

REGIONAL PROSPERITIES PROJECT REPORT: YEAR 2 NORTHWEST AREA FOUNDATION

RECOGNIZE
FRIENDS
Everyone
is my
neighbor

FAMILY

Respect

Inclusion

Faith
Healthy
Relationships

Lifelong
Learning

Friends
Trust



REGION FIVE
Development Commission

JULY 2021

www.regionfive.org

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I. Introduction & Evaluation Dashboard

We, the Regional Prosperity Core Team, are pleased to present the NWAf with this evaluation report. Although we are an all women team, we represent public, private, and nonprofit sectors; range in ages from GenX, millennials, baby-boomers, to seniors, and have had deep and far-reaching cultural experiences during our lives. We are passionate about Justice, Equity, Inclusion and Diversity work. We believe that the evaluation evidence will show that we have

successfully accomplished all the objectives set forth in the original NWAf proposal. As a summary of our accomplishments, we provide the following dashboard and then include a more detailed accounting in the pages that follow. We also know we have a long way to go as those opposed to JEDI work have become more radicalized, vocal and are threatening harm to those who do this work.

Dashboard: Objectives & Evaluation

Objectives	Evaluation
<p>Build: Establish 6 Welcoming Communities Advocacy Group (WCAG's) that include students and diverse community members that also include municipal elected officials, non-profit reps, school board members, EDO &/or private sector (including growers, artists, renewable energy businesses and other industry representation) and others passionate about community prosperity for ALL people and who are committed to equitable system change through each of the three value chains: Solar Energy, Arts/Culture aka Creative Placemaking and Local Foods.</p>	<p>6 WCAG Built Involved 398 individuals</p>
<p>Deliver IDI assessments to each of the 6 groups (estimated 15 individuals in each group, = 90 individuals).</p>	<p>395 (99%) IDI Assessment; 130 personal sessions</p>
<p>50% of WCAG's representation of people who may not have participated in or led past economic development efforts, including persons of limited income, youth, or racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities</p>	<p>200 (50%) represented marginalized populations (students, low-income, retirees, persons of color, LGBTQIA+)</p>
<p>Minimum of 5 networks (elected officials, private sector, non-profits, school board, students some of which are low-income &/or minority community members) per each WCAG engaged in supporting policy change aligned with value chain strategies. =30 networks.(6 WCAG x 5)</p>	<p>144+ Networks Engaged</p>
<p>Minimum of 3 of new ideas, policies and practices generated from each of the 6 WCAG's for business growth and equitable workforce retention = 18 new system change ideas.</p>	<p>25 new system change ideas</p>
<p>Minimum of 6 new programs/collaborative activities offered from WCAG's</p>	<p>6 WCAG projects fully developed and in various stages of implementation by July 1, 2021</p>

Objectives	Evaluation
Minimum of 1 of new ideas, policies and practices generated from each of the 6 WCAG's ANNUALLY for business growth and equitable workforce retention = 6 new system change ideas a year.	6 WCAG projects
Implement. Economic system changes from the 6 WCAGs through collective action. Post the group IDI assessments - over 1.5 years (18 months) R5DC will coordinate/facilitate 6 quarterly WCAG meetings in each of the six communities to increase assets in each of the 8 forms of wealth and will complete a community-driven activity/initiative/project.	
6 collaborative activities that put into practice systems change that exemplifies cultural bridging – within the three identified value chains.	The qualitative questions on the IDI and WCAG surveys indicate that nearly half (47%) improved their cultural agility
\$60,000.00 invested in collaborative activities	\$60,000 invested \$29,890 additional dollars leveraged
At least one employee-owned venture/business opportunity	Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL) initiated an employee ownership program during the NWF grant period.
Deploy a minimum of one equitable economic system changes annually per WCAG – 6 a year - that address “linkages and leakages” within the 3 value chains	Equitable Economic System Changes = 40 (See Appendix A-5)
Pilot the local food value chain – system change idea a doctor prescribed RX CSA's to individuals in opioid recovery or mental health programs to create systems that bridge these marginalized populations into our economy and communities.	
Connections made between mental health doctors and health/wellness programs to improve overall health and opportunities to integrate this stigmatized population into the workforce.	Connections with mental health organization, county probation officers and case workers, veteran service officers
\$32,000 of CSA sales from low-income local farmers/ranchers/producers allowing for farmland to stay in production and access to new markets.	\$32,000 CSA sales
A minimum of 50 low-income growers to participate beyond the 2 year pilot project.	50+ low-income growers participated in 2-year project. Long term outcomes include increased revenue to growers, and building a less fractured closed loop food system.
Evaluate and share our story nationally via toolkits and documentation of lessons learned.	
A minimum of 6 stories related to culture and evolving regional identity (qualitative measure; content relevant to preserving, enhancing, or evolving beliefs, values, languages, and traditions matter more to communities than the number of stories).	35 Stories Shared
A minimum of 3 successions and new entrants in locally owned businesses in sectors that are important to regional identity (new activity in economy)	Of the 55 SBEL & ELP Program loans made by R5DC/NCEDA 12 were for start up businesses.
Minimum of 6 activities related to regional identity and culture	All 6 WCAG projects addressed some aspect of culture.
A minimum of one other region in NWF service territory seek to learn about and deploy the R5DC regional prosperity through equitable systems change - Welcoming Communities Value Chain Development.	Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) & R5DC Learning Exchange



II. Welcoming Community Advocacy Groups

The Welcoming Communities Advocacy Group (WCAG) initiative was focused on building workforce attraction and cultural agility in our region. WCAGs were formed with a group called Go North, a pilot advocacy group, and then were expanded to the communities of Brainerd, Staples, Crosby, Little Falls, Long Prairie, Pequot Lakes and Pine River, and with the Mid-Minnesota Women's Center (MMWC). A total of 398 individuals were involved in this work. Of these 200 (about 50%) represented marginalized populations (students, low-income, retirees, persons of color, LGBTQIA+) who had not previously been engaged in planning activities and 248 (62%) completed the IDI Assessments.

The process included recruitment of communities and six facilitated group sessions which culminated in a group project. Appendix A-1 has a more detailed accounting of the WCAG curricula. In summary, the six meeting agendas had a few common elements and then were customized to meet the needs of each

WCAG. Meeting 1 was the kick-off meeting and used to help WCAG team members review the group IDI profile and begin to define key terms such as diversity, inclusion, equality, equity, values, beliefs, culture and intercultural competence. The discussion topics for meeting #3 included: world view/implicit bias, hidden rules among classes, welcoming communities, improved livelihoods, equitable ecosystems and systems change. In Meetings 3-5 WCAG core teams began to identify and refine project ideas. These meetings were supplemented with relevant materials such as: *Root of Racial Injustice (TedTalk): How do we ensure our conversations are addressing the ROOTS of inequities?* Meeting 6 was a wrap up and time for the core team to reflect on the experience and lessons learned.

Brief stories about the WCAGs including a description of their project, WealthWorks Capitals built, Equitable Economic Ecosystem (EEE) systems changes, and lessons learned may be found in these Value Chain Reports at regionfive.org/resources:

Energy and Environment Resiliency in Region 5: Little Falls WCAG

Local Foods: Building Health & Wealth from the Ground Up in Region 5: Pine River WCAG

Creative Placemaking: Creating Livable/Likeable Places: GoNorth WCAG, Brainerd WCAG,

Staples WCAG, Long Prairie WCAG, Mid-MN Women's Center WCAG, and Pequot Lakes WCAG

Outcomes: IDI Assessments

Community members part of the WCAGs had the opportunity to take a widely used and vetted intercultural competence assessment referred to as Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Those who took the IDI Assessment were offered an opportunity to provide feedback on the experience. There were 54 individuals (22% of 248) who responded to the online survey. Most 69% (37 of the 54 who responded) chose the response

option, *"I can see how this might be a beneficial tool."* Improved cultural agility may be discerned from their responses to open-ended questions. For example one responded, *"By knowing my profile, it made me more aware of how my filter may vary from someone else's. I will be more aware going forward of how our views may differ and work to communicate to allow for the most clarity."* (See Appendix A-2 for additional detail)

Another indicator of value was that large organizations decided to have their boards of directors, administrative staff, and employees take the IDI assessment from R5DC. During the NWAf grant these organizations requested assessments: Long Prairie Chamber of Commerce Board (7), Central Lakes College Leadership Team (21), and Pequot Lakes School Board as part of their strategic planning process. A lesson learned was that the WCAGs benefited and were better able to make progress when they were located in communities where the IDI assessment had been administered to many within the community. It was often those who had previously participated in the IDI assessments who became champions and movers/shakers for the WCAG.

Outcomes: Benefits from participating in the WCAGs

Most of the core team members completed an assessment of the experience. They reported that they felt like they were an important part of the WCAG, felt encouraged to express their options, felt comfortable to express their opinions, believe the work will make a difference for the community, believe the WCAG is making progress and believe that the WCAG will make a difference for the community. They reported that they learned a number of valuable skills and that the experience contributed to opening their eyes about culture, diversity and equity issues and gave them an opportunity to be part of the work and the solution. A few illustrative quotes follow. (See Appendix A-3 for a more detailed accounting).

“I learned that our city and community can always be more welcoming and that with our

changing demographics, we need to be creative and connect with our newcomers. We need to give everyone a place to meet and play together.”

“[I have served] on WCAG for over a year now. Our Foundation has a DEI goal, and we support the BLA Newcomers Club. We will be more intentional about asking BIPOC newcomers to our club.”

Unintended Outcomes

There are several unintended outcomes from the project. Members of the Regional Prosperity Core Team also had these insights:

All 6 groups are starting to find each other and merging in different ways. One dimension of the Brainerd WCAG project is an inclusive employer initiative. Pequot Lakes WCAG members contacted the Brainerd members and are beginning to talk together about employers and inclusive practices. This is leading to our asking, “How can this be a network in our region?”

All the projects are not just one and done. The WCAGs have put projects into place and have been very conscious about considering how they will sustain the work. All the projects are using project dollars to leverage additional dollars.



Lessons Learned from the WCAGs

There were many learnings that came out of the WCAG work. A few highlights are these.

In theory it was anticipated that recruitment was going to be a relatively straightforward task. In practice, however, recruitment of communities proved to be more difficult than anticipated.

“There is great diversity across the IDI continuum and even within an orientation, such as the minimization orientation, how individuals perceive things is very different.”

“Given the COVID Pandemic, George Floyd murder, and the capital riots – the fact that any of the WCAGs are making progress is amazing.”

“There are many more people in region thinking about equity in new ways ... So many have stepped up and said, “It is time for me to learn time for me to take responsibility for equity issues in this region.”

Our expectations for 6 groups only meet with 6 times was unrealistic. They needed to make big leaps in mind sets, thinking and community assets. It may be that creative placemaking is the best place for communities to start working on equity issues. It is hard to think about equity and system changes when trying to minimize the polarization in the community. Placemaking is easy to do and keeps the work community focused.

All of the groups wanted more access to materials and education. They kept saying, “We need to learn more!”

“How were we supposed to ask think about system changes when communities were just trying to learn what does equity mean. Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) is euphoria because it takes so much time for people just to understand equity.”

Improved Livelihoods

The \$60,000 appropriated for the Regional Prosperities work was used in most cases to include BIPOC or low-income growers and makers to complete project work. In addition, the NWAFF grant and additional funding was used for evaluation work, local foods, and energy and environmental planning expertise in the region. **Through intentional work in all these fields throughout this grant period, our team realized that only considering economic indicators to measure improved livelihoods is inadequate. If one considers “livability”, the Regional Prosperities project took head-on the need to address racism, equity**

and inclusion in a region that has become more radicalized and where opponents to JEDI work are becoming more active, threatening, and vocal. Protests as well as threatening letters and emails were a response to the JEDI work done throughout this grant period. This response from some community members illustrates that we need to be more strategic in our future efforts with Regional Prosperities 2.0, especially when we plan for events. In the future, we will provide ways to protect our change makers who have stepped forward to tell their stories of racism and injustice in the region.

A comprehensive review of all lessons learned, EEE system changes, and improved livelihoods may be found in Appendices A-4 through A-6.

III. RxCSA

NWAF funding enabled the team to pilot the local food value chain system change idea whereby doctors prescribed Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) food shares to individuals in opioid recovery or mental health programs. It was believed that this pilot project would help create systems that

bridge these marginalized populations into the regional economy and communities. The full story is available in the Local Foods Value Chain report, which includes lessons learned and the ways the RxCSA built wealth, Equitable Economic Ecosystem System Changes, and improved livelihoods.

