



CREATIVE PLACEMAKING: CREATING LIVABLE/ LIKEABLE PLACES PART 2 EQUITABLE ECONOMIC ECOSYSTEMS



REGION FIVE
Development Commission

JULY 2021

www.regionfive.org



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Acknowledgements

Dawn Espe, Equitable Development Specialist at Region Five Development Commission (R5DC) and Dr. Stacey J. Stockdill, CEO/Founder, EnSearch, Inc. with Cheryal Hills, Executive Director, Angela Anderson, Marketing Director, R5DC, and Jane Leonard, President, Erin Wilson, Communications Coordinator Monica Segura-Schwartz, Policy and Outreach Consultant, Growth & Justice.

R5DC EEE project reports can be downloaded at www.regionfive.org/resources

Creative Placemaking in Region 5

Creative Placemaking - Creating Livable/Likeable Places is one of three value chain focal points in Region Five Development Commission's (R5DC) Equitable Economic Ecosystem (EEE) initiative for regional prosperity. R5DC partners have used Creative Placemaking initiatives over several years to lift up arts and culture to build relationships between diverse partners and to build positive change. Creative placemaking engages stakeholders, including artists, early in the community improvements process. This approach provides opportunities to explore community challenges and ways to become more inclusive based on a variety of community perspectives.

This report updates the Creative Placemaking - Creating Livable/Likeable Places and Welcoming Communities Advocacy Group (WCAG) initiatives of the Region's EEE project for regional prosperity. The previous report and other two value chain and WCAG efforts, updated in separate reports, include Solar Energy and Local Foods.

GoNorth Group - Emily, MN



Dashboard | By the Numbers

Outcomes through the WealthWorks Lens



5 new infrastructure or community spaces

GoNorthMN Post Office, GoNorthMN Candy Store, Downtown Brainerd Window Walk, Harmony Park Little Falls



377 Individual IDI Assessments in the region

56 DEI workshops/knowledge sharing

21 stories that share participant improved understanding of depth/breadth of community



42 students engaged

377 people improved cultural agility through final IDI assessment scores



96 new connections to under-served populations





Policy changes Central Lakes College reviewing department policies with equity lens



\$94,200 Investment in grant dollars and donations of time and materials for community projects



Infill of vacant lots in Downtown Emily
Improved park, lake and recreation spaces in Long Prairie



33 Organizations improved cultural agility through final IDI assessment scores



Connecting Across Generations - GoNorthMN

WCAG Pilot Community

Although not funded through the NWAf grant, the GoNorthMN group acted as a “test run” for the Welcoming Community Advocacy Groups R5DC was hoping to facilitate around the region. Working with this pilot group allowed for revisions and improvements on the process, desired outcomes, group expectations and quality of resources.

Participants

GoNorthMN includes volunteers from Emily, Fifty Lakes and three surrounding townships. The group formed in 2015 to help promote “sustainable, fulfilling, prosperous and healthy living for residents, businesses and visitors...”.

Project Description

The WCAG initiative provided GoNorthMN with an opportunity to consider diversity and inclusion in their mission. New and long-time residents, across multiple generations, came together to save an old post office (see photo page 5) that was to be demolished. This small historical building will become the Welcome Center, as well as a place to host groups, classes and revolving student art displays. This area of Region 5 has “no iconic buildings, yet nostalgia for local history and quaint structures turned out to be a catalyst” to engage young and old, build relationships, learn new skills, and create a shared vision for what they want their community to be for future generations.

Lesson Learned

There was a need for improved relationships and communication between permanent residents/ local businesses and seasonal property owners/ visitors; work will continue on this. Participants envision that the Welcome Center will serve as a place to build community, together.

WealthWorks Capitals Impacted

BUILT WEALTH

restoration of historical buildings, improvements on vacant lot

SOCIAL & INTELLECTUAL WEALTH

Multigenerational skill-sharing through physical space restoration. Youth engaged in setting vision for use of the buildings and vacant lot.

