

JANUARY 2021

rural communities equity action guide

To achieve equitable economic ecosystems for shared local and regional prosperity



INDEX

This action guide was created by Mónica Maria Segura-Schwartz, Katie Pierson, and Jane Leonard of Growth & Justice with the support of the Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) staff and the Equitable Economics Ecosystem project team members. Graphic Design by R5DC Marketing Director Angela Anderson.

Funded by a grant from the Northwest Area Foundation to Region Five Development Commission, with additional support by the McKnight Foundation, the Blandin Foundation, and Sourcewell.

FOREWORD	p.4
----------	-----

INTRODUCTION & KEY ACTION STEPS	p.6
------------------------------------	-----

EQUITY ANALYSIS	p.8
-----------------	-----

OVERVIEW	p.13
----------	------

CASE STUDIES	p.15
--------------	------



PAGE 18

THE MEANDER ART CRAWL

The award winning Meander Art Crawl is a free self-guided tour of artist studios featuring 40 local artists from the Upper Minnesota River Valley. This event has more than 30 individual studios in and near the Western Minnesota Communities of Ortonville, Appleton, Madison, Milan, Dawson, Montevideo and Granite Falls.



PAGE 23

ACCESS PROJECT

THRIVE Access Project builds a welcoming, more inclusive community environment through shared work on early childhood education and interventions.



PAGE 28

HEALTHY TOGETHER

As Willmar implements community-led health initiatives, with support from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota, it is poised to be a model for other communities facing health barriers, throughout the state and nation.



PAGE 33

MAIN STREET PROJECT

Main Street Project is advancing a resilient agriculture system that demonstrates the power to heal our lands, nourish our communities and prepare aspiring farmers.



PAGE 41

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

The Bemidji Project includes Supportive and Transitional Housing serving homeless families and individuals. The 20 unit project includes 16 supportive units, 3 transitional units and 1 unit for a resident caretaker.



PAGE 37

PROJECT FINE

Project FINE is a nonprofit organization that helps newcomers integrate into the community. They provide foreign language interpreters and translators as well as opportunities for education, information, referral, and empowerment for immigrants and refugees.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

| p.46

RESOURCES

| p.50

SHARE YOUR STORY

| p.59

BIENVENIDOS
BOOZHOO
SOO DHAWEYN
WELCOME
WILLKOMEN



FOREWORD

“Equity is part of our rural and national heritage.”

Jane Leonard
President, Growth & Justice

Simply and powerfully, “EQUITY IS just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”¹

I write this introduction to the Rural Communities Equity Action Guide from the dining room of the farm in Central MN that has been in our family for over 100 years. From here, in 1911, my immigrant great-grandparents, Karin and Nils Berg, organized with other local immigrant families to seek fair and just inclusion into the local and regional economy by forming chapter #5944 of the American Society of Equity, an agricultural cooperative and advocacy association that helped farmers compete with capital and organized labor on equal terms.

They worked together to get fairer returns on the investments they had made in producing crops they sold, fairer pricing of supplies they needed, and combined their loads of potatoes and other crops to gain lower transport costs on the rail lines to Minneapolis. They pulled their resources together to help secure shareholders for the building of a potato warehouse, “each share to be \$10.00 and no one person to be allowed to secure more than 5 shares each.” (ASE Chapter 5944 Minutes, April 11, 1914).

Their actions, to create together an equitable economic ecosystem for shared sustainable prosperity in their day, provide a useful reminder and role model for reintroducing more equitable and inclusive economic and community development practices today: diverse community members acting together, welcoming more newcomers, gaining fairer treatment for all in

society and in the marketplace, contributing each as they were able, to help their families and their shared community succeed.

Today’s challenges in rural communities (and everywhere) seem greater, more complex, and more buffeted by national and global storms of change that often do not understand or care about rural America’s essential role in the health and well-being of our economy and society. And sometimes we in rural America can be our own worst enemies of progress when we let fear of change and fear of others, and otherness, overcome more helpful and productive societal inclinations: friendliness, welcome, and developing a shared sense of belonging.

My 40-year career in community, economic, and rural development was inspired by the welcoming attitudes and actions of my rural ancestors. And, as Minnesota and our country continues to grow into a multi-cultural, global majority of people, I work every day to increase a robust commitment to embracing equity - regional, racial, and environmental -- to create the conditions that lead to and sustain a thriving, inclusive economy and a vital democracy.

We live now in a time of great reckoning. We must reset and rebuild our society and our economy. COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc in our lives and livelihoods, and has uncovered for all to see the gaping disparities by race, by income, and by zip code in health care, broadband, and in other drivers needed for all to participate and prosper in a modern economy and a just society. We must work hard and affirmatively to dismantle injustice and racism wherever we find it, in real estate

¹ From “Minnesota’s Tomorrow: Equity is the Superior Growth Model.” 2014 PolicyLink report (https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/MNT_032514.pdf)

covenants, in corporate and government policies, in business financing practices and access, and more. Such negative policies, practices, attitudes, and behaviors drag all of us down. Together, with an equity and inclusion lens, we can create a culture in which all people reach their full potential. Doing so is essential for community and economic survival. Ultimately, it's the pathway to gaining and sustaining thriving people and vibrant places.

My great-grandparents and their fellow community members sought an equitable economic ecosystem - a system that was fair to all, that did not depend on exploitation of many resources and many people for the benefit of a few. Reckoning towards fairness today means figuring out where we are, problem-solving together, and plotting a new course to a preferred destination of shared local and regional prosperity.

My great-grandparents and their neighbors used social equity practices (*welcoming newcomers, sharing ideas and resources, and meeting regularly in various settings and for various reasons to develop trust*) in the process to seek and achieve financial equity for themselves (*including other shareholders to gather shared capital, cooperating to build market strength, making more opportunity and profit together than they could muster alone*).

Equity is indeed embedded in our rural heritage, in rural life and livelihoods. It is embedded in our sense of fairness, of justice, of unity and cooperation. It is in people building trust for the long haul, building a shared sense of belonging and welcome, especially with newcomers as they arrive and helping them take root. Equity is in our rural roots, in our rural sensibility, and in our small-town living. It is in people connecting with and helping each other, especially in a crisis - and we are indeed in crisis today.

Some of those rural roots have weakened to where visitors and newcomers can often find themselves literally and figuratively stared at -- as different, as strangers, and as an “other” - as I experienced when I arrived back in rural Minnesota after college. There are many reasons for this rural reticence: a sense of fear of the unknown translated into fearing people different from you, a fear of

change, and maybe a poverty of imagination as economic woe increases. Yet community survival and growing vitality for the long haul depends on welcoming a diversity of people and ideas, on creating a sense of belonging for everyone already in and for those considering living and working in a rural community (or any community).

Begin the steps towards greater equity and inclusion from wherever you are -- personally, professionally, and as a community member/leader. The simple, yet powerful act of intentional connection, of welcoming, can begin to open doors to the steady stream of people, ideas, and energy needed to power equitable, inclusive, shared, and sustainable prosperity for all.

We hope you find this guidebook helpful on your own journey towards creating an equitable and inclusive economic ecosystem in your community, geared towards local and regional shared prosperity. Great-Grandma Karin and Great-Grandpa Nils and their neighbors paved the way in 1911. We can, and we must, work together again for equity and inclusion, in 2020 and beyond, to gain and sustain a vital and vibrant future for all. Your actions today will help create a thriving Minnesota Where Equity Is Our North Star and We All Belong.²



² From the guiding motto of the *Minnesota Equity Blueprint* co-created by the Thriving by Design Network - Rural & Urban Together, June 2018-February 2020.

INTRODUCTION & KEY ACTION STEPS

How this Rural Communities Equity Action Guide can be useful to Rural Minnesotans to gain shared economic prosperity and community vitality.

Defining prosperity

Region Five Development Commission and Growth & Justice are not the first entities to create an Equity Action Guide. However, this may be a first attempt at a guide for rural communities seeking to achieve equitable economic ecosystems for shared local and regional prosperity.

And before we go too much further in this guide, just what is prosperity? Here's a great description, from a recent report on the 2020 U.S. Prosperity Index (<https://usprosperity.net>):

Genuine prosperity is about far more than a society's economy or an individual's financial wealth; it represents an environment in which everybody is able to reach their full potential. A nation is prosperous when it has effective institutions, an open economy, and empowered people who are healthy and educated.

Prosperity is multifaceted and cannot be defined by simple linear measures. It is a multidimensional concept, which the United States Prosperity Index seeks to measure, explore, and understand as fully as possible. The framework of the Index captures prosperity through three domains, which are the essential foundations of prosperity – Inclusive Societies, Open Economies, and Empowered People.

<https://usprosperity.net/about/what-is-prosperity>


(and find Minnesota's rankings at:

<https://usprosperity.net/rankings/state-by-state>)

Effective rural models towards shared prosperity look different than effective urban models.

Nationwide, communities are building shared prosperity and equity, pivoting from “survive” to “thrive”, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic and recent racially-charged killings of people of color reveal to all the long-held and systemic disparities and injustice suffered by populations disadvantaged by their zip codes (rural and urban places alike), by their race, and by their income levels.

However, rural communities face different leadership and community/economic development conditions than urban areas due to their remoteness, lower population density, scattered market strength, and difficulties with formal and informal information exchange. There is a persistent need for documented (new and time-tested) approaches to building shared prosperity in rural areas in 21st century conditions and challenges. An equitable and inclusive economic ecosystem is one that includes and benefits everyone and helps a community thrive, but you must be more intentionally equitable and inclusive as you build it. See this excellent summary of rural and urban similarities and differences when it comes to assessing prosperity and gaining it: <https://usprosperity.net/articles/article/structural-drivers-of-prosperity>.



Rural examples of creating equitable economic ecosystems are rarely documented. This Action Guide responds to requests from rural Minnesotans for a kind of road map to do so. It also provides affirmation to those folks who have worked on and for equity and inclusion for a long time already. We've gathered a few of their stories here, but there are many more and we would love to keep collecting, mapping, and sharing them (see last page of this document for instructions on how to do that). The case studies in this guide are intentionally gathered from Greater Minnesota and are rooted in Minnesotan and Midwestern good instincts and emerging practices in equitable and inclusive community and economic development.

The creation of this guide and the larger effort to foster regional shared prosperity is led by the Equitable Economic Ecosystems project team at Region Five Development Commission in Central Minnesota. It is funded by the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAf) with additional support from the McKnight Foundation, Blandin Foundation, and Sourcewell. Though Twin Cities-based, NWAf and the McKnight Foundation have invested extensively for many years in strengthening rural areas in Minnesota and across multiple states and countries. Blandin Foundation and Sourcewell invest in helping rural people and places thrive.

They and their other cutting-edge state and national philanthropic peers that also invest in rural vitality apply several core standards to the projects they fund:

- They view equity as a critical strategic underpinning for all areas of rural work (i.e., Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation program, [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#)).
- They support place-based strategies. As culture and demographics shift, “using a place-based approach empowers rural communities to identify and advocate for their specific challenges and needs and allows funders “to support culturally competent - and therefore more effective - services.” (i.e. Rural Philanthropic Analysis by [Campbell University](#)).
- They support action that tackles upstream inequities with the goal of downstream results; for example, striving to improve social determinants of health such as rural housing, transportation, and education environments to ultimately improve health disparities (i.e. [California Endowment, Hogg Foundation](#)).

This is not an exacting cookie-cutter “how to” Action Guide. Every community is different, and how-to-do equitable economic ecosystems in your own community will depend on the conditions and resources unique to your community. This guide, and toolkit, is a compilation and sharing of examples and learnings from community members doing equity and inclusion work in Greater Minnesota and elsewhere. We analyze both common traits and actions and differing traits and actions from the community examples and from other resources. Take inspiration and guidance from the examples and the frank insights. You do not need policy creation experience or a degree in community engagement, planning, community development, or economic development to do this work. All you need is a heartfelt desire to help your community thrive.

This is a “how to begin and a how to keep going” action guide based on what others have learned along their own journeys to be more equitable and to be more inclusive.

This Action Guide assumes an audience of readers ready to explore and eventually implement the challenging, intentional, and persistent work together to build equitable, shared prosperity in rural Minnesota. The Guide does provide some analysis of resources and references to help you think thru and manage your own projects.

To help ground that work in real-life experience, we feature six stories/case studies of communities across Greater Minnesota; each of them offer their own learnings and reflections about doing work that is intentional and intentionally involves equity and inclusion towards more equitable economic ecosystems. Some themes emerge that are common throughout the experiences; some are unique to each story. Every community is at a different stage of readiness for and implementation of this work. Start where you are and keep going. Even if the work seems like two steps forward and one step back, keep going.

We also convey their stories through the lens of the *WealthWorks Framework: Eight Forms of Wealth Continuum* and systems change to illustrate how positive systems change for all can happen when underrepresented and minority populations also build and benefit from the capital being created. (See page 54 for a description of WealthWorks and the eight forms of capital.)

Before we get to those stories, here are some key questions and action steps below to keep in mind. And some historical context, too, to keep us grounded in the realities of rural community and economic conditions, both opportunities & challenges.



EQUITY ANALYSIS



An Equity Analysis to Guide Your Equity Actions

Key Guidelines and Questions to Consider
when introducing equity & inclusion into your community decision and action processes:

Before you read through the community stories/case studies and as you consider your own community action, consider these universal steps of an equity analysis when it comes to building a more equitable and inclusive economy and community:

Take stock and do your own equity analysis (that's an equity joke for those of you who equate equity with owning stock or owning your house) for any community and/or economic improvements you seek.

An equity analysis looks at the impact of proposals, policies, and programs on various populations with a particular focus on people, groups of people, and communities experiencing inequities, past or current.

An equity analysis inserts an equity lens and framework into your engagement and decision-making activities and processes. It helps you consider the potential impacts of proposed decisions, programs, and policies from the perspectives of those most impacted. You consider the people most impacted because you intentionally involve them as fellow community members, in the process and in the actions you take together.

Doing so helps increase your capacity to identify and eliminate geographical, gender, racial, ethnic, and other social and economic disparities so that what you seek to achieve does reflect, involve, and benefit all who make up your community.

When do you do this analysis? Constantly and intentionally. Throughout your process and your actions - beginning, middle, end. Equity is not only an outcome - it must be imbedded in the process of any improvements you seek for your community.

An Equity Analysis for, with, by your community members



Defining the Problem: the What's & the Whys

1. What is working well and what is not - for whom and for why?
 - Who is left out and why? (Think about disparities you may be observing, where resources available to a community/society are unevenly distributed.
 - What do you think are the root causes or factors creating any identified inequities?
2. Why do you seek a change (hopefully for the better)?

Articulating Your Approach & Your Process

3. What is your proposal to help overcome inequities and strengthen your community/economy, and what are your desired results and outcomes?
4. How have you traditionally made decisions and how can you include more of the impacted community members in the planning, decision, and implementation processes, so that you create a more inclusive and equitable project and environment overall?
 - Who/what groups are impacted by your ideas/proposals?
 - Have other community members and stakeholders been consulted and are they involved in your efforts?

Doing the Research to Help Shape Your Approach, Inform Your Process, and Make Your Case for Equity & Positive Systems Change

5. What does the community/economic data tell you?
 - What data or evidence supports the need and the implementation for what you seek to do/accomplish?
 - How does the community health, social well-being, economic, and demographic data inform your work, and what points are especially helpful in making your case?
6. What can you find out about how past policies and/or programs contributed to inequities in the community?
 - What strategies can address root causes of inequity?
 - How does the policy, program, or project build community capacity, and share power with community members most affected by existing inequities?
 - What strategies address immediate needs and impacts? What might happen long-term?
7. How will the policies, program, or project address the stated needs equitably?
 - How will community be engaged long term? (Consider potential obstacles to implementation.)

