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Evaluation Model

The evaluation of the LACE project focuses on both process and outcome strategies. The overall evaluation focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency of the program's development and interventions, such as improvements to the LACE space and the presence of CVCAC staff on-site at the LACE location to provide services for entrepreneurs. The evaluation also examines strategies to recruit and retain vendors, quality of technical assistance provided, and client outcomes such as increased sales, earned income, and job creation. These outcomes are anticipated to result from connecting local producers and entrepreneurs to a viable market. The outcome evaluation provides an assessment of project results as measured by collected data that define the net effects of the interventions applied in the project. The outcome evaluation will produce and interpret findings related to whether the interventions produced desirable changes and their potential for being replicated, answering the question of whether or not the program worked. The process evaluation component is an ongoing examination of the implementation of the LACE investment and project, including collaboration among project partners. The results of the process component are intended to be a management tool to facilitate continuous project improvement. In documenting project development, the process evaluation also serves to help staff identify challenges or barriers, strategies to resolve them and pro

Supporting entrepreneurs

Vendors who sell products at the Market and Gallery and utilize the community kitchen are small and micro businesses (with five or fewer employees) or sole proprietorships that employ

CRS evaluation strategies are designed to answer the following research questions in efforts to evaluate

This evaluation utilized a mixed methods approach to capture data on project implementation and outcomes, based on the research models of Weiss (1998), Patton (2002), and related research (Cranwell & Kolodinsky, 2003a, 2003b; Schmidt & Kolodinsky, 2006; Schmidt, Kolodinsky, Flint & Whitney, 2006; Clark & Kays, 1995, 1999; Klein, Alisultanov & Blair, 2003). Specific areas examined include the LACE project implementation, dynamics of partner relationships, impact on vendors and customers, and ways LACE contributes to supporting larger community revitalization and economic development efforts in Barre. Mixed methods were employed to collect data including focus groups with project partners, interviews with key staff, an in-store customer intercept survey, a telephone survey and focus group with Gallery vendors, and community data collected from a statewide public opinion poll. Future evaluation activities that have not yet been completed are to follow-up with Kitchen vendors through interviews and/or focus groups, survey community business partners such as area businesses and the Barre Partnership, and interview store employees and volunteers through the work placement program.

Vendor Intake Data

Intake data was collected from Gallery and Kitchen vendors to generate baseline data including annual income earned and sources of income, receipt of public assistance including TANF (Vermont's Reach Up), Food Stamps, and housing assistance, and personal demographics including gender, age, race, ethnicity, and disability status.

Gallery Vendor Survey

Telephone surveys were conducted with Gallery vendors by trained interviewers from July to September 2009. Contact information for active and non-active vendors (n=71) was provided to the researchers with permission. Vendors were informed of the survey by in person and mail communications from the Gallery manager and business counselor. Verbal consent to participate was obtained either by the business counselor or the interviewer at the time of the call. Interviewers utilized Computer-Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) Ci3 software to conduct the 10 to 20 minute survey. Calls were made during daytime and evening hours from 10:00am to 9:00pm and up to 20 attempts, including scheduled call backs, were made to reach vendors. The survey instrument was developed in collaboration with the project staff using the models of similar research (Clark and Kays, 1995, 1999; Cranwell and Kolodinsky, 2003a, 2003b; Klein, et al., 2003) where self-reported vendor outcomes are collected at least four months post selling products in the Gallery. A total of 40 vendors completed the survey for a response rate of 56%. Additionally, five vendors participated in focus groups held in April and August 2009 to capture in-depth information on outcomes realized because of the Gallery and feedback to improve business counseling services received.

Staff Interviews and Focus Groups

Focus groups with CVCAC and LACE staff (n=8) and individual/small group staff interviews (n=1 to 3) distinguished by staff roles were conducted annually or every six months, in person or by telephone for one and two hours each (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002). Periodic electronic mail communication between staff and the researcher was also incorporated into this evaluation. These methods provided information and rich qualitative data that informed how the project is

being carried out, challenges encountered and overcome, lessons learned, and partner relationships.

