



# MONITOR

## TECHNICAL BRIEF

Spring 2007

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The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Main Street Program provides downtown revitalization technical assistance to Virginia communities, using the National Main Street Center's Four Point Approach™ (Organization, Promotion, Design & Economic Restructuring) to comprehensive preservation-based revitalization of historic commercial districts.



Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development  
"Partner for Better Communities"

## Recruit, Train, and Recognize: Three Steps to Develop an Effective Volunteer Workforce

By Dave Lewis and Stephen Versen

They are the most important part of your organization, but chances are you may not have a single line item in your budget about them. It is also likely that they aren't among your organization's top three priorities of the upcoming year. Yes, everyone knows volunteers are the heart and soul of the Main Street Approach to downtown revitalization, yet budgets and action plans often don't reflect this reality.

While the United States has long held a strong and unique volunteer tradition, it can be difficult for Main Street organizations, who are often competing with other groups for the same volunteers, to develop a volunteer workforce sufficient to achieve the organization's goals.

Therefore, it is critical to create a superior volunteer experience from start to finish by effectively recruiting, training and recognizing volunteers.

### Recruitment

The first step to developing an effective volunteer workforce is, of course, getting people to commit their time in the first place. Fortunately, research shows there to be a great number of individuals out there ready to give their time to a cause – the trick is making it your cause.

According to Independent Sector, an organization that serves as a meeting ground for the leaders of America's charitable and philanthropic sector, an estimated 44 percent of Americans volunteer their time on a yearly basis. This constitutes 83.9 million Americans, whose time volunteered represents the equivalent of a million full-time employees at a value of \$239 billion dollars. In 2005, the estimated dollar value of volunteer time was \$18.04 per hour.



To effectively recruit today, Main Street programs must adapt to the changing nature of volunteerism. In the past, volunteers generally wanted to serve on boards or committees on an ongoing basis. In today's busy and over-scheduled world, volunteers often look for more specific, ad hoc volunteer opportunities. This may mean breaking down projects into smaller parts and distributing duties to more volunteers. Also, volunteers may prefer performing duties at home and on their own schedules. For example, when it comes to doing a mass mailing, consider allowing volunteers to take letters and envelopes home to stuff on their own time. This will likely get a better response than asking someone to come by the office during business hours to stuff the envelopes there.

(continued on page 2)

People who have never volunteered for your organization before may be hesitant about getting involved. A good way to deal with this reluctance is to ask new volunteers to give a specific block of their time, three hours for example, with a clear start and stop time. When the time is up, thank them and let them go. Only later should you ask them to volunteer again. Acting professionally and respecting their time will make them more likely to volunteer again.

For many people, helping their organization build an effective volunteer base is a daunting task. They fear rejection or just feel uncomfortable asking others to give their time to the cause. A change of attitude is needed. Volunteers for Main Street give their community a gift that gets repaid over and over again through an increased quality of life and satisfaction for aiding a worthy cause.

There are many sources in your community from which to recruit volunteers, try to tap into them all. This includes your existing volunteer base. Be sure to include volunteer opportunities in all of the organization's regular communications and get those currently associated with your organization to recruit new volunteers from among their family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Other fruitful resources can include volunteer coordination programs of universities or large, local employers.

Another important volunteer source are the other charitable and service organizations in your community, such as the Lions Club, the Jay-Cees, etc. Working with these groups to find similar priorities and projects is an excellent way to leverage your community's volunteer resources for achieving your organization's goals. Two good ways to begin a relationship with these other service organizations is to recruit them to help with a fun upcoming event, or to speak at one of their meetings about your downtown revitalization efforts and where help is needed.

When it comes to building a strong base of volunteers, it helps to match the recruiter with the audience. For example, you will be more successful with a high school student recruiting other students, and a Rotary Club member recruiting other Rotarians, than if it were the other way around. Make sure your recruiter will be a strong ambassador for the organization. At a minimum, they should be able to briefly describe the organization's goals, key accomplishments, and significant ongoing projects, and have knowledge of the specific task for which they are recruiting.

Another important lesson is to not make assumptions about the volunteers you want to recruit. Often, the group may decide that a person has too many other obligations to

## Recruiting Volunteers on the Web

The Internet can be a powerful tool for volunteer recruitment; however, for many organizations this opportunity is largely underutilized. The case for using the Web to solicit volunteers is compelling. A recent study by The Journal of Volunteer Administration on one online volunteer referral site, VolunteerMatch.org, found that 85 percent of the nonprofits posting volunteer opportunities there said it helped them recruit people who they otherwise would not have been able to find.