As you begin to seek and build a more inclusive and equitable community and economic ecosystem, ask these reflective questions:

1. Are equitable outcomes clearly stated?
2. Who will benefit from the investments you are making?
3. Who will be most burdened by these changes?
4. What factors may be producing and perpetuating negative and/or positive effects on communities?
5. How are you controlling or eliminating “unintended” consequences? (Thinking and acting more systematically and comprehensively is one way to do this. Ask yourself how seemingly separate issues relate to one another. Housing, childcare, transportation all affect one another, for example, but we often treat them as separate issues, with separate committees and separate actions.)
6. Are these investments sustainable for the triple bottom line - three “P’s”: people, places (the environment), and profits?
7. How do you plan to measure your progress, communicate your actions, and ultimately evaluate the results? What are you learning and how are you adjusting your plans and actions along the way?



How Rural Minnesota & Rural America got to 2020: a brief history and context for your work in gaining an equitable economic ecosystem towards shared and sustainable prosperity.

The story of rural decline and rural vitality - rural inequity and rural equity -- is partly economic and partly civic/social. Rural resilience is what gets us through the good and bad times. Since the industrialization of the United States in the second half of the 1800s, rural America has collectively experienced waves of outmigration of people and natural resources, especially young people, to urban America. The overall population decline has resulted over time in a lessening of amenities, market strength, and a diminishing of diversity of people and businesses, and often, the creative energy needed to boost rural places. The presence and interactive combination of these ingredients propel and sustain robust economies and vital communities anywhere.

Legacy economies in rural areas that are based on extraction of natural resources (for example in Minnesota: some sustainable - agriculture and timber, and some not - mining) and talent (our young people) and therefore the exportation of value-added wealth to other places, result in a recipe for decline over and over again with each succeeding generation.

Left unchecked by an equal pull of a robust civic society -- the rules of fair play and equitable opportunity -- a market-based economy tends to exploit rural people and places - and working-class people and immigrants everywhere. An out-of-balance undiversified market-based economy can foster racial and income injustices and can also irreparably harm the natural resources we all depend upon for life and livelihood. None of the more recent economic drivers in rural Minnesota - tourism, manufacturing, and advanced agribusiness -- are robust enough alone to generate a shared sustainable prosperity, and over-reliance on one industry leaves communities and regions vulnerable to market changes.

We have seen movements of people and cultures from rural to urban to suburban and back over the decades and generations as community and economic conditions change, but on the whole, rural places in 2020 remain majority white dominant culture and majority older - more people over 65 and more heading out of the workforce age range.

While we know communities need fresh talent and ideas to survive, we also know some places are home to people with a documented hostility to both. Some of these naysayers are family members, friends, and neighbors we love and respect. That can make it harder for us to convince them that being more welcoming benefits them, too.

Given that global dynamics weigh heavily on rural communities, and that many rural residents are necessarily stuck in survival mode, it is hardly surprising that many of us feel we cannot afford the risk of trying new ideas and welcoming new people.

Resulting deficits in opportunities and cultural amenities further discourage young workers, families, newcomers, and potential home-comers from settling in rural communities. Systemic barriers to education and workforce credentialing, likewise, tend to shut out immigrant newcomers and communities of color.

Which means the rural narrative is also about politics and social insecurity (not unique to rural, but more visible perhaps).

“Rural communities are noted for their ability to respond to extraordinary tragedies that lead to temporary poverty, such as fires, tornadoes, or floods. But rural communities are much less able to respond to conditions of chronic poverty . . . rural residents tend to feel that proper attitudes lead to hard work, and hard work should lead to material success. As a result, lack of material success—such as an inadequate income or the lack of a decent home (preferably owned)—is viewed as a moral failing. The dominant view is that rewarding such moral failings by providing “handouts” to those out of work or with low incomes should be avoided.” (*Rural Communities, Legacy and Change* by Cornelia Butler Flora, Jan L. Flora and Stephen P. Gasteyer, Fifth Edition. 2016 Westview Press.)

Rural Minnesota’s low population density also presents very real (yet under-researched and under-documented) physical barriers to communication, relationship building, and social connection outside of immediate family and close neighbors. Policy makers and even rural communities themselves tend to minimize these inherent challenges as, “here, everything is just far.” This perception

serves to undercut momentum for better roads, transit, schools, childcare, new technologies, and other services that would bridge these gaps. Add to these contexts a politically-motivated, race-baiting narrative about the “rural-urban divide” (as though we are not all inextricably linked), and we see a resulting decline in both spirit and in the practice of common good within and between people and communities.

Rural renaissance is possible through equitable economic development.

To reverse these various forms of decline, we must embrace and build equity and inclusion locally and regionally in two interdependent ways: in social equity actions that create a stronger and more shared sense of community belonging among current residents and newcomers alike; and in economic equity actions to create and sustain investment and wealth building practices that demonstrate how shared confidence in investing in ourselves supports whole communities (much like the public policy and community practices invention of the Greater Minnesota Initiative Foundations by local communities, the McKnight Foundation, and the State of Minnesota all working together in the 1980s to push out of the recession and farm crisis then).

A diversity of people, ideas, cultures, and experiences, when channeled together, can revitalize a community and overcome barriers to communication and social connection. For example, pairing place-neutral technologies such as broadband that support working and living anywhere with intentional welcoming practices such as cross-cultural get-to-know-your-neighbors events can build a community’s economic strength and sense of connection. But that is just the beginning.

What we cannot fathom until we do them are the bonus ramifications of these new connections. The possibilities include improved mental and physical health as a community, an ability to attract and sustain young families and new businesses, and the energy, delight, and opportunities that can come from a simple and intentional willingness to exchange ideas. Blue Cross Blue Shield’s case study in the chapter ahead is an example of these positive ripple effects in a community.

OVERVIEW



We all benefit from equitable policies

While few Minnesotans would say they oppose economic growth, a substantial majority of current residents who have been losing economic ground over the last generation tend to equate equitable community and economic practices with further personal losses.

But we are better off together, working to eliminate systemic barriers to local and regional shared prosperity. And whether we choose to admit it or not, most of us have been beneficiaries of equity practices. Programs designed to stabilize and expand the middle class such as Social Security, Medicare, the G.I. Bill, decades of farm subsidy

policy, and college scholarships have reduced poverty and pay for themselves over the long term by broadening the tax base and stimulating consumer spending.

According to the Brookings Institution, states and localities spend \$50 to \$80 billion on tax breaks and incentives each year in the name of economic development despite a mountain of evidence showing that tax incentives produce mostly marginal returns.

These traditional approaches to economic development by local governments have not benefited all populations – and, in many cases,

the policies and programs have particularly neglected or even shortchanged people of color, indigenous populations, immigrants, rural, and low-income communities. This systemic inequity slows growth for everyone. But when communities instead invest in making economies more equitable (and diverse) from the bottom up, or from the middle class out, economic growth is likely to benefit and be better for all residents, and that growth is more likely to be sustained over longer periods of time.

Defining an inclusive, diverse economy.

For decades, rural communities in Minnesota have been reduced to a single employer economy. Owners and management of these large companies, such as Walmart, dairies, meat packing plants, and mining companies, usually live outside of the community. As the main source of employment and a sometimes a quick economic return to small town coffers, they are often welcomed at first.

This lack of economic diversity, however, brings detrimental effects in the long run. It forces young workers (and returning home-comers in some cases) to leave the area if they seek a different kind of employment that has more advancement opportunities, or if their entrepreneurial energies are snuffed out by lack of support for small business development and retention. A lack of diversity of businesses and job types can result in areas being highly vulnerable to economic catastrophe if a sole economic driver shuts down or moves operations.

According to the Rockefeller Foundation, “An inclusive economy is one in which there is expanded opportunity for more broadly shared prosperity especially for those facing the greatest barriers to advancing their well-being. Quite simply, there are more opportunities for more people.”

To this observation, we would add that when this happens, when people from diverse backgrounds offer new perspectives, new niches, and new economic alternatives, they increase the whole community’s prosperity.



Next is the introduction to and the set of six community stories/case studies in building a more equitable economic ecosystem that we hope inspire you. We also encourage you to share your **own** stories using the questionnaire at the back of this guide.

“We all benefit from equitable policies.”

CASE STUDIES

Sharing Equity Action Stories: Context for the Case Studies

Examples of community & regional efforts in Minnesota that work towards systems change for more equitable economic ecosystems that can lead to shared prosperity

There is and has always been work in Rural Minnesota on community and economic development that challenges the status quo and aims for equity. In the search for resources for this guide, we found a number of projects, programs and initiatives that could offer wisdom from both failures and successes in this arena. Many of these stories get buried in a grant report for a funder, or in the memory of elders who have hoped for opportunities to pass along their know-how onto others.

The frustrations we have experienced in finding and sharing lessons learned illustrate one of the problems of low population density and barriers in communication systems that exist in rural Minnesota: there are few coordinated and broader information exchange platforms. People don't know what others have done already. Without a way to exchange information more regularly, we face the risk of doing the same thing repeatedly in one place without progress. Knowledge of previous work, of shared findings and suggested pathways, from those who have tried different approaches, can help more people reach the satisfaction of progress towards shared prosperity in their own regions and communities.

Our case study methodology and the WealthWorks Framework

The next section includes interviews with people highly involved in six equity and inclusion related projects in Greater Minnesota, across different sectors, from arts to business, housing, workforce, agriculture, health and education, all aiming towards shared local and regional prosperity. This sample is not fully representative of all people or all sectors in rural Minnesota nor of Minnesota's diversity overall.

Nonetheless, together these projects illustrate a diversity of ideas, peoples, and initiatives present in rural Minnesota from several regions of the state. Many readers may know of these examples already but seeing them together may create new understandings, new perspectives, and hopefully helpful patterns that emerge.

We also reflect and convey these stories through the lens of the WealthWorks Framework: Seven Forms of Wealth Continuum to illustrate how positive systems change for all can happen when underrepresented and minority populations also help create and benefit from the several types of capital being built. (See page 55 for a more detailed description of the WealthWorks eight forms of capital that are imbedded in systems change.)

WealthWorks (wealthworks.org) is a 21st-century approach to local and regional economic development that brings together and connects a community's assets to meet market demand in ways that build livelihoods that last.

WealthWorks aims to advance a region's overall prosperity and self-reliance, strengthen existing and emerging sectors, and increase jobs and incomes for lower-income residents and firms—all at the same time. It can work for people, firms and places of all sizes, shapes and success levels.

Equity is a compelling word and action within the WealthWorks Framework. Equity (stock) is not only *financial capital* in the most traditional sense (**Financial Capital**: *unencumbered monetary assets invested in other forms of capital or financial instruments*). Equity within the WealthWorks Framework is also a driver for the seven other forms of capital investment useful in accomplishing systems change towards building and sustaining an equitable economic ecosystem:

- **Individual Capital** is the stock of skills and physical and mental healthiness of people in a region. Investments in human capital include spending on **skill development** (e.g. literacy, numeracy, computer literacy, technical skills, etc.) and health maintenance and improvement.
- **Social Capital** is the stock of trust, relationships, and networks that support civil society. There are two forms of social capital: bridging and bonding.
- **Intellectual Capital** is the stock of knowledge, innovation, and creativity or imagination in a region.
- **Natural Capital** is the stock of unimpaired environmental assets (e.g. air, water, land, flora, fauna, etc.) in a region.
- **Built Capital** is the stock of fully functioning constructed infrastructure.
- **Political Capital** is the stock of power and goodwill held by individuals, groups, and/or organizations that can be held, spent or shared to achieve desired ends.
- **Cultural Capital** influences the ways in which individuals and groups define and access other forms of capital.

An Introduction to the Case Studies

The case studies below are not exhaustive (and we hope you will share your stories with us, too, using the form at the back of this guide). Case studies included are here because of the generous contributions of time and insights of the community members featured. We networked with many people to find these stories, and to find people brave enough and willing to share their stories, failings and surprises and all.

We started a dialogue, we learned, and now we share. We found other projects, too -- many more. We intend to continue to document and map these experiences and stories ongoing, so that a striking and informative tapestry can emerge exhibiting the extent and impact of equity and inclusion in Minnesota. Please share your stories (use the form on the back page or go online at regionfive.org/yourstory). Together we can grow a network of community members and economic and community development practitioners from whom we can all continue to learn helpful practices and know-how, and from whom a more complete, more diverse picture of Minnesota equity and inclusion practices can be painted.

We hope you will be inspired to share your story and to start your own good works from the stories shared below. It took some courage to tell these stories, to set them down on paper. It can be difficult and sometimes even dangerous for people in rural Minnesota to speak about themselves against dominant cultural norms that often keep the hard and helpful truths from rising above conformity.

Minnesotans often stay quiet about triumphs and tragedy (rooted in generations of trauma for many Minnesotans: from exclusion and removal of Native Americans, persecution of Germans during and after the two world wars, rivalry and persecution based on race and religion and gender, massive and destructive swarms of fires and pandemics in the 20th century (and now!) and more over the generations).

We need to listen to one another, Minnesotans new and newer and ancient ones - all together. With the sharing comes reflection and with reflections comes the conscious learning - a knowledge and understanding of legacy, of current and future equitable growth, and then, hopefully working together for positive change now and into the future.

Case Study Findings

Equity and inclusion work starts and continues with intentional and steady building of relationships.

We conducted interviews over several months to learn more about the six diverse rural Minnesota examples documented below, and found that they shared several common characteristics - both negative and positive attributes -- in their work to seek a more equitable economic ecosystem.

Four common hurdles to success:

1. A feeling of disconnection and loneliness among newcomers
2. A lack of understanding of, or access to, the resources that many long-time residents take for granted.
3. Barriers, awkwardness, and lack of skill at building relationships. Therefore, clusters of people not integrating with each other.
4. Fear among White Minnesotans of saying the wrong thing and causing offense. (This white fragility is the corollary to Minnesota Nice which many Black, Indigenous and People of Color equate with passive aggressive racism. When you avoid conflict and prize pleasantness over clarity, you fail to acknowledge - let alone do - the hard work.). But this fear can present itself differently in rural areas, as opposed to urban areas (see conclusion).

Four attributes towards success:

We knew from researching emerging state and national practices and academic studies that successful community engagement efforts towards reaching equitable development goals feature four common components. These fundamental components were confirmed as well after gathering stories and insights from the six Greater Minnesota community equity examples featured in this Guide. The success factors require relationship and trust building every step of the way:

1. Stakeholder involvement at every stage of project development and execution.
2. Shared definitions of key phrases, values, and desired outcomes.
3. A clearly defined and widely communicated project scope.
4. Use of qualitative and quantitative data to measure progress.

Overall, we also learned that Minnesotans have a desire to be better at working for the greater good and for each other. Equity and inclusion work is not rocket science. Underneath all the layers of how-to's and why for's, it is about fairness and being welcoming, like we learned as young children, when we started to realize we were part of a community and began to learn to share and get along with one another.

The work is doable but difficult because it requires persistence over time (months and years, in fact), patience, and no small measures of grace and courage. It requires learning to share power and developing a new habit of using equity and inclusion values as the frame, the lens, for ensuring fairness and justice as we consider and enact local, state, and federal policies and actions for change for the betterment of all.

The following six case studies show that building trust and relationships across communities is not just the foundation of successful work. **It is the work**, whether you can quantify it or not. The process itself of working together toward small goals, adding up to meeting bigger goals, is what changes hearts and minds.

We thank our interviewees and stakeholder organizations for their candor and generosity in sharing these stories.

RURAL COMMUNITIES EQUITY ACTION GUIDE

Based on interviews between Mónica Maria Segura-Schwartz, Growth & Justice Policy and Outreach Consultant, and Patrick Moore, Meander Art Crawl co-organizer

Case Study One

MEANDER ART CRAWL

Supporting local artists in the
Upper Minnesota River Valley.



Artist: Kathleen Marihart

Community Equity & Inclusion Focus

This project is about **placemaking** and increasing diverse, inclusive entrepreneurial development activities through and in support of the arts. The Meander Art Crawl is an example of a true partnership among community members from diverse sectors who are typically separated by stereotypical ideology and lifestyle but came together to build a more equitable and inclusive economic and community ecosystem.

Results are mixed. Over the years, the Meander has introduced many visitors to the beauty and cultures of the region, and the diversity of arts and crafts created in the area. The tour does bring people into small towns to experience other local businesses, events, and activities, but not all ethnicities are represented among the featured artists.

