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PROJECT/PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Hoosier Enduring Legacy Program (HELP) seeks to help communities that want to be strategic about planning for and deploying their American Rescue Plan Act funds to best leverage the full offering of federal funds and the other “buckets” of funding within ARPA.

HELP is supported by the tremendous expertise and knowledge of Ball State Indiana Communities Institute, Indiana University Center for Rural Engagement, Purdue Center for Regional Development, and Ivy Tech on this initiative.

This program will utilize community engagement, prior planning, asset building, and collaboration to prepare communities to implement strategic investment plans.

The 52-week process is broken down into 4 stages. Weeks 1-12 are focused on Team Building, weeks 13-25 are focused on Community Collaboration, weeks 26-39 are focused on Pathway Assessment and Project Identification and weeks 40-52 are for SIP Development and Implementation. The program encourages communities to develop Strategic Investment Plans focused on four pathways: advancing e-connectivity, enhancing quality of place, promoting community wellness, and strengthening local economies. The state program will utilize the \$1.28 billion allocated directly to Indiana communities from the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Funds through the American Rescue Plan Act.

Kosciusko County was one of three communities selected by the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) to participate in the first cohort of the HELP program. The Towns of Etna Green, Mentone, Milford, and Pierceton are participating with Kosciusko County in the 12-month HELP program.

PREVIOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

a. Hometown Chats

- i. **Goal:** To understand the hopes/dreams of residents for their communities to inform the Community Foundation’s grantmaking and our work as a catalyst and convenor.
- ii. **Objective:** Host 12 Hometown Chats in towns across our county.
- iii. **Strategy:** Ask residents about their hopes and dreams.
- iv. **Results:** Top four issues identified were #1) a need for community planning/visioning, #2) More housing, #3) More affordable childcare, #4) Workforce readiness.

OVERVIEW

PREVIOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS (cont.)

b. **Housing Resource Hub**

- i. **Goal:** Increase access to housing, especially for the workforce, around Kosciusko County.
- ii. **Objective:** Help Kosciusko County communities plan and execute housing initiatives that would meet the housing demand.
- iii. **Strategy:** Mentor/Support KEDCO as they launch a Community Housing Development Corporation, housing revolving loan fund, and land trust.
- iv. **Results:** \$4 million housing revolving loan fund established, CHDO received its 501(c) (3), Club 720 mobile app developed to help home buyers access programs that they are eligible for such as down payment assistance.

c. **Forward Kosciusko County**

- i. **Goals:** Update the countywide comprehensive plan and establish individual plans for small communities.
- ii. **Objective:** Update the current plans so they reflect the current goals and objectives on how planning and zoning matters should focus on growth in our communities. Also, try and identify areas in which the stakeholders view county needs.
- iii. **Strategy:** Meet with stakeholders and the public to guide the focus of the plans through coordinated public input.
- iv. **Results:** Looking at adoption in May 2022 at the county level with adoption by Towns to follow.

d. **Public Safety Communications Study**

- i. **Goal:** To create a system for use by Public Safety departments (County Dispatch, Fire Departments, Police Departments, Sheriff's Department, EMS) which will provide improved interoperability for all agencies involved, to better communicate in emergency situations.
- ii. **Objective:** Identify areas where emergency communications have not been optimal; choose tower sites and equipment to provide the best communications system possible for County emergency personnel.
- iii. **Strategy:** Evaluate current systems; compare with newer systems available; choose equipment that will best suit the County's needs; identify tower sites; complete construction and put a system together.

OVERVIEW

d. **Public Safety Communications Study (cont.)**

- iv. **Results:** Public Safety Communications tower system is currently under construction and is slated to be completed and operational by the end of 2022.

e. **Broadband Study**

- i. **Goal:** To improve broadband coverage for the County, both for Public Safety Communications and for community needs (such as e-learning for schools, and work-from-home needs for residents).
- ii. **Objective:** Identify areas where broadband coverage has not been available or has a weak signal quality.
- iii. **Strategy:** Use Public Safety Communications towers to make space available for use by broadband providers, so services can be opened to the public in areas identified as low-frequency broadband zones.
- iv. **Results:** Public Safety Communications tower system is currently under construction and is slated to be completed and operational by the end of 2022. Following the completion of the project, Requests for Proposal will be offered to make space available on the towers for broadband companies.

f. **US 30 Coalition**

- i. **Goal:** Reconstruct US 30 into a freeway from its eastern terminus in Allen County to the intersection with State Road 49 in Porter County.
- ii. **Objective:** Develop local solutions to improve transportation safety while facilitating access to community assets.
- iii. **Strategy:** Facilitate local stakeholders and public meetings to develop community preferences in anticipation of the INDOT Planning and Environmental Linkages study.
- iv. **Results:** The community desires to maintain the current US 30 corridor as a preferred route for freeway improvements and frontage road construction.

g. **Gallop Poll**

- i. **Goal:** Increase well-being to transform Kosciusko County into a thriving place to live, learn, work, play, and visit.

