



# Texas Economic Development Council

Resiliency Hub Case Studies

Rockport Center for the Arts & Workforce Development Center



## 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 Rockport, Texas

Rockport is a small coastal town on the Gulf of Mexico. On August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the city was devastated by Hurricane Harvey, leaving the region unrecognizable.

In the aftermath, the Aransas County Partnership Economic Development Corporation was created. Their focus has been on rebuilding the vibrancy of the community by focusing on the reconstruction of the Center for the Arts and the development of the Workforce Development Center.

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I think people are very impressed by the fact that there's this level of facility that is world class and state of the art, here in our little beautiful Rockport, Texas.

Executive Director of the  
Rockport Center for the  
Arts





## About the Rockport Center for the Arts

The Rockport Center for the Arts, pre-Hurricane Harvey, used to attract between 1,000 and 2,000 people a month. The Center was housed in a Victorian-era home that was donated by the O'Connor family of Victoria, Texas in 1983.

The new center, which opened its doors to the public in 2022, is a two-story, 14,000-square-foot building with five learning and maker spaces, five exhibition spaces, and attracts more than 5,000 people per month. The primary purpose of the Center is to create a communal space that displays world renown artists, as well as art pieces created by local artists in their "Member's only" gallery.

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One of the things that marked the renaissance of Rockport after Hurricane Harvey was the art community. We never cancelled a single event or program. It felt important that the community have something else to do other than clean their house or try to figure out what was lost. It was important we provided a service to bring the people together.

Executive Director of the Rockport Center for the Arts

The true testament of the Rockport Center for the Arts is how it helped the residents overcome adversity and what it offers the community today:

### Funding

- ▶ Received a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration.
- ▶ Fundraised more than \$7.5 million from private donors.
- ▶ Opened its doors in 2022 completely free of debt.

### Community improvements

- ▶ Built from concrete and steel to be more resilient during potential future hurricanes and survive the next 100 years.
- ▶ Acts as a gathering place for residents and visitors to have conversations over art, speak to the artists, and take classes.

### Programs and events

- ▶ The Center hosts a variety of art exhibitions, classes, and workshops in pottery, jewelry making, and art, to name a few.
- ▶ It hosts summer camps for Rockport youth, such as ArtSpace and culinary programs.
- ▶ The Center hosts regular community events, such as art, music, and film festivals.

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A young lady who completed the millwright industrial maintenance program went to work for Gulf Coast Growth Ventures and, after 2-3 years, is making more than \$125,000 a year.

Executive Vice President  
and COO of Del Mar  
College

## About the Workforce Development Center

Aransas County and Del Mar College partnered to develop the Workforce Development Center in Rockport, which is scheduled to open late 2024. The Center will provide local resources for community members to train for high-skilled jobs in effort to upskill and retain local talent, as well as attract new businesses to the region.

This serves as a critical component to Rockport's business retention and expansion efforts as it will expand the local labor force and create a more robust talent pipeline.

### Funding

- ▶ The Center was developed through a combination of funding that came from taxpayers, industry, businesses, and partners from the area.
- ▶ There has been more than \$14 million in direct investment into the equipment and technology in the facility.
- ▶ The carpentry program is supported by the Governor's Office through a grant that provided more than \$1 million for training.

### Job creation and retention

- ▶ Participants in business and industry programs were traditionally male-dominated. Now, there is a 50% female participation rate.

### Community improvements

- ▶ Industry partners of the workforce development center provide jobs in the workforce in high-skilled areas, such as process, technology, instrumentation, millwright, and welding. The Center provides opportunities for families in Rockport to learn and acquire jobs within these areas in the community.

### Programs, events, and policies

- ▶ Students learn the curriculum in specialized fields, such as process technology, industrial instrumentation, millwright, and welding, and then apply those skills using the same equipment they would use in the field. Additionally, these skills are taught by experienced professionals who would have recently transitioned from production occupations into this instructional and mentorship role for students.



## What other regions can learn from Rockport

### Understand what your community needs.

Prior to Hurricane Harvey, Rockport was known for its arts culture, tourism, and shrimping and fishing exports. While the hurricane devastated the region, it gave the community a chance to re-evaluate what it needed in order to bounce back.

In response, Rockport created its first economic development office, the Aransas County Partnership EDC. They worked in collaboration with their community to help fully fund the new Rockport Center for the Arts, which historically was a cherished gathering place. Reopening this center gave residents hope in the face of disaster.

They also understood that their residents needed better access to career opportunities. The partnership between Aransas County, Aransas County Partnership EDC, Del Mar College, and the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) enabled the opening of a workforce development center which will allow for residents to stay close to home as they learn new skills for high-wage jobs in the region.

### Collaboration is key.

Collaboration starts at the local level, but it includes regional and statewide collaborators. For Rockport, it meant including major players like the EDA, the U.S. Small Business Administration, among others. These partners brought the expertise and funding needed to help support, rebuild, recover, and become more resilient to future events.

### Have a clear vision for the future.

With a clear understanding of their community needs and through effective collaboration, Rockport was able to create a clear vision for their future and achieve their goals by:

- ▶ Expanding the employment and tax bases
- ▶ Strengthening economic diversity by training future manufacturing workers
- ▶ Maintaining, preserving, and improving the quality of life in Rockport for residents, as well as enhancing the visitor experience

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Rockport has been able to achieve more in five years than most communities hope to achieve in ten years of disaster recovery.

President of the Aransas County Partnership





