

# RPIC - Delta Communities Connected through Placemaking & Innovation FY2022 Report for Public Distribution

## Community Grassroots Efforts Lead to Placemaking Success

In the final year of the RPIC Delta Communities Connected through Placemaking & Innovation (DCCPI) project, Winrock's technical assistance and support for grassroots efforts led to **increased placemaking planning and implementation**, **leveraged funding and technical assistance**, and to **new and enhanced partnerships** for Arkansas Delta communities of England, Stuttgart, Lonoke, and Helena-West Helena.

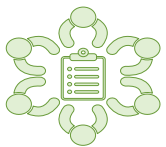
### Increased Placemaking Planning & Implementation

#### England's Placemaking Coalition



As a result of Winrock's intensive capacity building process, the City of England formed an **eight-member local coalition** to establish priorities and build a placemaking plan. The coalition is comprised of local residents with diverse backgrounds, including senior residents, new residents, municipal leaders, engaged residents, former England residents, and a mix of races and ethnicities. The Coalition has engaged in regular, bi-weekly meetings and technical assistance trainings with Winrock. The Coalition drafted an official mission and vision and engaged in brainstorming for community priorities. The Coalition is the local mechanism through which priorities will be developed and placemaking projects implemented. This will provide sustainability and broad representation for placemaking efforts, despite any potential transition in elected leadership.

#### England's Placemaking Plan & Priorities Survey



As a result of the Coalition's community survey, the Coalition transformed survey results into a placemaking action plan with five key areas of priority: Downtown Revitalization, Beautification, Parks & Recreation, Infrastructure, and Planning and Zoning. This action plan and five pillars

became the roadmap for the local Coalition to engage in community develop and placemaking. From the five pillars, the coalition identified specific strategies of address these key areas, including achieving affordable infrastructure, addressing drainage issues, improving street design, creating safe walking and biking routes, growing and supporting small businesses, expand Haywood Farmer's Market, organizing and hosting community events, improving existing parks, and coordinating city-wide cleanup. Winrock continued to provide technical assistance to sustainably implement these strategies, including grant writing and

identification training, managing grants, stakeholder engagement and communication, and volunteer recruitment. Winrock also worked with the local coalition to establish post-grant meetings, identify local assets and analyze their use for project sustainability efforts, and develop a strategy to coordinate efforts with city interests and resources. This placemaking plan will go hand-in-hand with England's Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which was leveraged technical assistance funded by a grant from the CDC.

#### England's Placemaking Plan



The City of England answers how to strengthen its town through placemaking.

**FIVE TO THRIVE**

**FIVE TO THRIVE** is a survey report on what England citizens deem most important in growing England. The survey was created by the England Coalition, a group of 10 England leaders and citizens, in partnership with Winrock International, who desired a cross-section of opinions on the highest priority needs for the city. These survey results will establish objectives for the Coalition in working with business and community partners to improve England.

Survey responses were collected from October 2021 to January 2022. The survey asked Englanders to rank five strategies, spotlighting concerns and prioritizing goals for the coalition.

<p><b>Downtown Revitalization</b></p> <p>Growing small businesses, buying local, building exterior refurbishment, pedestrian safety, expanding Haywood Farmer's Market</p>	<p><b>Beautification</b></p> <p>Gateways to the city, landscaping, public art, city cleanup events</p>	<p><b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b></p> <p>Develop new parks and enhance existing, community events, sporting events for adults and families</p>	<p><b>Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Street design and road improvements, sidewalks and crosswalks, walking and biking routes, affordable broadband, drainage issues</p>	<p><b>Planning &amp; Zoning</b></p> <p>City ordinances &amp; policies, enforcing local ordinances and city code, drainage and unsightly structures, planning for possible housing developments</p>
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## Stuttgart's Pocket Park and Traffic Calming Pop-Up



After completing the pocket park and traffic calming pop-up, which were deliverables under this project, the City of Stuttgart was awarded an **Outdoor Recreation Matching Grant Application by the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism** for the construction of the pocket park. The

grant required a 1:1 match. Winrock provided direct technical assistance in grant writing, securing matching funds, reading and understanding Request for Proposals, budget development, and meeting technical requirements of funders. Stuttgart leaders aligned the Pocket Park Pop-Up with the grant application requirements. Stuttgart leaders secured technical requirements, such as technical design renderings, garnering and demonstrating community support, providing and considering community feedback in the park design, and passing a City Council resolution for the park. Crafton Tull used the community feedback gathered during the Pop-Up to update the rendering of the pocket park as well as the crosswalks and curb extensions. Winrock also worked with Stuttgart to leverage broadband assessments completed under Winrock's USDA-RCDI STRIVE project to add broadband components to the park, including free Wi-Fi hotspots. Winrock and project partners provided technical assistance for budget development, technical writing of the proposal, securing quotes for construction materials and labor, and helped develop a strategy to secure the required match. This resulted in **Stuttgart successfully securing \$198,951.50 in match** from local donations, leveraged partnerships with local organizations, and donated labor and materials. The City of Stuttgart submitted the application for a project valued at a total of \$397,903 (\$198,951 in grant funds and \$198,951 in match) Winrock and project partners also trained Stuttgart leaders in presentation best practices for the second stage of the application. **The City of Stuttgart was awarded \$195,000 for the construction of the pocket park. The total value of the award, including match secured, is \$393,951.**