Summary

“The Meander” is a free, annual (in the Fall) and award-winning self-guided art studio tour featuring 45 artists from five counties in the scenic Upper Minnesota River Valley. A collaboration of artists, businesses, regional government and non-profits, The Meander has built connections to local history, culture, local arts, and landscapes since 2004. It has become a significant regional economic development event – giving rise to supporting events such as concerts and progressive dinners – that attracts visitors from 12 states. Total reported art sales in 2018 amounted to \$108,108 with average sales per artist for the weekend reaching more than \$3,000. Getting to this point of success was not easy. Achieving social and financial equity along the way remains a process in progress.

Background

Minnesota's southwest region encompasses much of the state's Great Plains prairie, but with surprising rolling hills and river valley cliffs where the Minnesota River turns north and east towards its meeting place with the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities region. Like much of western Minnesota, its economy remains tied to agriculture, agribusiness, food processing, and manufacturing, but is also home to education and health care related organizations and businesses.

Southwest Minnesota is home to nearly 300,000 people (per the boundaries of the SW Initiative Foundation, one of six business and community development catalyst and grant-making organizations co-created by local communities, state government, and philanthropy in the late 1980s across the state).

It is also home to three of the state's 11 regional development commission districts so there is a heritage of cross-sector intergovernmental collaboration going back at least three generations. And it is also the home of Dakota peoples, Upper and Lower Sioux Communities, and dozens of ethnic and immigrant cultures, from the Danes in Tyler to the Micronesians and Norwegians in Milan. Two generations of Hmong peoples reside here; Walnut Grove elected its first Hmong city council member over a decade ago.

Shortages of skilled workers, housing and childcare continue to challenge the region. Like many places in the state and in the United States, youth poverty is a growing problem. One in six southwest Minnesota children lives in poverty. The Southwest Initiative Foundation launched **Grow Our Own** to reverse the trend. Diverse entrepreneurship is one approach to keeping the region's vitality but is dependent on strengthening the welcoming nature of its communities, large and small.

The Upper Minnesota River Watershed where the Meander originated is an area of small towns and farming communities, two lane highways, and gravel roads. People can visit artists in their own environment who celebrate a lifestyle that represents the small, handmade, personal, and local culture of the area. This event has more than 33 individual studios in and near the southwestern Minnesota communities of Ortonville, Appleton, Madison, Milan, Dawson, Montevideo, and Granite Falls.

It started with a coffee shop. Patrick Moore, longtime resident of Montevideo and a former community organizer with the MN Land Stewardship Project, had once been told by a mentor, "If you want to change the world, you create a business."

When he and his wife, Mary, opened Java River in 1998 in Montevideo, their vision was that it would become the most welcoming coffee shop in the world. Specifically, he wanted to incubate and elevate the local businesses and creative spaces that had been devastated by the arrival of Walmart in the area.

Moore's mentor at the Land Stewardship Project, Steve O'Neil, came from Saul Alinsky's school of thought in organizing. However, he taught him that to be an effective community organizer in rural areas meant putting aside Alinsky's style of "rubbing raw the sores of discontent" to become less confrontational, less controversial, and more inclusive of different points of view.

Lesson learned: Every borrowed tool needs to be adapted to a new/different environment. Alinsky's organizing experience came from an urban area but with adaptation, can be used in rural communities.

Moore grew up in a big Irish Catholic family that welcomed company at the dinner table. When he moved from the Twin Cities to southwest Minnesota for his first job, he remembers feeling like an outsider in a town full of Norwegian Lutherans. "I was just 22: people would stop talking and look at me when I would walk into a cafe, but no one would reach out and say 'Hi'". His initial discomfort gradually became a realization that welcoming newcomers was just not part of the townspeople's experience. "People were shy and reserved," he says. "To be welcoming, you need to be confident and outgoing."

WealthWorks Capitals

WealthWorks Framework elements at play in the Meander (working towards eventual systems change towards an equitable economic ecosystem):



Individual Capital – artists/business owners & operators, visitors, community members skills



Social Capital – vendors, visitors, residents, community organizers bonding & bridging



Intellectual Capital
innovation, creativity, imagination



Natural Capital array of environmental resources (air, water, land, flora, fauna) on display as visitors "meander" thru region to artist studios, shops, etc.



Built Capital transportation & communications infrastructure, water



Political Capital shift in how artists in region are seen - as entrepreneurs as well as creative placemakers, shift in cultural appreciation, increasing voice, access, inclusion in decision-making of traditionally underrepresented community members



Financial Capital – investment in organizing the meander by local businesses and organizations, increase in income (tho limited) for artists



Cultural Capital changing dynamics, knowledge of who is known and what heritages are valued, collaboration across races, ethnicities, generations

Over the past 20 years the business that Patrick founded, Java River, became a showcase and marketplace for local artists and musicians, a place that welcomed everyone from self-described tree-huggers to Republican members of the country club. A group of nuns/coffee shop patrons helped Moore name and refine his practice of “radical hospitality”. “Everyone walking through that door would be a potential collaborator,” he says.

Lesson learned: “Radical Hospitality” turned out to be an important ingredient to build community, partnerships, and allies.

Process

The Meander Art Crawl idea emerged from what Moore describes as an organic process. “You have to serve what seeks to emerge,” he says. “One day a gentleman, Don Sherman, from Ortonville, MN, brought me a big manual of policies and said, ‘This is the economic development plan for North Minneapolis. We need to have something similar in this region.’”

The two men sketched out some ideas on a napkin. The concept of an “Art Crawl” encompassing local art, geography, and culture, came out of this and subsequent conversations with various community members Moore had come to know through Java River. They discussed how local government could foster art based economic development. Moore set up visits between tourism and economic development-oriented business owners in Montevideo and Ortonville.

Local business owners especially liked the idea to attract visitors to the area and spread the word to their professional peers. Outreach to Dawn Hegland and Kristi Fernholz at the Upper Minnesota Valley Development Commission, a regional organization that was already working on eco-tourism projects, resulted in a formal partnership.

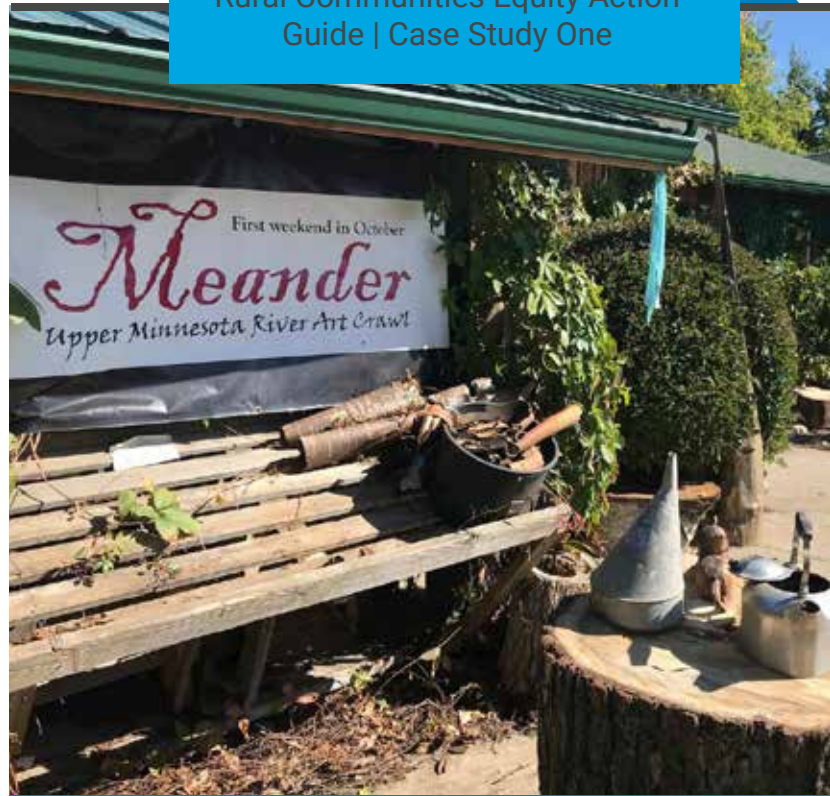
“Dawn ended up being a crucial driving force in moving ahead with the idea of an art crawl. What made it an attractive idea was that the Meander could highlight two major assets of the region: our landscape and river valley and our handcraft artisan culture. It was an idea that could knit together communities that heretofore saw themselves in competition with each other.”

Lesson learned: We all do better when we ALL do better. The trick is to have the patience and grow the relationships to find the how.

Artist: Nancy Bergman



Rural Communities Equity Action Guide | Case Study One



For everyone involved, the Arts Meander was good for community. It was not only about and for artists. “It was about the discovery that when we work together, we can make something good happen for everyone,” says Moore.

Local artists were obviously a key part of the mix. The planning group was thrilled when the Montevideo Economic Authority granted the initial project \$500. Andy Kahmann of A to Z Letterpress Printing was also a co-founder. Moore reports that local businesspeople and other politically conservative participants in the effort appreciated that the event gave a common purpose to all businesses while creating more awareness of local agriculture. They also liked that Moore invested his own funds in the venture instead of relying solely on grant money.

He also incorporated “Creative Class” ideas for economic development based on welcoming a diversity of people, incorporation of arts & culture (to foster creativity) and supporting a diversity of businesses. (The Creative Class approach was pioneered by Richard Florida when Florida was a business professor and researcher at Carnegie Mellon and Pittsburgh was trying to revitalize their economy that was once based on the then fading steel industry.)

The original idea was that The Meander would build on the reputation and activities of an existing spring tour of three established artists’ studios while elevating lesser-known artists at the same time. “It took some convincing, to show these artists that it was also in their interest to do this,” Explained Moore. It was because of the trust Moore had built with all parties and the relationships already established, that they came around.

The planning of the project had its ups, downs and demanded people's compromise. Moore "proposed doing community engagement and publicizing the event through social media, but the artistic community was not all that familiar with its promise and resisted it at first." Everyone had interests that needed to be considered. The artistic community wanted aesthetic control and preferred to design and distribute a traditional brochure to guarantee image quality. The planning group chose to hold The Meander in the fall to respect the existing Spring open house tradition and to stay out of the way of pre-Christmas sales.

Lesson learned: Diverse participation means diverse interests and in turn a more difficult decision-making process. But diversity and inclusion of all stakeholders assures inclusive results.

Moore's extensive experience as a meeting facilitator helped everyone come together initially but it took a while to get and stay organized. The first Meander happened in 2004, and it was a great success. "We asked each artist to contribute to have a listing in the brochure. Local businesses also paid to be listed. A local sign making company – Impact Plastics – donated the 45 original signs used to identify the artist location sites. We pulled the first Meander off on a shoestring budget of less than \$5,000."

After this first event's success, the group found themselves in need of other elements to become sustainable. There were many details that needed to be solved such as appropriate (agreeable) advertisement, financial mechanisms, organizational structure (whose responsibility was it to do what, for how long). At that point there was some disagreement regarding roles, responsibilities, and levels of ownership. This led to internal tensions.

Lesson learned: a less formal structure created a leadership group that could be responsive to community input but also may have made it harder to raise money together and sustain operations over the longer term.

The artist community preferred that The Meander not become a formal organization. A steering committee emerged instead.

Lesson learned: Build consensus early on about operating and planning infrastructure. Make decisions and clarify expectations about committee leadership, record-keeping, delegating action steps, and managing finances. This does not always happen organically. Work through these tensions. Don't give up if everyone believes in the ultimate goals.

Artist: Doug Peterson



Results

Results are mixed. Over the years, the Meander has introduced many visitors to the beauty and cultures of the region, and the diversity of arts and crafts created in the area. The tour does bring people into small towns to experience other local businesses, events, and activities, but not all ethnicities are represented among the featured artists.

There's a regional pride generated by the Meander but there is also a challenge keeping it going in the face of continuing difficulties for small towns and rural artists to stay in business, especially as necessary COVID restrictions currently challenge economic health across the region and the state.

Reflections

The Meander has changed the urban myth of rural areas being bereft of an arts community. However, arts support is harder to sustain in rural areas, especially in southwestern Minnesota because it is so far away from more dense urban centers of population (and potential customers/visitors) such as the Twin Cities.

The organizing process behind The Meander was so organic that community need was not explicitly identified at first. There was just a general feeling that economic development and entrepreneurship in rural areas is difficult due to population density challenges and therefore needed creative ways to generate more market strength. The community needed to do something more to encourage young people to stay or to return home after exploring the rest of the world. The Meander started as a response to these general concerns; clarifying conversations about objectives and tactics came later.

For everyone involved, the Arts Meander was good for community. It was not only about and for artists. "It was about the discovery that when we work together, we can make something good happen for everyone," says Moore.

However, there continued to be challenges, too. "After the first event in 2004, continuing the project was a struggle," he says. "It had no money, no structure, and no one knew if it was going to still exist." It took a few years for respective roles to be defined and for financial management and clerical infrastructure systems to become operational and trusted by all.

The Meander needs "to become more inclusive of Native People and People of Color. So far, this has been a white middle class effort. As an organizer, you always want to work yourself out of the job. You don't want to hold onto power. You have to let go. They need new artists. We need to have new Minnesotans in our midst, too."

Lesson learned: Building full diversity and inclusion, and shared leadership in community means White people, the currently dominant culture, need to let go and share power.

"Some people in this region don't want to hear the Native American perspective. Neither that, nor new immigrants, or a gay perspective or anything 'different.' 'Diversity' in this area has been between Irish and Germans, Lutherans and Catholics," says Moore.

"I had the opportunity recently to participate in a Worthington Art of Hosting meeting about what it means to belong in Minnesota," says Moore. "If you look for these stories, it is the new frontier. I feel increasingly like an old white guy who needs to step aside."

Lesson learned: Having inclusive leadership from the beginning is the best way to ensure inclusive participation.

Says Moore, "Eventually this effort will have to be led by a new generation of people with a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds. All I can do is pass on a platform to reimagine and foster new ideas and events that reflect the changing times and nature of southwest Minnesota."

Artist: Dale Streblov



RURAL COMMUNITIES EQUITY ACTION GUIDE

Based on interviews between Mónica Maria Segura-Schwartz, Growth & Justice Policy and Outreach Consultant, and Jane Ellison, THRIVE Access Project Director

Case Study Two

THRIVE ACCESS PROJECT

Welcoming the youngest new
Americans in Central Minnesota

Community Equity & Inclusion Focus

THRIVE Access Project builds a welcoming, more inclusive community environment through shared work on early childhood education and interventions. Stakeholders re-examined and rebuilt power-sharing through more inclusive ways of problem solving and relationship/trust growing. As a result, early childhood field and community members reap new, helpful insights into culturally sensitive approaches to practice and applied research.

This is an initiative/collaboration that gathers different organizations around the topic of child development and mental health for children 0 to 5 years old.

“By creating a co-learning environment in which all voices are at the table from the start, the Access Project has had a ripple effect in both the immigrant and refugee communities and within professional communities.

Summary

By approaching Somali community leaders and intentionally creating an environment in which White and Somali stakeholders could discuss why the Somali community wasn't taking advantage of early childhood programs, THRIVE started a process of community engagement that would turn into a nearly 5-year project involving 4 specific cultural groups: Somali, Latino, South Sudan and other African Immigrant people. The Access Project was not intended to be a welcoming community strategy or an attempt to assimilate a specific group into a community. It was about meeting a specific need. This effort to increase access to early childhood programs by Somali families, however, did produce a positive side effect of building a more welcoming community.

Background

While St. Cloud's majority population is White, it has a large Somali minority plus smaller communities of Latinx, and African Americans (US Origin and Immigrant-Origin Blacks). Over 50% of all families live in poverty, although unemployment rates are low. Some immigrants state that the White community expects immigrants to conform to White norms. Problems arise when that does not happen. White individuals who are struggling economically tend not to recognize there is white privilege when they do not perceive that they have any privilege themselves.

THRIVE is a coalition of Central Minnesota community organizations invested in supporting healthy social and emotional development of young children. It includes Milestones, St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids/Rice and Sartell school district early childhood programs, Benton Stearns Education District (and Help Me Grow), Catholic Charities, Public Health, St. Cloud State Child and Family Studies Department, Reach Up Head Start, and the Initiative Foundation.

