



# DESTINO 191

Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge 2021



**Foundation  
for Puerto Rico™**





## THE DESTINO 191 PROJECT

In the “El Yunque’s **Destino 191: Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge in Puerto Rico**” (Destino 191) project, Foundation for Puerto Rico (FPR) partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to collaborate with the distressed rural municipality of Naguabo, Puerto Rico and key stakeholders to develop an innovative placemaking plan to revitalize the Route 191 south corridor as an inviting and vibrant destination and as an alternative entrance to the El Yunque National Forest, which is the only tropical rainforest in the U.S. National Forest Service system, and at nearly 29,000 acres, it is one of the smallest yet most biologically diverse ecosystem. El Yunque region includes the municipalities of Canóvanas, Rio Grande, Luquillo, Fajardo, Ceiba, Naguabo, Las Piedras, Juncos, and Humacao and serves as an important economic driver, accounting for 20% of travel activity around the island, where the rainforest area receives around 1.2 million visitors each year (prior to the Covid-19 closure).

Located in an Opportunity Zone, Naguabo, Puerto Rico is a distressed rural community with a population of 26,075, where 40.7% live in poverty, and per capita income is \$9,283 (compared to \$12,194 for PR, and \$34,103 in the U.S.). As other rural municipalities in Puerto Rico, Naguabo has severely limited resources for capital and other investments to address the crisis it faces regarding rising inequality, problems of aging infrastructure, contracting economy, poverty, unemployment, immigration, and lack of empowerment of social communities.

Since the 2017 hurricanes Irma and María, FPR has been working within Naguabo and its neighboring municipalities of Ceiba, Luquillo and Fajardo, delivering donation and installation of resilience equipment to provide crucial power, water security, and telecommunications support for future emergencies, including: water filters, 180 gallon cisterns, solar powered outdoor lamps, and 3 photovoltaic microgrids and battery storage for community resilience centers in the North-East Bottom Up region.

Through Destino 191, **FPR provided technical assistance and training to co-create a plan with actionable strategies that leverage local community assets and capacity by designing distinctive public spaces, events, and revitalization efforts that contribute to the community’s social, physical, and economic well-being.** Specifically, this multi-sectoral project engaged residents, local small business owners, community-based organizations, state government agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources, and the municipality to develop a Route 191 (“Destino 191”) Placemaking Plan based on community-based assessments. **FPR also mentored the Comité de Desarrollo Cubuy (Comité) in implementing small-scale placemaking projects within a 24-month performance period.**

In addition to the “Destino 191 Placemaking Plan for Naguabo,” FPR drafted and published the Rural Placemaking Innovation Toolkit for Puerto Rico: Methods to Implementing Placemaking in Your Community (in Spanish and English) to share with and use in other rural communities on the island. Working with the



USDA Forest Service, the Puerto Rican Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DRNA), municipality of Naguabo, and Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTOP), we aimed to develop viable schemes for improving the appearance, safety and accessibility to the southern part of El Yunque National Forest that leads to the Rio Sabana Recreation Area and Trail which are within the Community Interface Resource Management Area (CIRMA), and also slated for revitalization by our community engagement partners. In cooperation with the USDA, FPR's "El Yunque's Destino 191: Rural Placemaking Innovation in Puerto Rico" project supported and amplified locally driven efforts that improve economies in a sustainable and resilient way while creating vibrant and inclusive rural places in Puerto Rico where more people want to live, work and play.

The Foundation for Puerto Rico received \$250,000 in federal funding from the Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge funds and committed \$37,500 in cash matching (15%) to this project.



## PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Destino 191 project aimed to:

01

### Establish collaborations

with the Rural Development Division (USDA) to create an innovative placemaking plan for the southern corridor of Route 191 and transform it into an attractive destination.

02

### Provide technical assistance and training

to co-create through a participatory planning process that benefits the social, physical, and economic well-being of the community.

03

### Support a community

lead rural placemaking project and create a new brand for the Destino 191 community initiative with marketing strategies to increase visibility of the destination and boost community vitality, attracting investment and growth to rural areas.

04

### Develop and publish

the Rural Placemaking Plan for Destino 191 and the Rural Placemaking Toolkit for Puerto Rico.

05

### Support local efforts to improve the economy

and create inclusive rural places in Puerto Rico, while enhancing social cohesion in the municipality and encouraging citizen participation.





## METHODOLOGY

Destino 191 focused on five (5) major aspects to understand, plan, and implement community development and participatory planning effectively:

**01 Understanding the Context**  
The project began with thorough research to comprehend the state of public spaces, community desires, and the tangible and intangible assets available in the Cubuy sector. Historical research was also conducted to understand the community's background, especially in the context of the Destino 191 Cultural Route.

**02 Community Involvement**  
From the project's inception, the local community was actively engaged in the planning process through various means, including meetings, field visits, surveys, and workshops. Visualization exercises were used to determine the community's vision for shared public spaces.

**03 Site Analysis**  
A detailed site analysis was conducted, considering topography, infrastructure, environmental conditions, and demographic information. This analysis also included assessing the existing infrastructure, green spaces, and assets along Route 191.

**04 Planning and Resource Identification**  
Destino 191 included identifying small-scale projects, creating a strategic vision, identifying funding sources, and collaborating with various organizations. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted to prioritize objectives.

**05 Technical Assistance and Training**  
To ensure the implementation of the plan, the local non-profit organization received technical assistance on various topics, including placemaking, branding, fundraising, data collection, environmental conservation, and more.