Winrock has continued to work with the City of Stuttgart during the planning and construction phase of the park. With technical assistance from Winrock, Stuttgart worked diligently with engineering firms to coordinate construction of the Pocket Park with ongoing water system and street improvement in Stuttgart, aligning park with the City's branding efforts, as well as for projects related to the Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The city has secured bids from contractors for the park to be completed for the Wings over the Prairie Festival in November, which attracts thousands of people from across the county every year. The Stuttgart Chamber of Commerce hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for the Rotary Centennial and Allen Homra Memorial Pavilion on September 27. During the ceremony, the Stuttgart Chamber Director recognized the significant community support that had made this project possible, as well as technical assistance from Winrock in securing the grant.



USDA RD and Winrock visit the site of Stuttgart's downtown pocket park



Stuttgart's Pocket Park Groundbreaking Ceremony





### Helena-West Helena's Placemaking Implementation



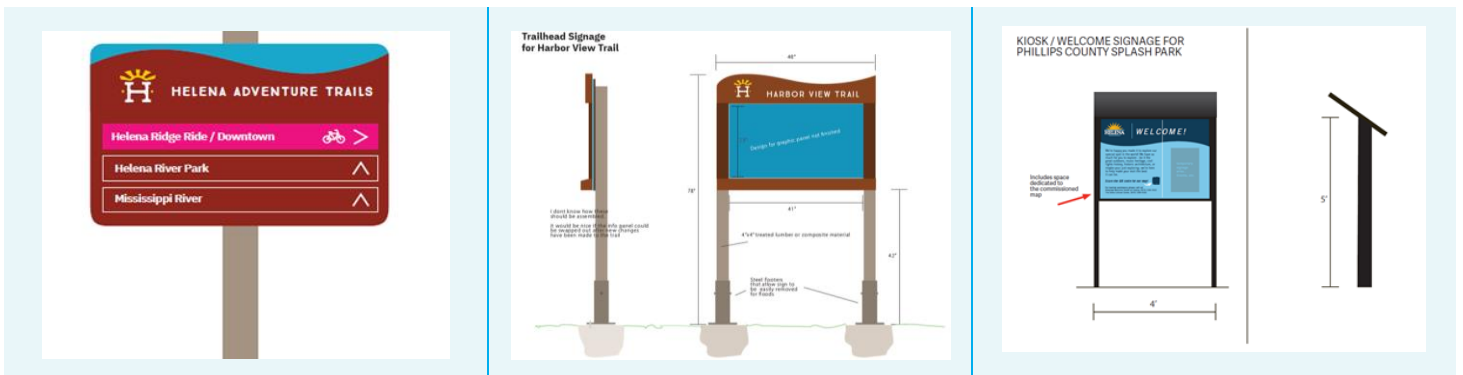
Through RPIC funds and Winrock's technical assistance, **Helena-West Helena completed a series of placemaking projects to increase signage, pedestrian safety, and to highlight the local culture and tourism assets.** Among the placemaking projects completed are a mural to encourage cycling and enjoying outdoor recreational opportunities (pictured above) as well as two crosswalks along downtown intersections that denote the river culture and assets of the town. Thrive, Inc., which was responsible for completing these murals, engaged local students from Thrive's Creative Leadership Program, a program designed to engage youth in public beautification and outdoor recreation community projects and foster young creative leadership, to design and paint these crosswalks. Working with local students in this important art installations increases community participation and support for and placemaking initiatives.

### Helena-West Helena Crosswalk Mural and Map-Me-Helena Snapshot



The City of Helena-West Helena also completed signage for the Harbor View Trail, which includes a sign connecting the BRT/DHT Connector Trail to the Harbor View Trail and a trail head kiosk. Additionally, signage for a covered, outdoor kiosk that will provide local information to tourists was designed. Thrive, Inc. also designed an informational brochure and map of Helena-West Helena that will be accessible through a QR code on the city's welcome kiosk and additional locations throughout the city ([Map Me Helena](#)). Additionally, Thrive identified three businesses that could be designated as places to carry a small assortment of cycling equipment and bicycle repair kits for visitors. Many of these efforts are directly related to Helena-West Helena's Innovation Implementation Challenge project, which is working to promote tourism and a culture of cycling throughout the area's local trail systems.

