A Trail Map for Growth: Recreation Economies and Preservation of Local Quality of Life

NADO Annual Training Conference
Cleveland, Ohio · November 8, 2023
Your Session Facilitators

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Today We’d Like To…

- Explore why and how outdoor recreation can be an important part of regions’ economic development strategies

- Share some examples and lessons learned from the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities planning assistance program
  - Lake Champlain-Lake George Regional Planning Board (NY)

- Try out parts of the RERC Toolkit

- Hear from you about the challenges and opportunities you are seeing in the rural regions with whom you work
What region are you from?

Drop a pin to show us where you are coming from!

Visit menti.com and use code 2465 9002

or Scan this QR code:
The Results...
What region are you from?
RECREATION ECONOMY
for
RURAL COMMUNITIES

Why EPA?
EPA’s Office of Community Revitalization

EPA’s mission:
Protect human health and the environment.

Where and how we build our communities impacts human health and our land, air, and water.
• Communities ask for our help creating a vision for what they want their communities to look like in the future
  ✓ We provide planning assistance
  ✓ We convene stakeholders together to have these conversations
  ✓ We bring federal agencies to communities so they can learn how their programs can help
Smart Growth in Your Community

EPA Smart Growth and Community Revitalization Projects

[Map showing various projects across the United States]
RECREATION ECONOMY
for
RURAL COMMUNITIES

Why Outdoor Recreation?

Photo by Chuck Helfer
Why Outdoor Recreation?

Outdoor recreation is a large contributor to GDP.
The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) estimates the contribution of outdoor recreation in terms of its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2019 the value-added contribution of outdoor recreation to the U.S. economy was $459.8 billion, representing 2.1% of GDP.

Outdoor recreation is a large and growing employer.
Nationwide, outdoor recreation employed almost 5.2 million people in 2019 who earned more than $226.3 billion dollars. For comparison, outdoor recreation employs about the same number of people as are employed in the nation’s hospitals, and twice the number employed in farming.

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“Inspiring the Future Outdoor Recreation Economy,” State Outdoor Business Alliance Network (Summer 2021)
Outdoor recreation contributes to economic success in many ways.

**Tourism**
Visitors who come to enjoy the outdoors spend money on lodging, restaurants, and other services, creating jobs and putting money into the community.

**Entrepreneurs + Talent**
Access to the outdoors and a high-quality of life attracts and retains new businesses and skilled workers.

**Retirement + Investment Income**
Wealth from retirees and investors who are drawn to live near outdoor access helps boost the local economy.

**Main Street Businesses**
Restaurants, grocery stores, gear stores, and other local retailers benefit from visitors and new residents.

**Gear Manufacturing**
Companies that make outdoor equipment tend to locate in places with outdoor amenities, providing jobs and investment in the community.

**New Residents**
Places with recreation amenities on federal public lands have higher rates of in-migration, helping fuel jobs for teachers, doctors, construction workers, and more.

**Tax Revenue**
Spending at local businesses and increased property tax revenue contribute to the tax base.

**Healthier Residents**
Access to the outdoors improves public health and reduces costs of chronic conditions, especially for impoverished and under-resourced neighborhoods.

"Inspiring the Future Outdoor Recreation Economy," State Outdoor Business Alliance Network (Summer 2021)
Amenity-rich communities can face challenges around:

1. Housing
2. Infrastructure and Public Services
3. Fiscal Policy
4. Natural Disasters

Communities can:
- Wait
- React
- **Proactively Plan**
Recreation Economy for Rural Communities

- Outdoor recreation is a big and growing part of the U.S. economy
- Planning assistance program to help rural communities leverage **outdoor recreation** to **revitalize their main streets** and **diversify economies**
- Helps the community convene to articulate their vision, goals, and actionable next steps
- Federal and state agencies (and other partners) come to the table to listen and help with implementation

https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/rerc
Program Purpose

Partner with communities to:

• **Revitalize Main Streets** through outdoor recreation

• Strengthen **economic opportunities** for residents and businesses

• Get people outdoors, as a key part of the **sustainable use** of natural resources – improving people’s health

**RECREATION ECONOMY for RURAL COMMUNITIES**
10 communities in the pilot round in 2020-2021

25 communities in Round 2 of the program, with workshops in 2022-2023
Planning Assistance Process

**Assess**
- Understand context, self assessment
- Refine the problem statement, goals
- Customize agenda and materials
- Coach community on stakeholder participation
- Engage federal stakeholder partners

**Convene**
- Conduct community tour
- Affirm collective vision
- Assess assets, challenges relative to advancing the community’s goals
- Discuss relevant case studies and generate ideas and locally relevant strategies
- Refine goals and identify specific actions and next steps to move forward