FINANCIAL WEALTH

Project dollars expended within the GoNorthMN communities, supporting local businesses. Funding also supported the work of a graphic artist from Kenya on the final report.

Equitable Economic Ecosystem Impacts and Improved Livelihoods

- This five-community area annually experiences a boom/bust economy with the ebb and flow of seasonal tourism. In addition, the City of Emily does not have high tax base. Creation of the welcoming center and plans for using the old candy store as a summer economic opportunity are important community-driven catalysts for EEE system changes.
- During the previous five years of work, the GoNorthMN saw little participation from youth. As part of the IDI and WCAG discussions, GoNorthMN became more intentional about involving youth in the vision and work of creating a place welcoming for all.
- Creation of community space will connect residents and visitors alike, envisioned as both a destination and as a place where shared journeys can begin, to help all feel and be at home.

Harmony at Harmony Park | Long Prairie, MN

Participants

Many times in small rural communities, people must wear many hats. That holds true for this group of individuals. Though they are a small group of 5, they are a highly connected and represent key community organizations: the Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, Rotary, K-12 education, mayor's office, senior center, economic development commission, hospital, and community health center.

Project Description

The placemaking project the WCAG decided to focus on was one where the Long Prairie-Grey Eagle ESL students indicated they felt most comfortable – the city park. Although the park is a place where people gather, it has long been neglected, with the “water feature” little more than a polluted pond. Personal interactions there consist of small homogeneous clusters with very little cross-cultural mixing. The Harmony Park project is working with an expanded social and cultural network to help the park be a place where all cultures feel

welcome. The park will help promote and yield positive community interactions between distinct cultures that participate in the Long Prairie economy, including long-time Amish and more recent Latinx peoples.

Lessons Learned

Finding ways to hear the voices of all within the community was critical to this project. This group benefitted from the work of a University of Minnesota graduate student through her *Photovoice Project Long Prairie Grey Eagle Adult ELS* and the *Welcoming Communities Toolkit*. This project shared the voices of the ELS students and their experiences living and working in Long Prairie. The group experienced scathing feedback from a few community members after the press release announcing it hit the local paper. Thanks to the relationships within his group and their agency within the community, they became resolute and more determined to ensure the project moved forward so that Long Prairie could become a more welcoming community for ALL.



WealthWorks Capitals Impacted

BUILT

Pavilion, tables, multilingual signs, games, musical instruments and art installations

INDIVIDUAL

Improved health through exercise, community sports, hands-on games and music, connecting with neighbors, gardening/planting, early childhood education opportunities

INTELLECTUAL

Place to host community events, library offerings, ECFE and other early education opportunities. Chamber of Commerce board participated in the IDI.

NATURAL

Local tree expert made recommendations for varieties of trees and shrubs that are native and hardy to be added to the park. Plants will be added to the pond to reduce the amount of pollution and create a healthy water feature for wildlife. Master Gardeners will assist in the upkeep of the flowers.

POLITICAL

City mayor serves on WCAG; city council approved project; Rotary and Lions support project.

FINANCIAL

Local businesses and individuals donated \$3,810

to project. Local Community Growth Fund serves as the project's fiscal host.

SOCIAL

Gathering/mixing spot for ALL. Additions at the park from project encourage interaction and a greater understanding of the cultures in Long Prairie.

CULTURAL

Bilingual signage, activities/games from local cultures, native plant species

Equitable Economic Ecosystem Impacts and Improved Livelihoods

- The WCAG choose minority-owned businesses from Latinx and Amish communities to help design and construct pavilion area
- High School art teacher was commissioned to design permanently installed games, with input from students
- Including bilingual signage throughout the park- on buildings, on games, on flora and fauna ID tags will help Harmony Park become a more welcoming destination place for all within the community.
- Engaging a local tree expert and reviving engagement of Master Gardeners to care for the flora, fauna, wetland, and planters transformed the park from poor health and underuse into a healthy and thriving Harmony Park.



