

A Collaborative Partnership in Rural Preservation Planning:

An evaluation of effectiveness and impact of RARE-Main Street community partnership in Oregon



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Executive Summary

Abstract

The National Main Street Approach® is a highly regarded community revitalization tool. It provides a starting point and method for economic development and preserving a sense of place within distressed downtown commercial centers. While many rural Oregon communities have the interest to carry out the Approach®, most struggle to attract the appropriate skilled professional to spearhead the initiative, secure sustainable funding sources, or maintain initiative momentum.

Beginning in 2009, a unique partnership formed between the organization Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) and Oregon Main Street programs to assist with local downtown revitalization efforts. For the last 20 years, RARE has helped communities boost their capacity to improve local conditions and overall quality of life. They do this by placing an AmeriCorps participant within the community for 11 months to provide technical assistance on community-defined social and economic issues or challenges.

From the exterior, the RARE-Main Street partnership may appear to be a win-win; however, the creation of the partnership only began five years ago and could still be considered to be in a new, or trial, stage. Additionally, there is no evaluation mechanism in place to assess if the RARE-Main Street partnerships are meeting program goals and capacity needs.

This study assessed the effectiveness and impact of the RARE-Main Street partnership in rural Oregon communities by combining academic research with a practical program evaluation. The researcher gathered feedback and insights from former RARE-AmeriCorps participants, their supervisors, and community members in four case study communities – Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande, and Milton-Freewater. Additional feedback and insights were also gathered from the state Main Street Coordinator, Sheri Stuart. The following questions were used to guide research throughout the course of the study:

Research Questions

- Based on performance measures of each program (RARE, AmeriCorps, and Main Street) and the expectations of community members, is the RARE-Main Street partnership effectively and efficiently building community capacity?
- What is the overall impact of the RARE-Main Street community partnership for rural Oregon communities?
- How could the RARE-Main Street partnership be improved to ensure a positive, long-term impact for communities?

Findings

Findings reveal the partnership makes a positive and significant impact within communities for the duration the RARE-AmeriCorps participant is serving. However, the lasting long-term impact of the partnership is far more uncertain and heavily dependent on local circumstances. Prior to the RARE-Main Street partnership, all communities selected for the study identified human and financial capacity needs – having person(s) available to devote time and energy to Main Street revitalization efforts and sustainable funding for the initiative. Other capacity needs included social (need for effective leadership and having a point person to be the “face” of the local Main Street program) and organizational capacity. Additionally, each community

had reached a pivotal crossroads with their local Main Street program and needed help propelling the program in the right direction.

According to interview and survey respondents, RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement not only provides an affordable alternative to a full-time staff person, but also (generally speaking) provides “high-quality” individuals who are “well-educated” and bring a “youthful excitement” to the local community. Besides the state Main Street program and RARE, survey and interview respondents were unaware of any other non-profit organization that provided technical assistance for communities implementing the Main Street Approach®. And, there are only a few private consultants available to provide expert advice on the Approach® and strategic planning within the state. The majority of interview respondents agree the local program would not be where it is today (or would have made the progress they have) without RARE’s assistance.

While all interview respondents viewed the RARE-Main Street partnership as a positive collaboration that should be continued, most agreed there were areas of the partnership which could be “refined” or improved upon. The information below summarizes the strengths and limitations of the partnership.

Strengths of the RARE-Main Street Partnership

The following impacts and strengths of the RARE-Main Street partnership *for the local communities* were revealed during the study. All factors are considered to contribute to the capacity building potential of the RARE-Main Street partnership.

- Bring awareness to the local Main Street program or downtown revitalization efforts.
- Increase the number of actively engaged partners and volunteers.
- Provide an external or “fresh” perspective to addressing local issues or challenges.
- Get things done.
- Build or sustain momentum for the local Main Street program.

Limitations of the RARE-Main Street Partnership

Providing capacity vs. building capacity

The study revealed RARE *provides* a “critical” capacity gap by placing a well-educated, enthusiastic young professional within rural communities. However, RARE’s ability to *build* capacity within Main Street communities is hindered by partnership limitations and the lasting long-term impact and sustainability of the local Main Street programs once the RARE-AmeriCorps participant has left is much more uncertain. Below are partnership limitations revealed during the study:

- Disparity between capacity needs and tasks identified for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.
- Balancing expectations.
- Length of service.
- Continuity and knowledge sharing.
- Initial capacity issues remain after the partnership.
- “It is what you make of it.”

Moving Forward

The most encouraging finding throughout this study is not only that the potential for the RARE-Main Street partnership to build capacity is there, but the actual framework to realize this potential is already in place – it simply has to be fine-tuned. RARE’s assets – a fresh perspective, youthful excitement, dedication and momentum – are exactly what these Main Street programs need to thrive. The key is learning how to transfer that knowledge and energy into the community. It is balancing “getting things done” (the mantra for AmeriCorps) with building capacity (the mission of all three programs). It is important for developing Main Street programs to show progress, demonstrate what is possible with a local stewardship board or alliance, and to increase awareness for local initiatives. However, if a Main Street program is to be sustainable following the RARE partnership, they must break free of external assistance dependency and build internal capacity to address local issues. In order for RARE to achieve greater success moving forward, the organization must shift its mindset from providing purely technical assistance towards mentoring these communities and helping them navigate through the Main Street Approach®. The role of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant within a Main Street community should be to *orchestrate, facilitate, and organize* resources and opportunities for program advancement.

In order for the RARE-Main Street partnership to have a long-term positive impact on rural communities, the researcher recommends applying considerations included within the study and focusing on the following four core areas of capacity building when a RARE-AmeriCorps is placed within a Main Street community:

- **Strategic planning**
RARE staff can help Main Street communities better identify capacity needs and how to address those based on 20+ years of providing technical assistance to rural areas. More involvement from RARE staff could prepare communities for the partnership and how to transition out of the partnership, as well as ensuring the community is ready to support the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.
- **Bonding capital**
Facilitate opportunities for ideas sharing and context specific strategy development based on local expertise and collective knowledge. Form both internal and external collaborative partnerships, as well as working relationships with business owners and local government. Form close working relationships

with the community so that local learned experiences, identify of place, and social values can remain at the forefront of the local Main Street initiative.

- **Bridging capital**

Help attract a larger volunteer base and diversifying community support. Tap into potential RARE networks and networks of local community members relevant for local downtown revitalization efforts. Raise awareness of local endeavors both locally and regionally.

- **Education and training.**

Bring in outside success stories for downtown revitalization and Main Street precedents. Ensure all RARE-AmeriCorps participants can attend as many Main Street trainings as possible. Develop and implement strategies for more effective continuity and knowledge sharing among partnership participants.

- **Increasing awareness and recognition.**

One of the most significant assets a RARE-AmeriCorps participant can provide a local Main Street program is increasing awareness for Main Street initiatives and gaining recognition for the local board or alliance. This requires the participant to get their hands dirty and engaged with the local community. Through demonstrable and tangible improvements projects and collaboration the local Main Street program can show progress to the local community and gain further support for larger initiatives.

Though it will take time and commitment, the researcher is optimistic the RARE-Main Street partnership will only continue to grow in a positive direction if lessons learned are incorporated into administrative decisions and collaborative strategy development moving forward.

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I. Introduction

Many attribute community development and revitalization as an effort to “reinvent” a particular place in order to allow for new economic opportunities. However, successful revitalization is most often community-led efforts which unearth an existing cultural identity of a place and improves the overall quality of life; including, the ability to withstand, or bounce back from, economic and social fluctuations. Harnessing the existing identity of a place can highlight an already-present, culturally rich community and its heritage, as well as extract existing opportunities and solutions for positive change that may have developed organically through learned experiences.

Community revitalization is a planning process, or conscious effort, of nourishing positive assets within a particular neighborhood, district, or entire city so that the community can flourish. It should acknowledge and respect the social connections and cultural traditions that exist, while allowing for new cultural identities and opportunities for growth to meld organically with the social fabric. Assets, within this context, are community resources and characteristics that contribute, or have the potential to contribute, to the vitality and vibrancy of that place, as well as tap into the community’s cultural and collective identity. For example, assets of a downtown district may include a historic theater that serves as an anchor business, a dedicated advocacy group that fosters engagement and awareness, or a heritage festival that brings community members together. These are, in short, assets that serve a greater purpose for the larger community.

The National Main Street Approach® has become highly regarded by many researchers, preservationists, planners, and policymakers as a successful community revitalization tool, or method. The Approach® aims to link community and economic development to existing assets of a particular place, including human resources and the historic built environment. It identifies and enhances these assets in a systematic way so that the community can become self-reliant to address local social and economic issues. The success of the Approach® is attributed to its four-point, comprehensive method that combines organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring to help revitalize distressed communities.

The Approach® has been implemented in more than 2,200 cities and towns in 40 states across the country with the help of the National Main Street Center and state programs. In Oregon, there are nearly 80 communities participating in the state Main Street program. However, “some researchers acknowledge that the Main Street [Approach®] is not a quick or guaranteed fix for all communities, stating that the program is successful for about three out of every four communities that participate”.¹ According to Sheri Stuart, Oregon State’s Main Street Coordinator, there is an enormous learning curve for local jurisdictions implementing the Main Street Approach® due to its comprehensive nature.² Some communities struggle to maintain the momentum of the program, as well as securing steady funding sources and hiring a full-time program manager.³ In order for the Approach®

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COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION
THE MAIN STREET APPROACH®

to be successful it requires dedicated collective action on the part of community members and business leaders, identification and organization of community assets, and forming partnerships.⁴

While many rural communities in Oregon have the interest and community backing to implement the Main Street Approach[®], most struggle to attract the appropriate skilled professional to spearhead the initiative or to secure a stable funding source for such an individual. Beginning in 2009, a unique collaborative partnership formed between the non-profit organization Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) and rural Main Street programs or alliances to assist with local downtown revitalization efforts. For the last 20 years, RARE has helped communities boost their capacity to improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions and overall quality of life. To do this, RARE places an AmeriCorps graduate-level participant within a community for 11 months to provide technical assistance on community defined social issues or challenges.

Once a Main Street community partners with RARE, the participant takes on the role of either “Main Street Coordinator”, “Downtown Coordinator”, “Main Street Manager”, “Program Director”, or “Economic Development Analyst”. Additional external assistance, or expertise, is provided by RARE staff and their network of community planning officials. Although the participant’s tasks are dependent on the community’s needs and participant’s skillsets, the participant’s typical responsibilities to build community capacity are tied directly to the National Main Street Approach[®] such as economic restructuring, organization, volunteer recruitment, committee facilitation, event planning, streetscape design, and downtown promotion.

This initiative is much more than a working relationship between a non-profit organization and local communities. The partnership becomes a fusion of three established programs (proven successful independently) – RARE, AmeriCorps, and the Main Street Approach[®].⁵ Additionally, there is a strengthened focus within the partnership due to the overlapping missions of all three programs – build community capacity by leveraging existing assets and volunteer or community recruitment. Success of the partnership is heavily dependent upon the commitment of local community members and collaboration between the RARE-AmeriCorps participant and community members.

From the exterior, the RARE-Main Street partnership may appear to be a win-win; however, the creation of the partnership only began five years ago and could still be considered to be in a new, or trial, stage. Additionally, there is currently no evaluation mechanism in place to assess if the RARE-Main Street partnerships are meeting program goals and capacity needs.

Background & Context

This report provides background information and analysis of data to assess the effectiveness and impact of the RARE partnership in rural Main Street communities throughout Oregon. The study developed out of requests from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and AmeriCorps for RARE to conduct in-depth analysis of each of their community service programs, or partnerships, in the State of Oregon. CNCS and AmeriCorps are both partner organizations which help RARE achieve their mission of capacity building in Oregon communities and serve as a primary funding source for RARE. Additionally, this study comes at a pivotal time for RARE as they are now in their 20th year of service and 5th year providing technical assistance to Main Street communities. Since the initial RARE-Main Street community

partnership in 2009, the program has expanded to a total of nine partnerships. This past year RARE received a record number of applications from Main Street communities seeking technical assistance from an AmeriCorps participant and this number is expected to increase with each passing year.

The researcher took on two primary roles while conducting the study: an external consultant for RARE and as an academic researcher. Megan Smith, Director of RARE, approached the researcher to see if she would be interested in completing the partnership evaluation as part of terminal project degree requirements based on her (1) previous work experience with the Community Service Center as a Graduate Student Project Manager, Associate, and Coordinator and (2) interdisciplinary academic pursuits in the fields of Historic Preservation and Community and Regional Planning.

Purpose & Methods

The purpose of this study is to analyze the existing RARE-Main Street partnership in Oregon and evaluate the strengths, limitations, and areas in need of improvement. The researcher integrated the more practical exercise of program evaluation with the academic study of (1) the need for intervention in local communities and (2) what “capacity building” means to the broader audience of community planning and preservation professionals, as well as to individual rural communities, within the context of community revitalization and the Main Street Approach®. With this intent in mind the following research questions emerged:

Research Questions

- Based on performance measures of each program (RARE, AmeriCorps, and Main Street) and the expectations of community members, is the RARE-Main Street partnership effectively and efficiently building community capacity?
- What is the overall impact of the RARE-Main Street community partnership for rural Oregon communities?
- How could the RARE-Main Street partnership be improved to ensure a positive, long-term impact for communities?

Over a nine-month period, the researcher explored the effectiveness and impact of the RARE-Main Street partnership through the following series of activities:

Analysis of Secondary Data

To begin to analyze the RARE-Main Street community partnership, the researcher gathered secondary data from a wide variety of sources. These included:

- **RARE documents and reports:** grant applications for federal funding, community applications for RARE assistance, and exit surveys of RARE-AmeriCorps participants for the Main Street partnership.
- **Journal articles and published literary works** on the following topics: program evaluation methodology and strategies, history and impact of the Main Street Program on communities, history and impact of AmeriCorps, and capacity building for sustainable and resilient rural communities.

Secondary data analysis was the preliminary research phase. It provided background information for the study topic and began to shed light on the need for intervention in rural Main Street communities. The researcher used secondary data to guide the direction of the study, develop a program evaluation tool,

and compile an index of research-generated indicators and strategies for the Main Street Approach® and capacity building success.

Case Study Research

The purpose of case study research was to better understand the effectiveness and impact of the RARE-Main Street partnership in context. Since 2009, RARE has partnered with nine Main Street communities throughout the State of Oregon, each with unique assets and challenges. The study assessed four of the nine communities as a representative sampling. This allowed the researcher to analyze what worked well and what could be improved with the partnership both in a holistic perspective and specific to each community or location. Additionally, it allowed the researcher to test, or implement, the developed program evaluation tool and provide recommendations for how the tool might be improved for future evaluations.

The cities of **Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande, and Milton-Freewater** were selected as a representative sample of RARE-Main Street communities for purposes of this study. Selection of these sites was contingent upon the following three criteria:

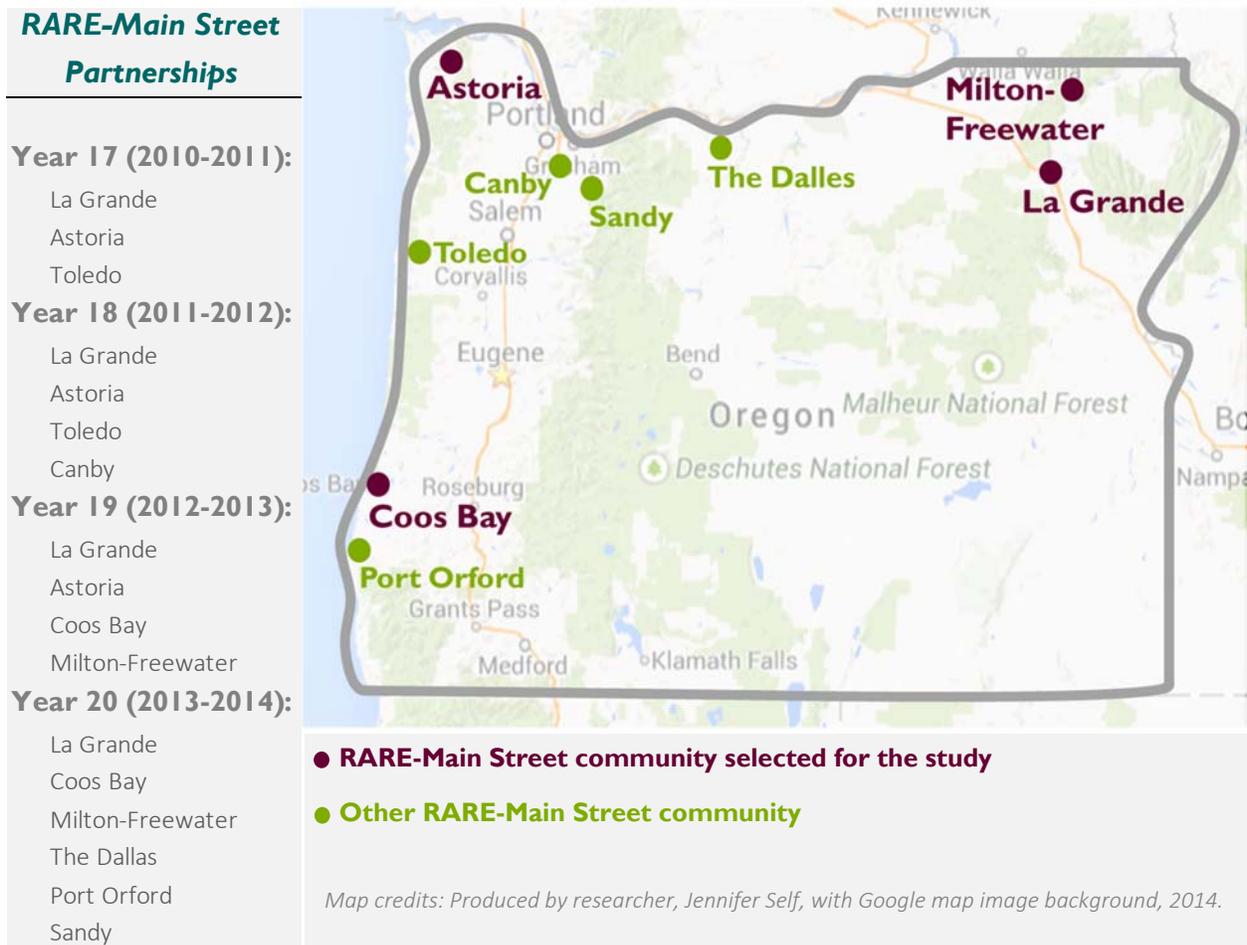
1. Community had a completed tenure or service contract with a RARE-AmeriCorps participant.
2. Rural area that is not adjacent to a large metropolitan.
3. Alignment of the partnership to the National Main Street Approach's® four-point strategy.

For further discussion on defining “rural”, see Chapter 2 Literature Review. For further discussion on site selection see Appendix B Site Selection.

Once a representative sampling of RARE-Main Street communities was selected, the researcher inventoried expectations and goals through secondary research for each program included within the partnership – RARE, AmeriCorps, the National Main Street Approach® - and each community. Expectations and goals of AmeriCorps and the National Main Street Approach® was researched primarily through journal articles and online media. Expectations and goals for RARE and the communities they partnered with were researched through applications for AmeriCorps participant placement. These applications are submitted by the communities to RARE and outline their perceived capacity need and general background information on the existing local program. This information proved particularly beneficial for the study to assess the initial expectations to outcomes of the partnership.

The researcher also compiled a community profile and conducted a downtown observation walking tour for each RARE-Main Street community selected for the study to better understand local conditions that might affect the outcome of the partnership. The profile included socio-economic data, general information pertaining to their local Main Street initiative, and their involvement with RARE. Observation stemming from the downtown walking tour provided a first-hand experience within the community and added to the existing knowledge of assets and challenges faced by the local Main Street initiative.

For further information on each of the RARE-Main Street communities selected for the study, see Chapter 5 Community Profiles.



Partnership Participant Interview & Survey

The study involved collecting primary data through interviews and online surveys within each RARE-Main Street community selected for the study. Phone and in-person interviews were conducted with former RARE-AmeriCorps participants which assisted with downtown revitalization efforts, their supervisors while in service, and the State Main Street Coordinator. Online survey respondents were community members recommended by the RARE-AmeriCorps participant or the supervisor who were directly impacted by Main Street initiatives or worked with the RARE-AmeriCorps participant during their term of service. The purpose of the interviews and surveys was to gather insights and perspective of partnership participants knowledgeable about the RARE-Main Street partnership to shed light on its strengths, limitations, and areas in need of improvement.

Between the four communities selected for the study – Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande and Milton-Freewater – the researcher was able to obtain a list of 10 individuals: six former RARE-AmeriCorps participants and four supervisors. (Note: Some RARE-AmeriCorps participants served multiple years within the Main Street communities and supervisors often manage incoming RARE-AmeriCorps participants over several years.) **Eight of the 10 community respondents completed the interviews** (five RARE-AmeriCorps participants and three supervisors), which is a response rate of 80%. Two in-person interviews and six phone interviews were completed.

The researcher was able to obtain 25 community member contacts. Eleven of the 25 community members responded that he or she would be interested in participating in the survey and emailed the survey link (response rate of 44%). Of those that received the survey, **nine community members completed the survey.** (Astoria = 3, Milton-Freewater=3, Coos Bay=2, and La Grande=1. A completion rate of 36%.)

For further discussion on research methods, see Chapter 2 Conceptual Framework and Research Design.

Projected Outcomes of the Study

RARE and AmeriCorps embrace a “getting things done” mind-set towards community revitalization and sustainability. This study was designed as a barometer of the RARE-Main Street partnership effectiveness and impact. The report aims to provide key findings and practical considerations for how the partnership could be improved to better meet goals and objectives. It will also provide a program evaluation tool for future self-evaluations to be conducted by RARE.

While research for the study will focus primarily on the RARE-Main Street partnership, findings and observations will likely be useful for a much broader audience. The integration of a program evaluation with academic study provides a rich context and foundation for examining the partnership between rural service providers and the communities they assist. Research and final outcomes for the study demonstrate effective interdisciplinary strategies for preserving Oregon heritage and revitalizing downtown commercial centers, as well as providing a potential model for future program evaluations.

Benefits of the Study

For RARE...

- Allows the organization to see what is working well and where the partnership may need improvement.
- Fosters a better understanding of partnership limitations.
- Helps ensure the organization makes informed decisions moving forward towards achieving partnership goals.
- Serves as an accountability tool between the organization and its funders to ensure the organization’s impact is appropriate to missions of all interested parties.
- Cultivates trust and stronger relationships between the programs working in unison to achieve mutual goals.
- Provides the organization a potential model for future program evaluations.

For RARE-AmeriCorps participants...

- Provides background information to better understand anticipated challenges and opportunities, as well as the nature of the RARE-Main Street partnerships.

For other rural service providers and communities...

- Highlights effective interdisciplinary strategies for preserving Oregon heritage, revitalizing downtown commercial centers, and building capacity in rural communities.
- Serves as an informational, or reference, tool for communities considering to partner with RARE to maximize benefits and target needs.

Organization of this Report

The remainder of the report is broken into five chapters, organized as follows:

Two: Conceptual Framework

The following chapter presents further information on the methodology and research design of the study.

Three: Literature Review

The subsequent chapter further develops the context of the study through literary academic research. It includes information pertaining to the organizational framework of the partnership, background information for each program included in the partnership (RARE, AmeriCorps, and the Main Street program), capacity building in rural communities, and the development of a program evaluation tool unique to the RARE-Main Street community partnership.

Four: Program Evaluation Tool

The study combines academic research with a practical program evaluation. Prior to this study, no evaluation mechanism was in place to assess the overall effectiveness and impact of each RARE program. The program evaluation tool seen in Chapter Four was developed by researcher specifically for the RARE-Main Street community partnership and implemented as part of this study. Recommendations included at the end of Chapter Four were based on lessons learned and feedback gathered from the study for the how the evaluation could be improved in the future.

Five: Community Profiles

Chapter Four provides background information for each RARE-Main Street community selected for this study. Information pertains to their socio-economic conditions, local Main Street initiatives, and involvement (or partnership) with RARE.

Six: Findings - Interview Responses & Seven: Findings - Survey Responses

Chapter Five and Six provide a summary of insight and feedback of partnership participants. This information was gathered using in-person and phone interviews, as well as online surveys within each of the four communities selected for the study. Findings are divided into broad, overarching key take-aways regarding the impact and areas in need of improvement with the RARE-Main Street partnership as a whole.

Eight: Conclusions & Considerations

The final chapter provides a summary of key findings from the academic study and program evaluation of the partnership, considerations for improving the RARE-Main Street partnership in the future, and areas for further research.

Chapter 1 Notes:

¹ Bradbury, Susan L. "An Evaluation of Iowa's Rural Main Street Program." *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, no. 6 (2011): 71-84.

² Stuart, Sheri, interview by Jennifer Self, & Megan Smith. Oregon Main Street Coordinator (September 11, 2013).

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Trust for Historic Preservation. History of the National Main Street Center. 2013.

<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-center/history.html#.Uo5Hi-L5ccl> (accessed Fall 2013).

⁵ Thomson, Ann Marie, and Jerry L. Perry. "Can AmeriCorps Build Communities?" *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (Sage Publications, Inc.) 27, no. 4 (December 1998): 399-420.

National Main Street Center. What is Main Street. 2014. <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street> (accessed January 2014).

Goes, Jim. A RARE Program Evaluation and Report. Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), Community Service Center, University of Oregon, Cybernos, LLC., 2009.

II: Conceptual Framework & Research Design

The RARE-Main Street partnership is a fusion of three established programs – RARE, AmeriCorps, and the Main Street Approach®– aimed at creating environmental, social and economic resiliency and improving the quality of life for distressed communities. Each program works to achieve this mission by utilizing existing local assets with community and volunteer support to build community capacity. Additionally, all three programs have been proven successful independently¹. However, there is no mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness and impact the *partnership*, or fusion of the three programs mentioned above, has had on rural communities.

The following problem statement and research questions were developed to assess the effectiveness and impact of the partnership with the overlapping missions of the three programs in mind:

Problem Statement

Many distressed communities in rural Oregon currently do not have the capacity, or ability, to initiate community revitalization strategies on their own.² Forming external partnerships with organizations such as RARE may provide a solution. RARE provides communities a “portal” to new networks, employees, and external sources of expertise.³ However, there is currently no evaluation mechanism in place to assess if these partnerships are meeting program goals.

Research Questions

- Based on performance measures of each program (RARE, AmeriCorps, and Main Street) and the expectations of community members, is the RARE-Main Street partnership effectively and efficiently building community capacity?
- What is the overall impact of the RARE-Main Street community partnership for rural Oregon communities?
- How could the RARE-Main Street partnership be improved to ensure a positive, long-term impact for communities?

Research Design: Integrating Practical Program Evaluation and Academic Study

A program evaluation alone is a practical endeavor, or management tool, intended to provide information that can be used to improve social programs.⁴ It is generally not an attempt to build theory or necessarily develop social science knowledge.⁵ However, when paired with an academic study and theory the potential insights to be gained from a program evaluation are much more significant. The critical point of the Collaborative Partnership study is to assess the effectiveness and impact a local non-profit has had assisting rural Oregon communities carry out a preservation-based initiative to revitalize their commercial districts and improve quality of life.

To develop a holistic perspective of the partnership, the researcher integrated a more practical exercise of program evaluation with the academic study of the partnership. The academic study examined the (1) need for intervention in rural communities and socio-economic environment of Oregon; (2) nature and extent of the interventions and other influencing factors on the partnership; (3) mission and goals of each

program operating within the partnership; and (4) how the partnership could be improved in the future. Information to support the academic study was done primarily through literature review and feedback gathered from partnership participants.

With the intent of integrating a more practical program evaluation with academic study of the partnership, the following goals were developed by the researcher in collaboration with RARE staff and an academic advisory committee:

Goals

1. Develop a program evaluation tool to assess effectiveness and impact of RARE-Main Street partnerships.
2. Understand the context of the interventions by examining the operational framework and structure of each program within the partnership – RARE, AmeriCorps, and the Main Street Approach®.
3. Gather information pertaining to how “capacity building” is defined and approached by broader audience of community planning and preservation professionals, as well as to individual rural communities within the context of community revitalization and the Main Street Approach®.
4. Implement program evaluation tool in a representative sampling of RARE-Main Street communities.
5. Understand the context, strengths and challenges for each selected rural community within the RARE-Main Street research study.
6. Reveal the success, limitations, challenges, and areas for improvement of the RARE-Main Street partnership.
7. Provide considerations for improving both the partnership and future program evaluations.

Findings and generated considerations for the Collaborative Partnership study are dependent on literature review, measurable impacts, and subjective feedback. The study included extensive research, interaction with partnership participants, and in-person site visits to each of representative sample RARE-Main Street communities – Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande, and Milton-Freewater.

To initiate the study, the researcher first worked with RARE staff to establish goals and expectations for the study, then worked with academic committee members to expand the boundaries of a “typical” program evaluation into an academic study of the partnership. Other key factors adding to the development of the conceptual framework and research design include professional experience; an interview with the State Main Street Coordinator, Sheri Stuart; and extensive literature review.

The research design is comprised of two key components: (1) the program evaluation tool and (2) the academic study of the partnership and rural capacity building within the context of community revitalization and the Main Street Approach®. These components are not necessarily intended to stand independently, as development and findings with each component greatly influenced the other.

Goal I: Develop a program evaluation tool to assess effectiveness and impact of RARE-Main Street partnerships.

The program evaluation tool and nine guiding principles for evaluation were developed by the researcher specifically for RARE partnerships based on literature review and other program evaluation precedents, as well as consultation with RARE staff and academic advisory committee. The intent behind the tool development was to not only to assess the effectiveness and impact of the RARE-Main Street partnership, but to also provide a potential model for a program evaluation tool RARE could use for future self-evaluations with their programs and partnerships.

There are currently evaluation precedents to evaluate the (1) impact of the Main Street Approach® on local communities, (2) overall effectiveness of the RARE organization as a whole, and (3) individual exit reports, or self-evaluated performance surveys, completed by RARE-AmeriCorps participants following their service tenure. However, there is no mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness and impact the *partnership*, or fusion of the three programs mentioned above, has had on rural communities. Additionally, there is no formal opportunity afforded to RARE-AmeriCorps participant supervisors or community members to provide feedback and insights on how the partnership. (Informal conversations do frequently occur between the community and RARE staff.)

For further discussion on program evaluation precedents, see Chapter 3 Literature Review.

To determine the most appropriate evaluation method to assess RARE partnerships and programs, the tool is intended to be iterative. The tool implemented within this study is the initial iteration. Recommendations for how the program evaluation tool could be improved in the future are included at the end of the “Program Evaluation Tool” chapter of this report. These recommendations were based on feedback from partnership participants and lessons learned from the study.

The tool gathered an array of qualitative and quantitative, subjective and objective, information and data. Quantitative data was gathered primarily through the use of research-generated indicators for both capacity building and Main Street program success. The research-generated indicators included within the evaluation included a listing of (1) RARE’s performance measurements as seen on their community applications for RARE placement and (2) standards of performance for a Main Street community as defined by the National Main Street Center.^{vi}

Research Generated Indicators to Assess the State of the Local Main Street Program Prior to the RARE partnership

- Has broad-based community support for the commercial district revitalization process, with strong support from both the public and private sectors.
- Has developed vision and mission statements relevant to community conditions and to the local Main Street program's organizational stage.
- Has a comprehensive Main Street work plan
- Possesses an historic preservation ethic
- Has an active board of directors and committees

- Has an adequate operating budget
- Has a paid professional program manager
- Conducts a program of ongoing training for staff and volunteers

Research Generated Indicators for Partnership Effectiveness

- Increase the number of actively engaged volunteers.
- Increase community resources. (Includes but is not limited to outreach materials, assessments, maps, databases, programs, and/or studies.)
- Create finalized plans.
- Provide public speaking opportunities to the participant.
- Create or provide teaching opportunities on the topics of business plan development, marketing, and/or fiscal management.
- Transfer skills to community members.

Qualitative data was gathered primarily from open-ended questions regarding the partnership. For this study quantitative data was generally used to evaluate the partnership's effectiveness, whereas subjective (or qualitative) data pertaining to the perspective, opinion and insight of partnership participants were used to evaluate the impact. The program evaluation tool can be found in Chapter 4.

Goal 2: Understand the context of the interventions by examining the operational framework and structure of each program within the partnership – RARE, AmeriCorps, and the Main Street Approach®.

The researcher gathered information on the operational framework and structure of each program through extensive literature review, online research, several meetings with RARE staff, and dialogue with partnership participants. Key documentation resources for understanding RARE in context included a federal grant application to the Corporation for National and Community Service, RARE's website, and a 2009 organizational evaluation completed for RARE by an external consultant.

