

RCAC Final Report

USDA Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge Grant Award PY2022

Clearlake, CA:

Clearlake California is a small city incorporated in 1981 and located in Lake County on the southern part of Clear Lake just north of Sonoma and Napa counties. The city is situated next to the largest (43,000 acres) natural freshwater lake and one of the oldest lakes in North America. The lake is known for excellent bass fishing and is a popular spot for water sports, camping, and wildlife observation. The City of Clearlake is the largest incorporated city in Lake County with a population of 16,481¹ people.

According to the City's 2040 General Plan, the City and residents would like to focus on sustainable and incremental growth to maintain the community's historical development patterns and to keep its small-town feel. Rejuvenation of the City's Lakeshore Drive is a high priority for the city to eventually expand its boundaries and better connect to nearby residential areas.

The City of Clearlake submitted a letter of interest to RCAC on March 30, 2022, seeking support and technical assistance to explore community economic development opportunities through RCAC's Recharge Our Community's Economies (ROCE) workshop series.

RCAC's Building Rural Economies (BRE) partnership with City of Clearlake officially began with a kick-off on December 8, 2022. During the kickoff meeting, City Manager Alan Flora highlighted some of the opportunities and challenges for the Clearlake community. Since 2015, 70% of Lake County has been impacted by devastating wildfires. Additionally, the recent Boyles Fire destroyed 30 structures in September of 2024 and critical infrastructure.

Clearlake leadership requested RCAC provide and facilitate the ROCE sessions to help identify and establish steps to improve the economic environment of the city and to help identify key placemaking priority areas. City of Clearlake assigned a staff person to serve as the Community Coordinator to ensure members of the community had a local connection during the ROCE sessions and throughout the follow up technical assistance.

RCAC conducted four workshops utilizing the participant focused ROCE curricula. The process identified key placemaking priority areas that included supporting local businesses, creating vibrant public spaces/outdoor recreation, housing, and tourism. An average of 18 community members participated in the sessions. The attendees represented local officials, residents, entrepreneurs, small business owners, resource organizations, real estate companies and financial institutions. Below is a summary of the activities and outcomes:

¹ United State Census Bureau QuickFacts 2023

Recharge Our Community Economies (ROCE) Sessions:



Workshop 1 was held on August 14, 2023, at the City of Clearlake Council Room. A key outcome of the first session was identifying the community's strongest assets and creating a mindset on addressing the community's assets and strengths as strategies to address weaknesses or threats. The lens used to evaluate the community assets included the following: Political; Individual; Social; Intellectual; Natural; Financial and Cultural.

Workshop 2 was held on September 14, 2023, and was held at the Senior Center. Building on workshop #1 and continuing to evaluate the community's landscape, participants were asked to complete a History Timeline identifying major events over a 50-year period. Fishing and hunting, tourism, vineyards, agriculture, entertainment, and recreation were the economic sectors identified during the Timeline exercise.

The workshop activities led to the identification of three projects with potential positive impact on Lakeshore Drive and the surrounding community. The three projects included: 1) a business incubator, 2) revitalization of the Clearlake Queen Paddlewheel Boat and 3) establishing a Clearlake downtown business rehabilitation district and regulations - Infrastructure Rehabilitation of Clearlake (IROC).

Ad-Hoc Committees were formed by the participants for each project.

Workshop 3 was held on October 15, 2023, where Value Chain exercises were facilitated. Value chain is one of RCAC's main tools used for connecting community assets with proven market demand to help build community wealth and lasting livelihoods. The session also included a sample Action Plan template to help the Committee navigate their next steps to meet their goals and objectives.

Workshop 4 took place on November 13, 2023. The session was held with a focus on developing action plans for the projects identified during the four sessions. The final Placemaking priorities suggested for implementation were as follows:

Support Local Businesses:

- Create a business incubator
- Increase understanding of regulatory requirements prior to opening or expanding a business
- Improve communication and support between business owners & City of Clearlake
- Support entrepreneurs to establish new businesses

Promote Tourism and Historic Preservation:

- Revitalize the Clear Lake Queen Paddlewheel Boat

Boost Vibrant Spaces & Outdoor Recreation:

- Continue developing parks (Austin Park, Highlands Park, Redbud Park and Marina)
- Improve Lakeshore Drive and its visual appeal

Develop Housing:

- Assess housing needs and update building inventory
- Develop housing and rental units on vacant city-owned property

Final Outcomes:

RCAC staff facilitated the four on-site workshops and additional on-site meetings with the City Manager, Community Coordinator and project leaders.

