Program Goal:

The goal of the Main Street and Connect Communities Program is to support downtown community development in the state of Wisconsin.

This program primarily supports the following WEDC Strategic Pillar and Focus Area:

Community and Economic Opportunity: Downtown Development

Program Description:

WEDC provides technical assistance to communities in the planning, management, and implementation of strategic development projects in downtowns and urban neighborhoods. This includes Main Street support and Connect Communities, which is aimed at supplementing the Main Street program by expanding services to more downtowns across the state.

WEDC will maintain partnerships and develop new ones with other state and local public and private entities such as the Wisconsin Downtown Action Council, UW-Extension and USDA Rural Development to provide services to municipalities undertaking downtown revitalization projects.

WEDC will annually develop a plan that describes the objectives of the state Main Street Program and the methods for 1) coordinating with public and private sector, 2) soliciting private sector funds, and 3) helping municipalities engage in revitalization with help from interested individuals and organizations.¹ WEDC matches technical assistance from our own staff, the National Main Street Center and outside consultants to needs of respective municipalities and non-profit organizations. WEDC will also work with local communities to set strategies to solicit funding from the private sector in those communities to support the local downtown revitalization effort.

Eligibility Requirements:

Eligible entities for Connect Communities and Main Street Communities are communities with a central or core business district and demonstrated local commitment to preservation and revitalization activities.

WEDC will take the following into account when considering Main Street or Connect Communities applications²:

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¹ Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(c)
² Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(f)
1) Organizational capability: An applicant’s ability to bring financial and volunteer resources together according to the National Main Street Center’s four-point approach to downtown revitalization.

2) Public Sector Commitment\(^4\): The participation from local government in the form of financial and staff commitment to the local downtown revitalization effort.

3) Private Sector Commitment\(^5\): The participation from local businesses and individuals in the form of financial\(^6\) and volunteer commitment to the local downtown revitalization effort.

4) Financial Capacity: The ability of the community to bring together comprehensive financial resources to adequately support the downtown revitalization program. For Main Street Communities, this includes funds to employ a local program manager to manage the effort for at least 5 years.\(^6\) Communities with populations of 5,000 or more must employ a full-time, paid program manager and meet a minimum budget requirement. Communities of less than 5,000 must employ a half-time program manager and meet a minimum budget requirement. A community’s ability and commitment to hiring design consultants\(^7\) and providing training\(^8\) will also be taken into consideration.

5) Need: Applicants must show that they need the Connect Communities or Main Street Program. This need is exhibited by vacancy rate, excessive competition from competing areas, blight, building deterioration, and business mix issues.

6) Physical Capacity: An applicant’s ability to show that they have sufficient building stock, businesses and a recognizable downtown district.

7) Historic Integrity: An applicant’s existing historic resources in the downtown and genuine interest in saving and restoring their historic structures. WEDC will employ a Design Specialist to assist Main Street communities with design plans.

In addition to these criteria, local Main Street communities must commit to training and sharing downtown revitalization information with communities that do not participate in the Main Street Program.\(^9\)

**Incentives and Available Funding (FY20):** $ (staff and non-aids contracting)

This is a technical assistance program, therefore no funding is provided directly. This technical assistance is given in the form of training, façade renderings, small business consultations, and hiring of outside consultants to address topics such as business recruitment & retention, branding, historic preservation planning and event development. Per § 238.127(2)(j) Wis. Stat., WEDC expends at least $250,000 annually on the Main Street Program, which covers administration, staff resources and outside consulting services.

**Activities & Expected Outcomes:**

Assist 33 Main Street communities, plus one new community in FY20; 74 Connect Communities, plus 12 new communities in FY20, and 90 small businesses.

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\(^3\) Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(f)1.
\(^4\) Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(f)1.
\(^5\) Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(f)2.
\(^6\) Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(f)3.
\(^7\) Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(f)4.
\(^8\) Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(f)5.
\(^9\) Wis. Stat. § 238.127(2)(h).
Performance Reporting:

Main Street participants will be required to submit a periodic performance report documenting new businesses, new jobs, buildings rehabilitated, public improvements, attendance at promotional events, new downtown housing units, volunteer hours, as well as any other contract deliverable.

Connect Communities will have a reporting system that will track investment, businesses, jobs and accomplishments annually for the duration of their program participation.

WEDC may impose additional reporting requirements to evaluate project performance and to ensure compliance with contract deliverables.

Application and Awards Process:

Main Street

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation will annually select up to three new Main Street communities based on applications submitted to WEDC. Applicants must first participate in a Main Street application workshop. The application workshops are typically done regionally in the fall. The workshops describe building local commitment, raising funds, the Main Street Approach and budgeting. Following the application workshop, letters of intent need to be submitted from potential applicants to the Account Manager.

The Main Street application process is competitive. When applications are received they go to an outside committee that is selected annually. Committee members have backgrounds related to downtown development. The committee meets once a year to help select new Main Street Communities. This committee scores the applications off-site and then convenes. During this meeting the applicant communities will make short presentations to back up their applications. The scoring committee will then discuss the applications and make adjustments to their scores. They will then make motions and vote on who they will be recommending for Main Street status. This recommendation is reviewed by management for approval, the communities are informed that they have been selected as Main Street communities and previously marketed assistance is implemented immediately starting with a Kickoff Visit. As this is a technical assistance program, no funds are awarded.

Connect Communities

Communities interested in the Connect Communities program submit an application through one or more announced application periods. Applications are reviewed by Downtown Development staff and the recommendations are approved by management. Applicants are subject to background checks as part of the review process. Selected communities must pay an annual fee of $200 to WEDC.

For more information on application review, internal process, and award distribution, please refer to WEDC’s award administration policies and procedures.
Revision History:

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<tr>
<th>Effective Date</th>
<th>Description of Change</th>
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<tr>
<td>7/1/2019</td>
<td>Added statutory citations; simplified Program Description; clarified Expected Outcomes.</td>
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PROGRAM REVIEW:

This document has been reviewed by the following parties (Check all that apply):

- [ ] Chief Operating Officer
- [ ] Chief Legal Officer
- [ ] Chief Financial Officer
- [ ] Other ________________________________

Senior Director of Public Policy: __________________________ Date________________________

Division Vice President: __________________________ Date________________________

AUTHORIZED APPROVAL:

CEO or Designee: __________________________ Date________________________