### Helena-West Helena Signage



## Helena-West Helena's Planning and implementation of Broadband Recommendations



As a result of the completed Broadband Infrastructure Assessments and technical assistance provided in this project for enhancing local internet access, the City of Helena-West Helena **allocated 10 percent of funds received through the CARES Act to make improvements to its broadband network.** This technical assistance was critical for the Mayor of Helena-West Helena, as he expressed not having the technical knowledge to determine how to best allocate these funds. The improvements were used to install broadband hotspots in various parts of the city to provide free access to critically underserved residents. Other improvements will leverage planned water and wastewater infrastructure by purchasing

and multi-duct conduit and laying it in open trenches during repairs of the lines. The City will lease the right of use for the conduits to internet service providers who want to install fiber. The Broadband Infrastructure Validation Assessment completed for Helena-West Helena in this project will be used to prioritize where conduit should be laid, mainly near middle mile provider lines and anywhere there is an opportunity to lay conduit across a roadway, as this will help complete fiber-to-the-home network installation. Winrock also provided technical assistance about conditions the city can place for renewing the franchise license for the current internet provider to enhance its service, as well as considerations for an RFP at the time of expiration of the current license to encourage competition. Finally, the assessment completed in this project will serve to develop the broadband strategy for the city. This type of involvement represents a huge increase in capacity for the city and would not have occurred without technical assistance from this RPIC project.

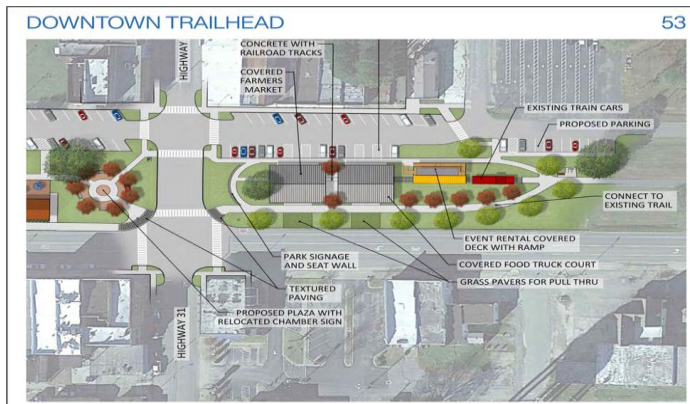
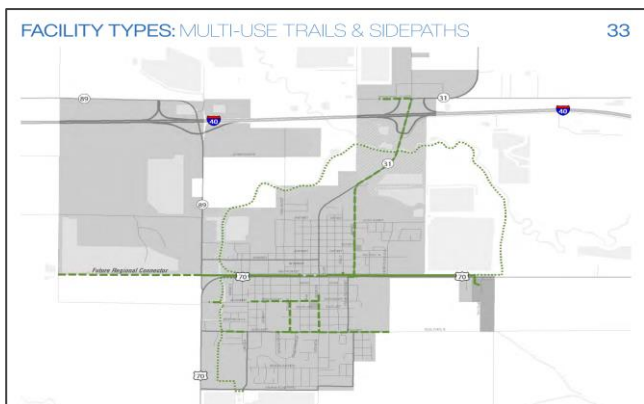
## Lonoke's Master Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan



**Crafton Tull completed Lonoke's Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, including the Network, Assessment, and Recommendation phases.** Winrock and Crafton Tull provided technical assistance to Lonoke about how this important plan will serve as a strategy for systematic improvements to the build environment and to improve safety and quality of life for residents. To develop this plan, in addition to the engineering assessments, Crafton Tull and Lonoke leaders have engaged Lonoke residents throughout this process to ensure that the recommendations presented meet community needs and receive support

for adoption. This community engagement has taken place through various city-wide meetings and working with the Infrastructure Committee of the Lonoke 2022 Strategic Plan Leadership, which is a group of engaged residents that have been working over the past five years to implement the recommendations of the Lonoke 2022 strategic plan. The plan was adopted by City Council resolution and will serve as a key placemaking plan for years to come, including for the Central Arkansas Greenways project, a multi-million-dollar investment to connect Central Arkansas through an extensive network of paths and trails, similar to the Razorback Greenway in Northwest Arkansas.

## Lonoke's Master Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan



## Completed Broadband Assessments and Mobile Connectivity Assessment along USBR-80

To support broadband infrastructure and increased access in rural communities, the RPIC-DCCPI project completed a series of technical Broadband Infrastructure Assessments and related technical assistance in England, Lonoke, and Helena-West Helena. The assessments identified gaps in infrastructure or services and real and perceived broadband needs of residents, leaders, and stakeholders. The assessments also provided mobile drive testing to collect mobile broadband data on cycling routes in the Mid-Delta region, including the U.S. Bike Route 80, which runs through or adjacent to all project communities. **The data enabled stakeholders to effectively plan and make informed decisions when coordinating with mobile carriers to close gaps along the cycling routes in this region.** The assessment noted that, **since the beginning of the project, England and Lonoke have gone from laggards in broadband access to some of the better-connected communities in the Arkansas Delta** due to recent federal and state investments in network infrastructure.