Community Workforce Inclusion Initiative | Brainerd, MN

Participants

The group's composition was different from the other WCAGs in that there were individuals who were in leadership roles within their organization and within the community. Participants represented higher education, school board, diversity council, workforce development, city government, health care, and for-profit companies.

Project Description

This group divided their efforts into three areas of need in the Brainerd community, with attraction and retention of a skilled workforce as the overarching goal.

1. Partnered with the Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce and Central Lakes College (CLC) to host [Showing up to Build and Lead an Inclusive Workplace webinar](#). Over 130 business individuals from the area participated in this informational event. Two prominent leaders in this work shared their know-how and attendees also gained useful tools to bring back to their personal and professional lives.
2. Partnered with CLC to start the Community Workforce Inclusion Council (CWIC). CWIC

will sustain the WCAG efforts, work with employers on inclusive and equitable business practices, and help BIPOC students from CLC as they transition to jobs in the community after graduation. Participants in the CWIC represent community members from diverse backgrounds, including Latinx, Tribal and at-risk youth. To prepare for this work, the CWIC participated in Augsburg University's Forum on Workplace Inclusion that has operated for over 31 years and focuses on professional leadership and effectiveness skills in the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) field.

3. Support of the [Brainerd Lakes Area Newcomer's Club](#) - this group has traditionally been relatively monocultural. However, the project funding provided to this group will allow them to attend DEI trainings, improve social media presence, and increase outreach to new populations in the region.

Lessons Learned

This group consisted of high-level leaders in area organizations. This makeup brought a breadth of ideas and intentional discussion around DEI. However, without any "doer" in the group, it was more difficult to enact a project.



Community Workforce Inclusion Initiative | Brainerd, MN

WealthWorks Capitals Impacted

INDIVIDUAL, INTELLECTUAL & CULTURAL

Central Lakes College, Brainerd Community Giving, MN CEP, and the Brainerd City Council participated in the IDI, including 101 individuals in learning about and impacting diversity, equity and inclusion

POLITICAL & SOCIAL

Although members of the Brainerd WCAG have known each other for many years, they became more deeply invested in the issues of race, equity, and inclusion through this effort. Another important political development is the partnership between the WCAG and the Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce

FINANCIAL

Project dollars were used to leverage \$5000 in funding from the Initiative Foundation with plans to seek additional funding from philanthropic organizations, such as the Bush Foundation, to sustain work beyond the two-year experiment.

Equitable Economic Ecosystems Impacted and Improved Livelihoods

- Widseth, an engineering consulting firm, is becoming certified as an inclusive employer; they are also planning to bring in a tribal member to assist in their designing processes when they work on tribal lands. They've begun to expand their thinking about how buildings and parks in the region can be more conducive and inclusive of tribal neighbors. Widseth is also working alongside Sweetgrass Consulting, LLC, a nationally-recognized First Nations planning firm, to learn how to conduct a feasibility study for the Leech Lake Bank of Ojibwe (LLBO).
- The Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce is working with WCAG members to help employers think about and consider equity issues in the workplace.



Inclusive Workforce Designation Awards Conversation

- **Trisha Maruska**, Human Resources Director, Delta Dental of Minnesota
- **Dr. Hara Charlier**, President: Central Lakes College
- **Nathan Hamilton**, PHR, SHRM-CP, Human Resources



The Big Read | Staples, MN

Participants

The core team consists of 9 individuals highly connected in the community. The sectors include the economic development agency, city council, hospitality industry, health care, higher education, K-12 education, nonprofit, and small business. Half of the core team also represent marginalized populations (Veterans and Latinx).

Project Description

This group divided their efforts into two areas of need, with improved awareness around DEI and tools to create a more welcoming community.