In summary, the methodology combined a range of concepts and approaches to promote sustainable and equitable development in the Cubuy sector through technical assistance and planning procedures, highlighting the importance of leveraging local assets, conserving natural resources, and actively involving communities in shaping their future.



## PLACEMAKING PLAN

The **Rural Placemaking Plan for Destino 191** was a collaboration among multiple stakeholders throughout the entirety of the project. Understanding the community's desires and goals was essential and required the community's involvement. Thus, as part of the process, the team assessed the needs of residents through data recollection and analysis on areas such as infrastructure, health, education levels, and employment, among others. Key collaborators such as the student from the Graduate School of Planning and the School of Architecture from the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus were pivotal in asset mapping, assessing infrastructure conditions, identifying community needs through survey efforts, and helping residents and local leaders visualize spaces through architecture students' sketches. Other collaborative exercises, such as creating a collective vision, a SWOT analysis, and designing the Cultural Route were carried out in multisectoral meetings to design the vision and identify areas of opportunity. All the efforts described hitherto contributed to the creation of the plan; a process that integrated feedback from various sectors to ensure its validity and effectiveness.







## PLACEMAKING TOOLKIT



The Rural Placemaking Toolkit for Puerto Rico: Methods to Implement Placemaking in Your Community compiles all technical assistance material into a toolkit that serves other rural communities in replicating these Placemaking processes. The tools available in this publication emulate the key major areas following the methodology from the planning process. The goal is to make methods accessible across the archipelago and for it to serve as a resource. It is important to emphasize that communities may have diverse desires and needs, thus the Placemaking process should be modified based on the realities of residents and the needs of the community.



## COMMUNITY SURVEYS

As previously stated, designed by the Graduate School of Planning, the project conducted a community survey to acquire pertinent information about the Cubuy sector in Río Blanco. The survey focused on various aspects, including infrastructure, health, education levels, and employment, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current conditions and needs of Cubuy residents. The goal was to identify areas where residents' quality of life could be enhanced, considering the available project implementation and management resources. The major steps for this process were the following:

- A representative sample of 103 housing units was chosen from a total of 140 identified dwellings in the community. This sample was balanced and selected randomly to ensure fair representation. Backup structures were also selected in case the primary units were unavailable.
- The primary data collection method involved house-to-house visits by trained volunteers. Due to the survey's length and complexity (over 100 questions), interviews were conducted in person rather than using a paper survey. Two leaders supervised the visits and transported volunteers due to the community's dispersed housing.
- To address project timeline challenges, a mixed methodology was introduced. Survey data was collected through prepared packets with printed forms and written instructions for survey delivery. A community liaison conducted this process.
- Seventy (70) surveys out of the 103 were obtained, and data analysis was initiated. The analysis aimed to understand the community's needs across various aspects such as population, housing, health, education, employment, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, and environmental justice. This analysis provided information for the development of suggested community development projects as part of the Placemaking project.







## POP UP DEMO PROJECTS

An integral component of the Destino 191 initiative was to support el Comité, or the local NGO in Cubuy by executing small-scale projects related to the technical assistance and training provided in topics of Placemaking. These projects not only served as a practical scenario but also generated a surge in engagement, drawing in volunteers and donations to the community. Each demo project contributed to the rehabilitation and enhancement of the La Mina Community Center, and other areas along Route 191 transforming them into more welcoming and functional spaces for community members and visitors.

Here are the key pop-up demo projects executed:

### REHABILITATION OF LA MINA COMMUNITY CENTER

The La Mina Community Center is a shared public space, currently being maintained by the Comité Desarrollo Barrio Cubuy, Inc. (Comité), used for community meetings, workshops, events and emergency management during natural disasters. The vision for this space is to also serve as a visitor center or "Portalito" for the Cultural Route and the Sabana River Recreational Area in the National Forest. The Sabana River Recreational Area is currently being co-managed by the Comité and USFS. The following placemaking efforts were performed as part of the pop-up demo projects:

- The center was painted using new brand colors. This not only improved aesthetics but also reinforced the center's identity and importance within the community. For this, human resource coordination was essential and required mobilizing community members and volunteers to actively participate in the beautification process.
- Designed and created an external mural on the center's walls. The mural aimed to enhance its outdoor visual appeal and contribute to the overall revitalization efforts. The design was achieved through a collaborative design at an Open House event at the Center.





- Functional repairs to the facilities including sealing roofs, repairing eaves, and simple window fixes. This helped in making the building more functional and weather-resistant for future gatherings.
- A signage design was implemented for the community center establishing it as the official meeting venue and aligning it with the new branding identity and interior design sketches made by the UPR students.
- The creation of an interior mural based on the architecture students' recommendations. The mural, w donated by the Asociación de Artistas Plásticos de Puerto Rico (AAPPR), adds artistic and cultural value to the community center's interior.
- Procurement processes for television, speakers, ceiling fans, shelving for storage, and office supplies aimed to further placemaking efforts and improve the community center's utility. These items enhanced its capacity to host various activities and serve as a hub for its residents and other federally funded projects.
- Inspired by architecture students, the refurbishing of a counter, for the Center's first building visualized to become a Visitor Center or "Portalito" to the Forest, was executed. This counter will facilitate information dissemination and visitor management.







