

HOME GROWN TOOLS

for ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CONTRIBUTOR PACKET



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Introduction

What is Homegrown Tools? Homegrown Tools is a database developed which helps to **connect communities with information and inspiration.**

In [insert year here], methane gas emissions from a closed landfill threatened the town of Dillsboro, North Carolina. To turn the town's environmental predicament into an economic asset, this small rural community on the edge of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park took creative measures. Town officials built the Jackson County Green Energy Park, a collection of artisans' studios, and converted the landfill gas into energy to power the studios. The result was not only a cleaner environment, but new jobs and businesses for the community, and another attraction for tourism.



Dillsboro's economic win-win is just one of dozens of stories featured on Homegrown Tools, a clearinghouse website that houses **case studies of communities around the U.S. that have successfully stimulated private investment and job creation.** With 44 communities currently featured from across the country, Homegrown Tools is looking for additional case studies to add to the database.

Homegrown Tools is managed by NCGrowth, an EDA University Center at UNC Chapel Hill, in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, the UNC School of Government, the NC Rural Center, and the UNC Department of City and Regional Planning.

About NCGrowth NCGrowth is a university center at UNC Chapel Hill that helps businesses and communities create good jobs and equitable opportunities through applied research and technical assistance. In partnership with other universities and community organizations, NCGrowth provides technical assistance to businesses and governments on economic development and entrepreneurship projects. Since 2012, NCGrowth has helped to create hundreds of jobs and worked with more than a hundred clients. Learn more at www.NCGrowth.unc.edu.

Who Can Use It? The tool lets users perform customized searches for case studies relevant to their community. Users can search by development strategy, geographic area or specific attributes such as population, community strengths, and desired outcomes. The web tool is specifically designed to aid:

- **Public Officials:** Mayors, Town Council Members, Tribal Governments, Policy Makers
- **Practitioners:** Consultants, Local Government Staff
- **Researchers:** Faculty, Students, Policy Think Tanks
- **Community Members:** Volunteers, Non-Profits, Church Leaders, Civic Board Members

The goal of Homegrown Tools is to connect these groups with successful strategies and lessons learned, and inspire communities to **leverage their unique assets!**

How Does It Work? The Homegrown Tools website homepage displays three different ways that users can engage with the material:

- Start off with a “**Customized Results**” option which will take you to a quick survey; this will ask about your town’s assets and challenges, and allow you to find case studies that are related to towns like yours.
- Click on “**Explore Towns**” which will take you to a map and allow you to find case studies in a similar state or completely different context. While the majority of case studies are currently clustered in the geographic Southeast, the lessons they provide translate readily to other regions of the country.
- Click on “**Browse Strategies**” to view case studies grouped by the strategies that are employed. For example, you can find strategies centered around “Tourism” or “Business Retention and Expansion.” After making your selection you’ll see a list of all the communities that have employed that strategy. Case studies are also tagged with any additional strategies that were employed.

Contributing to Homegrown Tools:

What is Needed? Homegrown Tools continues to build new and updated case studies that connect communities with strong economic development strategies. Are you a local official or practitioner in your community, part of a university center, an academic researcher, etc.? We need contributors to identify interesting communities and write new case studies.

Why Participate? Contributing to Homegrown Tools offers benefits for multiple groups, including community practitioners, local officials, and academic researchers:

Community Practitioners & Local Officials:

- Promote your community story on a growing platform and increase community interest and awareness.
- Highlight the efforts of dedicated volunteers and organizations, showing appreciation for their contributions.
- Create institutional memory by documenting your community's process.

Academic Researchers:

- Translate your community-based research for an audience of practitioners to promote adoption of best practices and policy change.
- Help your students apply classroom theory to real-world case study creation for class assignments. For example, as part of a graduate level economic development policy course at UNC Chapel Hill's Department of City and Regional Planning, students research and write case studies, and can choose to submit them to Homegrown Tools. This tool offers an opportunity for students to publish their work, and to share their findings directly with community practitioners and local officials.

