

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Imperial County Enterprise Community

In December of 1994 Imperial County was fortunate to receive a designation as a Federal Rural Enterprise Community and awarded \$2.95 million in Social Services Block Grant dollars for economic and community development. For the past five years the Enterprise Community (EC) Program has facilitated the formation of partnerships to work together to improve the quality of life by empowering people to develop strategies and solutions to physical, social, economic, and environmental barriers. Moreover, the impact of the EC designation has been significant in Imperial County where we have leveraged our original appropriation of \$2.95 million to well over \$20 million. The EC program has allowed this border community to address problems which require significant attention; encourage solution-oriented discussion, planning, and implementation; create partnerships with a common vision in order to empower the people to find imaginative solutions to unique issues and circumstances; and to organize for action.

The EC projects continue to be successful and reach out to a large part of the community. Major accomplishments have been achieved in a majority of the EC benchmarks in large part due to the creation of partnerships at the federal, state and local level to address and find imaginative solutions to unique issues, problems and constraints. Another significant accomplishment has been that EC funds have been a catalyst for community and economic development organizations to receive funding through federal and state agencies.

Perhaps the most important process that should be highlighted during the past year is the level of community participation and the overall support demonstrated by the citizens of Imperial County for the Round II Empowerment Zone (EZ) Initiative enacted on 1993 by the Clinton-Gore Administration's Community Revitalization Strategy.

Imperial County really came together as a community to create partnerships between all levels of government, private businesses, community groups and local residents to respond to the Round II EZ funding. For more than three months local community representatives and government agencies worked together to develop Imperial County's Empowerment Zone Application.

The Valley of Imperial Development Alliance (VIDA), Imperial County's community and economic development department, was designated as the lead entity responsible to oversee the development of the EZ Application. The process began in May of 1998 with VIDA and the Imperial County Administrative Officer summoning a group of individuals to discuss and determine the level of interest to participate in the proposed Round II application. The group of 10-15 key community stakeholders quickly agreed to pursue the proposed EZ initiative.

VIDA coordinated the effort and provided two full-time positions to act as staff to the planning committee. VIDA staff were given roles and responsibilities that included: preparing meeting notices; scheduling meetings and preparing minutes; acting as translators; obtaining critical data maps, and information; and developing timelines. In addition, VIDA was given the responsibility of preparing the application and drafting the strategic plan.

The first task in preparing the EZ application for the proposed Imperial Valley EZ was to convene a group of individuals responsible for guiding the design of the "Strategic Planning" process. The

approach utilized in the Round II EZ funding was much like the process undertaken to prepare the Imperial County Enterprise Community (EC) application in June of 1993.

The role of the working group was to build interest and support for conducting the strategic planning process as well as to oversee its design. The working group agreed to meet monthly for the duration of the strategic planning and application process.

In preparing the EZ application, the County's responsibility was to elicit as much community and organizational participation as possible. However, long before the federal government initiated the EZ/EC Community Program, local governments, community-based organizations, and local businesses had been creating community-based partnerships in order to combat a growing number of social and economic problems in the community.

Building on the successful historical experiences in planning and decision making, the community adapted the process to assure that unique needs and circumstances of the communities were represented at the table. The process initiated by involving a cadre of individuals/organizations who possess the skills and capacity to guide, facilitate and formulate a dynamic plan for the community's future. These individuals covered a wide range of participants including existing staff of planning agencies; private business; academic institutions; and in addition, civic associations/nonprofit organizations.

The program/process very successful in that over 250 persons attended workshops or worked in subcommittees representing more than 30 different organizations.

Another important progress, which should be highlighted, is the accomplishment made with benchmark no. 3 whose goal/objective is to reduce the salinity and improve habitat in the Salton Sea. Governmental authorities at the federal, state and local level are working together to identify prudent actions that can be implemented so the Salton Sea resource can be restored and reclaimed.

