

MAIN STREET RHODE ISLAND

Great Places Don't Happen By Accident

Rhode Island's downtowns and village centers are our state's most underutilized economic engines — places where small businesses grow, jobs are created, and property values rise. Main Street Rhode Island, administered by Grow Smart Rhode Island in partnership with Main Street America, is the state's coordinating program dedicated to unlocking that potential in communities across the state.

Proven Return on Investment:

Nationally, since 1980, Main Street America participants have generated:

- **\$115.27 billion** in public and private reinvestment
- **181,647 new businesses** opened in Main Street districts
- **815,894 jobs** created
- **\$22 return** for every \$1 of public investment in states with coordinating programs

Main Street America Collective Impact Report, 2024

Main Street Rhode Island connects our state to Main Street America's successful national framework: **47 state and regional coordinating programs across 43 states and DC, supporting 1,600+ local organizations. RI has joined this movement, and the opportunity is now.**



A Statewide Network, Built By Demand

In June 2025, the Rhode Island General Assembly made a landmark investment: \$125,000 to launch the state's first Main Street coordinating program. Here's what that investment has built in Year 1:

A formal MOU with Main Street America

RI is now directly connected to the foremost commercial district expertise in the country. This partnership gives Rhode Island communities access to tools, training, and expertise that no individual municipality could secure on its own.

The most active year in Main Street RI history

- **12** monthly roundtables on topics from parking reform to preservation
- **6** bimonthly networking events
- **Over 100 participants from 20 municipalities** registered for our inaugural Main Street Together Conference
- Establishment of our first **RI Main Street Learning Cohort**
- **10** episodes of the "Main Street" podcast, highlighting and promoting main street communities across Rhode Island

28 of 39 municipalities

engaged + formal learning cohorts in:

- Woonsocket
- Central Falls
- Pawtucket
- Providence
- Cranston
- Warwick
- North Kingstown
- South Kingstown
- Richmond
- Hopkinton

Uniting leaders across sectors

We brought the people driving RI's commercial district growth together. Before Main Street RI, they were working in isolation. These connections will compound, fueling statewide revitalization and economic development.



Nonprofit
& Community Advocates



Tourism
& Economic Development



Government & Planning



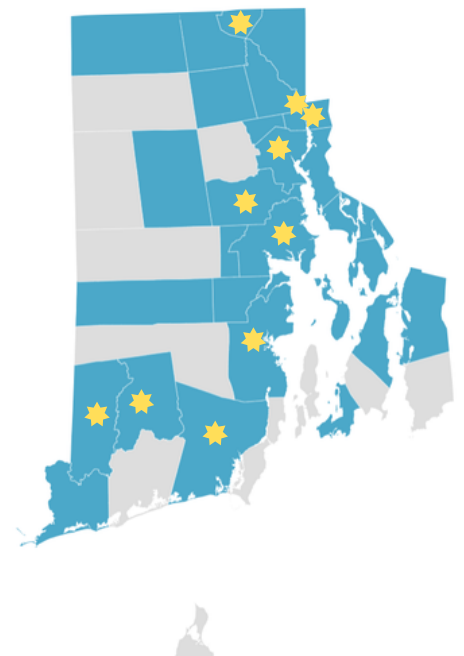
Design Professionals



Business Owners
& Entrepreneurs



Education & Academia



From Conversation to Implementation: The RI Main Street Learning Cohort

The Learning Cohort is the deepest expression of what Main Street RI makes possible — intensive, expert-led technical assistance for communities ready to move from planning to action.

11

Teams

85

Participants

300,000+

Rhode Islanders in cohort communities

Cohort members receive **six full-day technical training intensives** led by Main Street America staff. Topics span:

Design → Improving the built environment to attract businesses and visitors

Economic vitality → Business growth, retention, investment, and job creation

Promotion → Marketing districts as economic and community destinations

Organization → Building the local leadership to sustain revitalization and development

Year 1 is building momentum. Teams have brainstormed strategies and early-stage projects for their districts, including:

→ Unique regional festivals

→ Public window art displays in vacant buildings

→ Farmers market collaboratives

→ Hosting local workshops sharing new knowledge

→ Conducting business retention audits

→ Utilizing placer.ai data through Main Street America to track consumer behavior in Main Street districts

The Road Ahead: Continuing the Momentum

All existing cohort teams plan to continue with our programming, and we've received additional training demands from new groups across the state. Continued investment is essential to build on Year 1.

Our network is ready to move from strategy to implementation.



To continue this work, Main Street RI is requesting \$150,000 for FY2026–27.

Contact: Jillian Finkle, jfinkle@growsmartri.org