

Note: this is a schedule draft, and some pieces may shift slightly in the final agenda.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

Pre-Conference Social: 5-8 pm

Join other conference attendees that arrive prior to Thursday for some evening socializing and trivia. Food and beverage is available for purchase.

THURSDAY, APRIL 4

Pre-Conference Sessions:

10-11:30 AM: Main Street Basics

This session is an introduction to the Main Street Approach, the Four Points, Guiding Principles, and how many street can be an economic development tool for your community. All are welcome to attend, but this course is tailored toward people new to Main Street. This includes new and interested community leaders, new staff, new board members, new volunteers, and anyone else being introduced to the Main Street approach.

10:11:30 AM: Main Street Directors

This session is for directors of Accredited and Affiliate communities.

Registration:

11:30-12:00: Check in, get lunch, get oriented for the day

12:00-1:45: Welcome, Introductions, Wayfinding and Keynote 1

Keynote Session 1: 12:15-1:45 PM

Keynote: “Cultivating Generative Conversations with Boards”

Presentation by Amanda Ziebell, Propel Nonprofits

Main Street Programs are joint ventures, led by stakeholders and board members that oversee the program mission and vision. Amanda Ziebell of Propel Nonprofits will share tools and best practices to foster generative conversations within board settings. We will explore the power of meaningful dialogue and collaborative thinking as catalysts for innovation, creativity, and strategic decision making. We will discuss ways to encourage diverse perspectives, promote constructive dissent, and spark collective wisdom on boards and committees.

Breakout Session 1: 2:00-3:00 PM

1A “Art for Community Resilience”

Presentation by Sarah Johnson, The Joy Labs

In this inspiring session at the Main Street Conference, we delve into the transformative power of art as a catalyst for building resilient communities and combating the growing loneliness epidemic. Sarah Johnson will share how creative arts can foster connections, cultivate belonging, and support mental health in our neighborhoods. With real-world examples from Southern Minnesota that illustrate the transformative potential of art in addressing social isolation and loneliness, you'll be introduced to strategies for building sustainable support networks, fostering ongoing community connections through art-based programming, and create inclusive spaces that welcome individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences to connect authentically through creative expression.

1B: "Empowering Main Street Succession: Exploring Employee Ownership Models"

Presentation by Kirsten Kennedy, Minnesota Center for Employee Ownership

Gain insights into the unique challenges and opportunities associated with business succession on Main Street. Explore the demographic trends driving the need for succession planning and the implications for small businesses and local economies, and discover how employee ownership fosters a culture of shared responsibility, collaboration, and innovation within businesses. This session will address common barriers and challenges associated with implementing employee ownership models, such as financing constraints, legal complexities, and cultural resistance. You'll also learn from real-world case studies and success stories that illustrate how businesses have overcome these obstacles to achieve successful transitions.

Breakout Session 2: 3:15-4:15 PM

2A "Data-Driven Strategies: Leveraging Demographics for Grant Acquisition and Funding Success"

Presentation by Courtney Bergey Swanson, Community and Economic Development Associates

In today's competitive landscape, securing grants and funding is essential for the sustainability and growth of Main Street programs. But how can you increase your chances of success and stand out amidst a sea of applicants? The answer lies in harnessing the power of data that's already at your fingertips to craft compelling narratives and strategic proposals that resonate with funders.

Courtney Bergey Swanson will share practical insights for using data to drive meaningful impact. Whether you're seeking funding for revitalization projects, economic development initiatives, or community engagement programs, this session will provide you with strategies to leverage data insights for funding program efforts.

2B "Main Street Reimagined: Sustaining Engagement and Relevance for Mature Programs"

Panel Featuring Jessica Rucker, Executive Director of Waterloo (IA) Main Street and Mark Wicks, Community Development Director for Charles City (IA)

As Main Street programs mature past the start-up phase, it can feel challenging to envision new ways to approach revitalization activity. Main Street programs play a pivotal role in preserving heritage, fostering economic growth, and enhancing quality of life. However, as programs mature, they often encounter challenges in maintaining momentum and adapting to shifting demographics, economic trends, and technological advancements. This session will feature two long-time Iowa Main Street community directors, their challenges, successes, and will share their efforts to address these challenges head-on.

Owatonna Streetscape Tour 4:15-5:30pm

Owatonna's historic downtown has been transformed with new streetscape design that addresses pedestrian access and safety, stormwater management, and people-centered infrastructure. This is a great opportunity to learn about best practices in building reuse and revitalization, walkability and planning, and civic infrastructure, with the community at the forefront of the planning process.

