



# **Strategies for Diversifying Economies of Small and Mid- sized Communities**

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# The Challenge for Small Towns

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- Many communities experience changes in the industries, technologies, or land use patterns that help form the foundation of their local economy
- But small towns are more likely to depend on a single economic sector and can lack infrastructure, facilities, and human capital needed to adjust.



# Economic Development Approaches

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- Traditional approach: Recruitment
  - Moves rather than creates jobs
  - Difficult for small towns to make competitive offers
- Alternative approach: Build on existing assets
  - All towns have assets, even after the loss of a main economic driver
  - Helps create new jobs that reinforce the community's strengths

# Strategy #1: Identify and Build on Existing Assets

Roanoke, Virginia, remade itself as an outdoor recreation destination. Just one event, an annual marathon has generated \$2 million in regional economic activity over five years.



The Roanoke Go Outside Festival is an annual event to encourage healthy, outdoor recreation that brings community members together for music, competitions, demonstrations, and outdoor gear sales.

# Strategy #2: Engage the Community in Planning

Dubuque, Iowa, invested in a stakeholder-driven planning process to identify 10 high-impact projects – all of which are now completed or underway.



Courtesy of EPA

Community members identified restoration of the Historic Millwork District in Dubuque as one of 10 high-impact projects. Renovated warehouse buildings now anchor the neighborhood and preserve a vital part of the city's history and culture.

# Strategy #3: Take Advantage of Outside Funding

Douglas, Georgia, used a federal Transportation Enhancement grant to improve the downtown streetscape, adding street trees, patterned brickwork, sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, and landscaping. After the project, downtown vacancies fell from 25 to 6 percent



The Douglas downtown streetscape project helped make the area a gathering place for the community, including a monthly downtown market with local vendors, artists, and farmers.

## Strategy #4: Create Incentives for Redevelopment and Encourage Investment

Paducah, Kentucky, created a program to buy vacant and foreclosed buildings to sell to artists. The town spent \$3 million in the first five years, while artists invested \$35 million.

Paducah's LowerTown Artist Relocation Program attracted more than 100 artists to the neighborhood, which is now filled with galleries, shops, and restaurants.

Courtesy of WKMS via flickr.com



## Strategy #5: Encourage Cooperation Within the Community and Across the Region

In Dubuque, Iowa, a partnership of the city, the county historical society, the local chamber of commerce, and a local development corporation launched *America's River*, a 90-acre riverfront revitalization project.



In phase III of *America's River*, Dubuque reduced the flood risk to over 1,100 flood-prone properties by uncovering and redirecting portions of Bee Branch Creek, saving the city millions of dollars to build new storm sewers and creating an attractive community park.



## Strategy #6: Support a Clean and Healthy Environment

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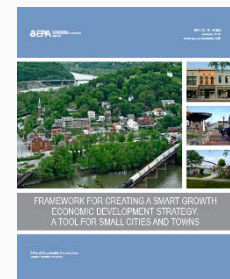
Bend, Oregon, cleaned up a contaminated former lumber mill to create the Old Mill District, an economic engine that employed 1,700 people just a year after opening.



Bend's Old Mill District includes recreational activities along the Deschutes River, as well as a variety of restaurants, shops, and art galleries.

# EPA Resources

- How Small Towns and Cities Can Use Local Assets to Rebuild their Economies: Lessons from Successful Places  
<http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/how-small-towns-and-cities-can-use-local-assets-rebuild-their-economies>
- Using Smart Growth Strategies to Foster Economic Development: A Kelso, Washington, Case Study  
<http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/using-smart-growth-strategies-foster-economic-development>
- Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns  
<http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/framework-creating-smart-growth-economic-development-strategy>





# Session Organization

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- Opening
  - *Melissa Kramer, EPA Office of Sustainable Communities*
- Kelso, Washington, Economic Development Efforts
  - *Steve Taylor, City of Kelso*
  - *Melissa Taylor, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments*
- Emporia, Kansas, Economic Development Efforts
  - *Casey Woods, Emporia Main Street*
- Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Plan
  - *Dena Belzer, Strategic Economics*
- Group exercise