

Regional Early Action Planning Grants of 2019 (REAP) Close Out Report Form



County of Sierra

December 20, 2024

REAP Close Out Report Form Instructions

This form is for Regional Early Action Planning Grants of 2019 (REAP) grant holders to satisfy the reporting requirements of California Health and Safety Code section 50515.04. The report must be submitted to the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) via email to reap@hcd.ca.gov no later than December 31, 2025.

Additional information about the REAP program is found at the program's webpage at: <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-and-funding/programs-active/regional-early-action-planning-grants-of-2019>

Please proceed to the REAP Close Out Report Form on the next page and complete Parts I–X.

REAP Close Out Report Form

Part I – Summary

Briefly describe the grantee's REAP project(s), including but not limited to the following information:

1. Overview of the project
2. Project start date, duration and completion
3. Project goals and relevance to REAP goals
4. Proposed uses and actions taken in support of proposed uses
5. Actions that had the greatest impact on housing production
6. Overall outcomes including quantified outcomes

1. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

There were initially two (2) separate projects (composed of four [4] tasks or cost allocations) identified under the REAP grant, some of which overlapped with Sierra County's LEAP grant. Then it was amended (twice).

The first project was the development of AFFORDABLE HOUSING MASTER PLANS and rolling out a permit-streamlining process with free, pre-approved plans and significantly-reduced permitting fees for three (3) different model homes (1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, and 3-bedroom options each with or without attached garage, and each designed for five different snow loads). This project was carried out in partnership with 5 other jurisdictions in the region, with Sierra County's \$48,607 REAP allocation contributing to the overall \$400k+ project cost.

The second project that was initially proposed under the REAP grant was the preparation of an INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY ANALYSIS in partnership with the City of Loyalton (in eastern Sierra County), with the goal of informing new streamlined affordable housing policies and max. allowable-by-right densities and even preliminary site planning designs (under the LEAP grant) for low-income affordable housing projects in two areas previously identified in the Sierra County General Plan that are adjacent to the city limits, and (with LAFCo approval) proposed extension of city water and sewer services into these unincorporated areas currently with no adequate infrastructure to support higher-density development. The REAP grant initially allocated \$24,303 (plus \$22,750 from LEAP) toward for the infrastructure capacity analysis, plus \$42,531 for preparation of environmental review (plus \$9,750 allocated from LEAP; plus other LEAP funds for public outreach and administrative costs). HOWEVER, before the infrastructure analysis and preliminary site planning could commence, the city of Loyalton began to experience failures to its existing infrastructure necessitating emergency repairs and moratoriums on new connections---and it became obvious that an expensive technical study was not needed to realize that

the city in fact currently has NO additional/supplemental capacity to extend its utility services into outlying areas for new development projects. Instead, the County pivoted and successfully amended both its LEAP and REAP grants to delete the infrastructure analysis/site planning/CEQA/public outreach components, to instead focus the remaining funds (under REAP specifically) to: (1) updating our ca. 1973 Zoning Code to specifically address housing-related policies to implement changes to State Housing Law and related policies; and (2) provide supplemental funding for a collection of housing-related planning tasks that the County identified as: “Continued updating to General Plan with consultant Mintier Harnish, ADU Ordinance, streamlining permit application process with Cloudpermit/county staff, vacant sites inventory analysis with the help of Price Consulting Services and County staff...” and related background studies. For this REAP close-out report, we will refer to this amended grant scope as: Task 1 – Affordable Housing Master Plans, and Task 2 – Development of Housing Policies & Procedures (collectively).

