SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The Road to Success 2

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Arlington, Virginia

Grantee Team Profiles
Participant Contact Information & Biographies
Resource Team & Staff Contact Information & Biographies
Acknowledgements

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1. OPA-LOCKA, FL
2. ERIE COUNTY, PA
3. GREATER LANSING, MI
4. ST. CHARLES PARISH, LA
5. AUSTIN, TX
6. WESTERN NORTH DAKOTA
7. NORTHCENTRAL MONTANA
ABOUT THE REGION
The City of Opa-locka is a small city of 16,500 people in an area of 4.2 square miles of Miami-Dade County. The city is located 10 miles north of downtown Miami and 10 miles south of Fort Lauderdale. Opa-locka is challenged by high unemployment – approximately 16% of the population is unemployed, 98% of which are African-American or Hispanic and 32% of families are below the poverty line.

PROJECT SUMMARY & GOALS
With funds from their HUD Challenge grant, the city is drafting a new Comprehensive Plan Sustainable Opa-locka 20/30, updating the city’s zoning codes, and creating strategies for housing and economic development. This project will also address barriers to sustainability, including transportation, affordable housing and economic opportunity.

Sustainable Opa-locka 20/30 is being built upon earlier planning efforts. In 2010, an intense community visioning charrette was held, with participants including nationally known leaders in urban design, planning, housing, historic preservation and implementation as well as city, county and regional planning staff. The resulting Opa-locka Vision 20/20 brought a fresh local perspective and illustrated that the city has the assets not just for revitalization, but for a much more sustainable economy and environment. Sustainable Opa-locka 20/30 will take this vision to the next step.

The city will also be partnering with a newly-formed community redevelopment agency with responsibility for community and economic development projects in blighted areas of Opa-locka, representing approximately 20% of the city. The city falls within the project area served by a larger HUD-funded regional planning effort, the Seven50 Initiative.

ANTICIPATED PROJECT BENEFITS
- Create an economic development strategy that will enable Opa-locka to take advantage of scattered assets such as a large general aviation airport, hundreds of thousands of square feet warehouse/industrial flex space, and the unique sense of place that derives from the presence of more than 100 historic Moorish Revival buildings in or near the city center.
• Create a housing strategy that will address affordability, historic preservation, mixed-use and mixed income development, and assure more housing units are clustered near public transportation and stores that sell fresh food.

• Engage in strategic property acquisition to create an early catalytic example of a project that demonstrates the viability of new economic development strategies for this community.

• Conduct a model community engagement strategy that seeks consistent and genuine participation from residents and businesses to chart a new, more livable, and more sustainable future.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

• Ensuring public engagement in the final phases of the planning process;

• Developing a plan that reflects the needs and wants of the community, while also meeting the requirements of state and federal agencies; and

• Aligning substantial implementation funds – while the city has had success in winning small grants, they have struggled with having to piece together funds to make large investments in infrastructure and brownfields.
ABOUT THE REGION

Located in northwestern Pennsylvania on the shores of Lake Erie, Erie County is a medium-sized region with large challenges and the determination to address them. Located in the center of the “rust belt,” the region has experienced firsthand the impact of lost manufacturing jobs, declining population, environmental pollution, and low-density sprawl that consumes rural lands and natural resources. Throughout its history, Erie County has been an industrial hub. Major employers include GE Transportation, which is headquartered there, and many plastics manufacturers. As in many other regions, a steady loss in manufacturing jobs has created significant challenges for the county’s cities and towns. Yet the economic base has become much more diversified in recent years, with healthcare, education, technology and tourism sectors strengthening. Though the manufacturing sector appears ready to rebound, the skilled workforce needed to sustain its growth is no longer available. The agricultural sector is considered a major contributor to the quality of life and to the economy, while abundant water resources, including Lake Erie and thousands of miles of streams, are significant assets for the region’s environment, economy, and communities.

Erie County is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. A small but rapidly growing immigrant population hailing from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America is making its mark on neighborhoods throughout the county. Poverty, and concentrations of poverty in the cities and boroughs, is a significant issue, with an estimated 22% of children under the age of 18 living in poverty. Though five major colleges serve nearly 25,000 students annually, the percentage of residents with a Bachelor’s degree is low compared with the state as a whole.

Recent trends show that the Erie region’s population is shifting from its urban core to its suburban and rural municipalities. The region’s urbanized area increased by 3,000 acres from 1990 to 2000, contributing to an increase in vehicle miles traveled as workers lengthen their commuting distances.