Goal 3: Gather information pertaining to how “capacity building” is defined and approached by broader audience of community planning and preservation professionals, as well as to individual rural communities within the context of community revitalization and the Main Street Approach®.

The researcher conducted extensive literature on the topics of rural capacity building, community revitalization, and the Main Street Approach®. Additionally, consultation with academic advisory committee members and the State Main Street Coordinator, as well as dialogue with partnership participants provided valuable insights. Key documentation resources included journal articles, Main Street program evaluation precedents, and Cornelia Flora's book *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*.

Goal 4: Gather partnership participant feedback and insights on the effectiveness and impact of the RARE-Main Street partnership

The developed program evaluation tool was implemented in four of the nine Main Street communities RARE has partnered with since 2010 – Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande, and Milton-Freewater. A representative sample, or case study, of communities was selected due to constraints of time and having one researcher on the study.

For further information regarding the representative sample of communities selected for the study, see Appendix A Site Selection.

Partnership participant feedback was gathered primarily through the use of phone and in-person interviews, as well as online surveys. Phone or in-person interviews were beneficial for robust, honest feedback from participants intimately knowledgeable about the RARE-Main Street partnership. These allowed the participant increased opportunities and flexibility to offer information or insights about the partnership or projects not otherwise asked through structured questions. Online surveys allowed the researcher to reach a much broader audience and ask quantitative questions pertaining to research-generated indicators.

The researcher only gathered feedback from individuals that were knowledgeable about the RARE-Main Street partnership or interacted with the RARE-AmeriCorps participant while he or she served within the local community. RARE staff provided participant information for RARE-AmeriCorps participants and their immediate supervisor while in service for the selected communities. These individuals were interviewed first using in-person or phone survey methods. During the interview, RARE-AmeriCorps participants and supervisors were asked to recommend community members to be a part of the survey study given the following parameters:

- “Community member” may be a city planner or other public official, business owner, member of a local advocacy group, or member of the general public.
- “Community member” must be (1) directly affected by the local Main Street initiative (such as a business owner within the downtown district), (2) help with revitalization strategies on a routine basis (such as a city planner), or (3) be a member of a local advocacy group or focused on community development or historic preservation.
- “Community member” must be between the ages of 18 and 65.

Internet surveys through surveymonkey.com were used to gather feedback from community members. Community members were allotted one week to complete the survey. The target window placed a sense of urgency on completing the survey, rather than having an open ended completion date, in an attempt to receive a greater number of responses.

Goal 5: Understand the context, strengths and challenges for each selected rural community within the RARE-Main Street research study.

Prior to the program evaluation tool being implemented, the researcher gathered general information for each RARE-Main Street community selected for the study. This included information pertaining to their involvement with RARE, self-identified needs assessment for RARE involvement, and socio-economic data. Key resources for the information included each community’s initial application for a RARE-AmeriCorps participant (provided by RARE) and US census data.

Additional information regarding the strengths and challenges faced by each community were asked using targeted questions during partnership participant interviews and surveys and observational walking tour within each downtown district. The downtown walking tour was a method adapted from annual Main Street evaluations conducted by the state's Main Street coordinator. This observation proved to be beneficial for taking an informal inventory of historic resources, architectural styles, and challenges faced by the local Main Street program (such as, vacant storefronts); seeing first-hand how users interacted with the commercial district and what commercial or retail opportunities were available; witnessing cultural events facilitated by Main Street programs or alliances; and to grasp the overall feeling and association of the downtown commercial district.

Goal 6: Reveal the success, limitations, challenges, and areas for improvement of the RARE-Main Street partnership.

Goal 6 can be seen as an umbrella goal that includes methodologies used within previous goals. This goal served as a framework structure for the study and guided its direction.

To reveal the success, limitations, challenges, and areas for improvement of the RARE-Main Street partnership, the researcher analyzed before, during, and after influencing factors of the intervention. These factors included partnership expectations, context, input, process, product (outcome), and relationships (social). Having these factors in mind throughout the duration of the study (1) provided guidance on the nature of information collected, including literature review and development of targeted survey and interview questions, and (2) ensured some level of comparison between each of the RARE-Main Street communities. These factors were not intended to be a linear or rigid framework to evaluate the partnership, but rather guide posts.

Expectations

Expectations were what each partnership participant anticipates from the intervention – services, level of expertise/knowledge, working relationship, etc. Expectations could have included agreed upon and documented goals, contracts, and position descriptions of the RARE-AmeriCorps volunteers or be non-verbalized expectations.

Context

Context related to the physical and working environment of the partnership participants, as well as the social, political and cultural environment. This could have included an inventory of existing assets in the community, incoming and learned skillsets of the RARE-AmeriCorps volunteer, existing community political dynamics or support of the program, etc. Context targeted the initial need for intervention, opportunities in place to address needs, underlying problems or tension, and potential limitations.

Input

Description of each participant's contribution to addressing program goals or the issue at hand.

Process

Process included how the partnership is addressing the issue at hand, what is actually occurring on the ground, and the collaboration taking place between partnership participants and the local community.

Product (Outcome)

The result of the intervention, partnership, or initiative. This could have included documented or measurable outcomes, as well as subjective interpretation by the partnership participants.

Relationship (Social)

The underlying working relationship and collaboration of the partnership participants working together to achieve goals and build local capacity.

Key resources for attaining information on the above factors included initial applications from communities for RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement, RARE-AmeriCorps exit reports following their tenure of service, feedback and insights of partnership participants, and literature review.

Goal 7: Provide considerations for improving both the partnership and future program evaluations.

All findings and developed considerations for the study were dependent on literature review, measurable impacts of the partnership, and subjective feedback from partnership participants.

Data Collection Tools & Mechanisms in Summary

The information outlined below summarizes the research tools and mechanisms used in the study to (1) develop study goals, expectations, and purpose; (2) develop program evaluation tools; and (3) answer research questions.

Literature Review

- Program evaluation methodology and strategies.
- RARE documents and reports (including grant applications for federal funding, community applications for RARE assistance, and exit surveys of RARE-AmeriCorps participants serving in the Main Street partnership).
- History, impact, and effective strategies of the National Main Street Program.
- History and impact of AmeriCorps.
- Capacity building within the context of community revitalization and the Main Street Approach® and associated effective strategies for sustainable and resilient communities.

Interviews (phone or in-person)

- State Main Street Coordinator – Sheri Stuart
- RARE Staff – Megan Smith and Titus Tomlinson

- Academic advisory committee – Shannon Sardell, Gerardo Sandoval, and Dr. Lauren Allsopp
- RARE-AmeriCorps participants – five total
- RARE-AmeriCorps participant’s community supervisor – three total

For more information on interview methodology and findings, see Chapter 6 Findings – Interview Responses.

Internet Surveys

- Community members affected by or directly involved in Main Street initiatives within each selected RARE-Main Street community – nine total.

For more information on interview methodology and findings, see Chapter 7 Findings – Survey Responses.

Example of Training Opportunity Provided for RARE-AmeriCorps Participants

- Main Street training workshop hosted by Oregon Main Street for community members or RARE-AmeriCorps participants serving in Main Street communities.

Downtown Observation Walking Tours

- General observation of Main Street initiatives within each selected RARE-Main Street community.

Community Profiles

- General, public information regarding socio-economic conditions and local Main Street program for each selected RARE-Main Street community.
- General information regarding the working relationship with RARE, including length of partnership, capacity needs identified to be addressed by the partnership, RARE-AmeriCorps participants serving within the community, and participant duties and responsibilities while service within the community.

Matrix of Partnership Expectations and Goals

- Inventory of partnership expectations and goals as defined by each program (RARE, AmeriCorps, and Main Street) and each selected RARE-Main Street community.

Chapter 2 Notes:

¹ Goes, Jim. *A RARE Program Evaluation and Report*. Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), Community Service Center, University of Oregon, Cybernos, LLC., 2009.

National Main Street Center. *What is Main Street*. 2014. <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street> (accessed January 2014).

Thomson, Ann Marie, and Jerry L. Perry. "Can AmeriCorps Build Communities?" *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (Sage Publications, Inc.) 27, no. 4 (December 1998): 399-420.

² Smith, Megan E. "Application for Federal Assistance, Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE)." for the Corporation for National and Community Service, February 5, 2013.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Royse, David, Bruce A. Thyer, Deborah K. Padgett, and T.K. Logan. *Program Evaluation: An introduction*. 3rd. Canada: Brooks/Cole Social Works, Wadsworth, 2001.

⁵ Ibid.

^{vi} National Main Street Center. *National Accreditation Standards of Performance*. 2014. <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-programs/performance-standards.html#2> (accessed Winter 2014).

III. Literature Review

This study aims to assess the effectiveness and impact of the partnership between a rural service provider, Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), and Main Street communities throughout the State of Oregon. To initiate the study, the researcher conducted an extensive literature review to better understand what the partnership (or intervention) is and why it is needed, as well as to help structure the program evaluation tool developed and implemented specifically for this study. This chapter provides an overview of literary academic research and develops a context for the study. The chapter is divided into three main sections, or discussions:

- (1) *“Understanding the Organizational Framework of the Partnership”* describes each vehicle for change – RARE organization, AmeriCorps service member placement, and the National Main Street Approach®.
- (2) *“Building Capacity in Rural Communities”* will define capacity building and describe how service providers can be impactful within rural communities.
- (3) *“Developing a Program Evaluation for RARE-Main Street Partnerships”* will briefly describe program evaluation precedents and how an evaluation tool can be better targeted for RARE partnerships.

All three subsequent sections will introduce concepts and present research-based strategies for effective change.

Understanding the Organizational Framework of the Partnership

The National Main Street Program was launched in the 1980s as a comprehensive community revitalization tool specifically targeting distressed historic commercial centers. States participate in the program through a licensing agreement with the national center which ensures the necessary local administrative and financial assistance is in place to oversee the local program. The State of Oregon was among the first wave of states in the early 1980s to receive their affiliating Main Street program status and launched the Main Street Approach® in a few cities and communities. However, shortly thereafter the state’s licensing agreement lapsed and there was a long period the state was not a recognized Main Street affiliate.¹

In 2007, Oregon’s State Historic Preservation Office and the First Lady of Oregon began a campaign to revive interest in the program and use the Main Street Approach® to revitalize Oregon communities.² The campaign proved to be a success and gained substantial support both from regional political leaders and communities throughout the state. By the following year, local legislative action renewed state administrative and financial support and the necessary licensing from the national program was obtained. The new, or second generation, of the local Main Street program was launched between 2008 and 2009 and was expanded to include communities previously unaffiliated with the program.

The State Main Street program provides communities general guidance and some financial support to implement the Main Street Approach®. However, there must be dedicated local leadership and substantial local investment, both in terms of financial and human resources, for the Approach® to gain traction within the community and improve local conditions. While many rural communities in Oregon had the interest and community backing to implement the Main Street Approach®, most struggled to

attract the appropriate skilled professional to spearhead the initiative or to secure a stable funding source for such an individual.

Beginning in 2009, coinciding with the revived interest in the state Main Street program, a unique collaborative partnership formed between the non-profit organization Resources Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) and rural communities to help launch or revive local Main Street programs. Since 1994, RARE had been helping communities boost their capacity to improve their overall quality of life. Their assistance with the Main Street Approach® as a community revitalization tool seemed to be a natural fit. Communities could apply for RARE assistance and have an AmeriCorps graduate-level participant placed within the community for 11 months to provide the much needed technical and human resource support.

The partnership became much more than a working relationship between a non-profit organization and local communities. It fused three programs (proven successful independently) with overlapping missions – RARE, AmeriCorps, and the Main Street Approach®.³ Each of the programs aimed to help build local community capacity by leveraging existing assets and volunteer, or community, recruitment. The sections below discuss each of the programs in detail to allow for a better understanding of the partnership’s framework in context.

Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) & AmeriCorps

Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) was founded in 1994 as an AmeriCorps program to help rural communities in Oregon improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions.⁴ It is housed within the University of Oregon’s Community Service Center. RARE aims to build local capacity, or the ability, to (1) organize and mobilize existing resources and (2) identify and address local issues and challenges. They do this by placing a trained AmeriCorps participant within communities with the greatest need – those distressed communities lacking the initial capital or expertise to implement community and economic development initiatives on their own.

RARE is housed within the Community Service Center, a service-learning organization at the University of Oregon.



The mission of RARE is to help rural communities build capacity. AmeriCorps is the vehicle and ethos framework to get them there. AmeriCorps embodies civic responsibility and engagement through service. The program aims to cultivate the next generation of leaders in public service by placing students in the driver's seat of real-world, pressing social issues. Having this framework in place instills a strong work ethic and motivation in most participants to strive towards achieving the greatest good. Organizations that partner with AmeriCorps are provided with opportunities for organizational and financial assistance. To obtain and ensure continuance of this assistance, organizations apply for financial support and submit evaluations ensuring their mission and programs align with AmeriCorp's. Below are the three goals AmeriCorps, as an organization, strives for:⁵

Goals of AmeriCorps

1. Getting things done through direct and demonstrable service.
2. Developing the leadership and skills of national service partnerships.
3. Strengthening communities.

Research suggests the most effective and efficient ways to meet these goals include personal and professional development of AmeriCorps participants, building capacity or community-based organizations, and fostering partnerships among those organizations to better meet community needs.⁶

RARE-AmeriCorps Participants

RARE uses a variety of outreach methods to attract AmeriCorps participants. These attempts generally target undergraduate and graduate students with experience or interest in professional fields that provide skillsets to address social, economic or environmental challenges; such as, planning, public policy, natural resource management, geography, and sociology.⁷ RARE-AmeriCorps participants who were interviewed for this study generally came from a public policy related undergraduate program. Both communities and participants apply to participate in the program and are then matched by RARE staff and a local interview committee based on needs and skillsets. When selected, a RARE-AmeriCorps participant is placed within a community for 11 months (September through July) and given a modest living stipend and educational award.

The participant receives multiple engaging and participatory training sessions before, during, and after their service from RARE, partner organizations, and the participant's placement supervisor. Trainings for participants serving in a RARE-Main Street community include an orientation hosted by RARE staff and alumni, Main Street related workshops facilitated by the state Main Street coordinator, and state and national Main Street conferences.¹ Through these trainings, participants are provided the opportunities to gain core skills and competencies needed for working in community development during their service and beyond. These trainings also familiarize the participants to the Main Street Approach[®] and precedents, or success stories, from other communities. In addition to the trainings, there is also peer-to-peer mentorship and cohort team building among the RARE-AmeriCorps participants. Regular check-ins

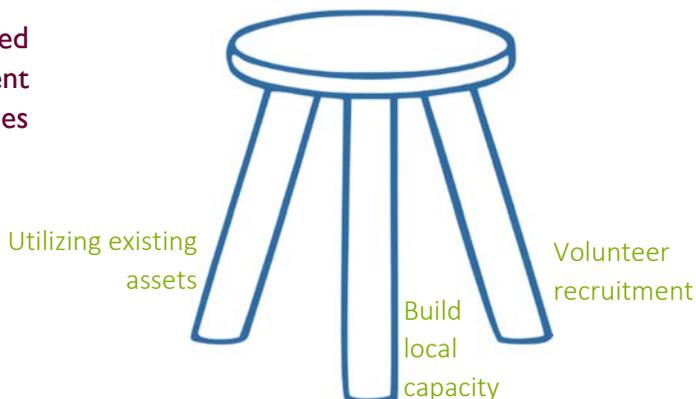
¹ Attendance to state and national Main Street conferences are not guaranteed training opportunities and are reliant on the schedule flexibility and available funding of the local community sponsoring the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.

between participants working within communities and RARE staff allow individuals to share challenges encountered or lessons learned.

RARE's Approach

RARE uses a three-pronged approach to help communities address social, economic, and environmental issues. The approach is modeled after evidence-based community impact studies and external evaluations of their program's impact over the last 20 years.⁸ RARE-AmeriCorps participants are introduced to the approach during their initial orientation and encouraged to adhere to it while they are in service. The first mechanism in the approach is to utilize existing assets within the community that have the potential to add to the vitality of that place. For example, rather than focusing on depressed or declining industry sectors, RARE-AmeriCorps participants are trained to turn their attention to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of local businesses that are helping to create jobs and adding value to the neighborhood or district.⁹ The second mechanism is capacity building. This helps to ensure once initiatives are underway local organizations are more capable of being self-sustaining and providing long-term continued services.¹⁰ (The concept of capacity building will be discussed in further detail within the subsequent section.) The third mechanism in the RARE approach is local volunteer recruitment to help with local initiatives. Keeping with the AmeriCorps civic engagement ethos, RARE-AmeriCorps participants are expected to recruit other community volunteers while in service. "On average, each member will recruit 60 volunteers."¹¹ These individuals can be community leaders, skilled professionals, or residents seeking to make a greater impact in their community.

RARE's Three-Pronged Approach to Building Resilient Communities



According to RARE, this three-pronged approach is having a significant positive impact on the communities they assist:

"Not only does the research overall support these [mechanisms], our evaluation data supports it as well. Over the past five years, 100% of the organizations at which our members served indicated that their capacity was significantly or greatly increased as a result of members' service."¹²

Findings and conclusions regarding RARE's effectiveness and impact on Main Street communities will be presented in later chapters of this report.

Where there's a need

As their name implies, Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) focuses their attention and energy on rural communities throughout the State of Oregon. However, according to Director, Megan Smith, “rural” is defined loosely within the organization. Many rural studies adhere to three established governmental definitions of rural as defined by either the US Census Bureau, US Office of Management and Budget, and the USDA Economic Research Service. The Oregon Main Street Program defines “small town, rural” as having a population of 5,000 or less. What all of these sources have in common is that they define rural in terms of quantifiable data – population size, geographical distribution of people and communities to larger metropolitan cities, and commuting patterns. What the quantifiable definitions do not take into account is perhaps the greatest difference, or divide, between urban and rural – the state of economic distress, loss of human and social capital, and importance of retaining traditional social norms and values.

Low-income, unemployment, and poverty are societal challenges faced by most US cities regardless of size, but “nowhere are economic problems more evident today than in rural areas.”¹³ Rural communities face extraordinarily complex community and economic development challenges are due to declining populations, significant industry sector shifts or loss, geographic isolation, and competition with other larger regional hubs.^{14 & 15} Traditionally, rural economies in the western United States were primarily dependent on selective industries – such as, manufacturing, agriculture, or extractive natural resources – or their proximity to travel routes or destinations. But declines of diversified family farms to large scale agri-business, loss of manufacturing to global markets, restrictions or declines in natural resource extraction (such as timber or mining), highway bypasses and reversions, and the rise of suburbs adjacent to metropolitan areas have all struck a devastating blow to rural communities and their commercial vitality.^{16,17,18}

Today, many rural communities are “seeking survival strategies” just to sustain themselves and ensure their residents can earn living wages.¹⁹ Ultimately, a rural community’s longevity depends on its ability to be self-reliant and adapt to changing economic conditions.²⁰ However, economic stability must be balanced and approached with other societal concerns having equal weight. The solution to rural economic stability is not simply diversifying their economy. Social capital in rural communities plays an equally important, or arguably greater, role ensuring the health and longevity of that place. Social capital refers to the internal networks and associations of a particular place. In a 1958 article, sociologist and anthropologist Selz Mayo, concluded that rural community development is much more of a social movement than their urban counterparts and adds alternative complexities to planning decisions.²¹ Rural communities place much greater emphasis on retaining traditional lifeways, values, civic responsibility, and their shared cultural identity.^{22 & 23} In short, it is difficult to draw a line between what is “urban” and what is “rural”. Many pose the argument of: “You know it when you see it”.

Rather than adhere to a strict definition of rural, the RARE-AmeriCorps program focuses their attention on communities and regions within the State of Oregon that are experiencing economic distress as classified by Business Oregon, the state’s economic development department. In Oregon, economic and community development is a long-standing capacity need expressed by rural communities as they seek to replace jobs lost over the decades-long collapse of traditionally natural resource based economies.²⁴ Addressing distressed rural downtown commercial centers is among the top three community development challenges facing rural Oregon communities today.²⁵ According to a 2009 RARE report, the

most significant limitations rural communities face when addressing community and economic development challenges in general include:²⁶

Limitations Affecting Community and Economic Development in Rural Communities

- Difficulty attracting highly skilled professionals.
- Significantly older population than the statewide average.
- Seasoned employees lacking fresh perspective of external, 'next generation' professionals.
- Lack of technology infrastructure and upgrades.
- Few ways to connect with the myriad of resources at the regional or state level.
- Fiscally troubled condition of the State of Oregon in general.

All communities within this study are currently economically distressed and, like many other rural communities throughout the country, have experienced significant shifts in their industry sectors. Median income is 19% to 30% lower than the state median household income and people living below the poverty rate range from 19% to 27%.

Despite the challenges and hurdles faced by rural communities that partner with RARE, there is at least one last commonality. All of the communities selected for this study initiated collective action to address social and economic issues affecting their local community. This positive attribute spurred momentum within the community, whether great or small, which is the foundation for effective change. All communities within this study had a board or alliance of concerns citizens wishing to revitalize their distressed downtowns and had taken the steps to become an active Main Street member. The RARE partnership, or intervention, was initiated to help progress that initial interest forward.

For further information regarding the needs and challenges of RARE-Main Street communities included within the study, see Chapter 5 – Community Profiles.

National Main Street Approach®

Beginning in the late 1970s, the National Trust for Historic Preservation undertook two landmark studies to address the problem of economically declining downtowns in rural areas and the subsequent threats this phenomena was causing to historic commercial architecture and sense of place. The first, in 1977, was a three year Main Street pilot project, “...to study the reasons so many downtowns were dying, identify the factors affecting downtown's health, and develop a comprehensive revitalization strategy to save historic commercial buildings.”²⁷ From its very inception the project focused on community-based solutions that were reliant on local participation and a connection to social capital to address the larger national trend of declining downtowns. The National Trust assisted three pilot communities – Galesburg, Illinois; Madison, Indiana; and Hot Springs, South Dakota – conduct architectural inventories and economic market analyses. Then, revitalization strategies were developed based on each community’s unique assets, needs, character, and heritage. After just three years, the demonstration project was deemed a huge success.²⁸ “Business improved in all three downtowns, new businesses opened, sales tax revenue [and private investment] increased, occupancy rates rose and numerous buildings were rehabilitated and put back into productive use.”^{29 & 30}

The second landmark study, in 1986, was the first comprehensive study to evaluate downtown retailer’s retention, recruitment and expansion successes.³¹ The study found two-thirds of all new jobs nationwide occur in small business. This helped stress the economic significance of downtowns to planners and policymakers because these community cores typically consist of small businesses.

The Main Street Approach® and the National Main Street Center, Inc., a non-profit subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, emerged from the two landmark projects. Today, the approach is considered a proven, comprehensive method for preservation-based downtown commercial revitalization.³² It is administered through a network of State Main Street programs with financial and technical support stemming from the National Center. Typically, a state Main Street program is housed within either an economic, local affairs, or parks and recreation department. Communities can apply for national Main Street community designation and receive customized assistance based on the unique local conditions and challenges through their state office, rather than go through the distant National Center.

The Main Street Approach® is largely an organizational tool most beneficial for communities that have demonstrated an interest to downtown revitalization, but are still in the formative stages of redevelopment.³³ It provides communities with a framework and guidance based on substantive evidence-based approaches. The following page provides a concise overview of the Main Street Approach® and a list of its benefits.

THE MAIN STREET APPROACH®

The success of the Main Street approach is attributed to its integrated four-point strategy and guiding principles that directly link economic development to social capital initiatives. To implement the Approach® correctly each of these points must be addressed *simultaneously*.

DESIGN

Integrating appropriate modern infrastructure design and preservation standards to enhance the visual quality of downtown.

ORGANIZATION

Fostering a local collaborative environment of public-private partnerships, as well as community members and volunteers working together to improve their downtown.

PROMOTION

Marketing the cultural value and economic development potential to shoppers, visitors, and investors. And creating opportunities for community members and visitors to interact with the downtown core.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Analyzing current market forces to develop long-term solutions to: recruit new business, sharpen competitiveness of existing business owners, and creatively convert underutilized spaces for new uses.

BENEFITS OF THE MAIN STREET APPROACH®

Research estimates that each dollar spent on Main Street programs has generated, on average, another \$40 dollars of private investment.³⁴ Other potential, positive impacts the Approach® has on downtown centers include:^{35 & 36}

- *Attracting new businesses, shoppers, and visitors.*
- *Retaining existing local businesses.*
- *Serving as an incubator for new jobs.*
- *Increasing local sales and property tax base.*
- *Rehabilitating existing underutilized infrastructure.*
- *Creating a renewed sense of pride and community involvement.*
- *Preserving the local heritage and cultural resources.*
- *Creating a more aesthetic and welcoming downtown.*
- *Conserving open space and agricultural lands by adaptively reusing already developed areas.*

The purpose of the Main Street Approach® is to completely reverse the decline of downtown commercial centers. “It helps communities organize themselves for success, improve the design of their neighborhoods, promote their district, and enhance the economic base of a community.”³⁷ The Approach® has become highly regarded by researchers, planners, and policymakers as a way to successfully link economic development to social capital initiatives and the preservation of the historic built environment. In 1997, a National Main Street center publication documented the program had “helped over 1,200 communities revitalize their downtown districts, generated \$5.87 billion in new investment, created 115,000 new jobs and 33,000 new businesses, and rehabilitated 34,000 commercial buildings”.³⁸ Many community and local business leaders are attracted to the economic development potential the Main Street program has to offer, but as seen within the insert on the previous page the Main Street Approach® revives something deeper within the community’s core. The Approach® provides a community with the opportunity to celebrate their unique cultural heritage and sense of place, as well as fostering better communication and collaboration between local businesses, property owners, city officials, and the community at large. The vast majority of community members who participated in the Collaborative Partnership study agreed the Main Street Approach® had revived a sense of pride within their community.

Although the Main Street Approach® provides a framework and guidance for addressing downtown revitalization, “researchers acknowledge that the Main Street program is not a quick or guaranteed fix for all communities, stating that the program is successful for about three out of every four communities that participate”.³⁹ The Approach® is a long-term investment strategy sometimes taking upwards to five years or longer for the community to witness any progress. For example, two communities included in this study have been affiliated with the state Main Street program since the early 1980s and continue to implement revitalization strategies. According to Sheri Stuart, Oregon State’s Main Street Coordinator, there is an enormous learning curve for local jurisdictions implementing the Main Street Approach® due to its comprehensive nature.⁴⁰ Some communities struggle to maintain the momentum of the program, as well as securing steady funding sources and hiring a full-time program manager.⁴¹ Additionally, for the approach to be successful it requires the following key ingredients:⁴²

Key Ingredients for an Effective Local Main Street Program

- Strong state, city and community support
- Public-private partnerships
- A dedicated local organization and volunteer base
- A full-time local program manager
- Commitment to appropriate and quality design
- Quality promotional programs
- A coordinated process
- A mix of large-scale, comprehensive initiatives with smaller “progress” projects

The communities selected for this study met varying issues and challenges when implementing the Approach® within their downtown districts; however, most were related to limited human and financial resources.

For further information regarding the needs and challenges of RARE-Main Street communities included within the study, see Chapter 5 – Community Profiles.

Oregon State Main Street Program

The Oregon State Main Street Program is administered through the State Historic Preservation Office within the Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation. The program provides resources, education, training, and technical services to assist designated Main Street communities or those that are interested in “exploring the possibility of future...designation”.⁴³ The program uses the Main Street Approach[®] developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as the foundation for their assistance.⁴⁴ Today, there are 78 communities throughout Oregon participating in the program. While many rural communities in Oregon have the interest and community backing to implement the approach, some lack the initial capital or expertise for a hired Main Street Manager to spearhead the initiative. Additionally, remoteness from larger regional hubs provides challenges for these communities to take advantage of economic development services.

Beginning in 2009, RARE formed their first partnership with an Oregon Main Street community – La Grande. The following year the partnership tripled to include Astoria and Toledo as well. Since that time, RARE has returned to those communities at least once and expanded their partnership to include a total of nine Main Street communities within the State of Oregon. This number is expected to further increase within the following year. RARE provides these communities an alternative and affordable way to boost their local capacity through the placement of a trained graduate-level professional. Furthermore, the RARE-AmeriCorps partnership with Main Street communities has been endorsed and promoted by the state Main Street Coordinator, Sheri Stuart. Stuart has in fact been instrumental in forming some of the RARE-Main Street partnerships, including several within this study.

When RARE partners with Main Street communities a RARE-AmeriCorps participant is placed within the community and takes on the role of either a “Main Street Coordinator”, “Downtown Coordinator”, “Main Street Manager”, “Program Director”, or “Economic Development Analyst”. Additional assistance, or expertise, is provided by RARE staff and their network of community planning officials. Although the participant’s tasks are dependent on the community’s needs and participants’ skillsets, typical responsibilities relate to the Main Street Approach[®] four point strategy and include: volunteer recruitment and management, committee facilitation, event planning, and communication and outreach.

For further information regarding assistance provided by RARE-AmeriCorps participants, see Chapter 5 – Community Profiles.

The assistance provided by RARE does fill a significant capacity need. There are very few service providers available within the state to meet the needs of rural communities; and RARE is the only non-profit organization that provides technical assistance to rural communities implementing the Main Street Approach[®] other than the State Main Street office in Salem.⁴⁵ The RARE-Main Street partnership provides a “portal” to new networks, innovative employees, and sources of expertise to help rural communities revitalize their downtowns. Furthermore, the partnership creates a fusion of three proven, comprehensive programs for rural revitalization – RARE, which also encompasses the AmeriCorps program model, and the Main Street Approach[®]. The word cloud on the following page presents the most common challenges and hurdles Oregon communities encounter when implementing the Main Street Approach[®].

Common challenges and hurdles Oregon communities encounter when implementing the Main Street Approach®:



The following section will help define and develop the concepts of community revitalization and capacity building further, as well as explain the uniqueness of community and economic development for rural places.

Building Capacity in Rural Communities

Community development is what people do to improve the overall quality of life in the community. Although community development often involves economic development, it implies far more.

Central to the concept of community development is the concept of collective agency. Collective agency is the ability of a group of people to solve common problems together.

-Cornelia Flora⁴⁶

The general overarching objective of community revitalization is to improve the quality of life and create resiliency to withstand economic and social fluctuations while preserving a sense of place. However, the outcome of revitalization is particular to each community and does not come in a one-size-fits-all solution. Economic development and community revitalization in rural areas can sometimes pose even greater complexities than their urban counterparts.

The key to successful rural community revitalization is acknowledging the interconnectedness of a community's assets and how those can benefit one another, as well as involving all people that make up the social fabric and cultural heritage of that place.⁴⁷ Rural community revitalization becomes much more of a social movement than many other initiatives within the professional field of planning. At its core, revitalization relies on organization, forming partnerships, and collective action. It can become a public statement to what a particular community upholds as their identity and values.

Community capacity, in this context, can be defined as a jurisdiction's resources or characteristics that affect their ability to identify, mobilize, and implement effective change.⁴⁸ It goes far beyond solving a particular problem; it better prepares the community to address future issues and challenges. Capacity can be tied to a wide range of variables, including:

Variables Impacting Community Capacity

- Financial capital
- Professional training and education
- Community structure or governance
- Available planning mechanisms or policy tools
- Community activism and participation
- Networking or forming constructive partnerships (both internally and externally)
- Communication and trust between community members and public officials

Having limited capacity can hinder a community's ability to implement effective change and, perhaps most importantly, can cause a detrimental ripple effect to a community's sustainability and self-reliance, especially in rural areas.

This section will discuss two concepts used within the RARE-AmeriCorps program to build rural community capacity: (1) action and organizational collaboratives and (2) bonding and bridging capital.

Action and Organizational Collaboratives

Successful rural community and economic development is heavily dependent upon balancing goal and objective accomplishment with capacity building. One strategy to finding this balance is forming collaboratives either internally or with external organizations and neighboring communities. Collaboration is best used when societal or environmental issues are too complex to be solved by any one agency or individual or when there is a need to distribute the burden of creating solutions to address controversial issues.⁴⁹ It provides an opportunity to solve issues more holistically and efficiently by pooling resources and fostering idea-sharing.⁵⁰ In order for solutions to accurately reflect the complexity of the problem, the planning process must expand beyond conventional norms to allow for innovation, a deeper understanding of the issue, and creative problem solving.⁵¹ Distressed rural downtown commercial centers is not a challenge affecting a few communities in Oregon, it is a universal challenge. Today there are 78 communities in Oregon implementing the Main Street Approach® to revitalize their communities and over 2,200 communities nationwide. The Main Street communities in Oregon which have formed collaborative partnerships with RARE not only to gain a staff person to spearhead the local initiative, but to also gain an external perspective on the community's assets and challenges.

