



National Main Street Center

a subsidiary of the
National Trust *for* Historic Preservation

The Four Point Refresh: A Primer

Where We've Been

Main Street has been a successful model for commercial district revitalization since its beginnings 35 years ago. What sets it apart is the powerful network: the unique combination of grassroots dedication to comprehensively improving quality of life at the local level, integral support and expertise provided by Coordinating Programs at the city, county, and state level, and leadership and direction from the National Main Street Center (NMSC). The Four Point Approach, which has served to organize the work of Main Street programs and shaped the way we help communities tackle their most challenging revitalization and historic preservation needs, has been an effective and useful framework.

The community development field has changed dramatically over the course of the past three and a half decades. In many ways, new trends in planning, development, and preservation build off principles that those in the Main Street network have long understood: that revitalization must be inclusive and representative of the community, that a place's distinctive characteristics and older and historic buildings are its greatest assets, and that fostering a strong local-business environment creates enormous rewards. In order to ensure the continued success of the Main Street model in revitalizing older and historic business districts, the National Main Street Center's Board of Directors appointed a Four Point Refresh Task Force to oversee the renewal of the Center's signature revitalization framework. The Task Force is led by Main Street veteran and NMSC Board Member Mary Thompson and is working with community revitalization experts Kennedy Smith and Josh Bloom of the Community Land Use and Economics (CLUE) Group and in partnership with the network of Main Street Coordinating Programs to update the Four Point Approach. (See last page for a full list of Refresh Task Force members.)

The purpose of the Four Point Refresh is to obtain a clear picture of what the most common challenges are facing older and historic downtowns and business districts, how different audiences use and perceive the Four Point Approach, and how this Approach should evolve to better meet the needs of the Main Street network and the revitalization field.

The Refresh research found that the Four Point Approach remains strong and relevant. However, instead of being a set of guidelines or framework leading to the ultimate goal of community revitalization, the nature of the Four Point Approach encourages users to be overly focused on the process itself. Additionally, many Main Street programs tend to focus too much time and effort on the components of the Main Street Approach where they may feel most comfortable, and where they can have the most visible impact in a short period of time – most often, Design and Promotion. As a result, many programs report that they struggle to be recognized as serious revitalization organizations and reach key revitalization benchmarks.

Additionally, we received feedback that many organizations and communities outside of the Main Street network are interested in Main Street, but see it as being “not for them.” Some perceive Main Street as being too rigid, requiring a very specific kind of organizational model that does not fit their existing

structure. Others have the misconception that Main Street is only for towns of a certain size or demographic.

The Refreshed Main Street Approach

Based on feedback from surveys, focus groups, and direction from the Four Point Refresh Task Force, the National Main Street Center will focus efforts on implementing an updated framework, with the goal being to make the Main Street Approach work better for those already using it, and make it more accessible for those not yet involved.

This is not a dramatic re-write of the principles that have worked well for so many Main Street practitioners over the years, but a renewed focus on holistic transformation and rigorous outcome measurement. The primary focus will be on outcomes, as opposed to process. As has been the case in the past, Main Streets will be encouraged to engage a wide range of local stakeholders in developing a vision of success for their downtown or neighborhood commercial districts. Main Streets will then be urged to develop cross-cutting Community Transformation Strategies that are connected to meaningful, long-term change. Progress will be measured in a variety of ways, including through economic metrics and qualitative assessment.

Under the refreshed Main Street model, **Community Transformation Strategies** will become the focus of a Main Street program's work. After community visioning processes and up-front assessments of local market needs, the Main Street program or host organization will commit to two to three transformation strategies and organize its work around those strategies (as opposed to organizing people, funding, and time around the Four Points). These strategies will be rooted in a thorough understanding of the district's existing assets and economic potential, and will combine a focus on those actions needed to spur long term, sustainable change in a district, as well as shorter term catalytic activities. Placemaking efforts – those actions which focus on what can be achieved “lighter, quicker, and cheaper” - can be particularly effective and important in energizing the community and demonstrating short-term progress. These changes will require a shift in focus for many communities, though some we understand are already operating this way. It will also impact the way Coordinators and the Center conduct training and assessments.