Promote your Involvement! Spread the word to your network about this resource and your involvement as a contributor. On **pages 17-20** of this packet, we offer social media graphics with potential captions, making it easy to share with your audience.

Contributing a New Case Study

If you know of a community that has successfully implemented an economic development strategy in your region or research, write a case study using the following guide. Once submitted the Homegrown Tools editorial review board will then review the submission for inclusion on the site.

This section includes a step-by-step guide for how to write a new case study with detailed examples from existing case studies. These instructions accompany the Case Study Template Word Document which can be accessed here: tinyurl.com/HomegrownToolsContributor.

To create and submit a new case study:

- 1) **Download the Case Study Template Word document at <https://tinyurl.com/HomegrownToolsContributor>**
- 2) **Review the Interview Guide below**
- 3) **Conduct Interviews with knowledgeable stakeholders in the community**
- 4) **Write the case study following steps 1-11, beginning on page 9**
- 5) **Submit to Carolyn_fryberger@unc.edu for review**
- 6) **Contact us with any questions along the way!**

The most valuable case studies are those that dig into the specifics of how a strategy was implemented, and why it worked or had the intended impact.

Case Study Interview Guide

This interview guide is particularly directed toward students who are writing a case study as part of a class. However, local officials and practitioners may find the questions useful to clarify or confirm case study details with local contacts such as town managers and planning directors.

Preparing for the Interview:

- Before reaching out to individual contacts for interviews, conduct a search for relevant local news articles related to the strategy and developments that may have happened. Review in detail to familiarize yourself with the concepts, strategies and events that you will discuss.
- Review the interview questions below and add additional questions relevant to the case and what you've learned from your research.
- Send the interview contact a link to Homegrown Tools with a brief description of the website. Make sure to introduce yourself!

Interview – Project Introduction:

At the beginning of your interview, introduce yourself and give the interviewee the following context:

- *Homegrown Tools tells stories of community-led economic development. The tool connects public officials, practitioners, and researchers to successful strategies and lessons learned, and inspires communities to leverage their unique assets. Homegrown Tools is managed by NCGrowth, an EDA University Center at UNC Chapel Hill, in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, the UNC School of Government, the NC Rural Center, and the UNC Department of City and Regional Planning.*
- *This interview is for a case study of your community's economic development strategy to add to the tool's growing database. We would like to add the story of your town to this website so that others can learn from the work of you and other community members, so they can be inspired to also work towards similar successes in their own communities. Thank you for taking the time to share your story!*

Sample Interview Questions:

1. What is your role in your community?
2. Can you give me a brief history of your community?

3. What is particularly unique about your community?
Probe: Assets your town has, such as being a retirement destination or having a strong cultural heritage.
4. What are the three most urgent economic challenges your community needs to address (e.g., population loss, empty storefronts)?
5. Tell me about your community's most successful economic development strategy, implemented within the last 5 years.
 - a. What specifically was done to implement the strategy, step by step?
 - b. Who were the community partners for the project?
 - c. How was the project funded?
6. Why is the strategy is working? Is there anything you would do differently if you could do it over again?
7. What are some outcomes that can be attributed to this strategy? (for example, new businesses, more visitors, increase in tax base, lower unemployment rates, improved resident satisfaction or engagement)
8. What advice would you give to practitioners around the country hoping to implement this strategy?
9. Are there other people in the community that are knowledgeable about this effort that I should talk to?
10. Collect and record contact information for key contacts responsible for implementing the town's economic development strategy.

For smaller towns, confirm demographic details, especially population size, with the interviewee.



Wadesboro, NC

Writing the Case Study

Below you will find a detailed guide with examples for creating your own case study. This is meant to accompany the Case Study Template Word document, available here: tinyurl.com/HomegrownToolsContributor. Follow the steps below to develop a case study which incorporates concrete details about the community's strategy in action.

OPENING:

- Town Name, State
- Author Name, Title and Organization
- Email Address & Phone Number
- Date Written

BODY OF THE CASE STUDY:

1.

