



San Joaquin Valley Rural Development Center

Background

Established within the Office of Community and Development at Fresno State in 2010, the San Joaquin Valley Rural Development Center (SJRDC) was created in direct response to requests made by rural community leaders in the region. SJRDC is designed as a “one-stop hub” of information, resources, services and experts in specific subject matter, to address the various needs, challenges and opportunities confronting rural residents, small businesses, municipalities, special districts, school districts, and nonprofits.

Approach

SJRDC connects rural stakeholders to a regional network of more than 40 on- and off-campus partners as well as provides a variety of services aimed at building the local capacity and improving the quality of life of the rural communities it serves. Whether immersing low-income residents in digital literacy training, delivering technical assistance to small businesses, helping municipal staff understand the fundamentals of economic development, or training nonprofits in grant-writing, SJRDC facilitates self-sufficiency for rural stakeholders in the San Joaquin Valley.



Sustainability

OCED staff contributing to the delivery of SJRDC services has grown to six and includes the associate director, finance director, project manager, and three project assistants. Cross-training among SJRDC staff is ongoing to build further organizational capacity. To obtain its own level of sustainability, SJRDC implemented a model of social enterprise that allows it to generate a modest level of revenue while keeping its services accessible to the rural communities it serves. To date, service agreements have generated \$321,190 of unrestricted revenue. These flexible dollars have allowed SJRDC to leverage an additional \$322,968 in competitive State and Federal grant funding that required match contributions. Since its establishment in 2010, SJRDC has generated \$644,158 in total income.



Our Services include

Community Assessments. Grassroots canvassing of residents, businesses or other stakeholder groups. SJVRDC assists in development of a survey instrument and synthesizes collected data for host community. For example, in Cameron Creek Colony (Tulare County), an assessment of septic tank and water well conditions was conducted to determine residents' willingness to connect to water infrastructure of a neighboring rural community. Collected data helped inform a successful \$500,000 grant award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to connect both communities with mutual water infrastructure. The project's success was witnessed firsthand by USDA Secretary Vilsack during his visit to Cameron Creek Colony in 2014.

Economic Development Certificate Program. Four-day intensive training in the fundamental principles of economic development. Annual sponsorships are issued to leaders and staff from rural cities, special districts, and tribes to equip them with the tools necessary to successfully implement economic development initiatives in their respective communities. Eleven rural stakeholders have been sponsored. For more details, visit <http://www.fresnostate-econdev.org/>.

Economic Development Strategies. Facilitate community-based model that includes an educational process for members of an ad hoc advisory committee, which reflects a diverse cross-section of stakeholders in host community. A collective SWOT analysis and strategy formation yields a document that is presented to the host community's City Council for adoption as official economic development strategy. Strategies have been completed for the cities of Arvin (Kern County), Orange Cove (Fresno County) and Taft (Kern County) generating \$100,000 in revenue.

Financial Technical Assistance. Provide rural municipal staff with training in grant fiscal management, reporting, audit preparation and acceptable accounting practices. SJVRDC has utilized \$133,958 in USDA Rural Community Development Initiative funding since 2011 to provide similar technical assistance to rural communities in the San Joaquin Valley.

Fresno State Parent University. Digital literacy curriculum for parents of low-income school children who are unserved or underserved by broadband. Curriculum has been delivered to more than 3,500 parents in 12 different school districts

throughout the eight-county region. Service agreements with these school districts have generated \$158,905 in revenue. SJVRDC also has leveraged investments issued to OCED, its principal organization, to expand broadband infrastructure and adoption among rural populations in the San Joaquin Valley. Investments have included \$600,000 from California Emerging Technologies Fund and \$450,000 from California Public Utilities Commission.

Grant Writing Training Workshops. Provide introductory level information on identifying, preparing, submitting and administering funding proposals. Fourteen workshops have been provided throughout the eight-county region and have served more than 300 rural stakeholders. Follow-up technical assistance has been provided to at least 50 participants. The first 11 workshops were free while the last three workshops have generated \$2,975 in combined revenue (\$35/participant). Elected officials (U.S. Congress, County Supervisor, Mayor) have established partnerships with SJVRDC to host these workshops.

Local Food Systems. Technical assistance for starting or expanding local farmers markets has been provided to the rural cities of Firebaugh and Mendota and the unincorporated community of Biola, all in Fresno County. Technical assistance has included training local farmers market managers and recruiting vendors; and compliance with county public health and safety regulations. SJVRDC has assisted with establishing community gardens in Biola and Firebaugh. These efforts have garnered \$114,010, including a USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program grant, and created three seasonal local farmers market manager jobs.

Small Business Development. More than 40 small businesses and entrepreneurs have received training in these areas: business planning, management, financing, water and energy efficiencies, e-commerce and technology, Quickbooks/accounting and cottage food operations. As a result, 10 jobs have been created and/or retained; \$65,000 of capital has been infused and four new businesses started. USDA has awarded SJVRDC three consecutive (2013-2015) Rural Business Development Grants (formerly RBEG) totaling more than \$110,000 in support of rural business development efforts. In addition, SJVRDC provides UC Merced SBDC Regional Network coverage in the region's rural communities.



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Economic Development

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