In-Store Customer Intercept Survey

Community member data was captured through a customer intercept survey and an annual telephone poll of Vermonters. An intercept survey of Market, Café and Gallery customers was conducted in the store for five days over a one week period in August 2008 and again in September 2009. In 2008, the survey was conducted over a five day period from Tuesday through Thursday, Saturday and Sunday and, in 2009, the survey was conducted over six days

Statewide Opinion Poll

The Vermonter Poll is a statistically representative, statewide annual public opinion survey of Vermont residents who are 18 years of age and older, conducted by CRS to gauge Vermonters' opinions on current issues of interest to non-profit agencies, government officials, and researchers. Questions on Vermonters' awareness of and shopping patterns at LACE were asked on the 2009 Vermonter Poll. Responses are limited to randomly selected Vermont households with a telephone number listed in the state directory and do not include cell phones¹. The Poll was conducted between 4:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. over a ten day period in February 2009. The survey was conducted from the University of Vermont using computer-aided telephone interviewing (CATI). A total of 615 respondents completed the survey producing a margin of error of plus or minus four percent and a confidence interval of 95 percent.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 17.0. Bi-variate an

compounded this issue. Kitchen construction also placed strain on the Café's kitchen, which

role including overseeing operations, grant reporting, and developing education and outreach programs that focus on LACE's mission.

Challenges addressed

One challenge addressed by the Market and Café is limited funds to support staff positions and turnover of two longer term staff that left in the fall of 2009. Staff turnover increased the workload for Ariel and the Café Chef, Adam Woogmaster, until a full time cook, part time prep cook, and part time market, produce and counter assistant were hired in September 2009 to fill this void. Ariel noted that another ongoing challenge she faces, as owner of the private enterprise and director of the nonprofit, is managing different legal and financial requirements of the private-public partnership and how they coexist and support one another within federal and state guidelines.

The Gallery

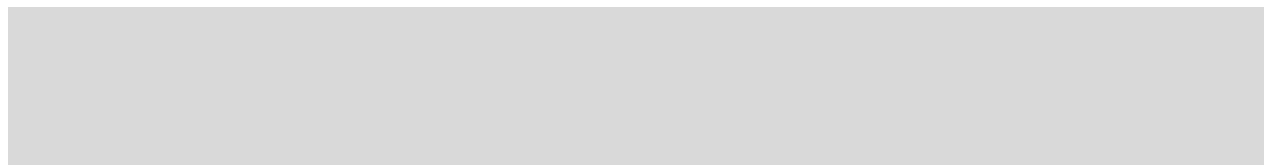
The Gallery space at LACE was constructed during the first fiscal year of the grant after the Market and Café portion of LACE was in operation. Customers now pass through an arched doorway to enter into the separate Gallery space filled with a variety of artisan products. Before the Gallery was finalized, artist and craft vendors placed products for sale in the Market space. These products have since been transferred to the Gallery space and vendors work directly with Kym Maynard, the Gallery vendor liaison and business counselor from MBDP. Kym works on site at LACE to provide business assistance to artist and crafters who sell products in the Gallery, manages Gallery policies and procedures, and supervises staff that oversees day to day operations. Initially Kym's position included working with contractors who remodeled the Gallery space and addressing security issues that led to theft of Gallery items, such as the store's back entrance and limited round the clock staffing to monitor the Gallery during evening hours. Both of these areas are no longer an issue. With the Gallery in operation for about a year and a half, Kym focuses on managing contracts with vendors, inventory control, product layout and aesthetic design of the space, and supervising and training Gallery volunteers/staff.

