

HIRING A MAIN STREET MANAGER



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The following information contains general guidelines for hiring a Main Street project manager and includes an outline of the selection process, sample interview and reference check questions, a job description and a help-wanted advertisement.

The most important skill a project manager brings to a local Main Street program is the ability to get along well with people. No matter how skilled a designer, promoter, developer or organizer the candidate is, he or she will not be successful without being able to develop a good rapport with community members.

THE SELECTION PROCESS:

1. Decide Who Will Hire the Project Manager, and How

Those involved in organizing the Main Street program should who will serve on the project manager selection committee. The salary should be set a contract determined. The contract should state the rate and method of pay, the work to be performed, benefits offered, the performance review system, vacation and sick leave policy. The contract should also specify the officer or organization to whom the project manager is expected to report.

2. Develop a Job Description and a Help Wanted Advertisement

The local Main Street program will probably have greater needs in some areas than in others and the project manager's skills should reflect the strengths appropriate for the community. For instance, if the community has a planning or economic development office already compiling financial packages for developers, it may not be important to find a project manager with skills in real estate development. Instead, a manager with skills in marketing, organization or design may be more appropriate. Assess the community's strengths and look for a manager whose abilities will match its gaps in skills and resources.

See the sample job description and help-wanted advertisement included below.

3. Advertise

The local Main Street program should advertise locally. The local program should also advertise in statewide newspapers, state planning and preservation newsletters and in the career planning and placement offices of colleges with graduate programs in planning, administration, marketing, preservation or business. The Internet also provides avenues to advertise the program managers position. The state Main Street office is willing to assist in the advertising process.

4. Designate a Selection Committee

The Selection Committee should include representatives of the groups involved in the local Main Street program -- local government, merchants, property owners and others involved in the local Main Street program. If the community has already established its Main Street Advisory Board, a task force of this Board may be appropriate. Limit the Selection Committee to a manageable number -- no more than five or seven -- and consider appointing an odd number of Committee members to prevent against evenly split votes.

5. Screen Resumes

Eliminate unqualified resumes first -- those which do not fit criteria for education and/or experience.

Look for attractive, well-planned resumes. Is the cover letter articulate and without grammar and spelling errors? The project manager must be an effective communicator.

Select three to eight candidates to interview. The candidates chosen should be those that a majority of the committee feels are most qualified. Once again, the state Main Street office can be called upon if desired.

Sample Reference Check Questions:

- A. How long have you known the candidate, and how has your association with him/her enabled you to evaluate his/her skills and abilities?
- B. Has the candidate had a good working relationship with co-workers and supervisors?
- C. Can you give examples of how the candidate has demonstrated efficiency and persistence in accomplishing assignments or projects?
- D. Can you give examples of how the candidate has been innovative in his or her approach to resolving problems?
- E. Does the candidate prioritize projects well?
- F. We are seeking a downtown project manager with the following skills and talents:
 - ◆ The ability to get along well with a wide variety of people
 - ◆ Research and organizational skills
 - ◆ Ability to work with minimal supervision
 - ◆ Self motivation
 - ◆ Good sense of humor
- G. Do you think the candidate has strengths in these areas? Why?
- H. What are the candidate's greatest strengths and weaknesses?

6. Local vs. Out of Town Applicants

All other things being equal, it is usually preferable that the project manager come from outside the community so that the program can get a fresh start with a fresh viewpoint. What is most important, however, is that the Committee makes every effort to find the best person for the position.

7. Set Interview Dates and Invite Candidates

Try to interview all applicants on the same day or on consecutive days so that differences between candidates will be clearer.

Notify the state Main Street office of your interview schedule so that travel can be coordinated (if necessary).

Applicants who live a long distance from the community should receive preliminary telephone interviews before being invited to the area. If, after this initial screening, the committee decides to invite the candidate for an interview, committee members should decide whether it can offer to reimburse the candidate for travel expenses for the interview.

Ask all applicants to bring along a writing sample - the project manager will need to write everything from press releases to annual reports, so be sure to get a project manager who can communicate well both verbally and in writing.

