



News Release

Contact:
danielle.gray@usda.gov

Louisiana USDA Rural Development Spotlights Rural Business Development Grant Recipients

ALEXANDRIA, LA, Jan. 31, 2024– Rural development is an essential component of fostering economic growth and sustainability in rural communities across Louisiana. The Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) program, administered by the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Development (RD) agency, serves as a vital resource for promoting small business investments and revitalizing underserved rural areas. The goal of the program is to stimulate economic growth and create jobs by granting funds to eligible entities. The applications are categorized into two groups - business opportunity grants and business enterprise grants - and the funds used to support a variety of business and community projects that benefit rural areas. In 2023 we had a record number of applications and are pleased to announce and highlight the four awardees of the RBDG program and their innovative initiatives to drive rural businesses and communities.

The City of Bogalusa in Washington Parish, Louisiana, was identified as a historically underserved target area through the USDA's initiative called CORE (Creating Opportunities through Rural Engagement). Recognizing the need for infrastructure redevelopment, the City of Bogalusa applied for the RBDG program and was awarded \$310,755. These funds will be utilized to repave streets in the city's central business district, directly benefiting numerous small businesses. Through this project, four businesses will be assisted, preserving 20 jobs, and revitalizing the local economy.

The Zydeco Historical Preservation Society, located in Opelousas, Louisiana and led by President Roderick Sias, demonstrated their commitment to rural development by applying for the RBDG program following their participation in outreach initiatives organized by the Louisiana USDA RD office. The Society received the FY2023 RBDG award of \$100,000, which will be utilized to conduct a Phase 1 feasibility study and provide technical assistance for the development of the Opelousas Arts, Music, and Cultural District (OAMCD). The initiative's scope includes outlining the district's boundaries and implementing a comprehensive study, development, and restoration plan for the historic Slim's Y-Ki Ki site. The project is expected to generate 50 new job opportunities, contributing to the economic growth of the region.

The Louisiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation (LCCF) embarked on their Louisiana Regional Tour in 2021, aimed at empowering and sustaining the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) business community through the establishment of local chambers. During this tour, the LCCF collaborated with the Louisiana USDA RD outreach team in New Orleans, Louisiana. Inspired by this partnership, LCCF applied for the RBDG program to increase small business investments in Bastrop, Louisiana, and Alexandria, Louisiana. As a result, LCCF was selected and awarded the FY2023 RBDG award for \$95,217. These funds will be utilized to provide technical assistance and support the establishment of a business support center in Alexandria, fostering entrepreneurship and enhancing the efficiency and success of existing businesses. This project is expected to create 28 new jobs and preserve 30 existing jobs in the region.

Lastly, the efforts of Louisiana USDA RD staff to connect with underrepresented communities led to an outreach initiative in Claiborne Parish, Louisiana. Main Street Homer, a nonprofit organization in Homer, Louisiana, seized the opportunity and applied for the

RBDG program. They were awarded \$215,027, which will be used to renovate a historic site and establish an outdoor farmer's market. The market will provide a platform for entrepreneurial farmers and artisans in Claiborne, while also enabling residents and surrounding communities to access fresh locally grown foods. This project will support 41 local businesses and foster economic equity within the community.

Through the Rural Business Development Grant program, the USDA RD agency is playing a crucial role in empowering rural communities and facilitating economic growth. The diverse initiatives undertaken by the Louisiana Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Zydeco Historical Preservation Society, City of Bogalusa, and Main Street Homer highlight the potential for positive change and sustainable development in rural areas. As these awardees continue to tackle barriers and invest in their communities, the impact of the RBDG program will undoubtedly be felt for years to come.

In order to apply for the Rural Business Development Grant, complete applications must be submitted in either paper or electronic format. The deadline for submission is 4:30 p.m. local time on February 28, 2024. These applications should be sent to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development (RD) State Office for the State in which the project is located. It is important for interested parties to adhere to this deadline to ensure consideration for the grant program.

To subscribe to USDA Rural Development updates, visit [GovDelivery subscriber page](#).

#

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.