PROJECT SUMMARY & GOALS

*Destination Erie: A Regional Vision* is a comprehensive planning process to develop a common vision for the Erie County region. It will result in an action plan to address the region’s economic, social, and environmental challenges by guiding investments and promoting a sustainable future. The plan will develop a vision and strategy for a sustainable economy that creates businesses and job opportunities for all citizens. It will identify strategies to build an inclusive community, promote equity, and improve access to economic opportunity.
The Destination Erie planning process builds on the existing network of partners who are working together to combat these challenges and reinvent Erie as an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable region in the 21st century. The plan is being driven by community input and guided by a consortium of over 72 local and regional leaders. The consortium includes representatives from Erie County’s many townships, boroughs, and cities; economic and community development organizations; cultural and educational institutions; and environmental and community health organizations. Five key work groups have been organized to provide feedback and help development the plan.

The Destination Erie process consists of three phases, covering three years (2012-2014). During the first phase, the process sought to develop an understanding of the existing conditions through data collection and stakeholder interviews. Several key regional issues were identified including: high poverty, manufacturing decline, mismatch between jobs and skills of the workforce, lack of regional coordination, inequality between public schools, and suburbanization/loss of population in city centers. The second phase focused on creating a vision for the future including identification of a preferred land use development scenario and establishment of strategic directions.

The planning process is currently in the third and final phase, developing recommendations and actions to address the region’s key challenges. During this phase, the individual work groups are refining action ideas and suggesting implementation steps. Six major public forums will be held in June, along with a number of smaller targeted meetings, to solicit feedback on the actions set forth by the work groups and to solicit additional ideas. The plan and its implementation guide will be drafted and rolled out to the public by the end of the year.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The Erie County region’s challenges have been clearly articulated through this process: the need for a regional economic strategy that addresses the decline in manufacturing jobs and a mismatch between jobs and skills of the workforce, high poverty rates and concentration of poverty, and lack of regional coordination. Of these, the lack of regional coordination has presented a particular challenge to the planning process itself. Engaging representatives from hundreds of entities in the process – and continuing to benefit from their knowledge through the three-year process – requires a well-thought-out strategy. It has also been difficult to communicate the goals of this process to all residents of the communities affected by it.

PROMISING PRACTICES OR INNOVATIONS

The Destination Erie process has already been successful in establishing new relationships between organizations and individuals working toward similar goals within the region. Often these organizations work in silos and have not had the opportunity to collaborate around the shared challenges. Through this process, community leaders working on the same issues have met and connected. The plan’s public outreach efforts have also been very successful in reaching and obtaining feedback from residents from throughout the region – over 3,000 individuals have participated in public outreach efforts to date.
ABOUT THE REGION
The Greater Lansing Region is a three-county area of mid-Michigan with a population of about 245,000. Home to the state capital, Michigan State University, and the original headquarters of General Motors Corporation, the regional economy has historically been balanced across those sectors. The region has weathered the decline of manufacturing, the collapse of the auto industry, and the dramatic shrinking of government due to declining property values and tax revenues. As a region, with help from the HUD Sustainable Communities program, they have developed the Mid-Michigan Program for Greater Sustainability (MMPGS). This effort builds on the 2004 regional planning framework, Regional Growth: Choices for Our Future. Additionally, it takes the region toward renewing a vision for smart growth with a true understanding and commitment to sustainability and resiliency.

PROJECT SUMMARY & GOALS
The MMPGS program has 8 project focus areas where citizens, community groups, agencies, and organizations are working to learn about, integrate, plan for, and take action steps toward greater sustainability. They include:

- Housing: A regional housing needs study and a regional fair and affordable housing plan.
- Energy: An analysis, baseline, and audit of energy use by built structures in the region to address energy savings and priorities.
- Urban and Rural Services Management: Development of a regional services management area focused on water-sewer services that encourages redevelopment of sites with utility services and limits sprawl into undeveloped areas.
- Greening Mid-Michigan: Activities to support, protect, and improve the region’s green infrastructure, including establishing an organization of watershed groups, establishing a heritage river trail, a public education campaign, and more.
- Complete Streets: Education and outreach with ordinance examples and adoptions, smart community planning, support for a walk-bike task force, and a walkability audit.
• Corridor Design Portfolio: Conduct charrette-style planning on a regional corridor and share a portfolio of best practices, regionally set goals and objectives for development/redevelopment, and develop safe routes to school programs throughout the region.

• Community Reinvestment Fund: Provide mini-grants (up to $5,000) to pilot and demonstrate successful methods for involving underserved and marginalized populations in their local government or neighborhood planning efforts.

