Economic Development in the Eel River Valley

Grant Type: Dollar

Grant Amount: $290,000

Organization: Melvin F. & Grace McLean Foundation

What was the objective of your grant or initiative?

In discussing the impact they wanted to make in our region, the Eel River Valley in Humboldt County, California, our board agreed that many of the problems our area faces are the direct result of a lack of jobs. As a nonprofit foundation, we cannot donate or work directly with businesses, so we had to think creatively.

What was your approach?

We believe our approach is unique, because we are looking at many of the problems facing our region and the ways in which our nonprofits are struggling to provide services. Most of the problems here can be traced to the loss of our main industry—timber and forestry—over the past 20 years.

We continue to fund services, youth programs, education, and so forth, but believe that, by partnering with city governments and business leaders, we can help address the root causes too.

What were the outsized results?

We hired a consultant to do a business community needs assessment, which yielded great information. One important finding was that the city governments in our regions lacked the capacity to look for government grants or infrastructure funding. This meant they couldn't truly support local businesses or attract new businesses. We saw that, with a close partnership with the local city governments, we could combine resources and focus energy on economic development.

We were able to recruit and hire an economic development coordinator with 30 years of grant, government, business, and nonprofit experience to work with the city manager, our foundation, and other community nonprofit and business leaders to bring funds, support, and jobs to our region.

This is a new partnership, and, so far, the beginning collaborations and increased opportunities are very promising. We are looking at a new community center, a new health clinic, business mentoring programs, and many other exciting things!

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Thanks to NGOsource for its support of the Hall of Outsized Impact.