Initial committees formed around each project moved and experienced limited success. Eventually the committee disbanded due to lack of local leadership and ownership.

Although projects did not move forward, the City Manager and Community Coordinator identified initiatives that fell under the placemaking priorities identified by the participants. RCAC is continuing to work with the City to identify funding and other resources for the placemaking priorities.

The Clearlake Placemaking Plan was developed and provided to the City Manager for distribution. The Plan will be revisited every 6 months to ensure new opportunities or economic changes in the community are documented and addressed accordingly.

Mora County, NM:

The small unincorporated town of Mora is located along the banks of the Mora River roughly 95 miles northeast of Santa Fe New Mexico. The community is the seat of Mora County. The U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) indicates Mora's population is 793.

Mora Valley is considered a nature lover's paradise due to the majestic mountain peaks, scenic waterways, undisturbed landscapes and state parks in the region. Mora Valley also has a history built on agriculture and farming. Between April and August 2022, the Hermit's Peak Calf Canyon Fire burnt more than 340,000 acres (531 square miles) in rural northeast New Mexico. The blaze started as two separate fires (the Hermit's Peak Fire, as prescribed U.S. Forest Service burn that escaped control and the Calf Canyon Fire started when a burn pile reignited). The fire spread quickly, reducing large swaths of forest to ash; destroying nearly 1,000 structures including homes, businesses and historic landmarks; displacing thousands of residents throughout Mora and the surrounding county.

In June 2022 one of RCAC's long-standing partners, Visiones Collaborativas, also known as Collaborative Visions (CV), requested training and technical assistance from RCAC BRE staff to help their staff work alongside residents and local leaders on fire recovery efforts in Mora County. Under the USDA RPIC grant, RCAC's goal was to work with CV to create a cross-training team (that included staff from RCAC's

environmental services, Building Rural Economies and disaster recovery department) to provide training, resources and technical assistance for working with the residents and local leaders and to identify and implement a placemaking vision for Mora County post-fire.

Recharge Our Community’s Economy (ROCE) Sessions:

Between January and April 2023, RCAC BRE staff worked with CV to plan and conduct three 6-hour in-person Mora County Disaster Recovery & Placemaking Workshops. The key concepts and tools from RCAC’s Recharge Our Community’s Economy (ROCE) workshop series were utilized to prioritize goals and objectives that would mitigate future disasters and to develop long-term planning. A total of 50 community members and partners including the USDA Rural Partners Network (RPN) participated in the workshops.



In addition to the in-person workshops, RCAC helped facilitate several virtual committee meetings.

A total of 3 Ad-Hoc Committees were formed to address the placemaking priorities:

- Housing Committee – Develop a preliminary housing needs assessment that will provide essential housing data for Mora County.
- Community Economic Development – Develop a comprehensive plan for a regenerative community known as “Plaza Nueva” that will include business space with shared resources, community meeting space, an affordable housing pilot project focused on culturally appropriate fire-resistant housing, a senior living center, a one-stop community resource center and recreational spaces including a park.
- Infrastructure Committee – Assess drinking and agricultural water quality/infrastructure issues due to fire and flooding disasters.

Innovation Seed Grant Program:

Under the USDA RPIC 2022 funding, RCAC successfully awarded three \$7500 Seed Grant awards for committee priorities. CV managed the initiative, where Seed Funds were distributed directly to three small non-profit or businesses to address the key priorities, infrastructure, housing, and economic development. The three deliverable reports/plans are attached to this report:

- Housing Committee – Preliminary Housing Needs Assessment
- Community Economic Development Committee – Outreach and Community Survey. The committee, in coordination with CV were awarded a \$150,000 Health & Human Services

Community Economic Development Planning grant to support pre-development costs for Plaza Nueva. To ensure CV collected input from all community members, the committee contracted with a company to conduct surveys in two phases, each were centered on outreach during major events.

Final Outcomes:

RCAC's BRE staff conducted three in-person Mora County Disaster Recovery & Placemaking Workshops as well as facilitated numerous virtual committee meetings for all three Ad-Hoc Committees.