OVERVIEW

g. Gallop Poll (cont.)

ii. Objectives:

- 1. Physical Well-being:** Increase the percentage of community members who are thriving from 34.4%. Decrease the number of community members who are struggling from 52.2% and those who are suffering by 13.4%.
- 2. Financial:** Increase the percentage of community members who are thriving from 53.1%. Decrease the percentage of community members who are struggling from 31.4% and those who are suffering by 15.5%.
- 3. Social Well-being:** Increase the percentage of community members who are thriving from 34.1%. Decrease the percentage of community members who are struggling from 49.1% and those who are suffering from 16.8%.
- 4. Career/Purpose Well-being:** Increase the percentage of community members who are thriving from 36.2%. Decrease the percentage of community members who are struggling from 51.4% and those who are suffering from 12.4%.
- 5. Community:** Increase the percentage of community members who are thriving from 52.1%. Decrease the percentage of community members who are struggling from 41% and those who are suffering by 6.9%.

iii. Strategies:

1. Convene the Kosciusko County Health and Well-being Council to strategically plan, influence, and initiate community-wide efforts to pursue an environment of well-being for all residents.
2. Develop baseline data of overall community health as well as data in each of five areas of Well-being: Physical, Social, Financial, Community, and Career-Purpose.
3. Convene well-being committees that will develop short-term projects over the next five years to increase well-being and decrease those who are struggling or suffering in the 5 areas of well-being.

iv. Results: Currently, over 100 community volunteers are serving on committees to increase well-being in the five areas. Gallup will resurvey the residents of Kosciusko County in the fall of 2026 to measure the effectiveness and outcomes of community well-being initiatives.

OVERVIEW

CLEARLY DEFINED ENGAGEMENT PURPOSE, GOALS, AND ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

1. Engagement Purpose: The purpose of the community engagement activities is to acquire community thoughts and ideas related to project types for each pathway.

2. Goals:

- a. To engage each community for program or project ideas related to Advancing E-Connectivity
- b. To engage each community for program or project ideas related to Enhancing Quality of Place
- c. To engage each community for program or project ideas related to Promoting Community Wellness
- d. To engage each community for program or project ideas related to Strengthening Local Economies

3. Objectives:

- a. Present the public at each community engagement activity with a board that highlights each pathway which we will refer to as “areas of focus” to ensure the message translates to the public.
- b. Engage the public by providing a high-level understanding of the HELP program and the purpose of the community engagement activities they are participating in.
- c. Ask each participant to identify which area of the County they represent, which “area of focus” they feel is most important to their community, and then request they submit a project idea related to their chosen “area of focus” for their community.



OVERVIEW

RISKS, CHALLENGES, AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

4. Risks:

- a. Low participation rate at community engagement events and minimal completion of community engagement survey.
- b. COVID breakout which causes community engagement events to be canceled.
- c. Lack of diversity of participation at events and with submitted survey results.
- d. Engagement fatigue due to multiple community engagement opportunities completed in the recent past.

5. Challenges:

- a. Navigating situations in which certain participants bully others by shaming them about their ideas.
- b. Navigating situations in which certain participants chose to be negative about the exercise or event and refuse to participate.
- c. Navigating situations in which certain participants are overzealous and dominate conversations that thwart others from participating.
- d. Only attracting the same attendees repeatedly at each community engagement activity.

6. Mitigation Strategies:

- a. Provide an in-person and virtual component to community engagement activities.
- b. Ensure that community engagement activities are at different times and days.
- c. Ask HELP Core Advisory Team members and Pathway Committee members to participate in community engagement activities and invite people.
- d. Host multiple types of community engagement activities using multiple platforms.
- e. Intentionally set expectations for each community engagement activity.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES, COMMITMENT & LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

It is the belief of the HELP Core Advisory Team that each goal builds upon the next. If each goal is executed successfully then the engagement purpose will be accomplished.

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

1. Careful Planning and Preparation

a. The HELP Core Advisory Team desires to ensure that each community engagement event is planned based on each community's culture in which they are held, and that the community engagement survey is created with the intention of being easy to understand and easy to use.

2. Robust Participation

a. The HELP Core Advisory Team hopes to have a high turnout for each community engagement event and a huge number of individuals who chose to submit a project via the community engagement survey.