Data Snapshot Table (Source: census data, most recent year available. Note data year for each statistic):

Include:

- Population
- Municipal budget (source: town website or stakeholder interview)
- Per capita income
- Median household income
- Poverty rate
- Minority population
- Proximity to urban center
- Proximity to interstate highway
- Strategic Approach
- Time frame of strategy implementation

Example: Columbia, NC:

	Columbia
Population (2000)	820
Municipal budget (2006)	\$1.2 million ²⁹
Per capita income (2000)	\$12,220
Median household income (2000)	\$20,590
Poverty rate (2000)	34%
Minority population (2000)	61%
Proximity to urban center	78 miles to Greenville, N.C.
Proximity to interstate highway	98 miles
Strategic approach	Tourism
Time frame	1991-2007

2.

Synopsis: 2-3 sentence teaser. Offer a glimpse of the implemented strategy.

- **Example: Oakland, MD:** *Oakland demonstrates that the arrival of Wal-Mart need not be a death knell for small, local businesses. Through the Main Street Program, Oakland works with existing business owners to prepare for the arrival of Wal-Mart.*
- **Example: Colquitt, GA:** *Colquitt uses the arts as a tool for community empowerment and economic diversification. The success of a community-based performing arts project has resulted in extensive downtown revitalization and economic development.*

3.

Overview/Introduction: 1-2 paragraphs. Provide a background on the town/community with an overview of the problem and what economic development strategies were implemented.

- **Example: Rugby, ND:** Rugby is a small town that has survived the economic transition by investing in its workforce. Historically, Rugby's economy was based on agriculture and retail trade. In [insert year here], the local labor force lacked business computer skills and training in newer technologies. Gary Satern, the local economic development director, came to recognize that this skill deficiency was limiting the ability of existing businesses to compete. The lack of tech-savvy workers also became a barrier for recruiting new competitive industries into Rugby. In response, Satern facilitated a partnership between the town and the Center for Technology and Business in Bismarck to develop a technology training program for the local labor force. As a result, one-third of Rugby's labor force has received training and new, technology-driven businesses have located in town.

4.

The Community and its History: 2-4 paragraphs detailing the community's background.

- **Example: Dillsboro, NC:** Dillsboro is a railroad town situated just on the edge of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in western North Carolina. In the 1880s, Southern Railway

constructed a railroad through Dillsboro, which led a cluster of general supply businesses to spring up along its path. The railroad also brought tourists to town, as people from across the region came to experience the cool summers and Smoky Mountain scenery. Over the years, Dillsboro and Jackson County have continued to build on their tourism assets by showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the area. Each year, Dillsboro hosts festivals and celebrations to highlight its craft heritage with blacksmiths, glassblowers, quilters and potters. Dillsboro's town clerk, Herb Nolan, estimates that the small town has nearly 90 businesses, most of which cater to tourists. Elsewhere in the county, institutions such as Western Carolina University and Southwestern Community College provide employment for many of the area's residents.

Like most rural counties, Jackson County has a small landfill. Located on the outskirts of Dillsboro, the Jackson County landfill and trash-transfer site was closed in 1996. Within a couple of years, however, county officials were notified that methane gas from the landfill was escaping into the atmosphere and that the site was in violation of federal environmental regulations. The typical response to this type of violation is to exhaust the gas by burning the methane as it leaves the landfill. "We wanted to find a more creative solution," said county manager Ken Westmoreland. "We had a problem, and either we could come into compliance by exhausting the gas or try to find ways to harness the gas to do something innovative."



Dillsboro, NC, Green Energy Park Project

5.

The Strategy: 3-5 paragraphs detailing the process behind the economic development strategy. Like the example below from Ayden, NC, be sure to use concrete examples and focus on actionable steps. If needed, review **the Interview Guide starting on page 6** for sample questions to ask the community (e.g., who funded the project, partners that were involved, specific steps taken, etc).