2. PROJECT DATES

Projected Start Date:

Task 1 – Affordable Housing Master Plans: June 1, 2021

Task 2 – Housing Policies & Procedures: January 2024

Duration:

Task 1 - Affordable Housing Master Plans: 2 years, 4 months

Task 2 – Housing Policies & Procedures: 11 months

Completion:

Task 1 – Affordable Housing Master Plans: October 19, 2023

Task 2 – Housing Policies & Procedures: December 5, 2024

3. PROJECT GOALS & RELEVANCE TO REAP GOALS

Increase supply of affordable housing for various income groups across the region. Promoting infill development and socioeconomic equity while encouraging environmental protection and efficient development patterns. Improving jobs-housing balance. Allocating a lower proportion of housing need to an income category when a jurisdiction already has a disproportionately high share of households in that income category. Affirmately furthering fair housing. Developing at least three different affordable housing options with full Title 24 compliance and engineering sufficient for housing in mountain communities (including snow loads, etc.) with designs that can be utilized as either ADUs or primary residences for a variety of household sizes and household income levels.

Make plans available to the public for free with a streamlined permitting process and reduced permit fees to promote and streamline ADU development and affordable housing options. Implement new electronic software/application to simplify and make more efficient the building permit processes of: submittal, review, permit issuance, scheduling and conducting inspections, code enforcement, and zoning entitlement processes. Update Sierra County's outdated zoning code and other land use policies and procedures to better align with current State Housing Law.

4. PROPOSED USES AND ACTIONS TAKEN IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSED USES

Completed both Tasks – implemented final designs for affordable housing master plans with three different design options (each with multiple variations for parking and snow load considerations), including unique streamlined application and permit-issuance process and dedicated website and advertising/outreach campaign (see flyer; website; submittal forms, attached); and completed adoption of new Housing-related zoning ordinances implementing current State law in the specific areas of: Streamlining affordable housing projects, reasonable accommodations, ADUs & JADUs, caretaker's residences & farm dwelling units, emergency shelters and supportive housing, and multi-unit dwelling objective design standards (Ord. 1133, attached). Executed new service contract and implemented "Cloudpermit" permitting software to facilitate streamlined permitting processes (see executed contract and scope of services, attached). Progress has been made (but no "deliverables" as such) in the areas of General Plan policy updates; background studies for AFFH; hazard mitigation; climate adaptation; vacant lands inventory & constraints analysis for upzoning parcels throughout the county, etc.

5. ACTIONS THAT HAD THE GREATEST IMPACT ON HOUSING PRODUCTION

This is a bit difficult to quantify. Since the Affordable Housing Master Plans project was completed and made available to the public, property owners in partner jurisdictions (namely Placer Co. and Nevada Co.) have taken advantage of this lower-cost and simplified process to construct affordable housing and/or ADU on their property—but in Sierra County, not one permit has been applied for under this program. Frustrating. We anticipate the new housing-related zoning ordinances and permitting software and other innovations will make it easier for people to obtain building permits in a more timely and cost-effective manner for future development; but these newly-adopted policies are simply too new and we do not have any data to support a measurable difference in the amount of housing production since they were adopted/implemented. Sierra County is a

tiny, rural jurisdiction of approx. 2400 people (and a RHNA of 2), so “housing production” is rather slow anyway compared to other jurisdictions.

In short: there is simply insufficient data so far to quantify whether any of the projects/actions performed with the REAP grant have had a measurable impact on housing production. Certainly it must “help”; but by how much, we cannot yet say.

6. OVERALL OUTCOMES INCLUDING QUANTIFIED OUTCOMES

The Affordable Housing Master Plans have been available to the public for over a year now—so far, with zero (0) takers. (But, for context, Sierra County typically sees only 3 to 8 new housing permit applications per year...and has not seen a single development proposal for higher-density housing projects in over 20 years.)

The permitting software/application and other electronic innovations to facilitate streamlining the permit process is currently being rolled out (after a year of setup and transitioning records, etc.)—and while expected to make the process easier, it is not expected to appreciably increase the actual number of permit applications submitted. Applications remain steady (but slow during winter, which is typical in this rural mountainous region), but no increase over historical trends has been indicated.