**Implement**
- Document Action Plan
- Conduct follow up discussions to review and refine action steps
- Engage project steering committee and stakeholders to identify additional resources/funding
- Finalize the blueprint for implementation
This phase includes:

- Three planning calls
- Forming the local steering committee
- Identifying stakeholders – who hasn’t been involved that could be invited in?
- Engaging federal, state, and other funding partners early in the process
- Completing the Community Self-Assessment
- Identifying focus areas/goals for the workshop
- Planning for workshop logistics
- Outreach!
Introduction

Congratulations on your community’s selection to participate in the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) planning assistance program! Supported by a federal agency partnership, RERC helps communities develop strategies and an action plan to vitalize their Main Streets through outdoor recreation. The program is currently in its second year. Ten communities received assistance in 2019-2021. Twenty-five were selected for the 2022 season, including yours!

This Community Guide provides an overview of the RERC program and the steps your community will follow during and after the planning assistance process. Lessons learned and suggestions for success come from communities just like yours, who have already been through this or a similar program. Inside, you’ll find an outline of the RERC program’s purpose, details on the three main project phases, and descriptions of each partner’s responsibilities, including the leading role your community will play throughout the process and beyond.

Use this guide to stay on track. Early in the process, you’ll find resources like the Program Overview helpful. A sample community four schedule and workshop agenda provide examples of how to structure these key parts of the program. You’ll also find tips on conducting outreach to ensure broad participation from the community during and after the workshops.

This guide anticipates many of your questions along the way, so refer to it often throughout the planning assistance process. Starting strong and maintaining the momentum generated while creating your action plan will help your community achieve key goals for leveraging the outdoor recreation economic assets for improving your downtown and Main Streets.

We look forward to working closely with you over the next few months to define these goals and the actions that will help you achieve them!

Photo Credit: Gary James
ASSESS: Community Self-Assessment

Area of Focus:
This section covers your community's current status in the following categories related to the outdoor recreation economy and Main Street initiatives:
1. Outdoor Recreation Asset Identification and Mapping
2. Recreation Infrastructure Development
3. Recreation Economy Support and Ancillary Services
4. Downtown Revitalization and Redevelopment
5. Economic Development: Opportunities and Advancement
6. Local and Regional Promotion and Branding
7. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
8. Public Health
9. Leveraging Partnerships
10. Natural Resource Stewardship
11. Risk and Resilience

Benefits for the Community:
- Helps the community conceptualize their current recreation economy and plan-based initiatives and begin to examine the scope of possibilities and interrelated activities.
- Helps generate ideas about potential strategies to invite to the overall plan.
- Provides a planning activity for the overall committee to do together.

Benefits for an outside facilitator:
- Provides valuable background information on the status of the recreation economy and place-based initiatives.
- Helps clarify workshop goals and desired outcomes.
- Helps identify case studies and supplemental materials most pertinent for the community.

1. Outdoor Recreation Asset Identification and Mapping
A key first step is to identify what resources are available to your community already, how they are currently organized, and what the market demands for these assets. This activity can help identify opportunities and gaps for new assets that can be developed to address market gaps and enhance the community's recreation infrastructure.

Common strategies for analysis:
- Identify local assets:
  - Parks, trails, green spaces, and natural areas
  - Existing outdoor recreation assets
  - Potential for additional assets
- Conduct a market analysis:
  - Analyze local demographics and recreation preferences
  - Identify target markets and potential for new recreation assets
- Develop a strategic plan:
  - Prioritize assets for development
  - Develop marketing and promotion strategies
- Implement action plan:
  - Develop funding opportunities
  - Develop partnerships for implementation
- Monitor and evaluate progress:
  - Regularly assess the implementation of the plan
  - Adjust as needed to ensure success.
CONVENE

This phase includes:

• Two-day, in person workshop in the community
• DAY ONE: Community tour and evening community meeting
• DAY TWO: All-day working session

• Bringing together all local stakeholders plus federal, state, regional, and other partners
• Moving from vision and values, to goals, to specific actions that the community wants to take moving forward to strengthen outdoor recreation and main street revitalization
• Includes interactive exercises, case stories to inspire, goal affirmation, and action planning
What does outdoor recreation mean to you?

Outdoor recreation means different things to different people! Tell us what outdoor recreation means to you.

Go menti.com and use code 1976 0813

or

Scan this QR code:
The Results...
What does outdoor recreation mean to you?