According to Richard Margerum in his book *Beyond Consensus*, there are three primary types of collaboration – policy, organizational, and action. The typologies are defined by an initiative's framework, characteristics of participants and decision making process, and desired outcomes.⁵² These are not necessarily intended to be distinct typologies, but rather a spectrum of ways in which collaboration occurs. A program or initiative may cross over one or a combination of typologies during its lifecycle. Categorizing collaboration in this way allows practitioners to evaluate outcomes, motivations, participatory roles, and the scale of the program.⁵³

Like many community-based collaborations, the RARE-AmeriCorps approach includes a spectrum of collaboration, but most closely identifies with action and organizational collaboration. Action collaboration can be thought of as implementing shovel-ready projects. This form of collaboration is usually focused on specific, well-defined goals and objectives that have tangible outcomes – such as, hosting a fundraising event, initiating a community garden, or developing an economic assessment. Because these collaborations are addressing a defined need, they are often formed with a set of pre-existing partnerships or community members in mind.

Organization collaboration focuses on the programs, priorities, management, and structural framework of organizations to help foster change.⁵⁴ “In turn, these organizations carry out activities and jointly produce action on the ground.”⁵⁵ Examples of RARE-AmeriCorps organizational collaboration include coordinating partner organizations, developing an advisory committee, securing funding, completing effectiveness assessments, or facilitating a strategic plan. Additionally, RARE-AmeriCorps participants recruit volunteers to help with local initiatives.

In both the action and organizational collaboration, the RARE-AmeriCorps participant relies on the social and organizational networks of the local community and existing assets. The primary difference between the two is that action collaboratives generally *provide* capacity needs while organizational collaborative *build* capacity so that the community can better address needs and challenges on their own in the future.

The RARE-AmeriCorps participant has the potential to build community capacity in a variety of ways, including: initiating projects, building a volunteer and community group support network, and bringing awareness to local issues and assets. This capacity building helps to ensure once initiatives are underway local institutions are more capable to being self-sustaining and provide continued services in the long-term.⁵⁶

While in service, the RARE-AmeriCorps participant takes on the role of an activist, facilitator, and coordinator for the local community. The success rate for RARE as an organization has been quite impressive. According to RARE Director, Megan Smith, 100% of the organizations for which the organization had a community-based partnership with reported that their capacity was “significantly or greatly increased” as a result of the collaboration.⁵⁷ The most significant contribution RARE makes towards the resiliency of rural communities is by providing an energetic individual with the time, energy, and motivational drive to carry out tasks previously unattainable by community members due to time, staffing, creative problem solving or financial constraints.

Bonding and Bridging Capital

By its nature community capacity is difficult to measure. It is multidimensional and exists in a dynamic state that is constantly shifting to the needs of the community.⁵⁸ Community capacity building fosters community resiliency by creating a culture of readiness and providing the necessary tools to address shifting capacity needs. One of the most critical tools a community can gain is learning how to foster effective collaboration and tap into available resources. Grassroots collaboration and resource-sharing is often more prevalent in rural communities because of the disproportionate scale of resource need to availability necessary to implement revitalization strategies for long-term economic development.

A rural service provider plays a unique role of strengthening internal networks, or bonding capital, and linking the rural community to external networks and alternative forms of assistance, bridging capital. Both bonding and bridging capital are essential in helping a community better address local issues.

Bonding capital pulls local community members or organizations together through a shared vision and shared experiences. It relies on and trusts the expertise and collective knowledge of the local citizens to develop strategies that will be most effective for their unique environment (context specific). Bonding capital can greatly impact the effectiveness of the RARE-Main Street partnership through the exchange of information, such as, which local Main Street initiatives are working well and which are struggling. It can also help the RARE-AmeriCorps participant tap into the local culture and achieve acceptance from community leaders.

Outward-focused information collection and knowledge sharing is known as bridging capital. It encourages local community members to turn towards external or previously unexplored networks to see which connections could serve or support capacity issues identified.⁵⁹ **Bridging capital** exposes resources and paths to make objectives and end goals more manageable, or achievable. Through community-based collaborative partnerships, such as the RARE-Main Street partnership, the service provider can therefore shift from being an external subject matter expert to a facilitator who provides supportive organizational structure and processes.⁶⁰ When rural communities partner with RARE, they strengthen their bridging capital by intentionally bringing in external viewpoints and perspectives from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the partnership has the potential to bring together a diverse group of local citizens and organizations around the shared resource of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.⁶¹ Bridging capital can help create more sustainable local initiatives by raising awareness, bringing outside success stories or

precedents, attracting a larger volunteer or participant base, and creating more opportunities for education and training. Increasing the amount of human resources and capacity is the foundation to building momentum around a local initiative and implementing effective change.

Summary

The similarities between community revitalization and historic preservation is that each is a dialogue to discover appropriate solutions specific to a particular place. When done successfully, both serve to unearth cultural and societal values cherished by an entire community and serve to nourish and celebrate assets found within that particular place. Revitalization and preservation are not cookie-cutter; they have to be shaped to the unique assets, limitations, and challenges of that place. Nor are these approaches quick-fixes; each requires long-term investment, in terms of dedicated and sustained human and financial capital. It requires an increase in communication and collaboration.

Learning the best approach to capacity building within a particular program or place requires periodic reflection of what is working and what could be improved upon, as well as the flexibility of the approach to be iterative so that these lessons learned can be incorporated. This study, and associated program evaluation, is an important step to ensuring RARE is effectively and efficiently helping rural communities build the capacity they need. The last section of this chapter will briefly discuss the literature review used by the researcher to develop the program evaluation tool specifically for the RARE-Main Street partnership.

Developing a Program Evaluation for RARE-Main Street Partnerships

A program evaluation alone is a practical endeavor, or management tool, intended to provide information that can be used to improve social programs.⁶² It is generally not an attempt to build theory or necessarily develop social science knowledge.⁶³ However, the purpose of this study is to examine a partnership, or intervention, in practice to better understand its strengths and limitations, as well as developing considerations for how the partnership could have a more impactful long-term outcome for rural Main Street communities. The RARE-Main Street partnership is currently in a pivotal place, with RARE now in its 20th year and its 5th year partnering with Main Street communities, to reflect on areas where the partnerships could be improved moving forward. The researcher therefor conducted an analysis of each program and its objectives, how those objectives are met (as seen within earlier sections of this chapter), and precedents for evaluating the partnership prior to engaging with the Main Street communities selected for this study. This section provides an overview of findings from the evaluation precedent analysis.

RARE Evaluation Precedents

RARE currently assesses the overall effectiveness of the organization as a whole and the individual performance of RARE-AmeriCorps participants. There is no formal mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of each program, or partnership, or to gain feedback and insight from communities which partnered through RARE. This type of information is currently being gathered through informal conversations between RARE staff and community leaders or supervisors. RARE-AmeriCorps participants submit periodic written status reports of their achievements during their service, then a reflection exit report at the end of their service tenure.

The last organizational evaluation was conducted in 2009 by an external consultant. The project was made possible by a grant received through the Ford Family Foundation. The evaluation focused on two primary research questions:⁶⁴

Research Questions for RARE's 2009 Evaluation

1. Have RARE partnerships been effective for both participants and the communities they serve in?
2. What future directions should RARE consider?

The evaluation found that the RARE organization has a substantial and positive reputation within rural Oregon communities, the University of Oregon (which it's a part of), and with its AmeriCorps participants. Through the study, the benefits for the RARE-AmeriCorps participants became clear and apparent: "the program is highly successful and effective for the vast majority of [young AmeriCorps] participants..."⁶⁵ Following their service, participants were exposed to the realities and issues of rural Oregon, gained professional skillsets, and were generally more "confident and mature".⁶⁶ However, while rural communities greatly appreciated the RARE-AmeriCorps participants, there was less certainty regarding the lasting impacts of the partnership for the community. According to the report, RARE participants tended to become generalists filling vacant positions, rather than fulfill a specific or specialized need.⁶⁷ Conclusions for the study generally focused on (1) whether or not the organization should expand and (2) conducting additional evaluation focused on the organization's impact. The researcher also emphasized the importance of the participant placement screening between the RARE-AmeriCorps participant and the community in which they are intended to serve. Below is a summary of recommendations developed from the evaluation:

Recommendations from the 2009 RARE Evaluation

1. Build more alliances with other university departments.
2. Focus on core areas of emphasis (i.e. rural healthcare or entrepreneurship)
3. Consider potential detriment of program quality before expanding programs.
4. Form advisory board for long-term direction.
5. Conduct evaluation of long-term impacts.
6. Tell the RARE story and publicize success.
7. Consider a name change or rebranding.
8. Conduct aggressive recruiting and coaching of supervisors in rural communities
9. Set tangible benchmarks for placement, tied more directly to the nature of the project.

This section has documented the known evaluations RARE has in place to measure their performance. RARE staff informed the researcher for this study these evaluations are used to make administrative decisions for the organization; however, it is unbeknownst exactly how, or to what degree, the evaluations are used or the current status of the recommendations provided by the evaluations. The following section will document external evaluation precedents.

Evaluation Precedents for Main Street Programs, Rural Service Providers, and Capacity Building

During the initial research phase for this study, it became evident there is no standard, or “one-size-fits-all”, approach to evaluate the impact of either the Main Street Approach® or community development organizations. There were no evaluation precedents found to evaluate a partnership involving a service provider or consultant helping a community implement the Approach®, a testament to the uniqueness of the partnership. This section will present the precedents discovered for (1) Main Street programs and (2) rural service providers and capacity building.

Main Street programs

Although the Main Street Approach® has been implemented since the 1980s and proven to be a successful model, most academic literature and studies are descriptive in nature rather than evaluative.⁶⁸ In fact there has been very little empirical research conducted that evaluates the impact of the Main Street program.^{69 & 70} Presumably, this is due to the comprehensive nature of the Main Street program’s four-point approach and the difficulty evaluating all spectrums working simultaneously together. Of the Main Street evaluations gathered during initial research for this study, each had a unique methodology and objective; however, most focused on the economic impacts of the program rather than the program’s potential ability to build social capital in addition to commercial revitalization.

Main Street Program Evaluation Precedents Researched for this Study

- Routine evaluation performed by state Main Street Coordinator, Sheri Stuart, for “Transforming Downtown” affiliated Main Street communities. Sample evaluation was for Astoria, Oregon.
- Economic benefit analysis of Rural Main Street Iowa.
- Sustainability analysis of Pennsylvania’s Main Street Program.
- City and county impact assessment of the Main Street program in Brenham, Texas.
- Effectiveness evaluation of St. Albans Main Street program in West Virginia.

The program evaluation precedent the researcher found most helpful was Pennsylvania’s study on sustainability of their Main Street Programs. This evaluation aimed to develop factors, or indicators, that most significantly contributed to, or hindered, program sustainability. Although finances, or the state’s budget, was highlighted as a significant factor, the other three factors listed were related to a local community’s capacity. These factors included:⁷¹

Key Factors Impacting the Sustainability of Pennsylvania’s Main Street Programs

- **Leadership.** In terms of both the dedication of local leadership and the *length* of a Main Street’s manager term of service.
- **Governance,** or effectiveness, of the board to accomplish goals.
- **Staffing** made available to assist the program, including the use of volunteers.

This evaluation signifies the importance of evaluating both the performance measures, or local accomplishments, and local capacity building of any Main Street community.

Rural service providers and capacity building

Much like the Main Street program evaluation precedents, there is no set, or agreed upon way, to evaluate impact of community development organizations. Beginning in the mid-1990s, there was a real need to justify the effectiveness of these organizations in terms of return on investments (time, monetary, and resources) as well as to strategically plan for future initiatives. However, there has been a “real disagreement on what constitutes as community development and how community change takes place. Community development is a multidisciplinary ethos that encourages unconventional approaches”.⁷² It becomes difficult to isolate interconnected social change, or impacts, to evaluate effectiveness. Some large community development corporations, such as United Way, NeighborWorks America, and SuccessMeasures.org have developed success indicators based on themes in positive community change, or success stories that have emerged. However, in the article “Measuring Community Development Outcomes”, researcher Noah Dorius warns against this “one-size-fits-all” evaluation model of community development organizations. Instead, he recommends organizations should develop performance measures, or indicators, based on local self-learning unique to their organization and community.⁷³

A Program Evaluation for the RARE-Main Street Partnership

Program evaluation precedents gathered for this study revealed the importance of developing a holistic and comprehensive program evaluation tool for the RARE-Main Street partnership. It should be able to gather a variety of complimentary information that reveals the strengths (or value), limitations, sustainability, and areas in need of improvement. Additionally, the program evaluation tool should be iterative and flexible to incorporate indicators specific to the intervention or from previous lessons learned.

The program evaluation tool developed and implemented for this study combined a mix of subjective and objective data, as well as research-generated indicator responses and open-ended questions. This allowed the effectiveness and impact of the partnership to be well documented, as well as allowing for additional success or limitation indicators to emerge more organically through the insight of partnership participants.

The following chapter will present the developed program evaluation tool.

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IV. Program Evaluation Tool

The program evaluation tool seen below was developed by the researcher specifically for RARE partnerships based on literature review and other program evaluation precedents, as well as consultation with RARE staff and academic advisory committee. This tool is intended to be a stand-alone document that could be transferable, or used as a model, for other RARE self-evaluations.

Recommendations for how the tool could be improved in the future can be seen at the end of this section. These recommendations were based from partnership participant feedback and lessons learned from implementation.

For further information regarding development of the program evaluation tool and the entire research design for the study, see Chapter 2 Conceptual Framework and Research Design.

RARE Partnership Program Evaluation Tool¹

The RARE partnership program evaluation tool adheres to the following nine guiding principles:

- Engage stakeholders, partnership participants and the larger community.
- Gain a clear understanding of program need, mission, goals, and expectations.
- Form strategies for data collection.
- Gather credible evidence.
- Allow for iteration and project flexibility.
- Assess the partnership, not individual RARE-AmeriCorps participants.
- Gather a mix of qualitative and quantitative, subjective and objective, data to provide a holistic and richer perspective.
- Generate discussion between RARE staff, RARE-AmeriCorps participants, and the communities they serve.

Step I: Understand the context.

Gaining a perspective on the RARE partnerships is essential for establishing an appropriate research design and questions for partnership participants. Context surrounding the partnership not only allows the researcher to better understand the constructs for which the program operates within, but also provides information regarding the need for intervention, mission, goals, and expectations of the program so that a richer understanding of the partnership can be gained. The purpose of the program evaluation was set forth by the Corporation for National and Community Service – assess the effectiveness and long-term impact of RARE partnerships.

The following tasks should be completed to understand the context of RARE partnerships:

- Establish a program evaluation advisory committee, or team, to help collect necessary documents and data, as well as provide feedback for study outcomes. This team may consist of RARE staff, graduate students, or subject matter experts such as professionals who help employ the program at the state level or university instructors with a specialty in the field.
- Facilitate meetings with advisory committee early and often to provide opportunities for the evaluation to be redirected where necessary.

- Conduct literature review for the following:
 - Background information and documented impact of programs or approaches being used by the partnership, including (but not limited to) RARE and AmeriCorps.
 - Current strategies for effective community capacity building for sustainable and resilient rural communities.
 - Need for intervention of RARE within Oregon’s rural communities relevant to the partnership under evaluation.
- Gather RARE documents and other reports pertaining to the partnership. (Including funding or participant requests, RARE-AmeriCorps position descriptions, RARE-AmeriCorps participant exit survey, partnership contractual agreements, etc.)
- Describe the program including the need, expected effects, activities, resources, initial state, and influencing variables.
- Conduct observation walking tours within each selected RARE partnership community or project site.
- Create community or project profile with general information as gathered through secondary data and the observation walking tour. Profile could include socio-economic census data, or other information pertaining the general nature and environment as it relates to the context of the partnership.
- Compile an informational index of partnership participant’s expectations and goals.

Step 2: Develop strategies for data collection.

To reveal the success, limitations, challenges, and areas for improvement of RARE partnerships, one must analyze the before, during, and after influencing factors of the intervention. These factors included partnership expectations, context, input, process, product (outcome), and relationships (social). Having these factors in mind throughout the duration of the project will (1) provide guidance on the nature of information collected, (2) help guide the development of survey and interview questions, and (3) ensure some level of comparison between each of the RARE partnership communities or project sites. These factors are not intended to be a linear or rigid framework to evaluate the impact, but rather guide posts. Throughout the project implementation, it is expected that additional mechanisms or information could be learned and incorporated into the program evaluation tool.

The following tasks should be completed to develop strategies for data collection:

- Conduct literature review for the following:
 - Program evaluation precedents for the subject partnership or project.
 - Current RARE and Community Service Center program evaluation precedents.
 - Success indicators for the subject partnership or project and community capacity building.
- Gather performance measures for each program – RARE, AmeriCorps, and the subject partnership or project.
- Identify initial capacity need for each selected RARE partnership community or project site. This information can be found within the initial partnership application.
- Facilitate advisory meetings with committee.

Step 3: Collect feedback and data.

The evaluation should include remote research, interaction with partnership participants, and site visits to each of the selected RARE partnership communities or project sites. Data collection tools, including interviews and surveys, should be further developed based on information gathered during Step 1 and 2; however, below is a general framework. Findings should be largely dependent upon literature review, measureable indicators, and subjective open-ended questions. Community members asked to participate in the project should only be those directly affected by the partnership or project (such as a business owner), helped with partnership or project implementation strategies on a routine basis (such as a city planner), or was a member of a local advocacy group or focused on an initiative relevant to the partnership or project.

The following tasks should be completed to collect feedback and data:

- Interview* the following partnership participants for each selected RARE partnership community or project site:
 - RARE-AmeriCorps participant(s) whom served within each community or project site.
 - Local supervisor of RARE-AmeriCorps participant while he or she was in service.
 - Community member(s) previously or currently involved with the subject partnership or project. Community member can be identified by former RARE-AmeriCorps participants and their supervisors.
 - City official or personnel involved with the local partnership or project.
- Interview RARE staff.
- Interview subject matter experts within the state.
- Attend RARE-AmeriCorps training workshop available to participants relevant to the subject partnership or project.

Step 4: Analyze findings.

Identify emerging themes within gathered data and assess if partnership or project outcomes are aligning with initial capacity need identified by the community. Organize findings into the following three categories:

- **Community background information.**

This would pertain to information or variables that may be impacting partnership success; such as, the community's reasoning or mission for implementing the Main Street Approach® or why the RARE partnership was initiated.
- **The partnership in action.**

These findings should demonstrate the strengths and limitations of the partnership during the service tenure. Findings within this category pertain to what the RARE-AmeriCorps participant was tasked to accomplish, how projects or initiatives were identified, and the community's receptiveness to external assistance.

* Interviews can be conducted through the use of phone or in-person interviews or online surveys. Phone or in-person interviews are beneficial for robust, honest feedback from participants intimately knowledgeable about the subject partnership or project. These allow the participant increased opportunities and flexibility to offer information or insights about the partnership or project not otherwise asked through structured questions. Online surveys allow the researcher to reach a much broader audience, but may not provide the same depth of knowledge and insight.

- **Overall perception of the partnership.**

This last category will reveal findings of the partnership in hindsight including strengths, limitations, and areas in need of improvement. Support findings with information gathered during interviews and surveys such as direct quotes and information learned through the initial research phase.

Findings revealed during the study may be specific to the individual community or a general perspective of the partnership as a whole. Ask follow-up questions of participants when necessary.

Step 5: Develop recommendations for the partnership and future evaluations.

Develop recommendations based on evaluation findings and initial literature review. Link conclusions and recommendations directly to the evidence gathered. Recommendations should highlight what the organization does well and how those interventions or strategies could be continued, as well as where the organization could improve their approach to building capacity.

Program Evaluation Tool Recommendations:

The program evaluation tool revealed valuable insights regarding the RARE-Main Street partnership. The researcher encourages RARE to refine the tool based on the results of this study and implement the new tool within other RARE-Main Street communities.

The tool was effective gathering both measureable impacts and subjective feedback of the partnership. Research-generated indicators were helpful in gathering information regarding the state of the local Main Street partnership prior to RARE, as well as the strengths and limitations of the partnership. Indicators should always be supplemented with open-ended targeted questions to reveal feedback not otherwise captured in the more rigid indicator structure. RARE is also encouraged to continually update and add to indicators using the results of evaluations like this study. Therefore, indicators or performance measures can be based on local self-learning unique to their organization and the communities they assist. For example, future indicators may emerge from the strengths, limitations, and areas in need of improvement that emerged from this study.

The researcher found it difficult to attain the expected participation rates and diversity from community members. A similar program evaluation tool may be able to gain increased participation if facilitated by the RARE-AmeriCorps participant at the end of his or her service contract or by RARE staff immediately following the partnership tenure with RARE presence in the community. Further engagement between RARE staff and partner participants (including the local Main Street board or alliance, business members, property owners, city officials, and members of the general public) for the next program evaluation is highly encouraged. Engagement activities could include a focus group or round table discussions regarding the strengths and limitations of the partnership, as well as how the community could move forward. When possible use phone and in-person contact to elicit higher participation rates, rather than email.

Findings and recommendations *may* be better organized in future program evaluations based on the *mission of RARE* to demonstrate how the organization is measuring up to achieving its mission, rather

than key themes that emerged during the study. Based on the information gathered, the researcher views the primary mission of RARE as building capacity for distressed Oregon communities by providing a portal to new networks and strengthening existing internal networks. These concepts were explored and studied throughout this report and discussed in further detail in Chapter 3 Literature Review. Findings for the “Collaborative Partnership” study were organized by the information gathering tool used (i.e. literature review, community background research, interviews, and surveys). Future evaluations may find it beneficial to sort findings into overarching categories of “capacity building” and “bonding and bridging capital”. Having an evaluative framework in place that closely links findings to mission of building capacity may help identify more specific recommendations moving forward.

Chapter 4 Notes:

¹ Adapted from: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Office of the Director, Office of Strategy and Innovation. “Introduction to program evaluation for public health programs: A self-study guide.” 2011.

V. Community Profiles

The following section is intended to provide background information for each RARE-Main Street community selected for this study. Information pertains to their socio-economic conditions, local Main Street initiatives, and involvement (or partnership) with RARE. The section is divided into two primary sections: a general overview of key similarities and differences, then more detailed information for each community. Community information is listed within the following sub categories: “General Characteristics”, “Local Main Street Initiative”, and “RARE Involvement”. For source, or reference, information pertaining to socio-economic census data listed within the section, see Appendix B.

Overview

The four case studies selected for this project represent a diverse range of rural Main Street communities located throughout the State of Oregon. Each has progressed to different stages of downtown revitalization through the use of the Main Street Approach®; a testament that the Approach®, while comprehensive, has the flexibility to conform to each community and requires strong dedication and support from the local residents. Of the four, Milton-Freewater has the youngest Main Street program, which was established in 2011. Astoria and Coos Bay were among the first communities in the state to adopt the Main Street Approach® in the 1980s and La Grande began their own downtown revitalization using the Approach® in 2009, around the same time revived interest in the state Main Street program occurred.



Location of the RARE-Main Street communities included in this study. (Produced in 2014 by the researcher using a Google base map.)

Although each case study faces unique community and economic revitalization challenges, all share common capacity needs to implement the Main Street Approach® which led to the formation of their partnership with RARE: (1) an available, skilled professional to spearhead the initiative, (2) a sustainable funding source for such an individual, and (3) a fresh perspective for attracting and retaining community support. Additionally, each local Main Street program had reached a pivotal crossroads in their development or progress and needed assistance propelling it in the right direction. All four communities had a RARE-AmeriCorps participant(s) for at least two years between 2009 and 2014. La Grande’s partnership is among the longest with RARE, which began in 2009 and continues today.

Similarities and differences also occur within the socio-economic make up of each community. All communities within this study are currently economically distressed and, like many other rural communities throughout the country, have experienced significant shifts in their industry sectors. Community revitalization and business retention becomes a priority not only for city government, but also for local community and business members when the median income is 19-30% lower than the state median household income and people living below the poverty rate range from 19-27%.

A stark difference in the socio-economic make up of these communities is apparent in the age of the populations and their ethnicity. Astoria and Coos Bay both have an older population, while La Grande and Milton-Freewater have significantly younger population as compared to the state average. Most communities have a vast majority of white populations, with the exception being Milton-Freewater which has a significant population of individuals who identify themselves as Hispanic.

Being aware of socio-economic conditions such as these and the current state of the each Main Street initiative, afforded a better understanding of each community's context. Additionally, having this information on hand allowed the researcher to ask poignant interview questions of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant and their supervisors. Below is further detailed information pertaining to each community selected for this study.

Astoria

General Characteristics

Astoria is located at the mouth of the Columbia River along Oregon's northern coast. The town is the county seat for Clatsop County and is approximately 95 miles from Portland, the nearest metropolitan area. In 2010, at the time of the last decennial census, Astoria had a population of 9,477. Over the last decade the town's population has experienced a slight decrease.



Astoria has a slightly older population than the state as a whole, with a median age of 42 as compared to 38 respectively, and a significant population of residents 65 years of age or older (17%). The vast majority of the population, 92%, are white as compared to a state average of 87%. Only 10% of the population identifies themselves as Hispanic, which is lower than the state average.

Historically a port town, Astoria's industry was dominated by shipping, fishing, logging and other natural resource extractive activities.

¹ Today, the top three industry sectors are:

- Educational services, and health care and social assistance (20%)
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services (16%)
- Retail trade (15%)

The vast majority of workers within Astoria (71%) are private wage or salary workers. Government employees make up 16% of the total workforce and workers who are self-employed make up 13% of the total workforce. The average commute time in Astoria is 18 minutes, which is lower than the state average of 22 minutes.

Data suggests Astoria is economically distressed and the cost of living is disproportionately higher than earned income. Although unemployment is roughly the same as the state average (11%), the median income is only \$40,603. This is 19% lower than the median household income statewide. 21% of people live below the poverty level, which is higher than the state average of 16%. Additionally, the majority of occupied housing units in Astoria (52%) is renter-occupied, which is significantly higher than the state average (38%). Nearly 5% of the housing units are seasonal, which is higher than the state average.

Local Main Street Initiative

Astoria has a sprawling, 30-block historic district comprised of nearly 70 contributing resources and retains significant historic character. The district serves as the primary retail and cultural hub for the town. District boundaries extend from the Columbia River south to Exchange Street and east-west from Seventh Street to Seventeenth Street. Established neighborhoods comprised of single and multi-family residential units are located just to the south of the district lending well to the walkability of the district for the local community.



The district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998 as being significant in multiple categories, including: architecture, commerce, exploration and settlement, industry, and politics or government. Dominant architectural styles within the district include Late Victorian Italianate and Queen Anne, Late 19th and 20th century revivals (Colonial, Classical, Renaissance, and Beaux Arts), and early 20th century American commercial, modern, and vernacular styles.²

The proximity of the commercial district to the Columbia River, as well as historical archaeological remains of pier pylons protruding along the river bank lend well to the town's storied past. Today, the commercial district is vibrant and dynamic with an eclectic mix of businesses and cultural places (such as museums and public gathering spaces) that cater to the local community and tourists alike. Even mid-week, the downtown center usually remains active with a generational mix of shoppers and business people. From an

external perspective, the district appears to be well-cared for with visible, or tangible, examples of investments and few vacant storefronts. These include city artwork and sculptures, streetscape improvements (plantings, bike racks, etc.), historic building restoration and maintenance, and new construction underway.

Astoria's Main Street initiative has recently been hailed as a success story and a model within the State of Oregon. Astoria was among the first cities in the state to participate in the Main Street program back in 1985. The local program was also recently declared a Performing Main Street, by the state's Main Street Coordinator. This state designation signifies the highest level of program advancement following the Main Street Approach®.³

The local initiative is spearheaded by a non-profit, the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA). The mission of the organization is to: “Encourage community involvement and investment in preserving the character of historic downtown Astoria while promoting its health and future.”⁴ The organization is led by a Board of Directors comprised of 12 individuals, four committee chairpersons, and one Executive Director. At this time the Executive Director, which is a former RARE-AmeriCorps participant is the only full-time staff person and was brought on in 2013, following the RARE partnership.



Factors impacting the local Main Street program prior to the RARE-Main Street partnership were gathered from community members through an online survey, as well as interviews with a former Astoria RARE-AmeriCorps participant and their supervisor while in service:⁵

Primary Reasons for Implementing the Main Street Approach® in Astoria

- Small business development within the district. Competition with chain, big box retail in a neighboring town.
- Increase revenue, either through investment or consumer spending, within the downtown district.
- Improve the aesthetic appearance of the downtown district.

Secondary Reasons for Implementing the Main Street Approach® in Astoria

- Preserve, restore, or reuse historic buildings within the downtown district
- Increase awareness about community assets and businesses within the downtown district.

Top community assets, resources or characteristics which have helped spur downtown revitalization other than RARE and the local Main Street program.

- The “Riverwalk”.
- Local brewery.
- Community hospitality.
- City government.
- Interested and invested business owners and community members.
- Historic preservation initiatives.
- “Core” of dedicated board members began to build momentum.

Top issues, barriers or challenges met trying implement the Main Street Approach® prior to RARE partnership.

- “Fear of another failed try at organizing [downtown alliance].”

- Unavailability of business owners.
- General disinterest of the business community.
- No strategic organization.
- Lack of education and training on the Approach®.
- No point person to spearhead the initiative.
- Limited Volunteer capacity.
- Funding.
- Lack of cohesion, communication, and knowledge sharing between interested parties.
- Differing priorities and expectations – Main Street board vs. city government, absentee property owners vs. business and community members

Other factors that can be attributed to the success of the local initiative include (1) the community’s ability to form internal partnerships to address local issues, (2) majority of community members and business owners support downtown revitalization, and (3) a revived sense of pride has emerged from implementing the Main Street Approach®. Factors which could be potentially detrimental to the success of the local program include (1) not regularly forming external partnerships to help mitigate local issues and (2) reaching the potential of diversity for Main Street support.⁶



Source: Community member online survey completed for purposes of the RARE-Main Street partnership research study. 2014.

RARE Involvement

Astoria was among the first Main Street communities to partner with RARE. Their first RARE partnership occurred in the RARE's 17th year (2010-2011) and continued the following two years. The first RARE-AmeriCorps participant served two continuous years and one additional RARE-AmeriCorps participant served in the final year.

Prior to the RARE partnership, the ADHDA was somewhat of a grassroots effort with little to no funding.⁷ Although the organization had existed for some time, funding, interest, and available volunteers were a constant ebb and flow. Initial Main Street initiatives in Astoria were funded through a local property tax; however, a 1991 ballot measure did away with the tax. Without stable revenue, the organization diminished significantly. It also struggled to retain general community and business interest, as well as a supportive volunteer base. Additionally, there was a substantial amount of board member turn over, which was detrimental to the functionality of the organization and collective knowledge.⁸ In 2010, the board gained several new members dedicated to instigating positive change within the downtown district.

The primary purpose, or need, behind the partnership with RARE in 2010 was to demonstrate to the community and local officials what could be accomplished with a full-time Main Street Manager and bring awareness to ADHDA. Additionally, the organization needed to gain financial endorsement or find a sustainable funding mechanism to support a paid staff position. While serving within the community, the RARE-AmeriCorps participant became the face of ADHDA and spearheaded the local Main Street initiative.

First Year Astoria's Main Street Partnered with RARE
Year 17* (2010-2011)

Continuous Years Astoria's Main Street Partnered with RARE
Year 18 (2011-2012) & Year 19 (2012-2013)

Capacity Needed
Human, social, and financial. (Continuous all three years.)

RARE-AmeriCorps Position Focus

- Become the face of local Main Street initiative.
- Implement strategies for comprehensive community and economic development under the Main Street Approach®.
- Identify a sustainable funding model, mechanism, or endorsement for permanent, full-time Main Street Manager, or Executive Director.
- Increase awareness and volunteer base.

* The numbers following "Year" correspond to RARE's service contract cycles. RARE is now in its 20th year, or Year 20. Service contract cycles, or partnerships, begin in September and terminate in July.

Coos Bay

General Characteristics

The town of Coos Bay is located on a sheltered peninsula along Oregon’s southern coast. The town and neighboring community of North Bend are oriented towards the eastern bay which leads to multiple navigable waterways stretching inland. Highway 101 runs through the heart of Coos Bay commercial district, which brings tourists and touring cyclists to the area. Coos Bay is fairly secluded from other metropolitan areas; the nearest city of 50,000 or more in population is Eugene (approximately 140,000 people) 74 miles to the northeast over the coastal mountain range.⁹ In 2010, at the time of the last decennial census, Coos Bay had a population of 15,374. Over the last decade the city had experienced a slight increase.



Coos Bay has a slightly older population as compared to the state, with a median age of 42 (compared to state median age of 38) and a significant population of residents 65 years of age or older (19%). The vast majority of the population, 92%, are white as compared to a state average of 87%. Only 8% of the population identify themselves as Hispanic, which is lower than the state average.

