



REGIONAL PROSPERITIES PROJECT REPORT: YEAR 1 NORTHWEST AREA FOUNDATION



REGION FIVE
Development Commission

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www.regionfive.org



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Acknowledgements:

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Agreement Outcomes

Stated Outcomes in Executed Agreement:

- 1.** Train six (6) Welcoming Community Advocacy groups on the Intercultural Development Inventory assessment and Wealth Works models. This effort will draw in ninety (90) individuals representing youth, nonprofits, school board members, economic development organizations, private businesses, elected officials, and other community members. They will hone their individual advocacy and leadership skills to support a new way of advancing inclusive equitable economies. Half of the advocacy group's representatives will be community members that have not participated in leadership previously and will include individuals with low incomes and from diverse racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds.
- 2.** Generate eighteen (18) new policies or practices (three per advocacy group) for business growth and equitable workforce growth and retention. R5DC will report on the specific actions and individual impacts.
- 3.** The Rx CSA pilot will track the benefits and outcomes of participating clients, health practitioners, local farmers, and growers. R5DC will develop specific metrics for each one of these groups to help understand the system-level changes as well as related health and economic benefits.
- 4.** Create a rural equitable economic development toolkit to share R5DC's story and lessons learned. A minimum of six (6) stories related to culture and evolving regional identity will convey how communities can unify and meet the changing societal and economic conditions faced in rural areas. The stories will speak to how communities can embrace new equitable and inclusive business development approaches.

Mission: Through practice, build equitable economic ecosystems via system changes that exemplifies cultural bridging within three economic value chains and the 8 forms of wealth in our central MN rural region.



New Americans: In Long Prairie, University of MN grad student, Alyssa Scott, met with six ESL classes over six weeks. The students took pictures of the community and then spent time in class talking about where they feel welcome and where they don't feel welcome. These stories will help the Long Prairie WCAG better understand how their community looks and feels to new populations.



Train Advocacy Groups

1. Train six (6) Welcoming Community Advocacy groups on the Intercultural Development Inventory assessment and Wealth Works models.

Five WCAGs have been created at the time of this report. The sixth group is still being created but is set to begin in July 2020. Each of these groups has participated in the IDI assessment and is engaging in work around the Wealth Works model.

Community	County	Value Chain Focus	# of team members
Little Falls	Morrison	Solar Energy	7
Long Prairie	Todd	Placemaking	11
Pine River	Cass	Local Foods	11
Brainerd	Crow Wing	Placemaking	7
Staples	Wadena	Local Foods	11
Family Services	All	Solar Energy	*still being formed

185 individuals have completed the IDI, including all WCAG core team members and groups or organizations they are connected to. For example, Mary Sam is part of our Brainerd group and she also works at Central Lakes College (CLC). R5DC did IDI assessments with the 7 core team members and also the **18-member leadership team at CLC**, thus creating a ripple effect of shared terminology and basic understanding of intercultural competency.

At this time, a total of **236 community members** are engaged in the work of the WCAGs, of which, 82% are people who have not typically participated in economic development efforts, representing artists, growers, and youth as well as people from tribal, LGBTQIA+, low income and other racial or social minority groups. Further efforts around additional engagement opportunities are underway, particularly in Brainerd and Long Prairie, as these two communities have the most diverse population in our region.

72 networks are engaged to support policy change aligned with value chain strategies. The sectors included: higher education (administration and instructors), K-12 education (employees and school board), workforce development (regional and state), artists, an art council, social service organizations, military, nonprofits, telecommunications, health care, chambers of commerce, local units of government including elected officials and employees, economic development organizations, a library; small business owners, growers, the Brainerd Community Foundation, the Initiative Foundation, and local foods co-ops.

New Policies or Practices

2. Generate eighteen (18) new policies or practices (three per advocacy group) for business growth and equitable workforce growth and retention. Grantee will report on the specific actions and individual impacts.

WCAG's are still developing and finalizing project ideas that will be implemented within community. **13 new system change ideas** have been generated by the three of the six WCAGs that are at a point in the curriculum where they are ready to brainstorm ideas. Examples of project ideas the groups have been discussing are:

Rx Solar & Community Garden Combo with internships

- FFA students becoming teachers and solar ambassadors for the community garden
- Solar savings goes back to community organizations/social enterprise like Oasis or Habitat OR into a community fund for community led projects

Youth Business Competition

Community spaces like indoor/high tunnels & educational opportunities

- Educational connection with different generations

Welcoming program for newcomers- welcome bag, connect them to a current resident as a 'host', host gatherings for new and current residents to meet each other

Cross Cultural Exchanges: meals with community members from different cultural backgrounds, sharing stories and traditions, finding ways to connect

Harmony Park Project: This park attracts a diverse crowd for a variety of reasons; however, it isn't conducive to connecting with each other- what can be changed to encourage more cross-cultural connections?