The THRIVE leadership group noticed that while Somali immigrant families were highly visible in the community in general, they were not seeking or taking advantage of the community's child development or children's mental health resources. Early childhood professionals thought it likely that Somali children and families were struggling with the same issues as everyone else in terms of mental health and Kindergarten readiness.

Process

During what they now call "the pre-planning year," THRIVE initially thought the best way to find out why Somali families were not seeking or taking advantage of child development or children's mental health services was to conduct a survey, a typical data-gathering step in project planning. They reached out to Somali leaders who said, "That is not going to work." THRIVE leaders came to understand that Somali refugees had fled an authoritarian government that ruled with violence and fear. It would be difficult for Somali residents to share personal information; surveys could be perceived as intrusive and impersonal, even if they were confidential. Thrive needed to partner with a Somali-led organization that had already built trust with their target community.

Lesson learned: Establishing trust needed to come before Somalis would agree to share personal information. Involving stakeholders early in the process is imperative.

At the suggestion of a Somali-led organization, THRIVE partnered with them to plan and implement focus groups with Somali families instead of distributing an impersonal survey.

Lesson learned: Impacted communities must be involved in the first and every stage of planning, designing, and implementing any effort.

THRIVE leaders began to seek out leaders and cultural brokers of other local ethnic groups they perceived as underusing early childhood resources (Somali, Sudanese, Vietnamese, and Latino), and to organize new focus groups.

Lesson learned: In the process, THRIVE leaders also discovered that this engaged outreach created energy and expectation within those communities that a specific problem would be identified and solved.

THRIVE realized that the scope of this effort could be even wider and the community engagement even better. They started looking for funding and received a grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of MN (BCBS-MN) Foundation for a one-year planning process and three years of project development for what became the Access Project. All stakeholders agreed that the vision of the Access Project's was to ensure that all immigrant and refugee children in the St. Cloud area would have access to resources and support for healthy development.

WealthWorks Capitals

WealthWorks Framework elements at play (working towards eventual systems change towards an equitable economic ecosystem):



Individual Capital investment in skill development, physical & mental healthiness, increasing access to early childhood programs and physical and mental healthiness



Social Capital – program organizers, community members, cultural advisors bonding & bridging, establishing and sustaining trust



Intellectual Capital innovation, creativity, imagination, and dexterity in adapting to conditions in the target community



Political Capital – shift in how Somali and White community members work together to achieve mutual goals, shift in cultural appreciation, increasing voice, access, inclusion in decision-making of traditionally underrepresented community members



Cultural Capital changing dynamics, knowledge of who is known and what heritages are valued, collaboration across races, ethnicities, generations

As a funding condition, BCBS asked the project director (Jane Ellison), the evaluator, and other team leaders to participate in a three-day workshop in the Art of Hosting, a non-linear meeting facilitation methodology designed to include everyone in decision-making processes by removing hierarchical boundaries. Art of Hosting allots equal time and value to Relationships, Co-Learning, and Work (the identified project).

Jane Ellison said, “I didn’t think I needed this training. I felt very well trained in facilitation and group management, working with different community groups. I wanted others on our team to have the opportunity.” Ellison and three other members of the team attended the training, including representatives from the immigrant and refugee community, and she and her team ended up valuing the time the training gave them to debrief, strengthen their working relationships, clarify ground rules, and develop a framework to guide the rest of their work. They used the Art of Hosting agenda structure in their project meetings for the next four years.

Lesson learned: The process of building relationships and learning from each other was harder and, ultimately, as important as achieving the group’s stated goals.

With funding secured, the group spent the next three years using its new tools and new awareness to engage the Somali, Latino, and African (non-Somali) communities, and included leaders from each community on the team. All participating communities conducted focus groups and built consensus around the project’s goals and expected outcomes. Every month, Ellison met with a small, rotating group to plan the next meeting.

Lesson learned: Planning the meetings inclusively proved to be as important as the meeting itself.

Every meeting agenda started with time to build personal relationships and community within the group. Co-learning – built-in teaching and learning from each other – is another regular part of the agenda. In an interpreter training meeting, for example, interpreters taught providers how to manage interpretation and providers taught interpreters to manage specific situations. This gave both friendly space and time to adjust their plans to fulfill their individual and mutual goals.

Lesson learned: Spending time on relationships and co-learning is what allowed participants to trust each other, develop shared values and definitions of success, and help this project sustain itself and grow beyond its original goals.

Rural Communities Equity Action Guide | Case Study Two



“You need to come with humility about your own perspective while at the same time, maintaining forward movement. Change takes time.

The last part of the meeting agenda was when the team planned the activities to drive progress toward specific goals. Every team member had an opportunity to offer ideas and/or respectfully challenge ideas. When points of tension arose, the group spent extra time learning about each other’s points of view.

The Access Project’s specific objectives evolved – with collective input – into the following:

1. Continue to build relationships between and across cultures.
2. Increase the number of immigrants/refugees that have licensure in early childhood special education, parent education, or speech-language pathology. (Immigrant families trust educators who reflect their native culture.)
3. Increase the variety of modes of communication and co-learning between immigrant/refugee families and professionals in early intervention, early childhood education, and health.
4. Increase the quality of services by interpreters to families and early childhood professionals.
5. Share publicly what we have learned.



Activities in support of these objectives included:

1. Developing a leadership group to discuss and agree on initial definition of goals, activities, and financial decisions.
2. Holding a monthly leadership group meeting to define further activities.
3. Divide into sub-groups to organize three conversations with targeted community groups and in targeted locations around co-learning topics of interest to families (such as child development, autism, ADHD (and other mental health and learning disability assessments provided by schools), mental health, child protection, parent roles in their child's education, and use of interpreters).
4. Provide financial and professional support to immigrant and refugee students to attain licensure in relevant fields.

Results

Over several years, the Access Project succeeded in increasing the number of St. Cloud immigrant and refugee families participating in the city's early childhood resources. Specifically:

Relationships improved:

- The project's public health nurse reported an increase in her case load of Somali and Latino families. She attributes this to the opportunity to meet, follow up, and build trust with the families at co-learning events. She also started incorporating interpreters more intentionally into her home visits.
- The project evaluator, a professor at St. Cloud State University (SCSU) in Speech Development, developed a practicum for Spanish-speaking graduate students to do learning assessments for Spanish-speaking children in collaboration with community leaders in Cold Spring and St. Cloud. A child experiencing language delays with school interventions alone received this Spanish language intervention as well. As a result, the child achieved grade level work in one year.
- Early childhood professionals and immigrant and refugee community members in the greater St. Cloud area have built trust and advanced shared goals. For example, immigrant and refugee community leaders helped develop and participate in Art of Hosting leadership training. As a result, further grants and projects have been funded. One group even received an award for work that started with the leadership training. Faculty members at SCSU have had students attend the Access events, enriching their learning experience and, in some cases, sparking an interest in pursuing related work.

Recruitment and licensure among refugee and immigrant individuals increased:

- St. Cloud State University developed recruitment materials for potential immigrant and refugee students for parent education, early childhood special education and speech and language licensure.
- Two immigrant/refugee community members enrolled in the Parent Education licensure program at SCSU. District 742 is providing practicum experiences for them.
- Two SCSU departments have reserved new scholarship and graduate assistant resources to support diverse student applicants.
- Two workers from culturally specific communities completed their licensure in parent education and one completed a Masters in family studies and currently work in St. Cloud.



Communication and co-learning increased:

- Messaging and communications tactics focused on spreading the word among a narrow audience: early childhood practitioners and the diverse communities they served.
- Ten co-learning opportunities were conducted between early childhood professionals and immigrant and refugee community members, including Latino, Somali, Sudanese, and other African community members. These events were designed by teams of immigrant and refugee community leaders along with early childhood professionals and were tailored to each community. Topics included Child Protection, Child Development and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, and Discipline.
- Participants in the Access Project developed a video of stories of immigrant and refugee families with young children with special needs, a video of a conversation between a Somali parent and an early childhood specialist about child protection issues. A discipline game was translated into Spanish, and a song book of lullabies was recorded in various immigrant and refugee languages.
- Participants in the Access Project developed a manual on the design and lessons from the co-learning events along with handouts.
- The Access Project led to two related projects. One is the Lullaby Project that brings lullabies from various countries into childcare environments. The second is the Fathers and Literacy project that supports immigrant and refugee fathers to write children's books about their growing up experience for their own children.

The use of language interpreters is increasing in early childhood settings:

- Training and co-learning opportunities have been provided to address issues around the use of interpreters in the early childhood fields.

The Access Project is sharing what it has learned from its peers in this process:

- Several presentations have been developed by the Access Team, including "Diverse Voices: Cross Cultural Collaboration in Early Intervention," which was presented at the National Zero to Three conference; the MN Association of Children's Mental Health conference, and the SCSU diversity conference.

"By creating a co-learning environment in which all voices are at the table from the start, the Access Project has had a ripple effect in both the immigrant and refugee communities and within professional communities."

"The African Women's Alliance and their leadership has been strengthened, and the immigrant and refugee community leaders helped develop and participate in Art of Hosting leadership training," says Ellison. "From that training, further grants and projects have been funded within the immigrant and refugee communities. One group even received an award for work that started with the leadership training."

Reflections

"This project changed my life!" says Ellison. She reports having to learn how to modify her own value-judgements and figure out what was most important (for example, being efficient vs. being flexible and open to learning). It was about keeping her eye on the ball; reaching long-term goals were more important than worrying about little things that were not working in the moment. She emphasizes now that it was not a matter of dropping values and expectations, it was more about adjusting them, recognizing that "values" were different for different people or groups of people.

"You need to come with humility about your own perspective while at the same time, maintaining forward movement. Change takes time."

"In other groups you can assume a certain existing relationship," says Ellison. "But this group didn't have that. And keeping it was work that needed to be valued as part of the project, part of the work. We had to be willing to give the resources, time, and treasure necessary for this to happen."

Funding for this project was provided by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation, along with photo credits.



RURAL COMMUNITIES EQUITY ACTION GUIDE

Based on interviews between Mónica Maria Segura-Schwartz, Growth & Justice Policy, Wendy Foley, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Project Manager; and Ana Isabel Gabilondo Scholz, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Project Evaluator.

Case Study Three

HEALTHY TOGETHER

Building access and connection as
social determinants of health

Community Equity & Inclusion Focus

This focus on **health equity** was guided by the need in the Willmar community to address social determinants of health such as culturally competent childcare, sufficient transportation, safe housing, access to healthy foods, social connectedness, and an understanding of how to navigate the health care system.

"Blue Cross' role was to provide community with a space and a place and a platform to execute the way they [community members] need things to happen. No one person has the answers, no one organization is completely competent in culture or equity. We are all learning. We talk about that a lot."

Summary

The Healthy Together Willmar initiative was a five-year collaboration between Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) and the Willmar community. This collaboration led to Willmar seeing increases in productive and respectful interaction across diverse communities, improved access to health care for the East African, Latinx, and Karen communities, more social connectedness, and reduced isolation for senior citizens.

The purpose of the Healthy Together Willmar initiative was to create a future where all members of the Willmar community have access to the resources and opportunities needed to achieve their best possible health and well-being. This focus on health equity was guided by the need to address social determinants of health such as culturally competent childcare, sufficient transportation, safe housing, and an understanding of how to navigate the health care system.

Background

In 2016, Blue Cross explored opportunities to make place-based investments in communities where significant health disparities exist. Blue Cross has had longstanding relationships with many Willmar leaders and engaged them in conversations to explore what an innovative partnership could look like. Willmar was of interest due to its manageable size, rapidly diversifying and aging population, and support for existing health care initiatives. Local stakeholders reported a need for diverse leadership development and more culturally responsive health care.

The initiative drew upon the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Model and pursued a place-based approach to health equity, focusing exclusively on the Willmar community.

Process

"Community has the answers," said Wendy Foley, the Willmar-based project manager hired by Blue Cross. Foley set the stage for the next five years of work primarily by listening to the community and facilitating connections among community members. She met one on one with individual community members from a wide range of community representation.

"Blue Cross' role was to provide community with a space and a place and a platform to execute the way they [community members] need things to happen. No one person has the answers, no one organization is completely competent in culture or equity. We are all learning. We talk about that a lot."

Lesson learned: There is more than one way to do something. You can learn a lot by positioning yourself as a listener to and learner from others.

Foley conducted more than 70 formal, confidential interviews and many more informal ones, asking open-ended questions in a positive matter. Technically, she was inquiring about how individuals defined health equity, but these interviews helped her learn about shared values across communities, build relationships, understand and dismantle assumptions, and identify the tangible barriers to health equity, including social isolation among newcomers.

"It is hard to hate somebody if you get to know them," Foley says. "A lot of what people wanted to do is to get to know each other. But the number one reason people said they didn't connect with others was that they were afraid of offending someone. For many it feels easier to stay within their own comfort zone and not risk hurting someone or breaking laws of faith or culture."

Once the Healthy Together Willmar team realized how profound this social barrier was, they found ways to intentionally share that fact with the broader community. "We consciously decided to do something new, and we were open with the community that sometimes the discussions we would have were going to be uncomfortable."



WealthWorks Capitals

WealthWorks Framework elements at play (working towards eventual systems change towards an equitable economic ecosystem):



Individual Capital skills and physical and mental healthiness, and improved understanding of and access to health care for the East African, Latinx, and Karen communities, more social connectedness, and reduced isolation for senior citizens and physical and mental healthiness



Social Capital – community members, project organizers, health care organizations and other resource providers bonding & bridging



Intellectual Capital
innovation, creativity, imagination



Political Capital – reducing disparities in health care, better understanding of existing and desired health care policies, shift in cultural appreciation, increasing voice, access, inclusion in decision-making of traditionally underrepresented community members



Financial Capital investment in organizing and implementing the initiative by Blue Cross Blue Shield



Cultural Capital changing dynamics, knowledge of who is known and what heritages are valued, collaboration across races, ethnicities, generations

"People didn't realize that so many folks in our community had barriers to health," says Foley. "For a lot of people in Willmar, the existing systems work. Many people have access to what they need, and they know how to get it. A lot of my work was having conversations with these folks – folks who are predominantly white and hold a lot of power, whether they are aware of their power or not. It is humbling work for folks to determine how they can use their privilege to stand back and welcome other voices to come to the table." Foley approached this work with one-on-one conversations, small coffees, and guest speakers.

Lesson learned: One-on-one conversation, small coffees, getting to know each other and learning from each other is work.

"It isn't always an easy part of the work, but it's essential that folks who traditionally have a voice consciously step back and lift up different voices and perspectives. Because the folks who live with these barriers are the ones who hold the answers and are best positioned to implement the solutions."

One of the documents they shared broadly was "Characteristics of a White Supremacist Culture" from Dismantling Racism Work's web workbook. Foley appreciated that each characteristic offered in the document comes with illustrative anecdotes.

"It gives you things to work on," she says. "For example, the first one is perfectionism. The anecdotes show how you can dismantle this by developing a culture of appreciation." The organization takes the time and effort to show people that their work and efforts are appreciated. Likewise, an organization can counter perfectionism by developing a learning culture where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes, and everyone can learn."

"I think the most effective work is when you invite two, three or four people for coffee or tea and just really have candid conversations." "Dismantling Racism Works can be a challenging model. It requires white people to challenge other white people, help everyone imagine the potential a truly equitable community has, and illustrate how an equitable community is better for everyone. But those conversations – especially in the beginning – are going to be uncomfortable. Many existing systems are predominantly led by white people who have power and who may not have had these conversations before. And many folks are used to the usual way of doing things – things like setting agendas, running meetings, making decisions. But to make progress, it is essential to challenge the status quo and advocate for more equitable processes and language."

Foley served on 8-9 committees and coalitions as a relationship-builder representing Blue Cross. After six months, the work gradually coalesced into three main "buckets" of work.

The Community Table - A group created by Blue Cross that aimed to cultivate and lift up existing leaders who can help shape the future of Willmar, with a focus on leaders of color. The Community Table is made up of six to 11 members who have firsthand experience facing barriers to health. The Table still meets monthly to do leadership development and brainstorm ways to support local health equity projects.