What follows is an accounting of the degree to which the NWAF objectives were achieved.

NWAF Objective	Evaluation Assessment
Pilot the local food value chain – system change idea a doctor prescribed RX CSA’s to individuals in opioid recovery or mental health programs to create systems that bridge these marginalized populations into our economy and communities.	Successfully reached 130 individuals with year-round CSAs.
Connections made between mental health doctors and health/wellness programs to improve overall health and opportunities to integrate this stigmatized population into the workforce.	Connections made with mental health organization, county probation officers, county case workers, and veterans service officers
\$32,000 of CSA sales from low-income local farmers/ranchers/producers allowing for farmland to stay in production and access to new markets.	\$32,000 CSA sales. As can be seen on the following chart the NWAF investment leveraged an additional \$250,400.
A minimum of 50 low-income growers participate beyond the 2 year pilot project.	50+ low-income growers participated in the 2-year project. Long term outcomes include increased revenue to growers and building a less fractured closed loop food system.



The \$32,000 NWAF investment led to the ability to leverage an additional \$250,400 from MN Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), Sourcewell, Cargill Foundation, Essentia Foundation, and MN Department of Education.

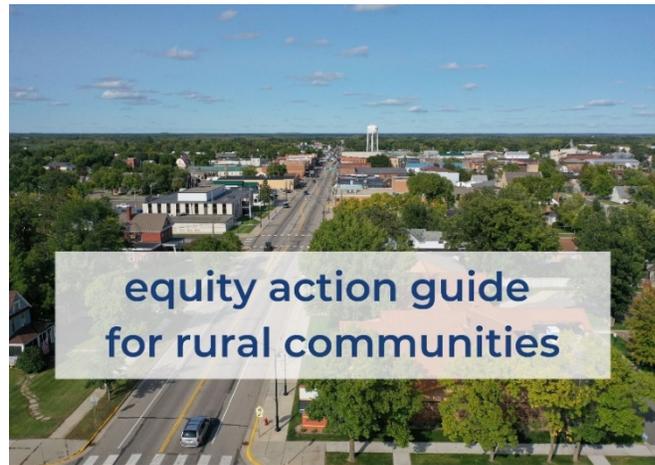
TABLE 2 NWAF Funding for 20 year-round CSA = \$32,000					
	RX and VET CSAs			Leveraged Funding	
	VET CSAs Provided	RX CSA Provided	Over Budget	Amount	Source
Year 1	50	22	2	\$92,400.00	MDVA
Year 2	25	33	3	\$25,000.00	Sourcewell - VET Rx continuation for 25 recipients
				\$10,000.00	GMCC - food insecurity relief from Cargill funding
				\$10,000.00	Essentia Foundation - 8 week intense programming referred from county agencies
				\$113,000.00	MN Department of Education grant to provide frozen meals
Grand Totals	75	55	130 (120 unduplicated)	\$250,400.00	8140 Frozen meals and 90 additional summer and year-round CSA produce boxes in addition to original 20 per year on NWAF funding



IV. Toolkit/Value Chain Stories/MN Equity Map

The [Equity Action Guide for Rural Communities](#) was launched January 4, 2021. The action guide was created by a team of champions from Growth & Justice with the support of the R5DC staff and project team: ***“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.”***

The *living guide* provided a way for other individuals and organizations taking steps to inspire others to build equity, inclusion and shared prosperity in Minnesota communities through the www.regionfive.org/your-story link.



MN Equity Map. The Center for Small Towns and Growth & Justice began a partnership in 2020 to build and launch the Minnesota Equity Map. This was the first step in creating a robust platform. The hope is that the map will provide an opportunity for users to, *“read about the wide-range of equity action initiatives and their spread statewide.”* At the time of this report the map had over two dozen stories. The plans for the future include locating and posting more stories and upgrading to a map with more functionality.

The Story map may be found at <https://www.growthandjustice.org/mnequitymap>



V. RDI Learning Exchange

The Learning Exchange Objectives included knowledge transfer with another region in the NWA service territory about Justice-Equity-Diversity-Inclusion work that embraced the WealthWorks model of economic and community development. The R5DC Regional Prosperities team was looking for a partner with: *A) extensive knowledge and experience in rural wealth creation value chains development B) understanding of systems change, C) one who could add value to this exchange by strengthening relationships with NWA and D) offers the opportunity for our region to learn from as well as share from.* Our team chose Rural Development Initiatives, headquartered in Oregon, as being the best suited partner in this endeavor.

The team originally had planned to meet in person for a 2-3 day cross-cultural learning exchange. However, because of the COVID 19 Pandemic the team decided to meet via zoom on July 29 from 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM.

A few highlights from the rich conversation follow. A more detailed transcript of the exchange may be found in Appendix C. In summary the key learnings are: Placemaking, health, arts, culture and leadership are foundational to economic development work, R5DC has seen and can clearly articulate system changes that have occurred in the region, sometimes the Wealth Works framework isn't culturally compatible, a wondering if rural voices will be heard in JEDI work, and an understanding that white organizations need to be clear what lane they should drive in and if they are the drivers or the passengers.



Learning Placemaking, Health, Arts & Culture and Leadership are Foundational to Economic Development Work

Heidi Khokhar (RDI): **What is compelling about [the R5DC] work is that that this is what we would call soft skills building and soft work.** You are an economic development organization. That is what you do. **But here you are in this placemaking space and talking about health, talking about arts and culture and it is a robust and well-funded initiative. That is compelling to me. I feel similarly that leadership development is foundational work ...**

Dawn Espe (R5DC): [In terms of Placemaking] we are just recognizing with workforce attraction that we were having folks come and move to our region. **They were fine in their jobs but the minute they would walk out of their job they were not welcome in their community.** So we are losing highly qualified workers in this region.

Cheryal Hills (R5DC): To follow up with Dawn's point, **I can lend millions of dollars for individuals who want to become ranchers/producers.** I can give them all the money they need. I can give them land. They can be part of the local foods system and the value chain. But where we were failing was in the creation of equitable economic ecosystems without prejudice and discrimination. For example, **we recently had a case where a couple were discriminated against because he is tribal and she is Latina – and they left– so all of the lending capacity was for not. ... Who cares how many jobs we created? We lost good people and the regions quality of life suffered.**

What is systems change?

Arlene Jones (SPROUT MN): **Systems change is when you get the county veterans service officers to work with you to refer veterans that they have contact with to the program and then to follow those folks through the program.** It's when the MN Department of Veterans Affairs allows Veteran Widows to be part of the program, and due in part because of our MDVA final grant report, the income guidelines were changed to better reflect poverty in rural places. We have also have had a target focus areas

people who are involved in the judicial system and folks that are in recovery of any kind and folks who are adapting to life with mental illness ... **We have county attorneys, county probation officers, public health professionals referring people that they connect with [to our RxCSA Program].** Another systems change that we can be proud of is all the work we have done with local foods, **convincing our foundations that our culinary chefs are artists in that culinary art is a bonafide art form.**

Sometimes the WealthWorks Framework isn't culturally compatible.

Amy House (RDI): The work that we are doing with **Warm Springs (a tribal community on the Warm Springs reservation)** is very interesting ... They are very visionary. They are very ambitious ... We partnered with them a few years ago. Initially, we were going to train the staff and build the capacity of the staff. And their staff were like – this is not what we need – we know this. **And we don't even like WealthWorks. It is such a capitalist language.** "Wealth, assets, markets." After a year of back-and-forth struggle, their priority was to move this building and create an incubator space. Their priorities were regarding how to get the incubator up and

running and figure out how it works. At some point we had a come to Jesus moment when Heidi and I said, "We don't care what we do. We will just help you with anything you want help with. Give us a list and we will do whatever ... **I think that the difference there is with some of our work sometimes with WealthWorks we can frame the community work about a set of values.... and we needed to respect that they had their values established. What they wanted was a different kind of support. It was different that we initially expected and it grew organically...**

What lane should predominantly white organizations drive in when doing JEDI work?

Heidi Khokhar (RDI): **We have this partner who was a former board member.** He is Gustavas who started with our leadership program. In doing so wanted to create an organization for the Latino population in Ontario Oregon. It was somewhat built on the idea of RDI but has a focus on building the capacity and advocacy voice. **He and I are really strong leaders and we are absolutely clear what our lane is.** He will say that RDI is so smart and so visionary, he will say, "Your work coupled with my work in my community across this state could really actually make a difference." This organization is culturally specific that is working in their community coupled with the work he saw. So he was trying to create my lane – **"Your lane is to get those middle age white women to do anti-racism work and understand white supremacy at the level that we can work together. So stay in your lane. Your work is not Latino work. That is my work.**

Cheryl Hills (R5DC): **As I am translating that Heidi, we have knitted a lane and I don't know if we have been really clear about what that lane is. That we are still open to either steering or rowing the boat. ... So what I am hearing you say – that we might need to be a little bit more clear about our role and if we are going to transition. We can have a "we" of new and the existing agencies that are working in that space. Thank you for this learning moment Heidi!**

Will rural voices be heard in the JEDI work?

Cheryl Hills (R5DC): Sometimes I feel when there is a shock everyone want to reactand for all the right reasons to address the immediate crisis, but sometimes I worry that we rush to action with unintended consequences ...

Heidi Khokhar (RDI): I sit on this Pacific Northwest rural workgroup. These are great people who do great work. I am constantly the only voice there that says, "Before you go in to fix that – maybe you should look at what is already happening?"

Cheryl Hills (R5DC): I am so appreciative of the foundation response to murder of George Floyd and approach to fund black and brown leaderships to enact racial justice throughout their service territories. My struggle with this whole approach is it doesn't meet communities like our region where we are. Guess who is leading this effort in a predominately white region? A bunch of white women. It would be wonderful if side-by-side those that have been doing the work can work with diverse people with different lived experiences. I think we need BIPOC leadership alongside the white leadership to witness real systems change.

It's true, I am not a big fan of bringing in outsiders who tell you what to do and leave. The

community culture you are going into matters. How are foundations going to successfully fund external groups to come into Central Minnesota or areas of the Mountain areas of Baker Oregon or all these other areas and build racial justice and equity without understanding the cultures?

Heidi Khokhar (RDI): I will say from the conversations we are hearing from the foundations ... is that they are going to put something out and it isn't going to be inclusive of the work that RDI is doing or the work that Gustavos is doing.

Cheryl Hills (R5DC): That is what is worrying me!

Heidi Khokhar (RDI): I have been framing now on purpose that RDI has been doing economic recovery work for 30 years. So thank you for coming to the show now. Our economy tanked 35 years ago in rural and we have not recovered. ... Let's remember that people have been doing rural recovery work for 35 years and there are people who have been really trying to figure out what is different with rural work. I actually say, "Welcome to the show! Thank you! I am glad you are here. We have been here for 35 years and so have many others."



VI. Core Team Journey – What Worked, What Didn't

Including the evaluator, there were 10 members of the Regional Prosperities Core Team. They represented a variety of sectors, ages, and had a wide range of content expertise and cultural experiences. They were all women and all but one was white. They all were passionate about this work. In a final, confidential, online survey, 9 members responded. All chose either agree or strongly agree to “I believe the work of the Regional Prosperities Project will make a difference” and “I believe the Regional Prosperities Project is making progress,” and “I felt comfortable to express my opinion.” As we move to Regional Prosperity 2.0 it looks like we have some work to do to make sure that all members feel encouraged to express their opinions and that they are an important part of the team.

When asked, **“What inspires you about the work of this project?”** core team members mentioned, “dedicated folks,” “great collaborations,” “the people,” “community led,” “focus on equity,” “the better good,” “holistic approach to community vitality,” “working with other passionate people,” and

“knowing that we are making a difference.” An illustrative quote was:

“What inspires me is the growth we have made as a group and seeing the amount of people we have impacted and made aware of our work. We cannot make BIG mind shift changes in just one year but I think our works shines light on many topics that are lacking in rural Minnesota. Bringing awareness and showing how we can make a change are two huge steps for this region. We are paving the way for others to make the same choices, have the courage to take a step in the direction of learning more, and giving a voice to others who might not have otherwise. It is truly inspiring.”

