



KANSAS
COMMERCE

ENGAGING PLACEMAKING FOR INNOVATIVE COMMUNITIES (EPIC)

Pilot Program Highlights

OVERVIEW

The Engaging Placemaking for Innovative Communities (EPIC) Pilot has demonstrated the powerful momentum that emerges when rural communities are equipped with tools, connections, and creative strategies to shape their own futures. Across the five participating cohorts—and the broader network of communities they engaged—Phase 1 fostered honest dialogue, collaborative planning, and a renewed sense of shared purpose. Participants identified challenges, envisioned solutions, and built project plans that reflected the unique character and aspirations of their hometowns. With Phase 2 came even greater transformation, as community-driven ideas expanded in scope, adapted to obstacles, and ultimately strengthened local pride and connection. The project highlights that follow illustrate how creative placemaking is actively shaping vibrant, resilient communities across Kansas.

PHASE 1

Planning and Group Meetings | March through December 2023

The best practices and planning sessions of Phase 1 were a great success for building community and connection across the five participating cohorts. Each group was candid about the challenges they wanted to address in their communities and what possible solutions could be. They worked together during the sessions and back within their community focus groups to identify project goals, map out project plans, and engage locals to get involved. Impact from the program will continue in Stafford, St. John, Cunningham, Kingman, Norwich, Hutchinson, Lindsborg, and all eight cities in Rice County.

In the anonymous Phase 1 evaluation responses, the EPIC Pilot was rated overwhelmingly as extremely and very valuable. Participants indicated:

- they feel better equipped to pursue other funding opportunities,
- they would recommend EPIC to others,
- they have a better understanding of the issues facing their communities through participation in the Program.

PHASE 2

Project Execution | January through December 2024

Once the projects began in Phase 2, each community idea expanded and evolved to encompass a much larger scope than originally intended. Some groups ran into challenges and had to pivot numerous times and change their tactics. The overall long term goals remained strong even as the pathways were adapted.

This response from Kingman Lead Coordinator Leslie Schrag sums up the impact of the EPIC pilot:

“ The last two years of the EPIC Program have brought about a rediscovered sense of pride about what rural Kansans can accomplish. Not only in individual achievement like Clyde Cessna, but how communities can work together to share something extraordinary.... Although the local TIF board had long dreamed of what could be possible at the abandoned gas station [in Kingman], it was not until the EPIC program provided resources and funds that the TIF district proceeded with purchasing the building. With ownership in the City’s hands future plans are to rehabilitate the gas station to serve as the economic development office, visitor’s center, and museum. The center will be an anchor point to encourage exploration of Kingman’s vibrant downtown district. **This is all and example of what public art can do for rural spaces.** ”

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* AMAZING
Projects,
* this way

HUTCHINSON

Goal: Activate underutilized spaces in downtown Hutchinson in every season in order to inspire more place attachment.

Outcome: DCI Park was overhauled through a partnership with Hutchinson Community Foundation, Hutchinson Parks & Rec, and DCI to prioritize making the space more inviting and functional for programming and use. Over the summer, Hutchinson held 20 activations: 12 for Food Truck Mondays (weekly attendance of up to 30) and 8 on Saturdays. The experience demonstrated demand for food trucks downtown, inspiring plans to launch “Foodie Fridays” in spring 2025.

The eight Saturdays were held purposely in conjunction with other community activities or events already happening downtown. Each saw over 1000 people during the events. Thanks to the deployment of the Canvas Cube, which allowed public participation in community art, over 100 people of all ages painted on the Cube, making it a beloved feature. Other Saturday activities, featuring mobile toys and games, fostered unique interactions between parents and children. Unlike typical park visits where parents scroll on their phones, we observed families engaging in pool noodle sword fights, building structures with Jenga blocks, and creatively using tire seating. These activities consistently drew at least 30 parent-child interactions each Saturday.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION:
500

ARTIST PARTICIPATION:
10

TOTAL GRANT:
\$45,000

ADULT PARTICIPATION:
400

ACTIVATED SITES:
1

TOTAL PROJECT:
\$83,500



KINGMAN COUNTY

Goal: Create public art spaces throughout the county to unify its residents.