Improvements to Gallery operations

One of Kym's accomplishments in early 2008 was to overhaul inventory management, pricing and marketing of Gallery products. Kym and other MBDP business counselors established a standard set of policies and procedures for inventory management and sales of Gallery items. Vendors are members of the Gallery at LACE and pay a rental fee to place their products in a booth. Kym noted that payment of rent is affordable and flexible as vendors have until the 15th of

During the first year of Gallery operation, limited staffing was a challenge that Kym has worked hard to overcome by recruiting, training and retaining staff that are paid through social service programs in exchange for work experience and skill building. In 2009, Kym stated that she and

Public-Private Project Partnership



LACE and CVCAC have a synergistic partnership based on common goals of supporting local businesses, connecting consumers with high quality, local products, and addressing economic development and revitalization needs of downtown Barre. Staff benefit from the expertise and resources of each other, such as the business exp

this critical information because they have fiduciary responsibilities for the nonprofit and need to plan budgeting and fundraising goals to ensure operations are sustainable.

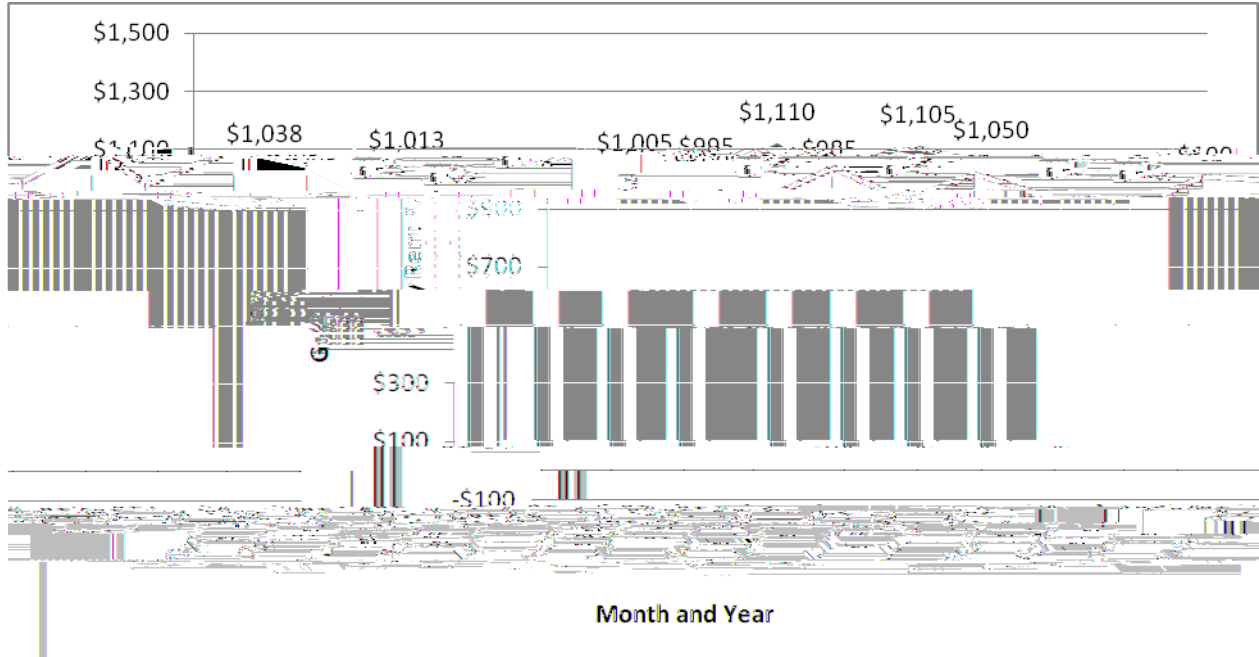


Figure 1 Rental income paid by Gallery vendors, 2008-2009

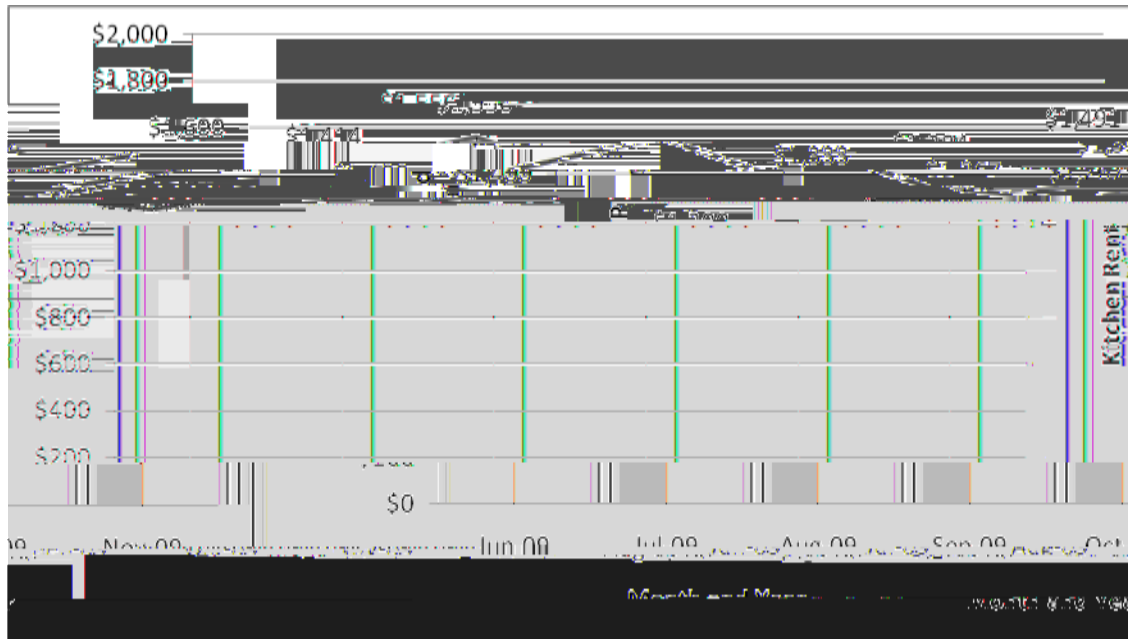


Figure 2 Rental income paid for use of community kitchen, 2009

Supporting Local Entrepreneurs

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Serving local entrepreneurs and self-proclaimed hobbyists, LACE features local produce and products for sale in the Farm Fresh Market and Cafe and the artisan Gallery. Food-based entrepreneurs and farmers use the commercially licensed community kitchen to develop and test recipes and prepare and store larger quantities of food for distribution to wholesale and retail markets, including the Market and Café.