Further, 90 percent of these nonprofits stated they were satisfied with the quality of the volunteers they had found using the site. Such sites are also a good resource for those seeking to volunteer. The same survey found that 86 percent of those using the site agreed that it made it easier to find volunteer opportunities. Even more impressive, one of four site users had not volunteered before.

While your organization may be eager to get its volunteer opportunities on the Web, there are a few things you should consider first. The most basic questions in determining if the Web is an appropriate place for your organization to be recruiting volunteers are:

- Can the opportunity be adequately

explained using the short chunks of information Internet users expect?

- Will your organization be able to quickly and adequately respond to inquiries from prospective volunteers?
- Are you able to frequently update your listings as new opportunities arise and others are filled?

If you answered yes to these questions, recruiting volunteers online might be right for your organization. You must keep in mind, however, since yours is not the only group looking for volunteers you must take care to present your opportunities well. To do so, you should:

- Make sure the volunteer opportunities page is easy to find and use:
  - Include a link on the site's home page;
  - Don't bury the page under layers of other pages;
  - Be clear and concise; and
  - Make sure any forms are easy to use.
- Provide enough information for potential volunteers to decide whether to pursue the opportunity by including: duties, qualifications, time needed, where activity takes place, benefits, etc.
- Use a specific and catchy title and include a detailed description of the opportunity along with what is expected of the volunteer.

- If you are using an online application, don't ask for more information than you need in an initial inquiry.
- If you do not have an online application, be clear in telling users how to apply or contact you. Be sure to provide an e-mail address, a name and a phone number. Here are some popular Web sites for recruiting volunteers:

### National Sites:

- Volunteer Match – [volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org)
- Network for Good – [networkforgood.org](http://networkforgood.org)
- Idealist.org – [idealist.org](http://idealist.org)
- National Mentoring Partnership - [mentor.org](http://mentor.org)
- Senior Corps' Join Senior Service Now – [www.joinseiorservice.org](http://www.joinseiorservice.org)
- 1-800-Volunteer – [1-800-volunteer.org](http://1-800-volunteer.org)

### Virginia Sites:

- Virginia Service – [vaservice.org](http://vaservice.org)
- VirginiaCORPS – [virginiacorps.org](http://virginiacorps.org)

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volunteer, never giving them the opportunity to say “yes” because they were ruled out from the beginning. Do not always assume that the banker wants to serve on the Economic Restructuring Committee, or that the architect wants to serve on the Design Committee – they may feel that they do enough of that type of work already. It is best to find out what they want to do as volunteers and match that with the needs of your organization.

You can do this through a more formal survey, by having them rank their interest in the various upcoming volunteer opportunities, or just taking them out to lunch to learn about their interests. The better you can match a volunteer with the type of work they prefer, the better job they will do and the more likely they will come back to help the organization again.

Perhaps an organization’s most effective tool for volunteer recruitment is also its most powerful tool for effectively running the entire organization: having a solid, detailed work plan that is based on the organization’s vision for downtown and demonstrates how each project contributes to achieving that vision. Volunteers are looking to do more than to just help; they are giving of themselves because they want to be part of a larger effort that is bringing long-term positive change to the community. The more clearly an organization can demonstrate to its volunteers how they are contributing to something larger, the better volunteers are going to feel about giving more of their time.

Additionally, a detailed work plan allows an organization to create a clearer job description for prospective volunteers, the benefits of which flow two-ways. The volunteer has greater certainty about their role, and the organization can be more targeted in its recruiting. Main Street organizations should not just use their work plan to run the organization, they should share it with the community as a way to broaden support and recruit volunteers.

### Volunteer Success Stories: Martinsville Uptown

The Martinsville Uptown Revitalization Association (MURA) effectively accessed their community’s volunteer organizations through their Uptown Window Walk program. The program involved convincing Uptown’s property owners with vacant storefront properties to allow volunteers to clean up their storefronts and put up a display.

The goal was to quickly and inexpensively make a significant visual improvement to the streetscape. Once permission was granted, MURA worked with local artists to show their artwork in the storefront windows, and with nonprofit organizations to display information about their mission and accomplishments. One property owner was so enthused by the experience that he is working with MURA to get a mural painted on his building’s large, exposed wall.