Three seed fund awards, each totaling \$7500, were awarded by recommendation from a Seed Fund Committee. The award deliverables were completed and attached to this report. The deliverables will help move the committees' end goals forward.

The placemaking Plan was completed and provided to Collaborative Visions. The Plan is attached to this report.

Fort Jones, CA:

Fort Jones, California is a small community in the heart of Siskiyou County's Scott Valley with a population of 6732. The Scott Valley is known for its vast, green landscape, cattle and dairy farms, outdoor adventure, and its three friendly towns of Fort Jones, Etna, and Callahan, each one with its own unique amenities and attributes. Originally part of the Karuk Tribal Lands, the Scott Valley became a hub for those looking to profit from California's gold rush in the mid-19th century. As the mines began to close in the years that followed, the timber industry, along with agriculture and the abundant hunting and fishing, sustained the town over the next century and a half after being officially incorporated in 1872. Much of Fort Jones' current economy is centered around agriculture and small-scale forestry, with the largest employer being a Tree Farm just outside of town. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an influx of tourists to the Scott Valley in recent years which has brought new life to small businesses along Fort Jones downtown, which sits on Highway 3.

Fort Jones' relationship with RCAC began in 2018 through RCAC's Environmental Services Department who was seeking assistance to perform the necessary Median Household Income (MHI) studies to qualify for grant funding to support needed improvements to the water and wastewater infrastructure including a new treatment facility. The Town was referred to the RCAC Building Rural Economies (BRE) Program by the RCAC staff conducting the MHI. As such, the Town submitted a letter of interest to participate in the 2019 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Capacity Development Initiative grant cohort to get access to capacity building support to engage in economic development initiatives, find access to funding to support General Plan updates, and to make training available to the Town council.

As the pandemic-related health restrictions began to be lifted and new guidelines allowing people to gather safely indoors began to be put into place in late 2021, RCAC's BRE team began plans with the town to provide in-person town council training and deliver our Recharge Our Community's Economy (ROCE) 4 in-person workshop series. At the conclusion of the workshops, RCAC staff began leveraging

² DATAUSA 2023

its partnership with local stakeholders and residents to provide technical assistance to the project value chain groups to create and establish action plans and maintain positive momentum. The value chains included, the development of a small boutique motel; establishing a citizen-led economic development and planning committee that would support a stronger dialogue between the council, business owners, and residents; and the redevelopment and enhancement of the downtown corridor.

Through the course of these projects, RCAC staff recognized a continued and growing need to build the town's capacity to pursue economic development initiatives. The USDA RPIC 2022 initiative was a perfect vehicle for the Town to identify and articulate the placemaking priorities. The RCAC staff and the Town of Fort Jones Administrator, town clerk, mayor, and council members during the summer of 2022 came together to develop Placemaking Plan priorities. They are as follows:

Mainstreet Redevelopment and Branding initiative

- Working with a citizen planning committee to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem for small business owners.
- Training for the Economic Development Work Group members on committee structure, roles and responsibilities and engagement strategy.
- Facilitating a community visioning session to reimagine use of dilapidated space using public input and survey data.
- Assessing culturally significant historical buildings.

Tourism

- Working with municipal staff to leverage the community branding work to create a brand guide and asset library.

Housing

- Assisting the town in developing a Request for Proposals to complete a housing study that will determine demand and housing typology needs, including an inventory of existing buildings and their potential for reuse and/or rehabilitation.
- Facilitating community meetings to identify and evaluate the community vision for housing expansion.
- Working with the town administrator to submit a Community Facilities Direct Loan application for a new firehouse and equipment.

Resiliency and Community Responsiveness Enhancement

RCAC staff worked alongside community leadership to develop disaster mitigation strategies to enhance resilience and preparedness in relation to wildfires. As part of our Placemaking project, BRE staff worked with the town staff and town council to identify and officially appoint the Economic Development working Group on January 9, 2023. Shortly after the placemaking grant was awarded, the Town Administrator who had been our primary point of contact was unexpectedly terminated and the town began to search for a new Town Administrator.

