

R5DC & NCEDA Strategic Plan



2021 - 2026



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	Introduction
5	Background Rooted in Community
6	Mission & Vision
7	Strategic Directions, Objectives & Performance Measures
7	Ensuring Organizational Integrity
8	Empower Communities to Support Quality of Life for All
9	Cultivate Regional Prosperity & Sustainability
A	Appendix A: https://bit.ly/3gbVKfh
B	Appendix B-J: https://bit.ly/3xcGLXX

PREPARED BY SWEET GRASS CONSULTING, LLC • MAY 2021



INTRODUCTION

Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) is a high-performing, regionally-focused partner providing community development, economic development and transportation initiatives in central Minnesota. Our five-county region includes Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties. Our programs are strategic and resilient in nature, and contain an inclusive and collaborative approach, with an emphasis on community and economic development. We are committed to helping the region respond to challenges by implementing strategies that expand the focus within regional and local communities. R5DC harnesses the power of regional collaboration to collectively raise the economic prospects of our region.

North Central Economic Development Association (NCEDA), our non-profit lending arm, facilitates five lending programs for businesses and two homeowner lending programs, for well-water and septic systems. By providing financial assistance in the region, NCEDA provides entrepreneurship opportunities for small-business persons, increases manufacturing activity, supports innovative products and processes, and provides customized high-touch borrower technical assistance.

Looking back at the past five years, we took time for genuine reflection of how far our organization has come and our experiences of catalyzing growth, facing challenges, and realizing achievements in the years of our 2016-2021 plan. Throughout the past five years we continually used that plan as a guiding document and made updates as needed to reflect new projects and capacities. Some of our most proud accomplishments included successfully leading

planning and implementation across our region in a variety of contexts – transportation, energy and environmental, placemaking, and more. We served and supported communities and populations who have been historically underserved, not only through our Welcoming Communities initiative but also through our veterans programming and finding creative ways for our region's most rural residents to share their stories. The growth of the Sprout Marketplace in Little Falls has impacted healthy and affordable food access as well as provides local growers, makers, artist, and small businesses an opportunity to grow their networks and income. The demand for our loans grew, and with that came expanding our capacity to increase our portfolio, streamline the loan process, and grow our technical assistance services. We rebranded, established a podcast, and developed a communications plan to help guide our efforts in storytelling. We grew as a team and worked diligently to continue our work in effective, useful, and creative ways.

Looking to the future, we created new strategic directions and goals that not only align with maintaining our position as a leader in the region, but also those that will foster the greatest impacts by responding to the changing hopes and dreams of our region. Throughout this strategic planning process, we maintained our approach of uplifting the voices of our region by allowing people, communities, and organizations to have an equal role informing our strategic plan. Offering space for the people we serve to share their stories not only contributed to our strategic planning processes, but it provided an opportunity to enhance our ability to continue meeting the needs of our region as well.



The Approach

We recognize that our strategic plan would not be successful and impactful if it were not first and foremost guided by those who benefit from and/or are impacted by (directly and indirectly) our economic development and community development programming. Thus, this plan began by collecting sincere input from community members and stakeholders through a community survey, key stakeholder interviews, staff interviews, and several community focus groups.

We worked with Sweet Grass Consulting, LLC as our external strategic planning partner to collect impartial information from our partners and community members. Sweet Grass interviewed 24 key opinion leaders from our region, performed interviews with all of R5DC/NCEDA staff, and conducted 3 focus groups with the R5DC commission, Economic Development Pros, and NCEDA Full Corporation. Another consultant conducted a focus group with transportation partners and this data was also included in our strategic planning. Finally, as we conducted a region-wide community survey for developing our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Sweet Grass utilized a smaller sample of that data to understand the wider community feedback. All of this data collection led to gaining perspectives and ideas related to where our organization could continue, enhance, or even develop new projects and programs to address the needs and strengths of the communities we serve.

Then, as staff, we participated in a direct strategic planning session where we first reviewed and responded to the data and stories collected. We applied this data as it relates to where our efforts, approach, and programs could continue and improve towards ways that address regional hopes, concerns, assets, and fears. As a team we built consensus around the strategic directions identified in this plan, as well as the objectives that we will take to get there and the measures we will use to assess the impact and success of those efforts. The work done was then reviewed by the R5DC Commissioners to ensure the goals and objectives presented within reflect the needs and hopes of the region.