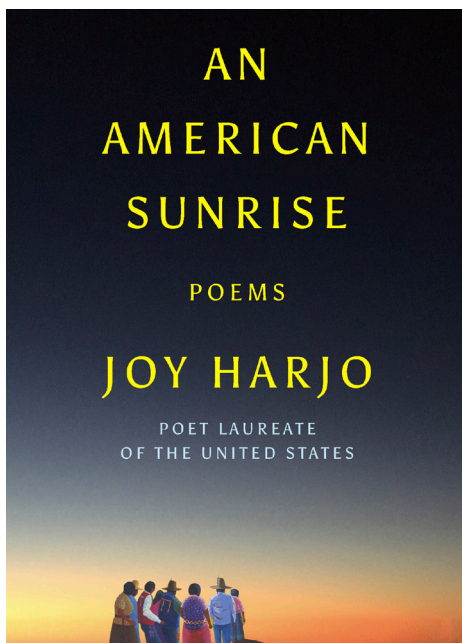
1. The Big Read: Staples - After the murder of George Floyd, this team felt it important to engage the entire community and businesses in more meaningful and deeper conversations about Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI). They applied to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to participate in the [Big Read project](#). In addition, they received \$7,500 from FWAC to launch and operate The Big Read: Staples on a smaller scale in case they do not receive the NEA grant. They will purchase *An American*

Sunrise for community members to read. This project also connects to students, resulting in the school district modifying their curriculum so that *Gidjie and the Wolves* by Anishinaabe author Tashia Marie Hart will be used in 5th grade classrooms.

2. Inclusive Employer Cohort - This team is working with CLC to create a series of workshops for small businesses and employers to help them learn how they can improve inclusive practices. Employers who participate in this learning cohort will be eligible to receive \$500 grants that can be used towards implementing what they learned.

Lessons Learned

Unexpected partnerships included the library, churches, authors, Leech Lake and Red Lake tribes. This group started with a very strong base of relationships which made a significant difference in what they were and will be able to accomplish. Members of the Staples WCAG also were younger than the other R5DC welcoming groups.



The Big Read | Staples, MN

WealthWorks Capitals Impacted

FINANCIAL

The Staples Chamber has agreed to serve as fiscal host for the \$10,000 NWAf grant. \$10,000 NWAf grant leveraged \$7,500 from FWAC. Purchase of The Big Read books through [Profits for the People](#), (profits from the sale will be used to purchase books for children in the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe and Red Lake Nation.

INDIVIDUAL, INTELLECTUAL & CULTURAL

Built through participation in The Big Read and through the employer workshop series.

SOCIAL & POLITICAL

Support of this initiative from the City of Staples, Central Lakes College, Staples School District, Lakewood Health Care, Chamber, and LEAP community group.

Equitable Economic Ecosystems Impacted and Improved Livelihoods

- The school district modification of their curriculum -- to add another book focused on DEI -- was an important EEE system change. It opens the door for the school system to start thinking about their role in creating welcoming communities.
- The employer trainings and small grants will help local employers review their hiring practices, how they onboard new employees, and how their business policies and procedures may or may not support a diverse workforce.



Reimagining their Impact | Mid MN Women's Center

Participants

This WCAG differs from the rest in that “community” is reflected in the folks who are a part of the Mid MN Women's Center (MMWC) instead of a specific city or town. The core team consists of MMWC staff, clients, and board members, as well as law enforcement, students, and health care professionals.

Project Description

MMWC wants to reimagine their impact in the Brainerd Lakes area. This project will allow them to reflect the population they ACTUALLY serve versus whom they have traditionally served in the past. What began as place for women in abusive relationships has now expanded to include men, LGBTQIA+, and children and people from diverse cultural and social communities.

Lessons Learned

Reimagining an organization such as the MidMinnesota Women's Center after 25 years of history rooted in the feminist movement and female empowerment of the 70's and 80's takes a deep understanding of the past as well as recognizing how important looking towards current and future needs of the community is for an organization that impacts people in such a personal way.

WealthWorks Capitals Impacted

INDIVIDUAL & INTELLECTUAL

Board of directors and staff participated in the IDI, as well as the Crow Wing Energize Equity Committee for a total of 26 individuals with greater awareness of their cultural agility.

SOCIAL

Connection to new populations and stronger connections with current populations to understand the needs of each individual community and person.

POLITICAL

Support from law enforcement and working to understand the populations they assist the Women's Center in serving.