## BRANDING AND PROMOTION

Destino 191 initiative was started by the community before receiving RPIC funding, indicating its intent to continue beyond the cooperative agreement closeout. Therefore, the primary objective of the project was to strengthen and facilitate communications and processes. The aim was to ensure that, post-project completion, the community would possess a robust foundation for sustaining the initiative. Accordingly, branding and marketing were essential for establishing a strong and cohesive identity for the initiative and the Cubuy sector. Branding efforts aimed to enhance engagement and promote a unified image for the area utilizing assets nearing the El Yunque National Forest Southern Entrance.

- A branding expert was hired to create a unique brand identity for the community. The brand utilized the flora and fauna of the region, including colors that alluded to the rainforest.
- As part of the branding efforts, promotional items were purchased, including but not limited to standing banners, tablecloths, stickers, shirts, pens, cups, and bottles. These goodies featured the newly created brand and continue to serve as promotional materials. (Purchased with other non-federal funding sources)
- To enhance online presence and community engagement, a landing page was created to be managed by the local NGO using Google Sites. This web page was designed in alignment with the newly established brand and will serve as a digital hub for community information and activities.
- Design concepts for signage throughout the community were developed, ensuring consistency with the newly launched brand. Signage plays a crucial role in promoting the brand and creating a cohesive visual identity for the Cultural Route.
- A launch event was coordinated to introduce the new brand identity to the community and stakeholders, marking the beginning of a unified and recognizable image for the Cubuy sector in Río Blanco, Naguabo.

Here are some of the elements from the branding created.





## BEAUTIFICATION OF AREAS ALONG ROUTE 191



Beautifying specific areas along Route 191 aimed to enhance the visual appeal of the community and promote community involvement in projects. The following were some key efforts involved in this enhancement process:

- Led by community leaders who began applying Placemaking efforts independently, improvements were made to Route 191's bridges by painting worn out bridges and creating gardens surrounding this infrastructure.
- Creation of a large (970 square feet) mural in Route 191 based on brand identity. FPR coordinated a two-day volunteer event that invited community members and stakeholders to attend the collaborative initiative. Cromápolis PR, in collaboration with community leaders, designed the mural based on the new branding. The mural serves as a visually appealing and artistic addition to the community, enhancing the aesthetics of the area and creating a picture stop for visitors.
- Installation of a welcome sign at Cubuy's entrance based on the brand identity. This signage marks the entry point to the destination, a B-1 Interior forest protected area, and contributes to the community's overall visual appeal.



## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Aiming to catalyze positive change and community development, the FPR team designed and executed a technical assistance (TA) curriculum to support local leaders and the selected local non-governmental organization, the Comité Desarrollo Barrio Cubuy, Inc., in the Cubuy sector from Río Blanco, Naguabo. The heart of this endeavor, along with the pop-up demo projects mentioned before, was to empower leaders, bring visibility and investment to the community, encourage stakeholder engagement, and reignite the community's vibrancy. The curriculum addressed key topics that have the potential to promote community growth and sustainability. The technical assistance curriculum[AM1] focus areas were the following:

- Placemaking, Multisectoral Approach, and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)
- Participatory Planning
- NGO Structuring
- Fund Raising and Project Management
- Conservation of Natural Resources
- Community Tourism, Visitor Management, Cultural Route, and Marketing & Branding

The integration of topics mentioned above ensured that the community's aspirations and needs were heard and translated into tangible actions, such as small-scale projects, the placemaking plan, and the toolkit.

During the performance period of Destino 191, a considerable increase in stakeholder engagement was seen. The program accomplished to highlight the invaluable historical, cultural, and ecological aspects of this sector. In addition, it equipped community leaders with placemaking knowledge and resources that empowered them to continue pursuing sustainable, and regenerative community-driven development.







Some of the lessons learned that may benefit future grantees who wish to replicate these processes, are described in the following tables:

### PLACEMAKING, MULTISECTORAL APPROACH, AND ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (ABCD)

**Summary of approach:** The essence of placemaking lies in the art of transforming spaces into vibrant, community-centered hubs. The program delved into the intricacies of placemaking and instilled a multisectoral approach that sought to harness the collective potential of various stakeholders. Rooted in asset-based community development (ABCD), this pillar empowered the community to identify, leverage, and celebrate its unique strengths and resources.

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| <p><b>Lessons Learned:</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Effective community engagement</b> is essential for successful placemaking and community development projects. This involved coordinating meetings and involving community residents in a series of events such as an Open House at the community center to inform the community on the project and health fairs. These efforts not only engaged residents but also involved them in the decision-making process to ensure their voices were heard and their needs addressed.</li> <li>• <b>Stakeholder management at the multisectoral and multijurisdictional level</b> was crucial. Teaching strategies such as maintaining contact lists and utilizing email marketing and social media to promote the RPIC program and garner support proved to be successful in providing visibility to the project.</li> <li>• <b>Asset mapping</b>, achieved through collaboration with students from the Graduate School of Planning at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), multiple field visits, stakeholder meetings, and tools such as Google Earth, supported the identification of valuable assets in Route 191, defining infrastructure needs and informing destination development efforts.</li> <li>• <b>Visualization exercises and sketch designs</b> for shared spaces helped resident see the potential of the public spaces and motivated them to push forward with the project. Assets identified during the course of the project were also assessed by students from the School of Architecture at the UPR who created several designs presented in the placemaking plan.</li> <li>• <b>Co management strategies</b> and principles were presented and discussed with leaders to involve stakeholders at a multisectoral and multijurisdictional level.</li> <li>• <b>Establishing long term key collaborations</b> was a direct result from the efforts and community leaders have further created alliances with partners such as the Forest Service (FS), who established a co management agreement for the recreational areas with el Comité, Rural Partner’s Network (RPN), whom have chosen the Destino 191 project as the INsignia Project for the Eastern Region; Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC), the Naguabo Municipality, state official from the Puerto Rico Office of Management and Budget (OGP), Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP), Triple S Foundation, members of the Community Resource Management Area (CIRMA), among many others.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Challenges</b></p>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gathering human resources (volunteers)</b> needed for implementing small-scale projects, including the community door-to-door survey process and the rehabilitation of key spaces in the community.</li> <li>• <b>Time investment</b> from volunteers proved challenging based on the community’s profile and the extended timelines associated with smaller scaled projects such visiting houses to perform interview surveys and the</li> </ul>  |