Race Talks/ "It's Time to Talk" event – ½ day training and ½ action planning. Should this event be before EVERYONE or should it be tailored to Brainerd's dominate culture as a learning opportunity to bring about awareness for change. How will we get people to the table? Idea to asked marginalized populations to help create the discussion questions? This event could compliment the work DEED is doing around welcoming employers designation in that the employers and the community are each involved in this effort.

SHED Agcelerator Project

All of these project ideas contribute to business growth as well as equitable workforce growth and retention by working to lift up those who have not traditionally been a part of these conversations.

Partnerships and relationships matter.

As a result of the IDI assessments occurring in the region, MN Department of Agriculture's staff enquired about our IDI process. The team at Minnesota Department of Agriculture is seeking ways to improve their department's cultural competency to better serve MN residents. These shifts may have happened without R5DC's Welcoming Communities program but it was an honor to be considered as Diversity/Equity/Inclusion thought leaders in rural MN.



MDA Staff Receives Award at R5DC Annual Meeting December 2019

In 2019/2020, RREAL worked with Tri-County Community Action Agency in Little Falls to build a community solar array at their headquarters. All the savings from that solar array will go to serve more families with their energy bill. The beneficiaries of the program are low-income disabled veterans in the community who have Minnesota Power as their provider. This is a partnership with MN Power: 1) they are funding part of the array, and 2) they have agreed to give credit for the energy produced to lower the bills of the low-income disabled veterans. This is a systems change example because Tri-County Community Action has never done a program like this where they get the solar credits for the bills of the low-income people served. The array went online in 2019. It is a 22kW array and will serve 10 veterans. This is a pilot to test the feasibility of this project. There is some consideration about expanding the array in the future. Lessons learned and next steps will be incorporated into the Little Falls WCAG as they are focusing on the solar energy value chain and a member of TriCAP serves as a core member of the group.



RxCSA Program Outcomes

3. The Rx CSA pilot will track the benefits and outcomes of participating clients, health practitioners, local farmers, and growers. Grantee will develop specific metrics for each one of these groups to help understand the system-level changes as well as related health and economic benefits.

This program features:

- **22 participants** (instead of the required 20)
- **Cooking Demonstrations:** Sprout also worked with county attorney and probation staff to recruit an additional 7 participants who are in opioid or other recovery programs. Sprout partnered with a regional executive chef, Matt Annand, who is also the Board President of The Sharing Bread Soup Kitchen. These participants share a meal, receive their CSA share, and spend educational time after helping to clean the facility with Mr. Annand. To date, they have received basic kitchen safety, cooking with children, and basic knife skills
- Food comes from a network of over **100 local growers and farmers**

Comments from RxCSA Participants:

“I have to make choices to feed my cat or feed myself.”

“I don’t eat cold cereal, milk is too expensive.”

Executive Chef Matt Annand Gives Food Demonstration

Rural Toolkit

4. Create a rural equitable economic development toolkit to share Grantee's story and lessons learned. A minimum of six (6) stories related to culture and evolving regional identity will convey how communities can unify and meet the changing societal and economic conditions faced in rural areas. The stories will speak to how communities can embrace new equitable and inclusive business development approaches.

Toolkit and Stories

Growth & Justice has been helping to create a community toolkit/action guide. While the tool kit won't be ready until later this summer, we have developed a framework around who the toolkit is for, the goals and purpose of the toolkit and general layout so that it is user friendly. Here are some of the guiding principles around the toolkit:

- The understated goal of the guide is to learn how to share power and to understand and use the power of equity as a frame and driver for regional competitiveness and shared prosperity.
- Working on this difficult journey with a PROJECT orientation gives people an achievable win. They can more clearly see a goal and reach it together.
- The PROCESS of embracing change is harder. Process is necessary in setting up a project with shared goals and strategies. It's building relationships and trust to be able to delve into the more vulnerable parts of existing culture/people/community ways of being that may be holding a community back from next steps in economic growth. It's scarier and maybe too in-your-face. Process supports action alongside a project plan as the project is implemented
- Process has steps, and the steps may vary depending on what the starting point/readiness level is for a community. Hence the need for some inventory/assessment of where community may be in terms of its evolution towards acceptance of difference, of embracing change (equity assessment) and where individuals are within themselves (leadership development) in terms of their intercultural competence (IDI tool)
- The guide uses other known examples and picks apart their components to learn how they might be applied in other communities.

