

Reimagine Mendota receives Community Heart and Soul Seed Grant

On March 31, 2023 Reimagine Mendota was awarded the Community Heart and Soul grant (CH&S). Developed and field-tested over a decade in over 90 small cities and towns across America. CH&S is a resident-driven process that identifies what residents love most about their community, what future they want for it, and how to achieve it.

Heart and soul work is based on three powerful principles:

- Involve everyone
- Focus on what matters most, and
- Play the long game.

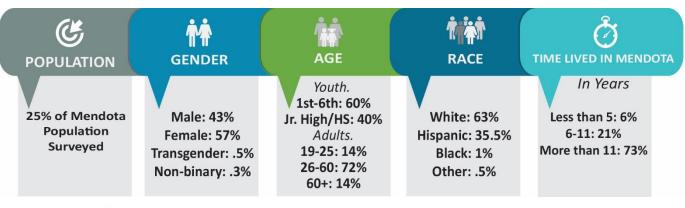
Grant funds were designated for hiring a program coach, establishing and marketing Reimagine Mendota, and hosting community meetings, listening sessions and events to collect data. It should be noted that this grant was not meant to fund a specific project or building. We are thankful to Community Heart and Soul, the City of Mendota, and sponsors for making this work possible.

Involve Everyone

To ensure that all demographic groups were equally represented from the data collected, Reimagine Mendota:

- Sent a mailer to all 3,782 households in Mendota to promote the
 9 CH&S Community Chats located around the community.
- Hosted a listening booth at **13** community events.
- Held 7 listening sessions at private facilities (High-rise, VFW, Williams Way Court, etc.)
- Conducted personal interviews with **50+** residents.
- Worked with 4 high school students to interview their peers at lunchtime.
- Trained 20 middle school students to conduct interviews with seniors, city workers, and school faculty.
- Collected 300+ coloring sheets from elementary students showing what they love about Mendota.
- Distributed survey links to both adults and youth resulting in about 600 responses.
- All materials, surveys, and sessions were available in English and Spanish.

Who we heard from...

















Community

Focus on What Matters Most

More than 1700+ residents shared why they love Mendota. The information gathered was organized into themes and further developed into value statements. Community Heart & Soul value statements are brief sentences that capture what matters most to the community and why. These statements will help Mendota prioritize actions and guide future decisions.

What we love about Mendota:



DRAFT Value Statements

COMMUNITY. We cherish our welcoming, supportive community, where people help each other and pull together when needed. It creates a feeling of home.

FAMILIES. We support families in raising strong, healthy children by providing excellent schools, great library programs, community activities and a safe environment where they can learn, play, and thrive.

ATMOSPHERE. We love our small town. It is peaceful, friendly, and safe, allowing people to engage and connect with businesses, services, and each other.

BUSINESSES. We appreciate our local businesses, services, and healthcare systems which provide the convenience to get things done right here in town.

EVENTS. We treasure our long-standing events like the Sweet Corn Festival and Tri-County Fair, while embracing new activities that reflect our evolving and diverse community. The collaboration of local businesses, volunteers, and civic clubs enables our community to come together and celebrate.

RECREATION. We value the recreation opportunities offered at our parks, lakes, trails, pool, and sports facilities. They enhance community life and wellness.

HISTORY/TRADITIONS. We take pride in our unique history and traditions brought to life by our museums, festivals, music, and arts, providing us with a sense of belonging and home.

LOCATION. Mendota is a crossroads. Through our proximity to the interstate, intersecting highways, and Amtrak station, we can take advantage of the different paths that give us wider access to larger cities and other resources while still choosing to live in a small town.

Hopes for the future

In addition to what people like about Mendota, Reimagine Mendota surveys asked what people want for the future of Mendota. Considering we have many opportunities downtown and city-wide for improvements, this data can be used to help determine what will thrive in our community. Below is an overview of suggestions from the surveys, with the top five mentions within each theme.