The assessments also confirmed that despite increased broadband access, adoption to internet services continues to be slow. Thus, Winrock provided training to project leaders to deliver educational efforts about the value of having an internet connection to encourage residents to connect. As a result, **the England Coalition posted information on the city's social media pages about the new internet provider in town and engaged Coalition members to inform residents within their network about the internet options.** Winrock also delivered technical assistance about the [FCC's Emergency Broadband Benefit Program](#), which provides debt forgiveness, a \$100 credit towards computers or tablets, and \$50 benefit to connect low-income residents to qualifying internet providers. This program is especially beneficial in communities like England and Helena-West Helena, where a large share of the population cannot afford the available internet plans. **Leaders used this technical assistance to communicate the benefit to residents and support the application process when needed. Helena-West Helena completed Wi-Fi hotspot installation.** Similarly, Helena-West Helena is planning to develop a network of hotspots across town in order to provide equitable access to different community hubs in town. Winrock will continue to provide technical assistance to communities to accomplish these goals.



## Innovative Implementation Challenge Projects

After placemaking planning technical assistance led by Winrock, RPIC project communities engaged in an application process to earn the Innovative Implementation Challenge grant funds of \$7,500 per community. These funds were funded by USDA RPIC project funds (\$5,000 per grant) and a 50 percent Match (\$2,500 per grant) provided by The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. An overview of each community project is included below.

To earn the grant, communities completed an application, which mirrored elements generally found in RFAs (Requests for Proposals). Winrock provided trainings to provide best practices on how to read an RFA, how to write an effective project proposal and budget, and how to responsibly manage a grant, including budget management, communicating with project teams and funder, leading project activities, and “art” of crafting narrative that shows the funder and the public the impact that the funding had on the community. Winrock and USDA RD staff reviewed the applications from each of the project communities to ensure they met the eligibility criteria, which included: the project is innovative, highlighted in the placemaking plan, high probability of success and sustainability, with identified outcomes to be achieved; and leverages partners and provided letters of commitments. After award decisions were made, Winrock and the project communities completed formal grant agreements with reporting requirements. Throughout this process, Winrock and USDA RD provided significant one-on-one technical assistance to each community to address particular needs around their projects, invoicing, and reporting requirements. All project communities consistently reported the importance of this training in building their capacity to better apply and manage grant funds, which demonstrates the significant impact that the unique Innovation Implementation Challenge element of RPIC has had on increasing the capacity of rural communities.

Key Dates	
RFP Announcement	Thursday, March 31
Informational Webinar	Monday, April 11, 1:00-2:00pm
Last Day to Submit Questions	Monday, April 18, 12:00pm
Application Due Date	Monday, April 25, 2:00pm
Award of Award	Monday, May 2
Project Completion and Final Report Due	Wednesday, August 31

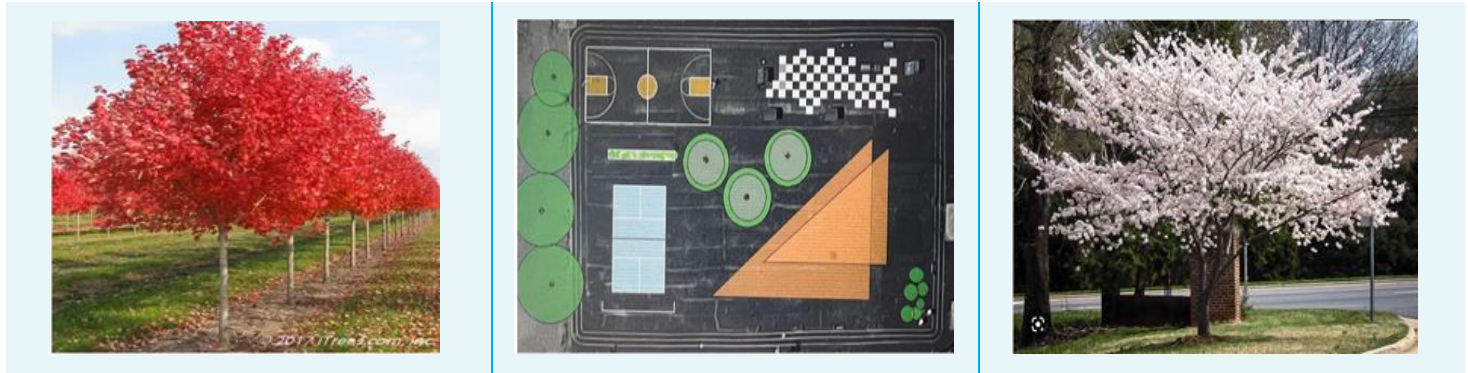
**DCCPI Contact**  
 Jordyn Williams  
 Winrock International  
[jordyn.williams@winrock.org](mailto:jordyn.williams@winrock.org)  
 (501) 280-3031

### City of England – Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant Project

As a direct outcome of placemaking planning during this project, the City of England and the England Coalition selected to use the Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant for beautification and planting trees to add shade the Black Top Park. This park is a former chemical plant that was remediated into a park where many residents and youth congregate to play basketball and skateboard. Despite its the heavy use, the park lacks greenery and adequate shade to protect users during the hot months. From community survey results conducted previously in this project, adding shade and beautifying this space rose to a top priority for residents.