Outcome: “Planes on the Plains” is a countywide sculpture initiative honoring aviation pioneer Clyde Cessna, who grew up in rural Kingman County. The project installed steel-rod sculptures of Cessna-style aircraft in three communities: Kingman, Cunningham, and Norwich. The Cunningham and Norwich sculptures sit on concrete pedestals with interpretive signage describing Cessna’s history and recognizing funders. Kingman’s much larger 38-foot-wingspan sculpture is mounted on the former gas station canopy posts.

“The EPIC Planes on the Plains project was a catalyst that sparked an increased use of a seldom used slogan for the City of Kingman (A Great Place to Land), the renaming of the local Fall Festival (now called Cessna Fest and includes a paper airplane contest), and a new community ad campaign titled “A Great Place to...” The “A Great Place to...” campaign will include several community events designed to improve the local narrative. All three communities are showing more interest in each other cities because of the common project. Residents in Cunningham are genuinely interested in Norwich’s plane and vice versa. These communities have more familiarity with each other than they once had and that was a primary goal of the project.” Leslie Schrag, Lead Coordinator.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION:
1,644

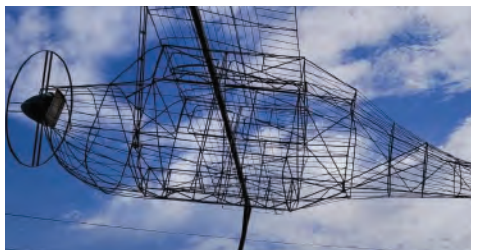
ARTIST PARTICIPATION:
3

TOTAL GRANT:
\$45,000

ADULT PARTICIPATION:
5,000

ACTIVATED SITES:
3

TOTAL PROJECT:
\$66,000



Primary artist, Robert C. Shea II, died March 5, 2025. The planes were the last art pieces he completed.

LINDSBORG

Goal: Elevate the presence of the arts in the Lindsborg community, impacting both the residents of the greater Smoky Valley and the economy by contributing to travel and tourism, a vital lifeline for Lindsborg.

Outcome: A committee of dedicated Lindsborg stakeholders formed an initiative called “Arts on the Prairie” in partnership with the Birger Sandzen Memorial Foundation and Museum to host artist-led workshops and experiences such as artist talks, screenings, workshops, musical performances, and more. Arts on the Prairie programming will continue as a catalyst for local arts tourism while also creating deeper connections between tourists and local residents.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION:
20

ARTIST PARTICIPATION:
16

TOTAL GRANT:
\$45,000

ADULT PARTICIPATION:
340

ACTIVATED SITES:
10

TOTAL PROJECT:
\$67,458



RICE COUNTY

Goal: Unite the people of Rice County through an artistic celebration of both our uniqueness and commonality.

Outcome: “Under the EPIC project, eight distinctive murals were crafted in collaboration with a gifted mural designer, a lead painter, several talented local artists, and the communities themselves. Each mural is a vivid representation of the heritage and identity of Rice County's eight unique towns. These remarkable "Pieces of Rice County" come together to form a collective mosaic that celebrates unity, history, and the rich local culture, while also serving as a mechanism for tourism and economic vitality. The murals were beautifully painted between July and November of 2024, marking a significant period in the county's cultural revitalization. This EPIC pilot program stands as a testament to the transformative power of creative placemaking. The "Pieces of Rice County" project aims to inspire and connect the residents of Rice County, nurturing a vibrant, cohesive, and sustainable future. By fostering a sense of belonging and pride among the community members, the project not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the county but also contributes to its long-term economic and social well-being.” Stacy Clark, Rice County EPIC Lead.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION:

0

ARTIST PARTICIPATION:

11

TOTAL GRANT:

\$45,000

ADULT PARTICIPATION:

80

ACTIVATED SITES:

8

TOTAL PROJECT:

\$90,925



STAFFORD COUNTY

Goal: To create outdoor public spaces where people can come together for music, art showcases, and the enjoyment of nature.

Outcome: The EPIC project installed a gazebo in the St. John Square and a band shell park was created in Stafford. In the new Stafford park there are concrete benches, a decorative metal fence created by a local artist, and metal pole banners installed. Both sites have already been used for numerous concerts and community events.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION:
60

ARTIST PARTICIPATION:
3

TOTAL GRANT:
\$50,000

ADULT PARTICIPATION:
300

ACTIVATED SITES:
2

TOTAL PROJECT:
\$119,972