Historically a port town, Coos Bay’s industry was dominated by ship building and logging. Although the town is still known as a large exporter of wood products, today, the top three industry sectors are:

- Educational services, and health care and social assistance (23%)
- Retail trade (16%)
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services (14%)

The vast majority (76%) of workers within Coos Bay are private wage or salary workers. Government employees make up 18% of the total workforce and workers who are self-employed make up 6% of the total workforce. Average commute time in Coos Bay is 16 minutes, which is lower than the state average of 22 minutes.

Data suggests Coos Bay is economically distressed. 13% of the population are unemployed, which is slightly higher than the state average. The median income is \$38,820. This is 22% lower than the median household income statewide. 19% of people live below the poverty level, which is higher than the state average of 16%. However, the majority of the housing units in Coos Bay are owner-occupied (55%).

Local Main Street Initiative

Coos Bay has a compact commercial district oriented towards the waterfront. Although the town does not have a designated historic district, the commercial center contains over 30 historic resources.¹⁰ This area was renamed by the local community the “Marshfield District”, after the town’s former name. Most activity of the district is centered around a new visitors center, Front Street, and a waterfront boardwalk. Front Street and the commercial district to the west contain numerous 1920s Art Deco inspired buildings, which signify a significant period of growth for the town. The other dominant architectural style is mid-century modern and late 20th century commercial.

Today, much of the commercial and retail activity occur along Front Street. Much of this activity seems to be drawing on the economic opportunities that are afforded by tourists traveling through the area – such as restaurants and other service industry businesses. Anchors for the district include the newly constructed visitor’s center and a new history and maritime museum currently under construction. The commercial district beyond Front Street contains a high percentage of vacant store fronts and receives very limited foot traffic; however, it is apparent that the town is attempting to breathe new life into the area. Many of the historic buildings have received façade restorations and some streetscape improvements have been made.



Coos Bay was among the first cities in the state to become a Main Street community and serves as an example that downtown revitalization is a long-term investment rather than a quick-fix solution. The Coos Bay Downtown Association (CBDA) was established in 1981 with the following mission:

“To foster the development of downtown Coos Bay by strengthening local business, encouraging new business, and connecting the community through partnerships. CBDA is committed to promoting Coos Bay as an attractive place to live, work, and visit by continually enhancing the quality life of the downtown area.”

The non-profit organization is led by a Board of Directors comprised of nine individuals. Funding for a permanent, full-time staff person has not yet been acquired. The Coos Bay Main Street initiative is designated by the state as a Transforming Downtown. This designation is for communities “committed to downtown revitalization using the Main Street Approach, but need [external] technical assistance” for implementation.¹¹



Factors impacting the local Main Street program were gathered from community members through an online survey for this study.¹²

Primary Reasons for Implementing the Main Street Approach® in Coos Bay

- Increase revenue, either through investment or consumer spending, within the downtown district.
- Improve the aesthetic appearance of the downtown district.
- Encourage the community and visitors to buy local.
- Increase awareness about community assets and businesses within the downtown district.

Top community assets, resources or characteristics which have helped spur downtown revitalization other than RARE and the local Main Street program.

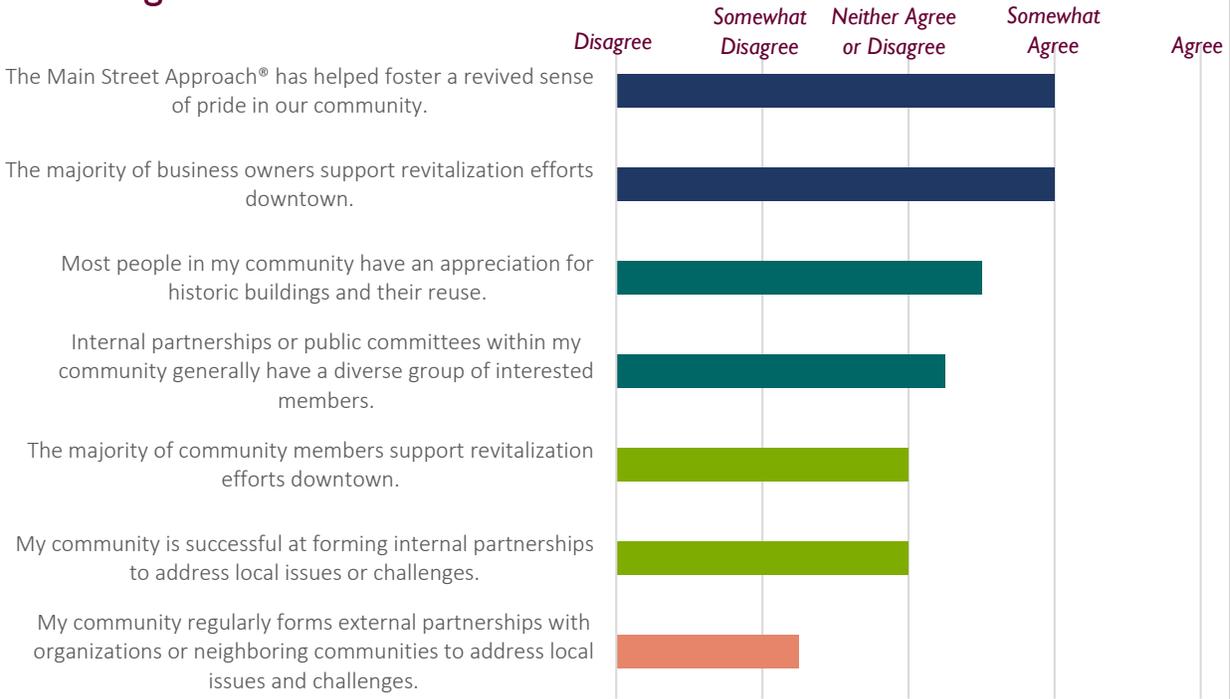
- Long-term downtown businesses
- Dedicated local government
- Proximity to Highway 101
- Restoration of historic buildings.
- Monthly downtown events.

Top issues, barriers or challenges met trying implement the Main Street Approach® prior to RARE partnership.

- Motivating businesses to get involved.
- Motivating committee members to complete projects and initiatives.
- Sustainable funding.
- Lack of up-keep on older, historic buildings.
- Motivating and engaging with volunteers.

Other factors that can be attributed to the progress of the local initiative include (1) a revived sense of pride has emerged from implementing the Main Street Approach® and (2) the majority of business owners support revitalization efforts. Factors which could be potentially detrimental to the success of the local program include (1) not regularly forming external partnerships to help mitigate local issues, (2) perceived lack of success forming internal partnerships, and (3) not having adequate support from community members.¹³

Do community members agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: Community member online survey completed for purposes of the RARE-Main Street partnership research study. 2014

RARE Involvement

Coos Bay first partnered with RARE for Main Street assistance in 2012 and again during the most recent cycle of AmeriCorps participant placement. Each year a different RARE-AmeriCorps individual was placed within the community.

Prior to partnering with RARE, Coos Bay had just received the Transforming Downtown designation by the state. For over 20 years the town had been designated as either an Exploring Downtown or Affiliate with some level of assistance from the state Main Street Coordinator, but never made the transition or commitment to the higher levels of designation. In 2012, there was a change in local leadership which worked to shift the focus of CBDA from solely promotion and event planning to being an instigator of change. The primary funding sponsor of CBDA at the time was the local government and many business owners were skeptical to invest time or financial resources due to the lack of initiatives in the previous decades.

The primary purpose, or need, behind the partnership with RARE in 2012 was to have a full-time staff person that could provide the time and energy for tasks associated to the administrative, oversight, organization, coordination, and promotion of the CBDA.

*First Year Coos Bay's Main Street Partnered with RARE
Year 19 (2012-2013)*

*Continuous Years Coos Bay's Main Street Partnered with RARE
Year 20 (2013-2014)*

Capacity Needed

Human, social, financial, and organizational capacity. (Continuous both years.)

RARE-AmeriCorps Position Focus

- Serve in the capacity of a full-time Main Street Manager.
- Promote the local organization and conduct outreach to the local community. Assist with administration, organization, and promotional duties of the CBDA.
- Increase the volunteer base and community involvement.
- Identify a sustainable funding model, mechanism, or endorsement for permanent, full-time Main Street Manager, or Executive Director.

La Grande

General Characteristics

La Grande is located in the Grande Ronde River Valley to the west of the Willowa Mountains along Interstate 84 in northeastern Oregon. The town has a rich heritage spanning back to the Anglo-American settlement period of Oregon. Portions of the historic Oregon Trail run through the heart of town. La Grande serves as the county seat for Union County, as well as an economic and community hub for many of the remote populations that live in northeastern Oregon. The nearest town of 50,000 or more is Kennewick, Washington, which is approximately 80 miles northwest.¹⁴ In 2010, at the time of the last decennial census, La Grande had a population of 12,327. Over the last decade the town has experienced a slight increase.



La Grande has a younger population than the state as a whole, the median age is 33 as compared to 38 respectively. The vast majority of the population, 94%, are white as compared to the state average of 87%. Only 5% of the populations identifies themselves as Hispanic, which is significantly lower than the state average.

Historically, La Grande's industry was dominated by timber harvesting and grain milling.¹⁵ Today, the top three industry sectors are:

- Educational services, and health care and social assistance (32%)
- Retail trade (14%)
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services (9%)

The significant percentage of "educational services, and health care and social assistance" can, in part, be attributed to the presence of Eastern Oregon University located within La Grande. The vast majority of workers in La Grande (72%) are private wage or salary workers; however, government employees make

up a significant (20%) of the total workforce. Workers who are self-employed make up 8% of the total workforce. Average commute time in La Grande is 11 minutes, which is significantly lower than the state average of 22 minutes.

Although the unemployment rate is slightly lower than the state average, data suggests La Grande is economically distressed. The median income is \$36,424, which is 27% lower than the median household income statewide. Additionally, 23% of the population live below the poverty level. Having a significant population of young adults enrolled at the University may partially account for the significantly lower income. The majority of occupied housing units in La Grande is owner-occupied, 54%; however, this is lower than the state average of 62%.

Local Main Street Initiative



The La Grande Commercial Historic District contains 57 contributing historic resources and is set against a picturesque backdrop of rolling hills.¹⁶ Although chain retail has built out from the district towards the east and south, the historic district remains the city center with administrative, cultural, and educational services. The district is bounded by a well-established, single-family residential neighborhood to the north and west lending well to the walkability of downtown for the local community. District boundaries extend from Union Pacific Railroad tracts along Jefferson Street on the north; Greenwood and Cove Streets on the east; Washington Street on the South; and Fourth Street on the west.¹⁷ An area of roughly 14 city blocks.

The district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001 as being significant in multiple categories, including: commerce, government, and architecture. Dominant architectural styles within the district include Italianate, Gothic, Renaissance, Mission, 20th Century Commercial, and vernacular.¹⁸

Today, the revitalization of the historic district through the use of the Main Street Approach[®] is a cornerstone of La Grande's Urban Renewal Plan and priority for city council.¹⁹ The district embraces a small town charm and is a welcoming place for both tourists and local community members. On weekday afternoon, you can find a mix of generational shoppers and families strolling along the sidewalks. Although some vacant storefronts exist, reinvestment within the district is apparent. Historic buildings have received (or are currently receiving) restoration and maintenance, streetscape improvements have been made, and an overall sense of place exists. Additionally, new cultural facilities, such as a large public library, have been construction along the periphery of the district.

La Grande launched their local Main Street program in 2009, a year after the state Main Street program was revived through legislative action. The local initiative was spearhead through the city’s Community and Economic Development Department and a Board of Directors comprised of 10 individuals. The mission of La Grande Main Street is to “create an inviting, sustainable downtown rooted in La Grande’s history and culture, providing a vital center for commercial and community activities”.²⁰



Factors impacting the local Main Street program were gathered from community members through an online survey for this study.²¹

Primary Reasons for Implementing the Main Street Approach® in La Grande

- Encourage the community and visitors to buy local.
- Preserve, restore, or reuse historic buildings within the downtown district.
- Promote local business and provide support for them to thrive.
- Attracted to the comprehensiveness of the Approach®.

Top community assets, resources or characteristics which have helped spur downtown revitalization other than RARE and the local Main Street program.

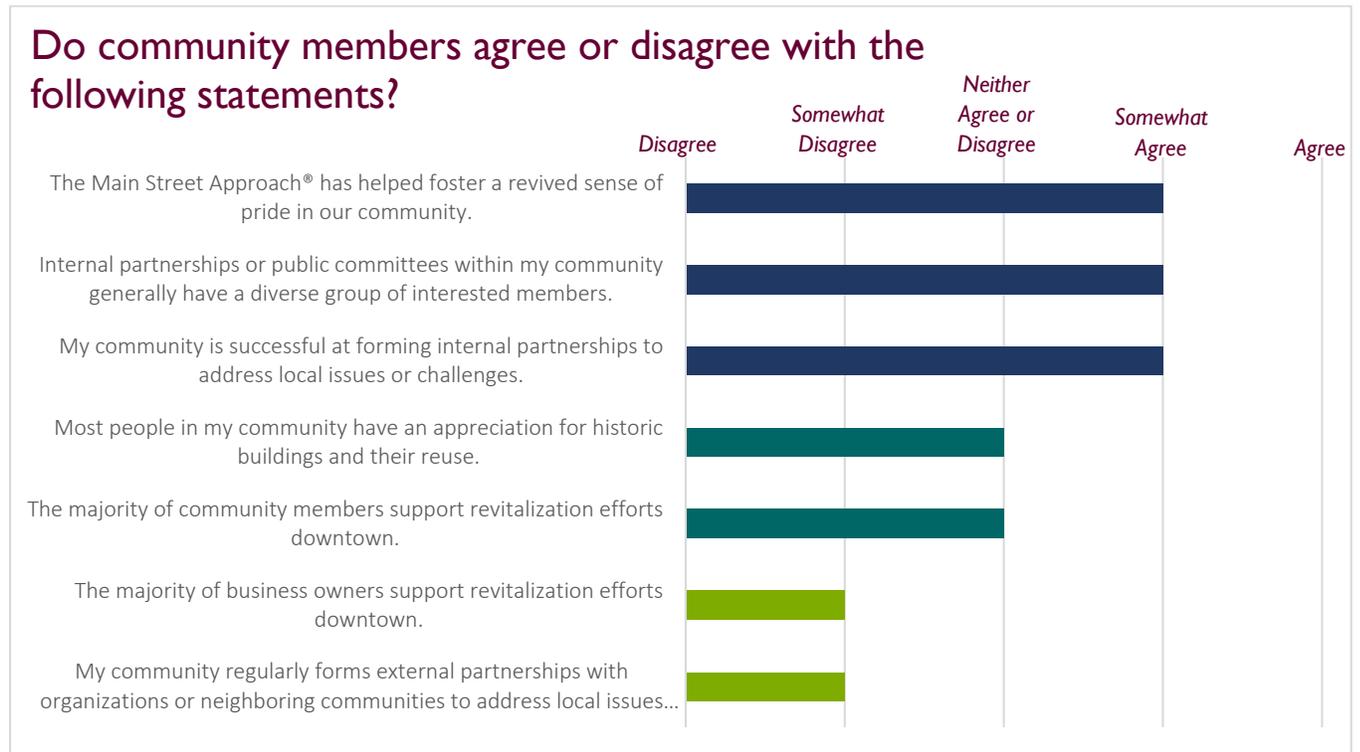
- Urban Renewal funding.
- Local business investment.
- Volunteers.
- Tradition. Community of multi-generational families.
- City had established working relationship with the State Historic Preservation Office for preservation related activities.

Top issues, barriers or challenges met trying implement the Main Street Approach® prior to RARE partnership.

- Lack of interest.
- Funding.
- Organization.
- Transitioning from city-led initiative to non-profit foundation initiative.
- Business investment.
- Retaining businesses within the downtown district.

Other factors that can be attributed to the progress of the local initiative include (1) a revived sense of pride has emerged from implementing the Main Street Approach® and (2) forming diverse internal partnerships. Factors which could be potentially detrimental to the success of the local program include

(1) not regularly forming external partnerships to help mitigate local issues and (2) not having adequate support from business members.²²



Source: Community member online survey completed for purposes of the RARE-Main Street partnership research study. 2014.

La Grande’s Main Street initiative is designated as a Transforming Downtown by the state’s Main Street Coordinator. This designation is for communities “committed to downtown revitalization using the Main Street Approach, but need [external] technical assistance” for implementation.²³

RARE Involvement

La Grande was among the first Main Street communities to partner with RARE and is the longest running partnership to date. This partnership coincided with the launch of the local Main Street initiative within the community in 2009. Since that time, La Grande has partnered with RARE for Main Street technical assistance each year and has had a total of four RARE-AmeriCorps participants. One participant remained within the community for two years.

Through the help of the RARE partnership the Main Street initiative has grown and is now at a crossroads of transitioning from a city led initiative to a volunteer-based organization. Up until that time, La Grande had seen many other downtown associations, but all had dissolved without much success.²⁴ There was a fair amount of community support, but the time, energy, and commitment of local volunteers was sporadic. Additionally, business owners were skeptical to invest in the program until the benefit of the Main Street initiative, or revitalization, progress was made apparent.

The primary purpose, or need, behind the partnership with RARE in 2009 was to have a full-time staff person that could assist the Economic Development Director and have a more neutral (non-government)

individual be the face of the local Main Street initiative to help the organization gain momentum, as well as support from the local community and business members.

First Year La Grande's Main Street Partnered with RARE

Year 16 (2009-2010)

Continuous Years La Grande's Main Street Partnered with RARE

Year 17 (2010-2011), Year 18 (2011-2012), Year 19 (2012-2013), & Year 20 (2013-2014)

Capacity Needed

Human, social, and financial capacity. (Continuous all five years.)

RARE-AmeriCorps Position Focus

- Increase interest and participation with the local initiative.
- Network and promote the local program to build partnerships.
- Assist the Economic Development Director implement elements of the city's Urban Renewal Plan.
- Assist committee members implement projects and host events.
- Help transition the program from a city government led initiative to a non-profit status.
- Identify and obtain a sustainable funding model, mechanism, or endorsement for permanent, full-time Main Street Manager, or Executive Director.

Milton-Freewater

General Characteristics

Milton-Freewater is located at the southern end of the Walla Walla Valley in northeastern Oregon in close proximity to the Oregon-Washington state line. This area is well-known for its agricultural production. Milton-Freewater is fairly remote; the nearest town of 50,000 or more is Kennewick, Washington, which is approximately 40 miles northwest.

In 2010, at the time of the last decennial census, Milton-Freewater had a population of 6,470. Over the last decade the city had experienced a slight increase.²⁵



Milton-Freewater has a younger population than the state as a whole, the median age is 32 as compared to 38 respectively, and a high population of residents 18 years of age or younger (30%). The majority of the population, 73%, are white as compared to a state average of 87% with a significant population (26%) that identify themselves as "some other race". Community members which identify as Hispanic is 43%; this is significantly higher than the state average of 12%.

Historically, Milton-Freewater’s industry was dominated by agriculture. Today, the top three industry sectors are:

- Educational services, and health care and social assistance (18%)
- Manufacturing (16%)
- Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining (14%)

The vast majority of workers in Milton-Freewater (83%) are private wage or salary workers. Government employees make up 13% of the total workforce and workers who are self-employed make up 3% of the total workforce. Average commute time in Milton-Freewater is 16 minutes, which is lower than the state average of 22 minutes.

Data suggests Milton-Freewater is severely economically distressed and the cost of living is disproportionately higher than earned income. The unemployment rate is 21%, which is significantly higher than the state average. The median income is \$34,974, which is 30% lower than the median household income statewide. 27% of people live below the poverty level, which is significantly higher than the state average of 16%. 56% of the occupied housing units are owner-occupied, which is lower than the state average.

Local Main Street Initiative

Milton-Freewater has a somewhat unique historic commercial district with two disjointed commercial areas connected by a dog-legged route of streets. One of the sections is located along state highway 11, while the other section, named “Old Town Freewater”, is set away from the current main thoroughfare. The area once supported two towns, which merged in 1950. Milton-Freewater does not have a designated historic district; however, there are three buildings between the two commercial sections listed on the National Register of Historic Places – Columbia College building (now City Hall), Central School, and the Walla Walla Valley Traction Company Passenger Station and Powerhouse. Other potentially contributing buildings include Greek and Italianate Revival brick commercial buildings dating to the turn of the 20th century within both sections of the commercial district. The other dominant architectural form is late 20th century commercial.



Today, Milton-Freewater’s Main Street initiative is in its infancy. Three years ago concerned community members sought a remedy to their crumbling economic and commercial base. Of the few businesses that do exist within the commercial district, most are located in newer constructed buildings. However, there is some effort being made to restore the older, underutilized brick commercial buildings. Other notable improvements, or Main Street efforts, are flower planters located throughout Old Town Freewater and annual events, or festivities. Like the other Main Street communities selected for this study, Milton-Freewater serves as an example that downtown revitalization is a long-term investment rather than an overnight solution.

Factors impacting the local Main Street program were gathered from community members through an online survey for this study.²⁶

Primary Reason for Implementing the Main Street Approach® in Milton-Freewater

- Improve the aesthetic appearance of the downtown district.

Secondary Reasons for Implementing the Main Street Approach® in Milton-Freewater

- Increase revenue, either through investment or consumer spending, within the downtown district.
- Encourage community members to buy local.
- Increase community or volunteer engagement with revitalization efforts.

Top community assets, resources or characteristics which have helped spur downtown revitalization other than RARE and the local Main Street program.

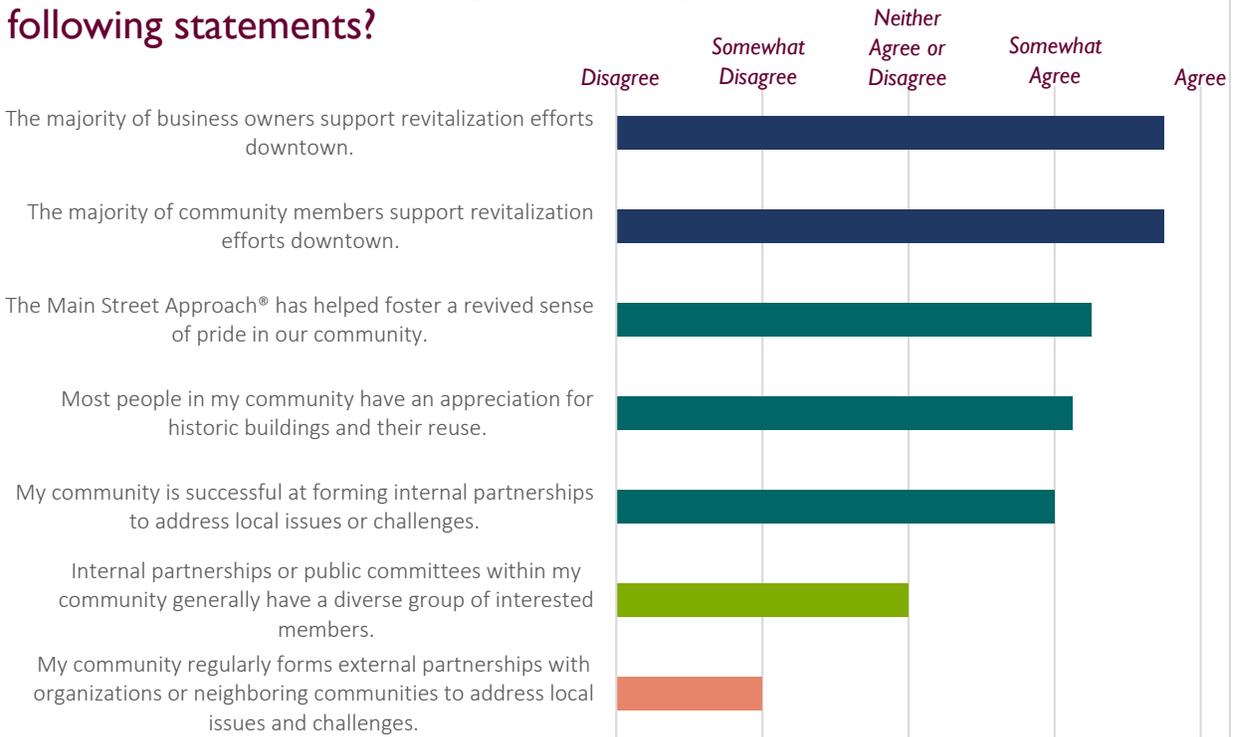
- Improvement grants.
- Publicity on revitalization efforts.
- Engagement and commitment from local business owners.
- Community wanted to see a change for the better.

Top issues, barriers or challenges met trying implement the Main Street Approach® prior to RARE partnership.

- Funding.
- Resistance to change from business and community members.
- Accountability for revitalization projects and initiatives.
- No available point person.
- Administrative responsibilities.
- Steep learning curve. Struggled with what to do and how to do it.
- Putting action behind interest.
- Retaining and attracting businesses.
- Separate cultural groups within community and lack of diversity on committees.

Other factors that can be attributed to the progress of the local initiative include (1) support from business and community members, (2) a revived sense of pride has emerged from implementing the Main Street Approach®, and (2) forming internal partnerships to address local issues. Factors which could be potentially detrimental to the success of the local program include (1) not regularly forming external partnerships to help mitigate local issues.²⁷

Do community members agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: Community member online survey completed for purposes of the RARE-Main Street partnership research study. 2014.

The Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance (MFDA) was established “under the umbrella of the Community Development Partnership, a group [of 10 individuals] built of community members who are from service organizations & clubs, are business and property owners or city officials and we are joined with the Oregon Main Street Program”.²⁸ The mission of MFDA is to create a positive climate for new and existing business with improvements in infrastructure and increased promotion. According to a MFDA member, the alliance sees the commercial and retail potential of the area because of its proximity to Washington state line. Oregon does not have a sales tax whereas Washington’s sales tax ranges from 6.5% to 9.5%.



RARE Involvement

Milton-Freewater applied for a RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement in 2012, just one year after the local Main Street initiative began. They have now had the same participant for two continuous years.

Prior to RARE involvement the local initiative was designated as Exploring Downtown. This designation is for communities interested in using the Main Street Approach® for downtown revitalization, but have not yet made a commitment.²⁹ At the time, the local initiative was not much more than an organization board with minimal support from the community.³⁰ In past years, external consultants had been brought into the community through various projects to provide revitalization and economic development advice; however, very few of the strategies or recommendations ever came to fruition. The community was, therefore, somewhat skeptical of the Main Street initiative at its origins.³¹ Additionally, all volunteer board members were also full-time professionals with limited extra time or energy to devote to the initiative.

The primary purpose, or need, behind the RARE partnership was to have a full-time staff person that could provide the time and energy to grow the initiative, determine what needed to be done, and who within the community would be able to assist MFDA.

First Year Milton-Freewater's Main Street Partnered with RARE

Year 19 (2012-2013)

Continuous Years Milton-Freewater's Main Street Partnered with RARE

Year 20 (2013-2014)

Capacity Needed

Human, social, financial, and organizational capacity. (Continuous both years.)

RARE-AmeriCorps Position Focus

- Serve in the capacity of a full-time Main Street Manager as a mix of providing oversight and as a task manager.
- Assist with administration, organization, and promotional duties of the MFDA.
- Increase the volunteer base and community involvement.
- Identify a sustainable funding model, mechanism, or endorsement for permanent, full-time Main Street Manager, or Executive Director.
- Assist in the development and execution of tangible (or visible) improvement projects.
- Assist in the facilitation of seasonal events.
- Promote the initiative through cross-cultural engagement and media.

Photo credits: All photographs for this section were taken by the researcher in May 2014.

Chapter 5 Notes:

- ¹ Astoria Downtown Historic District Association. "2010-2011 Community Full Narrative." RARE-AmeriCorps Participant Placement Application, Astoria, Oregon, 2010.
- ² Goodenberger, John E. "Astoria Downtown Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Astoria, Oregon, August 19, 1997.
- ³ Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Oregon Main Street. unknown.
<http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/SHPO/pages/mainstreet.aspx> (accessed Fall 2013).
- ⁴ Astoria Downtown Historic District Association. Downtown News. 2014. <http://www.astoriadowntown.com/> (accessed Winter 2014).
- ⁵ Anonymous, Main Street Community Members, Online survey prepared by Jennifer Self, RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 2014).
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Participant, Astoria RARE-AmeriCorps, interview by Jennifer Self. RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 1, 2014).
- ⁸ Supervisor, Astoria RARE-AmeriCorps, interview by Jennifer Self. RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 6, 2014).
- ⁹ Unknown. Coos Bay, Oregon. 2013. <http://www.city-data.com/city/Coos-Bay-Oregon.html> (accessed Fall 2013).
- ¹⁰ Unknown. "Coos Bay: A Walk through Old Marshfield." Walking tour brochure, Coos Bay, Oregon, date unk.
- ¹¹ Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Oregon Main Street. unknown.
<http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/SHPO/pages/mainstreet.aspx> (accessed Fall 2013).
- ¹² Anonymous, Main Street Community Members, Online survey prepared by Jennifer Self, RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 2014).
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Unknown. La Grande, Oregon. 2013. <http://www.city-data.com/city/La-Grande-Oregon.html> (accessed Fall 2013).
- ¹⁵ Reavis, Jim. La Grande History, Union County, Oregon. 2014.
<http://www.oregongenealogy.com/union/lagrande.htm> (accessed Spring 2014).
- ¹⁶ Hartmans, Donna, Sally Donovan, and Dr. Joby Patterson. "La Grande Commercial Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Arrowrock Architects; Donovan & Assoc., La Grande, Oregon, 2000.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ The City of La Grande. Economic Development Division. 2014.
<http://www.cityoflagrande.org/muraProjects/muraLAG/lagcity/index.cfm/city-offices/community-development/economic-development-division/> (accessed Spring 2014).
- ²⁰ La Grande Main Street Downtown. About. 2014. <http://lagrandemainstreet.org/sample-page/> (accessed Spring 2014).
- ²¹ Anonymous, Main Street Community Members, Online survey prepared by Jennifer Self, RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 2014).
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Oregon Main Street. unknown.
<http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/SHPO/pages/mainstreet.aspx> (accessed Fall 2013).
- ²⁴ Supervisor, Milton-Freewater RARE-AmeriCorps, interview by Jennifer Self. RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 9, 2014).
- ²⁵ Unknown. Milton-Freewater, Oregon. 2013. <http://www.city-data.com/city/Milton-Freewater-Oregon.html> (accessed Spring 2014).
- ²⁶ Anonymous, Main Street Community Members, Online survey prepared by Jennifer Self, RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 2014).
- ²⁷ Ibid.

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- ²⁸ Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance. "2012-2013 Community Full Narrative." RARE-AmeriCorps Participant Placement Application, Milton-Freewater, Oregon, 2012.
- ²⁹ Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Oregon Main Street. unknown.
<http://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/SHPO/pages/mainstreet.aspx> (accessed Fall 2013).
- ³⁰ Supervisor, Milton-Freewater RARE-AmeriCorps, interview by Jennifer Self. RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 9, 2014).
- ³¹ Participant, Milton-Freewater RARE-AmeriCorps, interview by Jennifer Self. RARE-Main Street Partnership Research Study (May 9, 2014).

VI. Findings - Interview Responses

The study aimed to gather insight and feedback from a wide range of partnership participants, including former RARE-AmeriCorps participants who worked within Main Street communities, their supervisors while in service, and community members. Insight and feedback regarding the partnership was also gathered from state Main Street Coordinator, Sheri Stuart, and has been incorporated throughout this report. A list of former RARE-AmeriCorps participants and their supervisors was provided by RARE for each community selected for this study.

RARE-AmeriCorps participants and their supervisors were asked to participate in either an in-person or phone interview with the researcher. All questions were open-ended in order to gather honest, subjective perspectives from each person. Interviews were voluntary and respondents were allowed to skip any questions he or she either felt uncomfortable answering or preferred not to answer.

Between the four communities selected for the study – Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande and Milton-Freewater – the researcher was able to obtain a list of 10 individuals: six former RARE-AmeriCorps participants and four supervisors. (Note: Some RARE-AmeriCorps participants served multiple years within the Main Street communities and supervisors often manage incoming RARE-AmeriCorps participants over several years.) Eight of the 10 respondents completed the interviews (five RARE-AmeriCorps participants and three supervisors), which is a response rate of 80%. Two in-person interviews and six phone interviews were completed.

Prior to their RARE experience, most RARE-AmeriCorps participants had an academic background in public policy or related fields, with little to some professional experience. Two of the supervisors interviewed were serving as Presidents for their local Main Street Board or Alliance; one supervisor was the city's Economic Development Director, who was instrumental in having the Main Street Approach® implemented in the local community.

Questions during the interview were primarily focused on open-ended subjective feedback and insights within the themes of (1) community background information or community aspects likely to impact the results of the partnership, (2) expectations and outcomes of the partnership, and (3) perspective of the partnership in hindsight. Although the researcher developed and used a structured questionnaire for the interviews, respondents were encouraged to have more of an open dialogue regarding the impact of the partnership. This was intended to elicit views and opinions that potentially would not have organically emerged through rigid questioning and to supplement the more structured online survey completed by community members.