"We heard very loudly in the community that people wanted more leaders from communities of color. A lot of the work up until then was being led by white people on behalf of communities of color, so the community asked for more diverse leadership and input in the work that was happening. This was what led to the creation of

Rural Communities Equity Action Guide | Case Study Three



"It is hard to hate somebody if you get to know them," Foley says. "A lot of what people wanted to do is to get to know each other. But the number one reason people said they didn't connect with others was that they were afraid of offending someone. For many it feels easier to stay within their own comfort zone and not risk hurting someone or breaking laws of faith or culture."

the Community Table. We especially wanted people who may not have had the opportunity to lead in the past. Blue Cross met with them at least once a month and they also had some subgroups among them that met regularly as well."

"Tokenizing communities of color is what happens when one or two individuals of color are regularly and frequently asked to represent their entire community – and this happens often. Pretty soon, those individuals feel burnt out and the connection begins to fade until it is gone. So, part of our work is to prevent tokenizing from happening in the first place. We educate on how to appreciate people – how to honor people for their time and their wisdom. And an important component of that is financially compensating people, which we did with our Community Table participants. This was one way we answered Willmar's call for more diverse leadership."

Lesson learned: Signal respect valuing everyone's time and input according to their own interest. Paying new contributors for their leadership/time is one way of doing that.

The Idea Fund – Community Table leadership wanted to create an equitable process to provide funding for good ideas put forward by community members around health equity. Offered during years three and four of the initiative, the Idea Fund provided financial support to organizations and community members to develop innovative ideas related to health equity. Funding was for one year and ranged from \$1,000-\$40,000. The Idea Fund used a unique application process that aimed to reduce barriers to applying, such as using video or in-person presentations instead of a written application, and hosting community meals where applicants connect with one another to further develop their ideas and potentially spark new partnerships.

Through the Idea Fund, and led by Community Table members, Blue Cross provided over \$500,000 to support 36 community-led projects focused on a variety of efforts such as: addressing food insecurity, interfaith relationships, improving quality of life for people living with disabilities, senior isolation, building social and community connections across cultures and generations, youth development, early childhood care and educational opportunities, and more.

"There were specific criteria for applying, namely that the folks proposing and leading the work needed to be a part of the community they were intending to serve and support. This automatically compelled people to reach out across cultures to solve problems together, so all the approaches had to be equitable."

The work also had to include at least one of ten different values, among them leadership, family, inclusion, education, and bringing people together. Receiving funding through the Idea Fund also became leverage for the community organizations to garner additional funding, because they could highlight that Blue Cross had initially invested in them.

"The Idea Fund's growing traction started to influence culture and conversation. White folks who may have been reticent to these new approaches initially were gradually becoming more receptive. The equity lens was a different approach than what people were used to. It wasn't conventional philanthropic funding. This new approach piqued curiosity in the community and helped people move out of their comfort zones."

Lesson learned: A diverse group of people generated new ideas, new approaches, piqued curiosity in the community and make it easier for them to take the risk of getting out of their comfort zones.



The Willmar Diabetes Coalition – Blue Cross is a member of the Willmar Diabetes Coalition and provides funding support. After hearing from the community about barriers to accessing healthy foods and transportation along with rising obesity, a responsive care table formed. The Willmar Diabetes Coalition is a group of 11 organizations that meets monthly to collaborate and design community-driven intervention strategies for diabetes-related prevention and care.

Foley recalls, “I love to tell people all the mistakes that I made. People were very fearful of each other because they didn’t want to hurt each other’s feelings. So, every time I made a mistake, I told everybody about it. ‘Hey, guess what I did last week? I reached my hand out to one of the East African male leaders and he is not a handshaker. I should not have done that because it is not appropriate.’” By admitting to her cultural missteps and publicly letting them go, Foley gave others permission to relax, to learn by doing, and move on to doing it differently the next time.



Lesson learned: Admitting your anxiety and acknowledging that in trying to be more welcoming, you may make a cultural misstep, is a way to share your own vulnerability. This allows others to let down their guards and learn by doing, too.

In all settings throughout the initiative, it was important to lift up the voices of those who historically haven’t been heard or had a platform from which to speak. “When we had community events, I was in the background. And if we had an opportunity for an interview, I encouraged Community Table members to be interviewed. Because if all roads lead to the coordinator, when the coordinator leaves town, then all the works leaves, too.”



“You have to build trust and build relationships and let the people do the work because those are the people who have the answers. They are the ones who know how to make the world more equitable. They just need to have a platform, a voice and an opportunity.”

Lesson learned: Letting go of decision-making power is hard. Sharing power is hard. And crucial.

Results

You can find Blue Cross’ formal evaluation of the project called “Model of Change” on the Healthy Together Willmar website. Says Foley, “This is more than a ‘feel-good’ report summarizing this initiative. We wanted people to see that using a health equity lens changes lives and communities.”

Reflections

Healthy Together Willmar serves as an example of transforming a community’s desire to improve health into creating a community grounded in health equity. “As a result of this project, Willmar is a more connected community. I think that a lot of assumptions have been busted. Having conversations about privilege and power – particularly through the lens of race and racism – has led to more diverse voices in leadership, more connections across cultures, more understanding and connection, and a healthier Willmar community.”

RURAL COMMUNITIES EQUITY ACTION GUIDE

Based on interviews between Mónica Maria Segura-Schwartz, Growth & Justice Policy and Julie Ristau, Main Street Project Executive Director

Case Study Four

MAIN STREET PROJECT

Advancing a resilient agriculture system that heals the land, nourishes community, and prepares aspiring farmers

Community Equity & Inclusion Focus

Main Street Project builds social, economic, immigrant, **rural-urban equity** via re-design of a corporate agriculture system into a more sustainable, community-based farming that brings vitality to people, land, and the communities they share to meet some of our most profound challenges: delivering healthy, wholesome food, reducing chemical- and antibiotic-intensive farming, reversing environmental damage, and building rural prosperity.

"Over and over we heard the word, 'disconnect. People felt disconnected from transportation, food, cultural understanding, being part of the community, being part of the leadership. The farm is really about a sense of belonging but also a physical commons. This is what we thought was needed to try to work together across cultures."

Summary

For more than a decade, Main Street Project has worked to create pathways out of poverty for the growing numbers of rural Latino and East African immigrants in Northfield. Many of these new residents, having been relegated to low-wage farm and food processing industry jobs, had no benefits and bleak economic futures.

Main Street Project's 100-Acre Farm in Dakota County, MN, serves as a training incubator for aspiring farmers, a place for community building, and a research and demonstration site where they can pilot new efforts. Initially funded by the Northwest Area Foundation in 2006, Main Street Project's mission is "Advancing a resilient agriculture system that demonstrates the power to heal our lands, nourish our communities and prepare aspiring farmers."

Background

According to Executive Director Julie Ristau, there have been several efforts at cross-cultural outreach and shared storytelling in the Southern MN Region. Over the past generation, meat packing plants brought immigrants (mainly Latinos back then) to communities such as Marshall (in southwestern Minnesota) but these migrant workers did not assimilate into the community and were seen as temporary residents. When a 2008 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid resulted in mass deportation for members of many Latino families it caused devastation in the entire community. The Main Street Project began to shift focus towards food security and developing a place where people could have meaningful work and build connections to the community.

Main Street founders believed in an ancient farming system that was good for the people, the landscape, the ecology and the economy. They saw the possibility to develop community-based, regenerative, sustainable agriculture. Immigrants had strong connections to the land and practical knowledge. They wanted to be able to raise food and be on the land. However, their work opportunities were typically (or only) in cheap food processing industries. They were poorly paid and often had no upward mobility options.

Main Street Project developed a model for immigrants aspiring to be farmers – a model that connected animals to perennial landscapes. Today, Main Street Project has their own farm where they continue to research how to deploy this farming system. Agripreneurs (families) learn how to raise their own animals for their consumption and/or business as well as learning stacking functions within a small piece of land to increase productivity and sustainability for the enterprise as well as the land and the environment.

Process

Initially, Main Street Project responded to identified community need by developing programs to deliver more specialized agricultural training and skills to help immigrant workers increase their incomes and leverage new job opportunities. America's industrial food system is built upon a foundation of low-wage work, externalized costs, and direct federal subsidies. It is unsustainable by design and difficult for new farmers to enter. Main Street Project needed a new design and new system sustainable for people, animals, land, and communities.

For the next seven years, Main Street Project worked with immigrant aspiring agripreneurs to develop the small-scale agricultural model that connects animals to native perennial crops. Poultry, a protein source in many cultures, was chosen as the animal component. Native perennials, such as hazelnuts and elderberries, were the plant-based ingredients for early synergistic experiments.

Parallel to the agripreneur work, “**Regenerative Agriculture**” had emerged and Main Street Project joined this growing movement. Participants in Regenerative Agriculture expressed a desire to raise food, live on the land, and apply their practical knowledge, sustainably.

Lesson learned: Building relationships first -- value people's knowledge -- leads to the development of innovative, culturally appropriate projects.

“If we supplied the [chicken] coops and the technical assistance and the financing, they were able to raise their own flocks together, starting at a more entrepreneurial level. This changed quickly into more multigenerational family and cooperative work. People were successful in the training work, and we were doing great at raising poultry,” explain Ristau.

Participants still faced structural barriers such as acquiring and accessing land and having transportation issues. When Ristau initially joined Main Street Project in 2015, her first task was to find land with which to develop additional paths forward. She later became acting director and in 2018, Executive Director.

WealthWorks Capitals

WealthWorks Framework elements at play (working towards eventual systems change towards an equitable economic ecosystem):



Individual Capital – skills & physical & mental healthiness of the Latino and East African immigrants



Social Capital – farmers, visitors, residents, community organizers bonding & bridging; farm place as community connector and builder



Intellectual Capital
innovation, creativity, imagination



Natural Capital array of environmental resources (air, water, land, flora, fauna) on display
aspiring farmers learn the craft



Built Capital transportation and communications infrastructure, water, farm place as shared infrastructure and shared responsibility



Political Capital – shift in how farming is seen, as entrepreneurial, as sustainable, with a shift in multicultural appreciation, increasing voice, access, inclusion in decision-making of traditionally underrepresented community members



Financial Capital – community wealth-building, investment in the business operations and land, purchase of inputs and resulting new sources of income and tax revenues that are locally-based.



Cultural Capital changing dynamics, knowledge of who is known and what heritages are valued, collaboration across races, ethnicities, generations

"When I came in 2015, she says, "We began the process of acquiring a demonstration and training farm so that people could work together and advance beyond the basic training. We still have a strong training component at the farm, but we are also working hard to break through some of the obstacles in land access and financing. And the farm itself is great place for the community to come together. We have a land share program which means that with very little, people can access a plot of land and work together in community growing things. We also expanded into vegetable production and then other ways that we can provide food security."

"We call it a hundred acres of innovation."

Ristau brought in an evaluator with experience in community organizing and in using qualitative data. Community engagement has always been a fundamental part of the Main Street Project. Throughout their evaluation, using social network analysis, they envisioned positions for people from their targeted communities as "Community Connectors". Rocky Casillas, a Community Outreach & Extension Education/Community Connector, has been a key link with aspiring farmers from marginalized communities. Through this new community connector, Latinos gradually acquired more leadership within the organization and started making changes. Main Street Project used evaluation results to improve upon and evolve their initiatives. Today Main Street Project employs an East African community connector as well as East African Agripreneurs. This is a highly technical program and represents a massive group/collective effort.

Lesson learned: Seek technical assistance. Built on your own evaluation. Collaborative effort = shared responsibility and shared benefits.

Results

The organization's diverse board and staff works as a collegial team in a horizontal structure; staff are community connectors who work with new communities and individuals. Main Street Project's evaluation process is extensive and based on storytelling and story sharing facilitated by the organization's four community connectors.

"There was very extensive social design behind this project."



Rural Communities Equity Action Guide | Case Study Four



When people come to the farm, they remark on the collegiality and group decision-making they see. We start with the idea of resiliency as key to equity, and with a land-based ethic that is very indigenous.

"Over and over we heard the word, 'disconnect.' People felt disconnected from transportation, food, cultural understanding, being part of the community, being part of the leadership. The farm is really about a sense of belonging but also a physical commons. This is what we thought was needed to try to work together across cultures."

"We have East African, Latino and White beginner farmers working here," says Ristau. "When visitors come, they are amazed to see such diversity of people and environment in one place. Public access is important to help people be able to imagine and be inspired. In the first two to three years of operation, we had almost 1,500 people come visit."

When people come to the farm, they remark on the collegiality and group decision-making they see. We start with the idea of resiliency as key to equity, and with a land-based ethic that is very indigenous."

The project also features ecological design. "This is a different kind of agriculture...it is meant to heal and restore the soil." In 2016, they acquired degraded corn-on-corn farmland. They are restoring it to health by keeping the soil covered, planting perennials, cleaning up waterways, and restoring/adding wetlands. Farmers are also working to improve production and developing markets for elderflowers and hazelnuts and conducting on-farm research to improve the profitability of poultry.

The Main Street Project embodies equitable and inclusive economics, changing the market paradigm to build real local wealth and food security in the community. Main Street provides bilingual training in poultry-centered perennial agriculture, agricultural methods and processes. They developed a bilingual (Spanish) farm business curriculum accessible to students with low literacy levels to support and form sustainable Agriprenuers. Chicken raised in the training program are then sold through the CSA (community supported agriculture). Local multigenerational families use garden plots to grow their own food for home consumption and/or for sale. Main Street Project also provides low-cost perennials from their nurseries to area farmers and they share their farm equipment with their neighbors.

This model contrasts with the larger agricultural system built on commodification and extracting wealth from communities. "Large-scale agriculture is consolidated and provides money for very few," Ristau explains.

"Main Street works towards policies that help advance healthy food access for all people. We build urban-rural partnerships with an equity lens through our work with Twin Cities local food security groups. Our farmland ownership structure is a national model. We have partnered with Dakota County, MN, to test a pilot easement program that will keep marginal lands in active perennial agricultural production," says Ristau.

Main Street Project has identified structural barriers to their transformational work, at national and state levels. Farmers encounter institutionalized inflexibility in everything from financing to infrastructure. Immigrant aspiring farmers hit roadblocks to access financing and other resources. "This is a very large problem," says Ristau. "We work with other organizations advocating and developing systems where individual farmers can secure land and financing....We just started a local Agrarian Commons with partner organization such as Compeer, Iroquois Valley Farmland REIT and Shared Capital Cooperative, and Latino Economic Development Center" to mention few.

Lesson learned: Larger issues require larger coalitions. Mainstreet has found allies to work towards these structural barriers at state and national level.

Reflections

Ristau says the Main Street models of perennial agriculture and livestock are replicable in theory, but it remains to be seen whether it is possible to make farmland accessible to immigrant farmers in small parcels. She and her team are experimenting with "stacked functions," a permaculture term on which every element in a design performs more than one function, to make it possible to make a living off a small area of land.

"Frankly, a lot of our immigrant farmers know how to do that. They just have not had access to land. But take five acres of land. In our model, you could raise three flocks of poultry per year on an acre and a half and sell them on the market. At the same time, you can grow garlic and black beans and elderberries, which has a lucrative

market lately." Stacking functions means a new farmer could earn a livelihood.

There is no clear pathway for immigrant farmers to be landed in this country. Ristau and her team are building a work-around of the system by hosting and incubating a local Agrarian Commons an affiliate of a national Agrarian Trust. Eventually, they hope to figure out how to move farmland parcels into a trust that can then be leased to any kind of farmer for the long term.

NOTE: Main Street Project is currently in the process of changing their name that will potentially be released by the end of this year.
Watch for it!



A: 105 4th Street E Suite 213
Northfield, MN 55057

P: (507) 786-9900

W: mainstreetproject.org

RURAL COMMUNITIES EQUITY ACTION GUIDE

Based on interviews between Mónica Maria Segura-Schwartz, Growth & Justice Policy and Outreach Consultant, and Fatima Said, Executive Director of Project FINE

Case Study Five



PROJECT FINE

Welcoming Communities;
Welcoming Community Vitality

Community Equity & Inclusion Focus

Winona's organizational and community collaborations have shown great innovation and leadership in establishing important partnerships to tackle **workforce equity**, respond to demographic change, and promote an inclusive culture, particularly in welcoming and weaving immigrants and refugees into the community and workforce as equal and contributing members.