Conversations around what our work truly means in the context of equity supported a deeper shared understanding about the equitable work we are already doing and allowed us an opportunity to articulate differing viewpoints so that we can continue to intentionally grow internally in ways that will extend into the work we do externally.

The Foundation

From discovery and visioning stages, to collecting community and stakeholder input, to the planning sessions with our dedicated team, to review and buy-in from commissioners – we leaned on our organizational values and trusted frameworks to guide the strategic planning efforts.

Our Values

Dynamic Capabilities

We act as a dynamic, forward-thinking organization, constantly working in a state of change. When appropriate, we stimulate activities, change or progress. We carry a positive energy and attitude and work efficiently to solve problems. We demonstrate competency and proficiency in community and economic development practices. This enables us to meet the evolving needs of our communities.

Collaboration

We value authentic partnerships, innovation and teamwork. We establish alliances with organizations that align with our mission. We work in cooperation as a team and with diverse groups to promote and manage projects and programs. We share in our dedication and commitment to each other and strive to support one another in reaching our full potential, both professionally and personally.

Growth

We focus on building economic prosperity and success in our region and strive to establish equitable economic ecosystems. We promote, encourage and provide opportunities for development, leadership and mentoring. We promote continuous learning in our organization and invest in opportunities to enhance our growth through knowledge and practice.

Integrity

We are accountable to the public, our funding agencies and to each other for the quality of our work, promoting development of the region and being fiscally responsible. We expect professionalism to be demonstrated in our behavior and our conduct. We value timely, open and honest communication.

Intention

The work of our team and the inclusive nature of our programs are planned, purposeful, and deliberate. We value and respect the diversity of our region, all of its people, our partners and our organization. We understand uniqueness and recognize differing viewpoints, and we respond in a balanced, flexible and open-minded way.

Measuring Success According to Our Values

Our organization leads the region in community and economic development efforts. To be a catalyst for change, we needed to implement a framework that aligned with our values and our commitment to the people we serve. Our approach to rural wealth creation is rooted in making lasting change on a holistic level. The WealthWorks framework acts as our guide to creating lasting impacts and evaluating those efforts in eight forms of capital: Built, Financial, Individual, Intellectual, Natural, Political, Social, and Cultural.¹ Some may consider this an ‘alternative’ approach to fostering economic development, but our hopes is that this framework becomes the standard.

BACKGROUND ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

Our region is changing. Depending on which contexts you view these changes, you can reveal peoples’ hopes, dreams, and opportunities for growth and you can also uncover peoples’ concerns, fears, and potential threats in the region. With a regional population of 164,697, these are just some of the key changes occurring: We have an aging population (median age of 45), farming has become a less prevalent industry, folks are moving to our region from suburban/urban areas while younger families are moving away for school and work opportunities, and we see more immigrants from all over are coming to our region. Although our region is predominantly white (92.5%), our second highest population is

American Indians (2.7%), with the remaining being Black, Asian, Hispanic or Latina/o/x, or other mixed races. Our values guide our work around diversity and inclusion through our built relationships and trust in our region. We are hopeful that there are many continued opportunities to share and find common ground through listening, learning from each other, and reflecting within.

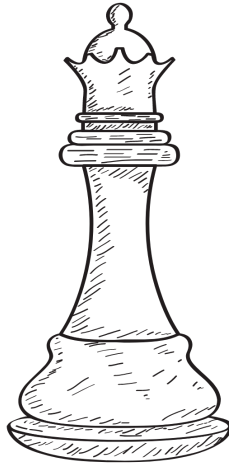
There are pockets of poverty, with 11.6% of our region currently living in poverty. Internally through the efforts of NCEDA, and in gratitude for other entities in our region doing similar work, community members are gaining opportunity towards financial wellness through development services and through access to capital. Our region faces rural challenges, including the lack of broadband access, food deserts, and transportation needs. Our organization has an opportunity to deepen our work and outreach into our region’s most rural and underserved communities. Our hope is that by maintaining our work and partnerships in these spaces and continuing to adapt these efforts to meet the need, we will create systemic change. Despite the unforeseen pandemic challenges, it helped our organization, and many others adapt quickly, realizing our resilient spirit, and it supported our ability to truly plan for the future in ways we never have before.

The individuals who make up our team at R5DC and NCEDA have a diverse set of strengths and passions that are drawn upon and uplifted to do our best work. Leaning on our supportive and gifted partners, we work together to collaborate – not compete – in order to best serve our region at large.



