roster**
 - Use of the IMS template is recommended for consistency and completeness.
 - Committees should reflect the Main Street Four Point Approach.
- **Volunteer Recruitment Plan**
 - This plan should follow the workplan format (template available).
 - Identify organizations you aim to involve(d) in activities within the district.
 - Identify all areas where volunteers are needed.
 - Identify where and how the organization is promoting volunteer opportunities.
 - Describe how the organization recognizes and thanks its volunteers.

Self-Assessment

- **Aspiring-IAMS Self-Assessment**
 - Complete the Indiana Main Street Benchmark Report in full.
 - Conduct the assessment as a full board to ensure shared understanding and consensus.
 - Avoid having one or two individuals complete the assessment independently.
 - Score honestly and realistically to support meaningful organizational growth.
 - Provide clear, thoughtful justification comments for each score.
 - Explain the reasoning behind all ratings in a thorough and constructive manner.
 - Submit all responses in typed format; handwritten submissions are not accepted.
 - Upload any supporting documents needed.

Historic Preservation Efforts

- **Historic Preservation Workshops, Trainings, and Education**
 - This section provides a list of historic preservation workshops and trainings that the Main Street program has hosted or attended within the past two years.
 - It also includes documentation shared with historic property owners, such as resources, guidance, and informational materials related to owning and maintaining historic properties.
 - It includes information about local design standards for historic landmarks, façade improvement grants, and other preservation programs.
 - It also outlines the work completed by the local government or Main Street organization to prioritize and protect historic character within the district.

Municipality Support

- **How does the municipality support the main street?**
 - Examples may include but not limited to:
 - Financial contributions
 - Leadership involvement
 - Participation in events or committees
 - In-kind support (staff time, services, space, materials)
 - Philosophical support or alignment with organizational goals
- **How is the main street helping the municipality achieve its goals for the downtown?**
 - Examples may include but not limited to:
 - Applying for grants
 - Supporting infrastructure improvements
 - Gathering community feedback or conducting surveys
 - Organizing cleanup days or volunteer events
 - Facilitating civic engagement
 - Assisting with downtown planning, promotion, or business support initiatives

Financials

- **Non-Profit Documentation**
 - Provide proof of IRS paperwork confirming submission of your SS-4 form. This documentation includes your Employer Identification Number (EIN).
- **Main Street Budget**
 - Submit the Main Streets budget for the upcoming year.
- **Main Street Profit & Loss**
 - Submit the current year's Profit and Loss statement from January 1 to submission date.

Workplans

- **Annual Workplan**
 - It is recommended that organizations use the Indiana Main Street Annual Workplan Template to clearly demonstrate the work being carried out across the entire program.
 - Annual workplans should outline goals, activities, timelines, and responsible parties to ensure transparent and accountable program management.
- **Task-Specific Workplans**
 - Organizations must provide at least one task-specific workplans that align with one of each of the Four-Point Approach: Design, Organization, Promotion, and Economic Vitality.
 - Use of the Indiana Main Street Task-Specific Workplan Templates is recommended to ensure consistency, clarity, and alignment with statewide program standards.

Business Support

- **Partners of Main Street**
 - Demonstrate the ways in which your organization collaborates with other agencies.
 - Letters of support from these partners are encouraged but not necessary.
- **Business Inventory**
 - It is recommended to use the Indiana Main Street Template to complete the Business Inventory.
- **Building Inventory**
 - It is recommended to use the Indiana Main Street Template to complete the Building/Property Inventory.
- **Map of your Main Street district**
 - Provide a clear map with legible and well-defined boundaries.
- **Organization Photos**
 - Photos should be clear.
 - Photos should be labeled.

Commitment

- **Does your organization commit to track Reinvestment statistics?**
 - Yes or No
 - The required statistics include:
 - Business openings, closings, and relocations within the district
 - Employee changes within the district
 - Capital improvement projects
 - Private Improvement Projects
 - Public and private investment
 - Volunteer hours
 - Events held
 - Event attendance
- **Does your organization commit to submitting quarterly reporting?**

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- Yes or No
- **Currently, who will oversee completing all reporting?**
 - Name
 - Title
 - Email
 - Phone Number
- **Why do you feel your main street should be considered for the Aspiring-IAMS level?**
 - Share your story: What key accomplishments has your organization achieved over the past two years?
 - Summarize major initiatives, improvements, or milestones that showcase progress.
 - Include examples of successful projects, partnerships, or community engagement efforts.
 - Identify any measurable outcomes, such as investment totals, volunteer involvement, or district enhancements.
 - • What goals has your organization set for the next five years?
 - Outline the short-term and long-term priorities that will guide your work.
 - Identify specific improvements, programs, or outcomes you intend to pursue.
 - Explain how these goals support sustainable downtown revitalization and continued alignment with Indiana Main Street standards