



Grant #: ED20CHI3070051
Grant Type: CARES Act Planning Grant
Grant Amount:
\$400,000 /\$200,000 per year
Grant Period:
July 1st, 2020-June 30th, 2022
Reporting Period:
October 1st-March 31st, 2021
Prepared and submitted by:
Erica Bjelland, R5DC Regional Planner

Performance Progress Report

October 1st, 2020 – March 31st, 2021

This semi-annual progress report summarizes the scope of work activities undertaken by Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) for the period of October 1st, 2020 to March 31st, 2021. These activities are made possible by an Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant through the CARES Act Planning Grant. Progress Milestones as they relate to the R5DC Scope of Work

A. Improving Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

- **Pandemic toolkit**
 - R5DC has continued to update our resource toolkit section on our website with important local, state, and national links for COVID economic relief and healthcare knowledge <https://www.regionfive.org/covid>
 - Our monthly newsletter continues to include a COVID section highlighting COVID response related programs and information
- **Pandemic in municipal plans**
 - The municipal plan being created in Hackensack, MN will include a COVID section in the final plan to be completed in summer 2021. A survey with COVID questions will be sent out to the Hackensack community in October to inform the plan.
 - Going forward, a pandemic section will be included in all comprehensive municipal plans done by Region Five.
- **New CEDs Strategies**
 - CEDs outreach has begun and includes integration of COVID relief response related questions in the regional survey.
 - More posters, table tents, and handouts have been dispersed throughout our 5-county area to try to reach more people
 - R5DC will host focus groups from varying sectors to answer questions via Zoom

B. Facilitating Energy & Environment Plans

A grant that was secured from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) in 2020 has made progress with two pilot communities, Hackensack and Staples, on Energy and Environment (EE) plans. The plans are meant to develop a 5-year plan for Energy and Environment-related action steps and resource suggestions to complete projects. Hackensack and Staples are both set to approve the plans and begin their projects in the next few months. Because of the success of the two pilot cities, a grant from a private family foundation for \$50,000 was received to continue the work and a grant to the USDA Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) was submitted. If all funding is received, R5DC will work with 8 communities over the next two years.

City of Hackensack

- This Environment and Energy Plan is being integrated into the city's comprehensive plan process set to be complete Summer 2021. Through this process and community surveys, the team put together action steps and goals for the city. The first review of the plan will occur in May 2021.
- The EE action steps specific to 2021 will be approved in the next few months. The projects chosen for this year are related to planting trees to help reduce runoff into a lake in town and switching all of the city's lights to LEDs.
- Once the plan is approved, the community will receive \$10,000 to begin the implementation of its energy and environment goals (this funding is from the MPCA dollars)

City of Staples

- This Environment and Energy Plan is a stand-alone plan that will be review by the city council in June 2021. The plan developed goals based on the city's comprehensive plan, hazard mitigation plan, local data, a community survey, and the local planning team.
- The EE action steps identified centered around hazardous waste knowledge and location in the city.
- Once the plan is approved, the community will receive \$10,000 to begin the implementation of its energy and environment goals (this funding is from the MPCA dollars)

C. Diversification of Business Opportunities

- Research continues into a regional business accelerator in the area. R5DC is exploring opportunities for building and programming support.

D. Securing Investments

Broadband:

- R5DC convened 3 broadband planning meetings 6 adjacent local municipalities (townships and cities).
- R5DC wrote a grant to the Blandin Foundation to bring on one of their expert broadband consultants to assist with broadband expansion. The grant was awarded and Mr. Bill Coleman will be offering technical assistance to the region over the next year.
- R5DC worked with telecommunications companies to offer household and business SPEED TESTS...to offer accuracy information intended to be used as information that contrasts statements from Tier 1 telecommunications companies (such as Charter, Spectrum, Integra) that have failed to serve the rural last mile.
- Meetings with multiple cities and townships on bonding for expanding local access to broadband, Cheryal Hills inquired with EDA, Darrin Fleener in early October 2020 regarding the possibility of a EDA application to fund a RLF that low income communities could borrow from to increase access to broadband. While we both thought this approach may not be a competitive application, Darrin wanted to check with CRO staff Catherine Canavan and get back to me. – **WE were not contacted regarding these questions. Likely learn more through the American Recovery Plan investments.**

Transportation:

- R5DC's Transportation Advisory Council (TAC) recommended approval of programming a list of prioritized highway reconstruction projects in February 2021. The list of projects was approved by the R5DC in March 2021 and represents a total investment of \$4,603,484. Of

the total investment, \$3,395,600 are Federal, and \$1,207,884 are local matching funds. The three projects that were selected to be programmed with these funds include:

- Morrison County Route 256
- Crow Wing County, County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 12
- City of Little Falls, Route 106

Each of these projects are reconstruction projects. The funding identified above has been programmed, and construction is set for 2025.

Access to capital:

- Region Five Development Commission continues to administer an EDA CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant to capitalize and administer Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs) that provide critical gap financing to small businesses and entrepreneurs adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic in Crow Wing, Cass, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties.
- Other Lending programs are offered for septic system loans, household well water loans, small micro loans, and larger gap funding business loans.

E. Delivering Public Education and Training

- Healthy Homes, local foods, and loan access resources shared on R5DC website and Facebook page.
- Information from state entities and resources about where vaccines are available locally was shared in our newsletter.

F. Diversifying Business Technical Assistance

Six communities continue work and educational opportunities through Welcoming Community Advocacy Groups (WCAGs). The WCAG groups are focused on welcoming more community members in their towns through local foods, renewable energy, and placemaking value chains. The groups are starting to implement their projects to make their communities more welcoming.

- **Local Foods**
 - Serve as fiscal hosts for small grants awarded to our local food co-ops and community groups.
 - Continued coaching and coordination of three regional value chains focusing on local foods, energy, and creative economies.
 - Continued partnership with two local nonprofits focused on food, Sprout and Happy Dancing Turtle, called the RxCSA. This program provides 20 participants who have self identified as dealing with mental health with twice monthly Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) shares along with cooking and nutrition education. Through this model, both local farmers and local people benefit from this approach. This program is currently funded through dollars from a private foundation.
- **Outreach for People without Broadband**
 - Local newsletter piece and posters created for comprehensive plan survey and updates
 - Translated poster about loan programs shared in Spanish-speaking communities.
 - Shared pandemic resources and programs on local Lakeland Public Television
- **Outreach for People with Broadband**
 - Monthly R5DC Take Five Newsletter highlighting resources about local foods, pandemic resources, and grant/loan opportunities
 - Social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube). Posted trainings, opportunities, work from home tips, and program resources on social media outlets and on YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/RegionFiveCommission/>
 - Started Region Five podcast 'Deep Dive with Region Five' to share about R5DC programs <https://www.regionfive.org/podcast>