¹ To read more about the WealthWorks framework, visit <https://www.regionfive.org/wealthworks>

MISSION & VISION



As part of strategic planning, we revisited the mission and vision statements for both R5DC and NCEDA. After reviewing these together, we worked as a team to update and enhance these statements to ensure they truly capture why we do our work and embody our dream for impacting our region.

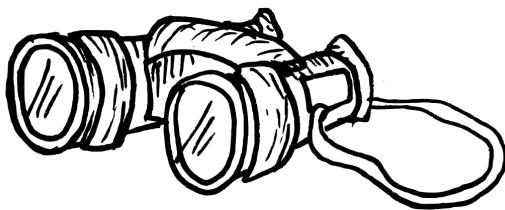
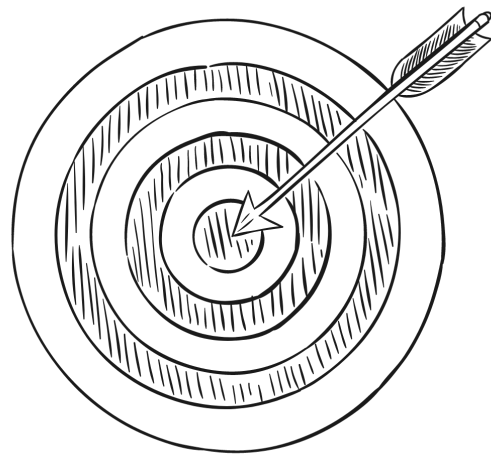
R5DC

Mission

To enhance vitality and quality of life for all people in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties by bridging resources and relationships.

Vision

To contribute, through planning and implementation of projects and programs, to a sustainable and prosperous regional economy, environment, and quality of life for all.



NCEDA

Mission

To provide assistance to cultivate new skills and resources that unite our communities and contribute to a prosperous economy.

Vision

Our communities, local businesses, and economy are sustainable and prosperous.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS, OBJECTIVES, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Ensuring Organizational Integrity

We will continue to be relevant and responsive to critical regional needs and issues through our innovative partnerships and ensure there is no duplication of efforts. Keeping our ears and hearts to the ground, we will bring together inclusive community input so that we can foster ideation and create future solutions that truly prioritize our people. Developing professionally as individuals and as a team, we will continue to grow our expertise and relationships.

Objectives

- a. Commission Administration
 - i. Continue to refine administration of commission to ensure effectiveness (this includes ensuring commissioners are able to communicate R5DC and NCEDA's strategic directions, objectives, and goals)
 - ii. Further define the role of the commission, including the potential mediation between region community members and R5DC and NCEDA.
 - iii. Continue to receive intentional feedback from commission to ensure meetings and roles are beneficial and supportive
 - iv. Continue to support local and specific meetings (such as Transportation Advisory Council (TAC), Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC), Human Resources)
- b. Grow Internal Professional Development
 - i. Attend useful events, conferences, and convenings to grow our networks and internal capacity, skill, and knowledge networks
 - ii. Attend useful trainings to grow our internal capacity, skill, and knowledge
 - iii. Utilize internal strengths and passions when starting new projects
- c. Continue to be Fiscally Sound
 - i. Continue to perform audits internally
 - ii. Produce our annual report
 - iii. Grow our net assets and annual surplus
 - iv. Continue to meet our needs in a sustainable way
 - v. Ensure NCEDA is fully self-sustained
 - vi. Carefully manage the growth of the NCEDA loan portfolio
- d. Communications & Branding
 - i. Maintain a quarterly newsletter
 - ii. Establish a soundproof podcast studio
 - iii. Continue to implement and refine creative ways to tell our story and communicate to the region at large
 - iv. Continue to implement the communications plan and adhere to the branding strategy
- e. Convenings, Partnerships, and Relationships
 - i. Produce and ensure all activities are in line with our regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
 - ii. Exceed expectations of all partners
 - iii. Continue to achieve positive and informative performance evaluations
 - iv. Creatively "outsource" as to not duplicate efforts and utilize our partners strengths to achieve projects
 - v. Participate as leaders throughout the region by participating on boards, commissions, groups, and at conferences and gatherings

Performance Measures

- The number and quality of reports submitted on time
- Commission self-evaluations used to measure stewardship
- Dollars used on professional development
- What was learned during professional development effort/event/etc. and how many events we attend
- Dollars in reserves
- Annual and clean audits and informative annual report
- Internal staff evaluations
- Number of hits and views on website and newsletters
- Number of new networks established and how many events were attended

Empower Communities to Support Quality of Life for All

We will continue to work towards empowering communities through equitable decision making, building authentic relationships and community connections, embracing different perspectives, and improving accessibility and inclusive participation that leads to a greater sense of belonging across the region. Through our internal approaches, communication, and policies and practices, we will advocate for and support intentional dialogue and community-driven projects that uplift all people and communities in our region, particularly those who have been historically underserved or disadvantaged.