**With grant funds, the City of England will plant a total of 12 October Glory Maple trees (left picture) and Yoshino Cherry trees (right picture).** Five trees will be planted along the parking area of the Black Top park which edges the actual park. A preliminary, conceptual drawing of the Black Top is included below as reference (center picture). The remaining eight trees will be planted in two rows along Allis Street, which will become the Trail Head for the United State Bike Route 80 (USBR-80) in England, AR. **The location of this trail head directly resulted from leveraged and additional technical assistance the City of England received due to this project to complete a Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which was paid for with funding from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Additionally, the City of England provided in-kind match to this project by providing mulch for the trees, in-kind labor, as well as committing to leading the maintenance and irrigation of the trees.** The trees have been purchased and are scheduled to be planted in November when the harsher weather has subsided to ensure their survival.

# England Black Top Park Sketch and Trees Selected



## City of Helena-West Helena / Thrive, Inc. – Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant Project

The City of Helena-West Helena worked with Thrive, Inc., a local non-profit organization, to apply for and manage the Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant project. The project stemmed directly from placemaking planning and technical assistance in this project. As a result of the broadband assessment, the City of Helena-West Helena chose to install a Wi-Fi Hot Spot to extend free access to Wi-Fi from Cherry Street to the entirety of Court Square Park. The Court Square Park will become the future Phillips County Splash Park, which will include a splashpad, bicycle repair equipment, seating space, and a kiosk with information about amenities in the area. The kiosk was designed as direct result of this project. Residents of Helena-West Helena currently struggle to afford broadband plans offered locally. Even when they can afford it, the service is often unreliable. Providing an option for residents to connect to Wi-Fi that is accessible for everyone was key to ensure equitable adoption of internet. As explained by local leadership, this hot-spot provides faster and more reliable broadband connection than most of the other paid services in the area. As a result, local students and work-from-home residents are often seen taking advantage of this resource for their education and career endeavors.

### Wi-Fi Hot Spot Installed in Helena-West Helena



Additionally, award funds were used for the production and installation of one Trailhead sign for the Harbor View Trail. The design of this sign was a result of the placemaking technical assistance completed during this project. Funds were utilized to also purchase two accompanying “bread crumb” signs as pictured below. Thrive and the City of Helena-West Helena have committed to match project funds with in-kind labor for the installation and clearing of the area. During the project, the leaders worked with Kristina Root, superintendent of Mississippi River State Park to learn best practices of trail marking and trail clearing techniques. In fall of 2022, this partnership will host a ribbon cutting of the Harbor View Trail that will serve as an introduction to the trail with an intentional effort on engaging the African American population.

### Harbor View Trail Signage in Helena-West Helena, AR

**TRAIL SIGNAGE//////////HARBOR VIEW TRAIL**

**Bread Crumb Signage**

**Larrie Jackson, maintaining the trail**



### City of Stuttgart – Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant Project

The City of Stuttgart proposed the design and installation of way-finding signage in downtown Stuttgart for the Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant project. Way-finding was identified as a key priority for Stuttgart’s downtown district during the placemaking technical assistance provided during this project, including during the walkability assessment. The City is interested in boosting local businesses in Main Street, reducing traffic congestion, increasing pedestrian safety and accessibility, as well as reducing confusion for visitors and residents navigating the area. The signage selected will support these priorities by bringing visibility to regularly visited sites and areas of interest, provide multiple route options to landmarks off of Main Street, remind residents of available public spaces that are often forgotten due to being “off the beaten path,” and provide direction to cyclists who may be visiting from the US Bike Route 80. The signage will also showcase the City’s re-branding campaign, which was an additional outcome of this project.

To complete this project, the City of Stuttgart used the walkability assessment completed in this RPIC project, information gathered during the traffic diet and pocket park pop up exercise in this project, engaged with the Sweet Street Walking Club to determine the best routes, and traveled to other cities to learn best practices for signage. The city is planning to expand this signage initiative to other areas of the community to maintain and grow in the coming years.



### City of Lonoke – Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant Project

The City of Lonoke utilized the Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant to implement two creative projects for the revitalized historic downtown district. The first project encompassed a unique sculpture celebrating the town and its region unique aquaculture industry. The sculpture was created by a local metal artist, Lauren Bostick, and was be installed in the town’s flag plaza adjacent to the historic depot and vehicle charging stations. The sculpture features nearly 200 fish in a swirling school formation ascending upward, which symbolizes the community’s development momentum. The second project entailed a downtown mural commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City’s founding, which was celebrated during 2022. The special logo was designed by the Lonoke Area Chamber of Commerce and was painted by local artist and downtown gallery proprietor, Terri Taylor. These projects were both unveiled during the inaugural Arts & Music Festival in Downtown Lonoke during the weekend of October 15, 2022.