This section provides key findings from all interviews completed. Interview findings below are organized within the sub-categories of “Community Background Information”, “The Partnership in Action”, and the “Overall Perception of the Partnership”.

For a listing of questions included within the interview, see Appendix C – Survey and Interview Scripts. For findings from the online survey completed by community members, see the following chapter “Findings - Survey Responses”.

Community Background Information

Interview respondents were first asked to describe the state of the local Main Street program prior to the RARE partnership and the driving force, in their opinion, for implementing the Main Street Approach® in the community. According to respondents small business and economic development was the primary driving force behind implementing the Approach®. Like many rural communities, those included in this study had experienced a decline of business activity within their downtown commercial centers. One community faced competition with nearby big box chain retail and another community used the Approach® as a cornerstone to their Urban Renewal program. Secondary driving forces behind implementing the Approach® included promotion and the appeal of a comprehensive method to address community challenges.

Driving Forces for Implementing the Main Street Approach®

- Economic development.
- Small business development.
- Promotion.
- Comprehensive approach to revitalization.

Prior to the RARE partnership, all four communities had reached a crossroads in their local Main Street program and needed assistance to propel the initiative in a new direction. Three out of the four communities had seen an ebb and flow of downtown revitalization efforts without substantial progress and had recently obtained new leadership in an effort to push efforts in the right direction. The fourth community had just begun the Main Street Approach® and the local organization was in its infancy.

Because of the varying states of the local Main Street initiatives in each community, interview respondents had varying opinions on what community “assets” existed prior to the RARE partnership; however, most agreed that there was city backing, moderate to high community support, and an anxious board ready to make change happen. These community assets are important to identify when helping to implement the Main Street Approach®. Each can be vital resources for moving the local program forward and keys to its success.

Likewise, universal issues, barriers, and challenges most often faced by communities implementing the Main Street Approach® is important to acknowledge. These factors can help to better identify capacity needs and gaps potentially overlooked in the initial RARE-AmeriCorps application, as well as compare before and after impacts of the partnership. Much like community assets, many of the challenges identified by interview respondents were specific to the individual community. The most common challenges of the local programs prior to the RARE partnership included

Common Challenges for Local Main Street Programs Prior to RARE Partnership

- A disorganized or new local initiative.
- Lack of funding.
- Volunteer and committee burn out.
- A skeptical business community hesitant to invest in an initiative before seeing results.

Although the assets and challenges provided by interview respondents may have been more targeted to each individual community, their need for a RARE-AmeriCorps participant demonstrated similar capacity

issues. Below are the most common reasons gathered from respondents when asked what need initiated the RARE partnership:

Common Responses for Initiating the RARE-Main Street Partnership

- Improve cohesiveness and communication between Main Street partners.
- Increase community support.
- Provide administrative and boots-on-the-ground assistance.
- Promote the local initiative and downtown businesses.
- Gain an affordable, professional staff person to help spearhead the initiative.

The Partnership in Action

To better understand how the partnership functioned, interview respondents were asked a series of questions regarding (1) the role and responsibility of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant, (2) how project or initiatives were identified, and (3) whether or not the community was receptive to the ideas and perspective of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.

Roles and Responsibilities of RARE-AmeriCorps Participants

The researcher found the role and responsibilities of RARE-AmeriCorps participants were largely tied to the state of the local program prior to his or her arrival. For example, in Milton-Freewater where the local program was in its infancy, the primary focus of the participant was to identify *what* needed to be done and *how* those projects or initiatives could be accomplished. In La Grande, the primary role of the participant was to help the transition of the local Main Street program from a city-led initiative to a non-profit board-led initiative. However, regardless of underlying objectives or participant placement, there were definitive commonalities between the roles and responsibilities of all RARE-AmeriCorps participants. One RARE-AmeriCorps participant provided a fitting, one-word summation to describe the role of a participant within a Main Street community - orchestrate. This description is in keeping with the other respondents perspectives as well.

The primary role of a RARE-AmeriCorps participant is to “orchestrate” projects and initiatives tied to the Main Street Approach®.

According to interview respondents, the role of a RARE-AmeriCorps participant within a Main Street community is unique to other RARE experiences. Whereas RARE-AmeriCorps participants outside of the Main Street partnership may focus on completing a single initiative or plan, the participant’s responsibilities in a Main Street community cover a wide variety of tasks. This includes a mix of providing guidance and oversight, building the local program, managing tasks and volunteers, prioritizing efforts, and identifying appropriate or untapped resources for projects and initiatives. Additionally, RARE-AmeriCorps participants became the “face” of the local Main Street initiative. For example, in Astoria the participant was brought in as an interim Main Street Manager to demonstrate what could be accomplished with a permanent, full-time staff person devoting time and energy towards the local program. In Coos Bay, the participant was expected to actively seek promotional opportunities (such as features on the local news) to bring awareness to the local initiative. In several communities, interview

respondents stated that having a “neutral”, or external, Main Street Manager was helpful because it eliminated (or lessened) many social and political boundaries or commonly held perceptions.

Partnership Project and Initiative Identification

Secondly, interview respondents were asked how projects or tasks initiated, continued, or completed through the RARE partnership were identified. In most communities a general starting point for project ideas was developed by the local Main Street Board or supervisor through informal learned experiences or professional strategic plans. However, most RARE-AmeriCorps participants found these initial objectives had to be “weeded” through and prioritized. A number of RARE-AmeriCorps reported the feeling of being overwhelmed by expectations or that actual capacity needs of the local community or Main Street program did not directly align with generated project ideas. For the most part, once the RARE partnership was underway the RARE-AmeriCorps participant identified future projects or tasks with some guidance from the local board. One community found it helpful to consult the state Main Street Coordinator for partnership focus, or direction. Another community found it helpful to conduct a survey of community and business needs and assets before prioritizing efforts.

Community Receptiveness

Lastly, interview respondents were asked if the community was generally receptive to the ideas and perspective brought forth by the RARE-AmeriCorps participant. The success of the Main Street Approach® is heavily dependent upon the collective action of the entire local community and business members. RARE partnership initiatives will only be as successful as the support it receives from the community. Without community support – in the form of volunteer hours, commitment, and involvement – even the most stable partnership will struggle to gain traction within the community.

All communities that participated in the study stated that the ability to bring in “new” or “fresh” ideas was a significant strength of the RARE-Main Street partnership. (Other partnership strengths can be seen within the subsequent section “Overall Perception of the Partnership”.) According to interview respondents, RARE provides an opportunity for communities to bring in an external and critical perspective that provides solutions and ideas not previously considered by the local board or Main Street program. It serves to link knowledge sharing from the larger field of planning and other areas of the country to rural Oregon communities. For example, all RARE-AmeriCorps participants who included within this study came from public policy academic programs outside of the State of Oregon. Additionally, participants are tapped into a network of other RARE-AmeriCorps participants sharing lessons learned and experiences. And lastly, RARE-AmeriCorps participants travel to state Main Street workshops, and in some cases the national Main Street conference, where they learn valuable take-aways and success stories from other communities implementing the Main Street Approach®. For the most part, these are learning and networking opportunities previously untapped by the local community due to constraints of time and funding. The assistance provided by RARE is also considered bridging capital, as discussed within the literature review.

Although one of more significant strengths of the RARE-Main Street partnership is the ability to bring in new ideas and perspective, interview respondents acknowledged in some occasions the RARE-AmeriCorps participant encountered push-back, or resistance, from the community. The most common resistance occurred from (1) business or property owners hesitant to invest in Main Street initiatives before seeing tangible results, (2) business or property owners not wanting to be overburdened by expectations, and (3) misunderstandings of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant’s role within the

community. In several circumstances, there was general resistance to change by the local community or a perception that the participant or the local board was “stepping on toes”.

Overall Perception of the Partnership

Benefits, or Strengths, of the Partnership

In addition to the questions regarding the functionality of the partnership as seen above, interview respondents were also asked questions regarding their overall perception on the effectiveness and impact of the partnership. Overall, all interview respondents agreed the RARE partnership was a significant benefit for their community and attributed the progress of the local initiative directly to the partnership. The most common assets, or benefits, of having a RARE-AmeriCorps participant assist with Main Street initiatives mentioned during interviews include:

Benefits of the RARE- Main Street Partnership

- Gaining momentum or program advancement.
- Providing a youthful energy and reviving interest in the local initiative.
- Providing an inexpensive, well-educated staff person with a strong work ethic.
- Gaining a fresh perspective.
- Increasing the awareness and promotion of the local program.
- Having a “face” to the local initiative.
- Getting things done.
- Increasing coordination and communication among program partners.
- Increasing local community support.
- Facilitating and implementing visible, or tangible, improvement projects.
- Providing an exceptional professional learning experience for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.

Limitations & Areas in Need of Improvement with the Partnership

While all interview respondents viewed the RARE-Main Street partnership as a positive collaboration that should be continued, most agreed there were areas of the partnership which could be “refined” or improved upon. Interview respondents were asked what, in their opinion, were the limitations of the partnership and areas in need of improvement. The most common responses to partnership limitations involved:

Limitations of the RARE-Main Street Partnership

- Balancing expectations.
- Length of service.
- Continuity.
- Participant placement screening.

Balancing expectations

One interview respondent stated that it's common for communities to view a new RARE-AmeriCorps participant as the “knight in shining armor riding in on a white horse” to improve the local program by leaps and bounds. While the RARE-Main Street partnership has proved to be beneficial for communities, a sustained and successful Main Street community must develop internal capacity rather than rely on a single individual or entity. This study helps to demonstrate the Main Street Approach® is a long-term investment to community revitalization, rather than an overnight quick-fix. The Approach® and its initiatives are intended to be continually evolving with the needs of the community. Astoria and Coos Bay, for example, have been members of the state Main Street Program since the 1980s. La Grande is entering its fifth year with the RARE-Main Street partnership. Community expectations must be correctly aligned with not only prioritized capacity issues, but also the available skillset of the participant and what can be reasonably accomplished within the partnership timeframe.

Several interview respondents stated it was common for the expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant to be confused or misguided between them and the local Main Street board or alliance. Participants are taught in Main Street workshops and trainings that the role of a Main Street Manager is to *facilitate* effective change, rather than complete tasks independently or to be a “work horse”. Ultimately the mission of the partnership is to increase the local capacity of the community so that local residents and business owners can be self-reliant. Respondents feel finding the balance between building capacity and “getting things done” can be challenging and a steep learning curve.

Length of service

The standard length of service for a RARE-AmeriCorps participant is typically 11 months. However, eight out of nine Main Street communities that have partnered with RARE between 2010 and 2013 (including all four communities selected for this study) requested participant placement for at least an additional term of service. La Grande is the longest RARE-Main Street partnership, currently completing its fifth year.

When asked “In your opinion, what were limitations of the partnership?” in an open-ended question, eight out of 10 interview respondents stated and emphasized the relatively short service tenure. As stated throughout this report, the Main Street Approach® is a community-led initiative that requires strong support and collaboration between numerous partners both *internally* – business and property owners, downtown board or alliance, city government, and the larger community – and *externally* – state Main Street Coordinator and technical consultation or assistance. Additionally, the comprehensive Approach® puts in place a long-term investment strategy for community revitalization, but has a steep learning curve. RARE-AmeriCorps participants find themselves at the intersection where multiple program objectives and the community's capacity needs intersect. According to interview respondents, RARE-AmeriCorps participants spend anywhere from three months up to a year getting to know the community, identifying what revitalization efforts (or aspects of the Main Street Approach®) need to be

accomplished, and prioritizing those efforts. As one participant stated, "...at minimum, you'll spend 25% of your time simply getting your feet wet."

As previously stated, most Main Streets communities selected for this study had experienced some form of skepticism from the local community or business owners as to whether or not the Approach® could bring about successful and sustained revitalization. When RARE-AmeriCorps participants are placed within a Main Street community, they face an uphill challenge. Each participant is required to not only grasp the concepts of the Approach®, but also become a knowledge source for the community on the subject. He or she must also build community trust and relationships with local residents and business owners to form lasting partnerships; learn how the rural community functions, or their social and political dynamics; become comfortable with public speaking and facilitating engagement; and develop their own professional skillsets.

Of the five former RARE-AmeriCorps participants who were interviewed, three had served back-to-back service tenures for a total of roughly two years. These participants saw a notable increase in productivity and their ability to make more significant lasting impacts on the community. According to one participant, "most of your growth and the ability to do good in the community" was through fostering meaningful communication with community members and learned experience from the previous year.

Continuity

When discussing limitations of the partnership with interview respondents, the term "continuity" was by far the most commonly used descriptor. Due to the role the RARE-AmeriCorps participant takes on within a Main Street community, he or she becomes a hub for information regarding the Main Street Approach®, how the community functions, what efforts are most effective, and prioritizing projects and initiatives for the future. Currently, there is no guidance in place for how the RARE-AmeriCorps participant should transition out of the community. Or, likewise, how the community should prepare leading up to the departure of the participant. Several RARE-AmeriCorps participants interviewed for the study mentioned their attempt to create some sort of reference document or make themselves available for contact after their service contract to ease the transition process.

All four communities reported a significant or "high" concern for the loss of continuity and training for the next Main Street Manager at the end of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant's service tenure. There was even a significant concern by three of the four communities regarding the loss of continuity during the month long "August gap", or when one RARE-AmeriCorps participant leaves the community at the end of his or her contract in July and the community is awaiting the following participant's arrival in September at the start of the RARE-AmeriCorps service cycle. Several interview respondents reported the local board feeling "freaked out" or nervous about the sustainability of the local initiative or that significant disorganization would ensue once the RARE-AmeriCorps participant left.

These findings on continuity concern highlight the need for steady continued action for the Approach® to be successful and a dependency some of these communities have formed with RARE. Without proper knowledge sharing during and at the end of the service contract, there is a significant risk for the loss of continuity. According to interview respondents, having no proper "hand-off" in place not only threatens the momentum of the local Main Street program, but also increases the likelihood that mistakes or efforts that lead to dead ends may be repeated in the future. One supervisor acknowledged the RARE-Main Street partnership was serving a definitive purpose for rural Oregon communities, but has learned

that having multiple RARE-AmeriCorps participants come in year after year to spearhead the local initiative is “not a sustainable approach to running the organization”.

Participant placement screening.

This study did not in any way intend to measure the performance of individual RARE-AmeriCorps participants; however, both former participants and supervisors agree that RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement screening for Main Street communities is “key” or “crucial”. Most interview respondents directly attributed partnership success stories, or lack thereof, to the personal characteristics and professional skillsets of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant. Respondents recognized the participant was clearly not solely responsible for the outcomes of the partnership, but rather it is important that the participant is a “good fit” for the local community so that opportunities for effective change can be maximized. According to interview respondents, it is important for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant to possess the following characteristics if he or she is expected to take on the role of a Main Street Manager or be the “face” of the local program:

Important Characteristics of RARE-AmeriCorps Participants Expected to be the “Face” of the Local Main Street Program

- Possess a strong work ethic.
- Ability to initiate projects or tasks independently.
- Ability to work with “difficult” or strong personalities.
- Ability to communicate and collaborate effectively with the local board and community.
- Willingness and comfortableness engaging with local community and business members.
- Be a creative problem solver.
- Have initiative to seek expert or external consultation.
- Ability to accept and embrace a rural lifestyle.
- Be sensitive to rural social norms or cultural traditions.
- Willingness to “get their hands dirty” or help implement projects.
- Possess confidence.
- Be detail oriented while still having the ability to see the larger picture.

This chapter has provided an overview of findings from interview respondents (former RARE-AmeriCorps participants and their supervisors). The following chapter will present insights and feedback gathered from community members through the use of an online survey.

For a detailed list of RARE partnership strengths, limitations, and areas in need of improvement gathered through participant interviews specific to each community see Appendix F – Selected Interview Responses.

VII. Findings- Survey Responses

The study aimed to gather insight and feedback from a wide range of partnership participants. This chapter summarizes findings from community members who participated in an online survey for the study.

A list of suggested community members was requested by the researcher from each RARE-AmeriCorps participant and supervisor given the following parameters: a “community member” eligible for the study must be (1) directly affected by the local Main Street initiative (such as a business owner within the downtown district), (2) have helped with revitalization strategies on a routine basis (such as a city planner), or (3) an active participant of a local advocacy group or focused on community development or historic preservation.

Community members were asked to participate in an online survey comprised of both open-ended questions and those where the respondent was asked to select among provided answers. The survey was voluntary and respondents were allowed to skip any questions he or she either felt uncomfortable answering or preferred not to answer. Between the four communities selected for the study – Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande and Milton-Freewater – the researcher was able to obtain 25 community member contacts. Eleven of the 25 community members responded that he or she would be interested in participating in the survey and emailed the survey link (response rate of 44%). Of those that received the survey, 9 completed it. (Astoria = 3, Milton-Freewater=3, Coos Bay=2, and La Grande=1) Most respondents were committee or board members for the local Main Street program, or business owners within the downtown commercial district. Respondents had a range of experience (in years) for community revitalization or historic preservation.

Questions within the survey were loosely within the themes of (1) community background information or community aspects likely to impact the results of the partnership, (2) expectations and outcomes of the partnership, and (3) perspective of the partnership in hindsight. This section provides key findings from all surveys completed. Survey findings below are organized within the sub-categories of those themes.

For a listing of questions included within the survey, see Appendix C Survey and Interview Script. For a compiled list of open-ended responses, see Appendix E Open Ended Survey Responses.

Community Background Information

Survey respondents were asked to select among provided answers as to which top two driving forces for implementing the Main Street Approach® existed within their community, or which two driving forces seemed to receive the most focus when implementing their local initiatives. The two driving forces which received the most responses were (1) to “improve the aesthetic appearance of the downtown district” (67%) and (2) to “increase revenue, either through investment or consumer spending, within the downtown district” (44%). Two driving forces which received the least amount of responses were (1) to “increase community or volunteer engagement with revitalization efforts” (11%) and (2) to “increase tourism to our community” (0%).



Community assets and characteristics are important to identify when implementing the Main Street Approach®. These can be vital resources for moving the local program forward and keys to its success. Survey respondents were asked which community assets, resources, or characteristics have helped spur downtown revitalization other than RARE and Main Street Approach® through the use of an open-ended question. Results were then organized by key themes that emerged. Below are the key themes in order from most frequent to less frequent. All responses can be seen as potential resources for future RARE partnerships.

Community Assets that Have Helped Spur Downtown Revitalization



Likewise, universal issues, barriers, or challenges most often faced by communities implementing the Main Street Approach® is important to acknowledge. These factors can help to better identify capacity needs and gaps potentially overlooked in the initial RARE-AmeriCorps application, as well as compare before and after impacts of the partnership. Survey respondents were asked to list the most common community issues, barriers or challenges the community faced trying to implement the Approach® prior to the RARE partnership through the use of an open-ended question. Results were then organized by key themes that emerged. Below are the key themes in order from most frequent to less frequent.

**Community Barriers
Encountered When
Implementing the Main
Street Approach®**

Funding
Motivating committee members or volunteers
Business involvement or investment
General interest
Getting things done
Strategic organization
No available point person to spearhead the initiative
Historic building maintenance or preservation
Administrative responsibilities
Education and training

The success of the Main Street Approach® is heavily dependent upon the collective action of the local community and business members. Without community support – in the form of volunteer hours, commitment, and involvement – even the most stable partnership will struggle to gain traction within the community. To help gauge the existing support in each community, survey respondents were asked whether or not a tradition of volunteerism or public involvement existed prior to the RARE partnership and reasons behind their answer through an open-ended question. 78% of respondents answered “yes”. The most common reason driving volunteers to participate in community action included a sense of pride in their community and a sense of responsibility. Also isolated location, lack of resources to initiate change, and apathy attributed to likelihood of volunteerism according to survey respondents.

The Partnership in Action

To better understand the strengths and limitations of the partnership, survey respondents were asked a series of questions. First, they were asked to list what they considered to be successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped their community initiate, continue, or complete through an open-ended question. A follow-up question had survey respondents list factors that attributed to success. Responses covered a wide variety of topics, a testament that the Approach® is not a cookie-cutter method of revitalization and outcomes are heavily dependent on local circumstances. However, the vast majority (75%) of respondents agreed that success was directly attributed to having a full-time staff person, or point person, available and dedicated to implementing projects and initiatives. Other factors that helped contribute to success are seen in the list below:

Factors or Characteristics Which Attributed to Success

- Available and dedicated full-time staff person.
- Active volunteers.
- Participating local government.
- Increased awareness of local initiatives.
- Having a “realistic cost share”.
- Engaged local leadership.
- Ensuring interested business owners were not overburdened from involvement expectations.

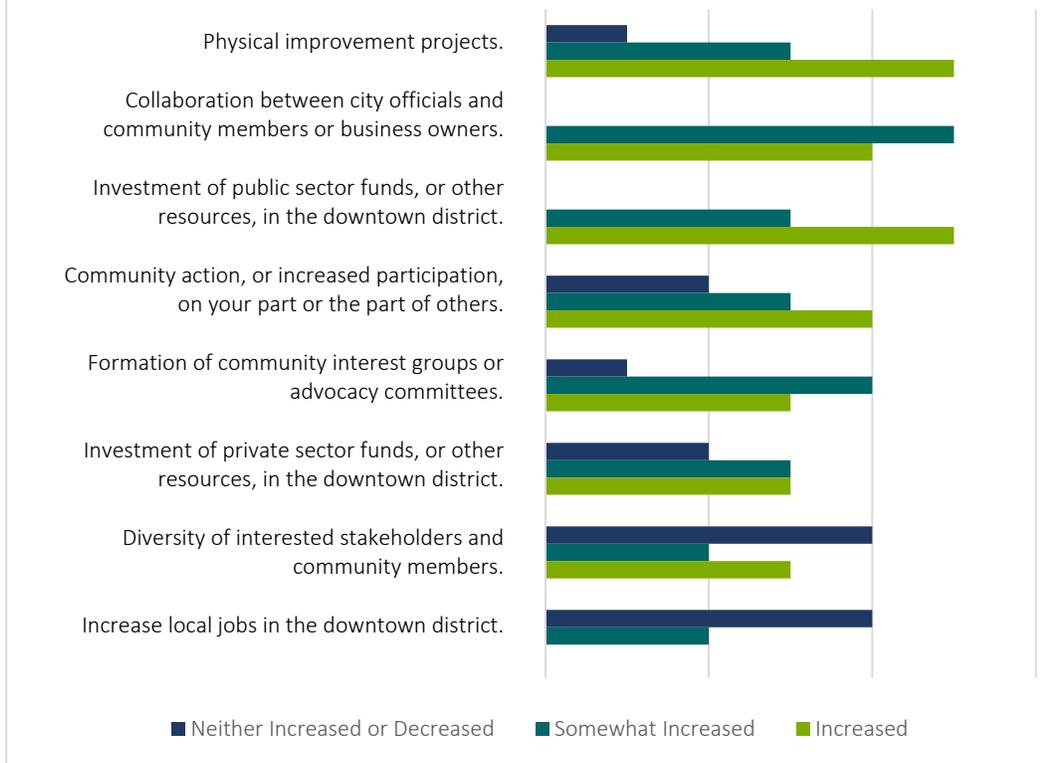
Second, the survey respondents were asked which project or initiatives under the partnership they considered to be less successful and what may have attributed to the lack of success. Projects or initiatives which were less successful, as well as the factors attributed to the lack of success were heavily varied. It is evident that the success of a project or initiative is entirely dependent upon the individual community and its participants; however, understanding reasons behind a project being less successful can raise red flags for future RARE-Main Street partnership initiatives. Below is a summary of responses as to what factors or circumstances attributed to lack of success:

Factors or Characteristics Which Attributed to a Lack of Success

- Lack of leadership or mentorship of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.
- Lack of knowledge or subject understanding.
- Project objective not aligning to the overall mission of the Main Street Approach® or relatively insignificant to the overall revitalization and vitality of the downtown commercial center.
- Lack of support from property or business owners.
- Lack of general interest from the community or volunteer network.

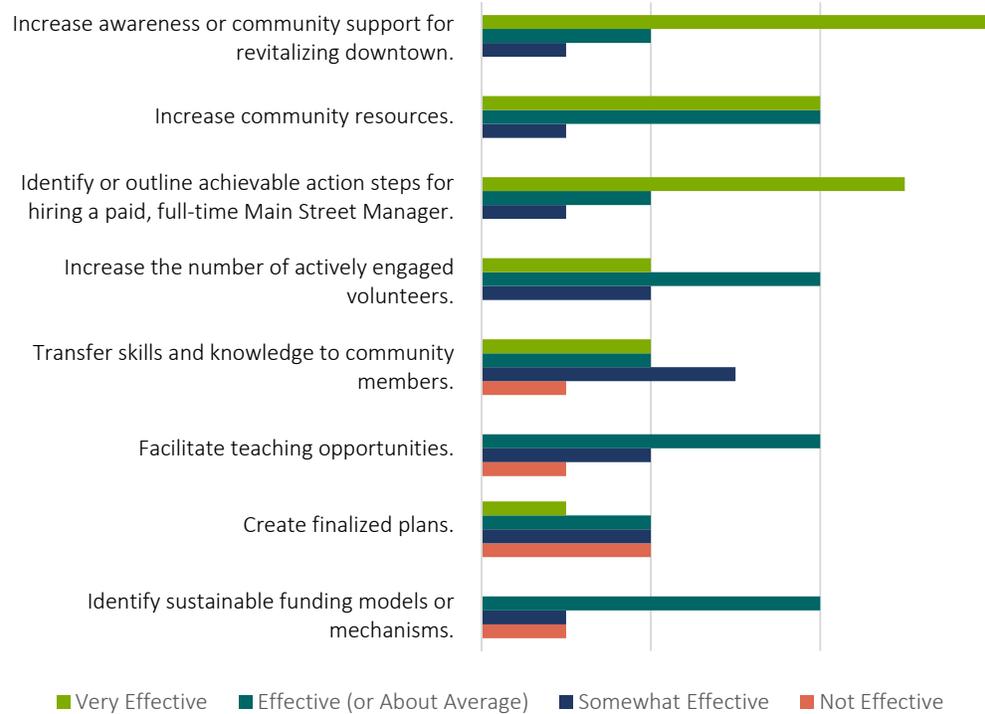
Next, survey respondents were provided a list of research-generated indicators for fostering a successful local Main Street program and asked if the indicators, or factors, increased or decreased as a direct result of the partnership. No respondents selected a decrease in any of the success indicators as a result of the partnership. Indicators that received the most significant increase as a result of the partnership included: collaboration between city officials and community members or business owners and physical improvement projects. The success indicator that was least likely to be directly impacted by the partnership was increase local jobs in the downtown district. This indicator also received the most “I don’t know” responses out of all indicators.

Research-Generated Indicators for Partnership Impact



Lastly, survey respondents were asked to rank the effectiveness of the RARE partnership through the use of provided performance measures. These performance measures were adapted from the initial RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement application. Survey respondents felt the partnership was most effective at (1) increasing awareness or community support for revitalizing downtown and (2) increasing community resources (including, but is not limited to, outreach materials, assessments, maps, databases, programs, and/or studies.) The partnership was least effective identifying sustainable funding models or mechanisms.

Performance Measures for Partnership Effectiveness



Overall Perception of the Partnership

In addition to the research-generated indicator questions above, survey respondents were also asked higher-level questions about their overall perception on the effectiveness and impact of the partnership. When asked overall if the respondent felt the projects initiated, continued, or completed under the partnership achieved anticipated results, 89% of respondents (or 8 of 9) answered “yes”. The greatest asset or benefit of having a RARE-AmeriCorps participant, according to community members, was to (1) assist committee members complete tasks associated with the local Main Street program and (2) bring awareness and support for, or revive, interest in downtown revitalization efforts. One write-in response was also provided, “having a full-time presence”. The asset or benefit of having a RARE-AmeriCorps participant with the least responses was facilitating education and training opportunities regarding the local Main Street program.

Greatest Asset, or Benefit, of Having a RARE-AmeriCorps Participant



Open-ended responses for the limitations of the partnership were somewhat varied; however, the most common responses were a lack of experience (or subject matter expertise) and local leadership. Limitations identified by each community can be seen within the community sections in Appendix ____.

While most survey respondents agreed the partnership is a beneficial program and should be continued, all had suggestions for how the partnership could be improved in the future. These responses were varied; however, themes of (1) improving communication, (2) identifying expectations, and (3) extending the time frame of service began to emerge. The majority of respondents agreed funding continues to be their community's primary challenge for implementing the Main Street Approach®.

For suggestions per community, see the community sections in Appendix E Open Ended Survey Responses.

For considerations to improving the RARE-Main Street partnership in the future, see the following chapter Conclusions & Considerations.

VIII. Conclusions & Considerations

The research topic “A Collaborative Partnership in Rural Preservation Planning” was intended to reveal current approaches, or mechanisms, rural communities use to revitalize their historic commercial downtowns. The focused study began with evaluating the effectiveness and impact of existing partnerships between RARE and rural Main Street communities in Oregon. Then expanded into a larger academic study of the Main Street Approach® in practice, the need for rural service provider intervention, and what “capacity building” means to the broader audience of community planning and preservation professionals, as well as to individual rural communities, within the context of community revitalization and the Main Street Approach®. The following questions were used to guide research throughout the course of the study:

Research Questions

- Based on performance measures of each program (RARE, AmeriCorps, and Main Street) and the expectations of community members, is the RARE-Main Street partnership effectively and efficiently building community capacity?
- What is the overall impact of the RARE-Main Street community partnership for rural Oregon communities?
- How could the RARE-Main Street partnership be improved to ensure a positive, long-term impact for communities?

The purpose of the previous chapters was to bring together the information gathered through the analysis of both secondary and primary sources, and discuss how that information relates to community revitalization and capacity building for rural Oregon communities implementing the Main Street Approach®. Chapter two provided background information for the partnership, as well as presented concepts and theories behind rural capacity building and revitalization. Chapters four, five and six presented findings and background information specific to case study communities where the partnership has been active.

Given the many topics discussed, it is helpful to summarize key findings before wrapping up this report. This chapter will present an overview of key findings and conclusions as they relate to the first two research questions, then present considerations for the partnership moving forward. Additionally, the chapter will present topics uncovered during the study for further research.

Conclusions

Study results revealed RARE fills a “critical” capacity gap with the Main Street communities they assist. Communities within the study identified capacity needs prior to the RARE partnership within their initial application for a RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement. All communities identified human and financial capacity needs – having person(s) available to devote time and energy to Main Street revitalization efforts and sustainable funding for the initiative. Other capacity needs included social (need for effective leadership and having a point person to be the “face” of the local Main Street program) and organizational capacity. For several communities, capacity challenges stemmed from previous initiatives that had attempted to revitalize the downtown commercial centers and for varying reasons had fallen flat. Further support and financial investment from the community, local government, and businesses were reserved until the local Main Street program could demonstrate sustained and committed progress. Each community selected for the study had reached a pivotal crossroads with their local Main Street

program and needed help propelling the program in the right direction. According to interview and survey respondents, RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement not only provides an affordable alternative to a full-time staff person, but also (generally speaking) provides “high-quality” individuals who are “well-educated” and bring a “youthful excitement” to the local community. Besides the state Main Street program and RARE, survey and interview respondents were unaware of any other non-profit organization that provided technical assistance for communities implementing the Main Street Approach®. And, there are only a few private consultants available to provide expert advice on the Approach® and strategic planning within the state. The majority of interview respondents agree the local program would not be where it is today (or would have made the progress they have) without RARE’s assistance. The RARE-Main Street partnership is unique and has a definite positive impact on the communities they assist.

The “Conclusions” section is organized into the following sub-sections: impacts and strengths, limitations, and “measuring up”. The “Impacts & Strengths” and “Limitations” sub-sections below present themes which emerged organically during the study. The final sub-section, “Measuring Up” summarizes the performance of the RARE-Main Street partnership based on pre-determined goals and measurements of RARE, AmeriCorps, and the Main Street Approach®.

Impacts & Strengths

The following impacts and strengths of the RARE-Main Street partnership *for the local communities* were revealed during the study. All factors are considered to contribute to the capacity building potential of the RARE-Main Street partnership.

- ***Bring awareness to the local Main Street program or downtown revitalization efforts.***

According to survey and interview respondents, the most significant impact of the RARE-Main Street partnership is the awareness it brings to the local initiative. The foundation to any successful Main Street program is collective action on the part of community and business members, property owners, and city officials. However, many local community and business members, as well as the local governments are hesitant to invest their time, energy and money into an initiative before seeing the commitment of the local Main Street board.