With the opening of the Gallery, artisan vendors gained access to affordable rental space to collectively sell their products at a store front venue. From September 2008 through November 2009, Table 2 shows that the Gallery brought in steady monthly rent paid by vendors for space, which averaged \$985/month and totaled \$14,774 over this time period (see also Figure 1 on page 26). The number of vendors that paid rent each month ranged from 35 to 52, with an average of 44 vendors who paid monthly rent for Gallery space. Vendors pay approximately \$22 per month

Showcasing products at the Gallery has required vendors to think about the visual appeal of their product, which encourages a customer to buy it. The Gallery also provides a place for vendors to learn about the seasonality of sales without experiencing a financial loss that other business owners face who are not supported by a larger venue. Gallery entrepreneurs also feel tremendous support and encouragement from business counselors, have gained confidence in themselves and their work from Gallery membership, benefit from networking and sharing ideas with other Gallery vendors, and appreciate the opportunity to get their product out there, and have increased customer awareness of their product. Vendors also benefit from networking with other vendors; Gallery members have built a strong sense of community that is non-threatening and provides a place for people to get feedback on ideas and hear positive and constructive criticism from their peers about their ideas and products. Vendors also appreciate receiving regular updates from business counselors and net sales revenue checks in a consistent manner.



Community kitchen specific business services

Jeff Dutton and another MBDP business counselor, Don Padgett, work closely with each vendor. Don provides financial assistance by developing cash flow analysis and helping them to obtain micro-grants. LACE has a set fee schedule and CVCAC will pay 50% of the fees if the vendor meets income standards. Jeff helps clients to develop business ideas, strategies, and plans, as well as aiding in scaling up recipes and utilizing the shared space.