Themes / Top 5 Listings

COMMUNITY

Create Community Kitchen space
Establish newcomers welcome packet/committee
More affordable senior housing
Update city website

FAMILIES

Things to do (Youth center/activities)
Businesses (Arcades, Go-Karts, Mini-Golf)
Skatepark
Youth Leadership/Volunteer programs

ATMOSPHERE

Downtown revitalization (Paint, flowerboxes, etc)
Amphitheater/band shelter/pavilion
Fix/add sidewalks and bike paths
Encourage/support "Shop Local"

BUSINESSES

Have pop-up shops
Enforce codes (building/businesses)
No more vape/gambling shops
Strengthen economic development/Mentor new businesses

Themes / Top 5 Listings

EVENTS

More community events/live bands/walks Create art space/gallery walks Revitalize tri-county fair/fairgrounds Create various clubs (chess, fishing, running, etc)

RECREATION

Fix pool/add splashpad
Build indoor sports complex
Fix/add sports fields, parks, frisbee golf course
Add paddleboats/kayaks at the lake

HISTORY/TRADITIONS

More connections between cultural groups
Add art/murals throughout community
Create space to showcase local art/theater/music
Create history app/tour and promote museums

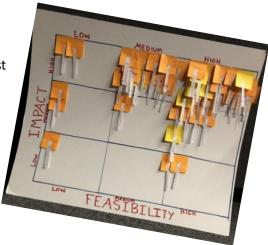
LOCATION

Add public transportation
Add signage/community promotion
Enhance tourism

Prioritize future projects

At the *Focus on Mendota Summit*, participating residents receive the full list of mentioned projects. Residents review each item within the themes to determine:

- Impact. Is the action predicted to have a high, medium, or low impact on the community? What are the benefits of the idea? How will quality of life change? For whom and for how many?
- Feasibility. Is the idea something that can be accomplished in a short amount of time and with modest resources and readily available funding? Or will it involve a multi-year effort involving many partners and funders?



Once impact and feasibility are determined, three ideas for each theme are presented and participants voted for what is most important to them. Check out <u>reimaginemendota.org</u> for full results and the next steps.

Play the long game

There is a renewed energy in our community. With this asset-based approach, people can focus on positive parts of the community and the opportunities ahead. Through the grant work, Reimagine Mendota:

- Recruited an additional 25 new volunteers.
- Secured two grants (Design-free consultation. Youth Substance Prevention \$1.875 million).
- Used data to write two grants (pending), a feasibility study, and data will be used for other future grants.
- Presented at various civic group meetings.
- Established a website (reimaginemendota.org)
- Expanded social media presence.
- Secured additional dollars in donations.
- Hosted the Food Truck Monday Mainia based on resident input of what they like.
- Established a new way to gain feedback for community and organization efforts.
- Worked within grant budget to have dollars for ongoing promotion of Mendota and revitalization efforts.

Long Game Next Steps

- Promote value statements and prioritized, proposed future projects for continued feedback and to determine feasibility.
- Work with the city to develop a city plan and workgroups for action.
- Engage the community for feedback and volunteers to help implement the developed plan.
- Celebrate the work and success we collectively have achieved.









THANK YOU:

We want to express sincere gratitude to Community Heart and Soul for awarding Reimagine Mendota the grant. We are very thankful to Jason Nieses, who coached the group throughout the process, provided valuable feedback, and encouraged us at every step. Thank you to the City of Mendota for their financial and human resource support, believing in the project, and recognizing the results that will guide future city decisions. A heartfelt thanks to all financial sponsors who contributed the matching funds needed for the grant. A special thanks to the businesses who hosted community events, provided food discounts for meetings, and promoted our events. Most importantly thank you to all volunteers who dedicated their time and energy to reach as many residents as possible and to the residents who gave their input. Your efforts are truly appreciated and all should be proud of the results. A special thanks to Amy Brewer and Annie Short, who volunteered their time to co-lead this project.