## Recognition

Once a volunteer is recruited, it is critical that the organization train and use this individual effectively. Remember, volunteers want to be effective and have a meaningful impact – that is why they got involved in the first place. The Organization Committee, or whoever is primarily responsible for volunteers, should strive to quickly bring new volunteers up to speed about the organization, their tasks and their responsibilities.

An effective way to do this is by holding an orientation session which reviews policies and procedures, project and program goals, and other relevant information. To complement this orientation session, many Main Street programs have created new board and committee member handbooks. Typically these include the following:

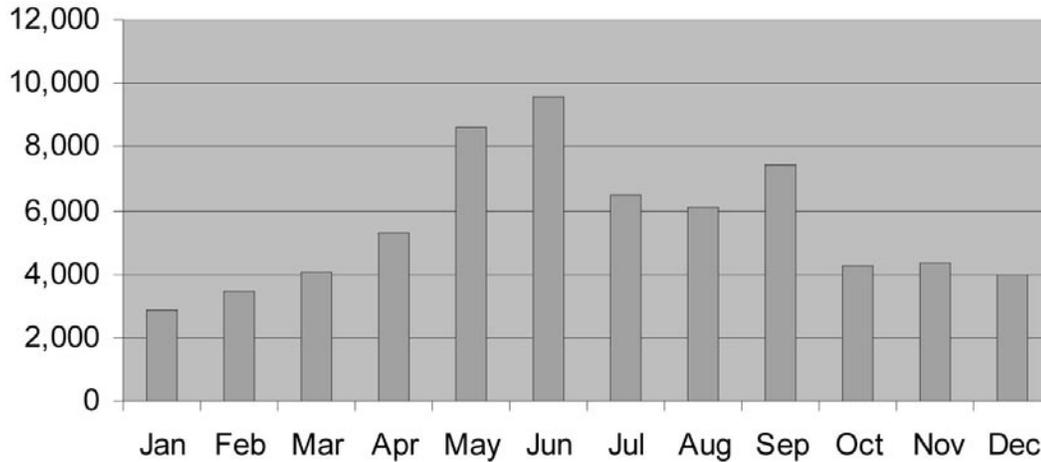
- A letter of welcome
- History of the program
- Descriptions of each committee
- Work plan
- Phone numbers
- Guidelines for volunteers
- Job specific information
- Emergency procedures
- Forms to facilitate feedback

Ongoing training is important, not only for educating volunteers on how to accomplish specific tasks, but as a way to develop volunteers and deepen their personal investment in the organization. That way volunteers can grow from simply being a helping hand, to becoming an integral part of the community’s Main Street effort.

Consider sending volunteers to seminars or workshops covering topics that pertain to their work. The Virginia Main Street program offers a variety of quality, in-depth training sessions, and is a good source to learn about other educational opportunities offered by the Virginia Downtown Development Association, the National Main Street Center, and related organizations.

While the nature of many of today’s volunteers is to help out from time to time with a specific task, it is still good policy to regularly give all volunteers the opportunity to be more involved. Accordingly, volunteers should be made aware of upcoming board and staff meetings, as well as upcoming training sessions. If the training or meeting is directly related to the work they commonly do for the organization, then a personal invitation from the committee chair is appropriate. This being said, it is critical that the meetings the volunteers attend are organized, efficient and end on time. There is nothing like being stuck in a meeting that drags on endlessly and without direction to make someone lose enthusiasm about the organization.

## VMS Community Volunteer Hours by Month - 2005



*Understanding how your organization's need for volunteer hours changes throughout the year can be helpful in determining the best time to do your volunteer recruitment, training, and recognition activities.*

Creating a positive volunteer experience is more than just having something worthwhile for a volunteer to do, but working to make sure they are successful in whatever it is they undertake. No one likes to fail at a task, and you

for them to do. They need to be made to feel that they are contributing to the effort; otherwise, they will feel that you don't need their help.

### Volunteer Success Stories: Lynch's Landing

Lynch's Landing Inc. in Lynchburg has made setting their volunteers up for success a priority, which is one reason why they have had more than 50,000 volunteer hours contributed to them since 2000. Their after-work concert series, Friday Cheers™, which regularly draws thousands of people to downtown during the summer months, is one where volunteers play a critical role. Each week, Lynch's Landing partners with area nonprofits to work the event and share in its proceeds. It takes a lot of people to make these events go smoothly, so Lynch's Landing relies on volunteer supervisors to oversee everyone involved.