Increased awareness directly stemming from the partnership can be attributed to (1) having a point person to spearhead the initiative or a “face” to the local program, (2) the ability to facilitate more events and festivities, (3) promotion of the local program through various media outlets, and (4) implementing tangible or visible projects. These efforts demonstrated the progress and commitment of the local Main Street program, got community members excited about the initiative, and in many cases led to increased financial investment by the local government.

- ***Increase the number of actively engaged partners and volunteers.***

The Main Street Approach® is a community-led revitalization effort. Without sustained, engaged volunteer activity it is nearly impossible for the Approach® to gain traction within a community. The vast majority of interview and survey respondents stated they had witnessed a slight or significant increase in participation with the local Main Street program as a direct result of the RARE-Main Street partnership. Additionally, all survey respondents acknowledged that collaboration between city officials and the community or business members had either “somewhat increased” or “increased”. A few interview respondents suggested that having a

neutral, or external, party participate with the local initiative may have actually helped to increase communication and collaboration.

- ***Provide an external or “fresh” perspective to addressing local issues or challenges.***

The role of the Community Service Center (CSC), the parent organization for RARE, is to link the skills, expertise, and innovation of higher education with the economic development and environmental needs of communities and regions throughout Oregon. Most of the communities selected for this study reported that they do not regularly form partnerships with external organizations or neighboring community to address local issues. All communities that participated in the study reported that the ability to bring in “new” or “fresh” ideas was a significant strength of the RARE-Main Street partnership.

RARE provides an opportunity for Main Street communities to expand their networks and increase their bridging capital. RARE-AmeriCorps participants bring with them the lessons learned from their academic careers and Main Street trainings, as well as the larger RARE network of other participants and planning officials from around the state. For the most part, these are learning and networking opportunities previously untapped by the local community due to constraints of time and funding.

- ***Get things done.***

A cornerstone for the AmeriCorps program nationwide is to help communities “get things done”. The communities selected for the study had local Main Street boards comprised primarily of engaged volunteer citizens who also have full-time careers. Without a full-time staff person, the possibilities of what a volunteer board can accomplish within a given timeframe is limited. The RARE-AmeriCorps participant provides a point person to assist with both administrative and tangible projects and initiatives. In an open-ended survey question, six out of eight respondents directly attributed the success of a project initiated, continued, or completed under the RARE partnership to simply having a staff person who could devote time and energy to the effort.

- ***Build or sustain momentum for the local Main Street program.***

This last point can be attributed to the previous impacts and strengths listed above, yet is important to call out. Most survey and interview respondents acknowledged their local Main Street program would not have progressed as far as it has within the last several years without the assistance of a RARE-AmeriCorps participant(s). Prior to the RARE-Main Street partnership, these communities were at a crossroads and seeking to expand their presence and impact within their local communities; however, they were lacking the human and financial capacity to make it happen. By providing those capacities, as well as increasing community engagement and collaboration, the RARE-Main Street partnership helped to build the momentum and thus helped to steer the local Main Street program towards success.

This momentum building can also be referred to as “spiraling-up” and is the foundation for rural capacity building.ⁱ The concept of “spiraling-up” acknowledges community resources, or capacities, are linked to one another. In order for one resource to thrive it must be a building process where resources are supporting one another. By providing a boost to one capacity, it creates a ripple or domino effect to increase other capacities. For example, having a point person to spearhead the local Main Street initiative (human and social capacity) can lead to increased

awareness for local revitalization efforts, which can lead to increased participation (social and human capacity), which can then lead to increased fundraising opportunities (financial capacity), which can then lead to the local initiative having the potential to have a greater impact on the downtown.

At the end of each survey or interview, study participants were asked if they had any additional thoughts or comments regarding the RARE partnership in Oregon communities they would like to share. Nearly all respondents stated their support and recommendation for the partnership which it, in itself, a testament to its overall effectiveness and impact. Other than positive reflections, the only other shared comments reflected how the partnership could be improved moving forward.

The call-out below highlights a RARE-Main Street partnership success story revealed during the study.

RARE-MAIN STREET PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS STORY

Astoria, Oregon

Astoria's RARE-Main Street partnership is considered a success by the State Main Street Coordinator, local Main Street alliance, and RARE staff. The local Main Street program was initiated in the 1980s, but saw an ebb and flow of activism, community and business interest, government support. When Astoria first partnered with RARE in 2010, the local Main Street program was at a pivotal crossroads with new, energized local leadership and needed help "proving their worth" to the local community in order to increase local participation and obtain a sustainable funding source for a full-time Main Street Executive Director.

Primary objective for the RARE-Main Street partnership:

Demonstrate what could be accomplished with a full-time Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA) paid staff person.

✓ **Achieved**

In 2013, following the RARE partnership, Astoria hired a full-time paid staff person to provide leadership and oversight for ADHDA. In fact, the new Main Street Executive Director is a former RARE-AmeriCorps participant who served with La Grande's Main Street program. Additionally, the partnership helped address some of the top issues, barriers or challenges met trying to implement the Main Street Approach®, including:

- Unavailability of business owners.
- General disinterest of the business community.
- No strategic organization.
- No point person to spearhead the initiative.
- Lack of cohesion, communication, and knowledge sharing between interested parties.

Following the RARE-Main Street partnership community members (who participated in this study) now agree **(1) there has been a revived sense of pride in the community, (2) the majority of business owners**

and community members support revitalization efforts downtown, and (3) internal partnerships to address local issues and challenges were formed.

According to study participants, the top factors that contributed to partnership success in Astoria included:

- ***Committed local leadership and mentorship of the RARE-AmeriCorps participants.***
The ADHDA was not only committed to the Main Street Approach® but also prepared to invest their time and energy into the RARE-AmeriCorps participant from day one. The ADHDA President mentored the participants and introduced them to community early on. In another RARE-Main Street partnership selected for the study, not having this daily contact or a mentor within the community was a significant detriment to the partnership’s success. ADHDA also had strong community collaborative partnerships in place – such as, the Astoria Sunday Market – prior to the partnership to lay the foundation for community support.
- ***Purpose-driven events.***
One of Astoria’s RARE-AmeriCorps participants and the local alliance worked in unison to develop and organize a local fundraising event, the Pacific Northwest Brew Cup, that addressed capacity issues (general local interest and funding) head on. The event also used and highlighted local community assets – brewers! According to another RARE-AmeriCorps participant, initiating events or festivals that do not have a clear focus or attachment to capacity needs can leave business owners feeling overburdened and generally do not achieve anticipated success.
- ***The “right fit”.***
Although this study did not intend to measure the performance of individual RARE-AmeriCorps participants, it was clear from conversations with ADHDA members and a local business owner that finding an appropriate match during participant placement is key. Main Street partnerships require an outgoing participant eager and willing to engage with the community and business owners. Additionally, having a participant multiple years helped to build trust and connections within the community.

The following list contains compiled partnership success factors gathered during the study.

Factors that Contribute to RARE-Main Street Partnership Success

- RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement provides a “good fit” for expectations and the local community.
- RARE-AmeriCorps participant who can engage with the community and business members, as well as embrace the local culture.
- Business and property owner collaboration and support.
- Actively engaged volunteers.
- Support of city government and local leaders.
- Events and activities with a *specific* objective or purpose that tie directly to the Main Street Approach® or local revitalization efforts.

- Mentorship and leadership of the local board for RARE-AmeriCorps participant and the local Main Street program at large.
- Training and knowledge of the Main Street Approach®, including success stories or precedents.

Limitations

Providing capacity vs. building capacity

The foundation of RARE and AmeriCorps programs, as well as the National Main Street Approach® is helping communities build capacity so that they can be more self-reliant to adapt to social and economic fluctuations and improve their quality of life. As mentioned above, RARE *provides* a “critical” capacity gap by placing a well-educated, enthusiastic young professional within rural communities. However, RARE’s ability to *build* capacity within Main Street communities is hindered by partnership limitations and the lasting long-term impact and sustainability of the local Main Street programs once the RARE-AmeriCorps participant has left is much more uncertain. Below are partnership limitations revealed during the study.

- ***Disparity between capacity needs and tasks identified for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.*** Information regarding the capacity needs of RARE-Main Street communities selected for the study and the tasks identified for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant were gathered from initial community applications for a participant placement and interviews with study respondents. Both sources revealed a notable disparity between the capacity need which initiated the partnership and the tasks, or responsibilities, of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant. All communities had human and financial capacity needs. However, for the most part, tasks and responsibilities were aligned to the implementation of the Main Street Approach®. For example, a participant might be responsible for developing and implementing a fundraising event, rather than helping the board identify how to develop and host an event or facilitate a training on running an effective event. The difference here is between *doing* and *showing or collaborating* so that the board can be more self-reliant to implement an event in the future without external assistance.

Due to the comprehensive nature of the Approach® and the timeframe of the RARE-AmeriCorps placement, some participants found it difficult to balance “getting things done” with identifying solutions to build a more sustainable Main Street program moving forward. Several participants acknowledged either their role within the community was not helping to build local capacity or that they unearthed a capacity need unrecognized by the local program through their experience.

This disparity between identified capacity needs and tasks for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant placed high and often unachievable expectations on the individual. Since communities have recognized that one of the most significant assets to having a RARE-AmeriCorps participant is having an external or “fresh” perspective there is a missed opportunity to focus more on strategic planning steps to address the underlying capacity issues. While the RARE-Main Street partnership has proved to be beneficial for communities, a sustained and successful Main Street community must develop internal capacity rather than rely on a single individual or entity.

- ***Balancing expectations.*** Expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant were often confused or misguided between them and the local Main Street board or alliance. The first

point of balancing expectations stems from the first limitation discussed above. RARE-AmeriCorps participants are taught in Main Street workshops and trainings that the role of a Main Street Manager is to *facilitate* effective change, rather than complete tasks independently or to be a “work horse”. The second point is community expectations must be correctly aligned with not only prioritized capacity issues, but also the available skillset of the participant and what can be reasonably accomplished within the partnership timeframe. There is a potential to improve communication and expectations to allow for better transparency and thus more productive working relationships.

- ***Length of service.***

The comprehensive Main Street Approach® puts in place a long-term investment strategy for community revitalization, but has a steep learning curve. While in service, RARE-AmeriCorps participants find themselves at the intersection where multiple program objectives and the community’s capacity needs intersect. If a RARE-AmeriCorps participant is expected to build local capacity *and* spearhead the local Main Street initiative, the current 11 month length of service is not enough allowable time to make a lasting impact. A number of survey and interview respondents agreed that a minimum of two years was required for the participant to make a long-term impact on the community under the current expectations.

- ***Continuity and knowledge sharing.***

The most common phrase shared when survey and interview respondents were asked to comments on the limitations of the partnership was “continuity”. Due to the role of and expectations placed on the RARE-AmeriCorps participant, he or she becomes a hub for information regarding the Main Street Approach®, how the community functions, what efforts have been most effective, and prioritizing projects and initiatives for the future. The loss of continuity and learned knowledge was a significant or “high” concern for several communities.

According to interview respondents, having no proper “hand-off” in place not only threatens the momentum of the local Main Street program, but also increases the likelihood that mistakes or efforts that lead to dead ends may be repeated in the future. One supervisor acknowledged the RARE-Main Street partnership was serving a definitive purpose for rural Oregon communities, but has learned that having multiple RARE-AmeriCorps participants come in year after year to spearhead the local initiative is “not a sustainable approach to running the organization”.

These findings on continuity concern highlight the need for steady continued action for the Approach® to be successful and a dependency some of these communities have formed with RARE. There is significant room for improvement as to how the participant transfers this knowledge to the local community and board during the partnership, as well as putting in place some guidance as how the community should prepare leading up to the departure of the participant.

- ***Initial capacity issues remain after the partnership.***

The study reveals that, although RARE helps local Main Street programs build momentum and progress forward, many of the capacity issues that initiated the RARE-Main Street partnership remain in the community after the partnership has ended. The most significant capacity need that remains is sustainable funding. Survey respondents acknowledged this was the least

effective performance measure of the partnership out of provided answers. Other issues, barriers, or challenges coming out of the partnership that are reminiscent of initial capacity needs include business involvement, general interest, and local knowledge regarding Main Street initiatives. It has been said that the Main Street Approach® is not a quick fix solution for community revitalization. However, the continued capacity needs prior to and after the partnership may demonstrate an imbalance between getting things done and capacity building while the RARE-AmeriCorps participant is within the community.

- ***It is what you make of it.***

The Main Street Approach® is intended to be a *community*-led initiative that relies on collaboration and engagement with community members and partners for success. It is also intended to be a *sustained* effort that is continually evolving with the needs of the community. Community revitalization is not a problem to be “solved”. It needs nourishment and local support. Even with the brightest or most enthusiastic RARE-AmeriCorps participant, partnership success is not guaranteed. Much of the partnership success, or lack thereof, is heavily dependent upon the state of the local Main Street program prior to the RARE partnership and presence of dedicated local leadership.

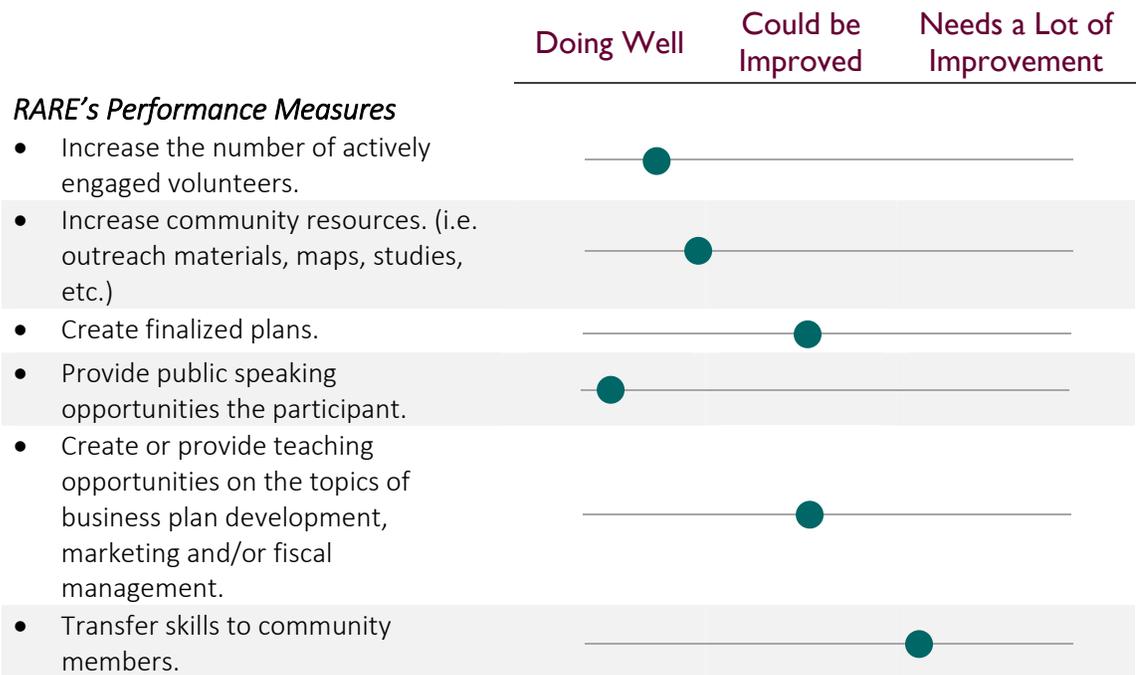
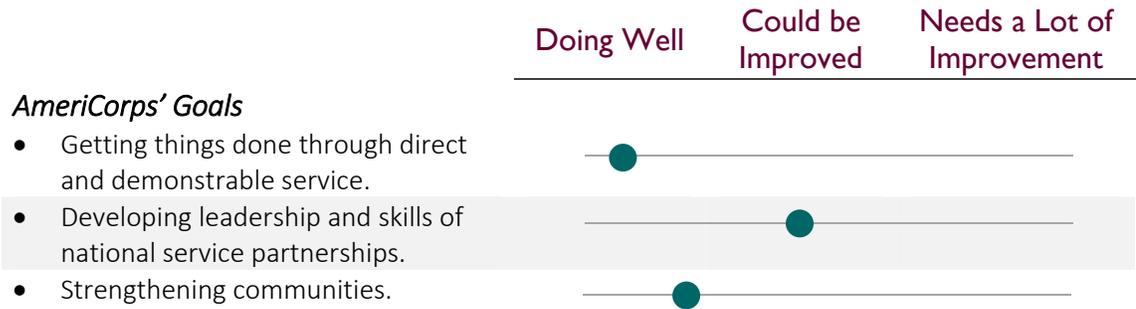
When gathering feedback and insights regarding the RARE-Main Street partnership, the broader topics of historic preservation, building restoration, and protecting the cultural identity were notably lacking. It left the researcher wondering, “Is preservation on the backburner? And if so, what impact is that having?” Only one RARE-AmeriCorps participant interviewed for the study had some exposure to historic preservation prior to their RARE experience. Economic development and business retention were undoubtedly the driving forces behind implementing the Main Street Approach® in the communities selected for the study. It seems when Main Street communities are studied under a microscope, these economic objectives are the most apparent. And, this focus is consistent with many of the program evaluation precedents for Main Street examining the economic impact of the program. However, when the study zooms out and the Main Street community is observed at large the importance of historic downtown commercial centers becomes centered on preserving a quality of life and sense of place, as well as nourishing small local businesses. In short, economic development is only a piece of the puzzle. It is unclear if the lack of preservation discussion with study respondents indicates a limitation with the partnership or not, but it certainly gives pause when evaluating the long-term impact of an initiative using a preservation-based approach to community revitalization.

Measuring Up: pre-determined performance measures and the RARE-Main Street partnership’s performance

The shared mission between RARE, AmeriCorps, and the Main Street Approach® is to help rural communities build capacity. However, operating within the current framework of all three programs the RARE-Main Street partnership must balance numerous objectives. For example, AmeriCorps is primarily focused on completing service projects and their well-known mantra of “getting things done”. While small “progress” projects are important to advancing local Main Street programs and bringing awareness to the local initiative, other objectives have an equal or arguably greater role in long-term success. For example fostering collaborative partnerships, facilitating education and training opportunities, and acquiring sustainable funding. The information presented below is intended to identify how the partnership is “measuring up” towards achieving pre-determined goals and performance measures and

areas in need of improvement. The following section, “Considerations”, will discuss how improvements can be made for the RARE-Main Street partnership in the future.

The AmeriCorps’ goals and RARE’s performance measures below were established by the Corporation for National and Community Service (parent affiliate of AmeriCorps).



The study revealed the Main Street Approach® is not a quick-fix solution, but rather a long-term investment. Research revealed the *likelihood* of Main Street program success are increased if the below factors, or indicators, are in place. These could be considered the foundation for a developing Main Street program. The matrix below identifies factors currently supported by the RARE-Main Street partnership.

<i>Factors which lead to a higher likelihood of local Main Street program success.</i>	Currently Being Supported by one or more of the RARE-Main Street Partnerships
• Broad based community support for the commercial district revitalization.	●
• General interest, involvement and investment from local businesses.	●
• Strong support from the local government.	●
• Collaborative partnerships.	●
• Active board of directors and dedicated committee members.	●
• Engaged and active volunteers.	●
• Main Street training and educational opportunities provided on a routine basis for staff, volunteers, and the local community.	●
• Full-time program manager employed.	●
• Commitment to appropriate, quality design and historic preservation ethic.	●
• Quality promotional initiatives that can bring awareness and recognition to the local program, as well as highlight the unique sense of place.	●
• Identification of assets and available resources for the local program.	●
• Mission and vision developed <i>relevant</i> to community conditions and the local Main Street program’s organizational stage.	●
• Sustainable funding and adequate operating budget.	●

Progress or success for each indicator, however, is highly contingent upon the local community and Main Street program, as well as the RARE-AmeriCorps participant. It is apparent that RARE has the potential to assist rural Main Street community in a variety of different areas. However, study research suggests RARE should focus their attention and energy towards indicators that are either not sustained or are the weakest link, rather than cast a wide net and attempt to provide assistance through numerous Main Street program indicators. Based on research and findings revealed during the study, a more focused partnership approach presents the greatest opportunity for RARE to have a long-term, positive impact on Main Street communities.

Other final comments and considerations for the partnership could be improved in the future are seen in the section below.

Considerations

The study was intended to highlight the strengths, limitations, and areas in need of improvement with the RARE-Main Street partnership. The researcher considers this to be step one in the process of ensuring the partnership has a positive, long-term impact on rural Main Street communities in Oregon and hopes findings from the study will help spur dialogue between RARE, AmeriCorps, Oregon Main Street communities and the state Main Street Coordinator. Considerations and recommendations for the partnership moving forward are seen below. RARE, in collaboration with partnership participants, will need to decide how improvements can be implemented within the programmatic framework.

Capacity Needs Identification & RARE-AmeriCorps Participant Placement

As mentioned in the limitations section above, there is currently a disparity between capacity needs and the tasks and responsibilities assigned to RARE-AmeriCorps participants placed within Main Street communities. Because of this disconnect, the RARE-Main Street partnership is currently more effective *providing* capacity needs rather than *building* capacity within the community. The study revealed a potential for capacity building improvement by creating mechanisms and procedures to better identify capacity and participant responsibilities *prior* to the placement of that participant.

One community included within this study found it helpful to consult Sheri Stuart, state Main Street Coordinator, prior to the placement to assess where the participant's assistance would be most beneficial in propelling their local Main Street program. Another community found it helpful to conduct an internal survey of capacity needs within their Main Street program prior to placement. Other existing sources of information to better identify capacity needs include past reviews of the local Main Street program conducted by the state Main Street Coordinator, as well as quarterly or exit reports completed by former RARE-AmeriCorps participants.

There is a real potential for RARE, as an organization, to become more involved in the pre-planning of participant placement by providing upfront consultation to help the community identify capacity needs and better prepare for having a RARE-AmeriCorps participant within their community.

Recommendation

Ensure conditions influence strategy. Work in collaboration with the state Main Street Coordinator and other partners to develop a procedure, or process, for helping communities better identify capacity needs *prior* to the RARE-Main Street partnership. For example, conduct a focus group meeting or survey with the local Main Street program partners (local board or alliance, city officials, business owners, and other community members) to reveal the weakest link in Main Street program success factors, or indicators, listed on page 89.

Findings from this process could (1) provide a valuable capacity building tool to maximize productivity while the RARE-Main Street participant is in service, (2) better develop expectations for the partnership, (3) determine expected length of the partnership (for example, if the capacity need was to develop a stronger working relationships between business owners and the downtown alliance or be the "face" of the local program), (4) develop or present community-defined success indicators, and (4) provide more effective participant placement screening criteria.

If a community is interested in partnering with RARE for assistance implementing the Main Street Approach®, it is strongly encouraged that the sole focus of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant’s focus is tied to downtown revitalization efforts, rather than tasks and responsibilities unrelated to the Approach®. This is due to the comprehensive nature of the Approach®, timeframe of the RARE-AmeriCorps service tenure, and the need for the Main Street participant to build trust and partner relationships within the local community in order to be a part of effective change.

Recommendation

RARE-AmeriCorps participants assisting a Main Street program should not have competing priorities (i.e. other social, economic, or environmental initiatives) unrelated to the downtown commercial revitalization during his or her service tenure.

Recommendation

Develop RARE-AmeriCorps participant and community applications specifically for individual partnerships, including the RARE-Main Street partnership.

Expectations & Communication

Once capacity needs are better identified, expectations for the RARE-Main Street partnership can be better solidified and understood by all partnership participants. The RARE-AmeriCorps supervisor should help enforce and share these expectations with the local Main Street board and community members. Transparency of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant’s professional skillsets and the learning objectives will also help create realistic and achievable expectations. Additionally, RARE can now share the strengths and limitations of the RARE-Main Street partnership with communities, as well as how communities can better prepare themselves for participant placement in the future based on the findings from this study.

Recommendation

Host a supervisor or Main Street board training workshop facilitated by RARE staff prior to the partnership to coach individuals on what to expect from the partnership and how they increase the likelihood of success.

Recommendation

Develop a universal position title that closely aligns with the role of the RARE-Main Street participant - such as “Main Street Coordinator” - to identify the individual as an interim facilitator. Participant position titles with “director” or “manager” are not advised.

Recommendation

Should a Main Street program acknowledge the need for a RARE-AmeriCorps participant to be the “face” or to substantially grow the entire program, inform and better prepare that community for having a participant(s) for a minimum of two years.

Education & Training

The RARE-Main Street partnership is an intense learning experience for both the RARE-AmeriCorps participant and the community in which they serve. The study revealed education and training is the backbone to decreasing the steep learning curve and increasing effective change. Former RARE-

AmeriCorps participants felt additional training on the Main Street Approach® early on would be helpful. Additionally, RARE is encouraged to work with communities to identify how and what funding sources are available to send participants to state and national Main Street conferences during their service tenure. Other training that would be beneficial includes opportunities to gain knowledge and skills specific to the Main Street Approach® - such as working with, communicating, and building relationships with diverse partners.

Recommendation

Help communities identify ways (i.e. transportation, scheduling and funding) in which the RARE-AmeriCorps participant can attend as many Main Street trainings and educational opportunities as possible.

Recommendation

Facilitate skills training(s) specific to on-the-job experiences in addition to orientation and retreats; such as, alternative approaches to attracting and retaining volunteers, working with diverse communities, and forming collaborative partnerships.

Since the RARE-Main Street partnership requires an intimate working relationship between the RARE-AmeriCorps participant and community and business members, participants who are introduced to the community through a local leader early on have a greater chance at success. Participants found it particularly helpful to have daily contact with a local mentor-type figure in addition to their supervisor.

Recommendation

Encourage the local community to facilitate a “meet and greet” opportunity for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant at the beginning of his or her service. Examples of this discovered during the study include a write-up in the local paper or visitation and introduction to local shop owners in the downtown district with the local board or alliance President.

Recommendation

Ensure the community has a point person available on a daily basis to provide guidance for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant. The researcher found most participants included in this study were dedicated self-starters who did not need to be micro-managed; however, having a local mentor readily available and engaged with the local Main Street program proved to be beneficial.

Continuity & Knowledge Sharing

In several of the Main Street communities selected for the study, the RARE-AmeriCorps participant becomes *the* point person for the local initiative. Having the “point person” as an interim player is bound to pose continuity issues.

Recommendation

RARE is encouraged to work with partner participants to develop tools, processes, or mechanisms to foster better idea sharing and knowledge transfer before, during, and at the end of each partnership. This includes the following:

- Sharing what has worked and what has not within the community up until that point with incoming participants.
- Being transparent about identified capacity needs.
- Facilitating ideas sharing and engagement opportunities between local partners.
- Transferring lessons learned from the participant to the local community.
- Allowing for participant to participant “hand-off” or overlap of service tenures to allow for placement training.
- Facilitating engagement opportunities at the end of the partnership service contract to better prepare the community moving forward by discussing what worked, what were limitations, and where the community or local initiative should go from there.

Recommendation

Continue regular program evaluations, such as this study, to assess the effectiveness and impact of the RARE-Main Street partnership, as well as areas in need of improvement.

Bridging Capital

One of the many assets, or benefits, of the RARE partnership is to link rural communities to external networks. These include the state and national Main Street programs, RARE network of local planning professionals and alumni, and other Main Street success stories and precedents discovered by the participant. Many of these networks were previously untapped by the communities prior to the partnership. The researcher sees the potential to expand these networking opportunities even further by examining other potential partners. For example, tapping into the knowledge source and experience of (1) historic preservation students within RARE’s university network to assist with Main Street Approach® initiatives such as façade improvement projects, historic building surveys, and more, or (2) facilitating outreach to community development corporation networks specializing in business incubation strategies.

Recommendation

Conduct a comprehensive inventory of previously untapped resources and networks available to RARE that may assist Main Street community partners.

Additional Considerations

This study highlights capacity needs of rural Main Street communities in Oregon, as well as the strengths and limitations of the RARE-Main Street partnership. Considerations to improve the partnership listed above are not exhaustive. The researcher fully expects additional, or alternative, partnership improvements or hidden potential for partnership success could be uncovered by RARE with the information revealed throughout this study.

Are there additional hidden potentials for partnership success by comparing known capacity needs with the assets, or benefits, RARE provides?

In Closing

The Collaborative Partnership study was both enlightening and encouraging. It showed RARE fills a critical gap in helping rural communities implement the Main Street Approach®. According to study respondents, the local Main Street programs in communities selected for the study would be nowhere near where they are today without the partnership. It is clearly beneficial for rural Oregon communities and should be continued; however, there is great potential for RARE to increase the partnership's capacity building efficiency and effectiveness.

The most encouraging finding throughout this study is not only that the potential is there, but the actual framework to realize this potential is already in place – it simply has to be fine-tuned. RARE's assets – a fresh perspective, youthful excitement, dedication and momentum – are exactly what these Main Street programs need to thrive. The key is learning how to transfer that knowledge and energy into the community. It is balancing “getting things done” (the mantra for AmeriCorps) with building capacity (the mission of all three programs). It is important for developing Main Street programs to show progress, demonstrate what is possible with a local stewardship board or alliance, and to increase awareness for local initiatives. However, if a Main Street program is to be sustainable following the RARE partnership, they must break free of external assistance dependency and build internal capacity to address local issues. In order for RARE to achieve greater success moving forward, the organization must shift its mindset from providing purely technical assistance towards mentoring these communities and helping them navigate through the Main Street Approach®. The role of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant within a Main Street community should be to *orchestrate*, *facilitate*, and *organize* resources and opportunities for program advancement.

In order for the RARE-Main Street partnership to have a long-term positive impact on rural communities, the researcher recommends applying the fore mentioned considerations and focusing on the following four core areas of capacity building when a RARE-AmeriCorps is placed within a Main Street community:

- **Strategic planning**
RARE staff can help Main Street communities better identify capacity needs and how to address those based on 20+ years of providing technical assistance to rural areas. More involvement from RARE staff could prepare communities for the partnership and how to transition out of the partnership, as well as ensuring the community is ready to support the RARE-AmeriCorps participant.
- **Bonding capital**
Facilitate opportunities for ideas sharing and context specific strategy development based on local expertise and collective knowledge. Form both internal and external collaborative partnerships, as well as working relationships with business owners and local government. Form close working relationships with the community so that local learned experiences, identify of place, and social values can remain at the forefront of the local Main Street initiative.
- **Bridging capital**
Help attract a larger volunteer base and diversifying community support. Tap into potential RARE networks and networks of local community members relevant for

local downtown revitalization efforts. Raise awareness of local endeavors both locally and regionally.

- **Education and training.**
Bring in outside success stories for downtown revitalization and Main Street precedents. Ensure all RARE-AmeriCorps participants can attend as many Main Street trainings as possible. Develop and implement strategies for more effective continuity and knowledge sharing among partnership participants.
- **Increasing awareness and recognition.**
One of the most significant assets a RARE-AmeriCorps participant can provide a local Main Street program is increasing awareness for Main Street initiatives and gaining recognition for the local board or alliance. This requires the participant to get their hands dirty and engaged with the local community. Through demonstrable and tangible improvements projects and collaboration the local Main Street program can show progress to the local community and gain further support for larger initiatives.

The researcher is optimistic the RARE-Main Street partnership will only continue to grow in a positive direction if lessons learned are incorporated into administrative decisions moving forward.

For Further Study

The following topics were uncovered by the researcher throughout the course of the study, but were outside of the scope of work.

Main Street Approach®

- How can the Main Street Approach® be used to create a diverse, multi-cultural downtown commercial center that preserves former cultural identities while allowing for new cultural identities to blend in with the social fabric?
- Can community defined indicators help the local Main Street program achieve program goals more efficiently and effectively?

RARE

- Is the RARE-Main Street partnership a model for other non-profits or government agencies attempting to provide technical assistance to communities implementing the Main Street Approach®?
- What is the success rate for newly initiated projects as compared to legacy project continued over multiple years through the RARE partnership?
- Does the RARE partnership make it more likely for communities they have partnered with to seek external assistance in the future?
- What are untapped resources within the RARE network which could benefit community partnerships? (For example, academic departments of historic preservation and economics.)

Chapter 8 Notes:

¹ Flora, Cornelia Butler, and Jan L. Flora. Rural Communities: Legacy + Change. 4th. Boulder: Westview Press, 2013.

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Additional Resources for RARE

The following resources were uncovered by the researcher throughout the course of the study, but were not referenced within this report. These resources may be helpful for RARE implementing Main Street partnerships and intended to supplement the above works cited.

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* Burayidi's book, *Resilient Downtowns*, was referenced within the report; however, this source was discovered near the terminus of the study and could be further researched.

Unpublished Works

- Oregon State University. Oregon Explorer. date unk. <http://oregonexplorer.info/>.
- Progress and site visit observation reports conducted by Oregon State Main Street Coordinator, Sheri Stuart. Contact Stuart for additional information.
- Neighborhood Economic Development Corporation (NEDCO) is interested in forming a regional Main Street alliance. As of the end of this study the concept was still in a brainstorming phase.
- National Main Street Center, 2014 Main Street Trends Survey (on-going during this study).