The Four Points remain critical to the Main Street Approach. One of the most significant changes to the Four Points will be in the form of a more flexible leadership structure. Instead of organizing people, funding, and time around the Four Points, committees, groups of volunteers, or ad hoc work groups may be formed to engage the community around the Community Transformation Strategies. This approach suggests a model in which the Four Points are embedded and institutionalized



in the work as part of the over-all strategies rather than as an organizing model. We believe this evolution is imperative. The way people organize themselves has changed significantly in recent years, and the Main Street Approach must reflect this reality. Communities are welcome to maintain their four committee structure if that is their preference. However, the Center will no longer advise this as a best practice as this model can result in the “silo-ing” of revitalization activities, thus potentially impeding community progress.

Additionally, the National Main Street Center will introduce updated names for the Four Points. We heard again and again that “Economic Restructuring” is a term with little resonance outside of the Main Street network, and is often confusing even for those working in Main Street. Yet Economic Restructuring has always implied more than traditional “economic development.” Going forward the term “**Economic Vitality**” will replace “Economic Restructuring.” By its very nature, the use of “vitality” positions our commercial revitalization work as energetic, strong, and with the capacity to renew. We think the term Economic Vitality will help demystify this point, and speaks to the great economic development and entrepreneurship opportunities on Main Street.

Guiding Principles

The Eight Principles are a set of values that help staff and volunteers articulate the Main Street program’s mission and focus their energy. Going forward, we will refer to the Eight Principles as “Guiding Principles,” and use them for internal training, rather than as a public messaging tool. The Eight Principles are an easily understandable, common sense teaching tool, but in our research we discovered that as a standalone list, they can be confusing to external audiences. The Guiding Principles – which will be based on the existing Eight Principles – will serve as a narrative value statement. We hope the framework we develop will be helpful as written for most communities, but we will also leave room for tailoring depending on community priorities and needs.

What Happens Next?

In many ways, the Four Points have evolved organically over time; some communities report that they are already using a more flexibly structured, outcome-based approach to the Four Points. Yet the Center’s update to a hugely successful approach takes time and great care. Thanks to generous support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, we are launching several demonstration projects (a minimum of 7) over the next 12 months to refine our proposed improvements to the Four Points. These demonstration projects will commence in fall 2015; currently, funding for the work is only available to [Knight Cities](#). The Center is also working with a number of non-Knight Main Street communities to conduct demonstration projects in those communities.

This fall, we are rolling out a “**Beta**” version of the Refreshed Four Point Approach to share with the full Main Street Network information about the Four Point Refresh. This will include:

- An Overview of the Refreshed Four Point Model, to be known officially as the “Main Street Approach”
- Examples of “Community Revitalization Strategies”
- Informational Materials for Coordinating Programs to share with their communities (in PowerPoint and handout form)
- Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Throughout the implementation of Knight demonstration projects, we will keep you updated on key findings in our participating communities. Stay tuned to Main Street Weekly and social media for key updates.

Growing the Main Street Network

The Center recognizes that there are many communities that are currently not involved with Main Street but may wish to be. Like the traditional Main Street model, we believe this refreshed framework has the potential to provide significant benefit to communities and commercial districts of all kinds – from urban districts, to inner ring suburbs, to rural communities. The Center will continue to offer several “points of entry” for communities and commercial districts to participate in the Main Street Network. Over the coming months, the Center will work closely with a newly formed Coordinator’s *Refresh Implementation Task Force* to develop our new affiliation structure.

Four Point Refresh Task Force

- Mary Thompson, Chair
- Barbara Sidway, NMSC Board Chair
- Jane Jenkins, Downtown Oklahoma City, Inc.
- Fred Kent, Project for Public Spaces
- Beppie LeGrand, Main Street South Carolina
- Ed McMahon, Urban Land Institute
- Manuel T. Ochoa, Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.
- Anwar Saleem, H Street Main Street
- Ascala T. Sisk, NeighborWorks America
- Patrice Frey, NMSC