Request for Proposals

2027 Main Street Maryland Conference

Proposed Dates: October 5-6, 2027

Deadline: March 16, 2026

Introduction

The Main Street Maryland Program is seeking proposals from qualified organizations to host the 2027 Main Street Maryland Conference proposed for October 5-6, 2027. This annual two-day conference brings together economic development professionals, community leaders, and Main Street practitioners from across the region to share knowledge, best practices, and inspiring stories.

While past conferences have utilized larger theater-style venues, the program welcomes innovative and non-traditional approaches to hosting the event. Communities should not hesitate to apply based on venue type or format. All thoughtful, creative, and well-organized concepts will be given full consideration as we continue to broaden our vision for the conference experience.

Conference Goals

The primary goals of the 2027 Main Street Maryland Conference are to:

- **Inspire:** Ignite passion and creativity among attendees through keynote speakers, a mix of ignite presentations and TED Talk-style presentations, and breakout sessions.

- **Educate:** Provide actionable insights and practical tools to help attendees strengthen their Main Street programs.

- **Network:** Facilitate connections between attendees to foster collaboration and partnerships.

Proposal Requirements

Qualified Organizations: Applicants must be fully accredited (by Main Street America standards) Main Street Maryland communities with a history of successful downtown revitalization and experience hosting events of similar size.

Proposals should address the following key areas:

1. Venue(s) and Accommodations

Venue: Propose a main conference venue suitable for the open plenary that accommodates minimally 400 attendees.
- o   All meeting facilities/sites must be ADA-accessible.
- o   Preferred location to be in the downtown district, will consider venues that are downtown adjacent.
- o   Must be able to provide or support advanced AV capabilities and have robust Wi-Fi connectivity. Advanced AV capabilities include:
  - ▪ high-quality microphones, directional microphones
  - ▪ speakers that capture and reproduce sound accurately
  - ▪ sound reinforcement systems that eliminate echoes and background noise
- o   Must have and/or identify a dedicated AV technician on-site during all assemblies, breakout sessions, and programming.
- o   Must have the following:
  - ▪ Large theater-style screen
  - ▪ Laptop that can accommodate a flash drive
  - ▪ Projector
  - ▪ Podium
  - ▪ Microphone (hand-held and lavalier)
  - ▪ Sound system
  - ▪ Laser remote/clicker
- o   Must have access to the space the day before the conference starts for set up

Exhibitor Space: Ideally, the open plenary space should accommodate up to 20 exhibitors, either within the main room or in adjacent common areas. Regardless of the configuration, exhibitor areas must be located within a close and comfortable walking distance from all breakout sessions to ensure strong foot traffic and visibility between sessions.
- o   Electrical power must be available for all vendors
- o   Must have access to the space the day before the conference starts for set up

Breakout Spaces:
- o   All meeting facilities/sites must be ADA-accessible.
- o   If not located in the same building as the open plenary, breakout space must be within comfortable walking distance.
- o   Must have 5-6 rooms that can accommodate 50-75 seated attendees each for breakout sessions.
- o   Must have a dedicated AV support person at each space during breakout sessions.
- o   Must have the following in each room:
  - ▪ Large screen
  - ▪ Laptop that can accommodate a flash drive
  - ▪ Projector
  - ▪ Podium
  - ▪ Microphone with sound system
  - ▪ Laser remote/clicker
- o   Must have access to the space the day before the conference starts for set up

Accommodations: Provide information on available lodging blocks and negotiated rates for attendees (preferred in the Main Street district or within a 5–10-minute drive).

- Hotel rooms (minimum 250-300 rooms) of varying price points and of an acceptable level of quality and comfort. Hotel blocks can be in multiple hotels in the area.
- Please make sure accommodation providers can honor "state rate" for Government and non-profit groups within the block.

2. Dining and Catering

Dining:
- Downtown Dining: Ensure a diverse range of dining options are available downtown to accommodate lunch and dinner for a 400+ person conference. Consider various price points to suit different budgets.
- Local Gift Card Program: A local gift card program is required for Day 1 conference lunches. This program not only provides attendees with flexibility and convenience but also serves as an important economic driver by encouraging conference participants to visit downtown businesses and spend money locally. Please provide detailed information on how the program operates, including participating businesses, distribution and redemption processes, and any administrative requirements. If your community does not currently have a gift card program, please describe how one will be created and implemented specifically for the conference.

Catering:
- Breakfast: Please propose a local caterer and menu options for breakfast, taking into account dietary restrictions and preferences. Preference for locally owned, operated businesses that are women and/or BIPOC.
- Beverages: Continuous coffee and water bottle refill station is required throughout the conference.

3. Host Responsibilities
- **Must attend weekly conference planning team meetings.**
- **Identify sites, attractions or activities related to downtown and/or neighborhood revitalization.**
- **Plan and execute specific conference agenda activities:**
  - Identify/plan tours and related opportunities
  - Welcome Party: a social gathering to connect with the local community, sponsors, and partners. The host community will plan and execute a memorable, original, and creative event showcasing the best of the Main Street district.
    - Attendance: 150-200 guests
    - Seating: Not required for all attendees
    - Food, Beverage, and Entertainment: Must be planned and approved by the Main Street Maryland program.
  - Identify and secure local, cultural, or historical performers to incorporate into conference offerings

4. Transportation and Parking

- Parking: Ensure sufficient parking spaces are available downtown to accommodate a group of 400+ attendees.
- Shuttle Service: The host community should arrange convenient shuttle transportation between local hotels and the main conference site.

5. Local Support and Partnerships

Outline the level of local support and involvement, including potential partnerships with local businesses and organizations. This includes potential sponsorship opportunities to support the event which can be both in-kind and financial.

Note:The primary objective is to raise $50,000+ in sponsorships. This goal reflects a collaborative commitment.

6. Volunteers:

Describe the plan for recruiting and managing volunteers.

- Have a team of local volunteers (20-25) to:
  - Act as wayfinding support and hosts/guides on walking tours or related activities
  - Serve as session monitors at breakout sessions for attendance, time-keeping and technical issues.
  - Prepare conference bag/swag for registrants
  - Set up and/ or decorate the registration space, Welcome Party, and breakout session rooms
  - Help with onsite issues as they arise and any day of logistics throughout the conference.
  - Support the conference planning team through consultation, coordination, and/or facilitation.

Proposal Submission

Online submissions are required for all proposals. Please access the submission form at [submission form](#) and answer the series of questions. Submissions are due by March 16, 2026

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Venue Suitability:** The appropriateness of the venue and its capacity to accommodate the conference.

- **Local Support:** The level of local support and involvement.

- **Budget:** The reasonableness and feasibility of the proposed budget.

- **Experience:** The organization's experience in hosting similar events.

- **Innovation:** The proposed innovative ideas to enhance the conference experience.

The selected host organization will be notified by April 24, 2026.

Please note: The Main Street Maryland Program reserves the right to modify or cancel this RFP at any time.