Agree on a set time limit for each interview -- thirty to forty-five minutes at the most -- and stick to it. Leave fifteen minutes between each interview to discuss each candidate's strengths and weaknesses.

8. Conduct the Interviews

Designate a spokesperson to begin each interview by briefly describing the program and the job. Remember, though, that the applicant should do more talking than the Committee.

Each member of the committee should ask questions of each candidate.

Be sure to ask similar questions of each applicant in order to make evaluation easier. See the list of sample interview questions below.

Be sure to tell each candidate the date by when a decision will be made.

Sample Interview Questions:

- A. Why do you want to be a Main Street project manager, and what special qualities do you feel you would bring to the position?
- B. What special work experience(s), either professional or voluntary, have you had which relates to this position?
- C. How would you go about organizing or strengthening a downtown business association?
- D. What is the most innovative project in which you have been involved?

- E. How would you convince skeptical merchants, property owners or city officials to participate in the Main Street program?
- F. What would be the characteristics of the relationship you would like to help forge between downtown business people, downtown property owners, the city government, the Chamber of Commerce and other community groups?
- G. Do you feel comfortable and competent speaking publicly and working in a position with high community visibility?
- H. Before hearing about this position, were you aware of the National Trust Main Street Center and the Main Street approach to downtown revitalization? Are you familiar with historic preservation issues?
- I. The project manager must deal with a large number of people, from government officials to media representatives to merchants. Can you give examples from your experiences that demonstrate your ability to work productively with others?
- J. The success of a local Main Street program depends to a large extent on diligent efforts made over at least a three year period of time. Do you feel you can commit several years to this position?
- K. Why are you interested in revitalization?
- L. This position will require occasional travel to other communities and other states, in addition to evening and weekend work. Do you have any problems with these demands?
- M. What are the most important issues you believe traditional commercial districts face today?
- N. Do you work best in an independent or in a group situation?
- O. How do you prioritize projects for yourself? How many projects do you feel comfortable working with at any given time?
- P. Of the four points of the Main Street approach design, organization, promotion and economic restructuring, with which do you feel most and least comfortable and competent?
- Q. If selected, how soon could you begin work?

Observations for Selection Committee Members:

Does the applicant listen and respond well to the questions asked?

Does the applicant make direct eye contact when responding?

Does the applicant ask clarifying questions when appropriate?

Does the applicant convey a sense of pride and accomplishment when speaking of past jobs and experiences?

Has the applicant prepared for the interview by doing research on the community? Does the applicant appear to be outgoing, pleasant and easy to speak with?

Does the applicant display a clear understanding of the ideas and issues involved in downtown economic development and provide examples of their application in past professional, volunteer or academic experiences?

Do you think you can work with this individual? Do you think this individual will be accepted easily by your community?

Select a Candidate

At the conclusion of the interviews, rank the candidates. Choose a first and second choice so that the Selection Committee does not have to re-interview candidates if the first choice does not accept the position.

The Selection Committee chairperson should call the selected candidate with the job offer.

Immediately after a candidate is chosen (and after the candidate accepts the position), send out short letters thanking the other applicants for their interest in the Main Street program.

SAMPLE HELP WANTED ADVERTISEMENT FOR MAIN STREET PROJECT MANAGER

MAIN STREET PROJECT MANAGER

{Name of community or organization} is accepting applications for the position of Main Street project manager. The project manager will be responsible for coordinating revitalization activities through the Main Street program. Applicants should have education and/or professional experience in one or more of the following areas; historic preservation, planning, economic development, retailing, marketing, design, volunteer management, nonprofit management and small business development. The project manager must be entrepreneurial, energetic, imaginative, well organized and capable of functioning effectively in an independent environment. Excellent verbal and written communication skills are essential. The salary range is {specify range}, depending on experience. Submit resume, letter of interest, and three references by {date} to {name and address of Selection Committee contact person}.