Equitable Economic Ecosystems Impacted and Improved Livelihoods

- Utilizing a local artist to create new logo, website, marketing materials, etc.
- Engaging with communities of which they serve to understand where they might be succeeding and where they may need to improve their service impact.



Community DEI Series | Pequot Lakes, MN

Participants

This group has a strong focus on the Pequot Lakes School District and consists of administration, teachers, counselor, and students. In addition, several community members, including a pastor, are members of the team.

Project Description

The Pequot Lakes WCAG decided to host a kick-off event followed by facilitated community conversations throughout the 2021-2022 school year. The Fall 2021 kick-off event will occur at a community meal, starting with a keynote sharing why this initiative important for community and the school. Mini-sessions will be offered each month for the remainder of the school year. The mini-sessions will focus on different topics as they relate to DEI in community. The WCAG core team wants to get students involved in gathering stories about living in Pequot Lakes. Through the community education department, the WCAG Core team can ensure that every household in the community learns about the initiative.

Lessons Learned

The Pequot Lakes WCAG is the most seasoned group of all the WCAGs in EEE. Most are newcomers themselves to Pequot Lakes and every single person on the core team has run equity groups, taken considerable DEI-related training, and has a DEI mindset. This is a braver group because of their previous experience with DEI training and initiatives. They are already confident about DEI and moved quickly to questions such as “What can we do now that we know this is the situation?” This group also wants to make sure that students are integrally involved in the project and not only because adults are more likely to behave themselves when youth are at the table.

WealthWorks Capitals Impacted

FINANCIAL

R5DC was able to obtain funding from Sourcewell to start the WCAG in Pequot Lakes.

INDIVIDUAL

Self-learning and self-reflection through the workshops

INTELLECTUAL & CULTURAL

Seeking presenters and cultural connectors from within their own community. The Pequot Lakes EDA and School Board participated in the IDI.

SOCIAL & POLITICAL

This group formed when a member of the Pequot Lakes EDA participated in the IDI with R5DC so a ripple effect is occurring. The core team wants the EDA, Chamber, Rotary, and others within the community to better understand what is happening at the school (has been and continues to be more multi-cultural than the surrounding community) and how that dynamic impacts what is happening in the community.