Being a supervisor is no small task, so in order to set these crucial volunteers up for success, Lynch's Landing holds an extensive training session. During the session volunteers go over step-by-step what happens when and what each supervisor's responsibilities are throughout the event. Additionally, Lynch's Landing provides supervisors with an easy-to-use guide with phone numbers and other information on how to deal with a variety of emergency situations, such as weather evacuation, or a lost child.



*Volunteers with Lynch's Landing handing out wrist bands at their Friday Cheers™ event.*

Organization's should have a "volunteer ladder" that allows volunteers to earn greater responsibility over time. For example, lay out a path so a volunteer can go from working the gate at an event, to coordinating other volunteers for the event, to serving on the promotions committee, to ultimately serving on the board. Let your volunteers

know about these opportunities during their orientation. A volunteer who feels empowered, and knows that others are counting on them is much more likely to keep showing-up and contributing positively.

can be sure that if a volunteer does feel like a failure, you'll likely not see them back again. For that reason, it is important that you set your volunteers up for success by providing the tools, training and resources they need to accomplish the job effectively and efficiently.

It is also vitally important to keep your volunteers busy once they agree to help. The quickest way to lose a volunteer is to have them show up for an event and not have a job

Good supervision is key to ongoing volunteer development. Volunteers should be given a specific supervisor, or mentor, who is responsible for keeping the organization informed of the progress of the volunteer. The supervisor, in turn, should provide clear instructions to their volunteers and be able to answer any questions they may have. Volunteers should not be made to sink or swim on their own.

## Recognition

It is far easier to keep an experienced volunteer happy and continuing to work, than it is to recruit and train a new one. Once an organization has gone through the processes of recruiting and training volunteers, it becomes especially important to retain them by rewarding and recognizing their accomplishments. In addition to keeping your volunteers coming back, a well structured and meaningful recognition program can be one of the most effective ways to motivate volunteers to do even more.

Everyone agrees that recognizing volunteers is important, but there is no such unanimity on how best to do it. This is understandable, because recognizing volunteers can be done in so many different ways. It can be as simple as an earnest thank you and a handshake, to something as grand as a formal award at a black tie gala. Whichever way you do it, your program for recognizing and rewarding volunteers should not be a one-size-fits-all operation. It is important for it to be personal and that you treat volunteers as individuals and thank them in the way that they want to be thanked.

For example, the last thing your hardworking, but shy star volunteer wants is to be dragged up on stage in front of a hundred people, given an award and asked to make a speech. However, if you have a town council person among your volunteers, this may be the best way to keep them coming back to help. Oftentimes, a small bouquet of flowers delivered with a note saying thanks can be more effective than a big cash prize and a person's face splashed in the paper. The important thing is to know your volunteers and be thoughtful in recognizing them.

Another rule of thumb is to, whenever possible, make the reward immediate. A simple thank-you as soon as the job is done can mean more than a grander gesture of thanks given weeks later.

More traditional ways to show appreciation and recognition are to give plaques, host luncheons, run ads in the paper, or send handwritten thank you notes. Some communities will hold special volunteer recognition events, such as breakfasts, evening events, or special downtown shopping days. Creating a "volunteer of the month" award, or some other incentive which would include a special prize is a great way to reward those volunteers that go beyond the call of duty.

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## WAYS TO REWARD & Encourage Volunteers

1. Encourage a sense of pride and ownership in the project
2. Promote team building
3. Encourage volunteers to involve friends and family
4. Create budget items for volunteer recognition
5. Set volunteers up for success
6. Establish a plan to best utilize a volunteer's time
7. Make it fun!
8. Encourage friendly competition
9. Show care and concern for your volunteers
10. Make it your goal to have volunteers ask you to participate again
11. Remember to say THANK YOU!
12. Smile
13. Have them train new members
14. Take time to explain tasks fully
15. Offer to write recommendations to prospective employers
16. Praise them to their friends
17. Give them free tickets to downtown events
18. Provide scholarships to volunteer conferences or workshops
19. Invite participation in policy formulation
20. Send letter of appreciation to employers
21. Provide good working conditions
22. Be fun and creative with the way you thank your volunteers
23. Celebrate outstanding projects and achievements
24. Enlist to train other volunteers
25. Allow them to grow out of a job

### Volunteer Success Stories: Harrisonburg

Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance keeps a line item in their budget for volunteer appreciation. They also host an annual reception honoring the service of their volunteers. This year it was held at a brewpub downtown where in addition to free hors d'oeuvres and beverages, the program included a slideshow highlighting past accomplishments, updates on new projects downtown, and the organization's plans and volunteer opportunities for the upcoming year.

