Texas Economic Development Council

Resiliency Hub Case Studies
McAllen Center for Urban Ecology Expansion

About TEDC Resiliency Hub case studies

The Texas Economic Development Council (TEDC) has a grant under the CARES Act from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to provide education and resources related to resilience, recovery and sustainability for economic development. TEDC created the Resiliency Hub to celebrate and share inspiring stories of Texas communities that have displayed exemplary work in establishing, implementing and maintaining programs that support their economies after facing economic distress and to:

- Highlight the importance of economic resiliency planning and implementation
- Broadcast and share innovative solutions to common economic problems
- Highlight potential future challenges and opportunities within the regions
- Reinvigorate professionals involved with the programs and initiatives with the meaningful outcomes and potential of their work

TEDC defines economic resilience as the ability of a community's businesses and economic development efforts to better withstand, and recover more quickly from, adverse incidents of any kind. Four regions were selected, showcasing their initiatives and programs which exemplify resilience and recovery in Texas.

About McAllen, Texas

McAllen is a large city located in the Rio Grande Valley region, and home to over 144,000 residents.

McAllen has evolved from a railway stop into a thriving city with a diverse economy. Initially rooted in citrus farming, it now includes retail and manufacturing industries. Transformed into an education hub, institutions like South Texas College and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley have campuses in McAllen. Balancing growth with environmental consciousness, McAllen prioritizes initiatives such as the Quinta Mazatlán Center for Urban Ecology, showcasing its commitment to a sustainable future.

//

We're one of the fastest growing regions in the country. We have to look at sustainability practices in our government, in our partnership and in our businesses.

Quinta Mazatlán leadership

The Center for Urban Ecology expansion project, is located in South McAllen and is both a place and a partnership. A heartfelt project that has been in the works for almost a decade is breaking ground in October 2023. The expansion will double the green footprint of the urban sanctuary, increasing it from 12 to 25 acres. There will be a five-acre children's adventure garden, a Center for Urban Ecology, McAllen transport park and ride, as well as other various attractions.

The foundation of the project is to create a resilient and sustainable region by utilizing funds provided by the EDA Grant to address the gaps in *education, economy, and the environment.*

Education

- Creation of the leadership entrepreneurship program, in partnership with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The program includes a research and development component on sustainable products and practices, education for business owners and community members on how to operate businesses sustainably and provides them with the tools to implement these products and practices.
- The education piece at the Center for Urban Ecology is two-fold. It provides education and learnings for students and visitors on things that can be done to make development more sustainable for the future. And gives the community and students real-time projects at the Center for Urban Ecology and in the region to improve the quality of life for all.

Economy (eco-tourism)

- By prioritizing younger generations and families in their programming, the Center is connecting children to nature, exposing them to future job prospects, and improving the workforce pipeline of the region.
- The project is expected to create 700 jobs and provide an economic impact of $284 million in construction, operations and visitor spending.

Environment

- The Center includes urban habitat restoration by planting a significant number of trees to combat urban heat island effect and create a more sustainable outdoor environment.

> **"**
> Urban ecology is the combination of "urban", which is about people and cities, and "ecology", which is about how organisms interact with each other and their environment.
>
> McAllen Urban Ecologist

TEDC

What other regions can learn from McAllen

Understand the needs of the community and harness assets.

The isolation that COVID-19 created in the community emphasized the importance of needing to seek refuge in nature and the outdoors as therapy for the mind, body and soul. It was through the pandemic that the City of McAllen really highlighted the power of the environment and the power of the planet to its residents and the importance of accessibility to clean air, water, and green spaces.

Building upon the pillars of *education, environment and economy*, Quinta Mazatlán was able to utilize the funds provided by the EDA Grant to build an education and training center to offer programs in entrepreneurship, small business recovery, economic and environmental resiliency, and workforce development.

"

The Center for Urban Ecology in McAllen, Texas, serves as a catalyst to bring about long-lasting benefits to the region. It is a big win for education, ecotourism and the environment.

City of McAllen Mayor

Sustainability is about building a stronger community for the future.

In bringing together *education, environmental restoration, and eco-tourism*, the expansion project is an example of urban sustainability, offering a holistic model for cities striving to cultivate a balanced and vibrant future.

- Through its innovative educational programs, the Center will empower the community with a deeper understanding of ecological principals and sustainable practices, cultivating a generation of environmentally conscious residents.
- By enhancing and restoring local ecosystems on the Center for Urban Ecology grounds and within the community, the project will contribute significantly to the city's overall biodiversity, air quality and natural resilience.
- The infusion of eco-tourism opportunities will not only attract visitors from around the world, but also spotlight the harmonious coexistence between urban development and nature.