88 responses
CONVENE: Workshop in Akwesasne, NY

Photos by Jason Espie and Steph Bertaina
IMPLEMENT

This phase includes:

• Three follow up implementation calls

• Broadening the steering committee

• Identifying community “goal champions”

• Drafting and finalizing the action plan together

• Identifying funding and other resources needed for implementation

• Charting a path for implementing the plan moving forward
RERC PARTNER COMMUNITIES:
New Featured Video!

RERC Partnership in Granville, NY and Poultney, VT

Granville, NY and Poultney, VT are two neighboring communities and recipients of the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) planning assistance program.

Watch on YouTube
RECREATION ECONOMY
for
RURAL COMMUNITIES

GRANVILLE, NY
RERC Goals

• Goal 1. Reinvest in Granville’s Main Street, Mettawee Park and the riverfront, and the cultural campus.
• Goal 2. Integrate Granville’s unique history, art, and cultural traditions to develop a distinctive identity, brand, and promotion strategy.
• Goal 3. Improve infrastructure such as trails, sidewalks, cell phone service, and park facilities.
• Goal 4. Support collaborative relationships with nearby communities.
• Goal 5. Create and expand opportunities for young people in Granville to be involved in outdoor recreation activities.
RECREATION ECONOMY for RURAL COMMUNITIES

CAMBRIDGE, NY
Overview of Village of Cambridge, NY

• Population ~1,800
• Median income $51,295
• 1 traffic light
• Major employer – school
• Local business gems – independent bookstore, craft brewery tasting room, co-op food store, renowned arts and cultural center, seed company
• Natural resources – Owlkill, Cambridge Creek, Cambridge Community Forest, small parks, school wetland trail, and nearby state forests, lakes and Battenkill
• Fun facts
Cambridge, NY RERC

Timeline

- May 2019 Submitted application
- Oct 2019 Awarded (only 10 in nation selected for inaugural round)
- COVID
- April 2020 Public workshops are postponed Committee work continues
- Sept. 2020 Virtual public workshops
- Action Plan drafted
- Oct 2020-Jan 2021 refined action plan, calls with committee, and updates on progress

Cambridge RERC Committee

- Committee consisted of:
  - Cambridge Village council member
  - Town board members
  - Cambridge Central School Superintendent
  - Cambridge Valley Community Partnership
  - Agricultural Stewardship Association (land trust)
  - Chamber of Commerce
  - A resident
Community Action Plan

• **Goal 1** – Support physical improvements to streets and sidewalks and provide wayfinding signs to safely connect Main Street to walkable and bikeable natural amenities.

• **Goal 2** – Identify next steps for development of the Community Forest that engages the community in planning, infrastructure development, and community-supported programming and activities.
Community Action Plan

• **Goal 3** – Celebrate what makes Cambridge unique, bringing all outdoor recreation assets together, assessing what exists and what is missing, building on business and service opportunities, and developing an identity and brand for the community.

• **Goal 4** – Develop an understanding of the regional context of recreational assets, connection to other communities, and alignment of regional priorities for leveraging the unique outdoor recreation amenities in the area.
Goal 1:
Improving Physical Connections Throughout the Cambridge Community

Progress to date:

- To improve walkability a subcommittee conducted a Sidewalk Audit (May 1, 2021)

- Complete Streets planning grant received to improve walkability and safety near district school, health and safety corridor and access point to Community Forest (2022)—underway

- Victorian Footbridge Rehabilitated and Installed October 2021

- Schematic plans to naturalize and better steward a highly channelized stream corridor being vetted
Goal 1:

Improving physical connections (continued)

- Village selected as NY Forward Community ($2.25 million) for mixed-use development initiative—a component of which advances a recreation economy connected to Main Street

- Seeking support for Owl Kill trail system—eventually to connect to ASA’s Community Forest
Goal 2: 

Cambridge Community Forest

• Formed an advisory group
• Repaired the bridge for access (2 grants)
• Secured a lease for parking area
• Installed signage, kiosk
• Held grand opening in November 2021
• Volunteers working on trails
Goal 4:
Regional Recreational Assets

• Agricultural Stewardship Association (ASA) working on a community engagement plan
• Stakeholder interviews
• Community conservation projects and programming
• Communities identifying need for recreational opportunities, trails, open spaces, linking natural resources with walkable communities
• Focus on welcoming and inclusive community lands
COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

• Giles County is composed of five small towns: Glen Lyn, Pearisburg, Pembroke, Narrows, and Rich Creek, a combined population of 16,867.

• New River Valley Regional Commission and Giles County Tourism collaborated on lead for RERC.

• Natural assets include the New River, Appalachian Trail, Cascades Falls, Jefferson National Forest.