Objectives

1. Increase Equitable Outreach
 - a. Recognize the underserved populations and identify who have not been included
 - b. Meet people where they are at (physically, socially, etc.)
 - c. Enhance outreach methods to intentionally include places and communities that have been left out
 - d. Genuinely include all voices and balance those voices that can be harmful
 - e. Host conversations after we share stories
 - f. Continue to offer trainings and listening sessions throughout the region so that communities and residents can come together
2. Improve Accessibility
 - a. Build Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant website
 - b. Develop other ADA resources and outreach materials
 - c. Ensure that training and developmental resources are created with differing levels of knowledge/perspective/languages in mind
 - d. Ensure the spaces we utilize are accessible
 - e. Develop physical space and resources specifically for equitable economic growth for local businesses
3. Enhance Policies and Practices
 - a. Practice intentional lending practices
 - b. Hire and partner with people with diverse lived experiences
 - c. Assess the composition of the R5DC commission and NCEDA full corporation – identify gaps in representation
 - d. Think more about how we spend our money. Ask ourselves if we can do a better job at using our resources for populations we typically don't work with
 - e. Keep asking ourselves who is at the table and who benefits from our work – identify gaps in representation
 - f. Enhance efforts to bridge communities within the region
 - g. Ensure the commission is well-versed in what this direction entails and how it will be achieved
 - h. Create a clear, measurable workplan to measure efforts made in this direction

Performance Measures

- How culture has shifted in region through storytelling
- Collect stories of impact from partners and communities
- The degree to which relationships and connections are authentic
- The number of people reached through our programs and services both directly and indirectly
- The dollars spent in lending, granting, and investments to local, small, and minority-led organizations and communities
- The time and non-monetary resources provided through our programs and services to local, small, and minority-led organizations and communities

Cultivate Regional Prosperity and Sustainability

Driven by local and collaborative resources, we strive towards economic stewardship that is driven by local decision-making. Weaving resiliency into these efforts, we will have impacts on long-lasting and thriving systems of sustainability and prosperity that enhance the quality of life in our region. NCEDA will provide the access to capital, technical assistance, and connections needed for small businesses to thrive.

Objectives

- a. Enhance Community Development Efforts
 - i. Continue effective regional planning services (Prioritized Implementation Planning, Comprehensive Plans, Energy & Environment Plans, CREDS/CEDS)
 - ii. Dig deeper into arts and placemaking work
 - iii. Weave resiliency into plans and projects (e.g. Health, safety, pandemic responses, environmental efforts)
 - iv. Develop proactive measures for new/upcoming/potential funding/staff coverage
 - v. Address and support place-based planning needs
 - vi. Increase developmental services at NCEDA
 - vii. Ensure fiscal responsibility (both internally and support externally for partners/ clients)
 - viii. Continue to draw upon the strengths, talents, and wisdom of local community leaders to support and inform projects within those communities
- b. Improve Upon Economic Development Endeavors
 - i. Continue lending practices that support local business growth
 - ii. Develop on-demand technical assistance/training (videos)
 - iii. Refine loan portfolio management
 - iv. Prepare for larger funding pools/projects
 - v. Create practices and plans to manage our continually expanding loan portfolio
 - vi. Enhance and grow partnerships with other banks/gap lenders to better serve the region
- c. Contribute to an entrepreneurial ecosystem through projects that attract workforce, families, and entrepreneurs Continue and Strengthen Transportation Partners and Projects
 - i. Deepen partnerships (e.g. TAC, RTCC, Area Transportation Partnership (ATP), MN Department of Transportation (MNDOT))
 - ii. Develop Integrated Transportation System/Transportation Management Coordination Center (ITS/TMCC) within RTCC
 - iii. Enhance our integrated approach
 - iv. Cultivate broadband in partnership with local units of government

Performance Measures

- How well we meet the place-based planning needs of our communities and partners assessed through performance evaluations and surveys from our partners
- Our ability to deploy loans to community members
- Our ability to serve clients and business owners with technical assistance