The new housing-related ordinances were just adopted by the Sierra County Board of Supervisors this month—so it is too soon to see if these policies result in a measurable increase in housing production. We do expect a small increase in the interest of property owners building more ADUs than before...but so far, no new applications.

Part II – Lead Agency and Partnerships

List lead agency and partnerships, including names, position titles, organizations, and the roles and responsibilities of each. What did those collaborative relationships and processes look like?

Sierra County worked closely with surrounding jurisdictions on the Affordable Housing/ADU Master Plans project – including Nevada County, City of Grass Valley, Nevada City, Town of Truckee, and Placer County; as well as working collaboratively with the city of Loyalton and the Sierra Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) on the difficult issues surrounding shared infrastructure capacity to try to facilitate higher-density housing development in unincorporated Sierra County (where only onsite septic systems and many individual wells exist) by (hopefully) extending city water and sewer services to outlying areas to encourage and streamline housing development.

The Sierra County Planning and Building Department entered into contract with Cloudpermit to set-up new digital/online permitting software, and worked closely with other County departments (especially the Assessor, GIS, IT Department, Environmental Health Department, Public Works Department) to streamline the application process, share data, and collaborate on developing more efficient and seamless permitting processes.

Sierra County also entered into contracts with two Planning consulting firms—Minter-Harnish and Price Consulting Services—to develop new Zoning ordinances, background studies, and General Plan/Housing Element policies and implementation measures to affirmatively further fair housing and facilitate a more streamlined process to encourage the production of housing at all income levels and regions of the county. Through this effort, Sierra County Planning Department reached out and worked collaboratively with many community groups, organizations, and other agencies including:

- Sierra County Social Services
- Sierra County Health & Human Services Department
- FREED Center for Independent Living
- Downieville Volunteer Fire Protection District
- Sierra City Volunteer Fire Protection District
- Pliocene Ridge Volunteer Fire Department
- Loyalton Fire District
- Sierra County Fire Safe Council
- Sierra County Senior Centers
- Sierra County Senior Transportation
- Plumas Sierra Rural Electric Coop
- Liberty Utilities
- Pliocene Ridge Community Services District
- Private Community Water Purveyors
- Downieville Public Utilities District

- Alleghany/Pliocene Ridge Water District
- Sierra Brooks Community Water System (Sierra Co. DPW)
- Sierra County Director of Health and Human Services
- Sierra-Plumas Joint Unified School District
- Sierra County and Eastern Sierra Valley Chambers of Commerce
- Sierra County Child Care Council
- Native American Tribes (SB-18 tribal consultation)
- Local Health Care Providers: Western Sierra Medical Clinic, Eastern Plumas Hospital District
- California Department of Housing & Community Development (HCD)
- Cal Trans
- United States Forest Service-Yuba River Ranger District
- Sierra Brooks Property Owners Association
- Sierra-Plumas Joint Unified School District
- City of Loyalton
- Sierra County Board of Supervisors
- General public outreach (newspaper, county website, post office postings, etc.)

Part III – Drivers

Answer the following questions:

1. Did any local, state, or federal legislation or mandates drive the project(s)? (SB 35, AB 1397, etc.)
2. Was it a community-driven effort?
3. Were there additional funding opportunities present?

1. DID ANY LOCAL, STATE, OR FEDERAL LEGISLATION OR MANDATES DRIVE THE PROJECT(S)?

The message from both the Governor and State legislature was clear: no matter how small the jurisdiction, we all need to do our part to facilitate and encourage more affordable housing development. Some of the legislative mandates that drove the project—especially the updates to our outdated Zoning Code—included: Gov’t. Code Sections 65302, 65913, and 65915-65918, et seq. (providing incentives such as density bonuses for the production of affordable housing for qualifying persons, households, and facilities); the plethora of recent ADU/JADU bills and statutes—such as: 2019: AB 68, AB 881, SB 13, AB 587, AB 670, AB 671; 2020: AB 3182; 2021: AB 345; 2022: AB 2221, SB 897, AB 916; 2023: AB 1033, AB 976, AB 1332; 2024: SB 1211, AB 2533, SB 450; and other housing-related legislation such as: SB 35 (and AB 2668: streamlining ministerial approval processes); AB 2334, AB 1551, AB 682, AB 1287, AB 529 (density-bonus & adaptive reuse provisions); AB 821 (resolving GP/Zoning conflicts); etc.