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| <p><b>Challenges continued...</b></p> | <p>rehabilitation of the center, which spanned for several months, made it necessary for leaders to commit to multiple project efforts simultaneously. Though community leaders are dedicated to the project, they mainly performed as volunteers and faced multiple challenges like chronic illnesses in a predominantly elder community which may extend timelines of the overall project.</p>   |
| <p><b>Impact</b></p>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tangible improvements</b> to enhance shared spaces, and infrastructure, and promote stakeholder engagement resulted in a more vibrant and interconnected community.</li> <li>• <b>Placemaking endeavors</b> such as visualization exercises, asset mapping, and the creation of the design for the Cultural Route as part of destination development, helped boost residents' morale and increase their engagement in the Destino 191 initiative.</li> <li>• <b>Effective stakeholder engagement and co-management</b> capacity building increased collaborations and resource sharing amongst stakeholders who support the project</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Value of Action</b></p>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community empowerment by actively involving them in decision-making processes, maintained a sense of ownership of the Destino 191 project. Focusing on the asset-based approach and cultural development not only preserves but also promotes local heritage, ensuring their sustainability for future generations.</li> <li>• Co-management and placemaking strategies pursued in the project were geared towards nurturing sustainable, and regenerative practices for community-driven development that promises long-term benefits and growth for the neighborhood.</li> </ul>  |

## PARTICIPATORY PLANNING

**Summary of approach:** An active participation of the community in the planning processes ensured that the Cubuy sector's future was shaped by the voices, aspirations, and needs of its residents.

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| <p><b>Lessons Learned</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Multisectoral and multi-jurisdictional approaches</b> in planning fostered a sense of collaboration and inclusivity, vital for the project's long-term success.</li> <li>• <b>Student volunteer involvement</b> in the mapping exercise and the creation of designs for key spaces yielded innovative and fresh ideas, enriching the project's overall outcome.</li> <li>• <b>Stakeholder meetings</b> played a crucial role in validating project plans, gathering essential feedback, and conducting SWOT analyses to refine the project's vision. The incorporation of detailed feedback from key stakeholders, achieved through emails, calls, or one-on-one meetings, ensured that the plan and toolkit aligned with the community's expectations and needs.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Challenges</b></p>      | <p><b>Resource-seeking from various stakeholders</b> demands effective promotion and negotiation skills to communicate the project's value and the importance of their feedback in the planning process. Engaging stakeholders in multisectoral and volunteer events was key for their integration by showing how the Cubuy community benefits from their recommendations and participation in the Destino 191 project.</p>  |





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| <p><b>Impact</b></p>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Robust community and stakeholder engagement was achieved</b>, resulting in an inclusive and community-driven initiative. It has also attracted greater volunteerism and investment to the project and community.</li> <li>• <b>Increased project validity and sustainability</b> through community and stakeholder feedback the planning process.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Value of Action</b></p> | <p><b>Quality assurance of projects outlined</b> on the Placemaking plan, and materials gathered for the toolkit through the participatory planning exercises and meetings, helped FPR gain various perspectives from the constructive feedback provided by the community and stakeholders. The participatory planning process, involving multisectoral visualization, ideation, and refinement of ideas for the long term of the Destino 191 project, motivated a sense of ownership and integration, paving the way for sustainable, and regenerative, community-driven development.</p> |

## NGO STRUCTURING

**Summary of approach:** : FPR mentored the Comité on administrative practices. Through the RPIC program, Asesores Financieros Comunitarios (AFC), an NGO dedicated to helping community organization formalize their operations, was hired to provide technical assistance that addressed the development and compilation of administrative documents for the Comité through a series of step-by-step workshops equipping the organization to navigate its operational responsibilities. Additionally, the La Mina Community Center has historically been co-managed by residents after the school closure in 1974; however, the local NGO has faced obstacles in the acquisition of official ownership due to organizational structural challenges. FPR provided additional TA to the local organization to understand and begin structuring a leasing agreement that would enable them to effectively manage and utilize this important community resource.