Ensearch, along with Growth & Justice has written three reports, one for each of the value chains within this project, sharing stories from around our region that have contributed to business growth as well as equitable workforce growth and retention. Those reports can be found at www.regionfive.org/resources

Outreach & Storytelling

Women's Press Feature

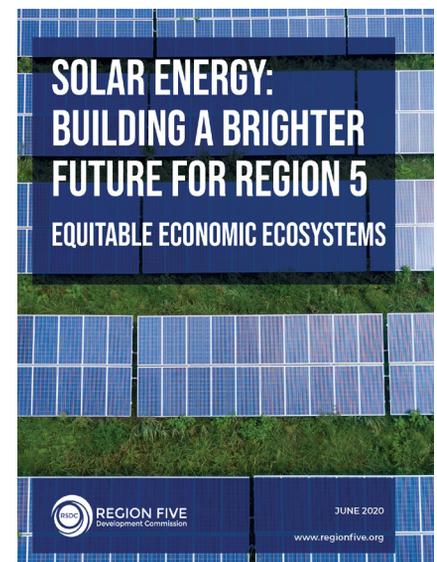
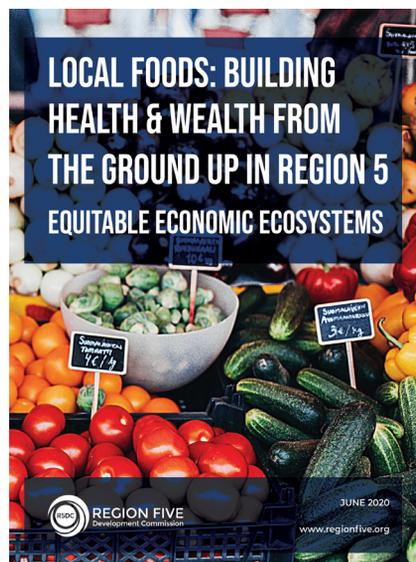
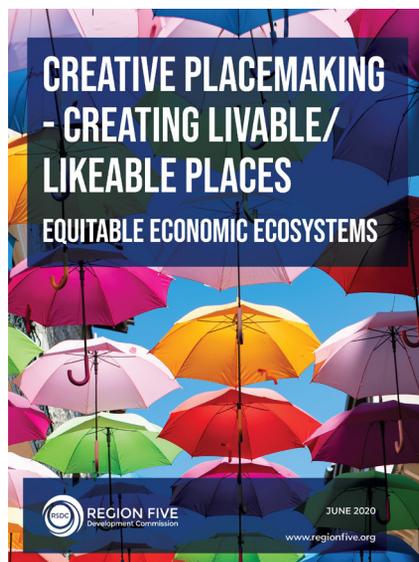
GROWTH: Welcoming Strategy in Central Minnesota
<https://www.womenspress.com/blueprint-solutions/>

Annual International Conference of the Community Development Society

Acceptance to present on WealthWorks and tying in the stories and process for Welcoming Communities, Equitable Economic Ecosystems, and Regional Prosperities projects for national/international audience. This was scheduled for July 2020 in Fargo, ND but was postponed due to COVID-19.

Equitable Economic Ecosystems Value Chain Reports

visit www.regionfive.org/welcoming-communities to learn more about the Equitable Economic Ecosystems value chains that are being developed and fostered in the R5DC service area of Central Minnesota. From breweries, to mobile food markets, to solar projects - intentional efforts to involve community and create welcoming spaces are thriving!



Take Five Newsletter

R5DC's Quarterly Newsletter where we share about the programs and successes from our community development and economic development efforts, focusing on regional prosperity.
www.regionfive.org/take5

Deep Dive Podcast

Region Five Development Commission staff interview partners, program participants and funders, along with Region Five Development Commission Commissioners to share details about our work in the region.
www.regionfive.org/podcast

R5DC Welcoming Communities Quarterly

This quarterly newsletter features tools, resources, articles and more for all participants of the Welcoming Communities Advocacy Groups and IDI participants.



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