• Challenged by lack of infrastructure, lack of walkable centers, want to increase amenities and staying power.
RECREATION & NATURAL RESOURCE ASSETS
But why?

• A robust approach to economic, community, & tourism development including outdoor & natural assets

• A place to "Live, Work, & Play"
GILES COUNTY, VIRGINIA

WORKSHOP GOALS

1. **Improve access and infrastructure:** Better publicize and manage recreation access and infrastructure, especially trails connecting to towns, highlighting less used sites, and improving existing infrastructure (parking, boat ramps, Cascades access).

2. **Improve mobility and safety:** Improve transportation options and traffic flow conditions, focusing on quality of the experience, walkability, and safety.

3. **Enhance the visitor experience and choices to stay longer, do more:** Better connect current visitors to existing downtown amenities and develop new related amenities, especially lodging but also other businesses.

4. **Strengthen partnerships and improve area-wide promotion:** Coordinate area-wide marketing and promotion and explore how to fund a County-wide Main Street Coordinator to work on behalf of all towns in Giles.
GILES COUNTY, VIRGINIA

SINCE THE WORKSHOP...

- Everyone knows RERC & Giles’ efforts to raise awareness & create opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 1- Access</th>
<th>Goal 2- Safety</th>
<th>Goal 3- Visitors</th>
<th>Goal 4- Partners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trail development in partnership with NRVRC &amp; Mountain Lake Lodge &amp; USDA USFS - see next slide</td>
<td>Cascades (USDA USFS) conversations around parking and access to</td>
<td>VT Management Team- Giles Tourism Study</td>
<td>VisitNRV Website launch and branding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Narrows trail from Duck Pond to Camp Success</td>
<td>Multi-locality resolution passed for Twin Depots Trail</td>
<td>STR Inventory &amp; Ordinance Review</td>
<td>Jumpstart Giles Network- small business development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Stoney Creek Improvements</td>
<td>Narrows Downtown enhancements</td>
<td>Trail Center Development</td>
<td>Fish Virginia First &amp; SWVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VT CDAC project for Camp Success</td>
<td>Route 100 widening study with VDOT</td>
<td>Hotel Feasibility Study completed &amp;</td>
<td>MATPRA &amp; VTC Itineraries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Destination Center Ground Breaking April 2023
Trail Center to Act as a Gateway to the Big Stony Creek Watershed
Drive 2.0 & Drive Outdoor

Kayak Storage Lockers Fall 2023
VisitNRV Brand & Website Launch May 2023
RECREATION ECONOMY for RURAL COMMUNITIES
MONTE VISTA, CO
COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

- Very remote, rural town in the San Luis Valley (high desert plateau) in Colorado, 4-5 hours from Denver.
- In an agriculturally-rich region surrounded by public land (Forest Service, BLM, National Wildlife Refuges, and state-managed land) with striking natural beauty and outdoor recreation assets (trails, river, wildlife) but many of these assets are not well-connected to the community of Monte Vista (both in terms of residents having access and in terms of tourism potential).
- SLV GO! and the City of Monte Vista were co-leads for this project, in partnership with many other organizations in the community.
- Wanted help from RERC to help Monte Vista tap into the potential of the outdoor recreation economy in the region, for residents and to draw some in-state visitors.

WORKSHOP GOALS

1. Recreation Opportunities and Access for All
2. Physical Connections, Safety, and Walkability
3. Downtown Amenities and Vibrancy
4. Business and Economic Development
5. Stewardship and Authenticity
ABOUT THE PROCESS

• **Youth Survey:** The committee worked with the school district to distribute a survey to high school students asking their thoughts on desired outdoor recreation opportunities, and we had great feedback.

• **Saturday Open House Exhibit:** We had an open house exhibit Saturday morning to share the results of the workshop to date, to celebrate success, and to gather additional community input.

• **Partnerships with Federal and State Partners:** Partnerships with federal and state partners unlocked a lot of other resources and guidance.

SINCE THE WORKSHOP

• Local news outlet covered the workshop: [https://montevistajournal.com/article/rerc-workshop-well-attended-organizers-say](https://montevistajournal.com/article/rerc-workshop-well-attended-organizers-say).

• Steering committee member made a video documenting the workshop: [https://youtu.be/QLwYNLbyXXI](https://youtu.be/QLwYNLbyXXI).

• Received NPS-RTCA assistance for additional trails planning.

• Received $1 million from the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry program.

• Exploring applying for an EPA OEJECR grant.

• RERC process and action plan was highlighted at upcoming Business and Entrepreneurship Summit in June 2023.

