

## Add attractive visuals. Add community spirit. Add revenue.

Project Graphics has long admired and respected efforts to preserve America's Main Streets. As a long-time member of the National Historic Trust, we are aware of the challenges faced by historic towns as they try to balance commerce and economic development with infrastructure renewal and preservation of the town's character and historic charm. We applaud the many success stories and over a decade ago we decided to develop an idea that would benefit everyone involved.

Project Graphics was founded in 1993 as a manufacturer of banners and other fabric promotions. We have worked with small towns and big cities nationally to create banner displays that unify communities visually and increase local spirit. We are now one of the premier manufacturers of light pole banners in the United States. While working with these clients in the 1990s, we realized that if we added a small "slice" of fabric to the bottom of the banners, it could be sponsored by a local business that would have their name printed on it and this would help fund the cost of the banner, the installation and generate some revenue for future banners.

When determining how to value a sponsored banner, it turned out that for the approximate price of a one-time small space advertisement in the local paper, the business could receive on-going name exposure in the downtown area for a year! We interviewed local merchants who were uniformly enthusiastic about supporting their town and getting their name in front of passing pedestrians and traffic in a tasteful and appropriate fashion. The Banner Sponsorship Program was born.

The Banner Sponsorship Program has allowed dozens of American towns who otherwise could not have afforded light-pole banners to add visual interest to their downtown areas and create a continuing source of revenue to fund a variety of renovation projects and events. The Program is flexible and straightforward and the revenue stream is limited only by the number of poles you have.

### Step One

The first step is to designate a leader of the Sponsorship Program. This could be someone in the Main Street Program but it doesn't have to be. It could be a local volunteer or community leader or municipal employee. It could even be a local business person who administers the program for a small percentage of the profits.

### Step Two

Define the Program and all its components. Decide which light poles will have banners installed and whether or not all of them will be included in the Sponsorship Program or whether some will be reserved to promote events and local resources. Now choose how many banners you want to have in rotation – are you going to start with just one or several? Do you want to have one general banner featuring the town, a patriotic banner for the summer and a holiday banner for the winter? Do you have a local festival or annual event that should be featured? Do you have a one-time event such as a centennial coming up? Periodically changing out the banners increases enthusiasm and awareness of the program, but you can of course start the program with a single banner per pole. Most banners can be reused, but all banners do have a total lifespan. A safe estimate is 3 years for a permanent banner display and five years for a seasonal banner rotation. It is recommended that a few extra banners are ordered as accidents happen.



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### Step Three

Establish the aesthetics of your project. Make sure your design and installation coordinate with the historical values and essence of your downtown district. Set guidelines for the types of materials you wish to use and determine the best size dimension for your banners.

Some towns decide to bring the public into the art development process. You can solicit design ideas from area schools, artists and designers, and publicize your designs to generate interest and community feedback. If you decide to get design input, you may want to do so at this stage or you may wait until after you get buy-in from local officials. Whichever the case, keep in mind that part of the price is dependent upon the number of colors used, so you may want to include a proviso that it must be 2 colors or 3 colors or 4 colors when soliciting designs.

### Step Four

Project Graphics is happy to provide pricing on the banners and hardware. Pricing is dependent on the quantity ordered and the number of colors used in the banners, but if you do not already have artwork for the banners we can help you design it or make assumptions about the final product that will allow you to establish your costs.

### Step Five

Now it's time to do the math and summarize your program. A clear, easy-to-understand written summary is a vital tool to gain the support of local officials and gatekeepers.

The total number of poles multiplied by the total number of banners and the cost per banner, plus the number of poles times the sponsorship slices, plus the one-time hardware charge and any installation fees will give you total costs. (Please note that many towns do not pay for installation as they have municipal employees handle this aspect.) The number of sponsorship poles, whether you are changing them semi-annually or annually and what the sponsorship price is will determine the revenues. Draft an official summary of all costs and revenues over the first year and the next 5 or 10 years and the projected use of excess revenues. We recommend that you also provide realistic timing for program launch as there tends to be a lot of enthusiasm and you don't want anyone to be disappointed by perceived delays. For example (and this is not a price quote as there are a variety of sizes, number of colors used, etc.):

<b>Sponsorship Sales</b>	Qty	Unit Cost	Total
36 Sponsors x \$300 annual fee	36	\$ 300.00	<u>\$ 10,800.00</u>
<b>36 Piece Banner Program Summary</b>			
36 Banners: 28"x60"Sunbrella fabric banners: 2-color imprint	36	\$ 51.05	\$ 1,837.80
36 Deluxe Adjustable Hardware Sets	36	\$ 65.71	\$ 2,365.56
36 Sponsor Slices (Hang Downs) printed 1-color	36	\$ 38.50	<u>\$ 1,386.00</u>
Total Cost to Implement Program			\$ 5,589.36
<b>Revenue Realized Year 1</b>			
First Year Revenue Gain (assuming your city installs the banners)			<u>\$ 5,210.64</u>

That's a revenue gain of \$5210.64 in the first year. Looking at the same program over 5 years, assuming annual sponsorships and a 100% sponsor turnover (though we find approximately 10% may not renew):

Each year, an additional \$10,800.00 dollars in revenue could be realized which does not include maintenance and the production of new sponsor names. Allocating \$2000 towards these expenses is reasonable.

