

Community Matters Now



A bi-monthly publication for Iowa leaders from Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS THE BEST OF ITS 2023 PROGRAMMING

The Community and Economic Development (CED) unit of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is wrapping up another year of successful programming. Highlights from CED's five knowledge teams demonstrate the breadth and depth of our impact in 2023.

Community and Business Development Community Arts Engagement

Upper-level ISU College of Design (COD) students collaborated with the community of Mount Ayr to create a new mural on the outside of the historic Princess Theater and co-hosted the town's May Day Mash, a community-wide celebration with arts activities and local music. The students used the [Community Mural Toolkit](#) by associate professor and arts engagement specialist Jennifer Drinkwater as a model to tailor the mural specifically for Mount Ayr. The toolkit is the first of a series Drinkwater developed to help communities engage their constituents through art. The latest in the series, [Pop-Up! A Toolkit for \(fun, invigorating, life-affirming\) Temporary Experiences](#), was published this summer.

Community Visioning Program

Ten towns—Denison, Dysart, Gilmore City, Glenwood, Independence, Marquette, McGregor, Slater, Vinton, and West Burlington—successfully completed the visioning process in 2023, which marked the 27th year that the program has provided transportation enhancement assistance to Iowa's rural communities. In April, [Community Visioning](#) earned an award for excellence in transportation design from the Central States Region of the American Society of Landscape Architects. In September, ISU President Wendy Wintersteen held a listening session in Emmetsburg, which participated in Community

Visioning in both 2001 and 2021, during which local representatives showcased successfully completed visioning projects.

Tourism Programming

CED's [Interpretative Guide Training and Certification program](#) received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, allowing 65 people to become certified in 2023. Thanks to additional funding from the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA), CED was able to train 42 entrepreneurs in our business class.

Local Government and Housing North Central Region (NCR) Housing Working Group

CED is part of the first thematic, multi-state working group created and funded by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD). Over three years, the NCR Housing Working Group will address what is often considered one of the most important problems for rural communities across the country—the lack of safe, affordable housing accessible to all residents. Collaborating across seven land-grant institutions, the working group aims to develop research-based housing resources and programming to improve rural housing conditions across the region.



Students collaborated with Mount Ayr to create this mural for the historic Princess Theater.

3D Housing Project

CED and the COD are working on 3D-printed concrete houses to potentially make housing construction faster, more affordable, and more sustainable. Researchers are experimenting with different concrete mixes, incorporating Iowa by-products such as corn stover and wind turbine blades, and different kinds of printers, drones, robotics, and digital designs. CED is helping coordinate partnerships with IEDA and the town of Hamburg to construct a 3D-printed concrete bungalow in 2024. CED is also helping to create a curriculum for Iowa Central Community College to train a new workforce in additive construction manufacturing with plans to extend this curriculum to other Iowa community colleges, [high school career](#)

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ONLINE RESOURCES

[INTERCULTURAL
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COMMUNITY VISIONING PROGRAM](#)

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academies, 4-H, and Iowa home builders. CED specialists are working with the COD and the ISU Ivy College of Business to develop a cost-analysis model to compare the costs of 3D-printed houses to traditional stick-built homes, manufactured houses, and other technologies to provide Iowa's housing industry with data they can use to decide which technologies and innovations to adopt.

Rural Housing Readiness Assessment (RHRA)

The [RHRA program](#) addresses Iowa's housing crisis by assisting communities in self-assessing their unique housing needs and helping them decide how to address those needs. To date, the program has successfully engaged more than 50 communities. RHRA communities have leveraged the program to repair and improve housing units, conducted land surveys, secured funds for upper-story housing, revitalized neighborhoods, and rehabilitated homes. Additionally, participants

have created their own housing improvement grants, updated zoning codes, removed dilapidated buildings, and created local incentives for residential construction. The 2023 RHRA cohort included Decorah, Eldora, Elkader, Fairfield, Humboldt, and Shellsburg.