"I love to see the accomplishments of those we serve - their smiles when they overcome barriers and start buying houses, putting their children through college. I know the feeling of that because I came with two children and two bags and nothing else.

Summary

Project FINE serves as a connection point for refugees and immigrants and built a formal partnership between Winona and the Welcoming America organization and its extensive resources. Project FINE (Focus on Integrating Newcomers through Education) is a nonprofit organization that has been serving Winona County and the surrounding area since 1990, helping build contributing individuals, healthy families, and a stronger, more respectful community for all.

Their work helped the City of Winona become the first city in Minnesota to join the **Welcoming America movement and its Welcoming International Network** which has helped "super-size" Winona and its surrounding areas to transform into a more welcoming place for all newcomers.

(Note: Welcoming America is a nonpartisan, international nonprofit that leads a growing movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous *by helping everyone know they belong*. It provides a roadmap and support for places to reduce barriers to full participation and build bridges between immigrants and long-time residents through direct contact and dialogue.)

Background

As of the 2010 Census, the only population increase in the Winona area was among diverse individuals. This growth is expected to continue, as will the challenges of cultural and language barriers that prevent newcomers from accessing services, gaining employment, and building connections and a new life in the community.

According to Project FINE Executive Director Fatima Said, "Diversity has grown significantly because there are great jobs in the community. The need for workers has driven the community to ask how to attract more people."

Project FINE began as a program in Winona County, organized by the University of Minnesota Extension Office in 1990 when it received a four-year federal grant to help (mostly Hmong, then) refugees access basic needs, such as food and shelter. Now an independent nonprofit, it is helping refugees and immigrants grow capacity and grow community roots, such as supporting homeownership and/or entrepreneurship.

Project FINE works closely with over 70 community partners to provide information and access to resources such as foreign language interpreters and translators, opportunities for education, information, referral, and empowerment for immigrants, refugees, and established residents.

In 2005, Project FINE was struggling but the need for the organization was still evident. They applied for and received support from United Way to develop a strategic plan, hire new leadership, and breathe new life into the organization. Since that time, they have grown considerably and are funded by a mix of fee for service programs and grants from private foundations.

Process

When Said became Executive Director in 2005, "Project FINE was in a very hard situation: no money, no space, no technology, and worst of all we had no friends." Not many in the community were aware of Project FINE's mission and Fatima thought, "What I am going to do?" Her answer was to start building relationships, one person at a time. "You cannot succeed on your own. You need people. You need partners."

With a board of directors that was generous with its time and support, Said's relationship-building gradually extended to funders who recognized the growing need for Project FINE's existing and proposed capacity-building services. The organization slowly stabilized.

Lesson learned: Relationships are a two-way street: To build relationships, you must share something from you. When you share, you become vulnerable and that is okay.

"I started sharing these success stories with the County Administrator, the Department of Human Services director, the public health director. In formalizing Language Services, we connected with health institutions like Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota and UCare, making sure that our program would meet their requirements for medical interpreters. Now we rent space in the county building and providers in our community can access interpreters easily. They don't have to invest in all that travel time anymore because we are an independent contractor right there," says Fatima.

WealthWorks Capitals

WealthWorks Framework elements at play in the Meander (working towards eventual systems change towards an equitable economic ecosystem):



Individual Capital – immigrants and refugees skills development, integration into community and businesses; strengthening of newcomers' and long-time residents' psychic and physical energy for productive engagement and capacity to use and apply existing knowledge and integrate new learnings and physical and mental healthiness



Social Capital residents, businesses, community organizations and newcomers bonding & bridging



Intellectual Capital innovation, creativity, imagination



Natural Capital array of environmental resources (air, water, land, flora, fauna) on display as visitors "meander" thru region to artist studies, shops, etc.



Built Capital transportation and communications infrastructure, schools, business structures



Political Capital – shift in how immigrants and refugees in region are seen – as entrepreneurs as well as skilled workforce, shift in cultural appreciation, increasing voice, access, inclusion in decision-making of traditionally underrepresented community members



Financial Capital investment in skills building and inclusion by local businesses and organizations, increase in income and tax revenues as more businesses are started, retained, expanded



Cultural Capital changing dynamics, knowledge of who is known and what heritages are valued, collaboration across races, ethnicities, generations

"We build relationships with agencies whose patients and clients are also refugees and immigrants and share with them what we can do together to help them deliver their services more effectively."

Lesson learned: Being a good partner and making sure that you deliver what you say you will confer dignity and respect upon all stakeholders. "It is all about respect. It is all about respect."

In 2011, Project FINE was approached by Welcoming America to be featured in their upcoming publication of success stories and be a resource for similar organizations. Said agreed to the offer.

"After that, I started to research them [Welcoming America] more and use them as a resource. We started becoming a part of their network: I learned from other people around the nation and they started learning from us. This is the beauty of this work when you are networking and sharing and collecting information."

Lesson learned: You are not alone in this work. No matter how far away your partners are, they are there for you.

In 2013, after partnering on various initiatives and attending their conference, Said was selected by Welcoming America to represent Project FINE and Winona as a Champion of Change at the White House.

Results

The partnerships helped Said's organization and its stakeholders build traction locally. Several years ago, Project FINE approached Winona's city administrator. They proposed that the city join Welcoming America's formal network as a way of intentionally recognizing the community's efforts to be inclusive. The City Council then passed a proclamation.

"We became the first officially welcoming city in Minnesota. I was so happy I cannot tell you." The city of Austin passed its own proclamation a few days later.

Being part of a national community of welcoming cities motivated Project FINE and the community to move to the next level. They began to host community celebrations on Citizenship and Constitution Day in September, engaging naturalized citizens, elected officials, and community residents to celebrate.

"We invited all citizens to come and share their stories and be together and have the elected officials welcoming those new citizens to the community. We invited the League of Women Voters to register them to vote."



Rural Communities Equity Action Guide | Case Study Five



"I just don't understand people that have something against being welcoming, being a good neighbor, being a good co-worker, being a good teacher to your students. It is much easier when you chose to be welcoming."

After several years, Project FINE approached the city for ideas about how to make the celebration an even bigger event. Last year's week-long celebration attracted 1,200 people.

"We did something different every day during Welcoming Week. Celebrations in the park with live music and dancing, our Citizenship Day Celebration, film screenings, all with the same purpose: bringing people together from different cultures and backgrounds to get to know one another and build relationships."

Lesson learned: Celebrations are places of sharing, community building, and getting to know each other. The whole community grows and benefits.

It was not just about the large attendance. "It was a huge success because so many people worked together." They printed two booklets of refugee and immigrant stories which the Winona Daily News published digitally. "When we share stories, we begin to know each other." "We are all the product of the environment where we grow up. You have to keep trying to send the positive message and share your story. It may be hard at times, but you have to swallow your pride and keep working."

Lesson learned: Work with everyone, even the leaders with whom you disagree.

"Hearing the Voices," was published as a series in 2015 in the *Winona Daily News*. In it, Fatima shares her reflections on the project:

"Fear, sadness, hurt, courage, hope, and contentment. Those of us who are newcomers faced these emotions and many more on our journey to the United States. Some of us came for education or love and others because of war or traumatic circumstances. All of us have had challenges and struggles, but greatly appreciate the opportunity to build a new life."

"I just don't understand people that have something against being welcoming, being a good neighbor, being a good co-worker, being a good teacher to your students. It is much easier when you chose to be welcoming."

"We are all the product of the environment where we grow up. You have to keep trying to send the positive message and share your story. It may be hard at times, but you have to swallow your pride and keep working."

Lesson learned: Work with everyone, even the leaders with whom you disagree.

Reflections

This mission is not only Project FINE's mission. It is Said's personal mission; she came to this country 26 years ago from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"I love to see the accomplishments of those we serve - their smiles when they overcome barriers and start buying houses, putting their children through college. I know the feeling of that because I came with two children and two bags and nothing else."

"You come here as a refugee and you appreciate what the community did for you. It's my motivation and my inspiration to do for others what they did for me through this work with a new generation of refugees and immigrants. I really appreciate our partners and people in community. Just recently, I had a conversation with the League of Cities, and we are looking into becoming a Southeast MN Welcoming Region.

"We come to this country because we want to live a better life. And there is no better life without work, right? So, you work, day and night, to build a better life. I really enjoy giving back to the state and the country that invested in me and my family so much. And I never will stop."



RURAL COMMUNITIES EQUITY ACTION GUIDE

Based on interviews between Mónica Maria Segura-Schwartz, Growth & Justice Policy; Bemidji Mayor Rita Albrecht; and Headwaters Regional Development Commission Executive Director Tim Flathers.

Case Study Six

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAMS

Reducing Native American homelessness

Community Equity & Inclusion Focus

This ongoing, multi-partner commitment to **housing equity** helps homeless individuals and families gain social and financial stability by pairing housing options with culturally competent wrap-around services developed through a partnership that addressed culture-specific needs and engagement of impacted community members.

"It was a lot more than just building the building. It was about helping families be successful . . .

Summary

Bemidji's successful supportive housing project is a strategic, broadly organized, and funded solution to a specific community need. Recognizing high rates of homelessness among many of its tribal residents, diverse stakeholders in the city of Bemidji worked together to build support, funding, plans and physical locations for two supportive housing units. The project is owned and operated by the Beltrami County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), an affiliate a partner of the Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC) which contracts with HRA to provide administrative support.

Background

Bemidji, population 15,400, is home to a large four-year university, technical college, and Christian college. Timber harvesting is an important industry. There are also jobs in federal and state government agencies, retail, health care, service, tourism, and hospitality. About 20-25% of the population is American Indian. Bemidji's median household income of about \$34,000 is low compared to other areas of the state and many families are at the poverty level. There is a gap between the skills of workers seeking employment and skills needed for available jobs. Public transportation is limited.

Finding affordable housing is a challenge for everyone, whether you are a student, individual, or a family. Minority populations face additional barriers. If you do not have rental history, for example, you are not going to be an attractive renter to a landlord in a city with only a 2% rental vacancy rate. High rent and low vacancies correlate to the number of university students in town. It can be difficult for those in poverty to save the money needed for a down payment or to qualify for home a loan, especially when the market for affordable homes is so competitive.

Bemidji has always had a homeless population, and many low-income families live in sub-standard, unsafe housing. On a single day in 2009, 393 people were known to be homeless in the Northwest Region of Minnesota, including 235 children and youth through age 21. And yet, for Indigenous families especially, Bemidji is their homeland. This area's regional housing agencies have historically worked hard to find affordable housing units for individuals in need. The problem, agency staff realized, was that there were not enough units to go around.

Process

In response to this persistent need for affordable housing, housing leaders in Beltrami County initiated a planning process to create a supportive housing project to help vulnerable individuals live with more stability. It was not easy.

Tim Flathers served as the community development planner/director for the Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC) for 30 years prior to becoming its Executive Director in July 2013.

"When I interviewed here," says Flathers, "we didn't really have a housing program at the HRDC but one of the things they asked me was what I would like to do. I said I was interested in housing." The HRA of Bemidji received substantial funding from HUD to support development of public housing. The City declined receipt of the funds and commissioned a housing study that was completed by the HRDC. The study documented a big need for those funds to be invested in public housing. "Ever since, we became the advocates, I guess," says Flathers.

"We used to convene a group of community partners to just talk about housing issues. The Red Lake housing staff participated in these conversations and we did some Public Homeownership 101 events together. We learned to work well together over that period. We had a sincere interest in working towards common goals. We worked together for probably ten years before we started going down the path of doing a real substantial project."

"Several years ago, I was invited to a Tribal round table event that included staff from Red Lake, Leech Lake, and White Earth. I went into the conversation thinking I was there to talk about home ownership. But one of the issues that kept coming up was the need to house homeless families in the region. "It is never a completely linear process as these things unfold."

Lesson learned: The relationship-building process –was key to successfully forming and implementing the actual housing project.

At the Tribal Round Table, Red Lake staff indicated that they could contribute some subsidy dollars to a targeted housing project if State bond funds could be procured. There was potential to work together but legally, the project needed a developer and a property owner to proceed.

WealthWorks Capitals

WealthWorks Framework elements at play (working towards eventual systems change towards an equitable economic ecosystem):



Individual Capital build community members' skills and physical and mental healthiness, stability



Social Capital residents, community organizers bonding & bridging



Intellectual Capital innovation, creativity, imagination



Built Capital affordable housing, transportation infrastructure



Political Capital shift in cultural appreciation, increasing voice, access, inclusion in decision-making of traditionally underrepresented community members



Financial Capital investment in wealth building resources



Cultural Capital changing dynamics, knowledge of who is known and what heritages are valued, collaboration across races, ethnicities, generations

Flathers explained, "Since we had a great relationship with the HRA Director at Red Lake, I said we could probably bring the developer (Headwaters Housing Development Corporation or HHDC) and the property owner (Beltrami HRA) if both boards would agree. That was the initial idea."

"The HRDC is our umbrella commission created under state statute," he says. "We have a non-profit subsidiary corporation -- a 501C3 -- that is called the Headwaters Housing Development Corporation. The commission itself cannot be a developer because we cannot own property other than our own building, so in 1998 we created the non-profit corporation. That allows us to build and sell single family homes and develop some multifamily projects."

"We also staff several housing authorities. The Beltrami County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) has been a strong partner. Because they are a public entity, they can be an owner for some projects funded with state bond funds. And because we staff them, it gives us additional tools." In other words, for public housing projects, the HRA can own it, the non-profit can develop it, and the HRDC can staff it under contract to both."

"Having HRDC staff ready to step in and knowing that strong relationships with tribes were already in place made the project pitch attractive to both boards. They said, 'yes.'"

"Red Lake really led the partnership, and they were the ones that basically brought Leech Lake along. We developed a great working relationship with them, too, as we went to the project." HRDC's role was to put together different teams to work on the different components.

Stakeholders held several public information meetings to inform neighborhood residents of the nearby potential project. Some residents voiced apprehension, says Flathers. It likely could have been overcome with further discussion but the project was relocated (due to soil conditions) before that happened. Community opposition to the overall project was minor and focused more on changing the characteristics of the site from an open field to a developed property than on serving homeless families.

"It was a lot more than just building the building. It was about helping families be successful and making sure that they had the services that they needed to the extent that they were interested in and partaking in services. So, we had a separate team doing that. The Tribes were partners on both of those teams. They offered a lot of feedback on where the project will be built and material choices, and all of the development type issues that you run into."

Rural Communities Equity Action Guide | Case Study Six



"When you are dealing with a complex project, you can't masterplan and just check a bunch of boxes. Things continuously change. You have to accommodate that and respect the differences that different people bring.

Bi-County Community Action Programs, Inc. (Bi-CAP) was a key part of the collaboration by becoming the primary service provider. HRDC also hired a development consultant (Barb Broen, Broen Consulting) to help bundle together the capital. Funding ultimately came from housing infrastructure bonds, sales tax and energy rebates, Red Lake Nation, Leech Lake Nation, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, and a grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank sponsored by a local bank. The City of Bemidji contributed as well by extending the street and utilities to the subdivision.

Jane Barrett, Director of the Red Lake Housing Authority provided tremendous leadership to make the project a reality. DW Jones Property Management was a key partner from the beginning and offered many suggestions along the way to help keep the ongoing expenses reasonable.

"The City and County both provide support essential for the success of the project and often don't get the credit they deserve."

Mayor Rita Albrecht was and continues to be a strong supporter. "If you don't have safe secure housing it is hard for kids to go to school every day," she says. "It is hard for people to go to work every day. Housing, education, and all those things are intertwined in creating a successful driving economy. As an elected official, I just tried to be out there in front of HRDC saying, 'this is a good idea, our community needs to do this.' I provided political cover and support whenever I could. I think it is more about being an ambassador and cheerleader for projects."



The tribes had a major say in how to provide culturally appropriate services. The group ended up building the units and sharing control over the leases. City and regional government partnerships with the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe—and pairing control over the master leases with tribal funding contributions – helped ensure that the solutions met the actual community need.

Lesson learned: Community has the answers. Culturally appropriate projects and services arise from intentional and total engagement and project-long input from the impacted communities.

