



ASSOCIATION OF
PUBLIC &
LAND-GRANT
UNIVERSITIES

IOWA STATE
UNIVERSITY



CECE

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES
AWARDS PROGRAM

CASE
STUDY
2021

IEP CATEGORY – PLACE

Iowa State University: Improving Housing for Rural Communities

ABOUT IOWA STATE'S COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC EXTENSION AND OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Iowa State University Community and Economic Development (CED) Extension and Outreach unit dedicates a significant portion of its staff time and expertise to rural housing. Why housing? One of Iowa's most significant resources is communities—the places where we live, work, and play. In rural communities especially, housing is among the most important factors affecting quality of life. Residents must have safe and sufficient housing to become engaged in community life. These words from Jon Wolseth, Associate Program Director of CED, capture this truth: “There is no greater tie to place than the home in which you live.”



Example of housing situation in rural communities in Iowa

COLLABORATION THAT IMPROVES THE QUALITY OF RURAL LIFE

Many rural Iowa communities have an aging housing stock, with much of the housing constructed before 1950. Rural communities are currently at a tipping point where immediate attention to the quality and quantity of housing stock can provide a desirable quality of life within the community. However, if the housing issue is not addressed, communities will become oversupplied with substandard aging housing and undersupplied with newer housing. Population decline will inevitably follow.

Standard practice in community housing planning involves performing a housing needs assessment. Data is gathered, perhaps by a consultant, and a report is created. CED specialists, officials at Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) and Empower Rural Iowa (an initiative of Iowa's governor) recognized the need for Iowa communities to take those reports a step further, to ensure on-the-ground improvements were being implemented to address identified housing gaps. These three organizations joined forces.

With expertise in housing planning and skills related to community engagement, facilitation, and strategic planning, CED housing experts created a data-driven workshop series that focused on decision-making at the community level. The Rural Housing Readiness Assessment (RHRA) helps participating communities learn where to find information they need, how to interpret the data, and how to

incorporate the data into decisions. The program includes a self-study assessment tool to find the various policies, ordinances, codes, programs, resources, and rules that guide local housing development. After the community gathers information from the self-study tool, ISU provides a workshop exploring the results and explaining aspects of housing market development, giving examples of how similar Iowa communities have addressed their own housing needs. Next, the community provides input on preferred types of housing (and price points). The program concludes with a co-created strategic plan identifying projects and resources to help the community achieve its housing goals. The strength of this workshop series lies in guiding communities to awareness of local conditions and development criteria, and then empowering them to make educated decisions for the future.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

IEDA created a funding opportunity that allows communities who complete an RHRA to access \$10,000 to be used toward implementing one or more steps of their locally created RHRA action plan.

In spring 2020, 11 rural Iowa communities were set to begin their housing workshops. Gathering in-person for the workshops was not always possible due to COVID-19 so the Community and Economic Development (CED) staff converted the RHRA program from a face-to-face series into an interactive, virtual workshop experience. Each town completed an action plan, and CED specialists provided follow-up assistance for next steps. The CED's work in converting to the online format was recognized by the ISU Vice President for Outreach and Extension with an award for Innovative Program Delivery in February 2021.

Participating towns created an average of three work teams, focusing on four to five housing-related projects over a three-year timeline. The typical action plan included goals related to increased code enforcement and rental inspections; reducing nuisance properties; building single-family houses and affordable multi-family housing; rehab programs for existing housing; updating zoning codes; upper story housing in downtowns; and more.

IMPACTFUL RESULTS

All 11 towns have completed the RHRA process, accessing a total of \$100,000 in state assistance and raising a total of \$51,500 in local match dollars. Over 100 local leaders were trained to make better decisions about housing in their local communities; they provide new knowledge and expertise at the local level.

Increased leadership has been another result; in each community, several volunteers are leading work teams and moving tasks forward.

After one year a CED program evaluator will check back with towns to verify progress and learn if additional technical assistance from their CED housing specialist is needed. While the program's development is at an early stage, progress is already happening.

- Ida Grove, pop. 2,142: Ownership of a large lot was transferred to a developer, substandard housing was demolished, and connections were made with a manufactured housing company. The lot was platted for manufactured housing within a few months of completing the RHRA workshops.
- Keokuk, pop. 10,780: Separate city and county housing programs have each been modified to create a more streamlined system for accessing housing funds.
- Creston, pop. 7,834: The city has accessed rental inspections from the county, providing improvement in rental housing quality.
- Manning, pop. 1,500: The city has annexed land to provide for more housing and created an informational toolbox for homebuilders, providing needed information on land, utilities, financing, and zoning regulations.

The range of impacts illustrates that the RHRA is meeting its objective: to empower local communities to make local decisions that strengthen and improve their communities.

ONGOING COLLABORATION

A second round of IEDA funding for 10 additional towns is now available. A housing conference is planned for fall 2021, providing a venue for learning from other towns' experiences and adapting new housing strategies. In addition, three Iowa counties, including 10-15 towns bordering the Missouri River plan to participate. Federal funds of up to \$60,000,000 are available to these towns after 2019 flooding, and housing plans are critical to wise use of these funds for effective replacement of lost housing stock.

The RHRA workshops open the door for CED specialists to help rural communities, empowering them to respond to local housing needs and improve quality of life in their own communities.

LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

Partnering Organizations:

- [Iowa State University Extension and Outreach: Community and Economic Development](#)
- [Empower Rural Iowa](#)
- [Iowa Economic Development Authority](#)

Programs Developed:

- [Rural Housing Readiness Assessment](#)
- [Rural Housing Assessment Grant Program](#)

Videos:

- [Rural Housing Readiness Assessment Work Group, Innovative Program Delivery Award](#)

ABOUT APLU

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is North America's oldest higher education association. APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. The association's membership consists of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations.

APLU's mission is to: expand access and improve student success to deliver the innovative workforce of tomorrow; advance and promote research and discovery to improve society, foster economic growth, and address global challenges; and build healthy, prosperous, equitable, and vibrant communities locally and globally.

Based in Washington, DC, the association's work is furthered by an active and effective advocacy arm that works with Congress and the administration as well as the media to advance federal policies that strengthen public universities and benefit the students they serve.

ABOUT THE IEP UNIVERSITIES PROGRAM

APLU and its **Commission on Economic and Community Engagement (CECE)** established the Innovation and Economic Prosperity (IEP) Universities Program to help higher education institutions codify, elevate, and advance their campus enterprise supporting economic and community development.

The **IEP designation program** recognizes institutions that have demonstrated a meaningful, ongoing and substantial commitment to economic and community development, growth, and economic opportunity.

The **IEP awards program** recognize exemplary and innovative projects in university-based economic and community engagement:

- **Talent** and workforce development
- **Innovation**, entrepreneurship, and tech-based economic development
- **Place** development through public service, outreach, and community engagement

Learn more at: www.APLU.org/IEP