While we have no high density, low-income affordable housing development projects in the works yet (Sierra County’s population is approx. 2400 people and declining; it’s not easy to entice developers to build where there is apparently negative demand), we are at least happy to report that we have exceeded our Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) of “4” for the 2019-2024 cycle by 725% (representing 33 new housing units since the end of 2023), across all income categories.

2. WAS IT A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN EFFORT? It was not.

3. WERE THERE ADDITIONAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES PRESENT? Sierra County incorporated both LEAP funding and county General Funds into several of the projects/tasks/deliverables for this grant—including updates to the General Plan & Zoning Code, background studies to facilitate the development of new streamlined housing policies and procedures, and the development of new online permit application software with simpler permit-tracking and inspection-scheduling.

Part IV – Engagement Process

Answer the following questions:

1. Who were your stakeholders?
2. What did the engagement process look like?
3. What role did stakeholders play in the process? (Keep in mind: training, education, council formation, technical assistance, etc.)
4. What were the outcomes of the engagement process?

1. WHO WERE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS?

Our stakeholders for these projects have been all citizens of Sierra County, across all income levels, races, ethnicities, gender identities, and walks of life; as well as other partner agencies in the housing permit process—including: Building Department, Environmental Health Department, Social Services, Public Works/Road Department, Cal Fire and local fire agencies, local utility providers and water purveyors. We have reached out to everyone, and the new policies, streamlined procedures, and opportunities affect and include everyone.

2. WHAT DID THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS LOOK LIKE?

We have conducted community meetings and workshops; posted to websites and in newspapers; posted flyers; and done outreach by phone and e-mail.

3. WHAT ROLE DID STAKEHOLDERS PLAY IN THE PROCESS?

Very little, unfortunately. Despite a concerted effort to solicit comments from a wide variety of potential stakeholders, the Planning Department received very few comments or suggestions.

4. WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES OF THE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS?

Unfortunately, community engagement has been fairly minimal – but then again, land use policy development is not everyone's cup of tea. :)

Part V – Challenges

Answer the following questions:

1. What challenges were encountered?
2. What solutions were encountered or created?
3. Are there areas for improvement of policy alignment at the state or federal level to help achieve this project more easily?

1, 2, & 3. Perhaps the greatest challenge has been the lack of funding and local resources to accomplish all that we had set out to do. The REAP grant program has been immensely helpful in assisting our tiny jurisdiction initiate and complete planning projects and policy development that we would have been unlikely to do otherwise; but the cost and complexity of completing these kinds of tasks today is immense. And this money (though greatly appreciated) has required creative supplementing from various other sources—mainly the county's General Fund—to try and get the projects completed...and managing multiple grants and funding sources across a variety of project tasks has proved challenging for a Planning Department staff of 2 or 3 these last few years.

Part VI – Outcomes

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the current or projected outcomes? What are the benefits?
2. Did actual outcomes meet expectations?
3. Have new opportunities arisen as a result of this project?
4. What are the next steps?

1. WHAT ARE THE CURRENT OR PROJECTED OUTCOMES? WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

While we have no high density, low-income affordable housing development projects in the works yet (Sierra County's population is approx. 2400 people and declining; it's not easy to entice developers to build where there is apparently negative demand), we are at least happy to report that we have exceeded our Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) of "4" for the 2019-2024 cycle by 725% (representing 33 new housing units since the end of 2023, across all income categories).