Services for food and farmer vendors supported by the Market and Café

In addition to supporting food and farmer businesses with the community kitchen and business counseling, Ariel Zevon notes that the Farm Fresh Market consistently works closely with and purchases products from farms ranging from small to large scale farms, providing farmers with an additional outlet for selling produce. Market staff facilitates wholesale purchasing by often picking up stock at the farm site rather than farmers having to deliver to LACE. The Market is also amenable to purchasing bulk orders when farmers have excess quantities of produce available and smaller quantities of an item from several farms to meet customer demand when an order cannot be filled solely by one farm. Ariel has also considered the idea of providing space for bulk clubs or community supported agriculture programs to use LACE as a storage, drop-off and pick-up site for product exchange.

Connecting Producers to Consumers

Another goal of LACE is to fill a vacant storefront with a much needed grocery store in downtown Barre. To begin to understand public perception of LACE, the researchers surveyed customers to gather their feedback on LACE and the impact it has on their community. Intercept surveys were conducted in August 2008 and September 2009 with customers at LACE over the course of five days in 2008 and six days in 2009 during different time frames to capture variation in customers.

Demographic Profile of Customer Respondents

The diverse demographic profile of customers who completed the intercept survey in 2008 and 2009 is consistent over time and suggests that LACE draws a variety of market segments to shop.

- Slightly more than half or 57% (74) of customers surveyed in 2009 are female (66% in 2008) and 43% (55) are male (34% in 2008).
- Respondents' ages ranged from 13 to 78 years old (minors completed the survey only with parent permission) with an average and median age of 45 years (range of 19 to 78 years in 2008), indicating that LACE has a draw for a variety of age groups.
- Two thirds of respondents or 63% are 65 or older (63% in 2008).

employees, friendly people, and sense of community. The aura of community spirit which LACE has aspired to cultivate is evidently tangible amongst customers, and contributes greatly to their overall satisfaction and dedication to the store.

Customer ratings support these findings as 82% in 2009 found LACE very helpful in providing a family friendly environment followed by 78% each that found the store very helpful in providing Barre residents with a place to hang out and a café (Table 5). These attributes help foster community social interactions and cohesiveness, specifically focused around food and family. Open responses show that customers like the large seating area with various sized tables, chairs and couches available for their use. The children’s play area that is located in between the seating area and the grocery section of the store is also an attraction for many customers, as consistently noted over both years. Though the concept is on target with customer needs and LACE’s mission, cleaning the children’s area was repeatedly mentioned as a suggestion to improve the overall store. One customer strongly advocated replacing the yellow rug, the dinginess of which tarnishes the otherwise pleasant, kid-friendly surroundings. LACE’s executive director and other staff specifically designed the layout of the store to provide a comfortable and family friendly environment for customers to buy food from the Café and dine in a relaxed and social environment. Given customer feedback, LACE is providing this intended environment for customers.

Table 5 Ratings of overall store atmosphere

	<i>Very helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat not helpful</i>	<i>Not at all helpful</i>
Providing family friendly environment				
Providing a place to hang out				
Providing Barre residents with a café				

Although contentment with the general ambience of LACE was widespread, a few customers did suggest that the layout of the store somehow be improved. The store has an over-extended feel with a design that is too spread out. When prompted for ideas to improve LACE, one customer remarked, It always seems dark and empty, over

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condition. As one customer earnestly commented, the general concept [of LACE] is excellent and worthy of support. In suppo