Both projects were completed with significant community engagement. Lonoke leadership coordinated with the Lonoke 2022 Beautification & Recreation Action Team to meet with artists, provide volunteer support, and to receive consistent updates. Additionally, the city of Lonoke engaged Main Street Lonoke for input regarding the design guidance and volunteer time to manage the project. The Lonoke Area Chamber of Commerce identified the mural, provided the mural design, and provided \$2,000 in private match funds for resurfacing and preparation of the wall for the mural painting.

#### Lonoke’s Metal Sculpture and Commemorating Mural



# USDA's Investment Unlocks Additional Assistance & Funding

USDA's investment in Winrock's RPIC-DCCPI project has unlocked **over \$601,000** in additional funding and technical assistance for project communities. This would not have been possible without the RPIC program. The technical assistance and funding leveraged will advance the communities' placemaking strategies and provide sustainability beyond the life of this project. The RPIC-DCCPI project also created new and enhanced partnerships for RPIC communities to implement quality-of-life improvements above and beyond the planned initiatives in this project.

## Leveraged Technical Assistance and Funding



**\$260,000**

of state, private & federal funding for RPIC Communities to implement Placemaking Projects



**\$221,430**

of match raised by local residents in Lonoke, England and Stuttgart for placemaking projects



**\$120,000+**

of technical assistance support to RPIC communities from other organizations for placemaking

### Federal & State Funding Leveraged:

- The **City of Stuttgart** was awarded **\$195,000 Outdoor Recreation Matching Grant** from the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage & Tourism for the construction of the Pocket Park on Main Street. This is a highly competitive state funding opportunity for the development of new parks and recreational spaces.
- The **City of England** was awarded **\$53,000 in federal funds from the Transportation Alternatives Program** grant to improve sidewalks on View Drive. This sidewalk improvements will be critical for improved walkability and accessibility for England residents.
- The **Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation** awarded Winrock International **\$10,000** to serve as match for the Innovative Implementation Challenge. These funds will go directly to RPIC communities to implement placemaking projects. This award was only possible due to USDA's investment in RPIC communities.

### In-kind and Cash Match Raised by RPIC Communities:

- The **City of Stuttgart** fundraised **\$88,677.15 in cash**, and **\$110,273.85 in donated labor, materials, land, and equipment use** for match to the Outdoor Recreation Matching Grant.
- The **England Coalition** has contributed **\$12,808.98 in in-kind match** to this project and to placemaking activities for the City of England, including organizing the survey initiative, fundraising gifts for survey participants, coordinating city events, and more. This in-kind match has been a great success for the City of England and builds a strong precedent for sustainability and local support for placemaking.
- The **Lonoke 2022 Committee** reported **\$9,670.40 in in-kind match** to this project, which represents over 271 percent of their original commitment. The in-kind match comes from committee members engagement in this project and in the implementation of placemaking projects for the community, including organizing community events, coordinating beautification efforts in downtown, and planning infrastructure improvements.
- The **City of Helena-West Helena** contributed **matching funds to the Innovative Implementation Challenge Grant project** to support the installation of the Wi-Fi hot spot in the downtown plaza.

### Leveraged Technical Assistance Support

- The **University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences – State Physical Activity and Nutrition (UAMS SPAN)** leveraged a **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** grant to fund **two (2) Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans for the City of England and the City of Stuttgart**. The Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans enhanced this project's placemaking efforts by providing a comprehensive, technical planning tool that each community can use to make systematic improvements to the built environment and to improve safety and quality of life for residents. The Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans were conducted Crafton Tull and are **each valued at over \$60,000 of technical assistance**.





- The early part of 2021 brought the closure of the only grocery store in the City of England, a Kroger Supermarket. With the closure of Kroger, England became a food desert, with the closet grocery stores located in Stuttgart or North Little Rock. This left many residents without reliable access to fresh groceries. Winrock worked diligently with the Mayor of England to build strategies to recruit a new grocery store. **Winrock provided technical assistance and a series of economic analyses, including retail capture and leakage for grocery sales in the area and trade area calculations, which demonstrated a strong market potential for a grocery store to be successful in England.**

England's Mayor presented these analyses to the owner of the grocery store building and to senior executives of Harp's, a grocery store chain. Harp's executives were highly impressed with the strong sales and market potential. After a few months of negotiations and securing equipment, **a new Harp's grocery store opened in England on December 8, 2021.** This opening also **generated 65 new jobs**, many of which were taken by former Kroger employees that lost their jobs during the store closure. The opening of this new grocery store in England provides a significant quality of life advantage for residents and secures placemaking efforts underway. The technical assistance and economic analyses provided by Winrock were above-and-beyond the scope of this project but would not have been possible without this RPIC engagement.