We have been successful in getting most of the proposed tasks (as amended) done, in the form of new policies and procedures to facilitate housing construction in Sierra County. But the reality is that this work (drafting numerous ordinances and updating our codes and implementing new programs) was part of a larger task and on-going, with LEAP and other funding sources still being utilized. And it remains too soon to gauge whether these projects have yielded much fruit in the form of actual housing production. Again: Sierra County is tiny, and losing population; so the demand for new development projects just isn't there as it is in many other parts of the State

But the REAP grant program was helpful to Sierra County, and if given a similar opportunity in the future, we could certainly use the money and find creative ways to put it to good use. And it should be easier for us to get tasks going and stay on top of the program administration next time.

2. DID ACTUAL OUTCOMES MEET EXPECTATIONS?

One of the lessons learned for us has been the realization that no amount of "streamlining" policies and procedures will be enough to truly incentivize higher densities of development in our small rural communities chock full of constraints; what we need to be able to build more houses across the spectrum of affordability and mixed-use development and services in our already-dense small communities is infrastructure. You just can't meet the density requirements for lower-income affordable units when each individual property relies on individual propane tanks and onsite sewage disposal systems (and often individual wells),

and there are literally no sewer systems and few public water systems serving the limited private properties – and nowhere “outward” to expand into, with over 70% federal public lands surrounding our tiny, gold rush-era communities. If affordability boils down to density, and density necessitates infrastructure to service it, we need to focus future planning grants on infrastructure feasibility and preliminary design projects.

One positive note to end on: HCD staff’s patient assistance, and the reporting forms and guidelines and other assistance provided (and improved) by HCD since this program started, has been great. It has made the chore of grant administration, reimbursement requests, and reporting a much simpler process than most. Thank you.

3. HAVE NEW OPPORTUNITIES ARISEN AS A RESULT OF THIS PROJECT?

Only in the sense that the exercise has helped local Planning staff focus its attention on housing-related policies and procedures, and brainstorm priorities for improvement.

4. WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

While this funding and the associated tasks have been helpful, there is a lot of work left to do just to play catch-up to the dozens of legislative mandates to update our policies and procedures and try to incentivize affordable housing development in our jurisdiction. Sierra County has already committed significant resources to work with Planning consultants to update its General Plan and do a comprehensive Zoning Code update—not just draft (or amend) a few select ordinances. We will actively seek additional funding sources to assist us with the necessary tasks of updating our Housing Element and Safety Element, SB 244 Analysis, vacant sites (and up-zoning opportunities) analysis, and other related projects—all of which are necessary components of complying with State mandates.

Part VII – Replicability

Answer the following questions:

1. What aspects of the project could be replicated in other communities?
2. What useful resources and tools were implemented? Were there specific tools used for specific regions or sectors?

1. WHAT ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT COULD BE REPLICATED IN OTHER COMMUNITIES?

This project was countywide and not specific to any individual community. The affordable housing master plans project was specifically designed to be as flexible as possible—including structural designs for a variety of different snow loads, and with all three of the house designs being no more than 1200 sq.ft. so the housing could be constructed in any community as either a standalone/primary residence or an ADU. The policies and streamlined procedures are applicable countywide as well, and not specific to any particular community.

2. WHAT USEFUL RESOURCES AND TOOLS WERE IMPLEMENTED? WERE THERE SPECIFIC TOOLS USED FOR SPECIFIC REGIONS OR SECTORS?

Heavy reliance on consultants—but even they had trouble at times developing the necessary information and analysis for “uncharted” territory. We tried consulting with HCD to help develop tools for small rural jurisdictions trying to get through AFFH analysis and similar requirements; but with limited demographic and built-environment data, much of this exercise was a real challenge. There remains a frustrating “one-size-fits-all” approach to much of the legislative mandates surrounding affordable housing programs, that often does not translate well to rural environments.

Part VIII – Project Highlights, Best Practices and Anticipated Achievements

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the most prominent project highlights and why?
2. What are some of the best practices that could be used by other agencies at a local, regional, state or federal level?
3. What are some long-term achievements that could result from the overall project?