Appendix A: Site Selection

The cities of **Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande, and Milton-Freewater** were selected as a representative sample, or case study, of RARE-Main Street communities for purposes of this study. Selection of these communities was contingent upon the following three criteria:

1. Communities with a completed tenure or service contract with a RARE-AmeriCorps participant.

This study looked at Main Street communities in Oregon that had formed one or more partnerships with RARE between 2010 and 2013.* (2010 was the first year RARE began assisting Main Street programs or alliances.) Due to the contractual cycle of RARE partnerships straddling two calendar years, the current RARE-Main Street partnerships beginning in the fall of 2013 and terminating in the summer of 2014 were eliminated as possible study sites for the purposes of this project.

2. Rural-Metro status.

The RARE-AmeriCorps program focuses on communities and regions within Oregon that are experiencing economic distress as classified by Business Oregon, the state’s economic development department.ⁱ Since an academic objective of this study was to better understand the capacity building needs and interventions within rural communities, the researcher chose to look communities outside of a metropolitan area that would likely have limited access to resources and forms of assistance.

The researcher assessed each RARE-Main Street community’s Urban Influence Code, as defined by the US Department of Agriculture.ⁱⁱ The Urban Influence Code distinguishes metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties by degree of urbanization and adjacency to a metro area.ⁱⁱⁱ Any community that ranked as a 1 or 2, as defined within the chart found on the subsequent page, was eliminated from the study.

RARE-Main Street Partnerships from 2010 to present

Year 17 (2010-2011)	
	Astoria
	La Grande
	Toledo
Year 18 (2011-2012)	
	Astoria
	La Grande
	Toledo
	Canby
Year 19 (2012-2013)	
	Astoria
	La Grande
	Coos Bay
	Milton-Freewater
Year 20 (2013-2014)	
	La Grande
	Coos Bay
	The Dallas
	Sandy

* The numbers following “Year” correspond to RARE’s service contract cycles. RARE is now in its 20th year, or Year 20. Service contract cycles, or partnerships, begin in September and terminate in July.

Urban Influence Code for RARE-Main Street Communities (2010-2013)

1	Large-in a metro area with at least 1 million residents or more	Canby
2	Small-in a metro area with fewer than 1 million residents	
3	Micropolitan area adjacent to a large metro area	Astoria
4	Noncore adjacent to a large metro area	
5	Micropolitan area adjacent to a small metro area	
6	Noncore adjacent to a small metro area with town of at least 2,500 residents	
7	Noncore adjacent to a small metro area and does not contain a town of at least 2,500 residents	
8	Micropolitan area not adjacent to a metro area	La Grande Coos Bay Toledo Milton-Freewater
9	Noncore adjacent to micro area and contains a town of at least 2,500 residents	
10	Noncore adjacent to micro area and does not contain a town of at least 2,500 residents	
11	Noncore not adjacent to a metro/micro area and contains a town of 2,500 or more residents	
12	Noncore not adjacent to a metro/micro area and does not contain a town of at least 2,500 residents	

Source: <http://oe.oregonexplorer.info/rural/CommunitiesReporter/>

Canby was eliminated for purposes of the study due to its Urban Influence Code of 1.

3. Analysis of community’s RARE application for alignment to the National Main Street Approach® four-point strategy.

The Main Street Approach® is a proven, comprehensive strategy that includes four focus areas being employed simultaneously – organization, design, promotion, and economic restructuring.^{iv} The researcher reviewed descriptions of “major activities and tasks to be performed by the RARE participant” on each RARE-AmeriCorps application for years 17 through 20 (2010-2013) to assess alignment with the four-point strategy.^v This allowed the researcher to gain an initial understanding of a community’s awareness and commitment to the Main Street Approach® without having further context at hand. (Note: A community wishing to receive technical assistance in only a few of the four approaches does not necessarily imply that all four are not being carried out by the community.)

This study included not only a program evaluation of RARE-Main Street partnerships, but also an academic study of external assistance being employed to help communities implement the Main Street Approach®. Therefore, only communities known to being actively employing all four focus areas were considered for the study. Communities only requesting the RARE-AmeriCorps participant complete tasks and responsibilities to two or fewer focus areas of the Main-Street Approach® were eliminated from the study. This criteria allowed the researcher to analyze the

effectiveness and impact of the partnership when the comprehensive, four-point approach is the sole focus of the participant.

RARE-AmeriCorps Participant's Position Alignment with Main Street Four-Point Approach®

Jurisdiction	Main Street Four Point Approach			
	Organization	Promotion	Design	Economic Restructuring
Year 17 (2010-2011)				
Astoria	X	X		X
La Grande	X	X	X	X
Toledo		X		X
Year 18 (2011-2012)				
Astoria	X	X	X	X
La Grande	X	X	X	X
Toledo		X		X
Canby				X
Year 19 (2012-2013)				
Astoria	<i>No application on file.</i>			
La Grande	X	X	X	X
Coos Bay	X	X	X	X
Milton-Freewater	X	X		X

Alignment with the Main Street Four Point Approach was as the discretion of the researcher using:
 (1) tasks listed on initial community application for RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement
 (2) information gathered on the National Main Street Center's website,
<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-approach/>.

Appendix A Notes:

- ⁱ Smith, Megan E. "Application for Federal Assistance, Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE)." for the Corporation for National and Community Service, February 5, 2013.
- ⁱⁱ Crandall, Mandy. *The Impacts of Classification*. 2008. <http://oregonexplorer.info/rural/ImpactClassifications> (accessed Fall 2013).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ^{iv} National Main Street Center. *What is Main Street*. 2014. <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street> (accessed January 2014).
- ^v Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE). "Community Full Narrative." Application for RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement and technical assistance, Eugene, Ore, 2010.

Appendix B: Socio-Economic Data

This appendix contains census data and reference sources for socio-economic information used within Chapter 4 - Community Profiles. Information pertains to each community selected for the study – Astoria, Coos Bay, La Grande, and Milton-Freewater – and the greater State of Oregon for comparison. The following list is a summary of information contained within this appendix:

1. Population Characteristics
2. Age Characteristics
3. Ethnicity, Race, and Hispanic Identities
4. Occupation, Industry, and Class of Workers
5. Commute Time
6. Unemployment Rate
7. Median Income
8. Poverty Rate
9. Housing Characteristics

Table I
Population Growth 2000-2010

Jurisdiction	2000 Population	2010 Population	2000-2010 Population Change	Percent Change	Average Annual Growth Rate
Oregon	3,421,399	3,831,074	409,675	12.0%	1.1%
Astoria	9,813	9,477	-336	-3.4%	-0.3%
Coos Bay	15,374	15,967	593	3.9%	0.4%
La Grande	12,327	13,082	755	6.1%	0.6%
Milton-Freewater	6,470	7,050	580	9.0%	0.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP-1 "Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000"; ^ U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP-1 "Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010," <http://factfinder2.census.gov>, accessed January 2013.

Table 2a
Median Age, 2010

2010	
Jurisdiction	Median Age
Oregon	38.4
Astoria	41.9
Coos Bay	41.6
La Grande	32.8
Milton-Freewater	31.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP-1 2010 Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics

Table 2b

Age Distribution, 2010

2010		< 18 Years		18-65		> 65 Years	
Jurisdiction	Total	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Oregon	3,831,074	866,453	22.6%	2,431,088	63.5%	533,533	13.9%
Astoria	9,477	1,925	20.3%	5,932	62.6%	1,620	17.1%
Coos Bay	15,967	3,234	20.3%	9,685	60.7%	3,048	19.1%
La Grande	13,082	2,930	22.4%	8,221	62.8%	1,931	14.8%
Milton-Freewater	7,050	2,145	30.4%	3,983	56.5%	922	13.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP-1 2010 Census Summary File 1

Table 3

Race & Hispanic Population Percentages, 2010

	White	Black or African American	American Indian /Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian /Other Pacific Islander	Some Other Race	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic or Latino
Oregon	87.1	2.6	2.9	4.9	0.7	6.1	11.7	88.3
Astoria	92.4	1.0	2.7	2.8	0.5	4.3	9.8	90.2
Coos Bay	92.0	1.2	5.6	2.4	0.8	3.5	7.6	92.4
La Grande	93.7	1.4	2.4	1.8	1.8	1.7	4.6	95.4
Milton-freewater	72.9	0.8	1.7	1.0	0.2	26.0	43.1	56.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP-1 2010 Census Summary File 1

Table 4a**City of Astoria, Industry and Occupation, 2008-2012**

Occupation	Percentage
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	26.9%
Service occupations	23.0%
Sales and office occupations	22.3%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	16.3%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	11.5%

Industry	Percentage
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	19.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	16.2%
Retail trade	14.7%
Manufacturing	10.3%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	8.1%
Construction	5.5%
Other services, except public administration	5.4%
Public administration	5.1%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	4.6%
Wholesale trade	3.4%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	3.1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	2.7%
Information	1.3%

Class of Worker	Percentage
Private wage and salary workers	71.3%
Government workers	16.0%
Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	12.6%
Unpaid family workers	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table DP03
"Selected Economic Characteristics"; <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/pct/pctProfile.pl>

Table 4b**City of Coos Bay, Industry and Occupation, 2008-2012**

Occupation	Percentage
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	30.8%
Sales and office occupations	23.8%
Service occupations	21.1%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	15.5%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	8.8%

Industry	Percentage
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	23.4%
Retail trade	15.7%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	14.2%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	7.3%
Public administration	6.6%
Manufacturing	6.6%
Construction	5.7%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4.5%
Other services, except public administration	4.5%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	3.6%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	3.3%
Wholesale trade	2.5%
Information	2.1%

Class of Worker	Percentage
Private wage and salary workers	75.8%
Government workers	17.8%
Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	6.4%
Unpaid family workers	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table DP03
"Selected Economic Characteristics"; <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/pct/pctProfile.pl>

Table 4c**City of La Grande, Industry and Occupation, 2008-2012**

Occupation	Percentage
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	33.0%
Service occupations	23.7%
Sales and office occupations	23.7%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	11.5%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	8.0%

Industry	Percentage
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	31.7%
Retail trade	13.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	8.8%
Manufacturing	7.4%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	7.3%
Public administration	6.2%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	5.1%
Other services, except public administration	4.8%
Construction	3.6%
Information	3.4%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	3.3%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	3.0%
Wholesale trade	1.8%

Class of Worker	Percentage
Private wage and salary workers	72.0%
Government workers	19.7%
Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	8.3%
Unpaid family workers	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table DP03 "Selected Economic Characteristics"; <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/pct/pctProfile.pl>

Table 4d**City of Milton-Freewater, Industry and Occupation, 2008-2012**

Occupation	Percentage
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	23.1%
Service occupations	22.2%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	20.7%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	19.4%
Sales and office occupations	14.6%

Industry	Percentage
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	17.8%
Manufacturing	15.6%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	13.9%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	11.4%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	10.7%
Retail trade	9.7%
Wholesale trade	4.7%
Public administration	4.0%
Construction	3.7%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	2.9%
Other services, except public administration	2.6%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	1.8%
Information	1.1%

Class of Worker	Percentage
Private wage and salary workers	83.0%
Government workers	13.1%
Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	3.2%
Unpaid family workers	0.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table DP03
"Selected Economic Characteristics"; <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/pct/pctProfile.pl>

Table 5
Average Travel Time to Work, 2008-2012

Jurisdiction	Average Commute
Oregon	22
Astoria	18
Coos Bay	16
La Grande	11
Milton-Freewater	16

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table DP03 "Selected Economic Characteristics", <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/pct/pctProfile.pl>

Table 6
Unemployment, 2008-2012

Jurisdiction	Percent of Population Unemployed
Oregon	10.8%
Astoria	10.6%
Coos Bay	12.6%
La Grande	8.9%
Milton-Freewater	20.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table DP03 "Selected Economic Characteristics", <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/pct/pctProfile.pl>

Table 7
Median Income, 2012

Jurisdiction	Median Household Income
Oregon	\$50,036
Astoria	\$40,603
Coos Bay	\$38,820
La Grande	\$36,424
Milton-Freewater	\$34,974

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table DP03 "Selected Economic Characteristics"; <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/pct/pctProfile.pl>

Table 8
People Below the Poverty Level, 2008-2012

Jurisdiction	All People
Oregon	15.5%
Astoria	20.5%
Coos Bay	18.6%
La Grande	23.3%
Milton-Freewater	27.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Table DP03 "Selected Economic Characteristics"; <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/pct/pctProfile.pl>

Table 9
Housing Occupancy & Seasonal Housing, 2010

	Total housing units		Occupied		Owner-occupied		Renter-occupied		Seasonal	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Oregon	1,675,562	100.0	1,518,938	90.7	944,485	62.2	574,453	37.8	55,473	3.3
Astoria	4,980	100.0	4,288	86.1	2,045	47.7	2,243	52.3	230	4.6
Coos Bay	7,542	100.0	6,950	92.2	3,819	54.9	3,131	45.1	105	1.4
La Grande	5,794	100.0	5,395	93.1	2,893	53.6	2,502	46.4	43	0.7
Milton-Freewater	2,742	100.0	2,479	90.4	1,376	55.5	1,103	44.5	9	0.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP-1 2010 Census Summary File 1

Appendix C: Survey & Interview Scripts

The following survey tools were used to gather primary data for this study:

- Interview with RARE-AmeriCorps Participant (administered via phone and in-person)
- Interview with RARE-AmeriCorps Participant Supervisor (administered via phone and in-person)
- Interviews (2) with Sheri Stuart (administered via phone)
- Online Survey for RARE-Main Street Community Members

Interview with RARE-AmeriCorps Participant

Hello.

My name is Jennifer Self. I am a graduate student at the University of Oregon conducting a research study on the partnership between Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) and Main Street communities in Oregon. The primary purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness and impact of the partnership.

Information and data for the research study will be gathered through surveys and interviews, as well as literary review. Study participants include former RARE-AmeriCorps service members, their supervisors while in service, and community members from four Main Street programs which partnered with RARE between 2010 and 2013. Findings from the study will inform recommendations for how RARE can improve their community relationships in the future.

If you agree to participate in the study, I ask that we spend approximately 30-40 minutes discussing interview questions about your participation with and insights of the RARE-Main Street partnership. Your participation is voluntary. Some of the questions in the interview are intentionally subjective. For these, I would like to know your honest opinion, or gut reaction. If you agree to participate, you are welcome to skip any question you either do not know the answer to or feel uncomfortable answering. Interview and survey questions for this study are in no way intended to measure the performance of the individual RARE-AmeriCorps participants, but rather the RARE partnership as a whole.

There are no reasonable, foreseeable or expected risks associated with this study. No identifying information will be attached to interview responses within the final report or any documentation provided to RARE. Your responses may be quoted in final reports, but will be reported anonymously.

[In-person] Please take a moment to read over the consent form and initial and sign where indicated.

[Phone] Do you agree to participate in the RARE-Main Street research study? Please say “yes” or “no”. By saying “yes”, you consent to the previous statement regarding your anonymous responses and voluntary participation.

Q1. Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the consent form, the purpose of the project, or how your answers might be used that we haven’t already discussed?

Q2. I see that you served as a RARE-Main Street volunteer within <COMMUNITY> from <DATE> to <DATE> as a <TITLE>. Is this correct?

Q3. What initially attracted you to RARE or an AmeriCorps position?

Q4. Did you have previous experience with community revitalization or historic preservation?

First let's talk a little bit about the community prior to RARE or your arrival. Then we'll talk more about your experience and perspective of the partnership in hindsight.

Q5. Prior to your involvement, what was the state, or progress, of the local Main Street program?

[As follow-up or conversation starter if needed, the following benchmarks were developed by the National Main Street Center. What would you consider to be the status of each benchmark for your local Main Street alliance or program? What would you say was the status of these benchmarks prior to your arrival?]

- *Has broad-based community support for the commercial district revitalization process, with strong support from both the public and private sectors.*
- *Has developed vision and mission statements relevant to community conditions and to the local Main Street program's organizational stage.*
- *Has a comprehensive Main Street work plan.*
- *Possesses an historic preservation ethic.*
- *Has an active board of directors and committees.*
- *Has an adequate operating budget.*
- *Has a paid professional program manager.*
- *Conducts a program of ongoing training for staff and volunteers.*
- *Reports key statistics.*
- *Is a current member of the National Trust Main Street Network.*
- *Did community members and business owners support downtown revitalization efforts?]*

Q6. What would you consider to be the top driving force for implementing the Main Street Approach® in that community? (*i.e. economic, tourism, restore buildings, buy local, etc.*)

Q7. In your opinion, what was the greatest need of the local Main Street program that initiated a partnership RARE?

Q8. Are you aware of the more significant issues, barriers or challenges the community met trying to implement the Main Street Approach® prior to the RARE partnership?

Now let's talk about your experience....

Q9. What were some of your tasks, responsibilities, or objectives of your service contract?

Q10. How were these tasks, responsibilities, and objectives identified?

Q11. In hindsight, do you feel the tasks and responsibilities you were expected to complete addressed the capacity need of the local Main Street program?

Q12. Did you feel there was adequate support, resources, training, and education to accomplish the tasks, responsibilities, and objectives you were expected to? (this could be locally, with RARE staff, or at the State Main Street level)

Q13a. In your opinion, what were some of the more successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped the community initiate, continue, or complete?

Q13b. Were any of these legacy projects? (carry overs from previous years)

Q13c. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to project success?

Q14a. In your opinion, what were some of the less successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership was involved with in your community?

Q14b. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to the lack of success?

Q15. Would you say that community members were generally receptive to forming the partnership with RARE and the ideas that were brought in?

Tell me a little bit about your transition out of that role...

Q16. Was there someone else taking on your role either within the community or as an external technical assistant after your term of service?

Q17. Did you help develop next steps or a strategic plan for addressing the community's need for after the RARE partnership?

The next few questions are really aimed at your perspective of the partnership in hindsight...

Q18. What you say were the top contributions the RARE partnership provided, or the strengths of the partnership for the community?

Q19. In your opinion, what were limitations of the partnership?

Q20. Do you feel the partnership directly strengthened the community's ability to implement the Main Street Approach® without external technical assistance in the future?

Q21. What top three community issues, barriers or challenges to implement the Main Street Approach® still exist for the community, or existed after you left?

Q22. Do you have any ideas for how the community could address these issues or challenges moving forward?

Q23. In your opinion, how can RARE improve their Main Street partnerships in the future?

Q24. If a community leader approached you and said he or she was interested in partnering with RARE to help implement the Main Street Approach® in their community, what advice would you give them?

Q25. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments about the effectiveness and impact of RARE in Oregon communities you would like to share at this time?

Q26. Do you have any suggestions for improving future evaluations of the RARE-Main Street partnership?

[For those who have not provided additional contacts.... Can you recommend three or more people to participate in this study?]

Q27a. Would you be interested in seeing results of the RARE-Main Street research study?

If so, please provide your email address: _____

Thank you so much for your participation. Your time is greatly appreciated!

If you have any further questions about this study, please feel free to email me at jself@uoregon.edu.

Interview with RARE-AmeriCorps Participant Supervisor

Hello.

My name is Jennifer Self. I am a graduate student at the University of Oregon conducting a research study on the partnership between Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) and Main Street communities in Oregon. The primary purpose of this study is to (1) assess the effectiveness and impact of the partnership and (2) develop an evaluation tool RARE can use for future studies.

Information and data for the research study will be gathered through surveys and interviews, as well as literary review. Study participants include former RARE-AmeriCorps service members, their supervisors while in service, and community members from four Main Street programs which partnered with RARE between 2010 and 2013. Findings from the study will inform recommendations for how RARE can improve their community relationships in the future.

If you agree to participate in the study, I ask that we spend approximately 30-40 minutes discussing interview questions about your participation with and insights of the RARE-Main Street partnership. Your participation is voluntary. Some of the questions in the interview are intentionally subjective. For these, I would like to know your honest opinion, or gut reaction. If you agree to participate, you are welcome to skip any question you either do not know the answer to or feel uncomfortable answering. Interview and survey questions for this study are in no way intended to measure the performance of the individual RARE-AmeriCorps participants, but rather the RARE partnership as a whole.

There are no reasonable, foreseeable or expected risks associated with this study. No identifying information will be attached to interview responses within the final report or any documentation provided to RARE. Your responses may be quoted in final reports, but will be reported anonymously.

[In-person] Please take a moment to read over the consent form and initial and sign where indicated.

[Phone] Do you agree to participate in the RARE-Main Street research study? Please say “yes” or “no”. By saying “yes”, you consent to the previous statement regarding your anonymous responses and voluntary participation.

Q1. Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the consent form, the purpose of the project, or how your answers might be used that we haven't already discussed?

Q2. I see that you supervised the RARE-AmeriCorps participant <NAME> within <COMMUNITY> from <DATE> to <DATE> as a <TITLE>. Is this correct?

Q3. What is your official title and affiliation to the local Main Street program?

Q4. Approximately how many years of experience do you have with respect to historic preservation or community revitalization?

First let's talk a little bit about the community prior to the RARE partnership. Then we'll talk more about the partnership in action and your perspective of the partnership in hindsight.

Q5. Prior to the RARE partnership, what was the state, or progress, of the local Main Street program?

[As follow-up or conversation starter if needed, the following benchmarks were developed by the National Main Street Center. What would you consider to be the status of each benchmark for your local Main Street alliance or program? What would you say was the status of these benchmarks prior to your arrival?]

- *Has broad-based community support for the commercial district revitalization process, with strong support from both the public and private sectors.*
- *Has developed vision and mission statements relevant to community conditions and to the local Main Street program's organizational stage.*
- *Has a comprehensive Main Street work plan.*
- *Possesses an historic preservation ethic.*
- *Has an active board of directors and committees.*
- *Has an adequate operating budget.*
- *Has a paid professional program manager.*
- *Conducts a program of ongoing training for staff and volunteers.*
- *Reports key statistics.*
- *Is a current member of the National Trust Main Street Network.*
- *Did community members and business owners support downtown revitalization efforts?]*

Q6. Prior to the RARE-Main Street partnership, what were the more significant issues, barriers or challenges the community met trying to implement the Main Street Approach® prior to the RARE partnership?

Q7. What would you consider to be the top driving force for implementing the Main Street Approach® in your community? (i.e. economic, tourism, restore buildings, buy local, etc.)

Q8. What would you say are the top community assets, resources, or characteristics that have helped spur downtown revitalization?

Q9. Does your community commonly form external partnerships with organizations or neighboring communities to address local issues and challenges?

Q10. In your opinion, what was the greatest need of the local Main Street program that initiated the RARE partnership?

Now let's talk about the partnership in action....

Q11. How were tasks and responsibilities for the RARE-AmeriCorps participant, or the objective of their service contract, identified?

Q12a. In your opinion, what were some of the more successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped the community initiate, continue, or complete?

Q12b. Were any of these legacy projects? (carry overs from previous years)

Q12c. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to project success?

Q13a. In your opinion, what were some of the less successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership was involved with in your community?

Q13b. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to the lack of success?

Now we'll talk a little bit more in-depth about your perspective of the partnership in hindsight...

Q14a. Overall, do you feel the projects initiated, continued, or completed under the partnership achieved anticipated results?

Q14b. Why or why not?

Q15. What would you say were the top contributions the RARE partnership provided, or the strengths of the partnership for the community?

Q16. In your opinion, what were limitations of the partnership?

Q17. In hindsight, do you feel the tasks and responsibilities expected of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant addressed the capacity need of the local Main Street program?

Q18. Do you feel the partnership directly strengthened the community's ability to implement the Main Street Approach® without external technical assistance in the future?

Q19. What top three community issues, barriers or challenges to implement the Main Street Approach® still exist for your community?

Q20. Do you have any ideas for how the community could address these issues or challenges moving forward?

Q21. Other than the state's Oregon Main Street program, are you aware of other external assistance available to help communities implement the Main Street program?

Q22. In your opinion, how can RARE improve their Main Street partnerships in the future?

Q23. If a community leader approached you and said he or she was interested in partnering with RARE to help implement the Main Street Approach® in their community, what advice would you give them?

Q24. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments about the effectiveness and impact of RARE in Oregon communities you would like to share at this time?

Q25. Do you have any suggestions for improving future evaluations of the RARE-Main Street partnership?

Q26. Would you be interested in seeing results of the RARE-Main Street research study? If so, please provide your email address: _____

Thank you so much for your participation. Your time is greatly appreciated!

If you have any further questions about this study, please feel free to email me at jself@uoregon.edu.

Interview #1 with State Main Street Coordinator

Q1. I understand that each year you complete progress evaluations within each Main Street community in Oregon. Which Main Street tiers receive this evaluation?

Q2. The 2012 Oregon Main Street Handbook states that program evaluations are completed annually? Do you complete these or are they occasionally self-evaluations?

Q3. The Handbook also state that a Senior Program Officer from the National Main Street Center and Sheri Stuart, Oregon Main Street Coordinator, conduct the periodic review of each local program. Is this necessary to meet certain Main Street evaluation criteria?

Q4. Are the results of the evaluations incorporated into the “2-year action plans”?

Q5. How are strategies and recommendations for the local Main Street developed through these reviews and evaluations?

Q6. “Strategies for the next 6-12 months.” Have there been longer term strategies developed during these reviews and evaluations?

Q7. In your experience, what component of the Main Street Four-Point Approach (organization, design, promotion, design, and economic restructuring) has been the largest, or most significant, hurdle for communities?

Q8. What are other outcomes, or deliverables, that come from the reviews and evaluations?

Q9. How have these program evaluations been funded in the past?

Q10. Do you know of any other external non-profit or government partnerships (other than RARE and the State Main Street office) which help communities implement the Main Street Approach®?

Interview #2 with State Main Street Coordinator

Hello.

My name is Jennifer Self. I am a graduate student at the University of Oregon conducting a research study on the partnership between Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) and Main Street communities in Oregon. The primary purpose of this study is to (1) assess the effectiveness and impact of the partnership and (2) develop an evaluation tool RARE can use for future studies.

Information and data pertaining to the partnership is being collected through surveys and interviews within four Main Street communities which partnered with RARE between 2010 and 2013, as well as literary research. Study participants include former RARE-AmeriCorps service members, their supervisors while in service, and community members. Findings from the study will inform recommendations for how RARE can improve their community relationships in the future.

If you agree to participate in the study, I ask that we spend approximately 20 minutes discussing interview questions about your participation with and insights of the RARE-Main Street partnership. Your participation is voluntary. Some of the questions in the interview are intentionally subjective. For these, I

would like to know your honest opinion, or gut reaction. If you agree to participate, you are welcome to skip any question you either do not know the answer to or feel uncomfortable answering. Interview and survey questions for this study are in no way intended to measure the performance of the individual RARE-AmeriCorps participants, but rather the RARE partnership as a whole.

There are no reasonable, foreseeable or expected risks associated with this study. No identifying information will be attached to interview responses within the final report or any documentation provided to RARE. Your responses may be quoted in final reports, but will be reported anonymously.

[In-person] Please take a moment to read over the consent form and initial and sign where indicated.

[Phone] Do you agree to participate in the RARE-Main Street research study? Please say “yes” or “no”. By saying “yes”, you consent to the previous statement regarding your anonymous responses and voluntary participation.

Q1. Before we begin, do you have any questions regarding the consent form, the purpose of the project, or how your answers might be used that we haven’t already discussed?

Q2. Describe your involvement with Main Street communities or AmeriCorps participants under the RARE partnership?

Q3. How often do you interact with RARE-AmeriCorps participants while they are serving in Main Street communities?

Q4. You mentioned in a previous interview that communities face enormous learning curves when implementing the Main Street Approach®. What are some of the other more significant issues, barriers or challenges communities face trying to implement the Main Street Approach®?

Q5. What would you say are the top community assets, resources, or characteristics that lead to a successful Main Street program?

Q6. In your experience, what is the driving force(s) for a community to partner with RARE?

Q7. Are you aware of any key success projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped initiate, continue, or complete?

Q8. Were any of these legacy projects? (carry overs from previous years)

Q9. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to project success?

Q10a. Are you aware of any less successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership was involved with?

Q10b. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to the lack of success?

Q11a. Overall, do you feel the projects initiated, continued, or completed under the partnership achieve anticipated results?

Q11b. Why or why not?

Q12. What would you say were the top contributions the RARE partnership provide, or the strengths of the partnership for Main Street communities?

Q13. In your opinion, what are limitations of the partnership?

Q14. In hindsight, do you feel the tasks and responsibilities expected of the RARE-AmeriCorps participant address the capacity needs of local Main Street programs?

Q15. Do you feel the partnership directly strengthens a community's ability to implement the Main Street Approach® without external technical assistance in the future?

Q16. In your opinion, how can RARE improve their Main Street partnerships in the future?

Q17. If a community leader approached you and said he or she was interested in partnering with RARE to help implement the Main Street Approach® in their community, what advice would you give them?

Q18. Do you have any suggestions for improving future evaluations of the RARE-Main Street partnership?

Q19. Would you be interested in seeing results of the RARE-Main Street research study? If so, please provide your email address: _____

Thank you so much for your participation. Your time is greatly appreciated!

If you have any further questions about this study, please feel free to email me at jself@uoregon.edu.

Introduction

Hello.

My name is Jennifer Self. I am a graduate student at the University of Oregon conducting a research study on the partnership between Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) and Main Street communities in Oregon. The purpose of the study is to assess the partnership's effectiveness and impact.

Information and data for the research study will be gathered through surveys and interviews, as well as literary review. Study participants include former RARE-AmeriCorps service members, their supervisors while in service, and community members from four Main Street programs which partnered with RARE between 2010 and 2013. Findings from the study will inform recommendations for how RARE can improve their community relationships in the future.

If you agree to participate in the research study, I ask that you spend approximately 30 minutes answering survey questions regarding your participation with and insights of the RARE-Main Street partnership. Your participation in the study is voluntary and you are free to exit the survey without penalty at any time, for whatever reason. Some of the questions on the survey are intentionally subjective. For these, I would like to know your honest opinion, or gut reaction. If you agree to participate, you are welcome to skip any question you either do not know the answer to or feel uncomfortable answering.

There are no reasonable, foreseeable or expected risks associated with this study. Because your participation consists of an online survey, no identifying information will be attached to your responses. Your responses may be quoted in final reports, but will be reported anonymously.

1. Do you agree to participate in the RARE-Main Street research study? By clicking “yes”, you consent to the above statement.

- Yes
- No

Thank you for your interest in the research study!

2. Which Main Street community are you from? (The communities listed below are those selected for the research study and do not represent all RARE-Main Street communities.)

- Astoria Coos Bay La Grande Milton-Freewater

3. Which of the following affiliations do you identify with? (Click all that apply.)

- Board member for the local Main Street program.
- Committee member for the local Main Street program.
- Business owner within the downtown historic district.
- Member of a local advocacy group or community organization.
- Member of the general public or volunteer with the local Main Street program.
- Government or public employee.

4. Approximately how many years of experience do you have with historic preservation or community revitalization?

- Less than 1 year.
- 1 - 3 years.
- 4 - 10 years.
- 10+ years.

Tell me about your community and the local Main Street program...

5. What would you consider to be the top two driving forces for implementing the Main Street Approach® in your community?

Although multiple answers may apply, choose the top *two* factors your community tends to focus on most.

- Increase revenue, either through investment or consumer spending, within the downtown district.
- Improve the aesthetic appearance of the downtown district.
- Increase tourism to our community.
- Encourage the community and visitors to buy from local businesses.
- Preserve, restore, or reuse historic buildings within the downtown district.
- Increase community or volunteer engagement with revitalization efforts.
- Increase awareness about community assets and businesses within the downtown district.

6. What top three community assets, resources, or characteristics have helped spur downtown revitalization?

7. What top three issues, barriers or challenges were met trying to implement the Main Street Approach® in your community prior to the RARE partnership?

8. Would you say there is a tradition of volunteerism or public involvement within your community?

- Yes
- No

9. Why do you think that is?

10. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	I don't know.
My community is successful at forming internal partnerships to address local issues or challenges.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internal partnerships or public committees within my community generally have a diverse group of interested members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My community regularly forms external partnerships with organizations or neighboring communities to address local issues and challenges.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The majority of community members support revitalization efforts downtown.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The majority of business owners support revitalization efforts downtown.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most people in my community have an appreciation for historic buildings and their reuse.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Main Street Approach® has helped foster a revived sense of pride in our community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Effectiveness and Impact

The following questions are intended to assess if the RARE partnership increased capacity in your community. Capacity can be defined as a community's resources or characteristics that affect their ability to identify, mobilize, and address community problems.

Any question pertaining to RARE within this survey is not intended to measure the performance of the individual RARE-AmeriCorps participants, but rather the effectiveness of the RARE partnership as a whole.

11. In your opinion, what were some of the more successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped your community initiate, continue, or complete?

12. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to project success?