The first project was twenty units, explains Flathers. “The Red Lake tribe master leases five [units] and the Leech Lake tribe master leases five. These [units] are only for tribal members. The other ten units could also be rented by tribal members but were not specifically set aside for them.” To live there, people must meet the definition of homeless.

Lesson learned: Sharing the work means sharing power and control.

“It was a win-win: they had the subsidies for those five units which help us assure that the unit was going to stay full. And we were able to designate those units permanently for those Tribal members.”

Lesson learned: Diverse participation means diverse interests and in turn a more difficult decision-making process. But diversity and inclusion of all stakeholders assures inclusive results.



Results

The first development, Conifer Estates, was funded in 2007 and completed in 2012. Its 20 units (Three transitional and 16 permanent supportive units along with one unit held for a resident caretaker) serve homeless families and individuals struggling with mental health and chemical dependency. Transitional housing has supports (staff) in place to help people understand how to be a renter, how to get a job, how to hold onto a job, and transition eventually to a place of their own. Conifer Estates filled immediately.

The second project, Conifer Villas, will sit just north of the first. One of its new buildings will also include a community meeting room and staff and conference space. Staff will help residents find and coordinate with other supportive services. A new playground will sit between the new complexes. Conifer Villas will offer permanent, subsidized housing.

Lesson learned: collaborative effort = shared responsibility and shared benefits.

Reflections

Flathers stresses that building relationships with tribes is no different than doing so with any other group. "It's about valuing what each of the partners brings to the project. Red Lake wanted to provide the best services possible to homeless tribal members in Bemidji. We were able to bring something to the table in terms of the ownership and developing capacity right in Bemidji where many of the targeted community had the mainstream services available and the employment opportunities. Red Lake could bring some of the subsidy dollars to bear but they didn't have the any units to subsidize located on tribal land." Flathers reflects that none of the stakeholders knew what the project would end up looking like.

Lesson learned: Talk less. Listen more. Remain flexible as understanding of the details and the big picture grow.

"We knew that we had an opportunity to serve homeless families, and that was really the core. You have to be light on your feet."

"We may have benefitted from a rural ethic that requires us to work well together to get things done. We had a large team of people working together for several years before getting the housing built and operational." "When you are dealing with a complex project, you can't masterplan and just check a bunch of boxes. Things continuously change. You have to accommodate that and respect the differences that different people bring."

"Have trust in the fact that having people that come to the table with diverse skills, diverse strengths, different ways of thinking about things. Collectively it's a tremendous amount of wisdom that you wouldn't have if you just did it on your own."



by Mónica Maria Segura-Schwartz, Growth &
Justice Policy and Outreach Consultant

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Creative, bold thinking and action comes from patiently working through the tensions and diverse opinions inherent in all communities.



Rural communities are not only different from urban ones, they are different than they used to be when they were the predominant form of settlement in the United States. In Minnesota, the fastest growth in populations of people of color, many of whom are immigrants to this country, is happening in counties outside of the Twin Cities metro area. This is a good thing. Community survival anywhere depends on embracing the diversity of people, ideas, energy, and culture that newcomers, and home-comers, bring.

I came to Minnesota 20 years ago from Colombia where I lived in the mountains and they were my world. To me, Minnesota was this flat horizon with miles and miles of nothing in my sight. It felt shocking and threatening. It took a Minnesotan (who loves Minnesota) to show me the beauty of this place.

Minnesotans joke all about the cold, the highways, the mosquitoes, and the non-existence of the spring and fall (we have two seasons here: winter and road construction). But I notice there is little talk of the love people feel for the landscape, the beauty of it, and the fun of living here. Minnesotans pride themselves as hard workers but sometimes it comes across to me as though work is the only thing that Minnesota has to offer. Fatima Said (Winona Case Study) makes a point speaking of new refugees: “you work, day and night [to build a better life]” I cannot help to wonder: do Minnesotans, newcomers and veterans, need to learn how to play?”

Now that I, too, have fallen in love with this beautiful place, I can see the hundreds of different animals (from mammals to insects) that live in my back yard (in St. Cloud). I see the purity of the air compared to other cities, the availability of clean water, the quick green all over in the summer, the fun of lake life and cookouts, the majesty of the trees, the grandeur of the Great River (the Mississippi) and the profound peace and beauty of snowshoeing or a hike in the winter.

Small towns can be tightly knit to the point that new residents are viewed with a curt curiosity and suspicion. We know that implementation, replication, or scaling up of the ideas and practices noted in this guide will not be quick or easy, especially for people used to doing things

“the way we’ve always done them”.

We are - and must be - united in our mutual responsibility to steward, show and claim Minnesota’s visual and cultural beauty. Our rural communities will thrive when we start talking about it with younger generations and with new Minnesotans. We must share our love for the region until everyone else falls in love with it as well. Only until we all love it will we all be working on its behalf.

We also need to recognize and learn together the impact of global policies in our communities, economic policies that have kept us highly dependent on large industries and forms of economic development that only keep us “surviving” not “thriving”. Surviving means we tend to trust outsiders who look like us; thriving means we grow to trust our own neighbors

“ It took a Minnesotan (who loves Minnesota) to show me the beauty of this place.”



Photo credit: Main Street Project

even when they look or worship differently than we do. “Surviving” only leaves time for the urgent (work, family, school, feeding our kids), completely disregarding the important (friends, health care, mental health, beauty, learning, seeing, and experimenting with new ideas...).

To step out of the survival mode, we need to take risks, like the people did (and continue to do) in the projects featured in the case studies. We share ideas, we learn from what other people have learned. Creative, bold thinking and action comes from patiently working through the tensions and diverse opinions inherent in all communities. And that process starts with getting to know and trust each other. It starts with intentionally building relationships; it is sustained by being welcoming, whether or not people are “from here” and expanding the circle of doing good with one another (social equity) and doing well together, too (economic equity).

Final Reflections

Equity is an imperative for rural economic development and prosperity. Scholars, community development, economists and other professionals and experts overwhelmingly agreed with this statement. Rural Minnesotans also need to state, develop, and expand what equity means for them and how this definition is inclusive of all people living in rural Minnesota.

Rural Minnesota has experienced years of economic development based on extraction of resources and people. Value-adding locally is still a rarity, as raw resources typically leave rural places along with the wealth to be gained from the middle and end processing and distribution markets. There remain low-skill and low-wage jobs with significantly less opportunities for upward mobility. As a result, rural Minnesota has large and often concentrated populations of people working and living in poverty. Communication systems tend to keep people separated from each other, not only physically but “ideologically”, hurting their ability to get to know each other as fellow human beings sharing a spot on this Earth, and sharing this Earth.

Rural Minnesotans are also resilient people, creative at finding ways to work against these larger negative forces and developing ways of positive and shared prosperity. This guide attempted to share a few of those examples and what people working on them learned that could help others:

Relationship building

Patrick Moore, talked about years of relationship building in a place that “radically welcomed” everyone from “Tree-Huggers to Country Club members to give birth to the meander. Tim Flathers said he spent about 10 years working with Tribal members before they could trust one another to work on a shared and significant project together. Relationship building takes time. It is part of the work. Wendy Foley conducted over 70 meetings one-on-one over six months to get to know many stakeholders in the community around a specific topic (health equity). Jane Ellison included relationship building time in her project work agenda meetings for over three consecutive years, while also doing the work. Each one of the practitioners talked about the importance of being vulnerable in this process, the importance of telling your story. “It is a two-way street” says Fatima Said of the relationship building in the now-30-year-old Project Fine in Winona.

Sharing Power

These practitioners also talked about different ways of sharing power. They imply an understanding of power as the ability to share power. Sharing power is as simple as letting others do things, or doing things in different ways. It can be difficult but it is very important. The case studies included several mentions of sharing decision-making power, letting go of preconceived rules, such as notions of time management or ways of participation. Be open to other ways of doing the work - non-Western ways, for example. Also, “You have to work your way out of the project” says Patrick Moore. As a starter of a project, “you have to let go of power [and let others lead].” Julie Ristau talked about a horizontal organizational structure where everyone has a say; they have different roles and they participate equally.

Value other's time and opinions

Main Street Project built an entire evaluation system based on storytelling. They use it to improve their work and continue to build community within their farm/project participants. This is in the foundation of their work. Fatima Said talked about sharing your story and letting others get to know you. Blue Cross Blue Shield developed an entire branch of their project on the premise of valuing others' opinions, leading to new way of distributing funding and community participation. Moore talked about different interests of different participants that needed to be met to move forward. Flathers also recognized that characteristic as the key to building relationships with tribal members. Valuing everyone's contributions has led these projects to innovate and create. Ristau reinforced this when she spoke of Main Street's farm, where they have "hundred acres of innovation."

The process is as important as the goals

It is not only about having clear goals and working towards them. The "work" is in the process. It is while working towards the goals that relationships are built, that everyone learns from each other and that practitioners get the experiences that help them build new projects. "This is not a linear process" said Tim Flathers, it's a journey. Jane Ellison stated that each agenda took time in planning and sub-teams were developed out of the larger team. Many of their activities considered details such as what makes the space welcoming, what type of food speaks to some or many, who hosts what and how, how you introduce each other. Ristau talked about the process of engaging cultural brokers. Flathers mentioned services to tribal members coming from tribal members and that the final product was at the end better but very different than what they first thought it might be.

Other learnings mentioned as well:

- Celebrations are important!
- Get technical assistance - ask for help.
- Develop your network and support systems - you are not alone.
- Make sure you and you team have a shared language and a shared understanding of key terms and definitions - that you all are talking about the same thing.
- In rural Minnesota you don't get too specialized as you need to wear as many hats as your project needs.
- Have fun!
- This is a work of love.

Start now and/or continue from where you are. Find your allies. Know your community, deeply and broadly. Analyze power by figuring out who does what and who listens to whom. Develop your own support system. Be brave. Plan carefully and intentionally. Act bravely. Reflect humbly and honestly. Repeat.

Your actions will help create a Minnesota Where Equity Is Our North Star and We All Belong.³

3 From the motto of the *Minnesota Equity Blueprint* co-created by the Thriving by Design Network - Rural & Urban Together

MAIN STREET PROJECT



RESOURCES



Resources for Building Equitable Economic Ecosystems

Regional and national frameworks for building inclusive rural economies

The Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) is one of nine “RDCs” in Minnesota. For nearly 50 years, R5DC has provided technical assistance to local governments based on regional needs. It also coordinates state, federal, and local comprehensive planning, and development programs to help citizens and local communities solve economic, social, physical, and governmental problems. R5DC roots its long-term strategy and plans in a proven regional economic development model, WealthWorks, which offers a systematic approach to building a more self-reliant and equitable economy.

R5DC has been on the equitable economic ecosystems path for a decade. In the fall of 2010, it received an \$800,000 Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Transportation (DOT), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Sustainable Communities Planning grant. This occurred at a time when the region was facing the worst economic crash since the Great Depression.

Over 18 months, 600 citizens from Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties came together to envision a brighter future for ALL children and grandchildren. The group was far more diverse than the demographic profile of the region and was one of the first initiatives to meaningfully engage marginalized populations in the region. This planning process was called the Resilient Region Project.

The resulting Resilient Region plan focused on integrating key sustainability and resilience areas of housing, transportation, energy, natural resources, connectivity/broadband, healthcare, education/workforce development, changing populations, efficiencies-effectiveness, and economic engines. Early on, success in each theme area was realized.

In 2014, R5DC and partners gave intentional focus on equity within value-chains (previously called “industry clusters”). Concentration was devoted to energy, sustainable food systems, and placemaking (elevating and celebrating local culture) as economic drivers where equitable economic growth could thrive and empower our future.

In 2018, the R5DC team and partners at Sprout Food Hub became Intercultural Development Inventory Assessments (IDI) Qualified Assessors (QA’s) as a way to improve regional social cohesion and increase cultural competency that would deepen our commitment to justice, equity, diversity, inclusion (JEDI) work within the three value chains; renewable energy, local food systems and placemaking.

In 2019, R5DC secured support from trusted partners; Northwest Area Foundation, The Blandin Foundation, Sourcewell and McKnight Foundation, to advance a sequenced strategy to build equitable economic ecosystems in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties in Central Minnesota.

The regional Welcoming Communities program was launched by R5DC and initially entailed a year of internal organizational DEI growth. R5DC spent the next 12 months delivering IDI assessments to over 29 groups (297 people) and over 90 individual one-to-one personal profiles. Eight community-wide consortiums were formed from a diverse representation of private, public, non-profit, student and underrepresented people to form the “Welcoming Community Advocacy Groups” (WCAG). The WCAG’s met quarterly to learn more about DEI and craft/build a physical project that offers a system change and exhibits how that community wishes to show the world their welcoming community culture.

In addition to the Welcoming Communities program, the effort expanded in 2020 to include story circles with artist renderings of community input, publication of this “Rural Communities Equity Action Guide”, and emerging mapping projects. Organizers are now engaged in Criminal Justice Consortiums and Gender Equity projects AND participating with several statewide learning opportunities to facilitate practitioner learning exchanges rooted in JEDI such as True Tuesdays, EDD workshops, and RUX (Rural Urban Exchange, pioneered in Kentucky). R5DC weaves our JEDI focus and strategies into transportation, business technical assistance, lending, CEDS, Energy/Environment planning ...into EVERYTHING WE DO.

Minnesota Equity Blueprint & the Thriving by Design Network - Rural & Urban Together

R5DC aligned its efforts with Growth & Justice, a Minnesota “think and do” tank devoted to statewide, sustainable, inclusive, and equitable economic development. R5DC is a key partner since 2018 in developing Growth & Justice’s and OneMN.org’s Minnesota Equity Blueprint for shared urban and rural prosperity and uses the Blueprint’s community-based strategies and policy recommendations as inspiration for its regional work. The Blueprint’s comprehensive compilation and research of interrelated priorities for shared and sustainable prosperity was co-created with hundreds of rural and urban Minnesotans through the Thriving by Design Network - Rural & Urban Together, working to build a Minnesota Where Equity is Our North Star and We All Belong.

In addition to the Minnesota Equity Blueprint and R5DC’s long-time investments in regional prosperity levers, this *Rural Communities Equity Action Guide* weaves together several other sources of energy, ideas, and know-how. It rests on the aspirations and four cornerstones of the DevelopMN Strategic Plan for regional economic competitiveness, created by members and constituencies of the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations. We also borrow ideas and practices from other organizations such as Welcoming America, “leading a movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous by making everyone feel like they belong.”

It also blends ideas from other such guides and toolkits on community equity and inclusion for economic and community health (please see section on Regional & National Frameworks and Action Guides). Since most other guides are written for and by the urban experience or for corporations and organizations, we use their examples as inspiration - not as purely replicable step-by-step in rural settings - to unmake the artificial but harmfully embedded hierarchies of power and inequity we have all created over many generations.

First and foremost, however, this Action Guide elevates the experiences of community residents working together to plan and implement thoughtful actions towards creating an equitable economic ecosystem. It emphasizes intentional, consistent, and constant relationship-building and actions towards a shared local and regional prosperity.

