



Embargoed until 5pm EDT on April 12, 2021

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MISSOURI MAIN STREET CONNECTION EARNS NATIONAL REVITALIZATION AWARD

CHICAGO (April 2021) – Missouri Main Street Connection is one of six winners of the Main Street Forward Awards, which recognize communities that have shown exemplary recovery and resilience efforts amid the multiple crises of 2020. Selected by a national jury of economic development experts, Missouri Main Street Connection (MMSC) is being recognized for its Four Ways to Connect programming, which helped support the state’s local Main Street programs via regular communication throughout the pandemic.

“MMSC’s response to the pandemic was especially effective because of its simplicity,” said Main Street America’s President and CEO Patrice Frey. “By serving as a clearinghouse for information, MMSC allowed Missouri’s local Main Street programs to focus on targeted assistance to meet the needs of their communities and small businesses.”

When the pandemic shuttered businesses last year, it was clear that Missouri’s Main Streets needed resources and information. To address the needs of the more than 180 Main Street communities statewide, MMSC prioritized regular communication through four touchpoints: an online resource outlet, their “Mornings on Main” webinar series, “We Care Calls” with community directors, and the “Downtown Chat” Facebook group.

“We felt a huge responsibility to our mission throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,” said State Director Gayla Roten said. “Having four points of communication with our communities allowed us to provide resources, support, and tools to our Missouri Main Streets. Four Ways to Connect helped our communities spend their time coming up with creative solutions to adapt to the current situation and plan for recovery, rather than searching for information from multiple sources.”

MMSC’s online resource outlet included links to available funding sources as well as information about how other organizations were responding to the changing situation. Meanwhile, the Downtown Chat Facebook group allowed directors to ask questions and get real-time input from peers who were facing the same challenges—which proved to be useful even with questions that weren’t directly related to the pandemic response.

Through weekly video conference calls with the directors of MMSC’s local programs, the Main Street program offered more personalized support, including grant writing advice, updates from Main Street America, and news of fundraising opportunities. As the immediacy of the issues lessened, the calls eventually became monthly—but regular communication is still necessary.

The final aspect of MMSC’s programming was the Mornings on Main webinar series, which featured expert presentations providing context, insight, and ideas from around the country.

Initially, MMSC hosted the webinars weekly, then transitioned to monthly in June. With an average attendance of 70 individuals, the webinars have not only had a large impact on more than 120 Missouri communities, but also on communities in 17 other states.

While the communication programming was especially beneficial during the beginning of the pandemic, it continues to be instrumental in updating Missouri Main Street communities on important resources and encouraging them to share ideas.

“Ongoing communication allows MMSC to adapt to potential issues in the future—and because of its simplicity and relatively low cost to implement, Four Ways to Connect also serves as an example for other communities and states throughout the Main Street network,” Frey said.

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ABOUT THE MAIN STREET FORWARD AWARDS

Main Street America, a program of the National Main Street Center, has historically selected the country's best examples of comprehensive commercial district revitalization each year. Given the events of 2020—including the converging impacts of COVID-19, a national and local reckoning related to racial justice and equity, and cascading climate crises—Main Street America decided to take a different approach to this round of awards. To recognize the inspiring tenacity and creativity Main Street programs have demonstrated over the past year, we introduced the Main Street Forward Awards, which honor six communities that serve as examples for the network—and for the country at large—of the power and perseverance of Main Street.

ABOUT MAIN STREET AMERICA

Main Street America has been helping revitalize older and historic commercial districts for 40 years. Today it is a network of more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, who share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. Main Street America is a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, Inc., a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For more information, visit mainstreet.org.

ABOUT MISSOURI MAIN STREET CONNECTION

Missouri Main Street Connection (MMSC) is a statewide organization devoted to preservation-based economic development. Through the Main Street America™ movement and its partners, the agency empowers community revitalization by celebrating, supporting and sustaining Missouri historic commercial districts in both rural and urban settings. As the Missouri coordinating program, MMSC offers a range of services that support local implementation of the Main Street Approach™. Those initiatives include matching service grants, a state conference, quarterly workshops, community outreach and advocacy as well as additional services added in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, MMSC works with more than 180 communities at different points in their Main Street journey. For more information, visit momainstreet.org.