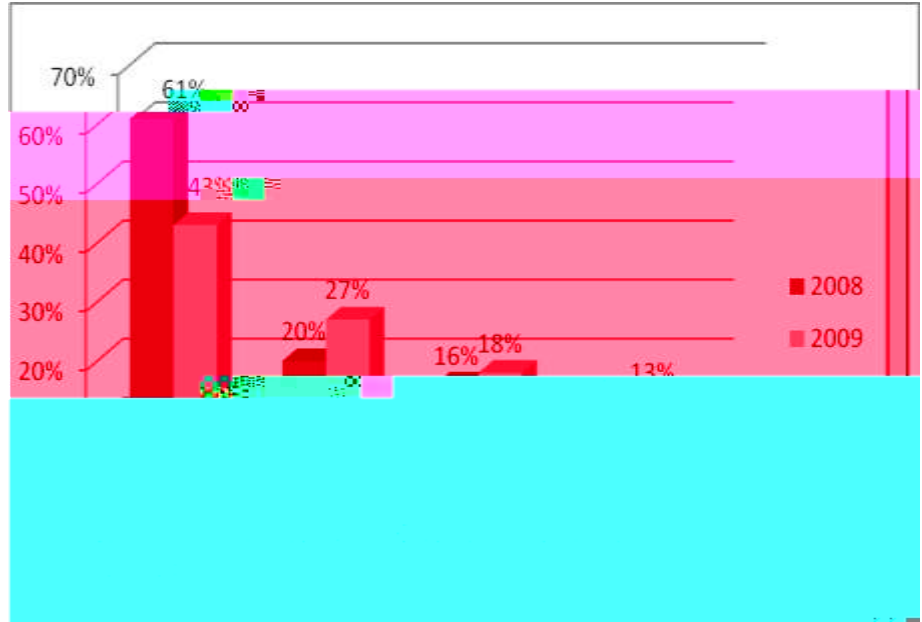


Figure 7 Most important quality when purchasing a food product

products; however the remaining majority rated LACE as somewhat helpful (52% in 2009; 48% in 2008) to somewhat not helpful (12%). Table 7 shows that customer ratings of price, sales, and coupons fall in all categories from poor to excellent, suggesting that these areas could be improved upon or added as customer shopping incentives.

Table 7 Ratings of product price, sales and coupons

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Coupons					
Sales or price specials					
Price of items					

Limited selection

Although LACE customers value purchasing local products, by limiting inventory to solely local products the market sacrifices the convenience of one-stop grocery shopping, which was noted as appealing to most customers. One customer noted, For a mother of multiple children, the necessity for convenience and lower prices of a large grocery store can supersede my desire to support local agriculture. Table 8 shows customer ratings of brand variety in the grocery section and product selection available in the Gallery. Compared to other ratings of quality measured on this survey, customers show mixed reviews of the availability of brands in the grocery store, with the majority rating selection as good (45%) followed by average (21%). The Gallery received more favorable ratings with half of respondents rating product selection as good and over a quarter rating selection as excellent.

Table 8 Ratings of product variety

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Several brands to choose					

Community outreach and events

Almost all survey respondents (99%) indicated that LACE is somewhat to very helpful in providing events for children, adults and families. Ariel, Kym and Crystal Zevon, with the assistance of other staff, have coordinated various events to welcome all people to the store. LACE hosts community dinners on Friday evenings as well as weekend brunches. One theme to a series of Friday dinners was *Foods from a Small World*, which featured different ethnic foods prepared by local chefs from backgrounds such as Asian, Indian, Latin, Caribbean and African. By featuring guest chefs, these dinners draw a diverse group of people to LACE, from friends and family members of the chef or simply community members who enjoy that type of cuisine. LACE also hosts Sunday brunches that feature live music from area musicians, to foster community interaction and fellowship through music. Ariel also has a vision of developing a food and film festival or series during these community meals.

Another event hosted by the Gallery during the 2008 winter season was the *Cabin Fever Flea Market*, which was held one Saturday a month to draw customers into the store during the winter months to support local vendors and have a social outlet. On Saturdays throughout December 2009, the Gallery hosts a holiday craft market that includes artist demonstrations and discussions, live music and Santa. The Gallery also sponsors the ongoing children and youth program, the *School of Rock*. Kym noted that many kids in Barre who do not have anything else to do will come and hang out at LACE. She coordinated a local musician to teach music

Table 10 Rating of LACE in helping community revitalization and economic development

	<i>Very helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat helpful</i>	<i>Somewhat not helpful</i>	<i>Not at all helpful</i>
A place for farmers to sell products				

participants experience and job skills in different types of food service. Ariel noted that two chefs who are currently employed at the Café kitchen were previously involved in this program.