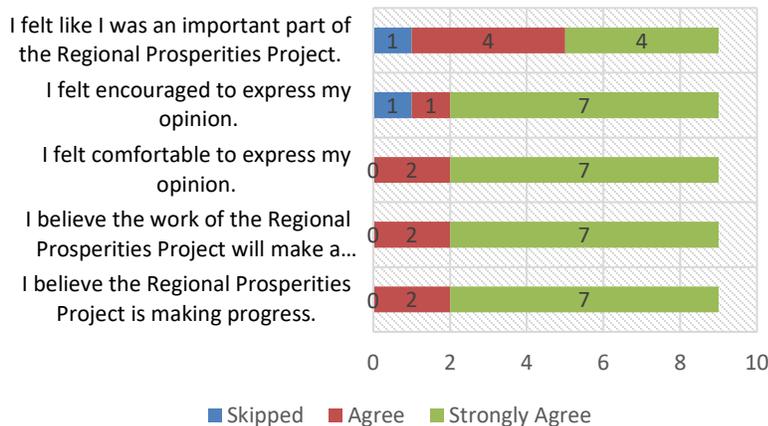
So much has been learned from participating in the project. Core team members mentioned “the work is even more important than I thought,” “a lot more of this work is needed,” “women are the hope for the future,” “the power of a well-designed consortium to effect systems change,” “we have a lot of work to do,” “we will preserve, the power of story in building community,”

and that “there are so many individuals in the region who want to work on equity issues.”

Two sample quotes are:

*“I have learned that **there are many people individually working on similar things** to what we are doing. **The power that comes from bringing these individuals together** is significant. I have also learned that **we have a lot to learn still** but that is the part of the process of growth. It’s truly incredible to see that.”*

Regional Prosperity: Core Team



*“That **connecting with one another** is essential, **listening** is essential, **helping people thru change** is essential.”*

When describing their personal experiences, the core team mentioned that the “work is hard,” “we have to stay strong,” “COVID made it difficult to feel connected at times for the core team as well as for the WCAG members.” Others said they learned “so much about collaboration,” “that it was a growing,” “rewarding,” “inspirational,” and “energizing experience.”

*“I’ve worked in community/econ/rural development for a long time, and **this has been the most challenging work of my career** -- in a good way -- and it is intense **we have mountains still to climb but the journey has begun and we’re in it together**, which makes all the difference in achieving our goals.”*

*“**Just love working with the group of women- great thinkers, very inspiring.**”*

*“I have enjoyed being able to connect with so many new people doing impactful work. **It has made me feel part of a supportive, women-led team.**”*

Core team members were asked what they would like to see as the future work of the Regional Prosperity Project. Responses included “keep ripple active, we have only just begun,” “more learning to help us grow,” “continuation of the community-based work,” “some form of the WCAGs,” and “more storytelling.” Other comments follow:

*“I would love to see Regional Prosperity Project **have more connections and ways to reach other community members**. Speaking only for myself/experience I feel like we connect with people whom we already knew or who knew this work was important. **Is it possible to connect with those groups we are not connecting with?** Is it asking too much to connect with individuals who already have so much going on in their life? I also do know the full extent and reach of all the work so this statement also might be false. I think we should keep continuing along the path of growth and learning! Which we do everyday!”*

*“Given the physical distancing challenges with COVID, **what’s next I think should be a continuation of the community-based work with the initial communities, so they have a chance to build on what they were able to accomplish** -- but now perhaps with more accessibility to physically-based gatherings? Review and reflect on the evaluations and “story” of this first phase and see where we want to learn more, do more, as future paths are revealed. And perhaps **add an applied econ person to the team and network mapping to capture the input output analysis of the resources invested, connections built/strengthened, and patterns of social, economic, business development based on the project inputs -- both tangible and intangibles** That would all **help us understand the ripple effects** of this project and help identify the key pieces/characteristics that make this an equitable ecosystem, and the potential for replication/scaling up going forward.”*

“Investing in leadership, multicultural and BIPOC development, with economic lens.”



VII. R5DC System Changes and Spin off Activities

There have been several ways that R5DC has changed practices, in part, because of NWAFFs investment. What follows is a summary of these important spin-off activities. Appendix C provides a more exhaustive review of these changes.

*“We have changed some of our **lending practices** to be able to focus more on BIPOC communities and BIPOC business enterprises”*

*“By doing the **energy and environmental work with a JEDI focus** we are making sure that we are providing opportunities for BIPOC community members but we are doing it in ways that don’t disrupt our environmental commitment.”*

*“That is all a part of our shift in how we are planning, and NOT Just our energy and environmental planning but **also in the areas of Comprehensive Planning, CEDS, Water Planning, -- we now have an intentional focus around who does it impact, what does it impact and how do we do the planning!***

“We changed how we measure system changes. The work out of that sift is also in terms of our work – such as the [Storytelling Circles](#).”

Although not directly funded through the NWAFF investment, the NWAFF investment meant that the Regional Prosperity work actually happened at the right time. Because R5DC and its partners were engaged in DEI and E3 work – they were well poised to begin to serve as important rural voices after the George Floyd murder and then the COVID-19 Pandemic. The activities below are natural spinoffs and outcomes as a direct result of how the Regional Prosperity team now thinks/acts and attempts to strengthen E3. Funded work included: **JEDI Presentation to NADO Annual Conference, Justice System Consortium, Leech Lake Housing Project, Rural Urban Exchange (RUX) Higher Education IDI Goal Setting and Transforming Rural Understand of Equity (TRUE) Partnership and TRUE Tuesdays**. In addition, **Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Mentors** R5DC staff are partnering with fellow equity practitioners to continue to learn how to bridge difference across cultures, specifically through the Intercultural Development Inventory framework.

Projects that are in the fund development phase but not yet off the ground are the **Native Culinary Artist in Residency** project. R5DC is working to make sure that rural voices are not excluded from this work.

VIII. Lessons Learned

This report would not be complete without highlighting some of the lessons learned from work of R5DC and its Regional Prosperity team members. The NWAFF investment has been a crucial stepping stone and allowed R5DC and its partners to deepen their work in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and their understanding that Justice – also needed to be an important element. So this JEDI work will continue in important ways. We conclude with the lessons learned in hopes that it will help not only NWAFF but others who read our story.

What are the lessons learned?

“Progress of JEDI work moves at the speed of TRUST through RELATIONSHIPS built with people who are in proximity with each other who are willing to help each other for the long haul.”

“When doing this work, especially in rural places, we take the approach that we need to not cause shame for people’s world view as people come from where they come from. We all start from someplace and can alter our paths as our perspectives shift and as we become more culturally agile.”

“Everyone is at a different part of their intercultural journey- for people, sometimes things are going too fast, sometimes too

slow. We, as practitioners, need to ebb and flow with the needs of the community and the individuals.”

“There is a theory that healing and growth begin when we are in conversations that are “uncomfortable” which sounds plausible.... what we have learned is that it does not matter what type of diversity you are addressing....the starting point of discomfort for people who are passionate about their focus of diversity are typically at letters S or T of the alphabet, but the starting point for many others is more often uncomfortable at the letter G of the alphabet.”

“We have learned that for many folks in our rural communities, these conversations are the first they have had around JEDI culture. The need or desire to engage in these conversations has been seen as more of an “urban” topic. With the recent social unrest, rural communities are hearing the call for change- for some it is “about time” and for others it is something they don’t want to face. FEAR of loss of culture and values is a powerful force and passionate practitioners leading these conversations with great intention of helping people be open to discomfort can push people into FLIGHT or FLIGHT zones which closes the conversation all together and damages the TRUST and potential growth.”



“YES, open dialog that embraces discomfortbe disruptors....but be as vulnerable as we are asking community members to be and lead this work in ways that help people grow. THEN, appreciate and celebrate the small steps, the small victories and then keep pushing for more.”

What are the greatest challenges?

“Acknowledgement that injustices and inequities do occur.”

“There will be push back from some folks in the region which is not your greatest challenge if your leadership, Board, Commission & STAFF support the work.”

“Currently the greatest challenge is understanding that this work is PERSONAL and INDIVIDUAL therefore it’s difficult to facilitate group discussions.”

Best piece of advice?

“This work is hard and practitioners are addressing people’s values, culture, hopes and fears.”

“Seek understanding....Ask community members about their experiences.”

“Have support...Board and Staff. Feed the passion of your staff.”

“Don’t do this work if you are not going to stick with it.”

“YES, be courageous and do the work but know it may spend some of your social capital.”

“Extend grace even when you don’t think it’s deserved.”

“Measure, measure, measure.”

“Make system changes....knowledge is power and conversations are foundational, but changing systems that prevent us from E3 is JEDI euphoria.”

IX. Next Steps: Regional Prosperities Equitable Economic Ecosystems 2.0 (E3 2.0)

The need for E3 2.0 became apparent as R5DC was working within the region through the E3 1.0 program from 2019-2021, which included community-led welcoming groups whose focus was on creating and ensuring inclusive and equitable communities for ALL. Access to diversity, equity and inclusion resources/tools, conversations, and exploration has not existed in our five-county region in ways that were accessible to a general audience nor approached in ways that could meet people where they are at in terms of cultural agility and intercultural competence. This has resulted in our region being less prepared for our nation’s changing demographics, ability to engage globally, and to attract a qualified workforce. This lack of access has also led to misinformation, fear, anger and other socially destructive impacts that need to be addressed in order for our region to ensure vitality and quality of life for all.

Our region is hungry for the continued infusion of equity initiatives. During the past two years of this work, we have seen more organizations, businesses and individuals coming to the table, knowing that it is important for the future of our region, state, and nation. To halt this work now would be a setback to the progress that has been made to date within our five-county region.

APPENDIX A

WELCOMING COMMUNITY ADVOCACY GROUP

APPENDIX A-1: WCAG Curriculum

Meeting #1 was where WCAG members reviewed the Group IDI profile and discussed next steps. The Welcoming Communities PowerPoint (See sidebar) was used to help members review and define key terms such as “Diversity and Inclusion,” “Equality and Equity,” “Values & Beliefs,” “Culture,” and “Intercultural Competence.” And the “Intercultural Development Continuum.”

The **Meeting #2** discussion topics included:

- World View/Implicit Bias
- Hidden Rules Among Classes
- Welcoming Communities
- Improved Livelihoods
- Equitable Ecosystems
- Systems Change

Meeting #3 often focused on:

- Who’s at your table? Who else should be? (Exploring marginalized populations)
- Power versus Interest
- Continued brainstorming for community project

Meeting #4 included review of materials relevant to the specific WCAG project:

- For the Brainerd WCAG the topics were: *Root of Racial Injustice (TedTalk): How do we ensure our conversations are addressing the ROOTS of inequities? And Hosting Meaningful Conversations: How can we ensure these conversations are meaningful in our RURAL spaces?*
- For the Little Falls and Long Prairie WCAGs, Chet Bodin, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development talked about the Inclusive Employer Program.
- For the Pine River WCAG resource materials presented included: *Who’s At Your Table, Arlene Jones, TexX Gull Lake, Food Connects People, and What Americans Can Learn from Other Food Cultures.*

EQUALITY

EQUITY

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

VALUES AND BELIEFS

What's Important to You?

TRUTH

CULTURE

The learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors of a group of interacting people.

~ J & M Bennett

Top 10%

Top 10%

Bottom 90%

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

The ability to **interact, communicate and relate effectively and appropriately** in a variety of cultural contexts.

(Bennett, 2004)

Intercultural Development Continuum

Denial → Polarization → Minimization → Acceptance → Adaptation

Monocultural Mindset → Intercultural Mindset

Increasing cognitive complexity

At **meeting #4**, The MidMN Women’s Center continued to explore how to better meet the needs of all within the community so their Meeting #4 focused on rebranding, Vision, Mission, and Value Statements.

Meetings 1 through 4 also was were WCAGs began to brainstorm project ideas and explore the feasibility of each project.

Meeting #5 was the one that focused on continuing to finalize project ideas and elements that were most relevant to the WCAG. For example: The Go North WCAG was trying to address inter-generational relations. At the 5th Meeting the video Intergenerational Living was viewed. These questions helped the group explore learnings from the video: “How can we incorporate into our work questions like: What was life like when I was your age? What do I expect life to be like when I am your age?” These questions allow for generations to learn from each other.