Over 5 years profits increase considerably. Select a revitalization project or local humanitarian fund as a recipient of a portion of the proceeds you collect. Designate a cause that makes a difference in the community. Fund a local non-profit, improve a park, have a festival, renovate a local landmark – you decide.

The example provided above is conservative in comparison to the average program initiated with Project Graphics. Many of our customers charge substantially more than the estimated sponsorship cost modeled above. Additionally, the average sponsorship turnover rate is less than 10%, with most programs adding more installations and generating more revenue in outlying years. The products used in this model are premium

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products produced by Project Graphics and focus on quality and longevity. Options are available that better suit the client's budget and the expected life of the program.

#### **Step Six**

Gain the approval of local officials and committees. Many towns have ordinances regulating banner displays and getting everyone on-board before moving forward is a vital step. Having the right information for these meetings, including costs and profits, the use of extra revenues and preferably graphic designs as well so everyone can truly see the vision, will help gain the support you need to proceed.

As you seek approvals, ask local politicians to endorse the project publicly. Seek a letter of endorsement from the Mayor or Selectman that can be distributed to local merchants, organizations and area professionals.

#### **Step Seven**

Now that you have a solid plan and local approval, you can solicit sponsorship dollars from local businesses, patrons, associations and community organizations. In return, these entities receive recognition on the banner itself, which acknowledges them as an active supporter of the community and its revitalization efforts and draws attention to local merchants. Gaining the support of your local chamber of commerce can be a good first step. Frequently the local paper will run an article about the program including contact information and local radio stations will either run public service announcements or be open to barter. We recommend that a form with prices and benefits be available in the town office and the library. An electronic version can be available on your town's website. Necessary marketing tools may include display boards for presentations, poster layouts and electronic files for email solicitation. Seek as many donated services as possible. Face to face contact with the businesses along Main Street, speaking directly with the merchants, is extremely successful. Project Graphics can provide sample banners for this stage so that you can show potential participants exactly what will be installed.

We recommend that you establish a timeline for sponsorship sales and that sponsorship fees will be due on the designated date. This lets the sponsors plan their expenditure and manages their expectation about timing. Most towns sell out fairly quickly, but it depends on how much energy is devoted to the effort.

#### **Step Eight**

Place your order, confirm your artwork and set up your installation schedule. You may want to alert your local newspaper and radio station to the installation date as well as you can frequently get additional coverage including photos. Enjoy!

#### **Step Nine**

Though you have finished your project, your light-pole banners are installed and look great and you are accepting the congratulations of your community, there is a small amount of follow-up to replace those few sponsors that choose not to extend their commitment. This continuing element can either be handled by the original promoter or handed off to another volunteer. One of our favorite ideas, generated by one of our clients, is to fund a \$1000 college scholarship at the local high school that includes a summer internship with the town after the student's senior year, and having the student go out and sell sponsorships. Sponsors and potential sponsors get to see some concrete benefits and find it difficult to say no! In the second or third year, you may also want to add new banners to your rotation or increase the number of light poles in the program.

#### **A brief overview of services provided by Project Graphics:**

1. Consultation to insure that the program is properly structured, marketed and executed.
2. Advisory services on all aspects of the banners, from the creation of suitable graphics to the proper decisions regarding size, location, fabrics, print process, hardware and installation.
3. Necessary marketing tools including artwork for display boards and presentations, poster layouts and electronic design files.

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4. Complete manufacturing of the product at our New England location.
5. Custom hardware systems that co-ordinate with the downtown fixtures.

If your community is currently undergoing downtown revitalization, utilizing the Historic Trust's Four Point Approach or simply seeking to fund-raise and implement a new banner display, a sponsorship program could provide the necessary funding to jump-start your project. Please contact us to discuss how we can help.

**Some comments from successful program managers:**

"Everyone at Project Graphics has been great to work with. They have provided me with everything I have needed to sell our banner program to our board and our community."

**Elwood Indiana Chamber of Commerce**

"I have had the opportunity to work with Project Graphics in two different positions with local communities here in Michigan and have been extremely pleased with the quality of your product and professionalism of your staff. You are by far the leader in the banner industry! Keep up the great work!"

**Kyle D. Hoffman, Downtown Development Director, City of Adrian**

"You are a very smooth professional company to work with. Great finished product and great designs that look way better than your competition."

**Squaw Village, California Neighborhood Company**