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| <p><b>Lessons Learned</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Regulatory compliance</b> was a key consideration, where AFC identified the necessity for the Comité to thoroughly understand and adhere to legal requirements through the revision of manuals, checklists, and documentation from the Comité to acquire formal ownership of the community center and further financial assistance and investment.</li> <li>• <b>Crafting essential documents</b> such as bylaws, mission and vision statements, and compiling administrative documents to build a solid organizational foundation was key to helping the local NGO in formalizing operations.</li> <li>• <b>Guiding the organization in creating a strategic and fiscal plan</b>, including workshops on local and federal tax exemptions as well as fiscal sustainability, was necessary to ensure the local NGO had the tools to plan for financial health and comply with relevant state and federal regulations.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Challenges</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Compiling and executing essential organizational documents</b> such as incorporation documents, tax exemptions, and the development of a strategic and fiscal plan was challenging for leaders due to bureaucratic complexities, requirements, and the time investment needed to seek and develop these.</li> <li>• <b>Reincorporation processes</b> were necessary due to fiscal obstacles faced by the organization. A pre-check process was performed by the AFC where they recommended reincorporation for the local NGO. AFC helped the Comité gain a deep grasp of legal and financial intricacies.</li> </ul>   |



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| <p><b>Challenges continued</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Limitations within the leaders' organizational and personal capacity</b>, all of which contributed to delays in formalization efforts for the local NGO. Further coordination by the local NGO is required to complete the process of acquiring state and federal exemptions. Acquiring these exemptions will open opportunities to seek and diversify sources of funding for the NGO.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Impact</b></p>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Addressing and providing TA on regulatory issues empowered</b> the Comité to take crucial steps on formalizing organizational operations and attaining a lease for the La Mina Community Center.</li> <li>• <b>Helped position the local NGO</b> to become receptors for further investment in community and destination development efforts, building foundational capacity for the longevity of the Destino 191 project.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Value of Action</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Formalizing the local NGO and addressing regulatory concerns</b> provided the organization with tools to reincorporate the organization, and create a strategic, a work, and a fiscal plan, to acquire local and federal tax exemptions. When the Comité completes this process, it will be better positioned to gain official leasing of the La Mina Community Center and will help strengthen its position within the community.</li> <li>• <b>Create further avenues diversifying funding sources</b>, enhancing its financial sustainability and capacity for long term initiatives.</li> </ul> |

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND FUNDRAISING

**Summary of approach:** Through the TA, strategies and skills were imparted to enhance project management and fund-raising capabilities to ensure the successful implementation of community and destination building projects outline on the Placemaking plan.

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| <p><b>Lessons Learned</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>TA underscored the importance of structured project management</b> emphasizing the need for the local NGO to perform organized planning, execution, and monitoring of long-term projects to achieve successful outcomes.</li> <li>• <b>Workshops on utilizing online tools</b> such as Google Drive applications, Gantt charts, evaluation forms, and timelines, helped leaders facilitate project coordination, organize documentation from the local NGO accessible to all its members, and collaborate in projects online.</li> <li>• <b>Resource identification, donor relationship maintenance, and data utilization</b> were the focus areas in fundraising approaches. During the planning process, FPR endeavored the critical task of identifying and aligning funding sources and collaborators for the community-based and destination development projects providing a guide with resources and strategies identified.</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>Challenges</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consistency and limitations in local capacity</b> were challenging in project management and execution of small-scale projects, and other coordination efforts, during the RPIC. As stated before, many projects relied on volunteer participation of community leaders and stakeholders; therefore, the execution was dependent on their availability, health, and other unforeseeable circumstances.</li> <li>• <b>Challenges in the formalization of the local NGO</b>, and the coordination required for its completion, limited the diversification of funding for the organization and the Destino 191 project from state and federal sources.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Impact</b></p>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Improved efficiency in the execution of events and small-scale projects</b> among leaders and stakeholders through the provision of tools for project management.</li> <li>• <b>Identifying various sources of funding for future Destino 191 small-scale projects</b> informed the local NGO on the requirements to apply to different programs, requesting donations, and fundraising strategies in general. FPR equipped the leaders with essential knowledge and tools for effective fundraising to increase the financial viability of their projects.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Value of Action</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Community leaders recognize the importance of project management</b> tools for increased efficiency. FPR modeled these processes to execute events, volunteerism, meetings, and small-scale projects.</li> <li>• <b>TA in funding source identification</b> further contributed to long-term financial sustainability by identifying funding sources. Lastly, the project’s focus on proficiency in project management and ideation sessions for Placemaking projects plays a pivotal role in guaranteeing the successful implementation and tracking of various community initiatives, furthering the long-term goals of the project.</li> </ul>               |

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

**Summary of approach:** FPR placed a strong emphasis on equipping the Comité with tools and methodologies for systematic qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, enabling data-driven strategies for community development.