Example: Ayden, NC (excerpt):

The strategy: Ayden employed a strategy of **comprehensive downtown revitalization** based on the national Main Street model for commercial district revitalization. In March of 2006, Padgett and other local officials decided to apply to the North Carolina Main Street Program. In July of the same year, Ayden was selected for participation, which entitled the community to receive three years of technical assistance and guidance in the development of a comprehensive revitalization program. Ayden was also eligible for various forms of small business assistance and training for local leaders. Although supported by the Main Street Program, community leaders – not outside consultants – assumed the responsibility for doing the difficult work of planning and implementing a revitalization strategy to bring downtown Ayden into the 21st century.

To kick off their community's strategy, Padgett and the Ayden Town Board of Commissioners hosted a **three-day charette** in October of 2006. Ayden tapped into the expertise of architects and landscape architects from nearby Greenville to guide citizens, officials and business owners through a visioning exercise. At the end of the three days, residents and officials had a clear and consistent vision for the future of downtown Ayden, and a new energy swept through town. "Two business owners were so excited about the work we were doing that they went ahead and updated their facades the next month," Padgett said.

The next step was to channel the community's excitement about downtown Ayden into a series of **monthly meetings** and to begin the real work of revitalization. Business owners, residents and officials were organized into three groups: design, economic restructuring, and promotions. To get early results, the design group revamped Ayden's existing facade improvement grant program. Matching grants for facade

improvements were doubled, encouraging more extensive renovations. In addition, Ayden's planning department offered free design consultations for updating Main Street storefronts. Results of this work were almost immediate, as applications to the facade improvement program jumped within days.

In the meantime, the economic restructuring group commissioned a **market study** to explore and highlight specific economic sectors and business types that were likely to thrive in downtown Ayden. Town Manager Adam Mitchell said the study, released in March of 2007, indicated an enormous void in Ayden's retail market that forced residents to shop in surrounding towns. The study estimated that businesses in downtown Ayden, particularly restaurants, clothing and shoe stores, could capture nearly \$9 million in revenue that, at the time, was leaving town and being spent in neighboring communities.

Armed with convincing research, local officials in Ayden had an effective tool to quell fears about locating new businesses in the downtown. "We are using the study to show successful businesses in the surrounding four counties that there is a market for their business in Ayden," Padgett said. "It's not meant to attract them away from their current location but rather to inform them that if they are looking to expand, downtown Ayden is a good place to locate."

The final group, promotions, rolled out a new **marketing campaign** for Ayden in March of 2007. The campaign includes a logo and the brand "Downtown Ayden: Close to Home, Close to Your Heart." Currently, the promotions group is working to put streetlight banners with the logo and brand throughout downtown Ayden. The objectives of Ayden's downtown revitalization projects are to create a welcoming place for businesses to prosper and for local residents to shop and spend time.

6.

The Outcomes: Create a bullet point list of concrete outcomes (as many as applicable) from the strategy implementation. Remember that different projects have different metrics that can indicate success. These do not all have to be quantitative/measurable—see examples below.

Example: Hillsborough, NC:

Economic Development Planner Shannan Campbell attributes the following outcomes to Hillsborough's recent economic development efforts:

- 16 small businesses started, expanded, or relocated in FY2018
- Unemployment is at about 4.5%
- 4 new, now annual special events started
- The visitors center was rebranded in 2015 from the Hillsborough/Orange County Visitors Center to the Hillsborough Visitors Center. In FY2018, it received over 6,500 visitors from 48 states and 12 countries.
- A new VisitHillsboroughNC.com website was launched in 2016 and receives an average of 4,000+ new users per month with annual user growth of 26% since launch.
- From FY16 to FY17 Food and Beverage Tax revenues grew 9.29%, or \$28,905

Example: Davidson, NC (excerpts):

Outcomes that can be attributed to Davidson's economic development strategy include:

- Through Davidson's planning ordinance, the town is preserving open space, creating a walkable community, encouraging affordable housing development and facilitating development on its own terms.
- In 2001, with the adoption of the adequate public facilities ordinance, Davidson became the first community in North Carolina to enact an inclusionary zoning ordinance, which requires a given share of new construction be affordable to people with low to moderate incomes.
- In 2005, the North Mecklenburg Industrial Park welcomed Prairie Packaging Inc. (242 jobs and \$48 million investment over five years).

7.