Meeting #6 was the final wrap up meeting. Again relevant materials were used, as appropriate. For the Staples WCAG the Ted Talk *Why Reading Matters* was used to kick off the meeting to help the group to continue on their learning journey. The groups also finalized their project plans and reviewed lessons learned from their WCAG experience.

The culminating group project was to address one of the value chains. Pine River WCAG addressed the Local Foods Value Chain, Little Falls WCAG’s project was within the solar energy/environmental planning value chain. The remaining WCAG’s focused on the Creative Placemaking Value Chain: Brainerd, Staples, Pequot Lakes, GoNorth, and Mid-Minnesota Women’s Center. Each project built at least one of the eight forms of wealth, build equitable economic ecosystems via systems change, improve livelihoods of marginalized populations and be welcoming to marginalized populations.

Wealth Works Capitals:

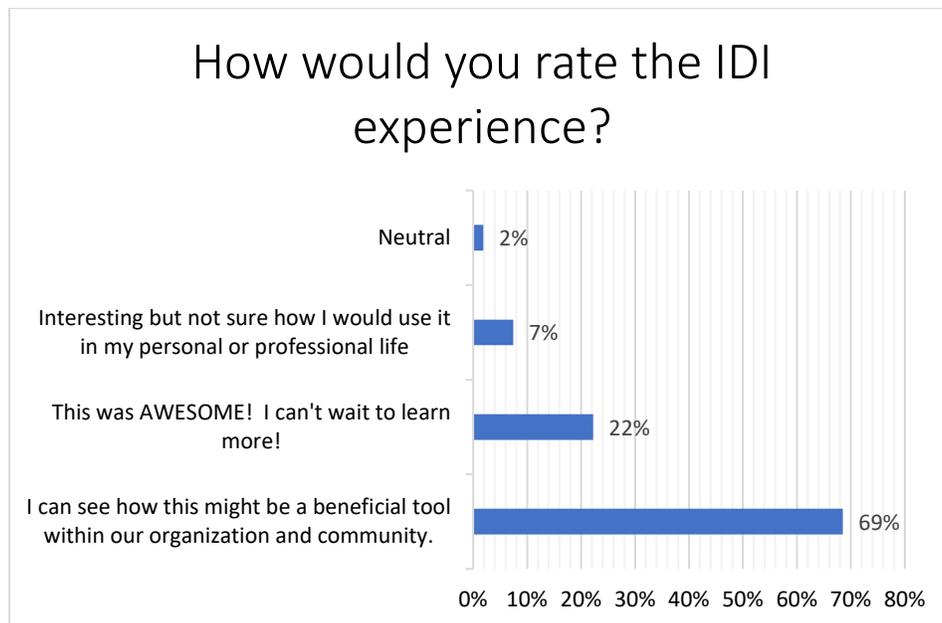
- ***Built Capital*** is the stock of fully functioning constructed infrastructure.
- ***Financial capital*** is the stock of unencumbered monetary assets invested in other forms of capital or financial instruments.
- ***Individual capital*** is the stock of skills and physical and mental healthiness of people in 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.
- ***Cultural capital*** is the stock of practices that reflect values and identity rooted in place, class, and/or ethnicity.

The criteria used to evaluate project ideas were that the project:

- Must identify how the WCAG is going to be welcoming AND Show how they are going to be welcoming.
- Must focus on Systems Change
- Must focus on populations we have not worked with before.
- Must build at least one of the 8 forms of capital.
- Must have long-term economic impact of marginalized populations.
- Project cannot otherwise be funded
- Project does not need additional funding to complete
- Project dollars cannot be used for staffing

APPENDIX A-2: Evaluation of the IDI Assessment

Those who took the IDI Assessment were offered an opportunity to provide feedback on the experience. There were 54 individuals (22% of 248) who responded to the online survey. Most 69% (37 of the 54 who responded) chose the response option, “I can see how this might be a beneficial tool without or organization or community.” Improved cultural agility may be discerned from their responses to open-ended questions. For example one responded, *“By knowing my profile, it made me more aware of how my filter may vary from someone else’s. I will be more aware going forward of how our views may differ and work to communicate to allow for the most clarity.”*



What is one take-away from the IDI session? ¹

*Getting a good sense as to the additional effort needed to meet the group's expectations
Makes me think about culture a little more than I did in the past. No actionable items, so not sure how to use.*

That we have a common thread and now we as a City will be able to explore further the potential

We should treat all people with respect.

Diversity: "Being asked to the Party" Inclusion : "Being asked to dance" I look forward to uplifting the BLA vibe so that people more often feel that they've been "asked to dance" and not just invited.

To see that there is more to culture than just people from different countries.

That cultural humility/competence is a continuum

It was helpful to know where the group is as a whole.

The different kinds of cultural groups

I think understanding where I am on the continuum will help me understand how to better engage with the college community

That maybe I am not as opened-minded as I thought.

We're not where we think we are.

There are many, many different cultures to consider.

Complexity of it all

There is a high level of experience and talent in the community

Even though our group was small, the ladies were very professional and helpful.

Just remember that we all have different views and perspectives on situations. One is not necessarily right or wrong. We need to keep an open mind and be respectful of others.

Subconsciously I had known some of the roadblocks I was hitting were related to culture. I felt some of the puzzle pieces clicking into place.

There's work to be done.

I am not where I thought I would be

None stands out.

There are opportunities available to enhance our goals.

Clearly there is a discrepancy in where we think we are at, where we think people see us at, and where we are actually at in the process.

Very informative

In Minimization... I recognize and tolerate, but don't go out of my way.

Each of us have our biases. It is important to understand how I see the world in order to better interact. There are no incorrect answers, only incorrect understanding or communication.

Made me wonder about who was generating the Survey. I'm naturally skeptical about these exercises.

¹ All quotes provided in this report are verbatim to honor the voices of those who provided feedback.

The perception vs reality in our results.

There's an authentic desire to make progress on this in Pequot Lakes.

That our group's responses were typical of the majority of "groups". As I said at the end of the presentation, I had difficulty completely understanding the group results of our survey and am hopeful I will have a better understanding after I meet with Dawn to discuss my individual results.

It was interesting to think of the different identities that people take on-- and all of that creates an individual's identification of their own culture.

We need to start a plan and we need to start thinking as an organization.

How our self-perception does not necessarily equate to the reality...and certainly not the reality that other people are seeing and feeling

The perception of culture is broader than the typical default when this language is part of a discussion whether in an organization or a casual setting.

That there is always room for learning more about the best way to work within and across difference.

Pretty much what I expected. No real surprises.

We have a large discrepancy between where we view ourselves and where we really are.

The continuum and descriptions.

I appreciate seeing the results, especially the Orientation gap. Truly, I expected a larger gap based on my experiences with the EdSol team at Sourcewell.

I enjoyed the interactive part of the session, where we lined up on the wall.

Desire to grow.

The five stages from denial to adaptation was good to see.

Thinking of culture more broadly, I also thought it was interesting that the denial was higher than the reversal in our group.

By knowing my profile, it made me more aware of how my filter may vary from someone else's. I will be more aware going forward of how our views may differ and work to communicate to allow for the most clarity.

I have taken the IDI before, about three years ago working on my Principal licensure. I'm also been immersed in equity and diversity work with Sourcewell for a few years now. I'm so bummed that my mindset hasn't shifted - especially the fact that I am parenting a black child. But I've learned that there are things you cannot fight against, but you can just keep learning and growing and opening your perspective a little more all the time.

I realized that I minimize differences way more than I thought that I did.

The 5 approaches.

What is a way you might use what you learned around IDI in your personal or professional life?

Continue to be mindful of the opportunities for self-improvement

To bridge differences and embrace similarities

I have used most of it my whole life. Its common sense.



Our explorations into Equity will be hopefully shed some great insight and guiding principles for helping us raise our children

To see people more as individuals

As a way to start conversations knowing a bit more about where people are at and how to engage them in this work to become more culturally competent

I will be more sensitive to tendency to minimize.

Be more cognizant of differences and ask more questions

To listen better and be more cordial.

Increased awareness of working towards acceptance

Enhanced sensitivity

Look for what's unique about each person, what they are willing to share.

Realize that there are different cultures to everyone not just one

Try to "step into someone else's shoes" more and see things from their point of view. Especially in the workplace, now that I realize our cultures are very different, even within our small group.

Not sure yet. Step back and observe...

I liked the orientation ladder. It's pretty easy to understand why we'd need to start progressing.

Become more accepting of others

The results and my perspective of my own attitudes toward diversity are at such odds I've no learnings to apply. I await viewing analysis of my inventory responses.

Find helpful people to whom to reach out.

Push myself and my group more. For example, don't just invite someone from another culture.

Invite them to be a part of the planning. Don't just get an interpreter, make steps to learn the language. Etc.

Personal interactions with community

Stay curious and open minded. Ask questions. Look at things differently - take away always and never

Be cognizant of other's perceptions.

I chose to use the exercise and the review as "food for thought".

Understanding the 5 levels of understanding and how they impact our thoughts/decisions.

Open-Ended Response

Will push this work in the school district and in how the city approaches plans for and works towards growth.

I feel I will be able to answer this question better after I review my individual findings with Dawn and your group provides me, personally and our group as a whole with possible steps/ideas to help us move forward with our intercultural knowledge/skills.

Recognizing behavior that could be attributed to not a strong sense of self-actualization.

To better serve people.

Not believe that I am alone in this world.

This information should help create an operating procedure in dealing with all cultures

Be more mindful about a 'default' way of thinking and be aware that human nature tends to veer toward self rather than all.

Don't judge, be curious, be fair

An overall general awareness. Keep working on it.

Deeper understanding of what culture means.

As we work with schools and focus on equity for all students, the continuum and descriptions are helpful to use as possible indicators of where people are at.

I would need to learn more personally to have a deeper understanding before I utilize any information.

More Self-Awareness

Following the actionable steps.

Continued self-work as well as ways to provide opportunities for our team and organization to keep making intentional moves towards more equitable communities and work spaces.

I communicate frequently with others in the public sphere, and offer services. I will be thinking more often about equity and our gaps in communication.

Stated above.

I want to take conscious steps to improve how I communicate and relate to other so that I can enter into the "acceptance" zone.

Being aware of other cultures and learning more about them as part of bridge building

What would you have liked to have more of? Less of?

The amount of information provided was a great fit for the group's expectations.

Hard to say at this point

Nothing.

Too early to tell :)

Not sure on this one

I would like more on how we can have these conversations and what types of prompts we can use to have the conversations / promote more dialogue within our org.

Good tone and summary of the group. More depth would have been helpful. The initial exercises were helpful, but several of us thought it would have been helpful to help us think more deeply.

Perhaps providing some case studies or examples to talk through would have helped us get to a bit more meat. Thank you for coming!

Not sure

I think it would have been helpful to have our personal scores first, so we could have deeper conversations about how to make changes/create opportunities at CLC

Not sure.

More on tools for improvement.

More "what is next for our group?" I would like to explore my personal profile.

Seemed right for the time available

More people involved in the next meetings, to benefit from the program.

I would like to have learned more about my individual profile, though I realize that this is better done in an individual setting, like you are offering. I would have liked to have done more of the



exercises at the beginning where we lined up in a continuum in response to the statements on the sheet. I thought it was very interesting to see where everyone was at.

I'm not sure how it could have gone differently. The content seemed appropriate.

Information how to implement, change, grow

More discussion of pitfalls of current "position" on the scale and benefits of moving "right" on the scale.

The topics were well covered.

This was helpful

IDI was well informed

Continue learning... always :)

A personal IDI assessment. Understanding and examples of how this program has benefited other groups, large and small.

More practical application ideas; less perceptions that I had taken a series of "trick" questions designed by people with a goal of obtaining a predetermined result tilt.

Nothing specific at this time.

Open-Ended Response

Address vocabulary when it's relevant/in context in the middle of the presentation. The examples are informative (skiing culture) and allowed folks to connect to the concepts.

I know you are going to provide this, but I am looking forward to having more information about the testing process and results and how to improve my views and attitudes to help our community and EDC be more welcoming.

N/a-- I thought it was a good presentation.

How's, like how to identify bias in yourself.

More detail of strategies to improve

More of the "common cues" to determine ways to recognize our own biases and prejudices

Longer session, actually a half day to discuss how we can incorporate personally and professionally.

I want my individual results, because that is where I can apply my learning to improve the way I see the world and deal with situations

I would have liked to review the questions that were asked. I really did not like the response options for some of the questions where there could have been 2 answers.