• Steering committee members presented about RERC at the Colorado Outdoor Industry Leadership Summit in October 2023.
PLANNING ASSISTANCE PROCESS

Assess

- Understand context, self assessment
- Refine the problem statement, goals
- Customize agenda and materials
- Coach community on stakeholder participation
- Engage federal stakeholder partners

Convene

- Conduct community tour
- Affirm collective vision
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Implement

- Document Action Plan
- Conduct follow up discussions to review and refine action steps
- Engage project steering committee and stakeholders to identify additional resources/funding
- Finalize the blueprint for implementation
Itinerary Planning Exercise
Itinerary Planning Exercise

Create a 2-day itinerary in your region for the following people (or choose your own target audience):

- A family with young children
- A local resident on a long weekend
- An out-of-state visitor
- An individual with mobility limitations
- A young couple/group of friends in their 20s
- A group of seniors

Where would they go and what would they do? Think about where they would....:

- Recreate
- Buy or rent gear, supplies, and guide services
- Eat, drink, shop, sleep
- Get information
- How they would get around
- What they would do in different weather conditions; at different times of the year

Itineraries should be based in reality, not aspirational.
**SAMPLE ITINERARY:** For a family with children visiting the region in July

### Day 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Location/destination</th>
<th>Supplies and services needed, source</th>
<th>Transportation/route to next stop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrive, have lunch downtown</td>
<td>Walt’s Diner</td>
<td>Information from downtown kiosk</td>
<td>Drive Rts. 28 and 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoe and swim</td>
<td>Big Moose Lake</td>
<td>Canoes from inn, maps? Snacks? Waterproof bags for phones?</td>
<td>Walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check in, have dinner</td>
<td>Big Moose Inn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening activities?</td>
<td>Big Moose Inn/ nearby?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Day 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Location/destination</th>
<th>Supplies and services needed, source</th>
<th>Transportation/route to next stop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short, easy hike</td>
<td>Bald Mountain</td>
<td>Snacks from convenience store?</td>
<td>Drive Rts. 1 and 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have lunch downtown</td>
<td>Adirondack Dog House</td>
<td></td>
<td>Drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenic chairlift ride</td>
<td>McCauley Mountain</td>
<td>Souvenirs?</td>
<td>Drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>Pied Piper</td>
<td></td>
<td>Walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etc...</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Identify the following:

- **Strengths:** What kinds of recreation and downtown amenities do you have a lot of/in high quality to leverage?
- **Gaps:** What are you missing? What could make your region more attractive to locals and visitors who want to recreate?
- **Opportunities:** What strengths could you build on or gaps could you address for maximum impact?

As you answer, think about the items on the asset-based place-based economic development wheel, what opportunities exist to build up this value chain, particularly in your downtown?
Your Task

1. Choose one of the perspectives (young family, group of seniors, etc.) and write your community/region’s name at the top.

2. Think about your community/region’s current assets and complete the itinerary to the best of your ability.

3. Keep in mind what you wish you could have added to your itinerary (what’s still missing).

4. When everyone is done working on their own, we will discuss and share!
Itinerary Planning Exercise

Create a 2-day itinerary in your region for the following people (or choose your own target audience):

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Itineraries should be based in reality, not aspirational.
What are we learning?

- RERC community partners are on a spectrum – from having well-established recreation economies to just starting to develop their recreation economies.

- Specific opportunities and challenges vary depending on where they are on this spectrum.

- Many communities are balancing the **need for capacity** – the human power that is needed to advance their outdoor recreation and revitalization efforts – and many are finding creative ways to meet that need.

- Many communities are tackling the need for capacity – the human power that is needed to advance their outdoor recreation and revitalization efforts – and many are finding creative ways to meet that need.

- Specific challenges vary for each community, but many RERC communities have expressed infrastructure as a challenge (downtown amenities, transportation, housing, etc.). For housing, even very rural communities are seeing a lack of **availability**, **affordability**, and **accessibility**.

- There is a lot of funding out there right now – but many communities find it challenging to navigate the sources of funding and have the capacity to apply for and manage grants.
What’s Next for RERC?

• Currently wrapping up projects in Round 2 of the program and planning for Round 3.

• Stay tuned to the RERC website for future opportunities to apply to the RERC program!

  https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/rerc

• Subscribe to our EPA listserv for more info on the RERC program.
• What challenges and opportunities are you seeing in the rural communities and small towns with whom you work?

• How are your regions balancing tourism and economic dev opportunities+ residents’ needs?

• Are you seeing solutions and strategies that are working?
Thank you!

Contact Info:
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Beth Gilles: Beth.gilles@lclgrp.org

For More Info:
RERC Program
https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/erc

Photo by Lee Hart