Township Trustee and Clerk Training

Since the 1970s, CED has conducted training for township trustees, clerks, and elected and appointed county officials to help them better understand their roles and responsibilities. Local government specialists have revamped this long-standing program to offer it in a virtual format starting in 2024. The program includes a one-hour training session, a downloadable copy of CED's [Township Trustee and Clerks Reference Manual](#), and a certificate of completion.

Municipal Professionals Institute and Academy (MPI/MPA)

The 48th annual [MPI/MPA](#) concluded in October with another year of record-breaking

attendance. More than 400 people attended the MPI and/or MPA. CED specialists and other experts trained 275 people from 85 Iowa counties, as well as two people from out of state, through MPI. An additional 130 people received advanced training through MPA. Overall, the two events provided training for individuals from 91 of Iowa's 99 counties. In partnership with the Iowa Municipal Finance Officers Association, 30 people completed Municipal Clerks and/or Finance Officers certifications.

Data and Technology

2023 Data Science for the Public Good (DSPG) Young Scholars Program

Nine undergraduate and four graduate students took part in the 2023 DSPG program, which included four projects. Two teams investigated using Artificial Intelligence for community development. Another team developed an application to help rural grocery store owners evaluate their expected market size, revenue, and expenses. The full DSPG student group worked on the Walking

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM OUR PROGRAM DIRECTOR

As the end of the year approaches, countdown lists of various people, places, and events, along with celebrations of who or what we've lost or gained, are ubiquitous. While they are cliché, I love the way that they celebrate the victories and remind us that over the course of a year, big things happen.

We in the Community and Economic Development (CED) unit in Iowa State University Extension and Outreach also take time to reflect on what we've done to serve Iowa communities and how we can build on those accomplishments to have an even more positive impact. This issue of *Community Matters Now* presents some of the work of which we are most proud, showcasing the broad scope of our programming, which ranges from creating community art, marketing our hometowns, and supporting local tourism, to addressing the housing crisis, training local government officials, and helping communities feed their children.

Also notable is the longevity and variety of the partnerships we've forged with state agencies, local governments, nonprofits, other land-grant universities, other ISU departments and Extension and Outreach program areas, and many more. For instance, we partnered with the Iowa League of Cities and the Iowa Department of Transportation for decades on the Municipal Professionals Institute and Academy and the Community Visioning Program, respectively. Our long-standing relationship with the ISU College of Design continues to thrive. We welcomed new partnerships in industry, across other areas of state government, and with nonprofits and communities.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of our programming is the people who participate with us—that is, you! CED could not accomplish what we do without the passion and dedication of our clients, communities, and organizations. It is also the people in CED that make our work tick. In 2023, we welcomed Esther Crompton,

our new communications specialist, and Dr. Scott Samuelson, a faculty member in the Department of Philosophy. We also said goodbye to Jane Nolan Goeken, who has served as a community development specialist in Northwest Iowa for 22 years and was the mastermind behind CED's grant writing programs; she launched Grant Writing 101 and our more advanced Grant Writing Boot Camp, building them into sustainable programs that CED can carry forward to help communities accomplish their visions.

Amid the busyness, it's easy to lose sight of the progress. As the calendar turns to 2024, taking the time to reflect offers both celebration of what is behind us and inspiration for what is ahead.



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Infrastructure Investigation (WINVEST) project. Project descriptions are available on the [DSPG website](https://dspg.iastate.edu/2023-projects) (<https://dspg.iastate.edu/2023-projects>).

Enabling Healthier Community through Data-enriched Decision Making

CED's Data team received a grant from the ISU President's FY2024 strategic planning funds to further develop its Indicators Program, which provides curated data to help Iowa leaders and decision-makers focus efforts, deploy resources, and seek additional support for enhanced rural vitality in Iowa's communities.

Hydrogen Hub Project

IEDA invited CED to assist in researching and presenting relevant information for a multi-state response to a Department of Energy (DOE) grant for hydrogen hubs. Data were used to describe the potential hub regions and their needs to better quantify the potential benefits and costs of a hub development, as well as to identify stakeholders to facilitate more productive local dialog and decision-making.