I felt like we went through a lot of information very quickly. I think it would have been good to have more processing activities. It would have also been good to have talked through a few next steps more deeply based on our results.

Nothing....just right.

We should have had time scheduled individually, but not surprising that our manager would avoid this.

It seems most of us were not sure what "culture" we were referencing when doing the IDI. Was it supposed to be Sourcewell culture, public etc.? Would have loved more of the interactive pieces, where we can see where we are and others in the organization.

More how

I see a benefit in scenarios and or cases shared and different reactions to them.

I think because our group has done some work around equity over the past 1.5 years, most were able to digest parts of the beginning. It was still a lot to take in very quickly, even with the background we brought. Wondering how the experience might have been different or overwhelming with less exposure to the thinking you were sharing. The opening activity was a great, low - risk activity to move into the work.

Ours was a small group to sample. I think it would be really interesting to apply this exercise to a larger group such as those within my work organization.

Can't wait to get into more work on implicit bias, etc. I am reading "White Fragility" with Rachel Logan for a Sourcewell group. Have you seen any work by Paul Gorski? We use his book "Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice" Education for some good discussions in our groups.

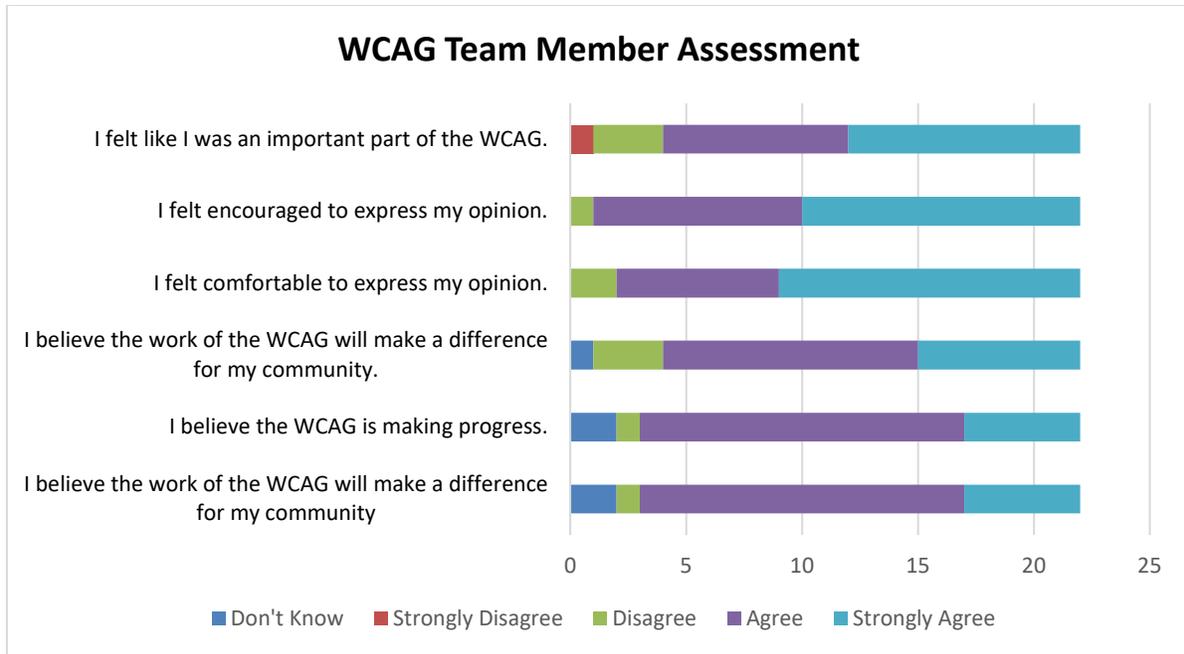
I am very curious about the project(s) that we are going to work on. I appreciate that we are given a lot of freedom, but I am excited to learn more about what we are actually going to work on and accomplish.

More - Group Discussion Less- Hearing background info twice in same level of detail.

APPENDIX A-3 Evaluation of the WCAG experience

Most of the WCAG core team members completed an assessment of the experience. They reported that they felt like they were an important part of the WCAG, felt encouraged to express their options, felt comfortable to express their opinions, believe the work will make a difference for the community, believe the WACG is making progress and believe that the WCAG will make a difference for the community. They reported that they learned a number of valuable skills and that the experience contributed to opening their eyes about culture, diversity and equity issues and gave them an opportunity to be part of the work and the solution. A few illustrative quotes follow.





What did you learn from participating in the WCAG?

Articles Dawn shared were helpful!

Don't assume.

How hard it is to involve others in the community

I had the opportunity to work with a variety of people who have different and unique ideas of what will improve a community. I find it interesting to look at the options that are available.

I learned how easy it can be to have cultural bias and how cultural norms could negatively impact a community.

I learned how rich the diversity in a community adds to breaking down barriers to connection of people from different backgrounds.

I learned that our city and community can always be more welcoming and that with our changing demographics, we need to be creative and connect with our newcomers. We need to give everyone a place to meet and play together.

It was interesting hearing from other people that had different jobs throughout the community. Just to hear other's perspectives is valuable.

On a personal level, I liked the IDI. Since it was a smaller group, I felt it was easy to express opinions and have meaningful conversations.

That people care about my community

The amazing work that is happening already within the community

The BLA Chamber is showing more leadership in this space than I expected

The IDI assessment identified areas for personal growth and the group shared valuable resources

There are lots of needs in our community

Ways to include all in community activities

Describe your personal experience with this project.

Has opened my eyes to culture and how it is not just defined by race, gender or sexual orientation

I attended meetings and did research of some of the options. I felt comfortable expressing my ideas, which in some cases were somewhat different than those of others. My parents instilled the idea that if you want something changed or improved, you may need to be part of the process and this gave me the opportunity to do that.

I enjoyed collaborating with members of my community. I would not have had that opportunity if it wasn't for this group.

I feel that I've learned and grown a lot by being involved with this group!

I had a very positive experience and enjoy getting to know new people and hearing new perspectives. The group help to reignite my creative side and better understand differences among us.

I have enjoyed coming together with others in the community who are movers and shakers and are positive about change and want our community to be welcoming.

I joined the group late and truly enjoyed getting to know other members of this project. It was a great experience.

I was able to help form the project from the beginnings. It was fun to work with this group and see what each member added with their different experience.

I was not able to participate as I was hoping due to COVID and working in healthcare during this time.

I wish this was around when I first came to this community from another country 20 years ago.

I'm enjoying the people and I'm hopeful for a great project next fall!

In the beginning I was looking forward to doing something for the underserved part of our community, like the seniors or the kids. I think there was a lot of outside conversations that I was not aware of, so by the time a meeting came about, a few members had already discussed what they were doing, so the meeting was just a formality. I was sad to see that the direction of the project changed and no longer was for the kids/seniors.

It gave me hope

I've connected with people in the community that I didn't know and developed strong relationships through the work

Serve on WCAG for over a year now. Our Foundation has a DEI goal, and we support the BLA Newcomers Club. We will be more intentional about asking BIPOC newcomers to our club.

The willingness of the volunteer members of the group to step up to accomplish the necessary tasks to realize the project. The excitement and energy about the cooking & culture classes has been fun to see too.

Truly great!



APPENDIX A-4: Lessons Learned

Brainerd WCAG.

The Brainerd WCAG was comprised of individuals who tended to be in leadership and management positions. They had brilliant ideas. It took the group longer than anticipated to put their ideas into practice.

Final WCAG Meeting the team reported, *“We need to have a variety of ways to talk about equity (value proposition). We may lose some board members, supporters and funders when standing up for equity and justice. We must find the words because saying nothing is worse.”*

GoNorthMN. One of the many lessons learned was called the “us and them” lesson learned and was described as “the need for improved relationships and communication between permanent residents/local businesses, and seasonal property owners/visitors still exists. GNM’s mission is to work for both.”

Little Falls WCAG.

COVID definitely changed the way the budding relationships of the WCAG were being developed. Having virtual meetings meant that participation waned and was a barrier for one person in the group. Having a group that did not have any previous connection was great at connecting new people in some ways, but also created barriers when we switched to virtual meetings and the connection to each other harder to develop.

One big lesson learned was that building relationships with people outside the WCAG was helpful to share the work the group was doing and make even more connections with the City. Once the group found those connections, the project portion really took off with new engaged partners.

Long Prairie WCAG. “The group IDI profile revealed that the group was operating at a “marginalized” perspective. That was somewhat surprising to me because given that the Latinx population has lived in Long Prairie for so long, 25 years, I expected that the group of leaders may have been further along the scale. However, upon reflection I believe that this is where the group needed to be. Long Prairie as a community is very polarized with groups in denial stage. There are signs in downtown asking “Latinos to go home” and when the press release was distributed the Mayor received scathing remarks about the project. It took a strong team of white leaders to not let that deter them from working to make the community more welcoming for all who live there.”

Pequot lakes WCAG.

The Pequot Lakes WCAG is the most seasoned group. Every single person on the core team have run equity groups, taken considerable training, and has very much a DE&I mind set. This is a braver group because there isn’t a lot of initial learning about DEI that needs to be done. They

are already confident about DEI and went very quickly to questions of: What can we do now that we know this is the situation? This community approached R5DC to participate in WCAG. The person who works for the EDA had gone through IDI with R5DC over year prior to the development of the Pequot Lakes WCAG. In addition, the Superintendent of Schools, who is very engaged in the community in the Rotary and on the EDA board, participated in the IDI assessment in the past and wanted to do more work in the area. He has been very proactive in all of this and engaged the Rotary and EDA in conversations about DEI. Therefore, this WCAG had a number of Champions and members were well aware of where there were good alliances in the community.

Also, a majority in the group was new to the region and the community within the last 2 years. They all now have a way to be much more engaged in the community and have more of a voice within the community, *"I just moved here pay attention to me."* It is more personal for them because they have been marginalized because they are newcomers to the community.

An unintended outcome from the Superintendent stepping out to tell his story about equity issues in Pequot Lakes School/Community resulted in a large number of community members asking about legal action that can be taken and asking for the board to fire him.

Pine River WCAG.

The Pine River Backus Community Education Director became a driving force behind the success of the project. In part because of his connections with cultural guides living in the community but also because he was so excited about the project saying, "This is why I am a community education director!"

Plan at the beginning of the series to clarify and verify with chefs that the videos and recipes may be used beyond the lifespan of the project.

For the recipes to become public there will need to be some editing because without the video they are not sufficiently detailed to provide all the steps needed to prepare the meal.

Staples WCAG. Unlike other WCAG, the Staples WCAG was very well connected and already had trust among a majority of the members. They "owned" the project. They were fully engaged in all meetings, reading the materials, engaged in deep conversations about what they were learning, and even deeply concerned about the George Floyd murder and the riots and attempted coup in Washington DC. 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 tended to be younger than the other R5DC welcoming groups.

Stories of Everyday Changemakers: The Rural Reveal. Unfortunately this beautiful event was marred by white supremacists who buzz bombed the event spewing racial slurs. The event organizers shut the event down and then invited back in those who were known. They apologized during the event and then in follow-up letters. Lessons learned included these:



It is important for those who have the courage to host public events addressing the cancer sores of racism and inequality that they understand that events may be compromised.

The **next step strategy is not to then turn to exclusionary events** where only those known are invited into the public dialogue because not everyone will be known.

The most crucial lesson learn is how to handle the situation. We learned from Emily Gayle, a women of color, that she is often faced with situations like this – what was different was, ***“The fact that you and your team did not just sweep it under the rung ... 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.”***

APPENDIX A-5: Equitable Economic Ecosystem (EEE) Systems Changes

Solar Schools Project:

- The region learned what it takes to work across the region with multiple public, private, and nonprofit organizations to deploy solar to address energy stabilization.
- The solar installations are demonstrating to the region how renewable energy can reduce the carbon footprint and work, on a local level, to address climate change.

Little Falls WCAG Project

- EEE Systems Changes was the building of cooperative relationships between R5DC, the WCAG, the Little Falls Historical Society, Little Falls Visitors Bureau, and the City of Little Falls.
- An emerging relationship at the time of this grant was with the Little Falls Our Town committee. Phoebe Ward from Lead for Minnesota and Dawn Espe from R5DC have spoken about how both groups are working to realize the same goals. There is a hope that Region Five can be seen as an important resource for the Our Town grant and that that relationship can help build deeper connections around EEE work.

R5DC Energy and Environment Planning (Staples and Hackensack)

- Communities participating in this project will be enacting projects that improve environmental-related infrastructure and/or community processes.
- \$10,000 from MPCA and may help with budgets in the future for planning EE projects
- Education given to group members about energy and environment
- Engagement of cities in a new process that is specifically thinking about energy and environment related action steps. Learning about what this means, potential city threats, and new opportunities for cities to consider to both protect their community and attract new people.
- Environmental protection and consideration--rain garden, efficiency, hazardous waste education
- In the region, we are making this a priority and sharing with communities and the whole state that we are doing this work. EE plans have not been done very much in rural Minnesota communities, so this is an opportunity to show that rural communities care about environmental health and also that this is a real opportunity in the region

Rx & Vets CSA

- Financial Capital EEE Systems Change occurred through the choosing of low income, local farmers/ranchers/producers to provide food for the CSAs.
- Local chefs taught food preparation skills thereby helping the participants learn food security skills.



- Purchases from low income local farmers/ranchers/producers allowed local farmland to stay in production.
- County veteran service officers referred veterans that they have contact with to the Vet CSA program and then followed those folks throughout the program. For the Rx CSA program county attorneys, county probation officers, public health professionals, county case managers referred people that they connect with to the RX CSA Program.
- MN Dept of Veterans Affairs allowed Veteran Widows to be part of the program.
- For the first year, MDVA income guidelines were changed to better reflect poverty in rural places. Unfortunately for the second year of the Vet CSA program the income guidelines reverted back to the State Soldiers Association Program (SSAP) which made it difficult to find veterans who qualified for the Vet CSA program. This was in part because some of these Veterans lived in rural places and although the vet was earning a poverty-level income the value of their homes rendered them ineligible.
- Sprout worked collaboratively with Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches to identify gaps and barriers for rural food shelves during July of 2020. This work resulted in a working relationship with the Boys & Girls Club of Leech Lake Area (B&GCLLA), who shifted it's programming to provide childcare to essential workers. Sprout partnered with B&GCLLA to secure funding from MDE to provide prepared foods to send home with families every week for a 16-week period. *"I can speak for SPROUT as an entity on its own. This is one of the most substantial relationships that we have built, collaborative work that will benefit families of the Leech Lake Band. To me that is another systems change."* - Arlene Jones, Sprout MN.
- The Vet CSA and RxCSA programs were augmented with a \$113,000.00 grant from the Minnesota Department of Education to address food insecurity for adults and children. Sprout worked with local chef and local restaurant to prepare 8,140 frozen meals.

Pine River WCAG

- Core team members and virtual cooking class participants gained new insights into the cultures of England, South America, Africa, Philippines, Korean, and Ojibwa. They also learned about the personal journeys of those who presented. Sometimes these journeys were positive and sometimes painful, *"Even though I spoke English, I was often treated poorly because of my British accent."*
- Having community education and the school take such an active role in thinking about diversity. The school is more diverse than community and now the school is reaching out into the community to highlight the diversity.
- The partnership between HDT and school system is not new but has been expanded.

Sustainable Land Management & Water Quality. The collaborative partners individually and collectively working to promote and bring about changes in the ways agricultural lands are managed and on improving water quality.

Go North:

- Youth gained skills in building restoration by working and learning from local senior mentors. Youth were engaged in ways they had never been engaged before. Youth gained new skills.
- The Go North project used vacant lots and abandoned buildings so that they became destination places.
- This five-city area experiences a boom/bust economy with the ebb and flow of the seasons. Also the City of Emily does not have high tax base. The addition of the welcoming center and plans for using the old Candy Store as a summer economic opportunity are important built capital EEE system changes.
- The group decided in part because of their learning through the IDI and WCAG materials to spend the \$500 provided by R5DC to tell their story to partner with Design Contests an Australia organization and chose an Artist from Kenya to design and write their final report. In addition, during the previous five years of work, few youth were involved. As part of the IDI and WCAG discussions the Go North MN group became more intentional about involving youth in the work.

Long Prairie WCAG

- Financial Capital EEE Systems Change occurred through the choosing of minority owned businesses to help design and construct pavilion area from Latinx and Amish communities
- High School art teacher commissioned to design permanently installed games, utilizing input from her students
- Including bilingual signage throughout the park- on buildings, on games, on flora and fauna ID tags will help Harmony Park become a destination place for all within the community.
- By engaging a local tree expert and reviving engagement of the master gardeners in the care of the park's flora, fauna, wetland, and planters the park has moved from a neglected park in poor health to a healthy and thriving Harmony Park.

Brainerd WCAG

- BIPOC students will be offered opportunities to contribute to the region's intellectual capital and workforce through the formation of the Inclusive Community Committee.
- Because Mary Sam was a part of the Brainerd WCAG, the CLC President hired R5DC to: 1) administer the IDI assessment with her cabinet and 2) to set and monitor progress on individual and professional IDI goals.
- The Crow Wing County Food Co-op Board of Directors, Brainerd Community Foundation Board of Directors, Central Minnesota Rural CEP, and Brainerd City Council all requested IDI assessments for their organizations.
- Widseth Smith Nolting is becoming certified as an inclusive employer and are planning to bring in a tribal member to help in some of their designing processes when they are working on tribal lands. As a company, they have begun to expand their thinking about how buildings and parks in the region can be more conducive and inclusive of tribal neighbors. They are also working alongside Sweetwater, a nationally recognized First Nations planning firm, to learn how to conduct a feasibility study for the Leech Lake Bank of Ojibwe (LLBO):



“This assessment includes a market and financial analysis, architectural designs, and a management plan. The workforce initiative will address the unmet need for housing and enhance development of the tribal construction industry. Plans call for the feasibility of developing 2,000-4,000 affordable housing units for Tribal members over the next 20 years and creating a minimum of 100 jobs. Half of these homes will be for low-income families to reduce existing poverty rates of more than 40%, high unemployment, and homelessness on the reservation.”

- The Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce is working with WCAG members to help employers think about and consider equity issues in the workplace. The hoped for standing Inclusive Community Committee will help interested employers improve DEI in their workplaces.

Staples WCAG

- Change occurred because half of the members of the Staples WCAG core team who represented underrepresented/minority populations were authentically engaged in the process and implementation.
- Getting the school district to modify their curriculum to add another book focused on DEI was an important EEE system Change. In addition getting the school to start thinking about their role in creating welcoming communities.
- Partnering with Profits for the people will mean that the Staples WCAG will provide Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwa and Red Lake Nation children with culturally relevant books.
- The hope is that through the collaboration of many community organizations that community members will have deeper conversations about JEDI and hopefully come to a place where ALL will be welcome to live, work and play in Staples.
- The hope is that the employer trainings and small grants will help local employers begin to think about their hiring practices, how they onboard new employees, and how their business policies and procedures may or may not support a diverse workforce. The hope is that employers will start to look at their workforce in a new light. One of the offerings will talk about the Chet Bodin Inclusive Workforce Employer (I-WE) program. If an employer decides to participate, they could apply for one of the \$500 mini grants. The mini grants could be used, for example, to hire R5DC staff to do IDI assessments and goal setting in their workplace.

Pequot Lakes WCAG

- Through creation of WCAG group a spin-off is that the WCAG work will help the school board shape their strategic planning for the school. They are putting equity at the core of their strategic planning.
- The core team is made up of and dedicated to giving students a bigger voice. This team is very invested in student voice. That is something that has not been taken seriously in past. They have so much value in their world view. This core team understands that in 2015 youth became the most racially and ethnically diverse group in the United States and recognizes that the community of Pequot Lakes Lakes needs to listen to their youth.

APPENDIX A-6: Improved Livelihoods

For the Regional Prosperities \$60,000 was used by WCAGs in most cases to hire BIPOC or low-income growers and makers to complete project work. In addition, the NWAf grant along with other funding helped to sustain evaluation, local foods, and energy and environmental planning expertise in the region. But only considering economic indicators of improve livelihoods is inadequate. If one considers “livability” the Regional Prosperities project took head-on the need to address racism, equity and inclusion in a region that has become more radicalized and where opponents to JEDI work are becoming more active, threatening, and vocal. Protests as well as threatening letters and emails illustrate that we need to be more strategic in 2.0 in planning for events and providing ways to protect our change makers who have stepped forward to tell their stories of racism and injustice in the region.

Brainerd WCAG. The hope is that through the Inclusive Community Committee that Central Lakes College BIPOC students will have better opportunities for working and living within the Brainerd Lakes region.

GoNorth MN. The economies of Fairfield, Fifty Lakes, Little Pine, Outing and Emily ebb and flow with the seasons. The Go North project collaborative are working to become a welcoming place where people want to live and where youth want to stay and/or come back to work. The hope is that through the Welcome center and the indoor/outdoor community gathering place the community of Emily will become a destination place and a sought out place to live, work and retire. The hope is that the refurbished Emily Candy Store will become at a minimum a seasonal businesses opportunity to help build the local economy.

Little Falls WCAG. The intent is to have a local First Nations artist design the signs and help tell the story of indigenous people in Little Falls on the signs. The group is also working to have summer student interns research local history and craft language that will be included on the signs.

Long Prairie WCAG. The project dollars were being spent locally- focusing on small minority-owned businesses whenever possible. The park will become more welcoming to marginalized populations through: Bilingual signage, greater opportunity for interaction between community members, and nonprofit events to highlight area resources and to bring the diverse community together

Pequot Lakes WCAG. The improved livelihoods won't be seen in improved economics – rather the hope is that there will be improved quality of life for all who live within the community.

Pine River WCAG. Of the \$10,000 that was allocated for this project \$2,100 was budgeted to support the local cultural guides who taught the classes and \$3,500 to purchase food from the local stores and food coop.

Staples WCAG. The hope, in the long term, is that employers going through the training will change their hiring practices to diversify their workforce. Another long-term goal is that by having the entire community involved in The Big Read the community as a whole will have a better understanding of DEI and develop more meaningful relationships with marginalized populations. The improved livelihood measure may not be financial; however, it could improve the quality of life for those who have for so long remained on the fringe of the Staples community.



APPENDIX B

R5DC/RDI LEARNING EXCHANGE

The Learning Exchange Objectives included a transfer of knowledge with another region in the NWAf service territory about Justice-Equity-Diversity-Inclusion work that embraced the WealthWorks model of economic and community development. The R5DC Regional Prosperities team was looking for a partner who fits the following A-D objectives: A) extensive knowledge and experience in rural wealth creation value chains development B) understanding of systems change, C) one who could add value to this exchange by strengthening relationships with NWAf and D) offers the opportunity for our region to learn from as well as share from. Our team chose Rural Development Initiatives (RDI), headquartered in Oregon, as being the best suited partner in this endeavor.

The team originally had planned to meet in person for a 2-3 day cross-cultural learning exchange. However because of the COVID 19 Pandemic the team decided to meet via zoom on July 29 from 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM.

What follows is a detailed transcript of the exchange:

Learning Placemaking, Health, Arts & Culture are Foundational to Economic Development Work

Learning: Heidi: What is compelling about [the R5DC] work is that that this is what we would call soft skills building and soft work. You are an economic development organization. That is what you do. But here you are in this placemaking space and talking about health, talking about arts and culture and it is a robust and well-funded initiative. That is compelling to me. I feel similarly that leadership development is foundational work. This is where economic development comes, from these conversations, and is also foundational work. That said, none of what I heard you say is about traditional economic development. If I were an economic development funder – I would be but what job did you create.

Dawn: That is where the building of value chain addresses economic development. Also just recognizing with workforce attraction that we were having folks come and move to our region. They were fine in their jobs but the minute they would walk out of their job they were not welcome in their community. So we are losing highly qualified workers in this region. We need to be a region that is welcoming. We need to attract folks to our region to fill those jobs.

Heidi: And you have to be able to speak about the work that you do in such a way that it shows the impact, so you can show the theory of change that will get you to why the heck we are doing this to get to that.