While LACE has informally provided these employment training and skill building opportunities, LACE Business Manager Lorraine McBride says that there is no official program in place and managing volunteers takes a lot of paid staff time. Part of Lorraine's new role is to develop a more structured and organized job skills training program, which will more efficiently and effectively benefit participants and provide subsidized workers for LACE. Ariel aims to incorporate community youth into this volunteer program, such as partnering with the New Directions of Barre youth program to encourage young people to get involved in their local community and gain work skills and experience.

Challenges to Reaching Project Outcomes

The model of LACE as a business incubator space, test market outlet, and affordable rental space has huge potential to support local entrepreneurs and create new jobs in the community. However, vendors and project staff identify several obstacles to the full fruition of the private-public model. CVCAC staff perceives that the Market and Café should place more emphasis on improving marketing, advertising and business management practices to increase customer flow and revenue generation from this enterprise. By making this business sustainable and profitable, the Gallery and community kitchen can divert some of their revenue to sustaining their own operations.

The Local Agriculture Community Exchange (LACE) is a community revitalization project, through collaboration between LACE and CVCAC. The LACE project is funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Service for three years, from

These entrepreneurs, including food processors, caterers, and farmers, often use the commercially licensed kitchen and cold storage facility to test and refine recipes, process raw ingredients into value-added products, store large quantities of food, and eventually increase production for distribution and sale beyond the Market and Café.

The private-public partnership also helps offer vendors critical micro business development and support services through CVCAC's Micro Business Development Program (MBDP) (Clark & Kays, 1995, 1999; Lindenfeld, 1998, Edgcomb & Klein, 2005; Edgcomb, Klein & Clark, 1996). MBDP has on-site business counselors working out of the Gallery and kitchen space, who have expertise that match the needs of artisan and food-based vendors. MBDP also has off-site business counselors and a vast network of resource and referral services to provide vendors with more extensive assistance. Vendors are assisted in technical areas such as product development, display, recipe refinement, food safety, packaging, and pricing. MBDP also supports vendors to write a business plan, improve financial management skills and gain access to capital by applying for a business loan or grant seed money. Vendors garner support systems and social capital through networks of local business owners with similar characteristics and shared needs that are formed as the result of a participating in a shared-use and cooperatively rented space (Cranwell & Kolodinsky, 2003a, 2003b; Schmidt & Kolodinsky, 2006; Schmidt, Kolodinsky, Flint & Whitney, 2006).

Supporting the community

In addition to assisting area businesses, LACE supports community members through enhanced food security, social outlets, educational programs, and employment and job skills training (Laurison & Young, 2009; Unger & Wooten, 2006). Until LACE was established, many of central Vermont's poor, seniors, and disabled persons, who are concentrated in this community, had limited access to local, fresh, and nutritious foods. Many residents lack transportation and downtown Barre previously did not have a supermarket within walking distance. The Farm Fresh Market and Café provide a much needed grocery store in the heart of Barre City's downtown area to help improve community food security, health, and nutrition (Blakely & Bradshaw, 2002). Residents also benefit from the shared kitchen space where LACE hosts hands-on workshops, cooking demonstrations and educational programs that cover topics such as healthy eating and nutrition, and cooking with seasonal, fresh, and local ingredients.

Additionally, the storefront location includes a multi-purpose community space that is equipped with wireless internet service, comfortable seating for work, dining or socializing, and a children's play area. This space provides residents of all ages with opportunities to commune and connect with one another over lunch, community dinners, and events in a family friendly environment. LACE also utilizes this space to hosts free workshops, discussion groups, lectures

Increase the marketing and advertising of LACE and each department

LACE vendors pooled their creative and entrepreneurial talents and developed strategies for improving LACE and Gallery advertising.

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Laurison, H. and Young, N. (2009). *Oakland Food Retail Impact Study*. Development Report No.