Shared Data Analyst

CED's Data and Food Systems teams are in the process of hiring a data analyst focused on local food systems initiatives. This shared position will develop and maintain datasets, reports, and analysis specifically related to food systems and community impacts. This individual will provide technical assistance related to data discovery, synthesis, and explanation, and design visualizations and reports that will be utilized for community decision-making across a variety of audiences within Iowa and the nation.

National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals (NACDEP) Awards

In 2023, the CED Data team earned two awards from NACDEP: the Educational Materials award for the online, on-demand [Data for Decision Makers](#) reports, and the Educational Technology award for the Languages Spoken in Iowa website, a series of dashboards that maps the diversity of languages spoken in Iowa.

Civic Engagement and Equity Intercultural Development Inventory®

In 2022, the Civic Engagement and Equity (CEE) team added the world's premiere cultural competency program, [Intercultural Developmental Inventory®](#) (IDI), to its menu of services. IDI® is designed to help organizations and communities evaluate their cultural competency and create an action plan. In 2023, CED shepherded 121

leaders from six organizations across the state from a variety of sectors, including industry, government, leadership programs, and community coalitions through the IDI® program.

Facilitation Services

CED specialists offered [facilitation services](#)—strategic planning, vision and mission workshops, action planning, and focus groups—to help organizations develop and accomplish critical projects. Clients in 2023 included Iowa Public Radio, the ISU English Department, the ISU Arts and Visual Culture Department, the ISU's Parks Library, Community 1st Microloan, Wayland Childcare Center, and the Youth Building Systems Academy.

Leading Communities

The CEE team introduced substantial improvements to CED's location-focused leadership initiative, with a strong emphasis on inclusivity. [Leading Communities](#) promotes community involvement and empower people to collaboratively address common community challenges and issues, ensuring inclusivity at its core. In Henry County, 13 people completed the 2022–23 program and 9 more began the 2023–24 cohort, along with 11 people in Lee County.

Marketing Hometown America

The town of Treynor is participating in this national extension program that gives rural communities the tools to retain high quality of life and market themselves to newcomers. CED specialists train local volunteers to facilitate conversations with residents about unique local assets and to strategize on creating a promotional plan to invite and welcome newcomers.

Scenario Planning

The CEE team is piloting a new planning method, "Scenario Planning," with the ISU Parks Library. Using this method, organizations look further into the future than strategic planning. Participants are asked to identify signs of what could happen that could impact them positively and negatively and develop and use scenarios to address those possibilities. Considered what might transpire and how positions organizations to be proactive and cohesive in a response.

Community Food Systems

Community Food Systems + Farm to School and Early Care Conference

In June, the Food Systems team hosted its first joint conference. The event was designed to engage and inspire individuals, organizations, and businesses related to food systems and farm-to-school and early-care education, and featured federal USDA



Students at Windsor Elementary School in Des Moines participate in a demonstration of the mobile food-process cart.

representatives and a day of touring local farms and food businesses that ended with a farm-table dinner.

Tri-state Grocery Research Project

The Food Systems team, along with researchers from Kansas State University and the University of Minnesota, completed this project that started in 2021. The goal of the study was to better understand independent grocers' and food producers' needs and sourcing issues and their capacity to process food. The research team surveyed independent grocers and interviewed both grocers and food producers. The team is moving forward on a national study to understand best practices in independent grocery and local food procurement.

Mobile Food-processing Cart Pilot

Based on the 2022 Scaling Up Processing research project, the Food Systems team continued to work on increasing fruit and vegetable processing options across the state. The team developed and piloted a mobile food-processing cart, which has been used in four different sites across the state.

Local Food Leader Certification

In 2023, 95 people from throughout the country successfully completed [Local Food Leader Certification](#) sessions. This program teaches foundational competencies critical for successful food systems development including equity in food systems, working in food systems, facilitation and coordination, evaluation, and professional development.

Farm to School and Early Care Program

Through a grant from the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, the farm-to-school and early-care team has been working with several early-care sites across the state to promote school gardens, nutrition education, and local food procurement.

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