The clean up of the Salton Sea has been of major concern for federal, state and local officials. The 380-square-mile sea, California's largest lake, is twenty-five (25%) percent saltier than the Pacific Ocean. Scientific, environmental, and feasibility studies have been conducted to address environmental issues that have arisen since the creation of the sea. The environmental review was written by scientists, engineers, and planners to consider all aspects of the proposed project's impacts to the environment. Five options for reducing the salinity level have been proposed. Each option proposed comes with a price tag of at least \$300 million plus a cost of more than \$1 million annually to maintain. It will be up to Congress to make the final decision on what option is chosen and Congress will have to make the decision on providing funding.

The Department of the Interior, through the Bureau of Reclamation, is the federal lead agency undertaking efforts to restore and reclaim the Salton Sea. Public Law 102-575, 1992, directs the Secretary of the Interior to "conduct a research project for the development of a method or combination of methods to reduce and control salinity, provide endangered species habitat, enhance fisheries, and protect human recreational values … in the area of the Salton Sea." In addition to this authority, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Salton Sea Authority have entered into agreements to jointly study problems associated with the Salton Sea. The Department's other Bureaus, particularly the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is also playing pivotal roles in the restoration efforts.

The State of California has been an active participant in efforts to restore the Sea for over two decades. The State's Department of Water Resources is the principal point of contact. Other Resource Agency departments also play important roles, particularly the Department of Fish and Game. The California

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its departments also play important roles.

The Salton Sea Authority, comprised of the County of Imperial, County of Riverside, Coachella Valley Water District and the Imperial Irrigation District, with ex-officio representation from the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians and various state and federal agencies is the local lead agency undertaking feasibility studies and cost analyses for options to restore the Salton Sea.

The New River, the dirtiest and most polluted river in the United States, continues to be a problem of major concern for both Mexico and the United States. The river starts in Mexicali, Baja California, and flows across the U.S. - Mexican border at Calexico, California and empties into the Salton Sea.

Benchmark no. 4 allocated EC funds to provide workshops to increase awareness of the New River pollution and to identify and secure financial resources to help reduce the level of pollution in the New River.

Congressman Duncan Hunter put together the Citizen's Congressional Task Force on the New River in 1997 to come up with a local solution to the problems associated with the river. The task force, headed by Leon Lesicka of the City of Brawley, is just about ready to begin an ambitious project to filter the river through a series of ponds. Portions of the New River will be diverted through the ponds to create a gradual cleansing process as the water eventually reaches the Salton Sea.

In 1998 Congressman Duncan Hunter gained \$3 million last year to clean up both the New River and Alamo River. "The key to this effort will be community involvement," said Congressman Hunter. Funding has also been gained for sewage treatment projects in Mexicali, Mexico, in order to help clean the New River before it crosses the border. For many years, the City of Mexicali has had an inadequate sewage collection and treatment system, causing sanitation and water quality problems for both the United States and Mexico.

The Salton Sea Authority will hold its third New River/Salton Sea Symposium January 13 and January 14, 2000. The symposium will consist of a two-day conference. The first day's theme will be "Restoration planning, policy and politics." The topics will consist of a discussion on the restoration plan presented by Congress; balancing agricultural, environmental, recreational and economic interests; governmental roles and responsibilities, the sea in context: California water issues, the Pacific Flyway and Mexico; and the politics of restoring the sea.

The second day's theme is "New scientific information and discoveries." The topics will consist of biological environment of the sea; the physical environment of the sea; fish, wildlife and vegetation; and the next scientific steps.

EC benchmark no. 8 is another project, which has been able to achieve its goal through the cooperation and support of multiple agencies. The Calexico Family Resource Center (FRC) Collaborative composed of local agencies has been working diligently to improve the lives of Calexico residents. The FRC is unique and impressive in the sense it provides under one facility treatment to disordered families by means of employing intensive management concepts.

The FRC Coordinator represents thirty-seven agencies to enhance and coordinate common work efforts to avoid non-duplicating community activities, events, and services under a One-Stop-Shop Program, which leads the resource center with multiple supporters to a safer environment. Under the auspices of local merchants, community-based organizations, educational institutions, and county government agencies, the center is able to cut across unemployment, inadequate housing, poor health care, and

limited access to supportive services. The FRC brings together individuals and resources to meet human needs.