Equitable Economic Ecosystems Impacted and Improved Livelihoods

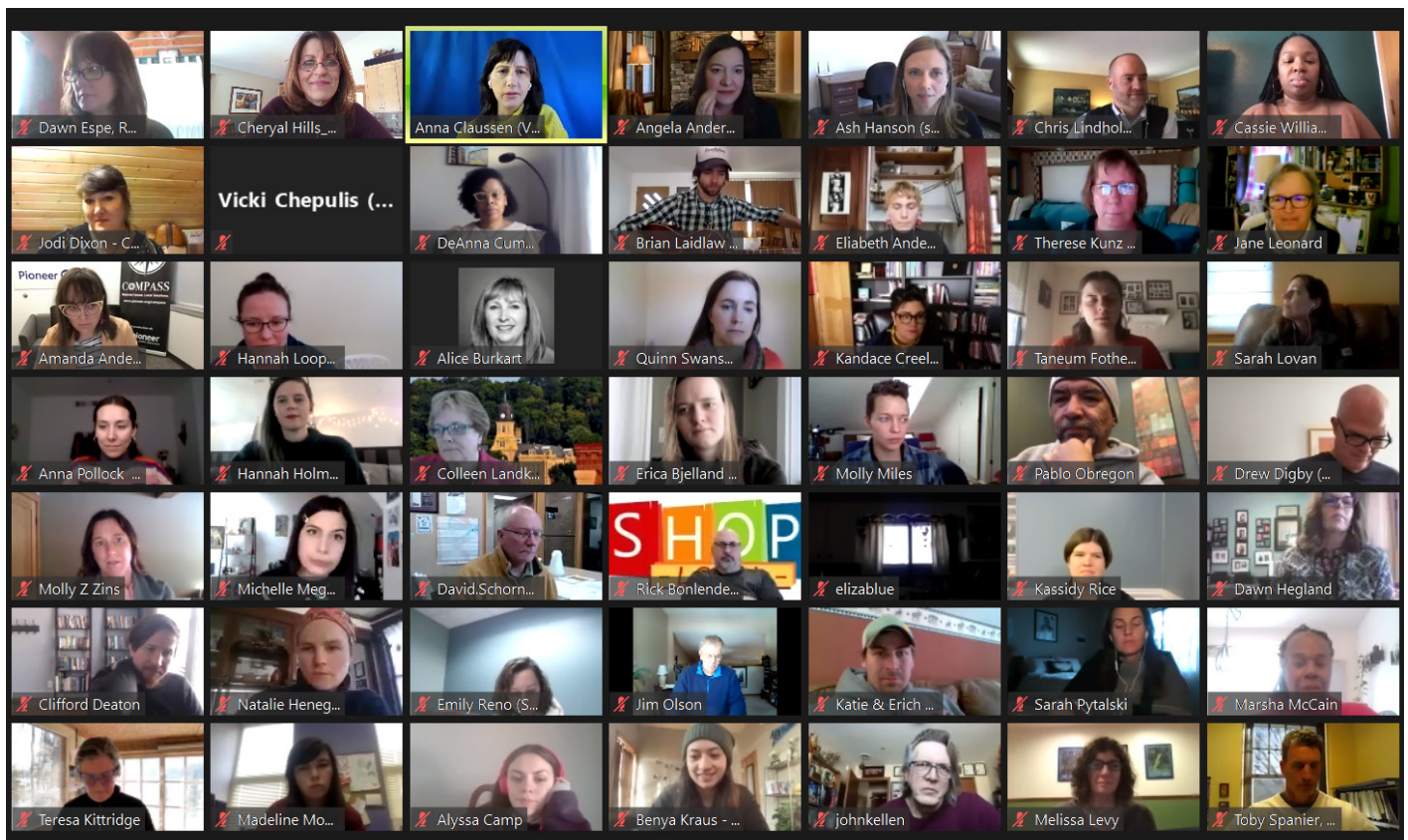
- The Pequot Lakes School intends to put equity at the core of their strategic planning, using some of what was learned through participation in the WCAG.
- Intentional focus on encouraging the local units of government to participate and support the equity work so it is better received by the general community.
- This core team understands that in 2015 the youth population became the most racially and ethnically diverse group in the United States and recognizes that the community of Pequot Lakes needs to listen to their youth – they are the future.

Stories of Everyday Changemakers: The Rural Reveal

Funded by the McKnight Foundation, this storytelling project was a year-long, artist-led effort to help deepen the understanding of what area residents are doing daily to advance equity and anti-racism work in their communities, and to learn what is needed to sustain the emotionally taxing work of being from, working with, and living the change you wish to see in your community. The project produced several resources including Changemaker Stories, The Creative Brief, The Infrastructure of Hope poem, Silo song, and Health Equity illustrations.

While the public event in February 2021 to

celebrate these stories was “Zoom-bombed” by a hateful racist group of individuals, R5DC and partners from Growth & Justice, Department of Public Transformation, and Voices for Rural, chose to persevere. The most crucial lesson learned is how to handle the situation. We learned from one attendee, Emily Gayle, who often faces situations like this. She provided this insight into the situation, “The fact that you and your team did not just sweep it under the rug ... is the beginning of change. For too long and even now circumstances like that one are just pushed aside and life goes back to normal for the majority. For me ... not so much.” As we continue this important work, we carry Emily’s message with us, not letting the hate win.





What's next: where do we go from here?

E3 2.0 - Normalizing the Conversation

We continue the work, with financial and moral support from funders and partners.

“

What we learned is how to handle it. That we needed to make sure that the white supremacists didn't win. That we cannot shy away from this work.
-Cheryal Hills, Executive Director of R5DC, reflections after the zoom bombing

“

Do the best you can until you know better.
Then when you know better, do better.
- Maya Angelou





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