3. All voices heard in the collaborative environment

a. The HELP Core Advisory Team believes that if a collaborative environment is created for each activity, then individuals of all types will feel comfortable sharing their ideas and thus all voices will be heard.

4. Positive impact and produce measurable results

a. The HELP Core Advisory Team hopes that each community engagement activity will leave a great impression which will cause a positive impact in the communities and lead to producing measurable results.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES, COMMITMENT & LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

COMMITMENT & LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

- a. The Community Coordinator with the assistance of the HELP Core Advisory Team and under the direction of the CEO of the grant process will inform the public about the HELP program in a manner that is easy to understand.
- b. The Community Coordinator and the HELP Core Advisory Team will create a collaborative environment around the program which will spur community conversation.
- c. The Community Coordinator and the HELP Core Advisory Team will involve the community in the program process by accepting every opportunity to share about the program and answer all questions received.
- d. The Community Coordinator and the HELP Core Advisory Team will empower community members to be a part of the program by ensuring that they feel that their voice is being heard and their ideas matter.

NEGOTIABLES & NON-NEGOTIABLES

3. Negotiables

- a. Ensure all ideas are respected and taken into consideration.
- b. Opportunity to work with communities to implement community-led and community-funded projects.

4. Non-Negotiables

- a. Legislative requirements for project implementation that cannot be altered.
- b. Restrictions of project funding that cannot be altered.

KEY MESSAGES

- a. Ensure community members feel included, valued, and heard.
- b. Ensure community members know the County represents all its communities and residents.
- c. Ensure community members know the County is excited for future possibilities of growth in each community.

PARTNERSHIPS & STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

PARTNERSHIPS & STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

1. Kosciusko County Government

Kosciusko County Commissioners, as the local unit of government that submitted the HELP application to OCRA, have a responsibility in ensuring that the program is implemented according to program policies and procedures. In addition, they are responsible for hiring and managing a community coordinator who acts on behalf of the County government to implement the program. Lastly, the County government is responsible for providing resources which may include financial support for the program in partnership with OCRA and other granting agencies as presented.

2. HELP Core Advisory Team

The HELP Core Advisory Team is a group of community leaders from each community and multiple organizations who have a vested interest in the HELP program. These individuals are from strategic industries and organizations and will assist in the planning and implementation of the HELP program, the hiring and support of the Community Coordinator, and will aid in the selection of Pathway Committee members, and the creation of the Community Engagement Plan. In addition, the members will promote the program in the community and may be called on to provide additional resources to support the program that may include providing funding for projects. Organizations on the Core Advisory Team that have boards will be encouraged to ask their board members for assistance with outreach with contacts in their networks, and to encourage those organizations to like and share the HELP Facebook page and updates.

3. Pathway Committee Members

The Pathway Committee Members consist of two community members from each partner community including the County, as well as a lead for the committee, and a county expert in each pathway. The community member's purpose is to work with the educational facilitators to analyze community data and project ideas and make final project recommendations. They will also be responsible to present their recommendations to their respective decision-making body for final approval of projects before they are brought before the HELP Core Advisory Team. The Committee lead's purpose is to work with the educational facilitators of their respective committees to schedule meetings with community members and keep the Community Coordinator updated on committee progress.

PARTNERSHIPS & STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

3. Pathway Committee Members (cont.)

The county experts' purpose is to provide insight into the committee subject matter for the County to ensure duplication of projects does not occur and to answer any questions the educational facilitators or members may have related to the subject matter for the County.

4. Marketing Outlets

The program is dependent on each media outlet which includes partner organizations such as the Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, KEDCO, and the Community Foundation to provide opportunities for HELP program information to be distributed. This may include agreeing to post information received from press releases, creating original content related to the program, or post information received.

5. HELP Communities

The HELP program will only be as successful as the participation provided by each community. If community members chose not to actively participate in the process, then the projects decided will not represent the community as a whole and the community engagement principles will not be met.

6. Community Coordinator

The Community Coordinator will work diligently to engage with each community based on their community culture and will travel to communities to visit with town clerks and do town tours to understand the dynamics of each HELP community more fully. The coordinator will work with the HELP Core Advisory Team to accomplish all tasks according to OCRA's requirements and will communicate with OCRA if a requirement is unable to be met. The coordinator will meet with the CEO of the grant program periodically to check-in and receive guidance on outstanding questions and concerns. The coordinator will ensure the program is communicated to the public in a positive and understandable manner to ensure maximum buy-in for the program.