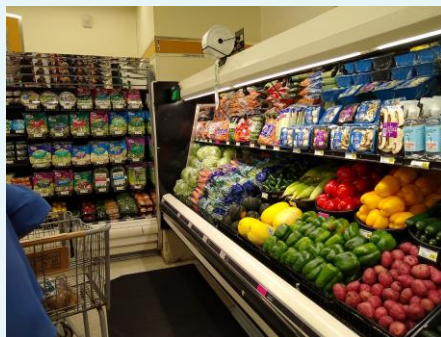


Photo Credit: William F. Foster Library

- **The Walk Action Institute (WAI).** Winrock worked with project partners to secure this additional, no-cost technical assistance for all RPIC communities. The type of networking experience that WAI provided is extremely valuable to small, rural communities who typically aren't exposed to national technical experts. This was the first time that WAI included rural communities. During this intensive, three-day training, community teams learned best practices from national technical experts and other community leaders on how to promote public health through community development projects. Additionally, communities were given the opportunity to present their own built environment goals and challenges, get feedback from technical experts and their peers, and develop an action plan to accomplish their goals. England, Stuttgart, Lonoke, and Helena-West Helena developed projects based on their Walkability Assessment, Pop-Up Simulation, Master Bicycle-Pedestrian Plan, and wayfinding project, respectively.
- **Winrock leveraged a private investment to provide outreach and technical assistance to over 120 local businesses and non-profits in the area of Helena-West Helena and broader Phillips County** on a variety of topics, including shifting business models to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, accessing emergency funding for the continuation of operations during the pandemic, such as the Payment Protection Programs; and enhancing services or products offered to support local tourism strategies.



## New & Enhanced Partnerships



As Winrock and project partners provided technical assistance and supported placemaking planning efforts, a special focus was placed in helping RPIC communities identify, cultivate, and enhance new and existing partnerships with other state and federal organizations and agencies that can assist in the planning and implementation of placemaking plans even after the end of this project.

Among the partnership developed and enhanced are:

### Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism

The state agency responsible for support, funding, and regulation of outdoor recreation, tourism, parks, and heritage. As such, it is a vital organization for RPIC communities as they seek to leverage state tourism investments and recreational opportunities as a strategy for local community and economic development and placemaking. The partnership with the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, Tourism was critical in helping Stuttgart develop a competitive proposal for the Pocket Park application and will be important for the other RPIC communities as placemaking plans are implemented.

### Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT)

ARDOT is a key state agency for RPIC communities with which to build a strong partnership. It is a regulatory agency for state highways and roads that run through these towns, a funding source for needed improvements and new infrastructure projects, and a planning organization for improvements to state highways and roads. This has been key in the City of England's securing an award for sidewalk improvements as well as to ensure compliance to regulations in proposed and planned improvements in Helena-West Helena and Lonoke roads and sidewalks.

### Arkansas Community Foundation

The Community Foundation is a 501c3 nonprofit organization working statewide that offers tools to help Arkansans protect, grow and direct charitable dollars while learning more about community needs. The Arkansas Community Foundation is an important philanthropic partner and source of funding for rural communities, including RPIC communities. This is an enhanced partnership, as local communities already had knowledge of this organization. However, Winrock has bolstered the engagement of RPIC communities with the Foundation by connecting them specifically in

### Arkansas State Broadband Office

Due to its broadband planning and technical assistance, Winrock connected all RPIC communities with Glen Howie, Director of the Arkansas State Broadband Office. This connection resulted in Mr. Howie leading a participating in a public event in Helena-West Helena to discuss some of the state's new broadband plans, maps challenge processes, and upcoming funding opportunities. This partnership will be instrumental for all RPIC communities to use the broadband technical assistance in this project to develop competitive funding proposals for enhanced broadband infrastructure.

### Broadband Connectivity Coalition

The Broadband Connectivity Coalition is a conglomerate of local philanthropy, practitioners, state agencies, and funders which are working in coordination to advocate for the equitable development, deployment and adoption of broadband in the state. Winrock is a member of the Coalition and has connected RPIC communities to relevant members to address needs identified. For example, the City of England had difficulty obtaining better broadband service from a fixed wireless provider. Winrock connected the City of England with a relevant philanthropic partner of the Coalition for support with the provider. Due to this connection, Winrock was able to connect city leadership with the top executives of the provider to reach a solution. This new partnership will be critical in ensuring the needs and wants of rural areas are recognized as new broadband funds are issued.



### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

This ongoing partnership has allowed for additional, no-cost technical assistance to RPIC communities to develop assessments and plans, such as the Master Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans in England and Stuttgart, that will lead to greater inclusion and walkability in these communities. Additionally, the CDC was critical in ensuring RPIC communities participated in the Walkability Action Institute.

### **Heartland Forward**

Heartland Forward is a nonpartisan, nonprofit “think and do tank” focused on improving economic performance in the center of the United States. Winrock worked with all RPIC communities to connect them with Heartland Forward, as it works closely with the State of Arkansas to increase broadband access and adoption. Winrock continues to engage with Heartland Forward to address and advocate for needs of RPIC communities.

### **MetroPlan**

An association of local governments that has operated by inter-local agreement since 1955. Originally formed as the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission of Pulaski County, Metroplan now has members in Pulaski, Faulkner, Saline, Lonoke and Grant Counties. Metroplan is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) under Title 23 of the United States Code. This partnership has been critical to the City of England to ensure that infrastructure planning efforts in Central Arkansas include and benefit England.