Cheryl: I couldn't agree more ... To follow up with Dawn's point, I can lend millions of dollars for individuals who want to become ranchers/producers. I can give them all the money they need. I can give them land. They can be part of the local foods system and the value chain. But where we were failing was in the creation of equitable economic ecosystems without prejudice and discrimination. For example,

we recently had a case where a couple were discriminated against because he is tribal and she is Latina – and they left– so all of the lending capacity was for not. Who cares how many jobs we created... we lost good people and the regions quality of life suffered. As a result of not being a welcoming region we can't attract and lift up lives of people we hope to serve and I respond to those who are less concerned about the minority and low-income target audiences.... That even white millennial adults (the children of boomers) won't be attracted to this region. The one thing we need more than capital access is human power. So we know if we don't start to address social cohesion issues, we can't get to the economic measures that most economic developers want to count.

Heidi: It is so very important that you have said this to us. We do see our theory of change is very similar to this. But is it a cornucopia?

What is systems change?

*Arlene: So you have heard about how we have pivoted and shifted. We have done a lot of work in the region to get community partners understand that they have place at the table to help refer people to food as medicine and help with food to continue to advance the value chain. That work has been going on since 2014. What we are working on now is to continue to build those processes with groups and target populations that no one has worked with ... You heard Staci Headley talk a lot about the VetCSA. I frequently hear the question – “what is a systems change?” **Systems change is when you get the county veterans service officers to work with you to refer veterans that they have contact with to the program and then to follow those folks through the program. It's when the MN Dept of Veterans Affairs allows Veteran Widows to be part of the program, and due in part because of our MDVA final grant report, the income guidelines were changed to better reflect poverty in rural places.***

*We have also have had a target focus areas people who are involved in the **judicial system and folks that are in recovery of any kind and folks who are adapting to life with mental illness** and when covid hit that did not help. A lot of the people we are working with have severe depression and now have increased social isolation. We have county attorneys, county probation officers, public health professionals referring people that they connect with – they are county case managers or they are in drug court – people who are really taking a step forward to advance their own individual prosperity participating in the CSA programs with us.*

*In addition, because of all the fine work we have done with artists in the community through our Art Place America grant our thinking and action has evolved. We are now moving toward trying to figure out how to have an artist in residency and are intentionally seek a Native Culinary artist. Another systems change that we can be proud of is all the work we have done with local foods, convincing our foundations that our culinary chefs are artists in that culinary art is a bonafide art form. We see it funded more often through some of our largest foundations. Getting the artists in residency **to help coordinate and do some of the cooking demonstrations with our local restaurants and putting featured items on the menu and when those items are ordered those funds come back to help support the program. So this is one way we are trying to make these programs sustainable** so we are not always relying on foundation funding.*

We submitted an MN Dept. of Education proposal that was funded. There is a lot more covid funding for food insecurity and food access. In relationship with the Boys and Girls club in Leech Lake that has had a severe pivot in that they have not been able to provide programming for kids. So when schools closed most of Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO) members that needed assistance with child care are the low income essential workers. The Boys and Girls Club shifted from providing programming and services to



becoming a childcare provider with no feeding programs involved. Not only did they have to learn how to do childcare – they could quickly because licensed under tribal department of health. Working with LLBO to secure funding from MDE to do prepared foods and send these kids home with prepared meals on weekends. For SPROUTs work, I will speak for SPROUT as an entity on its own, it is probably one of the most substantial relationships that we have built, collaborative work that we have advanced with the Leech Lake Band. To me that is another systems change.

Cheryal: And when Arlene works with LLBO Boys and Girls Club to bring in prepared food she is working with restaurants that buy/procure food from the SPROUT Food Hub..... who procures commodities from 100 low income local growers and ranchers.

Cheryal: Shawna Rattner who is the author of a WealthWorks book.....and a woman we respect, sent me an email after the launch of her book. She wrote “good job you guys you are doing some good work but you need to move past grant funding and move toward industry or value chain funded efforts and reduce your dependency on grant dollars.” I didn’t respond to her for a while – because I understand that - that is the dream and intention of purist value-chains.....in that everything is self-sustaining and the private sector funds it. But I’m learning that in value chain work – at least in my reality the value chain work is led by nonprofits who continually need to depend upon resources that allow us to address equality. The private sector is not quite there yet, so I think as long as non-profits continue to do the work around systems change and around equity – it will require outside investments. It will never be completely funded by rate payers or by those who want our services. I also believe that is why donors give to foundations...because they care about what that foundation is focusing on. I just wanted to put that out there that we are thinking a lot about how our evolution is and if we are receiving the grant dollars that support our mission and could not otherwise be funded through private sector and the value chain process.

Heidi: I think we should pin this idea and put it in the learning space about funding of the work. The conversation about the problem of rural work and problem of funding of things in our context because I think it is more complicated.

Sometimes the WealthWorks Framework isn’t culturally compatible.

*Amy: The work that we are doing with Warm Springs (a tribal community on the Warm Springs reservation) is very interesting. That was a steep learning curve for us. On the Warm Spring reservation there is a confederation of three tribes. There is a nonprofit based in the Warm Springs community that is doing a lot around economic development. They are very visionary. They are very ambitious. Then they scramble to keep up with their visionariness. We have partnered with them a few years ago. Initially, we were going to train the staff and build the capacity of the staff. And their staff were like – this is not what we need – we know this. *And we don’t even like WealthWorks. It is such a capitalist language.* “Wealth, assets, markets.” After a year of back and forth struggle, their priority was to move this building and create an incubator space. Their priorities were regarding how to get the incubator up and running and figure out how it works. At some point we had a come to Jesus moment when Heidi and I said, “We don’t care what we do. We will just help you with anything you want help with. Give us a list and we will do whatever. What do you need?” They gave us this list of items such as, “research the Oregon Department of Transportation signage requirements,” and “Come up with a food truck lease template.” This may sound simplistic but what it has turned into is this incredibly rich work. Where we have developed a partnership. We have pulled in the Burns-Piaute Tribe, which is a tribe located in Burns Oregon, and they are working to set up commercial kitchen there. Suddenly it has blossomed into this networking and*

social capital building role. It didn't seem like it from the initial task list of "researching ODR requirements." Suddenly we are now figuring out how to tailor a Central Oregon Community College Program for Food Trucks to set up a program for the tribes. I think that the difference there is with some of our work sometimes with WealthWorks we can frame the community work about a set of values... and we needed to respect that they had their values established. What they wanted was a different kind of support. It was different that we initially expected and it grew organically...

Cheryal:the way all authentic trusted relationships do.

Will rural voices be heard in the JEDI work?

Cheryal: That is one of the challenges that I am thinking through right now. Sometimes I feel when there is a shock everyone wants to reactand for all the right reasons to address the immediate crisis, but sometimes I worry that we rush to action with unintended consequences. To your point about how do we shrink the timeline so we can get to those impacts – it sometimes feels to me like I have to help agencies, funders, and policy folks because it is harder to understand that when they are addressing these shocks – if they throw the baby out with the bathwater and if they don't understand the systems that have already been put into place that are moving along, and yes sometimes at a slow pace, but if they dramatically go left when track has been on right it takes us even longer. That is what Arlene said earlier in our discussion....that because we get hit by these impacts – such as the social unrest and our national racial reconciliation and with the environmental shifts and now these health and wellness impacts of the pandemic – for better or worse, all of those are disruptions. We DO need to react and we DO need change but we need to look at all the hidden groups who have been working in these spaces that we can build upon.

H: I sit on this Pacific Northwest rural workgroup. These are great people who do great work. I am constantly the only voice there that says, "Before you go in to fix that – maybe you should look at what is already happening?" I fear that if I wasn't on the call these amazing foundations who are really trying to help... may end up using valued resources to invest in something that is already happening. Maybe we could look at what is already going on and see if investments can improve/shift/grow that effort....Because they are already further along than you are. It's hard to sometimes think this way.

I was sitting on a call – and they were talking about giving out development block grants and making a pipeline of those accessible. I was the only person in the room who was representing rural. There were 5 cities there advocating to have access to these monies. I offered that investments should go 100% all to rural communities. You [big cities] already have your own set asides and I believe investments should be focused on underserved rural areas. We did not get that win. But we did get a 6 month advantage - for 6 months rural areas can receive those resources as a priority. There is a 6 month start for rural because you have to factor in the capacity of rural people and places to organize, to write the grant, to get it in. Where you are already ready and shovel ready – they are not.

Cheryal: The challenge that I am struggling with right now and I will talk with Martin about on Friday -- I am so appreciate of the foundation response to murder of George Floyd and injustices the approach to fund people of black and brown skin leadership to enact racial justice throughout their service territories. We know that authenticity comes from people who share lived experiences and a world view can bring a lot to the table. Diverse people who can help us build equitable leadership, that transcends and gives power. All the things that we have been talking about in a movement that creates equality.



My struggle with this whole approach is it doesn't meet communities like our region where we are. Guess who is leading this effort in a predominately white region? A bunch of white women. It would be wonderful if side-by-side those that have been doing the work can work with diverse people with different lived experiences. I think we need BIPOC leadership alongside the white leadership to witness real systems change.

It's true, I am not a big fan of bringing in outsiders who tell you want to do and leave. The community culture you are going into matters. I sometimes feel like there isn't any thought about the need for both. Yes, people with experience. Yes, transcending the power and making sure that BIPOC, LGBTQ+, low-income are leading the effort but doing it alongside traditional leaders "by/for/of" is the best way especially when you're talking about rural communities. A gentleman that Dawn and I were on a call with said, "If you are going to build relationships – you have to be in proximity with one another." That is important because progress moves at the speed of trust – with people you have trusted relationships with.

How are foundations going to successfully fund external groups to come into Central Minnesota or areas of the Mountain areas of Baker Oregon or all these other areas and build racial justice and equity without understand the cultures? And it is not about me protecting the work that Dawn and Staci and Cheryal and Arlene have done. I would be all about giving other groups more money/power and let them do it if they had the trusted relationships it takes to make the effort long lasting and to have system impacts....because we didn't raise our hands and say let's go do this. We were told if you are going to be truly impactful you need to think about this and people/foundations were right. Partners were right. If cultural assets have to be built, then social capital assets have to consider equity. I am worried that 5 years from now millions of dollars will have been invested into the equity effort..... the way Ford Foundation did Wealth Works in the early days – 32 million dollars later, and nobody knew what the heck happened except for a couple of southern organizations.

Heidi: We just stole WW because it was good stuff. With \$30 million – it should be good.

Cheryal: In the beginning, WW was really weak in terms of outcomes. And I am concerned that this is the path that we are going down again. A unilateral approach won't help value chains, economies, equity or underserved populations of people living on the fringe. If you do not build WW Equitable Economic Ecosystems alongside people who currently run and have the community power, we end up building a false foundation.

Heidi: I think my experience is that it is dual sided. We have this partner who was a former board member. He is Gustavas who started with our leadership program. In doing so wanted to create an organization for the Latino population in Ontario Oregon. It was somewhat built on the idea of RDI but has a focus on building the capacity and advocacy voice. He and I are adorable in that we are really strong leaders and we are absolutely clear what our lane is. He will say that RDI is so smart and so visionary, he will say, "Your work coupled with my work in my community across this state could really actually make a difference." This organization is culturally specific that is working in their community coupled with the work he saw. So he was trying to create my lane – "Your lane is to get those middle age white women to do anti-racism work and understand white supremacy at the level that we can work together. So stay in your lane. Your work is not Latino work. That is my work." What was helpful about that was the articulation of that is what is happening. So our role with Warm Springs and our role in Cottage Grove is to do whatever they need us to do. And our role, and I think Dawn has it better than I have it, our role with dominate population is to do that work of anti-racism, of understanding of how racism and excluding others is not creating welcoming community and is not good for our economy. So

building the case for equity work at the dominate culture level – as well as the skills and moving them forward. So I think it is both. So what is important is understanding that those two things are different -- that equity work and working in support of minority cultures and people on the margins of our work. Is one side of the work and there is another side and be clear on that and know what side you are working on – and why you do them both. Because I don't think I was culturally competent enough to understand the distinction before.

Cheryal: As I am translating that Heidi, we have knitted a lane and I don't know if we have been really clear about what that lane is. That we are still open to either steering or rowing the boat. In a lot of the cases around the Welcoming Communities work we have been asked to be in a role where we are steering. If there are other organizations that the foundations want to fund to come into the region because there isn't anyone else now – then I know we all would be very welcome to a rowing position. We don't care about who gets the steering role – we just want to see some progress and people be able to prosper and lead quality lives. And building all forms of wealth does that. So what I am hearing you say – that we might need to be a little bit more clear about our role and if we are going to transition. We can have a “we” of new and the existing agencies that are working in that space. Thank you for this learning moment Heidi!