7. OCRA

OCRA will provide oversight and direction to Kosciusko County Government as they work to implement the HELP program. OCRA will aid in answering all questions related to each stage of the program. They will ensure detailed information is received in a timely manner which will assist with the efficient implementation of each program requirement. In addition, OCRA will provide the clarity needed for parts of the program that may be confusing to the County.

TOOLS & RESOURCES

EXISTING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE COMMUNITY & CURRENT ENGAGEMENT METHODS

The HELP partners in current engagement activities are Kosciusko County, KEDCO, HELP town clerks, Kosciusko County Chamber of Commerce, and the Kosciusko Community Foundation.

Type	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Annually	As Needed
Staff interaction with the public	X				
Email Notifications		X			
Organizational Websites	X				
E-Newsletters		X			
News Releases					X
Board Meetings					X
Social Media Posts					X
Community Meetings					X
Council Meetings					X
E-Blasts					X
Marketing/ED Efforts	X				
Events					X
Sponsorships					X
Signage/Banners					X
Volunteer Program	X				
Surveys					X
Flyers/Handouts					X

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Each community engagement activity will be created in partnership with the HELP Core Advisory Team and using the KEDCO marketing team to create marketing collateral and will be highlighted on multiple marketing platforms.

1. Art Infused Events in partnership with Spoonful of Imagination and sponsored by Indiana Arts Commission

a. Purpose: Community-centric events provided to each HELP community to reach audiences not traditionally reached by making the engagement fun and inclusive, deepen creativity and innovation in each community and build community capacity for integrating arts into the planning process.

b. Dates:

- i. Mentone, May 4th
- ii. Pierceton, May 7th
- iii. Etna Green, June 11th
- iv. Milford, June 17th

c. Execution: The Community Coordinator will plan events with Spoonful of Imagination in partnership with town clerks. The Community Coordinator will harness all available marketing opportunities to ensure robust participation in the events is a reality.

2. HELP Facebook Page

a. Purpose: The platform will be used to gather project ideas from the unique audience who follow the page which may include community members by posting the community engagement survey.

b. Dates:

- i. May 24th – June 7th

c. Execution: The Community Coordinator will work with the KEDCO marketing department to create a community engagement survey that is easy to understand. KEDCO intern will create a post to release survey and continue to post to ensure maximum participation.

3. Kosciusko County Chamber HELP videos

a. Purpose: The platform will be used to provide community awareness to the HELP community engagement survey. The audience includes community members of all ages and the business community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

3. Kosciusko County Chamber HELP videos (cont.)

b. Dates:

i. Overall Awareness Video, Week of May 23rd

1. This video uses fun and outlandish message to provide awareness to the community engagement survey inviting individuals to complete the survey

c. Execution: The Community Coordinator will work with Kosciusko County Chamber staff to create a memorable video that will highlight the need for community input. The public will be directed to complete the community survey.

4. Kosciusko County Chamber Podcast Session

a. Purpose: The platform will be used to provide more detailed information related to the HELP community engagement survey awareness video. The audience includes community members of all ages and the business community.

b. Dates:

i. Week of May 30th

c. Execution: The Community Coordinator will work with Kosciusko County Chamber staff to create a podcast to explain the HELP program and direct individuals more intentionally to complete the community engagement survey.

5. Media Partner Coverage

a. Purpose: The platform will be used to share about the HELP program and to engage an older audience in obtaining project ideas.

b. Dates:

i. Press release will be distributed on Tuesday, May 24th

c. Execution: A press release, created by KEDCO, will be created, and released to all media partners to provide information regarding community engagement activities and highlight the survey.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES (cont.)

6. Community Engagement Session at Community Forum

a. Purpose: The platform will be used to capture project ideas from a captive audience. The goal is to obtain more County-wide project ideas.

b. Date:

i. Tuesday, June 7th, 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

c. Execution: The team will be hosting a community engagement session at the Community Forum to capture additional ideas from community members, business leaders, and elected officials.



EVALUATION, MEASUREMENT COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY

EVALUATION

To help the County determine the effectiveness of the engagement efforts the Community Coordinator will evaluate the following:

- a. Are we communicating as often as we should?
- b. Are we communicating the correct and most relevant information?
- c. Are we communicating in a manner that is easily understood by all people?
- d. Are we using the most effective communication tools?
- e. Is our communication producing robust participation?

MEASUREMENT

The County will use the basic measures of success to track program effectiveness including:

- a. Social Media Reach
- b. Event Attendance
- c. Survey Participation Rate

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

The Community Coordinator in partnership with the KEDCO marketing team, media outlets, and County website team will provide periodic press releases related to the program, updates on HELP Facebook page, and information updates on County website.