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| <p><b>Lessons Learned</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Researching the historical context of Route 191</b>, and sectors Cubuy and Florida in Barrio Río Blanco, revealed the wealth of prehistorical, historical, and cultural assets, increasing the overall value of the project. Researching and validating Route 191’s cultural assets with stakeholders helped design the Cultural Route. This endeavor required visiting Puerto Rico’s National Archives, and the University of Puerto Rico’s library, searching for resources in the town municipality, and interviewing the town historian for primary and secondary sources.</li> <li>• <b>Preserving the community’s cultural heritage strengthens</b> its identity and connection to the land. Rural communities in Puerto Rico have limited historical sources; however, gaps were filled utilizing oral history, by interviewing key community residents and a local historian. These insights helped FPR delve into the historical intricacies of the community, providing greater context to the planning process. Understanding the foundational aspects of the community’s history helped FPR delve into the long-standing values, traditions, and residents’ diverse ancestry. When defining community and destination development projects, it is important to consider the histories present so as not to disrupt long-established traditions and ensure conservation efforts are properly managed by the community and governmental agencies.</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>Lessons Learned continued</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Data collection through door-to-door interviews gave space</b> for residents to express their desires and needs and helped FPR gain insight into their priorities. Not only quantitative data was acquired, but important qualitative data as well through conversations with residents sometimes spanning from 30 minutes to an hour.</li> <li>• <b>Regroup meetings after each survey effort were important</b> to review the houses visiting and share key findings on the conversations had with residents at each interview. In most interactions, most visited residents were receptive and interested in the initiative, being very hospitable to volunteers while expressing their grievances and vision for the future of the community.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Challenges</b></p>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rural historical sources were limited</b> for the town of Naguabo, which has often been described as a “forgotten town” in the historical sources available, making oral history important in constructing the past’s narrative.</li> <li>• <b>The survey process required several volunteer efforts</b> to complete the process solely by interviews. That is why a mixed methodology was applied, where residents were interviewed in person, but had the option of receiving the survey on paper and returning it to community liaisons later. Having flexibility was important to continue with other programmatic priorities.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Impact</b></p>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Enhanced appreciation for the community’s rich cultural heritage</b> was the result of documenting the historical data and uncovering the richness available in Route 191.</li> <li>• <b>Community involvement with the Destino 191 project increased</b> due to interviews performed as surveys or oral history.</li> <li>• <b>Data research and analysis provided valuable insights</b> to FPR and community leaders that helped inform decision-making and project planning.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Value of Action</b></p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Historical research contributed to a more meaningful planning process</b> based on the historical and cultural assets available in the community. Data recollection and analysis tools equipped leaders with evidence-based insight to make informed decisions and prioritize key projects in the future.</li> </ul>   |

## CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**Summary of approach:** Preserving the environment and conserving natural resources are paramount concerns in the Cubuy sector. The program addressed these topics with available experts in FPR, offering guidance on sustainable practices and resource conservation initiatives.

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| <p><b>Lessons Learned</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gardening, composting, and other natural approaches</b> proved to be of interest in the community, helping residents get more involved by offering workshops on these topics. An important community engagement strategy was surveying residents on their interests. The people of Cubuy, having a strong connection to the forest, have a natural incline to nature-related activities; therefore, these workshops, and the creation of a community garden at the center, helped unify community members. Residents have also shown interest in composting, and one of the long-term projects at La Mina is building a compost center for residents.</li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>Lessons Learned Continued</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Asset interpretation guidance provided leaders with tools</b> to further appreciate and communicate on the cultural and natural resources available in the community. These tools focus on a community-based tourism approach for destination development.</li><li>• <b>Discussions on environmental conservation and maintenance of green and blue</b> areas with community leaders increased awareness of the processes needed to promote a clean environment for residents and visitors.</li></ul>   |
| <p><b>Challenges</b></p>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Erosion and landslides are major risk factors in the community</b> making reforestation efforts necessary in Cubuy, as well as informing residents on the best conservation practices. In this sector, natural disasters, heavy rains, and traffic have a greater chance of provoking landslide events. During the RPIC, hurricane Fiona was a major setback since a landslide covered one of the resident's homes. Moreover, the Río Blanco rises when facing heavy rains, flooding the entrance to the Cubuy sector, and leaving them isolated. These realities proved to be an ongoing challenge during the RPIC since rain is a constant factor in this area.</li><li>• <b>Current infrastructure</b> such as the community aqueduct, the maintenance of septic tanks and the inaccessibility to consistent clean water and recycling schedules, limits conservation efforts in the community.</li></ul>  |
| <p><b>Impact</b></p>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Sowing and maintaining a community garden</b> helped unify members. Specific edible plants were sown that are also easily grown in the sector's environment, making it a sustainable, and regenerative garden providing a food source for the community.</li><li>• <b>Creating greater awareness of natural asset management</b> promoted community members to take part in maintenance of green and recreational areas through brigades to clean water drainage and rapidly growing grass. The community participates in consistent efforts to maintain green areas in the neighborhood and the Sabana River Recreational Area.</li><li>• <b>The creation of an "Inclusive Trail"</b> using the remaining part of Road 191 through the Sabana River Recreational Area brought the community and stakeholders alike in the effort to clean this new "trail" to promote accessibility to El Yunque National Forest.</li><li>• <b>Increased awareness in the monitoring and maintenance</b> of green and blue areas to improve the vitality and use of these spaces. Regenerative approaches have also been taken as a central strategy for community tourism, promoting the conservation and betterment of these areas for visitors, making a differential tourism option for the community.</li></ul> |
| <p><b>Value of Action</b></p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Asset interpretation, environmental conservation, and collaborative maintenance efforts</b> such as brigades, promoted the appreciation of local natural resources. Equipping community leaders with knowledge and resources on these topics empowered them to promote and implement sustainable and regenerative practices within the community.</li></ul>   |





## COMMUNITY TOURISM, VISITOR MANAGEMENT, CULTURAL ROUTE, AND MARKETING & BRANDING

**Summary of approach:** Recognizing the potential for community-led regenerative tourism as an economic driver, the Technical Assistance Program explored the realms of community tourism, visitor management, and the creation of a Cultural Route that designed an itinerary for visitors interested in interpreting and appreciating the historical, cultural, and natural assets in the community. Marketing and branding strategies were developed to showcase Cubuy sector’s unique identity and attractions to a broader audience. One of the major projects for the community center, is converting one of the buildings in a Visitor Center or “Portalito” (small portal) to El Yunque and the Cultural Route in corridor 191 to improve visitor management in this environmentally delicate sector.