### **National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD)**

Unites 7,000 chronic disease professionals across the United States working in state, tribal, and territorial health departments, nonprofits, academia, and the private industry to promote health and to reduce the burden of chronic disease. As a national, nonprofit, professional Association, NACDD advocates, educates, and provides technical assistance, to inform programming and grow chronic disease prevention knowledge, leadership, and capacity. NACDD connected with RPIC communities through the Walkability Action Institute, where it provided technical assistance to the communities regarding strategies to enhance community health through the built environment improvements.

### **St. Louis Federal Reserve**

Winrock facilitated a site visit with leadership from the St. Louis Federal Reserve Community Development team and RPIC communities. The St. Louis Fed recently published *Investing in Rural Prosperity*, a book intended to inform rural development stakeholders how policies, practices, and funding streams at the local, state, and federal level can support the achievement of shared economic prosperity in rural communities, especially historically marginalized areas. Leaders from Lonoke and Stuttgart were able to attend and appreciated the opportunity to talk with the Fed about some of the challenges they experience in community development.

### **The Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation**

Winrock facilitated a new partnership for the RPIC project and beneficiary communities with the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. This partnership is key to local communities to unlock philanthropic dollars that can help them implement placemaking projects directly or serve as match to further leverage state and federal investments.

### **Thrive, Inc.**

Though a formal partner in the RPIC project, Thrive, Inc., has enhanced its connection with RPIC communities to provide needed and additional technical assistance regarding the use of branding and art to improve the placemaking efforts of the communities. For example, Thrive, Inc. worked with the City of Stuttgart to develop a branding effort rooted in community feedback to refresh the image of the city to better reflect its various cultural and tourism assets. This connection would not have been possible without the RPIC-DCCPI project.

### **University of Central Arkansas – Center for Community & Economic Development (UCA CCED)**

A key organization for technical assistance and training in Arkansas. The UCA CCED has continually provided no-cost training and support to RPIC communities which go in-hand with activities in this project. For example, UCA CCED provided a Walkability Assessments in Stuttgart and Lonoke. These were used as part of the application for Stuttgart’s Outdoor Recreation Grant and as a tool in all planning efforts in Lonoke. UCA CCED was also instrumental in helping Lonoke develop the strategy for placemaking and community development in Lonoke-2022.

# Media & Online Education as Partnership Building Tools

Winrock published two stories about the power of placemaking, detailing learning and impacts of project activities in the local communities. Winrock also hosted and organized a **webinar** to highlight the connection between tourism strategies and broadband for placemaking in rural communities. These stories and webinar were designed to spread the word about the RPIC-DCCPI project and to encourage other organizations to take an active role in supporting RPIC communities in their placemaking plans.



Winrock published a story to discuss the importance of broadband and mobile connectivity for community and economic development in rural communities. The story discussed the role of the broadband infrastructure assessments completed and the technical assistance provided in this project to USDA – RPIC and USDA - RCDI community leaders to ensure that rural communities have the capacity to make informed decisions regarding broadband connectivity strategies and are able to successfully negotiate and advocate on behalf of their communities with internet providers. A link to the story can be found [here](#).



Winrock also published story highlighting the role of community engagement and support for placemaking initiatives by using the Stuttgart Pocket-Park Pop-Up event. The story also showcased USDA's investment and involvement in helping rural communities plan and execute projects that will improve the quality of life and place, including through funding and through the active engagement of USDA Rural Development staff in all project activities. A link to the story can be found [here](#).



Finally, Winrock organized a webinar with project partners UAMS, Crafton Tull, and Connected Nation about the importance of statewide tourism initiatives and broadband for placemaking and community development. The webinar covered the development of the USBR-80 and technical assistance provided in this project to ensure that the communities of England, Helena-West Helena, Lonoke, and Stuttgart are prepared to capture tourism dollars associated with this initiative and other outdoor recreation programs. The webinar also provided an overview of the mobile connectivity assessments and related technical assistance provided in this project to help RPIC communities develop strategies to enhance broadband connectivity in their towns and along the USBR-80. Connectivity to broadband and mobile service is important for the safety of cyclists along this route and to ensure that visitors are aware and can visit the many businesses and tourism assets that these communities have to offer. Furthermore, the webinar explained the importance of partnerships and long-term engagement and support to ensure that rural communities take advantage of these state and federal initiatives. **The webinar was attended by 58 individuals, 48 organizations, and 16 different states.** A recording of the webinar can be found [here](#).

These stories and webinars are important to give RPIC communities the opportunity to display and communicate local efforts as well as to reach outside organizations that have programs or technical expertise that can be leveraged by RPIC communities.

For more information about the USDA RPIC Delta Communities Connected through Placemaking & Innovation Project, please contact:

**Michelle Perez**  
**Sr. Program Officer, U.S. Programs**  
**Winrock International**

[michelle.perez@winrock.org](mailto:michelle.perez@winrock.org)