How and Why the Strategy is Working: 3-5 highlighted takeaways with a paragraph of explanation.

Example: Helena-West Helena, AR (excerpt):

- **Opportunity arose from adversity.** Joe Black was pointed in his explanation of local conditions just prior to Delta Bridge. “In 2003, Helena hit the bottom,” he said. Economic and social conditions were so bad, and relations between the sister towns were so acidic, that something had to change. Delta Bridge effectively harnessed this energy, or momentum, for change and shifted the paradigm for development in a manner that had not been possible in the past.

Example: Hillsborough, NC (excerpt):

- **Foresight to see historic preservation as key to economic development.** Beginning as early as the 1950s when Mary Claire Engstrom documented the town’s history, Hillsborough’s leaders have had the vision to understand the link between preservation and economic development. Current town leaders inherited a well-preserved cultural and physical environment. They were able to capitalize on it to offer visitors a unique tourism experience and residents a great quality of life.

8.

Lessons Learned from the Story: 3-5 highlighted lessons learned with a paragraph of explanation. This can include an exploration of challenges met along the way or unexpected difficulties and how they were addressed.

Example: Helena-West Helena, AR (excerpt):

- **Look for opportunity in adversity.** People are more willing to change long-held behaviors and beliefs under conditions of hardship and adversity. Not only might new leaders come forward, but “worker bees” are typically more willing to participate in projects when they, or their friends and neighbors, are struggling. Hard times should be viewed as an

opportunity to mobilize a community by focusing on what can be done to turn things around, as opposed to what is wrong. “Delta Bridge led to the realization that people can control their own destiny and that a poor person’s fate is not predetermined,” one resident said. This shift in the perception of local residents would not have been likely without widespread adversity.

Example: Hillsborough, NC (excerpt):

- **Historic assets are economic development assets.** This case demonstrates that a long-term and proactive effort to preserve a community’s historic assets can pay major dividends in terms of growing a tourism economy and maintaining a unique quality of life for new and existing residents. Local officials in Hillsborough created a historic district and have been vigilant in maintaining the standards associated with that designation. Tourists are attracted to Hillsborough’s historic and cultural attractions and tourists spend money in local businesses, restaurants and hotels. A local tax on prepared food captures a portion of this spending and recycles it into additional promotion of historic Hillsborough.

9.

Contact Information: 2-5 people directly responsible for implementing the strategy.

- Name
- Title
- Organization
- Town, State
- Phone number
- Email

Example:

Jane Smith
Planning Director
Town Name, NC
(123) 456-7890
smithj@townname.

*Be sure to obtain approval from all contacts to have their information publicly shared.

10.

Images: 2-6 photos highlighting the place and strategy.



Black Mountain, NC:



Black Mountain Center for the Arts



Brevard, NC: Retiree Resource Network



11.

Formatting:

- **Citation style:** Chicago style footnotes
- **File name:** TownName_AuthorName_DateWritten

Social Engagement Templates

This section contains templates and sample content to share within your community or organization's social networks to spark awareness of Homegrown Tools.

Infographics and sample captions provided here are optimized for:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Print

Sample Social Media Images & Captions

INSTAGRAM



How to Access Images:

Visit this link to access a Dropbox folder with all graphics for Homegrown Tools outreach: <https://tinyurl.com/HomegrownToolsContributor>

Use the suggested captions on **page 19** or create your own.

FACEBOOK

44 Case Studies

7 Partners

18 States

18 Strategies

20+ Years of Perspective

TWITTER & LINKEDIN

7 Partners

44 Case Studies

18 Strategies

18 States

20+ Years of Perspective

SUGGESTED CAPTIONS

- Want to learn how your community can spur economic success? [Homegrown Tools](#) shares the stories of innovative communities with 44 case studies and counting! #HomegrownTools
- See how we're contributing to [this innovative tool](#) which shares stories of how towns have created an economically vibrant future. #HomegrownTools
- We're excited to announce our contribution to [Homegrown Tools](#), a web tool designed to connect communities with economic development strategies. #HomegrownTools

DETAILED INFOGRAPHIC FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS