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| <p><b>Lessons Learned (continued)</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting efforts with new branding, and the development of videos and photography assets produced by FPR’s communications team, provided greater visibility to the Destino 191 project. These assets were used on meeting invitations and event promotions that engaged stakeholders and are still useful for the community in their future efforts.</li> <li>• <b>Interior design and brand management guidance</b> to the local NGO, helped shape the revitalization of Community Center La Mina. The painting efforts based on brand colors, the new brand elements designed into the structure, murals along Route 191, and signage at the entrance of Cubuy were all beautification strategies to bring visibility. Interior design efforts, led by UPR students, aimed at improving the shared space, ultimately improving the life of residents.</li> <li>• <b>Digital materials procured for the community center improved</b> conditions to attract and engage stakeholders. The addition of a TV and speakers has enabled the community to hold meetings and events more efficiently. Residents have also spoken about creating movie night events, working as a unifying force for members. Additionally, these tools can also help create a welcoming environment for visitors, showcasing the project to those who are unfamiliar to the community and want to learn more about its history and efforts.</li> <li>• <b>Discussions and workshops on brand management and design</b> have led to the development of a cohesive and appealing community brand which has helped pique the interest of new stakeholders. The local NGO continues to expand its network of collaborators to create a collective effort that goes beyond Cubuy and can be replicated in other rural communities.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Challenges</b></p>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Building a representative brand of the community and balancing marketing trends</b> to attract visitors proved to be challenging during validation meetings with residents and stakeholders.</li> <li>• <b>Asset identification to design the Cultural Route</b> required multiple field visits, conversations with leaders, and validation from stakeholders in multisectoral meetings to refine the key spaces that are important for the community and hold value in destination development.</li> </ul>  |



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| <p><b>Impact</b></p>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>With the guidance on marketing strategies presented in the plan and the availability of digital assets</b> leaders can continue to promote the destination to gain greater support.</li><li>• <b>Image and branding development efforts and the pop-up demo projects</b> completed for this technical assistance have enhanced community engagement and visibility.</li><li>• <b>Designing a Cultural Route, a community landing page, and a signage project</b> with FPR’s communications team highlighted assets to increase the visibility of the area.</li><li>• <b>Press releases and social media presence have continued to engage</b> stakeholders and bring investment to the area. Community leaders may continue to use the new brand and follow the marketing strategies outlined in the plan, in addition to the digital tools and available assets, to continue promoting the initiative.</li></ul> |
| <p><b>Value of Action</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The TA has delivered significant value by empowering community leaders</b> with branding, marketing, and digital skills, enabling them to effectively promote community tourism. The efficient utilization of technology and digital resources has enhanced community engagement and resource management. Furthermore, the development of a Cultural Route and signage design have showcased the community’s rich historical, cultural, and natural assets to visitors, contributing to an enriched and more compelling tourism experience. These outcomes underscore the project’s positive impact on the community and its potential for sustainable and regenerative tourism development.</li></ul>  |



## WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MOST CHALLENGING OR UNEXPECTED ASPECTS OF THIS PROJECT?

Throughout the project in the Cubuy sector of Río Blanco, Naguabo, several challenging and unexpected aspects emerged, highlighting the complexities of community-driven placemaking initiatives.

Navigating collaboration and agenda with community leaders proved challenging, given their own personal challenges, and the slower pace of rural living, in contrast to the broad spectrum of TA topics and pop-up demo projects delineated in the project's work plan. The RPIC required multiple interactions such as meetings, site visits, open-house events, and multisectoral meetings to engage community members and stakeholders effectively. While the project entailed the execution of various components, FPR prioritized trust building and listening to residents' grievances to understand their values, desires, and needs; therefore, to foster engagement and build rapport, community workshops based on the residents' interest, such as creating a community garden, soap making, and medicinal plant use were coordinated at the center. This also helped create a sense of ownership of the center, and a willingness to

invest time and efforts on its rehabilitation. FPR held consistent meetings and field visits that helped maintain a strong presence in the community.

Another aspect that challenged the project were the bureaucratic processes and governmental limitations which delayed project timelines, as the execution of certain key aspects involved their awareness or approval. That is why, constant outreach to establish meetings and the provision of status update reports on events and endeavors taking place in Cubuy, Naguabo, were sent to key stakeholders such as the Naguabo Municipality, Forest Service representatives, and the CIRMA. The outreach efforts helped create awareness of the importance of the project and integrate them in the Placemaking planning process as speedily possible.

Moreover, natural events, such as Hurricane Fiona, further disrupted project timelines, underscoring the importance of contingency plans and adaptability in community development projects. During this period, the project focused on supporting residents to get back on their feet after the disaster. Lastly, the Cubuy sector is mainly comprised of an aging population and residents facing illnesses, which limited the local human resources available for the execution of certain small-scale projects such as the rehabilitation of the center. Processes like this entailed prolonged physical labor, requiring greater engagement from volunteer resources external to the community. Therefore, throughout the RPIC program, FPR needed to readjust expectations, tuning into the community's capacity based on unforeseeable circumstances such as natural disasters, heavy rains that isolate the community, and residents who suffered chronic illnesses, among other circumstance.







## IMPLEMENTING A SIMILAR PROJECT

In planning a project similar to the Rural Placemaking Initiative in Cubuy, it's essential to consider the community's strengths and limitations. Understanding the nuances involved in these areas are crucial for making informed decisions and navigating potential challenges. By addressing these elements proactively and building upon the program's strengths, organizations can enhance the effectiveness of similar community development projects and maximize their positive impact. On the following table, the major challenges described will be addressed along with suggestions on how to tackle these particular issues based on programmatic experience

| Aspect                                     | Strengths  | Limitations   | Advice for Other Organizations  |
|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Natural Disasters and Contingencies</b> | Highlighted the importance of contingency plans and adaptability in the work plan based on unenforceable but likeable events based on the community's profile. | Disrupted project timelines reinforced the need for flexibility in efforts related to small scale projects within the community.  | Develop contingency plans for natural disasters, and other unforeseeable situations in the community, that could limit capacity in project execution.       |
| <b>Governmental Involvement</b>            | Government presence and involvement is key to advancing project efforts, especially in areas where their input is required.                                    | Bureaucratic processes and local government limitations can slow down progress.   | Anticipate bureaucratic hurdles and plan for streamlined processes in your workplan as possible.  |
| <b>Volunteerism and Human Resource</b>     | Involved volunteers from the community and external philanthropic organizations in data recollection surveys and pop up demo projects.                         | Demographic factors such as an increasing elderly population limit the capacity within the community to execute certain efforts, requiring greater promotion to attract volunteers. | Performing consistent multisectoral meetings and public events will help maintain a volunteer contact list while bringing awareness to volunteerism needed. |



## IMPLEMENTING A SIMILAR PROJECT

Careful planning for contingencies and risk mitigation, as well as a more simplified programmatic work plan, is important to not overwhelm distressed communities and show flexibility in the face of unforeseen circumstances. Demonstrating the benefits of the project to engage the residents, while integrating their interest within the project can help garner support. Consider the demographic profile of the community if data is available, particularly when involving an elderly population, and strive to design and organize projects that accommodate their specific needs and limitations.





## WAS THERE AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH?

The Destino 191 program in the Cubuy sector innovated by designing a distinctive brand that resonated with the community's identity and the unique flora and fauna of the area. The brand was carefully created and validated with stakeholders to incorporate elements such as the Yaboa, Pitirre, and Puerto Rican Woodpecker birds, as well as Helicorneas, Miramelindas, and other indigenous plants that are specific to the southern entrance to El Yunque National Forest. By grounding the brand in these natural elements, the project successfully forged a meaningful connection between the community and its environment.

Furthermore, the involvement of architecture students in the project brought fresh and innovative ideas. The students drafted designs for key spaces within the community, including the redesign of the El Yunque southern entrance through Route 191, aligning them with the project's branding and community goals. One of the most innovative aspects of the project was the creation of an "Inclusive Trail" along remaining parts of Route 191 South through the Sabana River Recreational Area. The initiative involved repurposing an old road that had been unused for decades due to consistent landslides. The aim was to transform it into an immersive experience that would allow people to enjoy a low-intensity trail in a natural environment. The trail's development is a collaborative effort involving community leaders, the US Forest Service, the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, and other key stakeholders. The primary goal of these inclusive endeavors is to offer a unique and accessible experience.

This innovative approach enriched the project and contributed to creating a destination that prioritizes inclusivity and the celebration of the community's natural heritage. The success of this approach offers valuable insights for other organizations planning similar projects, encouraging them to consider creative branding strategies, involve stakeholders and the community in the design process, and consider inclusivity aspects when creating projects and experiences.







## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

In conclusion, the Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge in Cubuy has been a transformative endeavor that has significantly impacted the community and its surroundings. Through a comprehensive approach that included effective communication, community engagement, branding based on the region's unique flora and fauna, and inclusivity aspects, the project has empowered the community and enhanced its connection to its environment and history. It has also set the stage for sustainable and regenerative community development in the Cubuy sector of Río Blanco, Naguabo.

As we look ahead to the next steps for the project, it is imperative to maintain the momentum gained in community engagement and empowerment. Building upon the successful branding efforts and inclusive initiatives, the project should continue to promote its unique identity and create accessible experiences for all. This includes the ongoing development of the Inclusive Trail and Cultural Route, which holds the promise of making the natural beauty of the area accessible to a wider range of visitors. Additionally, it is important to prioritize community development projects outlined in the Placemaking Plan that relate to infrastructure, health services, and other key areas assessed through community surveys. Without this balancing act, destination development may hinder the residents' quality of life. Regenerative practices suggest that local efforts such as community tourism and attracting visitation should impact and benefit community members mainly. That is why destination development efforts should not be treated as an independent project, but one that integrates community development efforts to increase the quality of living of residents and visitors experiences alike.





## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Another major step to ensure the longevity of the project is to continue to foster collaboration amongst government agencies, community leaders, and stakeholders to address infrastructure and community challenges ensuring sustainability of environmental conservation efforts and the betterment of community gray infrastructure. The commitment to creating a shared sense of responsibility for the conservation of green, blue, and gray areas should remain at the forefront of future endeavors.

Furthermore, the project's Placemaking Plan and Toolkit can serve as valuable resources for other rural communities facing similar challenges and aspirations. Sharing the knowledge and experiences gained in Cubuy, Naguabo can contribute to the replication of successful strategies in different contexts. With the publication of these main deliverables, the RPIC in this sector stands as a model for community-driven development that prioritizes inclusivity, sustainability, and the celebration of local heritage. The project's journey continues, and its impact is poised to grow, serving as an inspiration for similar initiatives across the region.





A lush tropical forest with multiple waterfalls cascading down rocky terrain. The scene is filled with dense green foliage, including palm trees and various tropical plants. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

# DESTINO 191

El Yunque del Caribe