1. WHAT ARE THE MOST PROMINENT PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS AND WHY?

Three (3) of the most prominent project highlights were: (1) completing and making available to the public three different sets of affordable housing master plans (pre-approved plan sets available in 1-, 2-, or 3-bedroom floorplans, each with- or without an attached garage option); (2) completing a set of six (6) different housing-related ordinances, including a large update to our badly-outdated ADU ordinance; and (3) after a full year of hard work, we rolled out a new online permit-tracking application that should greatly simplify and facilitate faster and easier permitting in Sierra County.

2. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST PRACTICES THAT COULD BE USED BY OTHER AGENCIES AT A LOCAL, REGIONAL, STATE OR FEDERAL LEVEL?

Collaborating with other neighboring jurisdictions in the development of pre-approved affordable housing master plans was key for our small, rural jurisdiction. This is a project we would not easily have completed on our own. Working together with other rural jurisdictions, we could not only pool our limited resources to complete a large, complicated project for mutual benefit; but also collaborate at the staff level to complete tasks that would have been very difficult independently—both in terms of man-hours and expertise (sharing of information, collaborative review, sharing best practices, and more).

As far as the other tasks/projects under our REAP grant (mostly development of new policies/procedures for streamlining housing projects), we did not encounter or figure out tools or best practices that could effectively be used by other agencies. Sorry.

3. WHAT ARE SOME LONG-TERM ACHIEVEMENTS THAT COULD RESULT FROM THE OVERALL PROJECT?

Even though we have not realized significant gains in housing development (or increases in permit applications) thus far, all of the projects undertaken through

this REAP grant have been learning experiences and should make it easier for county staff to implement similar projects in the future.

Part IX – Additional Resources

Provide web links to:

1. the project itself, and
2. resources used throughout the project, and any other relevant resources.

1. WEB LINK TO NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING MASTER PLANS & APPLICATION FORMS:

[Affordable Housing Master Plans | Sierra County, CA - Official Website](https://www.sierracounty.ca.gov/794/Affordable-Housing-Master-Plans)
<https://www.sierracounty.ca.gov/794/Affordable-Housing-Master-Plans>

2. NEW ZONING ORDINANCES ON:

- SCC 15.10.010 Affordable Housing Incentives
- SCC 15.10.020 Reasonable Accommodations
- SCC 15.10.030 Accessory Dwelling Units & JADUs
- SCC 15.10.040 Caretaker's Residences & Employee Housing
- SCC 15.10.050 Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, and Supportive Housing
- SCC 15.10.070 Multi-Unit Dwelling Objective Design Standards

...were all adopted by the Sierra County Board of Supervisors on 12/3/2024 (Ord. 1133) and have not yet been codified. A true and complete, fully-executed copy of the adopted ordinance(s) is enclosed with this close-out report.

3. CLOUDPERMIT online permit-tracking app. was just implemented "in-house" in December of this year, but has not yet been integrated into the County's website (soft rollout while we work out the bugs and become familiar with the new process). Expected to go fully public in January 2025 for Building Department and Code Enforcement services; then followed by Planning Department applications/services 60-90 days later. A copy of the fullyexecuted Cloudpermit services agreement, including features, is enclosed with this close-out report.
4. BACKGROUND ANALYSIS/REPORTS, including Affirmatively Further Fair Housing analysis and vacant lands inventory analysis and mapping for the 2024-2029 Housing Element Update project (undertaken by Price Consulting Services) may be found at the following link:

<https://www.sierracounty.ca.gov/809/Housing-Element>

Part X – Further Information

Provide information on who can be reached for HCD to obtain more information about the project. Include names, phone numbers, and email addresses for one or more individuals.

Contact: Sierra County Planning Director Brandon Pangman at: (530) 289-3251, or:
bpangman@sierracounty.ca.gov