

Smart Valley Places – HUD SCI Grant Abstract

The San Joaquin Valley is widely recognized as a critical geographic and resource area for the continued growth and sustainability of California and for the West Coast of the United States, but faces serious and daunting challenges in fulfilling its potential. Many published reports in the past decade have compared and realistically painted the San Joaquin Valley as a region of significant concentrated poverty and unemployment; a predominantly low skilled and poorly educated workforce; neglected rural communities, downtown cores and surrounding low-income neighborhoods; severe deficits of affordable and diverse housing opportunities; insufficient provision of human and social services; undiversified and uncompetitive urban economies; very poor air quality and severe public health issues; emerging water supply and water quality issues; limited regional transportation infrastructure and inconvenient and ineffective transit service inside and outside of major cities; out-of-date land use plans, policies, codes, and difficult development permitting processes; fiscal resource and city/county staff capacity constraints; and a sprawling growth pattern of low-density, auto-dependent, residential/commercial suburban-oriented development that continues to consume significant amounts of irreplaceable and world-class irrigated farmland.

Smart Valley Places represents a consortium, commitment, and the much needed 'bridging capital' required to reverse and end these harsh interdependent realities, to improve the Valley as an attractive place to live, work, and do business, and to demonstrate and earn our rightful status as the key to California's healthy, prosperous, and sustainable future. Our Valley jurisdictions are coming together in a new and unprecedented regional partnership to build upon substantive recent regional efforts to develop shared vision and planning principles; to capitalize on prospective 21st century California High Speed Rail stops on the main line connecting Los Angeles and San Francisco; to mutually develop, adopt and share state-of-the-art Smart Growth, Livability, and Sustainability land use, transportation, resource efficiency and community leadership planning tools and best practices; and to better inter-connect our region to meaningfully and measurably overcome our deleterious array of local and regional challenges.

The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley (the SJV Partnership) is the lead applicant for the Smart Valley Places Consortium (Consortium) applying for a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant under Category 2 as a Large Metropolitan Region. The Consortium has the capacity and experience to refine, enhance, and implement an integrated Regional Plan for Sustainable Development in the San Joaquin Valley. This will shepherd the advancement of planning that prioritizes sustainability and inclusion as core outcomes of community development; shares elements of regional planning; aligns federal priorities and regional strategies; includes marginalized groups in decision-making and long range vision; and reduces social and economic disparities in underserved communities and neighborhoods. The Smart Valley Places Consortium will be coordinated by the SJV Partnership and driven by a compact of 14 cities (Compact Cities) in the eight county region, in partnership with four regional non-profit organizations, California State University, Fresno and the San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council (RPC), which represents all eight Metropolitan Planning Organizations in the Valley. The coordinated efforts and project deliverables are driven by a formalized Compact resolution among the 14 participating major cities. Additionally, the Consortium's regional partners have provided letters of commitment further ensuring that the purposes of the

Sustainable Communities Program will be carried out across the San Joaquin Valley region. Through this network of partners, the Consortium commits to this application more than 50 percent of the total grant funds requested in leveraged funds or in-kind contributions—far exceeding the minimum threshold of 20 percent.

Smart Valley Places eight counties contain the most productive agricultural industry and farmland in the U.S. and a current population of nearly 4 million residents, which is projected to double by 2050 with 90 percent of residents living and working within and proximate to our major Urbanized Areas. Integrating and balancing urban, rural, and agricultural development is paramount to the long-term success of the San Joaquin Valley and all our residents. In June 2005, Governor of California established the San Joaquin Valley Partnership in an unparalleled effort to direct attention to the needs and sustainability of the region. With a focus on the 3Es of sustainable growth, the Partnership formed ten Work Groups comprised of public and private sector leaders, experts, and elected officials to study and address challenges in the areas of: Economic Development; Higher Education and Workforce Development; K-12 Education; Transportation; Land Use, Agriculture, and Housing; Air Quality; Water; Energy; Health and Human Services; and Advanced Communications Services and Information Technology. A vision for success and a Strategic Action Proposal (SAP) were developed that form a critical component for our region's plan for sustainable development.

Another key component for our region in pursuing the 3Es of sustainable growth is the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint (Blueprint). The Blueprint is the result of a unique regional collaborative effort to plan for the future of the San Joaquin Valley that began in 2006 and involved seven Councils of Government and one Regional Transportation Planning Agency—representing all eight of the Valley's counties. Under the direction of these entities, an extensive public outreach campaign took place throughout the region which ultimately produced the values and vision of the Blueprint, as well as 12 Smart Growth Principles. These principles establish a benchmark for Blueprint related decision making and implementation of a single integrated regional plan for sustainable development as is intended by Smart Valley Places.

The Valley COGs worked closely with U.C. Davis and local planners to use UPLAN growth scenario modeling software to develop a variety of growth scenarios, including a status quo scenario that was essential to ensuring that the Blueprint identified realistic development patterns. The UPLAN analysis showed that if growth continued as it had during the previous five to ten years, an additional 760,000 acres of agricultural land throughout the Valley would be converted to urban uses by 2050. Through this scenario development process a single preferred growth scenario for the San Joaquin Valley was selected. On April 1, 2009, the Regional Policy Council adopted the preferred growth scenario and the 12 Smart Growth Principles, officially concluding the three year planning process and setting the stage for the transition to the implementation of the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint by the cities and counties of the Valley.

Smart Valley Places, with 14 of the 16 Urbanized Areas in the Valley and their critical mass of population, jobs, resource management opportunities, land use and zoning authority, and formal commitments to working with each other and all other regional partners and jurisdictions, is now the lead vehicle with the most potential for direct positive impact to achieve implementation of inclusive and integrated Smart Growth and Sustainability across our region.