MAIN STREET PROJECT MANAGER JOB DESCRIPTION

I. Work Objectives

The Main Street project manager coordinates activity within a downtown revitalization program which utilizes historic preservation as an integral foundation for core area economic development.

He/she is responsible for the development, conduct, execution and documentation of the Main Street program. The project manager is the principal on-site staff person responsible for coordinating all project activities locally as well as for representing the community regionally and nationally as appropriate. In addition, the project manager should help guide the organization as it grows and as its objectives evolve.

2. Full Range of Duties to be Performed

- a. Coordinate activity of Main Street program committees, ensuring that communication between committees is well established; assist committees with implementation of work plan items.
- b. Manage all administrative aspects of the Main Street program, including purchasing, record keeping, budget development and accounting, preparing all reports required by the state Main Street program and by the National Trust Main Street Center, assisting with the preparation of reports to funding agencies and supervising part-time employees or consultants.
- c. Develop, in conjunction with the Main Street program's Board of Directors, strategies for downtown economic development through historic preservation utilizing the community's human and economic resources. Become familiar with all persons and groups directly or indirectly involved in the downtown commercial district. Mindful of the roles of various downtown interest groups, assist the Main Street program's Board of Directors and committees in developing an annual action plan for implementing a downtown revitalization program focused on four areas: design/ historic preservation, promotion, organization/management and economic restructuring/development.
- d. Develop and conduct ongoing public awareness and education programs designed to enhance appreciation of the downtown's architecture and other assets and to foster an understanding of the Main Street program's goals and objectives. Through speaking, engagements, media interviews and appearances, keep the program highly visible in the community.
- e. Assist individual tenants or property owners with physical improvement projects through personal consultation or by obtaining and supervising professional design consultants; assist in locating appropriate contractors and materials; when possible, participate in construction supervision; provide advice and guidance on necessary financial mechanisms for physical improvements.

- f. Assess the management capacity of major downtown organizations and encourage improvements in the downtown community's ability to undertake joint activities such as promotional events, advertising, uniform store hours, special events, business recruitment, parking management and so on. Provide advice and information on successful downtown management. Encourage a cooperative climate between downtown interests and local public officials.
- g. Advise downtown merchants' organizations and/or Chamber of Commerce retail committees on Main Street program activities and goals and assist in the coordination of joint promotional events, such as seasonal festivals or cooperative retail promotional events, in order to improve the quality and success of events to attract people downtown; work closely with local media to ensure maximum event coverage; encourage design excellence in all aspects of promotion in order to advance an image of quality for the downtown.
- h. Help build strong and productive working relationships with appropriate public agencies at the local and state levels.
- i. Utilizing the Main Street program format, develop and maintain data systems to track the process and progress of the local Main Street program. These systems should include economic monitoring, individual building files, thorough photographic documentation of all physical changes and information on job creation and business retention.
- j. Represent the community at the local, state and national levels to important constituencies. Speak effectively on the program's directions and findings, at ways mindful of the need to improve state and national economic development policies as they relate to smaller communities.

3. Resource Management Responsibilities

The project manager supervises any necessary temporary or permanent employees, as well as professional consultants. He/she participates in personnel and project evaluations. The project manager maintains local Main Street program records and reports, establishes technical resource files and libraries and prepares regular reports for the state Main Street program and the National Trust Main Street Center. The project manager monitors the annual project budget and maintains Financial records in cooperation with the organization's Treasurer.

4. Job Knowledge and Skills Required

The project manager should have education and/or experience in one or more of the following areas: architecture, historic preservation, economics, finance, public relations, design, journalism, planning, business administration, public administration, retailing-, volunteer or nonprofit

administration and/or small business development. The project manager must be sensitive to design and preservation issues. The manager must understand the issues confronting downtown business people, property owners, public agencies and community organizations. The manager must be entrepreneurial, energetic, imaginative, well organized and capable of functioning effectively in a very independent situation. Excellent verbal and written communication skills are essential. Supervisory skills are desirable.

The foregoing is an accurate and complete description of this position as jointly agreed upon by the undersigned.

Representative of Main Street organization

Employee

Date