13. In your opinion, what were some of the less successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership was involved with in your community?

14. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to the lack of success?

15. Overall, do you feel the projects initiated, continued, or completed under the partnership achieved anticipated results?

Yes

No

16. How effective do you think the RARE partnership was assisting your community in the following categories?

	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective (or About Average)	Very Effective	I don't know
Increase the number of actively engaged volunteers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increase awareness or community support for revitalizing downtown.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increase community resources. (Includes, but is not limited to, outreach materials, assessments, maps, databases, programs, and/or studies.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create finalized plans. (Plans that could be implemented during or after the RARE term of service.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Create or provide teaching opportunities on the topics of business plan development, marketing, and/or fiscal management.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identify or outline achievable action steps for hiring a paid, full-time Main Street Program Manager.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transfer skills and knowledge to community members. (This can be informal or formal transfer of skills.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identify sustainable funding models or mechanisms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. Did the following factors increase or decrease as a direct result, or impact of, any project initiated, continued, or completed during the RARE partnership?

	Decreased	Somewhat Decreased	Neither Increased or Decreased	Somewhat Increased	Increased	I don't know
Investment of private sector funds, or other resources, in the downtown district.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investment of public sector funds, or other resources, in the downtown district.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increase local jobs in the downtown district.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formation of community interest groups or advocacy committees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community action, or increased participation, on your part or the part of others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaboration between city officials and community members or business owners.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Diversity of interested stakeholders and community members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical improvement projects.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. What was the greatest asset or benefit of having a RARE-AmeriCorps participant in your community? (Click all that apply.)

- Provide oversight, leadership or direction with the Main Street program.
- Assist committee members complete tasks associated with the local Main Street program.
- Facilitate education and training opportunities regarding the local Main Street program.
- Bring awareness and support for or revive an interest in downtown revitalization efforts.
- Increase the number of volunteers or participation with the local Main Street program.

Other (please specify)

19. In your opinion, what were limitations of the partnership?

20. How could RARE improve their Main Street partnerships in the future?

21. What top three community issues, barriers or challenges to implement the Main Street Approach® still exist in your community?

22. Do you have any ideas for how the community could address these issues or challenges moving forward?

23. Other than the Oregon Main Street program and RARE, are you aware of other any other external assistance available to help communities implement the Main Street Approach?

24. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments about the effectiveness and impact of RARE in Oregon communities you would like to share at this time?

25. Do you have any suggestions for improving future evaluations of the RARE-Main Street partnership?

26. Would you be interested in seeing results of the RARE-Main Street research study?

Yes

No

27. If so, please provide your email address:

Thank you!

You are now finished with the survey. Thank you for your participation!

If you have any questions about the research study, please feel free to contact Jennifer Self, jself@uoregon.edu or 256-694-6900.

Jennifer Self is a 2014 candidate for a Master of Community and Regional Planning, and Master of Science in Historic Preservation at the University of Oregon.

Appendix D: Human Subjects Research Compliance

Research Protocol

The following protocol documents the steps completed by the researcher following initial University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. These steps were required to meet compliance and standards of the university's Research Compliance Services for the implemented program evaluation tool. All digital data collected through the research and study was saved on a password protected personal hard drive. Periodically, data was backed up onto a University of Oregon secure server. Any hand written notes were secured in a locked cubby offered by the Department of Planning, Public Policy, and Management accessible only to the researcher.

Interviews

Participants

- **RARE-AmeriCorps participants** that served within each RARE-Main Street community selected as a representative sample for the project.
- **Local supervisors** for the RARE-AmeriCorps participants while he or she served within the RARE-Main Street community selected as a representative sample for the project.

Protocol

- ✓ Interview participants were contacted via phone call and read a verbal recruitment script to determine if they wish to participate in the study.
- ✓ Phone interview participants were asked to give a verbal consent prior to the interview.
- ✓ In-person interview participants signed a consent form prior to the interview for the researcher to retain.
- ✓ Interview participants were offered the option of having interview questions sent to them prior to the interview.
- ✓ Interviewees were read a confidentiality disclaimer prior to interviews and informed their participation was completely voluntary.
- ✓ Interview participants were asked their name, title, and community of resident for identity and informed the information was subject to publication within the final report.
- ✓ Contact information for researcher, committee chair and UO's Research Compliance Services was made available to all participants.
- ✓ Interview participants were provided an option to view transcribed responses or to receive a copy of compiled survey data (without any other participant information attached) at the end of the project.

Internet Surveys

Participants

- **Community members** that (1) were directly affected by the local Main Street initiative (such as a business owner within the downtown district), (2) helped with revitalization strategies on a routine basis (such as a city planner), or (3) were an active participant of a local advocacy group or focused on community development or historic preservation.

Protocol

- ✓ Survey participants were contacted via phone call and read a verbal recruitment script to determine if they wish to participate in the study.
- ✓ Interested survey participants were sent the internet survey via email.
- ✓ Survey site required no username, password, or access code.
- ✓ A confidentiality disclaimer and informed their participation was completely voluntary prior to the start of survey.
- ✓ Survey participants consented to the survey by selecting “yes” prior to the start of the survey.
- ✓ Survey participants were asked their name, title, and community of resident for identity and informed the information was subject to publication within the final report.
- ✓ Contact information for researcher, committee chair and UO’s Research Compliance Services was made available to all participants.
- ✓ Only the researcher had access to online survey data through a secure login account.
- ✓ Survey participants were provided an option to view their answers after submittal or to receive a copy of compiled survey data (without any other participant information attached) at the end of the project.
- ✓ Survey participants were allowed to return to previous survey questions and change their answers while the survey was active. Once the participant hit submit, the survey would be inactive and no further changes were allowed.

Verbal Recruitment Scripts

RARE-AmeriCorps Participant

Hello - My name is Jennifer Self and I am a graduate student from the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management at the University of Oregon. I'm calling to talk to you about participating in my research study. This is a study about the effectiveness and impact the RARE-Main Street partnership has had in rural Oregon communities. You're eligible to be in this study because you worked as a RARE volunteer in <CITY> in <YEAR>. I obtained your contact information from Titus Tomlinson, Program Coordinator, of RARE. Did Titus inform you earlier this year that the study was taking place?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions through an in-person or phone interview. This study is in no way intended to measure your performance as an AmeriCorps participant while you served in the community. Questions will pertain to the strengths and areas in need of improvement for the RARE-Main Street partnership. Findings from interviews will inform recommendations for how RARE can improve their community relationships in the future. The final deliverables for the research study includes a written report and presentation by the researcher.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate, we can go ahead and schedule an interview time. Would you like to participate? If so, where are you located, we may be able to set up an in-person interview?

If you need more time to decide if you would like to participate, you may also call or email me with your decision.

I will also be interviewing <NAME OF SUPERVISOR> and hope to speak with community members involved in the Main Street initiative in <COMMUNITY>. Would you be able to recommend three-four people to speak with?

Researcher Notes:

- *“Community member” may be a city planner or other public official, business owner, member of a local advocacy group, or member of the general public.*
- *“Community member” must be (1) directly affected by the local Main Street initiative (such as a business owner within the downtown district), (2) help with revitalization strategies on a routine basis (such as a city planner), or (3) be a member of a local advocacy group or focused on community development or historic preservation.*
- *“Community member” must be between the ages of 18 and 65.*

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

If you have any more questions about this process or if you need to contact me about participation, I may be reached at jself@uoregon.edu or 256-694-6900.

Thank you so much.

Supervisor of RARE-AmeriCorps Participant

Hello - My name is Jennifer Self and I am a graduate student from the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management at the University of Oregon. I'm calling to talk to you about participating in my research study. This is a study about the effectiveness and impact the RARE-Main Street partnership has had in rural Oregon communities. You're eligible to be in this study because you supervised <NAME OF RARE-AMERICORPS PARTICIPANT> while <HE/SHE> served in <CITY> in <YEAR>. I obtained your contact information from Titus Tomlinson, Program Coordinator, of RARE.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions through an in-person or phone interview. This study is not intended to measure the performance of the AmeriCorps participant. Questions will pertain to the strengths and areas in need of improvement for the RARE-Main Street partnership. Findings from interviews will inform recommendations for how RARE can improve their community relationships in the future. The final deliverables for the research study includes a written report and presentation by the researcher.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate, we can go ahead and schedule an interview time. Would you like to participate? If so, where are you located, we may be able to set up an in-person interview?

If you need more time to decide if you would like to participate, you may also call or email me with your decision.

I will also be interviewing <NAME OF RARE-AMERICORPS PARTICIPANT> and hope to speak with community members involved in the Main Street initiative in <COMMUNITY>. Would you be able to recommend three-four people to speak with?

Researcher Notes:

- “Community member” may be a city planner or other public official, business owner, member of a local advocacy group, or member of the general public.
- “Community member” must be (1) directly affected by the local Main Street initiative (such as a business owner within the downtown district), (2) help with revitalization strategies on a routine basis (such as a city planner), or (3) be a member of a local advocacy group or focused on community development or historic preservation.
- “Community member” must be between the ages of 18 and 65.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

If you have any more questions about this process or if you need to contact me about participation, I may be reached at jself@uoregon.edu or 256-694-6900.

Thank you so much.

Community Member

Hello - My name is Jennifer Self and I am a graduate student from the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management at the University of Oregon. I'm calling to talk to you about participating in my research study. This is a study about the effectiveness and impact the RARE-Main Street partnership has had in your community. A RARE-AmeriCorps participant served within your community in <YEAR> to help with downtown revitalization efforts. You're eligible to take part in this study because of your involvement with the RARE-AmeriCorps participant while <HE/SHE> served or downtown revitalization efforts. I obtained your contact information from <PERSON WHO RECOMMENDED COMMUNITY MEMBER>.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked a series of questions through an online survey at [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). Questions will pertain to the strengths and areas in need of improvement for the RARE-Main Street partnership. Findings from interviews will inform recommendations for how RARE can improve their community relationships in the future. The final deliverables for the research study includes a written report and presentation by the researcher.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate, I can go ahead and send you the online survey today.

If you need more time to decide if you would like to participate, you may also call or email me with your decision.

I have also interviewed <NAME OF RARE-AMERICORPS PARTICIPANT> and <NAME OF SUPERVISOR> and hope to speak with other community members involved in the Main Street initiative in <COMMUNITY>. Would you be able to recommend three additional people to speak with?

Researcher Notes:

- *“Community member” may be a city planner or other public official, business owner, member of a local advocacy group, or member of the general public.*
- *“Community member” must be (1) directly affected by the local Main Street initiative (such as a business owner within the downtown district), (2) help with revitalization strategies on a routine basis (such as a city planner), or (3) be a member of a local advocacy group or focused on community development or historic preservation.*
- *“Community member” must be between the ages of 18 and 65.*

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

If you have any more questions about this process or if you need to contact me about participation, I may be reached at jself@uoregon.edu or 256-694-6900.

Thank you so much.

Consent Form

Research Protocol Number: <INSERT>
 Collaborative Partnerships in Rural Preservation Planning
 Jennifer Self, Principal Investigator
 University of Oregon, Historic Preservation Program
 & Community and Regional Planning Program

You are invited to participate in a program evaluation project titled “Collaborative Partnerships for Rural Preservation Planning”. The project will be conducted by Jennifer Self from the University of Oregon’s Historic Preservation and Community and Regional Planning programs. The project has two primary purposes: (1) evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) and Main Street partnership in your community and five other rural Oregon towns, and (2) determine if the partnership could serve as a potential model for other non-profit or government agencies in the western United States seeking to assist rural communities use the Main Street approach for community revitalization.

Many distressed communities in rural Oregon currently do not have the capacity, or ability, to initiate or sustain community revitalization strategies single-handedly. Forming external partnerships with non-profit organizations such as RARE may provide a solution. RARE provides communities with a “portal” to new networks, employees, and other external sources of expertise. However, there is currently no evaluation mechanism in place to assess if these partnerships are meeting program goals. This project will evaluate the strengths and areas in need of improvement for RARE to have a successful, long-term impact with Main Street communities in Oregon. The study will draw conclusions and recommendations from stakeholder engagement, professional interviews, and observation in three rural Main Street communities RARE has partnered with in the last three years – Astoria, La Grande, and Toledo.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your knowledge with the RARE-Main Street partnership in your community and/or your interaction with the RARE participant while he or she served

within your community. Participants will be asked to complete either an interview or an internet survey. If you decide to take part in this survey project, you may be asked to participate in one in-person or phone interview, or internet survey lasting approximately one hour, during the Spring of 2014. Interview questions can be provided beforehand for your consideration. In-person interviews will be scheduled at your convenience at a readily accessible location. I will take handwritten notes during the interview. You may also be asked to provide a small amount of follow-up information through phone calls or email, or be invited to an *optional* focus group meeting.

Your participation is voluntary. Only those willing to publication of their names with quotations/information will be selected to participate. **If you decide to participate in this study, you must agree to be identified in the publication of findings. Please note, identification is not guaranteed, but may be acknowledged in the findings section of the final report. There is no expiration date currently associated with data collected during this project. Access to full interview, survey, or focus group meeting data and information will be limited to the researcher; however, please note the Institutional Review Board and internal University of Oregon auditors may review the research records.** If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained.

Your consent to participate in this interview or survey, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to RARE, rural communities wishing to engage with RARE, or potentially other non-profits seeking to assist rural communities in community revitalization efforts. I cannot guarantee that you personally, or your community, will receive any benefits from this research.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at 256.694.6900 or jself@uoregon.edu. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Research Compliance Services, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403, 541.346.2510.

Please read and initial each of the following statements to indicate your consent. Circle yes or no for each statement.

Initials	Yes or No (Circle Yes if you agree, No if you do not agree)	Statement
	Yes <i>or</i> No	I consent to my identification as a participant in this study.
	Yes <i>or</i> No	I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview or online survey.
	Yes <i>or</i> No	I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization, or community, with which I am associated.
	Yes <i>or</i> No	I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly reverse my comments and the information that I provide prior to the data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your interest and willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Self,
Project Coordinator,
Community Service Center
M.S. Historic Preservation Candidate
M. Community and Regional Planning Candidate
256.694.6900
jself@uoregon.edu

Appendix E: Open-Ended Survey Responses

This appendix includes gathered responses to open-ended survey questions for each community selected for the study. Question numbers correspond to order the question was listed on the online survey and organized into the following categories: “Community Background Information”, “The Partnership in Action”, and “Overall Perception of the Partnership”.

Astoria

Community Background Information

Q6. What top three community assets, resources, or characteristics have helped spur downtown revitalization?

Columbia River views from our Riverwalk Fort George Brewery. Friendliness of our population.

The city, interested business/ property owners, public

Historic preservation, river walk, Main Street program

Q7. What top three issues, barriers or challenges were met trying to implement the Main Street Approach® in your community prior to the RARE partnership?

Fear of another failed try at organizing ADHDA. Unavailability of biz owners. General disinterest of the biz community.

No strategic organization, no education on the subject and no one point person to go to.

Volunteer capacity limited, no money to pay for resource

The Partnership in Action

Q11. In your opinion, what were some of the more successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped your community initiate, continue, or complete?

Brew Cup 2012 through 2014. Jane Barnes Events Annual Downtown Cleanups. Monthly Art Walks. Building Blocks for Downtown.

Inventory of properties, activities within the downtown core, being the one person someone can approach on downtown issues.

Downtown revitalization program- staff support through the one year-plus project was critical; brew cup.. Major fundraising event; committee support helped further all of the committee efforts.(research, coordination, execution)

Q12. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to project success?

We had a great RARE volunteer who organized us and excellent ADHDA leadership.

Allowing interested business owners to not be overburdened with doing everything themselves. Having a RARE person take on needed projects allowed better follow through.

Having a dedicated resource brought projects to completion much faster than an all volunteer force could provide. Results also buoyed volunteers to do more and generated increased membership and participation.

Q13 In your opinion, what were some of the less successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership was involved with in your community?

Following through on the recommendations from the Building Blocks have been slow to date.

When they arrive not fully trained in the mission of revitalizing historic downtowns.

I really don't know if a project failed due to the RARE partnership.

Q14. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to the lack of success?

Leadership direction on that issue. And because ADHDA has a lot on its plate. We need to recruit more enthused quality ADHDA leaders before those we have now burn out.

Lack of knowledge.

If there was a lack of success I would attribute it to a failure on the part of the board to manage and mentor the RARE member. Volunteer board and committee leaders don't always have the skills to help a young person be successful.

Overall Perception of the Partnership

Q19. In your opinion, what were limitations of the partnership?

Leadership direction and communication and "chemistry" is the key to a successful relationship between the RARE volunteer and ADHDA. In one case that did not work so well.

Limited only by what the RARE person knew coming in.

The outcome is affected by both the RARE participant's abilities and the Main Street organization's ability to manage the person and process. When one or both of these elements are sub par, the experience may not be positive.

Q20. How could RARE improve their Main Street partnerships in the future?

This may sound like we are slave drivers but I think one of the reasons our first RARE volunteer was so successful is because her home town was across the country and she did not seem to mind working weekends and evening hours. Our second Volunteer had a local personal life so she was less available to us. And there was that communication problem.

More knowledge of the Main St Program and how to effectively communicate with people who are substantially older.

More board training to insure RARE experience will be fruitful for the Main Street program and the RARE member. Also suggest RARE participant NOT be from a community that is close to he one in which they are working. This situAtion made it easier for an unhappy RARE person to disengage from the Astoria area too easily and too often. She didn't have to solve the problems she was faced with at the board level, and didn't seem to bond with her adopted community.

Q21. What top three community issues, barriers or challenges to implement the Main Street Approach® still exist in your community?

Getting the biz community to pay membership dues. Getting members to volunteer their time.

Lack of knowledge, resistance to change, funding.

I don't know. I moved from the community over a year ago.

Q22. Do you have any ideas for how the community could address these issues or challenges moving forward?

Just keep on proving that we are a strong Association taht can only get stronger with wider support from the business community.

Better communications

Q24. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments about the effectiveness and impact of RARE in Oregon communities you would like to share at this time?

I enjoy the camaraderie that we have with other Downtowns. And I love that I feel proud talking to visitors to Astoria about the Main Street Program that we are part of - especially when they already know a little about it. It is a big success for us and I think bragging rights are in irder[order].

Please keep it moving forward.

I think it's a great program. It paved the way for a full time position in Astoria. People saw what having a paid resource could do.

Q25. Do you have any suggestions for improving future evaluations of the RARE-Main Street partnership?

Maybe do a shorter one more often.

No.

No.

Coos Bay

Community Background Information

Q6. What top three community assets, resources, or characteristics have helped spur downtown revitalization?

Long term downtown businesses. Dedicated helpful government. Hwy 101

Downtown Business organization. Monthly wine walk. Redevelopment of historic buildings.

Q7. What top three issues, barriers or challenges were met trying to implement the Main Street Approach® in your community prior to the RARE partnership?

Getting all businesses involved. Money for promotion. Getting committees to actively work hard on tasks.

Owners do not keep up old historic buildings. Volunteers do not always follow through. Funding for a director is hard to maintain.

The Partnership in Action

Q11. In your opinion, what were some of the more successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped your community initiate, continue, or complete?

There were projects completed but they have not really changed much. Also some good private projects happened but they probably would have happened anyway. The biggest success of the Main Street program has been to create a sense of working together to reach a goal.

Communication is improved. More people are involved.

Q12. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to project success?

Some active volunteers and a participating city government.

Having an employee.

Q13 In your opinion, what were some of the less successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership was involved with in your community?

Painting second street wall. The project really does not make a difference to the vitality of downtown.

Q14. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to the lack of success?

The project made people feel they did something but the project was too insignificant to matter.

Overall Perception of the Partnership

Q19. In your opinion, what were limitations of the partnership?

9 month time frame. Inability to motivate committees to act.

Building owners are not sufficiently engaged.

Q20. How could RARE improve their Main Street partnerships in the future?

Longer time frames of service. Total concentration on getting committee members to act on tasks to achieve goals.

Work on specifics with building owners and the City staff

Q21. What top three community issues, barriers or challenges to implement the Main Street Approach® still exist in your community?

Not enough continued participation by business owners. Not a long enough employed time by the RARE employee.

They are the same.

Q22. Do you have any ideas for how the community could address these issues or challenges moving forward?

Hire a permanent Main Street Director

We need to convert the old buildings to downtown apartments, but the perceived payoff is not there.

Q24. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments about the effectiveness and impact of RARE in Oregon communities you would like to share at this time?

No.

Q25. Do you have any suggestions for improving future evaluations of the RARE-Main Street partnership?

Yes. Phone interview of a few individuals asking open ended questions.

La Grande

Community Background Information

Q6. What top three community assets, resources, or characteristics have helped spur downtown revitalization?

Urban Renewal funds, Local business investments, Volunteers

Q7. What top three issues, barriers or challenges were met trying to implement the Main Street Approach® in your community prior to the RARE partnership?

Lack of interest, Funding, Organization

The Partnership in Action

Q11. In your opinion, what were some of the more successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped your community initiate, continue, or complete?

Flower Basket project, Façade Grant project

Q12. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to project success?

Availability of an individual in the coordinator position

Q13 In your opinion, what were some of the less successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership was involved with in your community?

Getting a successful EID

Q14. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to the lack of success?

Absentee property owners contributed and several disgruntled local merchants

Overall Perception of the Partnership

Q19. In your opinion, what were limitations of the partnership?

Lack of interest.

Q20. How could RARE improve their Main Street partnerships in the future?

Provide a longer commitment period

Q21. What top three community issues, barriers or challenges to implement the Main Street Approach® still exist in your community?

Stable funding, Business apathy

Q22. Do you have any ideas for how the community could address these issues or challenges moving forward?

Economy to take a upward swing.

Q24. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments about the effectiveness and impact of RARE in Oregon communities you would like to share at this time?

No.

Q25. Do you have any suggestions for improving future evaluations of the RARE-Main Street partnership?

This is an awesome program that allows young people to come into a unknown city and get some practical experience.

Milton-Freewater

Community Background Information

Q6. What top three community assets, resources, or characteristics have helped spur downtown revitalization?

Matching improvement grants; formation of the the "Downtown Alliance" & the extra publicity on revitalization.

Many empty buildings with historic value lie empty in the Downtown. Engagement and commitment from local business owners. Constant presence and reminders of MFDA.

Formation of Milton-Freewater Downtown Alliance 2) Urban renewal agency money available 3)RARE-full time director

Q7. What top three issues, barriers or challenges were met trying to implement the Main Street Approach® in your community prior to the RARE partnership?

Economics, economics, economics!

Resistance to change by many residents Constant negativity from some business owners People not following through on their offers of help.

1) Trying to do everything with volunteers 2) No available point person 3) Record keeping

The Partnership in Action

Q11. In your opinion, what were some of the more successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership helped your community initiate, continue, or complete?

1) Rejuvenated the city management and their commitment to improving the aesthetics of downtown. Wine barrels on main street intersections. 2) Let's make a difference 3) Wine barrels on Main St intersections

1) Facade improvements 2) Cinco de mayo 3) Main Street Approach

Q12. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to project success?

MFDA helped spur the city management to commit URA dollars to improving building facades through a realistic cost share.

Having a full time person available

Q13 In your opinion, what were some of the less successful projects or initiatives the RARE partnership was involved with in your community?

Bridge decal as a gateway to Oregon.

I cannot think of any negatives. Some projects by their size or interest have moved slower but I do not think they were less successful because the RARE partnership.

Q14. What factors or circumstances do you think attributed to the lack of success?

Lack of interest/ commitment to the project and ODA passing new ordinances which are unclear.

Youth can be a minus as well as a plus but I think anytime a project is not successful it is because of lack of participation or interest.

Overall Perception of the Partnership

Q19. In your opinion, what were limitations of the partnership?

The incumbent rubbed some shop owners up the wrong way. It is not their job to tell existing shop owners how to improve their marketability/ advertising efforts.

Business experience.

Q20. How could RARE improve their Main Street partnerships in the future?

Bring in more funding and write grants.

I think they do a very good job. We had a very positive experience but it is very dependent on the person chosen. Hard to specify improvement areas as every community is different.

Q21. What top three community issues, barriers or challenges to implement the Main Street Approach® still exist in your community?

Economics & diversity.

Activity Center/ Sports complex.

1) Historic preservation (taking off the tax rolls) 2) Stepping on other peoples toes (perceived)

Q22. Do you have any ideas for how the community could address these issues or challenges moving forward?

Bring in funding to purchase an Activity Center.

We have tried to include all groups in our organization and keep everything transparent but there are always those that feel threatened. Fill the buildings with businesses.

Q24. Do you have any additional thoughts or comments about the effectiveness and impact of RARE in Oregon communities you would like to share at this time?

They do a great job in most communities they are involved in.

I just think it was/is a very positive and effective program for us because of the program but more importantly the person. For those start up communities a full time person is very important.

Q25. Do you have any suggestions for improving future evaluations of the RARE-Main Street partnership?

Ensure the next incumbent is sensitive to local conditions, history of shopowners and follows through on sending out info to shopowners etc.

No

Appendix F: Selected Interview Responses

This appendix includes selected interview responses transcribed from the researcher's notes. Responses are arranged by strengths, limitations, and areas in need of improvement for each community selected for the study.

Astoria

Strengths

- Facilitating fundraising and cultural events.
- "Getting things done".
- Navigating how to accomplish goals and objectives.
- Implementing visible, or tangible, improvements to the downtown district.
- Coordinating with various partners.
- Delegating responsibility to the local community.
- Increasing the number of participants at public meetings.
- Orchestrating Main Street initiatives.
- Making it easier to transition to a permanent, full-time Main Street Manager.
- Encouraging property owners to retain businesses and renters.
- Initiating a visioning process.
- Helping the downtown alliance become a "bigger player" in the community.
- Bringing in a "fresh", "external", or "critical" perspective. This presents creative solutions or catches things the board may have overlooked.
- Organizing and promoting local downtown alliance.
- Being instrumental in re-establishing the local downtown alliance and demonstrating what could be accomplished with a Main Street Manager.
- Being the "face" of the local downtown alliance and having more of a "presence" within the community.
- Providing "momentum", "energy", and "commitment".
- Bringing awareness to the downtown commercial center and downtown alliance.
- Jump-starting and implementing projects in a much shorter amount of time than what was previously capable. People saw this progress and got more excited.
- "Great program"
- "Awesome experience"
- Attending Main Street workshops and trainings. RARE trainings were "refreshing".

Limitations

- RARE-AmeriCorps participant placement screening. (Some participants were good fits for the community, while others were not.)
- Lack of knowledge on the part of the incoming participant to how the local community functions. (Social and political dynamics.)
- Young professionals are still gaining business skillsets.
- "No hand off", or formal transition process in place. Communities were concerned with the gap in continuity and training the next Main Street Manager.

- “August gap”
- Community concern for Main Street program sustainability once RARE participant has left.

Areas in Need of Improvement

- Better placement matching.
- More skills training and development.
- Improve continuity and knowledge sharing.
- Introduction to the community.
- Ensure community has adequate commitment and support prior to RARE going in.
- Improved process, or guidance, for identifying community needs. Utilize annual reports conducted by former RARE-AmeriCorps participants or state Main Street Coordinator to help realize community needs.

Coos Bay

Strengths

- Helping to change the image of the local Main Street program.
- Increasing awareness.
- Building partnerships.
- Attending Main Street trainings and workshops.
- Promoting the local Main Street program.
- Providing an affordable, well-educated intern.
- Providing external expertise to bring in fresh ideas.
- Having a “new face” that is somewhat more neutral to social and political dynamics.
- Leaving the community “better off” at the end of the partnership.

Limitations

- Participant’s role did not directly “fix” the capacity need.
- Significant majority of the partnership’s service contract is spent getting to know the community, “25% of your time just getting your feet wet”.
- Steep learning curve, tough to get started.
- Lack of mentorship or daily contact by local community member for support.
- Relatively short service tenure is “tough on the community”.
- Volunteer burn out is common.
- Limited community support to implement projects, tasks, or initiatives.

Areas in Need of Improvement

- Better strategic visioning in place prior to the partnership to help prioritize participant’s focus and attention.
- Improve communication between local partners and the RARE-AmeriCorps participants so that expectations align.
- Ensure the community is ready and equipped to enter into the partnership. This includes awareness of the partnership prior to the participant’s arrival, internal issues are stable, a

supportive and engaged board of directors is in place, and adequate community and business owner support has been achieved.

La Grande

Strengths

- Implementing visible, or tangible, improvement projects.
- Forming a partnership with the local University.
- Helping to fill vacant storefronts.
- Getting to know the community and gain their trust.
- Facilitating public meetings.
- Increasing outreach, promotion, and awareness (weekly radio segments, weekly newspaper articles, won award for promotional event).
- “Getting the word out.”
- Providing an instrumental role in planning, promoting, and implementing Main Street initiatives.
- Creating a more sustainable local program.
- Allowing RARE-AmeriCorps participants’ service contracts to overlap.
- Bringing professional qualifications to rural communities.
- Providing a financially affordable alternative to a Main Street Manager.
- Building community support through funding, volunteers, and consistent participation.
- Networking both internally and through the RARE organization.
- Leaving the community better than when the participant started.
- Helping community grow to the next level and transition to a more self-sufficient local program.
- Bringing attention, energy, and “youthful excitement” to the local Main Street program.
- Providing skilled participants that usually need little supervision, “best of the best”.
- “This kind of work ethic doesn’t come with a volunteer.”
- “Good capacity builders.”
- “I’m an advocate.”
- Fulfilling expectations.
- Providing a great stepping stone for the participant.
- “RARE-Main Street is becoming a good relationship.”

Limitations

- Difficult to recognize and prioritize objectives.
- Capacity need recognized by RARE-AmeriCorps participant was different than what had been recognized by the local board.
- Partnership project success heavily depends on community support.
- Board was not fully aware of the participant’s skillsets or role within the community. (oversight and facilitation vs. being a “work horse”)
- Short service contract. La Grande is generational community, which takes time to build trust.
- Loss in productivity to get acquainted with community.

- Loss in continuity – “most of your growth and ability to do good in the community” is through communication and learned from previous years.
- Time and energy wasted by revisiting issues or challenges (revisiting dead ends previously discovered)
- No procedure in place for when partnership is terminated.
- “There’s a lot to shallow for a RARE person coming in.”
- Local board is “freaked out” for when the partnership terminates.
- RARE-AmeriCorps are occasionally insensitive to social norms in rural communities or can “step on toes”. The participant is “expected to be a change agent, not turn the town on its head”.
- Served a purpose but “not a sustainable approach to running an organization”
- Partnership is being used to continue operations and projects (not necessarily building capacity)

Areas in Need of Improvement

- Improve continuity and knowledge sharing.
- Provide more pre-placement training specific to the Main Street Approach®, so that participants are better prepared.
- Facilitate more opportunities for the participant to get to know the community early on.
- Improve placement screening – “incredibly important” to find the right fit for the community.
- Improve application process so that it is more focused on the Main Street partnership.
- Provide, or facilitate, more opportunities for the community to share what has been working and what could be done differently with the participant.
- Create an overlap of participant’s service contract to avoid the “August gap”
- Help communities determine how to get participants to more trainings and how to pay for those.
- Help communities prepare for the transition after the RARE partnership so that the local program can be more sustainable. Help determine how the local program will function.

Milton-Freewater

Strengths

- Helping local Main Street program build credibility. Community knows we’re serious to make effective change happen and they are now coming to us for help.
- Making things happen.
- Providing a “very skilled”, confident, and “intelligent” participant.
- Providing an inexpensive, well-educated participant.
- Facilitating and delegating without micromanaging.
- Providing an external perspective.
- Bringing in success stories and lessons learned from Main Street trainings.
- “Good program.”
- Inexpensive, well-educated quality person
- Less administrative than hiring, quick foot in the door
- Outside perspective
- Avoid conflicts with local politics.

- Propelling, or helping to progress the local program, much farther than they could have gone without the partnership.

Limitations

- Short service contract. The entire first year was used getting acquainted with community. It takes a lot of time to build up a proper knowledge base and get to know business owners.
- Uncertainty on the part of the local alliance for how the program will be sustained once the RARE-AmeriCorps participant's tenure is over.
- "August gap". Even if the same participant returns to the community for back-to-back service contracts, projects and tasks are slow to start after the hiatus.
- Having to attend numerous trainings reduces productivity within the community.
- Required regular assessments required by AmeriCorps seem to serve more as "busy work", rather than help make improvements to the partnership.
- Finding the "right fit" in participant is a significant concern for the community and local alliance.

Areas in Need of Improvement

- Improve or increase opportunities for continuity.
- Provide more Main Street specific trainings early on.
- Provide Main Street trainings for RARE staff.
- Provide more orientation specific to Main Street.
- Improve placement screening.
- Ensure all participants serving in Main Street communities have the opportunity to attend Main Street trainings and workshops.