Heidi: I will say from the conversations we are hearing from the foundations and the big message I heard is that they are go to put something out and it isn't going to be inclusive of the work that RDI is doing or the work that Gustavos is doing.

Cheryal: That is what is worrying me!

Heidi: I have been framing now on purpose that RDI has been doing economic recovery work for 30 years. So thank you for coming to the show now. Our economy tanked 35 years ago in rural and we have not recovered. And the work that RDI has been doing for 30 years is economic recovery work. If you would like to talk about economic recovery work we are happy to tell you of all the mistakes we have made and all the mistakes you have made in investment or disinvestment. I am happy to have an opinion about that. Let's remember that people have been doing rural recovery work for 35 years and there are people who have been really trying to figure out what is different with rural work. I actually say, “Welcome to the show! Thank you! I am glad you are here. We have been here for 35 years and so have many others.”

Amy: And for the tribes it has been a lot longer than that.

Cheryal: Amen Amy. They have been trying to rebuild their economies and keep their food sovereignty and maintain their culture. And I am concerned about that as well. And that is why I think that what Arlene was doing with her board was ahead of the game – It was Pre-Covid, pre George Floyd – it was about building the diversity of her board. We were starting to see the writing on the walls already even state agencies and foundations were asking us, justifiably so, about who are our leaders? Do you have representation of the diverse cultures within your service territory? Which are really important questions. But/And in rural places where the population is predominately white and we are trying the stage for welcoming even the first of the demographic shifts -- that is being done predominately by white people. I think we may be the last – again- to see investments into critically important issues because of the make-up of the people in our leadership and that is representative of our area. Because of the cycle of diversity avoiding our region due to discrimination and other factors..... there is a lack of diversity on our leadership boards...so again we remain the less economic prosperous and socially disadvantaged. UG!



Heidi: I think that is so well said. RDI has been working to diversify our staff and diversity our board. When Craig and Cathy were Executive Directors of this organization we had tribal representation on our board. When I took over – Diversity Equity and Inclusion was a major focus of my board. Foundations said “If you don’t figure this out for this organization, don’t even apply. And for anyone else applying – “If you can’t figure this particular element out for this organization, get out of the game.” I was left with was getting this organization to a place where diversity was welcomed and had influence. But that doesn’t happen right away.

But what I was sure was that I was never ever going to bring tribal member onto my board before we as an organization were capable of inviting that person in an authentic way without tokenizing them. And I will tell you, RDI is almost there. I am still working to make sure the organization is ready for leadership change. I don’t always know how to help my Board, but I am not going to bring a beautiful, smart, intelligent, active member of the tribes – onto my board only to have to deal with our “stuff”. [Arlene, “And you shouldn’t.”] Just to get funding. I am not doing it. So I am sorry! So I feel a lot of pressure. I feel a lot of pressure from tribal organizations – on this Robert Wood Johnson grant I got called to the table, “Why don’t you have a native person on your board?” So I can go into my shame space, “I know, I know I am sorry that I am so tardy.”

Cheryal: But your analogy it is so right for communities and for our regions. We want to get our shit together before we create job opportunities and bring people to communities. That is really important. That is the foundational work that is really really slow that Martin says takes forever and ever. He advised “Don’t get into it unless your are committed to it” and we freaking are, but that same analogy of wanting make sure that it is a space that doesn’t tokenize, that is genuine, that adds real quality of life for families – that happens at the community level as well. Just having someone else come in and say, “This is what you need to do.” and “You all need to understand your white privilege”, which is true. But then to add “you need to do X, Y, and Z” is not going to go over well.

The program delivery that happens, by the way in urban places – [doesn’t work for rural.] When we took our IDI it was amazing training. But it was delivered by and for urban people. It was not delivered to rural people. We know that we will never get any traction if all we do is walk in and shame our grandfathers.

Heidi: This is exactly what the Robert Wood Johnson grant, I hope, gets us to. If there is one thing that this national initiative did it uncovers the problem of talking about race and equity in rural. It articulates what the [xxx] to do about it. So let’s uncover it. Let’s get clear that this is the problem. Let’s find ways to invest in it. I think Robert Wood Johnson knows. I think that they have known about that all along. What I appreciate about that initiative is that they are saying, “What is going on in rural leadership development/rural efforts across the country. So instead of them saying, “Here is a program we are bringing in.” What they are saying, “What is going on in rural leadership? That we can uplift? That is doing good work. Then how can we invest in that and continue to uplift that work? What I appreciate about the RWJ Foundation Initiative is that they are authentically in that space.

*Cheryal: I think there are others too. My friends, my colleagues, my mentors –I really mean that from the bottom of my heart. **My foundation partners at NWF, Blandin, McKnight and others are PEOPLE who I trust and respect, who help us when our thinking needs to be challenged or enlightened. I know they want authentic partnerships too** or I swear I’d go elsewhere as I’m getting older and I don’t have time for the BS relations any more. We love you RDI friends, and we are grateful to you for allowing us to be vulnerable and show our underbelly. Next time let’s meet in person and share some laughter.*

APPENDIX C

R5DC System Changes and Spin off Activities

There have been a number of ways that R5DC has changed practices, in part, because of NWAFFs investment. What follows is a summary of these important spin-off activities. Appendix C provides a more exhaustive review of these changes.

Lending Practices: *“We have changed some of our **lending practices** to be able to focus more on BIPOC communities and BIPOC business enterprises”*

In addition, as part of the distribution of the CARES dollars R5DC started asking and pushing back on those who came for the 0% interest 30 year loans, “How will this loan and these favorable terms impact your employees?” In one case, the white male owned business realized that their head chef who was LBGQ+ was essential to the survival of their business and that they needed to use the dollars to provide a livable wage with advancement potential over the long run. R5DC staff are also now more intentional in their thinking about who truly benefits from their lending practices. They recognize that they have taken small steps: Low Income Septic and Well Water= \$62,944 and ELP Micro (Low income and BIPOC) = 30,000. However, the staff want to push their loan portfolio to be much more inclusive and diverse and know that to do that they need to expand their relationships with businesses owned by marginalized populations and increase their marketing strategies to better reach businesses owned by marginalized populations.

R5DC is including energy and environmental justice in all planning. *“We have started thinking about our planning practices and all of our planning. In the area of environmental and energy planning – the way that I have framed that is that we are focusing on environmental and energy planning as part of our JEDI work because out of balance undiversified markets – market based economies especially in energy can foster racial and income injustices that cause harm to our natural resources that we all depend upon. By doing the **energy and environmental work with a JEDI focus** we are making sure that we are providing opportunities for BIPOC community members but we are doing it in ways that don’t disrupt our environmental commitment.”*

Comprehensive Planning. *“That is all a part of our shift in how we are planning. Just our energy and environmental planning but **also in the areas of Comprehensive Planning, CEDS, Water Planning,** -- we now have an intentional focus around who does it impact, what does it impact and how do we do the planning? That shift in planning is much more intentional for our organization at R5DC. In addition we have shifted regarding the*



measurement of what we are doing. We have identified systems changes under the wealth works capitals. Never before did we tie the two elements together. In the past they operated as silos – there was wealth works, there was systems changes, and they was IDI – but never before did we put them all together. We changed how we measure system changes.”

The work out of that sift is also in terms of our work – such as the [Story Tellers Circles](#).

Although not directly funded through the NWAf investment, the NWAf investment meant that the Regional Prosperity work actually happened at the right time. Because R5DC and its partners were engaged in DEI and E3 work – they were well poised to begin to serve as important rural voices after the George Floyd murder and then the COVID-19 Pandemic. The activities below are natural spinoffs and outcomes as a direct result of how the Regional Prosperity team now thinks/acts and attempts to strengthen E3:

Funded Work:

JEDI Presentation to NADO Annual Conference. Cheryal Hills and Dawn Espe were invited to present at the National Association of Development Organization’s Annual conference. It was an opportunity to help others in the field of practice understand the history and lessons learned from this work.

Justice System Consortium. The goal of the Justice System Consortium is to build upon our assets, make appropriate investments and celebrate efforts that maintain the most effective and trusting police community relations possible. This group represents diverse perspectives, cultures and communities that include; LGBTQ+, persons living with mental health, low-income, limited English speaking community members and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) residents.

Leech Lake Housing Project. Sweetwater Consulting, a nationally recognized feasibility planning firm, along with Widseth Smith Nolting, a Minnesota-based architectural and engineering firm, have been hired to conduct a feasibility study for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO): *The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO) is the Tribal government overseeing the 1,050 square mile reservation that includes portions of four (4) counties in Central Minnesota. Funded by the United States Department of Commerce-Economic Development Administration (EDA), the LLBO has determined a need for a feasibility study of a vertically integrated workforce program. This assessment includes a market and financial analysis, architectural designs, and a management plan. The workforce initiative will address the unmet need for housing and enhance development of the tribal construction industry. Plans call for the feasibility of developing 2,000-4,000 affordable housing units for Tribal members over the next 20 years and creating a minimum of 100*

jobs. Half of these homes will be for low-income families to reduce existing poverty rates of more than 40%, high unemployment, and homelessness on the reservation.

Rural Urban Exchange (RUX) This opportunity is in the planning stages. We are working with partners in Kentucky who developed the RUX model. The RUX exchange grows relationships across divides to build a more collaborative and connected Commonwealth.

Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Mentors R5DC staff are partnering with fellow equity practitioners to continue to learn how to bridge difference across cultures, specifically through the Intercultural Development Inventory framework.

Higher Education IDI Goal Setting. R5DC qualified assessors are working with two local colleges to provide the IDI assessment and goal setting for administration, staff and faculty to assist in meeting the Minnesota State Equity 2030 initiative. One-on-one sessions provide an opportunity for personalized and confidential coaching and resources to improve cultural agility.

Transforming Rural Understand of Equity (TRUE) Partnership and TRUE Tuesdays TRUE Partnership is an informal alliance of organizations: Blandin Foundation, Center for Community Vitality U of M Extension, Minnesota Council on Foundations, Minnesota Humanities Center, Region Five Development Commission, Region Nine Development Commission, Southwest Initiative Foundation, and Voices for Racial Justice. Through inspiring co-learning and connected experiences emerging community leaders across rural Minnesota work to identify, nurture, model and advance actions work on JEDI initiatives.

Next Steps:

Below are projects that are in the fund development phase but not yet off the ground.

Native Culinary Artist in Residency. We have seen the transformative work artists can have in communities across the nation, yet Central Minnesota does not have an existing Artist in Residency program and to our knowledge, has never had an AIR program. We set out to offer a Native Culinary Artist in Residency to amplify our historical work in ways that merge a couple of existing programs in the region. The Native Culinary Artist Chef would be sought from Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, have the need and desire to offer a learning exchange of culturally relevant dishes and be open to a rural experience. The Native Culinary Artist will have indigenous culinary experience to offer learning opportunities that expand our cultural agility and showcase cross cultural connections. Like other Artist In Residence (AIR) programs across the world, our Native Culinary Artist



in Residence would have community service and professional development components. Community development: Modeled after the successful Choose Health program co-created by R5DC and Sprout leaders, the Culinary Artist would lead weekly cooking demonstrations and nutrition education at the Squaw Lake Community Kitchen within the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe reservation. Professional development: Offering plenty of time and space for the Native Culinary AIR to expand their craft, our program will include collaboration with restaurants across the five-county central MN region with other local chefs for a learning exchange that incorporates MN grown ingredients into local menus and shares culturally specific recipes. The Native Culinary AIR will learn one or two of the local restaurant's most popular culturally relevant dishes and then TEACH the restaurant chefs how to prepare one of his/her favorite dishes utilizing MN grown ingredients. The dish taught by the Native Culinary AIR will be featured on the local restaurant menu for TWO years and each time a patron orders that featured dish, one dollar will come back to the Culinary AIR program as a funding stream to fund future AIR's.

The Native Culinary AIR would receive a living stipend and room and board in a beautiful one-bedroom wood heated Airbnb in Pine River Minnesota for an eight-month period and ultimately an opportunity to grow resilience, inclusivity and tradition in ways that exemplify work in progress and facilitate the elevation of these programs to better serve our region.

Our program would seek participation of local restaurants who are owned and operated by low-income or minority owners or sites who primarily serve these populations. We also seek restaurants who are part of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture "MN Grown" program where possible.