Placemaking Projects Pursued by Economic Development Working Group:

- Hazard Mitigation
- Housing
- Lodging, Amenities, and Downtown Revitalization

Working Groups and Sub-Committees

Throughout the course of the Placemaking and Innovation Challenge Grant project work, RCAC primarily worked with town staff and the Economic Development Working Group. To ensure continued momentum of the Group's goals and objectives, sub-committees were established to take on specific tasks that advance the priorities.



Subcommittees:

- Housing
- Branding and Town Events
- Splash Pad

Final Outcomes:

The Economic Development Group and the sub-committees established met regularly and through virtual meetings, RCAC provided technical assistance and support to meet their goals.

Sub-Committee Placemaking Projects activities are as follows:

Housing – this subcommittee will primarily focus on monitoring the town's progress on hiring a consultant to complete and update the housing needs assessment and Housing Element for the town's General Plan and ensure transparency for residents. They will also focus on exploring funding and development options for new housing development that meet the needs of the aging population as well as local workforce development needs.

Branding and Town Events – this subcommittee was primarily focused on continuing to advance the previous town branding work, helping organize and facilitate new family-friendly events in town that contribute to that brand and local businesses, and recruiting new, younger members to volunteer

groups that facilitated town events. The recently erected Paul Garrison Pavilion at Paul Garrison Park in Fort Jones proved to be an important gathering place for residents.

The Splash Pad working group maintained a strong focus on the improvement of public places and things that contribute to the quality of life for Fort Jones residents. This, along with a continued desire to maintain an attractive and vibrant community for young families hoping to “move back” contributed to a greater need for enhanced public amenities. A new park has long been a topic of discussion. In 2019, the town administrator had plans drawn and submitted a grant application to the State of California Department of Parks and Recreation to support the development of a new splash pad park in Fort Jones. That grant application was ultimately denied.

Ultimately, the Town submitted a grant application to the State of CA Department of State Parks for the Per Capita Parks Grant. The Town has been awarded \$485,000 which they are planning for the development of a park.

Other notable outcome – the Economic Development Workgroup’s purpose is to support both current and prospective entrepreneurs and business owners in the community. Among those, was a resident who regularly attended meetings and contributed to the conversations surrounding the initiatives and was also planning to build and open a brand-new coffee shop along Highway 3. RCAC BRE small business coaching team, assisted with the development of his business plan. With support from the community and members of the Economic Development Working Group, the Ukonom Gold Coffee shop opened its doors in late October 2024.

Placemaking Plan. Placemaking Plan was completed and provided to the Town administrator. The Plan is attached to this report.



Figure 3 Ukonom Gold Coffee Shop in Fort Jones, CA. Photo Courtesy of the Ukonom Gold Coffee Facebook Page.

Final Report Questions and Responses: What have been the most challenging or unexpected aspects of this project?

- a) Ft. Jones - Loss of key community staff and fluctuating capacity of the Town of Ft. Jones.
- b) City of Clearlake – the initial projects which were driven by business owners who had limited time to take leadership of the projects. Additionally, there were ongoing delays due to their limited time and commitment to project development. As a result, the city manager and coordinator redirected their focus toward broader initiatives that could still meet the key priorities established by the participants.

What advice would you give to other organizations planning a similar project, include strengths and limitations of the program. If you had the opportunity, what would you have done differently?

- Healthy and productive collaboration with local leadership - The importance of healthy civic participation and establishing a supportive dialogue with the leadership of the community. The participation can be obtained by just attending council meetings and other community events that address future growth and opportunities.
- Wildfires and flooding - In periods where communities are addressing major disasters, such as fires and flooding, it is imperative that agencies working with the community allow them the time and grace to address immediate threats and to assist in facilitating collaboration from state and federal stakeholders during the recovery period.

If an innovative approach was used successfully, you should describe the approach in detail so that other organizations might consider replication in their areas.

- RCAC's Recharge Our Community's Economy (ROCE) workshop series is a proven community engagement curricula that is built on engaging the full community, making time to listen and engage all community members, leveraging strengths and assets in a community, breaking down barriers in communication.
- The WealthWorks model of Community Economic Development is woven throughout the curricula focusing on lifting up and leveraging local community assets and strengths as well as promoting resources and opportunities without creating harm to limited natural resources.
- Engagement and ownership at the local level is a necessary ingredient to building community resiliency, sustainability and stronger economies.