

City of Lemon Grove, California

2016–2017

**Five comprehensive development plans
provide service opportunities in the midst
of budgetary woes**

Program Details

The Sage Project

San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Drive
San Diego, CA 92182-1623

sage.sdsu.edu
sage.cesc@sdsu.edu



Partnership with Sage at SDSU put Lemon Grove on a path for growth

City of Lemon Grove,
San Diego County,
California, United States

Community Size:
2010: 25,320
2016: 26,860

Status: Completed

Lemon Grove, California, has suffered a budget shortfall for many years. Over 10 years ago, general fund reserves fell 19 percent and soon the city was slashing positions, merging its management personnel in the fire department with nearby cities, eliminating its recreation department, and reducing services like street sweeping and animal control. Things have not fared much better since; in July 2018, the city's budget shortfall is projected at \$1.5 million over the next five years. If things don't improve, bankruptcy could be next. "We are at the point where we really have to make some tough decisions to generate revenues," Mayor Racquel Vasquez said.

As the city struggles to figure out how to confront big issues like shoring up tax revenue and delivering basic services, it found a partner to help keep its eye focused on important long-term priorities like sustainability and green spaces that might have otherwise fallen through the cracks.

Sage develops five areas of sustainability projects critical to Lemon Grove's future

Enter the Sage Project. As a member of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), the Sage Project specializes in providing learning opportunities through community-based projects. The Sage Project, as part of the university's Center for Regional Sustainability, represents hundreds of students and faculty from a wide range of disciplines from campus including political science, civil engineering, and graphic design.

In the 2016-2017 school year, Sage started working with Lemon Grove officials to establish comprehensive planning documents on five critical areas of development:

Climate, Health and Social Issues. Such as air quality, climate change planning, and homelessness.

Urban Planning and Development. For issues like street signage, downtown redevelopment, and alternative transportation.

Infrastructure. Handling drainage and parking issues.

Public Spaces. Installing community gardens and green spaces.

Public Art and Image Development. Finding ways to highlight and beautify areas through photography and murals.

The partnership, which extended into the fall of 2017, gave the city planning and development resources it could not otherwise afford — things the city, at this critical juncture, says has been critical to its ongoing survival. “Each student that’s partnering with us is able to help the city because we only have 52 employees and half of those are firefighters,” said Mike James, Assistant City Manager and Director of Public Works.

City Manager Lydia Romero called Sage’s involvement “a blessing.” “They’re jump-starting a lot of programs that I don’t have the resources to allocate for... It’s a godsend to have the energy and the enthusiasm of students to work on projects,” she said.

Lemon Grove gets 800 percent ROI through the partnership

Sage provided the city with research, designs, solutions, connections to government resources, and important recommendations — all measures that gave Lemon Grove “a remarkable 800 percent return on the initial investment,” according to James.

The programs planted deep seeds for Lemon Grove so it could one day regain control of its future. For example, among the benefits the city gained were:

- **An urban agriculture analysis** showing feasibility in creating a healthier and more secure community for the city.
- **Expanding GIS mapping** from a dated inventory of existing street signs.
- **The revitalization of two downtown locations** through a development plan.
- **Reimagined ideas** to solve the city’s growing homelessness problem.
- **New community gardens** from plans created by Sage students.
- **Greater social media interaction** due to a development plan by students to inform and engage residents about Lemon Grove.
- **Two brand-new murals and designs for welcome signs** developed by students to brighten downtown and points of entry
- **Recognition as the first city in North America** to work with a **United Nations toolkit** to address climate change.

In fact, Lemon Grove joined only Vilankulo, Mozambique, and Glasgow, Scotland, to adopt a United Nations toolkit which is intended to help cities with their climate action planning process. Through Sage’s intervention, Lemon Grove is now able to meet their goal of reducing 15 percent of greenhouse gases by the state-mandated deadline, as well as achieve international accolades at climate change symposia around the world.

“All the pieces are finally fitting together.”

— Lydia Romero, City Manager, City of Lemon Grove





30
Classes



700+
Students



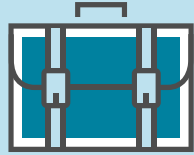
30,000+
Hours



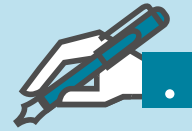
13
Disciplines



7
Projects



19
Faculty
Members



27
Assistants, Staff,
& Report Writers

***“It’s a godsend to have
the energy and the
enthusiasm of students
to work on projects.”***

— Lydia Romero, City Manager, City of Lemon Grove

Contact Us

info@epicn.org
epicn.org

PO Box 44069
Madison, WI 53744-4069