Evening Social and Main Street Awards Ceremony: 5:30-7:30 pm

Connect with conference attendees and celebrate this year's Minnesota Main Street Award winners! Heavy appetizers will be available, drinks will be on your own.

FRIDAY APRIL 5

Breakfast & Roundtables 8:00-8:45 AM

Grab a bite to eat and join topical discussion groups focused on the Main Street Four Points.

Breakout Session 3: 9:00-10:00 AM

3A: Harnessing the Power of Light in Downtown Revitalization

Presentation by Tiersa Wodash of Brick and Mortar

In this session we'll explore how strategic lighting design can enhance safety, highlight architectural features, and create inviting atmospheres that draw visitors and residents alike to Main Street after dark. Tiersa will uncover the profound impact that lighting can have on the perception and experience of downtown spaces. From enhancing pedestrian safety and deterring crime to fostering a sense of community and cultural identity, discover how thoughtful lighting design can breathe new life into Main Street.

3B: "Empowering Main Street Voices: Advocating for Policy Change at the Local Level"

Presentation by Erin Hanafin Berg, Policy Director at Rethos

Join us for an empowering session designed to equip Main Street stakeholders with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively advocate for policy change at the local level. As champions of vibrant communities and economic vitality, Main Street leaders play a crucial role in shaping the policies that govern their downtowns. In this session, you'll learn how to craft persuasive advocacy campaigns that resonate with policymakers and garner support from the broader community. Using the successful RevitalizeMN campaign as an example, we'll talk about crafting compelling messages, leveraging storytelling, and the critical role of "power mapping" as you build a case for policy change and funding support in your district.

Breakout Session 4: 10:15-11:15 AM

4A "Navigating Rezoning and Code Changes: Strategies for Main Street Redevelopment"

Presentation by Jason Hale, Executive Director for Housing and Redevelopment Authority of Cook County

As cities, economies and technology evolve, so should the regulations governing land use and development. Many rural communities still maintain zoning ordinances that were created before the Internet, before AirBnB, before our current housing crisis: these outdated frameworks don't always serve the best interests of downtown and historic districts. Whether you're a business owner, developer, or community advocate, understanding these changes and opportunities is crucial for ensuring sustainable growth and preserving the unique character of Main Street districts. Successful development requires collaboration between stakeholders and the community: from mixed-use developments to sustainable and more efficient practices, discover innovative approaches to revitalizing and preserving the heart of your community.

4B: Mission Matching: Aligning Main Street Goals with Community Values

Presentation by Emily Kurash Casey, Director of Community Programs at Rethos

Main Street programs in early phases of existence are often the catalysts for all activity in downtown. While Main Streets are the central connector for all things taking place in a district, programs cannot and should not carry the burden of planning every aspect of downtown activity. "Mission Matching" is a tool that allows programs to evaluate their plans and workload and explore the power of collaboration and partnership-building in advancing shared missions and goals. Explore methods for evaluating the impact of mission-matched initiatives on community well-being, economic vitality, and quality of life. Learn how to set meaningful goals, track progress, and communicate outcomes effectively to stakeholders, funders, and the broader community.

Keynote Session: 12:00-1:30 PM

Keynote: "Grounded dreams: data-driven approaches for community development"

Presentation by Neil Linscheid, State Specialist-Entrepreneurship with University of MN Extension

The possibilities for our communities can be exciting and intoxicating. It can be easy to convince ourselves that if everyone around us just believed as much as we did, the downtown, the one building, or our community as a whole could radically change overnight. But we've all experienced the difficult work of moving ideas from fantasies to dreams and then to reality. This session cuts through the optimism haze surrounding community transformation, focusing on concrete, data-informed approaches to achieve lasting change. It challenges the notion that belief alone can revitalize downtowns or communities overnight. Instead, it presents a pragmatic path using demographic data and strategic decision-making in areas like land use, zoning, and economic development. Learn how to temper enthusiasm with realism, ensuring community development projects are achievable, impactful, and rooted in the needs and potential of the community.

Conference Wrap Up and Closing Remarks: 1:30-2:00 pm

Optional Bank Tour: 2:00-3:00 pm

Conference attendees are invited to join a free tour of the historic downtown bank building, getting peeks at it's incredible architecture and learning more about its history.