## Putting It All Together

Effectively managing and executing the important and interrelated tasks of recruiting, training and rewarding volunteers can be a job in itself. Because of this, many Main Street organizations have created a dedicated volunteer coordinator position. While this may just be a volunteer position, having someone whose sole focus is developing a pool of volunteers is a wise investment of time. The organization should select someone who is not just dedicated and energetic, but also well organized and detail oriented. Because it is such an important position, the board or the organization committee should consider actively recruiting and interviewing for the position. If your organization does not already have a dedicated volunteer coordinator, make getting one a priority, as they can strengthen your volunteer program at every level.

Another, overarching theme for a strong volunteer program is fostering a dialogue with your organization's volunteers. While integrating good communication and feedback mechanisms into all aspects of your Main Street organization is good policy, it is particularly important to do when dealing with volunteers. Being clear and straightforward about what needs to be done, when, and why it is important will not only get a better response from your volunteers, it will add to their sense of accomplishment. It is also good policy to keep volunteers in the loop and abreast of organizational changes or important news, especially when it pertains to work they commonly do for the organization.

Good communication after the volunteering is done is also important. An annual review process for certain key volunteers (like board members) is one way to do this and will serve the organization well. These reviews should remain confidential, one-on-one, and most importantly, two-way. They should include recognition of what the volunteer is doing well, as well as ideas on how the volunteer can be



*HDR volunteers unveil banner at their recent volunteer reception*

more effective. Most importantly, the organization should listen to the volunteer's suggestions on what it can do better. Developing a basic evaluation form can help this process. Besides this annual look at volunteers, ongoing feedback throughout the year can prove just as important.

In conclusion, Main Street programs in Virginia and elsewhere, indeed the entire Main Street movement itself, owe their success to volunteers. Every organization involved in downtown revitalization, from the most sophisticated to those just starting out, can benefit by working harder to recruit, train and reward their volunteers. True to the interconnectedness of the Main Street Approach, the most effective thing you can do to help your organization in each of these three key areas is to be successful in implementing all four points of the Main Street Approach.

Volunteers will be more likely to sign up to help, enjoy the work more, and be even prouder of their accomplishments if they know that the group they are giving their time and efforts to is bringing positive change to downtown and their community.

### Volunteer Database

While there is no one, best way to keep track of all the important information for your volunteers, it is crucial that you keep the information in some way and databases are an effective means to do this. Not only do they aid in accessing volunteer resources, they ensure important volunteer information is not lost through changes with staff or the volunteer coordinator.

While all databases should include the basic information about your volunteers (e.g. name, e-mail address, phone, etc.), what additional information is

included depends upon how your organization interacts with its volunteers. For example, the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that Lynch's Landing uses for its volunteer database includes the volunteer's shirt size, birthday, allergies, and which weeks they are available to work their Friday Cheers™ event. Volunteer databases do not have to be fancy to be effective – they can grow over time as conditions change. Some additional items your organization might consider adding to their volunteer database are:

- Spouse's name
- Food allergies or preferences
- What days and hours they are willing to volunteer
- Their preferred type of volunteer work
- Other organizations they are affiliated with
- When they joined or first volunteered
- Notes on how they prefer to be recognized
- Events they worked in the past
- Trainings or workshops they've attended



**New DHCD Commercial District Affiliate Communities**

This spring saw six new communities further invigorate their downtown revitalization efforts by successfully applying to become DHCD Commercial District Affiliate Communities. In southwest Virginia, the communities of **Galax** (pop. 6,500), **Pound** (pop. 1,085), and **St. Paul** (pop. 1,007) are hoping the distinction and resources afforded by becoming an Affiliate community will aid in their successful application and implementation of a downtown revitalization-focused Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).

The Southside community of **Alberta**, currently implementing a downtown revitalization CDBG, has become the Affiliate program's second smallest community with a population of only 305. In Central Virginia, another small community, **Dillwyn** (pop. 457), which is the planning stages of a downtown CDBG, also successfully completed the Affiliate application. Lastly, Richmond's southern neighbor **Petersburg** (pop. 33,740), has joined the program. Petersburg's downtown development organization, Downtown Petersburg, Inc., has also recently hired a new, full-time executive director.