Resources for Building Equitable Economic Ecosystems

Regional and national frameworks for building inclusive rural economies

Connections to project-specific resources noted in the community stories/case studies

ACCESS Project in St. Cloud, Minnesota

- [Minnesota Thrive Initiative](#)
- [The Art of Hosting](#)

Healthy Together Willmar, Minnesota

- [Dismantling Racism Works Web Workbook's Characteristics of a White Supremacist Culture](#)
- [Blue Cross Blue Shield's Healthy Together Willmar's 2019 Model of Change](#)
- <https://www.healthytogetherwillmar.org/health-equity-tools/>
- <https://www.bluecrossmn.com/about-us/us-corporate-social-responsibility/health-equity>

The Main Street Project in Northfield, Minnesota

- [The Main Street Project website](#)

The Meander Art Crawl in the Upper Minnesota River Valley

- [The Meander website](#)
- [The Art of Hosting](#)
- [Creative Class Group](#)

Project FINE in Winona, Minnesota

- [Project FINE website](#)
- [Welcoming America Rural Toolkit](#)

Supportive housing programs in Bemidji, Minnesota

- [Bemidji Pioneer coverage of supportive housing project](#)
- [BeauxSimone Consulting](#)

Connect with statewide stakeholders

- [Region Five Development Commission](#)
- [DevelopMN Greater MN Strategic Plan for regional competitiveness](#)
- [Growth and Justice's and OneMN's 2020 Minnesota Equity Blueprint](#)
- [Northwest Area Foundation](#)
- [Race Class Minnesota: messages that work in rural Minnesota](#)
- [McKnight Foundation Vibrant & Equitable Communities](#)

Connect with regional and national frameworks and action guides

- [All-In Cities: Building an Equitable Economy from the Ground Up](#)
- Annie E Casey Foundation's [Race, Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#)
- [California Endowment](#)
- [Campbell University's Rural Philanthropic Analysis](#)
- [Colorado Action Guide](#)
- [Community Capitals Framework](#) (Flora and Flora)
- [Community Development Society's Principles of Good Practice](#)
- [Hogg Foundation](#)
- [Local and Regional Government Alliance on Racial Equity](#)
- [National Equity Atlas](#)
- National League of Cities' Center for Social Inclusion's [Race, Equity, And Leadership \(REAL\) program](#)
- NORC, U Chicago's [Exploring Strategies to Improve Health and Equity in Rural Communities](#)
- Policy Link's ["Minnesota's Tomorrow: Equity is the Superior Growth Model"](#)
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's [Culture of Health Action Framework](#)
- [Rockefeller Foundation's Inclusive Growth and Recovery Challenge](#)
- University of Kansas' [Identifying Action Steps in Bringing About Community and System Change](#)
- U.S. Prosperity Index & comparisons between urban & rural places: <https://usprosperity.net/articles/article/structural-drivers-of-prosperity>
- [W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation program](#)
- [WealthWorks](#)

National examples of equity work in rural communities (local governments working with Welcoming America. See [their general guidelines](#).)

- Roanoke, VA recently [announced](#) the creation of an Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board.
- Salisbury, MD has a [Human Rights Advisory Committee](#) that seeks to recognize and celebrate the diversity of Salisbury by sponsoring outreach efforts and serving as a resource for dialogue and raising concerns.
- South Sioux City, NE talked about how the environment, economy, and equity are key to sustainability in their [2017 comprehensive plan](#).
- Champaign, IL has an [Office of Equity, Community and Human Rights](#), that has various commissions and coalitions to maintain fairness, equality, and inclusion a community coalition that assists with various community issues.
- Bowling Green, KY has an [International Communities Liaison](#) that communicates with and supports the diverse communities.
- Kalamazoo, MI (along with three other cities in Michigan and 10 other cities throughout the US) has a [Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation](#) initiative, which identifies and addresses the historic and contemporary effects of racism to help communities heal and produce sustainable change.

Other rural-specific equity guides/resources

- The [Exploring Strategies to Improve Health and Equity in Rural Communities](#) report has guidelines on how to leverage rural assets to advance health and equity in those regions.
- Neighborhood Funders Group started the [Integrated Rural Strategies Group](#) to address disparities in rural areas. They held a webinar, Hope in the Heartland, where they talked about engaging people in rural areas on issues of race and xenophobia.

An Overview of the WealthWorks Framework

WealthWorks (www.wealthworks.org) is a framework for thinking about and planning sustainable economic development goals and processes that connect community assets to market demand to build lasting livelihoods.

It recognizes several forms of capital that exist or need to exist in a community; when leveraged in an equitable and inclusive way these WealthWorks can produce systems change for the betterment of all. (For more information on WealthWorks and its use in the R5DC region, go to <https://www.regionfive.org/wealthworks>)

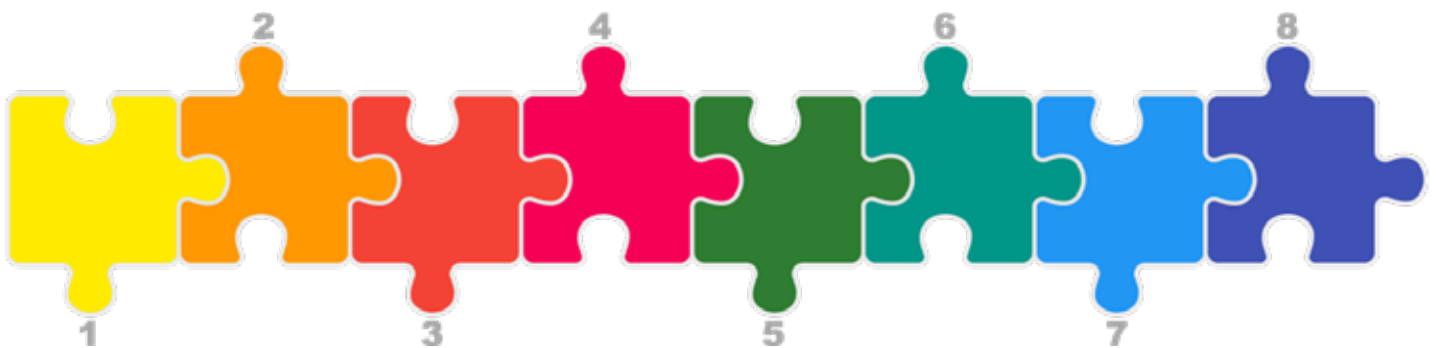
WealthWorks' definition of wealth building starts with the core belief that every place has wealth. Even if it is not currently in use, that wealth can be identified, deployed, and increased to improve the lives of residents.

Wealth building in a region like Central Minnesota means taking action to increase all three of these:

- The quality and quantity of wealth—embodied in eight different types of capital.
- The local ownership and control of that wealth by a region's people, places, or firms.
- The livelihoods of people, places, and firms in the region, including moving those on the economic margins toward the mainstream.

Defining Wealth: Eight Forms of Wealth (in summary)

- Built Capital is the stock of fully functioning constructed infrastructure.
- Cultural Capital is the stock of practices that reflect values and identity rooted in place, class, and/or ethnicity.
- Financial Capital is the stock of unencumbered monetary assets invested in other forms of capital or financial instruments.
- Individual Capital is the stock of skills and physical and mental healthiness of people in a region.
- Intellectual capital is the stock of knowledge, innovation, and creativity or imagination in a region.
- Natural Capital is the stock of unimpaired environmental assets (e.g. air, water, land, flora, fauna, etc.) in a region.
- Political Capital is the stock of power and goodwill held by individuals, groups, and/or organizations that can be held, spent or shared to achieve desired ends.
- Social Capital is the stock of trust, relationships, and networks that support civil society.





Built Capital is the stock of fully functioning constructed infrastructure. Built capital includes buildings, sewer treatment plants, manufacturing and processing plants, energy, transportation, communications infrastructure, technology and other built assets. Investments in physical capital is in construction, renovation, and maintenance. Physical capital depreciates with use and requires ongoing investment to maintain its value. The income or earnings generated by physical capital exists on in relation to its use. For example, sewer and water treatment plants contribute to human capital (health). Schools contributed to human capital (skill development) and social capital (if they are used as community gathering places) and many contribute to natural capital (if they include natural areas that are maintained or protected by the school). *A Built Capital Equitable Economic Ecosystem Systems Change occurs when infrastructure improvements occurs in areas with the highest need versus the highest tax base.*



Cultural Capital influences the ways in which individuals and groups define and access other forms of capital. Cultural capital includes the dynamics of who we know and feel comfortable with, what heritages are valued, collaboration across races, ethnicities, and generations, etc. Investments in cultural capital create or sustain the values, traditions, beliefs, and/or language that become the currency to leverage other types of capital. Investments in cultural capital could include support for venues to showcase cultural achievements, programs to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge and skills, and support for cultural transformations, among other things. “Income” from investments in cultural capital may include increased “buy in” to institutional · rules and shared norms of behavior, strengthened social · capital and increased access to other capitals through increased visibility and appreciation of cultural attributes and through cultural transformation, e.g. acquisition of language skills. We have not included cultural capital in the wealth matrix as a separate form of wealth to be measured because culture is expressed through the values, behaviors, and ownership patterns associated with the other seven forms of wealth. Where specific aspects of culture are critical to wealth creation, they can be defined and measured in relation to other aspects of wealth. For example, if a language or a craft is a critical form of wealth for a community, it can be defined and measured as a form of individual, intellectual and/or social capital. If shared savings is an existing or desired cultural norm, it can be measured as part of financial capital. *A Cultural Capital Equitable Economic Ecosystem Systems Change occurs when dominate populations evaluate success based on CULTURE and norms of region or group of non-dominate people most impacted from the measure. When qualitative measures directed by people and place are honored and valued as much as quantitative data.*



Financial Capital is the stock of unencumbered monetary assets invested in other forms of capital or financial instruments. Financial capital, if well-managed, generates monetary returns that can be used for further investment or consumption. For example, financial capital can be invested in land protection through outright purchase or purchase of easements. Public financial capital can be accumulated in a variety of ways including building budget surpluses by collection more in tax revenue than is spent on services, borrowing through bonding, and charging fees or public services over and above the real cost of services. “Rainy day funds” are an example of public stewardship of financial capital, designed to help society weather risks and uncertainties. In addition, through the growth of the non-profit sector, private philanthropic capital is often tapped for investments in other forms of capital that yield public goods, for example, preventive health care programs to increase individual capital. Stewardship of financial capital implies responsible investment to generate added income as well as elimination of unnecessary cost or waste in providing public goods and services. In creating wealth, we strive to invest financial capital in ways to increase and improve the quality of the other five forms. *A Financial Capital Equitable Economic Ecosystem Systems Change occurs when reinvestment patterns change to include minority populations or cultural norms within that market/economy/initiative.*



Individual Capital is the stock of skills and physical and mental healthiness of people in a region. Investments in human capital include spending on skill development (e.g. literacy, numeracy, computer literacy, technical skills, etc.) and health maintenance and improvement. Earnings from investments in human capital include psychic and physical energy for productive engagement and capacity to use and apply existing knowledge and internalize new knowledge to increase productivity. *An Individual Capital Equitable Economic Ecosystem Systems Change occurs when hiring, training and development of underrepresented minority populations within a value chain that is appropriate to the skillset of the individuals being hired.*



Intellectual Capital is the stock of knowledge, innovation, and creativity or imagination in a region. Imagination is what allows us to create new knowledge and discover new ways of relating. Investment in intellectual capital is through research and development and support for activities that engage the imagination, as well as diffusion of new knowledge and applications. Earnings from intellectual capital include inventions, new discoveries, new knowledge, and new ways of seeing. *An Intellectual Capital Equitable Economic Ecosystem Systems Change occurs when the education gap is reduced, and minority people are offered opportunities to contribute to the regions Intellectual capital.*



Natural Capital is the stock of unimpaired environmental assets (e.g. air, water, land, flora, fauna, etc.) in a region. Natural capital is defined as having three major components: 1) non-renewable resources such as oil and minerals that are extracted from ecosystems, 2) renewable resources such as fish, wood, and drinking water that are produced and maintained by the processes and functions of ecosystems, 3) environmental services such as maintenance of the quality of the atmosphere, climate, operation of the hydrological cycle including flood controls and drinking water supply, waste assimilation, recycling of nutrients, generation of soils, pollination of crops, and the maintenance of vast genetic library. Investments in natural capital include restoration and maintenance. Earnings or income includes a sustainable supply of raw materials and environmental services. Natural capital and its systems are essential for life. People can destroy, degrade, impair and/or restore natural capital but connect create it. *A Natural Capital Equitable Economic Ecosystem Systems Change occurs when natural resources are ensured to be safe and unmarred regardless of tax base/zip code of the community being served.*



Political Capital is the stock of power and goodwill held by individuals, groups, and/or organizations that can be held, spent or shared to achieve desired ends. Political capital is evidenced by the ability of an individual or a group to influence the distribution of resources within a social unit, including helping set the agenda of what resources are available. Investments in political capital are made through inclusive organizing that includes information, gathering, and dissemination, and increasing voice, access to and inclusion among decision-makers. Engaging players through a given capital include increased influence in decision making, increased access to and control over other forms of capital, and the ability to engage in reciprocal relationships, among others. Political capital can affect how rural areas are viewed in a regional context. Regions where political capital is equitably distributed or shared are typically characterized by leadership that is broad, deep and diverse; that uses research-based evidence to inform decisions; and that welcomes questions, open discussion, public involvement and help from the outside. *A Political Capital Equitable Economic Ecosystem Systems Change occurs when unrepresented people have access to power, decision making, native language to be competitive and participate fully.*



Social Capital is the stock of trust, relationships, and networks that support civil society. There are two forms of social capital: bridging and bonding. Investments in bridging social capital are those that lead to unprecedented conversations, shared experiences, and connections between otherwise unconnected individuals and groups. For example, sponsoring a town-wide festival could be seen as an investment in bonding social capital for town residents. Earnings from investment in social capital include improved health outcomes, educational outcomes, and reduced transaction costs, among others. *A Social Capital Equitable Economic Ecosystem Systems Change occurs given how and who was engaged in the process and implementation of the effort. Were people previously underrepresented/ minority authentically engaged.*



SHARE YOUR STORY

Recipes for Community Welcoming, Equity &/or Inclusion

The more we all share our experiences honestly, the more tools and connections we collect and disseminate to inspire others to build equity, inclusion and shared prosperity in our Minnesota communities. We will map these stories and share them on the Thriving by Design - Rural & Urban Together website at www.thrivingbydesignmn.org to build both a database of resources and a visualization of the extent of good works across the state.

We would love to hear about your wins, setbacks and lessons learned in doing the work of building equitable economic and community ecosystems. Please follow the outline below and fill in as much detail as you would like to include, no matter if you are just beginning or further down the road. This is the outline we used in creating the case studies in this document:

Project summary - One paragraph overview of what you are working on.

Identify WealthWorks forms of capital present in your initiative, policy, project, etc. (Please check any or all that apply and add a few words to describe how what you are doing might fit into the form of Capital you checked. For example, working to get better broadband in your community would be an infrastructure equity project targeted at BUILT CAPITAL that also helps support INDIVIDUAL CAPITAL. To get better broadband you would also likely be using types of financial, intellectual, political, and social capital in that quest. See the descriptions in the WealthWorks & Systems Change in the preceding pages of this guide to gauge if and how your work might represent one or more of the forms of capital listed on the following page.)

- Built Capital is the stock of fully functioning constructed infrastructure.
- Cultural capital is the stock of practices that reflect values and identity rooted in place, class, and/or ethnicity.
- Financial capital is the stock of unencumbered monetary assets invested in other forms of capital or financial instruments.
- Individual Capital is the stock of skills and physical and mental healthiness of people in a region.
- Intellectual capital is the stock of knowledge, innovation, and creativity or imagination in a region.
- Natural capital is the stock of unimpaired environmental assets (e.g. air, water, land, flora, fauna, etc.) in a region.
- Political capital is the stock of power and goodwill held by individuals, groups, and/or organizations that can be held, spent or shared to achieve desired ends.
- Social capital is the stock of trust, relationships, and networks that support civil society.

Background

- Describe your community's demographics and cultures
- List major stakeholder organizations
- Describe process by which a need in your community was identified

Process (list as many as apply to your initiative)

- Action steps taken over the course of the project
- Define the project's duration
- Show levels of community engagement at every stage (how, who, what, where, when)
- Show how your group developed shared values and definitions of success
- Show how you defined your project's scope
- List funders

Describe your communications efforts. What audiences did you try to reach? How? And what messages did you use?

Results

Describe the qualitative and quantitative data you used to know how you are progressing and/or what you are learning (this could be anything from Excel spreadsheet analysis to "Did the parade happen or not?")

What has changed? What policies, programs, relationships, or "vibes" are more welcoming, equitable, and/or inclusive now?

- How did your community respond to this project or program?
- Describe your setbacks and how you pivoted
- What technical, training, or written resources were helpful to you?
- Power shifting, or systems change in any of the following areas?
 - Engagement
 - Contracting/buying
 - Workforce/hiring
 - Access (including language)
 - Education
 - Evaluation

Reflections

- Describe your personal experience with this project. Lessons Learned?
- What's next?



Please share your story/photos/videos with us at:
regionfive.org/yourstory



