

New Mexico

Rural Business Cooperative Service
Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG)

Developing Entrepreneurship in Lovington, N.M.

When the first class of the 'Local Innovators Institute' gathered in March of 2020 there was nothing but excitement.

Why? Because everyone came to find out if their dreams of opening a restaurant would come true.

The 'Local Innovators Institute' is a business development class offered by the Lovington MainStreet. Specifically, the Institute was developed to provide entrepreneur training on owning and running a successful restaurant.

'Local Innovators Institute' provides training on various subjects such as menu development, who to market too, developing a business plan, branding and marketing and working with governmental entities for licensing and health inspections. And most importantly the students learned how to cook and sell their food products in a restaurant setting.

This was a good idea, but buying an existing restaurant was too expensive. And then the idea to buy a food truck was suggested. That was the solution!

The next hurdle was how to fund the training and purchase a food truck? That's when Mara Salcido the executive director of the Lovington MainStreet heard about USDA Rural Development's Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) program. Soon she found out this program would allow the 'Local Innovators Institute' to go forward and make dreams come true.

Lovington MainStreet received a \$75,900 RBDG grant in 2019 which was used to purchase a food truck they nicknamed "Big Blue". Then when the curriculum was set the first class offered by the 'Local Innovators Institute' was advertised. Then in 2020 Lovington MainStreet received another \$50,000 RBDG grant which was used to continue the Local Innovators Institute restaurant accelerator.

When asked about the process to apply for the RBDG funds Salcido said, "The process isn't as crazy as we thought, and I advise anyone (non-profits) to apply."

Once the students completed the training, they used the food truck to get the experience to cook and sell the food they were making. Since the first class graduated in June of 2020 the food truck has seen a variety of food being prepared including, Asian, American, Arizona style Mexican food, Bar-b-que, Caribbean, Mexican, and Vegan.

The 'Local Innovators Institute' is successful because students get to experience the restaurant business without the financial risk. Once they experience what it's like to own and run a restaurant they then decide if they want to go into business for themselves.

Currently, thirty to forty percent of those graduating from the 'Local Innovators Institute' have opened and are running their own restaurant in communities throughout southeastern New Mexico.



Lovington MainStreet Executive Director Mara Salcido directs customers to the 'Local Innovators Institute' food truck called "Big Blue"

Obligation Amount: \$70,900 Rural Business Development Grant in 2019
\$50,000 Rural Business Development Grant in 2020

Congressional District: Gabe Vasquez NM 2nd, Martin Heinrich, Ben Ray Lujan Senators

Demographics: Lovington, N.M. has a population of 11,489 residents. The oil and gas industry is the largest employer with 21.9% of the residents making a living from this industry. Currently, 4.8% of the residents are employed in the restaurant industry.

Impact: The Lovington MainStreet, Inc. is creating a better economy in this community with the 'Local Innovators Institute' because the training provided is allowing more restaurants to open which creating more jobs.

More Photos: [Click here](#) to see more photos.