This designation makes these communities eligible for quarterly Main Street trainings, remote consultation, and other Virginia Main Street services. To find out how your community can become an Affiliate, check out our Web site at: [www.dhcd.virginia.gov/MainStreet](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/MainStreet).

**People**

The Partnership for **Warrenton** Foundation, Inc. has hired **Sheri Murphy** as their new executive director. Murphy arrived in Warrenton from Tallahassee, Florida in 2002, where she was vice-president of the Florida Sports Foundation and directed a number of community events and festivals. Prior to joining the Partnership, Murphy worked for the Fauquier Alliance for Youth where she earned the reputation in the community as a friendly, energetic leader who knows how to get things done. **John "Sparky" Lewis**, that organization's board president, stated "I think she's exactly what the Partnership needs."

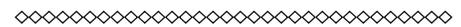
Two years ago, **Marshall Stowe**, a former banker, came out of retirement to take on the role of executive director of the **Martinsville** Uptown Revitalization Association. This January he re-retired and the organization had to look no further than its own Projects Coordinator to find their new executive director, **Susan McCulloch**. McCulloch, who joined the Martinsville Uptown in 2005, has a strong background in nonprofit marketing and development. She has a bachelor's degree in English and is in the process of completing a certification program in nonprofit leadership. The organization is hoping McCulloch will build on her past successes, like leading the Uptown Window Walk project, to take Martinsville Uptown to new heights.

After being ably served by their interim program manager **Chris Plumley**, **Waynesboro** Downtown Development, Inc. has selected **Kimberly Waters** as the organization's new executive director. Waters is well known in Virginia Main Street circles for her tenure as director of the Staunton Downtown Development Authority during a long and successful period for that community's downtown, which included winning a Great American Main Street Award. Bringing on

Waters is an important step for the organization, which has been without a full-time executive director since the city cut their funding in 2005.

In May, **Justine Roberts** joined the Virginia Main Street team as our new intern. Justine just finished her first year in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program at Virginia Commonwealth University. A native of Fairfax, Va., Justine did fundraising and special events for Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens and Washington National Cathedral prior to moving to Richmond.

In April, after 10 terrific years, **Amy Yarcich** stepped down as program manager of Virginia Main Street. She is becoming executive director of Rx Partnership, a Richmond-based nonprofit that distributes donated prescription medication to uninsured individuals through a network of free clinics throughout the state. Yarcich will be remembered well for her energy and dedication to Virginia's Main Street Communities. During her tenure, she worked hard to raise the program's standards, level of service, and in general, make both maintaining and achieving Virginia Main Street Designation a more challenging and rewarding accomplishment.



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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF  
HOUSING AND  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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## DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT CALENDAR

### June

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- 1 Save Our History Grant Application Deadline. (The History Channel, [www.saveourhistory.com](http://www.saveourhistory.com))
- 5 SBA Entrepreneur Express, Winchester, VA. (Virginia Department of Business Assistance, [www.dba.virginia.gov](http://www.dba.virginia.gov) or (804) 371-0058)
- 6 State Review Board and Historic Resources Board Joint Meeting, Richmond, VA. (Virginia Department of Historic Resources, [www.dhr.virginia.gov](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov) or (804) 367-2323)

### July

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- 19-19 Virginia Main Street Summer Tool Kit: Luray, VA
- 25-27 2007 VAPA Planning Conference, Wintergreen, VA. (Virginia Chapter of the American Planning Association, [www.vaplanning.org](http://www.vaplanning.org) or (804) 754-4120)
- 30 First Assembly Day, a Living History Program, Jamestown, VA. (Preservation Virginia, [www.apva.org](http://www.apva.org) or (757) 229-0412)

### August

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- 16 Regional Hot Topics Luncheon: Mixed Use Development, Richmond, VA. (Virginia Downtown Development Association, [www.downtownvirginia.org](http://www.downtownvirginia.org) or (434) 238-0986)
  - 25 National Park Service Founder's Day, Jamestown, VA. (Preservation Virginia, [www.apva.org](http://www.apva.org) or (757) 229-0412)
- Various SBA Entrepreneur Express (Virginia Department of Business Assistance, [www.dba.virginia.gov](http://www.dba.virginia.gov) or (804) 371-0058.)  
Visit website for numerous workshop dates and locations within Southwest and the Valley.