

History of the Nebraska Lied Main Street Program

In 1991 historic preservation leaders met with Governor Ben Nelson to propose a Nebraska Main Street program to be operated in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center. The Nebraska Rural Development Commission included the Main Street program in its recommendations on rural development to Governor Nelson. A Lied Foundation Trust grant was secured through the joint efforts of the Nebraska Community Foundation and the University of Nebraska Foundation. On September 19, 1994, the Lied Foundation Trust granted a start-up gift of \$350,000 to bring a Main Street program to Nebraska. The gift was used to establish a state office and secure a contract with the National Main Street Center. A second gift of \$350,000 was provided by the Lied Foundation Trust in 1995

The purpose of the Nebraska Lied Main Street program is to provide Nebraska communities with a population of 50,000 or less with the opportunity to revitalize their main street districts through economic development and historic preservation. Up to four communities are selected each year based on a competitive application and presentation process. Sponsoring state agencies-the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Architecture, the Nebraska State Department of Economic Development, the Nebraska State Historical Society, and the Nebraska Department of Roads-committed technical assistance, staff, and resources to provide non-duplicating, community-specific services to each designated Main Street community.

The most important aspect of community revitalization is that quality changes are incremental. Each local Main Street initiative has been encouraged to accomplish small goals the first year by organizing a strong pool of volunteers, accomplishing rehabilitation projects that are historically sympathetic and inexpensive for the building owner, and securing financial stability for the program during the succeeding years. By accomplishing smaller goals during the first year, each program has the opportunity to build on success, attract volunteers, secure additional funding, and provide a holistic community-initiated redevelopment plan.

In 1997 the membership-based Nebraska Lied Main Street Associates program was established to offer limited downtown revitalization training and technical assistance to any Nebraska community, regardless of population. Associates members have the opportunity to learn more about the Main Street Four-Point Approach at a pace that works best for their community. Four people from each community can attend a portion of each of the quarterly training sessions offered to designated Nebraska Main Street communities. The training sessions are offered at various locations throughout the state, usually in designated Main Street communities. This program offers networking opportunities with designated communities and limited one-on-one technical assistance in organizational development.

In 1998, an additional \$130,000 a year for 10 years was pledged to the program by the Lied Foundation Trust. This gift has been matched by an annual appropriation of \$125,000 from the State of Nebraska during the fiscal years 1998-2001.

In June of 1999, the program became an affiliated fund administered by the Nebraska Community Foundation. Along with this change came a change in organizational structure. In addition to the original four partnering state agencies, the Nebraska Community Foundation and the Nebraska Rural Development Commission were added as governing members of the program.

Nebraska Lied Main Street is dedicated to providing rural Nebraska communities with the opportunities to strengthen local pride and revitalize historic downtown districts by involving citizens in the local planning process.