Perhaps no other area in the country has been as severely impacted by the economic downfall than the eight counties that make up the San Joaquin Valley. Today, many of the rural communities throughout the Valley are lacking the resources and personnel needed to carry out projects crucial to infrastructure, economy, and overall quality of life.

To address this crisis, the Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED) at California State University, Fresno created the San Joaquin Valley Rural Development Center (SJVRDC) in 2010. The purpose of this initiative is to connect rural communities to a wide range of indispensable expertise, services, and resources to ensure their needs are met efficiently, effectively, and affordably.

The Role of SJVRDC

The SJVRDC consortium consists of more than 30 partners committed to providing their respective expertise, services, and resources to the Valley’s rural communities. SJVRDC currently provides services in the following 12 areas: business services, clean energy, economic development, finance, grant writing, health and human services, housing, nonprofit capacity, planning, project design and construction, trade development, transportation, and water infrastructure.

Functionality

The SJVRDC director is responsible for connecting the needs of the Valley’s rural communities with the appropriate consortium partners. Proactive outreach is conducted to make sure each community knows that SJVRDC resources and services are available and accessible. When a service request is received, it is assessed by the director and forwarded to SJVRDC partners for input and assistance. The director works closely with rural communities to ensure the technical assistance they receive is timely, effective, and affordable.
The Small Communities Network

The Small Communities Network (SCN) is designed to bring together representatives from the rural communities throughout the San Joaquin Valley. SCN facilitates quarterly regional workshops, webinar trainings, and daily informational e-mails to its members. SCN serves as an optimal medium for distributing information about available SJVRDC services to the region’s rural communities.

Moving Forward

SJVRDC was created out of a desire from the Valley’s rural communities to have access to a one-stop resource center. As such, OCED determined that input provided by the affected communities will shape the future course of SJVRDC. The overall goal is to empower communities to take ownership of initiatives taking place in their communities.

As demand grows for assistance and services, additional funding will equip SJVRDC with the capacity to supply the necessary solutions. SJVRDC must be able to facilitate services that are not only affordable for rural communities but also cost effective for consortium partners to provide. SJVRDC will use a marketing/outreach initiative, coupled with a multifunctional website destined to be a comprehensive resource for timely information, resources and inquiries, to reach all rural cities and unincorporated communities in the Valley.