The Imperial Valley Small Business Development Center (SBDC) received EC funds to establish access to technical services to businesses located in the EC boundary. The SBDC is a valuable asset for the small business community. The SBDC program provides small businesses with access to business counseling, intensive training and access to financing.

In 1999 the SBDC entered into a partnership with CalWORKs to offer customized training for the welfare-to-work population. Furthermore, the SBDC had previously assisted the US West Foundation and the Western Entrepreneurial Network in developing training curricula for micro-enterprise business ventures. The Imperial Valley SBDC served as a pilot center for the micro-enterprise training and the training marked the first comprehensive business course offered to the local CalWORKs population in Spanish.

The course participants included 17 individuals selected and prescreened by CalWORKs and the SBDC is happy to report that all of the participants completed the requirements for graduation. A majority of the participants came from EC designated areas. The business-training program was offered three days a week, three hours a session for eight weeks. At the end of the course, participants had to create a business plan. In addition to training, participants were able to apply for a micro loan. There are about eight participants who are currently applying for a loan.

Since, the County's adoption of the "Initial Housing Plan" in 1970, it has been the goal of Imperial County's housing policy that all residents have a decent home and a suitable living environment. The goal of benchmark no. 10 is to increase housing opportunities for the low-income residents of Imperial County. The Imperial Valley Housing Authority (IVHA) received \$197,500 in EC funds to develop and build 23 additional spaces at the Robert Noriega Mobile Home Estates mobile home park located in the City of Brawley. The project was successfully completed in November of 1998. Since that time IVHA has occupied 19 of the 23 new spaces thus providing the needed low income housing assistance.

The Robert Noriega Mobile Home Park housing development expansion project has been completed and the IVHA has attempted to develop projects with the City of Brawley using this development expansion project as a model. IVHA is attempting to develop affordable housing in the Brawley Water District Colonia utilizing public and private funding sources.

The City of Calexico through EC funding addresses the correction of deficiencies at the water plant and the continuation of a 24" water line. The project is proposed in three (3) phases:

Phase I: Construction of additional water filtration capacity of six million gallons per day (MGD) and additional distribution pumps at the filtration plant.

Phase II: The project will provide construction of a 24-inch diameter distribution main

From Highway 111 east along the south side of the All American Canal and north on Bowker Road.

Phase III: A six million-gallon treated water storage reservoir and a satellite pump station

in the vicinity of Bowker Road north of the All American Canal.

The significant accomplishments to date for this project which is identified as EC benchmark no. 14 has been that the funding received from the EC program has been a catalyst to receive further funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Initially, the City of Calexico received \$250,000 in EC funds for the engineering and design of improvements at the filtration plant. With the engineering and design completed, Phase I improvements were estimated at a cost of \$7,000,000.

With the cost estimates provided with EC funding, City of Calexico Public Works

Department pursued and received BECC certification. The Public Works department

applied for funding through NADBANK and has received approval of \$3,000,00 funding in the form of a grant through EPA. The balance will be funded with a \$4,000,000 bond issue that has been finalized and approved. The City of Calexico will also receive approximately \$3.4 million in transitional funding from NADBank over the next seven (7) years to repay a portion of the debt service.

Phase I, Construction of the additional water filtration capacity and distribution pumps at the filtration plant is at 58.82% time completion, and at 72.33% construction work completion.

The EZ Round II process certainly revealed the importance of having a community, with the cooperation of their federal, state, and local government, develop strategic plans and implemented by alliances among private, public and nonprofit entities. This process has been successfully implemented in Imperial County and it will continue to be because the community realizes the importance of working together to build a plan that will take them toward a new beginning.

Imperial County with the cooperation of its federal, state and local officials will continue to adopt an integrated and coordinated approach to promoting sustainable development in its community. The input and ideas of the public will continue to be the guiding principle in creating a vision and plan for the future of Imperial County. As demonstrated in this report the community's involvement and participation is the best approach to enhance the quality of life and spur economic growth throughout the community.