• Sustainability Communications Portal: An online place to share events, information, activities, initiatives, opportunities, and to discuss sustainability topics.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

This is the final year of the three-year program – a time full of deliverable final reports, summary documents and events, celebrations, and recognitions. It is also a time to identify next steps as a region and in the 8 project areas so the project can continue moving forward. There are challenges regarding taking next steps, securing funding, and keeping the positive momentum going in the face of continued economic challenges and limited local funds.

PROMISING PRACTICES OR INNOVATIONS

The corridor planning initiative generated a multi-jurisdictional shared vision for the region, and also brought in hundreds of area participants. The charrette-based techniques piloted for the corridor design are already being adopted by public and private sector developers.

The 40-member Consortium has held well-attended regional gatherings twice a year, as well as two very successful charrette planning weeks, which created a regional corridor vision for the regional “main street.” The housing study is completed, and plan development is underway. Distributing the Community Reinvestment Fund in mini-grants has drawn more underrepresented populations into regional planning efforts. The Greening Mid-Michigan video airing on public TV stations highlights regional green infrastructure, and ongoing communication with community members on sustainability topics is growing.
ABOUT THE REGION

Located in Southeast Louisiana, approximately 25 miles west of New Orleans, St. Charles Parish is home to approximately 52,000 residents. As its population ages and diversifies, growth is slowing – it is estimated that the Parish will have approximately 8,000 new residents by 2030. The Parish is part of the New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner Metropolitan Statistical Area and there are no incorporated areas in the Parish boundary.

The Parish is dominated by water. Approximately 80% of it is wetlands or open water with Lake Pontchartrain in the north, Lake Salvador in the south and the Mississippi River bisecting the Parish. Developed areas are split between rural and suburban with many residents desiring a small-town way of life.

Served by the Mississippi River, I-10, I-310, and major rail lines and adjacent to an International Airport, the Parish takes advantage of the region’s commercial, cultural, and recreational resources. The economic base of St. Charles Parish is dominated by energy, chemical, and transportation industries which are completing $2.5 billion of private, capital expenditures in the community. The labor force is approximately 24,000 with an average annual unemployment rate of 7.0%. With a nationally-recognized public school system, multi-modal transportation network, and land for commercial and industrial development, St. Charles Parish is an economic catalyst for Louisiana & the Gulf Coast.

PROJECT SUMMARY & GOALS

With a Challenge Grant from HUD, the Parish is working to develop the Paul Maillard Road (LA52) Corridor Revitalization Plan. The Plan focuses on a 2.6 mile state road that connects two east/west arteries and is home to several major service providers – the Parish Hospital, Community Health Center, Workforce Investment Act office, Agriculture Extension office, Luling Elementary School, and several religious institutions. The corridor can be seen as a socio-economic dividing line separating Old Luling, an aging community developed on a traditional street grid with site-built residences on single lots, and Boutte, which has poorly connected, narrow streets lined with ditches and a prevalence of blighted structures.
In accordance with the Parish’s vision, the Plan should encourage redevelopment of the corridor in ways that showcase HUD’s Livability Principles and a Complete Streets approach to infrastructure, both of which are new concepts in the community. The Plan will promote several of HUD’s Livability Principles including:

- Providing more transportation choices with the addition of pedestrian and cyclist pathways;
- Promoting equitable, affordable housing through a partnership with Family Resources of New Orleans who may be able to leverage USDA Rural Development funding for affordable housing in the plan area;
- Increasing job opportunities and mobility along the corridor in an effort to lower transportation costs;
- Enhancing economic competitiveness of all property owners along the corridor by encouraging public and private investment according to a plan rooted in sustainability;
- Support existing communities through a robust public participation plan that creates jobs and increases knowledge in the community; and,
- Valuing communities and neighborhoods by enhancing the unique characteristics of the communities and planning for investments to redevelop healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods connected to each other.

Within the past year, planning staff have completed several projects that support the revitalization plan, including strengthening partnerships in the study area, creating a database of property owners, researching a sustainable development and livability principles training program for the community and stakeholders, planning for community outreach and more.

**CHALLENGES AHEAD**

- Historic distrust between the community and the government
- Crime (both real and perceived)
- Identifying clear roles for the executive committee in implementation

**PROMISING PRACTICES**

Hiring three local residents to serve as outreach specialists was very successful and provided valuable feedback from the community about the project. Outreach specialists were asked to interview residents, conduct surveys and otherwise get resident feedback.
ABOUT THE REGION

According to Forbes Magazine, among the 100 largest U.S. Cities, Austin is “America’s Fastest-Growing City” for the 4th year in a row. However, while the City of Austin enjoys a favorable unemployment rate (4.8%) compared with the nation as a whole, the Challenge Grant Project Area has seen relatively little economic activity, development and investment. The project area encompasses five census tracts in northeast Austin, with a population of roughly 20,000 people, a poverty rate of roughly 35% (compared to 20.3% citywide), and an MFI of $41,702 (compared to $63,762 citywide). The project area includes both city and unincorporated county land, which presents a challenge due to the lack of land-use controls on lands outside of the city’s jurisdiction.

Despite these challenges, the Project Area has many assets. It is located nine miles from downtown Austin, is ringed by three major highways, is located along a proposed commuter rail line, and is located in the city’s desired development zone.

PROJECT SUMMARY & GOALS

The Colony Park Sustainable Community Initiative (CPSCI), funded through a $3 million HUD Sustainable Communities Challenge grant, seeks to create a master plan for 208 acres of Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)-owned property in the Colony Park neighborhood of Austin. The goal of the initiative is to create a master plan that integrates and reflects the needs and interests of the surrounding community while incorporating best practices in sustainable development. In order to achieve this goal, the grant identifies three overarching project outcomes:

1. Further land-use planning and development of 208 acres of publicly-owned land at Colony Park inspired by the HUD Livability Principles as an economic catalyst for the broader project area.
2. Foster cross-departmental/agency/community coordination and create successful models of comprehensive systems change to support sustainable and equitable development.
3. Support capacity building and community transformation goals of Colony Park area residents and stakeholders.

The project will finish in January 2015. April 14th, 2014 is the final Community Workshop after which the Land Use component of the master plan will be nearly complete.
THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The project area is located in an area that lacks many of the amenities present in wealthier parts of town such as healthcare facilities and grocery stores, leading to high rates of morbidity/mortality and economic neglect. Some of the challenges are based on current land uses which create a low-density area unattractive to commercial tenants. In addition, nonexistent land-use regulations promote a patchwork of incompatible uses, such as trucking and transport facilities adjacent to residential uses, as well as a large number of manufactured and mobile homes on county land. The street network poses barriers to connectivity and access for many residents, causing long driving times and discouraging other modes of transportation such as biking and walking. Adding to the problem is the land that falls outside of the city limits; under county control, there are no sidewalks along the streets nor is transit service provided to those who live outside of city limits.

PROMISING PRACTICES OR INNOVATIONS

This initiative has been incredibly successful in bringing together departments from across the city to focus on a single project, provide expertise from their relative fields, and incorporate each department’s strategic goals for development within the framework of the project site master plan. At the outset of the project, Neighborhood Housing and Community Development – the lead department – created a technical advisory group made up of staff members from throughout the city. These members have provided regular input on the process and the master plan itself, helping to guide the consultant design team through site analysis of watersheds, providing suggestions on street sections, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, orientation of homes to maximize solar gain, and suggestions on phasing to maximize economic development opportunities.

The initiative has also resulted in a strong partnership between the City of Austin and the Colony Park Neighborhood Association (CPNA). Through weekly meetings the City and CPNA have crafted and implemented a public engagement plan that is a model of government/citizen cooperation and community outreach. At the behest of CPNA, the City of Austin brought in the University of Texas as another partner to help implement the plan. To date, this three-party partnership has resulted in an outreach effort that has touched over 900 people and brought 370 stakeholders directly into the planning process through community planning workshops.

One particular noteworthy accomplishment was the process for choosing a consultant design team. In order to provide greater input on the process to the community, CPNA members helped draft the Request for Qualifications that was issued to solicit bids for the consultant team. In addition, after an initial review of submissions by the City of Austin, the top two firms presented before City Council and CPNA, and then 100 members of the public from the Project Area. CPNA members and attendees wrote their preferences on comment cards that were submitted to City Council. The result was the hiring of a consultant design team that was preferred overwhelmingly by the community.
ABOUT THE REGION

Western North Dakota’s economy is largely agriculture, but in the past four years the local region, home to 172,000 people, has experienced an energy industry phenomenon known as the “Bakken Boom.” Communities have seen a large influx of people, as well as a strain on many resources including housing, infrastructure, healthcare, education and more. Williston, located in Williams County, is currently the fastest growing “micropolitan” city in the nation, and Dickinson, located in Stark County, is the second. Western North Dakota has gone from communities that were fighting steady outmigration to communities that are struggling to come up with enough resources to keep up with the fast-paced growth.

PROJECT SUMMARY & GOALS

The Vision West ND consortium is comprised of economic development leaders from the 19 oil & gas producing counties in western North Dakota. HUD-funded Vision West ND is designed to create one voice for western North Dakota with the intent of making change at the legislative level. It will also help communities in the region to work collectively to mitigate the rapid growth and impacts from the Bakken Boom.

The pace and level of impact from the rapidly expanding oil industry started with North Dakota’s northern counties (the Bakken Region extends west into Montana and north into Canada), and is moving south. A second wave of oil-related investment and growth is anticipated from the Three Forks and Tyler Formations. Small communities are especially struggling with the impact of this development. The timing and focus of the planning activities financed through the HUD Regional Sustainability Planning Grant and the ND Energy Development Infrastructure and Impact Grant Fund programs are critical for western North Dakota.
The Region proposed a six-initiative approach to address emerging growth challenges:

1. Economic Development/Diversification Strategic Plan
2. Infrastructure Needs Planning
3. Planning and Zoning Recommendations
4. Individual Project Schematics
5. Lessons Learned Webinars
6. Regional Strategic Plan

Combined, this initiative is designed to:

• Address immediate, short-term needs of communities to meet growth management challenges
• Capitalize on one of America’s strongest rural economies for entrepreneurial development
• Set the stage for economic diversification based on the strength of the oil and agriculture industries
• Support livability and environmental objectives
• Establish a diversified economy in the future – looking past the current oil boom

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The most significant challenge that has been defined for the entire region is the lack of housing, specifically affordable to mid-level homes. Communities have shifted from short-term housing needs to demand for long-term investment homes such as single family and townhome options. The housing crunch has a direct effect on regional ability to attract and maintain workforce. Access to resources to solve these identified issues is also a major hurdle. The plan is focused on building capacity to deliver an effective message to the legislature as well as maintaining quality of life for the residents of western North Dakota.

PROMISING PRACTICES OR INNOVATIONS

One of the largest successes has been in creating a strategic plan for each of the 19 oil producing counties and three affiliated tribes in western North Dakota. Each was able to hold a planning week in which they could focus in on their needs and visions for the next 3-5 years. These plans were taken and together form one large regional plan, now in the editing phase.
GRANTEE TEAM PROFILE

NORTHCENTRAL MONTANA

ABOUT THE REGION

The Northcentral Montana region encompasses 11 counties and three Indian reservations, covers 31,248 square miles and is home to approximately 148,000 residents. The region is larger than 10 states. For over 20 years, these rural communities have suffered dramatic depopulation, economic constriction, loss of basic services, and eroding infrastructure, but there is still a strong regional commitment towards enhancing livability.

PROJECT SUMMARY & GOALS

The mission of the Vibrant Futures project is to enable the communities of Northcentral Montana to complete a region-wide visioning, planning, capacity building, and information exchange system that will help coordinate and move forward existing local plans to create a comprehensive response to high priority needs and opportunities for a more economically and environmentally sustainable development.

Goal: To develop citizen involvement and government planning that, over the next 20 years, will lead to improved employment, housing, community health and safety, regional transportation, water quality, and resource management.

Objectives:

- Establish goals, roles, and responsibilities of partners and consortium members for efficient and participatory planning in the region.
- Complete a thorough review of existing plans and data in the region that will inform the regional planning process.
- Engage vested regional stakeholders to ensure that they are properly informed during the planning process to advocate for sustainable development throughout the region.
- Provide resources for continued education and engagement of community development stakeholders to enhance decision making.
- Incorporate regional planning elements into local and regional implementation projects and demonstrate effective models for sustainable development in the region.

Currently, the team is in the process of drafting the regional plan which will then go back out for public input.

GRANT TYPE:
Category 1 Regional Planning Grant

GRANT AMOUNT:
$1,500,000

LEAD ORGANIZATION:
Opportunity Link, Inc.
THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The region's challenges include significant outmigration, an aging population, a lack of adequate and affordable housing, and costly, outdated infrastructure. Challenges in developing the plan have come from the vast geographic distances between communities and the diversity of the local communities. The region is roughly the size of South Carolina, so coordination and collaboration have proven to be difficult. Developing strategies for these very diverse communities, widely disparate in size (ranging from range in size from 60,000 people to 200 people), that are relevant for all (urban, rural, and tribal) is challenging, but very important for effectiveness and implementation.

PROMISING PRACTICES OR INNOVATIONS

The Vibrant Futures team has successfully partnered with and engaged a diverse consortium including 11 counties, three Indian reservations, six municipalities, three economic development corporations, and eight social service and education institutions. Over 30 community meetings have been held to ensure that the plan under development reflects regional values and priorities.